



## **'Soft' Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: An Exploration of the Benefits of Deradicalization Programs**

Gabriel Hoeft (Research Assistant, ICT)  
Spring 2015

### **ABSTRACT**

In light of growing threats from Islamist radicalization and violent extremism around the world, this paper aims to shed some light on current 'soft' approaches to counter-terrorism. The distinguishing feature of these 'soft' approaches is that they are designed to win the hearts and minds of radicalizing or radicalized individuals by employing non-coercive methods. While acknowledging the importance of counter-radicalization efforts, this paper will mostly focus on explaining and evaluating deradicalization programs. The first section will define the concepts of radicalization, counter-radicalization, and deradicalization before continuing on to address the range of factors and drivers that make up such programs. The second section will provide a survey of current models of de-radicalization. The third section will outline the various criticisms and perceived problems of deradicalization programs. The fourth section will provide a number of case studies. The purpose of these will be to provide a sample of different approaches and varying levels of success of programs that have been undertaken in Europe and the Middle East. The paper will conclude with a summary of the main findings.

\* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	3
SECTION 1: TERMINOLOGY .....	7
Radicalization .....	7
Counter-radicalization.....	10
Deradicalization and Disengagement.....	12
SECTION 2: MODELS AND APPROACHES.....	14
Comprehensive Disengagement.....	15
Prison-Based Approaches .....	19
SECTION 3: CHALLENGES IN ASSESSING PROGRAMS .....	26
SECTION 4: CASE STUDIES .....	31
Saudi Arabia.....	31
Yemen .....	38
United Kingdom.....	44
CONCLUSION.....	57
WORKS CITED .....	59

## INTRODUCTION

In light of the growing global security crisis brought about by Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, a debate is once again brewing about the best way to proceed. The expansion and perseverance of theaters of jihad from Africa through the Middle East and Southeast Asia, whether it be Boko Haram, the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, along with the phenomenon of foreign fighters and lone wolves in Western countries, have contributed to the opinion that not only are we not making headways in the ‘War on Terror’ but that our efforts have been mismanaged. Yet this is not at all a new argument. According to Hamed El-Said, "Long before the 9/11 attacks many scholars and academics were already criticizing the prevailing kinetic approach to countering the phenomenon of terrorism. Those critics have long called for a broader and more balanced approach, one which will rely more on, and incorporate larger aspects of, ‘soft’ or ‘smart’ policies as an integral part of the counterterrorism tool kit."<sup>1</sup> The concept of soft power, as developed by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability of an entity to shape the preferences of others through economic or cultural appeals, rather than through coercion in the form of strength or military might. In other words, through soft power a country can get others to want what it wants, without the other being ordered to want it.<sup>2</sup>

A 'soft' approach to counter-terrorism “seeks to undo the radicalization process by engineering the individual’s return to moderate society, usually by providing them with a stable support network, probing their original reasons for radicalizing, and divorcing them from their extreme beliefs and social contacts.”<sup>3</sup> In order to defeat radicalization and violent extremism it is necessary to understand and refute the ideology behind it, rather than simply strive to eliminate every terrorist in sight. Proponents of this approach

---

<sup>1</sup>Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-radicalization Programs* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy* 80 (Autumn, 1990): 166

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Stern, “Mind Over Martyr,” *Foreign Affairs* 89 (2010): 108.

believe that in order to be effective there needs to be as much emphasis placed on fighting the ‘War on Ideas’ as there is on fighting the ‘War on Terror.’

Following this line of logic we can illustrate this problem by employing Boaz Ganor's Terrorism Equation. Ganor presents the terrorism equation as a combination of having the motivation to take action and the ability to act on that motivation. He goes on to state that an effective counter-terrorism strategy will therefore seek to render the terrorists operationally incapable of action and at the same time eliminate the motivations that the terrorists have. However, he adds that the task of carrying out activities to break the organization's motivations is incredibly difficult, especially when coupled with the fact that offensive action tends to increase the resolve of the terrorists.<sup>4</sup> This difficulty has translated to an over-reliance on offensive action which brings immediate headlines and the illusion of measurable results of success. The problem with this approach, however, is that it holds terrorism as an event rather than a process, and it ignores that such actions are conducive to the radicalization and extremism that breed subsequent waves of terrorists.<sup>5</sup>

Current research and efforts aimed at developing policies for countering violent extremism (CVE) are welcomed initiatives yet, with the exception of a few countries’ policies, they disproportionately deal with strategies for the prevention of further radicalization and seldom produce non-kinetic strategies for already radicalized individuals. Furthermore, bearing in mind that the types of actors participating in terrorism are changing, targeting high-ranking members of a formal terrorist organization is no longer enough to defeat that organization.

---

<sup>4</sup> Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle; A Guide for Decision Makers*; (Herzliya: The Interdisciplinary Center for Herzliya Projects, 2008), 41-43.

<sup>5</sup> El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-radicalization Programs*, 4.

For example, El-Said mentions that after the Pakistani army had ended military operations in the Swat valley in 2007, they implemented a de-radicalization and counter-radicalization program that promoted the community, addressed local grievances, and encouraged tribal leaders to play a more active role in countering violent ideology. However, “the program was destroyed by the American drone attacks which demolished the confidence we built with the inhabitants of the Valley who now believe that we were conspiring with the Americans against them.”<sup>6</sup>

The 'soft' approaches to counter-terrorism seek to render extremist movements obsolete by undermining the foundations upon which these movements are built. Proponents believe that when responsibly coupled with defensive tactics and the occasional offensive strikes, the movement will be delegitimized from within. In *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, Audrey Kurth Cronin reviewed the history of abandoned terrorist organizations and outlined reasons for their end. Among them is the suggestion that terrorism ends when there is an unsuccessful generational transition. In other words, the organization is unable to entice younger people to join because they don't share the objectives or beliefs of the older generation.<sup>7</sup> For counter-terrorism measures to successfully bring about such an unsuccessful generational transition, it is necessary to seek to undermine the ideology behind the movement and to discredit the organizations.<sup>8</sup> During the Cold War, this was done by delegitimizing communist ideology and promoting the democratic alternative through American 'soft power'. This 'War on Ideas' coupled with the communist system's own brutality and ineffectiveness led the brunt of the system to implode. It is important to note that soft approaches to counter-terrorism are not considered to be a panacea; there

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

will always be those who are irreconcilable. For example, there are still people who identify themselves as communists all around the world, including Western countries. However, just as this generational transition rendered these remaining Communists as neither an existential threat to democratic order, nor able to mobilize large numbers, proponents of a 'soft ' approach to counter-terrorism believe the same can be done with Islamic fundamentalists. In fact, many of the approaches of Middle-eastern and Southeast Asian countries draw on lessons learned from dealing with leftist combatants and communist insurrections during the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>

In light of these growing threats from Islamist radicalization and violent extremism around the world, this paper aims to shed some light on current 'soft' approaches to counter-terrorism. The distinguishing feature of these 'soft' approaches is that they are designed to win the hearts and minds of radicalizing or radicalized individuals by employing non-coercive methods. While acknowledging the importance of counter-radicalization efforts, this paper will mostly focus on explaining and evaluating deradicalization programs.

The first section will define the concepts of radicalization, counter-radicalization, and deradicalization before continuing on to address the range of factors and drivers that make up such programs. It will differentiate between the ideas of disengagement and deradicalization and seek to explain why they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The second section will provide a survey of current models of de-radicalization. It will outline a variety of approaches ranging from individual level deradicalization to collective disengagement, explain the logic behind employing such programs, and identify the factors that may determine success. The third section will outline the various criticisms and perceived problems of deradicalization programs. It will highlight the

---

<sup>9</sup>Hamed El-Said, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*, (The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012), 25.

significant challenges in evaluating the success of a program as well as the cultural, political, and legal factors that hinder the ability of governments to implement comprehensive programs. The fourth section will provide a number of case studies from around the world. The purpose of these will be to provide a sample of different approaches and varying levels of success of programs that have been undertaken in the Middle East and Europe. The paper will conclude with a summary of the main findings and a general assessment of the policies of deradicalization.

## **SECTION 1: TERMINOLOGY**

### **Radicalization**

It is of the utmost importance to understand the process of radicalization in order to develop successful counter-radicalization and deradicalization approaches. Radicalization has been a hot topic of research in the last few years, with a plethora of definitions and explanations offered for how and why one becomes a radical. Some definitions specifically note that radicalization results in terrorism.<sup>10</sup> Others merely state that it results in the use of or support of violent means to influence societal change.<sup>11</sup> The above examples serve to demonstrate that the difficulty in defining radicalization stems from the lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism. The former is weaker than the latter because it would not attribute attacks against active military personnel or employees of security services as having been committed by persons who underwent the process of radicalization.

---

<sup>10</sup>HM Government, *Contest: the United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, Cm 8123 (London: The Stationery Office, 2011), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Charles E. Allen, Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis and Chief Intelligence Officer, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland, written testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2007, p. 4.

The definition of radicalization that will be employed for the purposes of this paper is borrowed from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Lorenzo Vidino. The ISD proposed defining radicalization as “the process through which an individual changes from passiveness or activism to become more revolutionary, militant, or extremist, especially where there is intent towards, or support for, violence.”<sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Vidino takes the definition further by distinguishing between cognitive and behavioral radicalization. He proposes that "cognitive radicalization is the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system. Behavioral radicalization occurs when an individual takes the additional step of using violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism.”<sup>13</sup>

Current research on radicalization has also resulted in multiple models and theories that seek to explain how radicalization happens and which individuals may be most prone to radicalize. Although this research demonstrates that there is no single route to radicalization, researchers agree that the convergence of several factors is at the base of the process. For example, the table below, from the European Policy Planners' Network for Countering Radicalization and Polarization's Working Paper, illustrates many of the same drivers and factors that the New York City Police Department's radicalization report had identified.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>“The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN),” Institute for Strategic Dialogue: 1.

<sup>13</sup>Lorenzo, Vidino, “Countering Radicalization in America: Lessons from Europe,” United States Peace Institute (2010): 4.

<sup>14</sup>Mitchell D. Silber, and Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West. The Homegrown Threat,” New York City Police Department (2007): 16.



<b>Type of Factor</b>	<b>Factors or drivers of radicalization</b>
Divisions	Lack of integration, ghettoization, polarization, internal community divides, identity crises, isolation, weak community leadership/infrastructure
Grievances	Under-employment, poor education, political/democratic disenfranchisement, discrimination, foreign policy and international conflicts/disputes
Narratives	Political movements, ideologies, faith
Means	Social/family/criminal networks, vulnerable/risky institutions and places, vulnerable individuals, charismatic individuals

Table 1: A framework for the factors and drivers of radicalization.<sup>15</sup>

The most important thing to realize when looking at both the definition and the factors or drivers is that radicalization is a process. In fact, all of the proposed definitions on radicalization hold that it is a process that may take many months if not years to complete. This, coupled with the idea that radicalization is as much cognitive as it is behavioral, provides counter-terrorism practitioners with multiple entry points through which to undermine extremism. For countermeasures to be successful, they must rely on lessons learned from the process and seek to implement case-specific responses that most closely address the root problem. On the other hand, for deradicalization approaches to be successful they cannot simply attempt to reverse the radicalization, as the factors

<sup>15</sup>“The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN),” 2.

preventing their exit from the organization may be different from the ones that had landed them there in the first place.<sup>16</sup>

## Counter-radicalization

Counter-radicalization efforts are those that strive to work upstream to prevent radicalization from happening and to intercept those persons who are in the process of radicalizing. These efforts are closely linked to counter-polarization projects which aim to promote healthy pluralism and reduce divisions between different groups in society.<sup>17</sup> This paper will adopt the United Nations Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that lead to Terrorism's definition of counter-radicalization. The UN defines counter-radicalization as "a package of social, political, legal, educational, and economic programs specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalized) individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists."<sup>18</sup>

The rationale behind counter-radicalization may have best been phrased by the Former Foreign Minister from Norway, Jonas Gahr Storer, when he wrote in the New York Times that, "political extremism does not grow in a vacuum. Ideas are the oxygen that allows it to flourish and spread. Extremist perspectives win sympathy and recruits because they offer narratives that claim to identify deep injustices and enemies. Without this fuel, the blaze of extremism is quickly extinguished."<sup>19</sup> In other words the idea is that along the path of radicalization the individual will continually assess and interpret their environment through pragmatic, emotional, and/or spiritual lenses before arriving to a point where they either commit themselves to active extremism or stray from the path.

<sup>16</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," RAND Corporation (2010): 23.

<sup>17</sup>"The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN)," 2.

<sup>18</sup>First Report of the Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism: Inventory of State Programmes, (United Nations), p. 5

<sup>19</sup>Jonas Gahr Storer, "Learning From Norway's Tragedy," New York Times, July 19, 2012.

Counter-radicalization projects seek to undermine the individual's resolve through counter-narratives, rebuttals, education, and positive examples. Others attempt to encourage the individual to channel their passion in ways deemed more societally acceptable. In the case of minors, counter-radicalization efforts may lead to a forceful separation of the child from their toxic environment.<sup>20</sup>

These efforts may not always overtly reflect their counter-terrorism nature.<sup>21</sup> Projects such as shutting down jihadi websites, writing counter-narratives, and monitoring and engaging persons of interest are all clearly security related interventions. However, in Western countries in particular, these efforts oftentimes blur the lines between security activities and community building. For example, since societal divisions have been identified as a potential factor for radicalization, some counter-radicalization projects have argued for the need of more ethnically heterogeneous police forces in minority communities to build trust between the community and the local government.<sup>22</sup> Others include "empowering local communities and making Muslim communities aware of the state's commitment to democratic participation, justice and equality; publicizing efforts to combat Islamophobia; and creating effective channels for communication between state and local authorities, religious institutions, schools, recreational associations, parents and mentors so that interventionist strategies might be employed as a preventative measure."<sup>23</sup>

In much of the Middle East and Southeast Asia where soft approaches to terrorism are being attempted, counter-radicalization projects are undertaken alongside deradicalization programs. European countries, on the other hand, tend to place much

---

<sup>20</sup>Asim Qureshi, "Taking Away our Children: The Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill 2014" Cage (2015).

<sup>21</sup>"The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN)," 2.

<sup>22</sup>Basia Spalek, Counter-Terrorism: Community-Based Approaches to Prevent Terror Crime (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 61-62.

<sup>23</sup>Jonathan Paris, "Approaches to Anti-Radicalization and Community Policing in the Transatlantic Space," Hudson Institute (2007).

more emphasis on counter-radicalization programs than on deradicalization.<sup>24</sup> Oftentimes this is because Western-secular countries are unwilling to engage extremists in debates on religious ideology. These countries prefer to focus on those efforts which seek to enhance social cohesion. If spiritual counselling is necessary, the governments of these countries will outsource the work to partner Muslim organizations.<sup>25</sup> This outsourcing however, may present a number of challenges to the government. In the case study of the United Kingdom's soft approaches to counter-terrorism, we will highlight the importance of wisely choosing the appropriate Muslim partner organization.

## **Deradicalization and Disengagement**

As both deradicalization and disengagement target individuals who are already participating in violent extremism, the two terms are often wrongly believed to mean the same thing. The fundamental difference between the two is that the former strives to introduce cognitive shifts, while the latter primarily seeks to modify behavior. Deradicalization shall henceforth be understood as "the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity."<sup>26</sup> Disengagement, defined simply, is the altering of behavior.

The two are not mutually exclusive, but this distinction is nevertheless important. Although deradicalization is not a prerequisite for disengagement, disengagement is necessary to deradicalize. In other words, the idea is that an individual who does not necessarily love their country can be held in check by secondary factors such as a sense of responsibility towards the family or through financial incentives. The opinion among

---

<sup>24</sup>Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. xx

<sup>26</sup> John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009), 153.

practitioners has been that it is more beneficial to pursue disengagement policies because they tend to be less time consuming, more easily measurable, and more realistic to accomplish than cognitive shifts.<sup>27</sup> However, the reality is that by only focusing on disengagement policies, the results are shaky at best. Continuing with the above example of conditional disengagement (disengagement that depends on receiving something in return), the individual may return to their former activities if there is a shift in their cost-benefit calculations. In light of continued strikes against their brothers, they may decide that their responsibilities towards their family or the financial incentives received are no longer enough to excuse inaction.<sup>28</sup>

It is therefore necessary for a ‘soft’ counter terrorism strategy to include elements of both deradicalization and disengagement.<sup>29</sup> Although some models propose that disengagement should be the primary objective, with deradicalization occurring further along in the process, others note that the course is not so clear cut, especially with regards to Islamic extremists.<sup>30</sup> First, studies conducted with ex-extremists show that just as there are multiple paths to radicalization, there are also multiple reasons for exiting an extremist organization. Some extremists break with their organization because they no longer believe in the group’s ideology. Others abandon their ideology only after having left their group. As a result there can be no ‘one glove fits all’ approach.<sup>31</sup> Instead it is argued that the rehabilitation efforts have to be case specific and must undermine the affective, pragmatic, and ideological commitments that prevent the radical from exiting the organization.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, Islamist extremists pose a specific challenge to the linear model of disengagement that leads to deradicalization because their ideology is perceived

<sup>27</sup> Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*; (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9-10

<sup>30</sup> “Tackling Extremism: Deradicalization and Disengagement,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2012): 3.

<sup>31</sup> Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*.

<sup>32</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 42.

as part of their religious obligation. Therefore, first engaging the radical in an ideological debate may be beneficial because “there is an opportunity to leverage mainstream Islam to challenge extremist interpretations of the religion.”<sup>33</sup>

This ideological component is at the center of the deradicalization approach to counter-terrorism. Although success cannot be achieved solely by engaging in religious debate and discussion, it must be the cornerstone of any such approach since “ideology, or rather the perceived failure of an ideology to explain the world or effect social change, plays an important role in the process of disengagement from an extremist group.”<sup>34</sup> If the extremists can be convinced that they have been following a corrupted understanding of Islam, it will not only undermine the extremist’s militant worldview, but may also lead to the hampering of future recruitment since the ideology will be discredited.<sup>35</sup> For example, one of the founding members of al-Qaeda, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (also known as Dr. Fadl), had participated in Egypt’s deradicalization program. Upon release he published a book in which he criticized the London and Madrid bombings and al-Qaeda’s actions in Iraq and Afghanistan as illegitimate jihad.<sup>36</sup> Deradicalization will eventually lead to a tipping point: a time when enough militants denounce their ideology to effectively render it unattractive and discredited.<sup>37</sup>

## **SECTION 2: MODELS AND APPROACHES**

In order to clearly understand deradicalization and disengagement it is necessary to explore some of the mechanisms behind the approaches. The following section will outline the kinds of disengagement that have been theorized and present the idealized

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>36</sup> David Blair, “Al-Qaeda Founder Launches Fierce Attack on Osama bin Laden,” The Telegraph, February 20, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 31.

model of comprehensive disengagement. It will attempt to demonstrate that although deradicalization is the end state that the model seeks to achieve, ideological engagement must be attempted much earlier in order to secure lasting results. Secondly, it will explain the rationale behind the prison-based individual-level approach to deradicalization, before concluding with a review of key factors and recommendations.

## **Comprehensive Disengagement**

Since disengagement is only the modification of behavior, it is difficult to know for certain whether the extremist intends to temporarily lay dormant or give up their efforts completely. As a result scholars have not only attempted to create models by which to track the deepening of an extremist's commitment to disengagement, but also have cautioned against an overreliance on incomplete types of disengagement. Gordon Clubb identified 'selective disengagement' and 'conditional disengagement' as examples of incomplete approaches that should be avoided when possible.<sup>38</sup> If these two types of disengagement cannot be avoided, other efforts have to be built upon them to avoid re-engagement.

Selective disengagement refers to limiting the range of legitimate targets and tactics.<sup>39</sup> For example, a group may decide that civilian targets are no longer legitimate, or that the organization will no longer make use of suicide bombings. The problem with selective disengagement is that while it is a step in the right direction, it nevertheless only scratches the surface.<sup>40</sup> For example, although he fiercely criticized al-Qaeda, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif nevertheless has only engaged in selective disengagement. In his book he has outlined reasons for why al-Qaeda is illegitimate and why the West should not be

---

<sup>38</sup> Gordon Clubb, "Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah," *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 3 Issue 3: Sept (2009): 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

attacked, but nevertheless holds that Hamas must continue to attack Israel, Sunnis should unite against the Shia, and the Taliban should rule Afghanistan as a caliphate.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, although it may result in some discontent among the most radical members, selective disengagement may actually strengthen the organization in the long run. By refraining from carrying out attacks against certain populations, the group may gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population and new recruits may join the ranks. Selective disengagement is also highly unstable. As soon as the organization deems that it is less effective and more threatened, the organization will abandon their self-imposed limitations on violence.<sup>42</sup>

The other incomplete model is conditional disengagement. Conditional disengagement refers to a situation where you purchase disengagement. The individual or organization will refrain from action as long as some incentive is being provided.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned before, this model is highly unstable because re-engagement depends on the extremists' expected utility. Conditional disengagement is oftentimes built into deradicalization programs. For example, since most individual level deradicalization programs are run in prisons and depend on voluntary participation, extremists are told that participation may result in an early release.<sup>44</sup> Although this incentive has been successful in securing participants, some extremists exploit the opportunity and only pretend to be overcoming their “false” convictions in order to shorten their sentence. Singapore's deradicalization program, on the other hand, does not inform prisoners that

---

<sup>41</sup> Dina Al Raffie, “Straight from the Horse's Mouth: Exploring De-radicalization Claims of Former Egyptian Militant Leaders,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol 9. No. 1: Jan (2015).

<sup>42</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 6.

<sup>43</sup> Clubb, “Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah,” 27.

<sup>44</sup> Abdullah F. Ansary, “Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia’s Approach,” *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 2, (2008): 119.



there is an opportunity for early release,<sup>45</sup> but still maintains a successful program with only one of forty participants having been re-arrested.<sup>46</sup>

According to Omar Ashour, disengagement will only be successful when it occurs at three levels – the ideological, behavioral, and organizational.<sup>47</sup> "When a group collectively abandons violence behaviorally, de-legitimizes it ideologically and acts on that by dismantling its armed units organizationally" it may be considered comprehensively disengaged.<sup>48</sup> The process to comprehensive disengagement can be outlined in a number of steps; however it is important to note that these stages do not necessarily occur in the order presented below.

Ashour labels the first step of this overall process as declarative disengagement.<sup>49</sup> This refers to the organization declaring that it is willing to put an end to its violent activities. It is also an opportunity for the leaders of the group to signal to the government that it is willing to sit down at the negotiating table.

If the leadership of the organization is charismatic enough to rein in at least the majority of its members, and if the government is responsive to the group's initiative, then the group enters the stage of behavioral disengagement.<sup>50</sup> Put simply, at this stage the group ceases violence and/or all activities it had announced at the declarative stage. Unfortunately, after reviewing case studies, a number of researchers have concluded that most attempts at disengagement end at this stage.<sup>51</sup> The reasons for why this happens are usually divided into three categories. First, behavioral disengagement rarely involves putting an end to all violence and usually comes at a cost (i.e. it is made up of some

---

<sup>45</sup> "A New Approach? Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism," International Peace Institute (2010): 9.

<sup>46</sup> Bjørge and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Omar Ashour, *The De-radicalisation of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009), 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Clubb, "Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah," 27-28.

combination of selective and conditional disengagement). Secondly, it is uncommon for entire organizations to disengage collectively. Usually there is some internal division with splinter groups emerging. As a result they may seek to undermine the disengagement process by carrying out attacks. When the government responds with force against the whole organization rather than the splinter group, the organization will claim the government has broken the agreement and return to its attacks. While such escalations are not very common, when they do occur the organization gains sympathizers as propaganda will present the government as dishonest.<sup>52</sup> Third, without a universally accepted definition of terrorism, how can one objectively state that a group no longer engages in terrorist activities?

For example, Clubb identifies Fatah as being an organization that has repeatedly only come as far as the behavioral disengagement step (at least in terms of interactions with Israel during the Oslo Peace Process). However, he states that "the United States turned a blind eye to acts of terrorism attributed to the PLO to maintain the momentum of the peace process during the pre-Oslo period. Later, from the al-Aqsa Intifada onwards, the links between Fatah and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade have been downplayed, arguably for similar political reasons."<sup>53</sup>

However, if the organization can successfully implement behavioral disengagement, then the next step in Ashour's process is organizational disengagement.<sup>54</sup> This step primarily refers to the dismantling of armed units while simultaneously trying to hold order and prevent internal violence and mutiny. The final step in the process is deradicalization, where the group gives up their violent ideology. According to Ashour, if all of these stages are met then the organization has undergone comprehensive

---

<sup>52</sup> Omar Ashour, "Islamist deradicalization in Algeria: The case of the Islamic Salvation Army and Affiliated Militias," in *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-Terrorism*, ed. Rohan Gunaratna et al. (Routledge: 2011), 12-15.

<sup>53</sup> Clubb, "Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah," 28.

<sup>54</sup> Ashour, *The De-radicalisation of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, 6.

disengagement and the likelihood of re-engaging is extremely low. Ashour identifies Egypt's al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group) as an example of a group that has undergone comprehensive disengagement.<sup>55</sup> If the organization successfully disengages behaviorally and ideologically, but during organizational disengagement part of the group violently breaks with the rest, then the result is termed substantive disengagement. And if the organization successfully disengages behaviorally and organizationally but does not abandon its ideology, the result is termed pragmatic disengagement.<sup>56</sup> Spain's ETA can be considered to have undergone pragmatic disengagement.

Where pragmatic disengagement has been achieved, the recommendation for counter-terrorism practitioners is to keep up efforts to secure deradicalization. It is believed that by allowing the group to interact with the government and by giving them a limited role in the consultations on policy, then the group will eventually give up their ideology due to socialization. Drawing on social psychology theory, the idea is that as members of the organization are exposed to rule-governed behavior and the logic of appropriateness, an internal dialogue will eventually take place and a new set of beliefs will materialize.<sup>57</sup>

## **Prison-Based Approaches**

Prisons have long been characterized as hotbeds of radicalization and as inefficient in reforming criminal behavior.<sup>58</sup> Vulnerable individuals are likely to explore new beliefs and, without positive social networks countering this message, take on new radical identities. Prisons have also long served as a symbol of oppression for militant and

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Risse, "Let's Argue! Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* Vol. 54, No. 1, Winter (2000): 4.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Birnbaum, "French prisons, long hotbeds of radical Islam, get new scrutiny after Paris attacks," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2015.

revolutionary groups. Whether Marxists, Islamists, or Republicans the imprisonment of comrades has been linked to spikes in violence. The real or perceived ill-treatment of these prisoners then served as propaganda for gaining further support for violence against the state.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore most deradicalization programs are based in prisons and aim to reduce “the number of active terrorists in a given society by helping individual terrorists abandon terrorism and [ease] their re-integration into mainstream society.”<sup>60</sup> Besides offering a closed and controlled environment in which practitioners can evaluate progress, prison-based deradicalization offers a solution to at least two problems the state is plagued with. First, these efforts counter-balance the radicalization that is already underway in prisons and offers ‘hanger-ons’ a way out. The second is that, afflicted with the inability and unwillingness to hold prisoners indefinitely, these programs will seek to reform engaged extremists and supporters and decrease recidivism rates.<sup>61</sup>

Prisons may also be the ideal setting for such programs due to the very nature of terrorism. Terrorists don’t share the government’s belief that they are ordinary criminals, no different than any other high security inmate. Identifying themselves as politically motivated offenders, they see their time in prison as an opportunity to continue their struggle; whether by indirectly contributing to the development of the ideology or simply by recruiting new members from among the prison population. For example Abu Mohammed al Maqdisi, the spiritual mentor of the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, wrote some of the most influential theories of jihadist warfare while in prison.<sup>62</sup>

Until recently, governments have been unwilling to recognize them as this ‘special’ kind of prisoner and chose to focus on security rather than reform when dealing

---

<sup>59</sup> Peter Neumann, “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries,” ICSR (2010): 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>61</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 37.

<sup>62</sup> Neumann, “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries,” 15.

with this prison demographic. For example, prisons in countries such as France, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom did not create reform programs for Islamist extremists because they believed these prisoners could no longer pose a threat to their respective societies. In France most Islamist extremists were foreigners that would be deported back to their home countries after serving their sentences. In the United States, terrorists were serving such long sentences that making major investments in counseling programs was seen as irrational.<sup>63</sup> However, more recently states are coming to the conclusion that a ‘security only’ approach may be futile.

For one, governments are increasingly comprehending the phenomenon of prison radicalization and realizing that while the terrorist himself may remain incarcerated, others that have been infected with his corrupted ideology may be released early and carry out attacks. Secondly, with the rise of homegrown terrorists, after-care and counseling programs are necessary since these new extremists will not be deported to third countries but rejoin the state’s civil society upon release. For example, in 2010 when the British government realized that many of its homegrown terrorists would be released in the near future, prison authorities began to create structures to ease their transition back into civil society. They created vocational trainings and educational programs and sought out partners among several community organizations, who then played an active role in providing social, psychological, and theological support for the released offender.<sup>64</sup> Similarly the case of Richard Reid, the shoe bomber, demonstrates the merits of creating and running after-care programs. While Reid converted to Islam in prison, it is believed that he followed a mainstream interpretation of the religion until he became acquainted with a group of extremists at the Brixton Mosque.<sup>65</sup> Had this support

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>65</sup> Greg Hannah, Lindsay Clutterbuck, and Jennifer Rubin, “Radicalization or Rehabilitation: Understanding the Challenge of Extremist and Radicalized Prisoners,” RAND (2008): 34.

been extended to him prior to his release he may not have fallen prey to the extremists so easily.

Current research being undertaken by Clarke R. Jones also contributes to the conclusion that after-care programs may be beneficial to the successful disengagement and deradicalization of terrorist offenders.<sup>66</sup> Although Jones challenges the notion of prison radicalization by stating that prison culture and the prison population's own code of conduct act as obstacles for recruitment and radicalization, he nevertheless offers insight into how to effectively disengage terrorist offenders.<sup>67</sup> Jones's ongoing study on the Philippine's corrective system seeks to understand whether terrorist offenders should be integrated or segregated from the general prison population. He seeks to determine which strategy is likely to lead to disengagement by the offender in a corrective system which lacks an active deradicalization program. The Philippines offers a conducive environment in which to conduct the experiment as all of the Philippine's terrorist offenders are incarcerated in one of two maximum security prisons. The New Bilibid Prison (NBP) integrates terrorists with the general population, whereas the Metro Manila District Jail (MMDJ) segregates the terrorists together into Special Intensive Care Areas.

Jones's preliminary findings have shown that when terrorists are segregated they are more likely to reinforce group discipline and foster their militant ideology.<sup>68</sup> In the NBP on the other hand, prisoners are assigned to one of twelve prison gangs. Due to weak prison regimes in the Philippines these gangs help authorities maintain a fragile state of peace and order. Membership is not required, yet group pressure and security

---

<sup>66</sup> Clarke R. Jones, "Are Prisons Really Schools for Terrorists? Challenging the Rhetoric on Prison Radicalization" *Punishment and Society* 16 (2014); and Clarke R. Jones, *Testing the Notion that Prisons are schools for terrorism: Examining Radicalization and Disengagement in the Philippine Corrective System*. Conference Paper, Abu Dhabi: Global Counterterrorism Forum (2014).

<sup>67</sup> Clarke's views on prison radicalization apply to correctional facilities which are neither located in Muslim majority states nor have large Muslim prison populations.

<sup>68</sup> Jones, "Are Prisons Really Schools for Terrorists?" 86.

usually lead terrorists to joining. The pressure to learn the gang and prison culture ultimately leads terrorists to acquire a new group identity and, “over time this gang membership may influence their behavior (and possibly their beliefs).”<sup>69</sup> However, Jones concedes that assimilating to gang or prison culture may only be a temporary disengagement on the part of the terrorist, especially if no other support is provided and upon release the offender returns to their original social setting.<sup>70</sup> Jones concludes that in the case of Western prisons where terrorist inmates make up small portions of the population, the inclination to segregate these prisoners is counter-productive. Furthermore, although integration alone produces pressures to adapt, terrorist offenders should be closely monitored and engaged both during their incarceration and after their eventual release.

As mentioned before, deradicalization refers to the bringing about of cognitive shifts in an extremist’s worldview. In order to do that, Tore Bjørgo argues that it is necessary to identify, address, and exploit the extremist’s ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. Push factors refer to all the reasons that cause the individual to doubt their involvement with the group. These can include disillusionment with the leadership, goals, tactics, their status within the organization, or with the reality of their struggle. Pull factors on the other hand include all the positive reasons for wanting to leave an organization, such as new social networks, friends, love interests, family, financial incentives, etc. Once these factors are identified, practitioners must also identify if there exist any ‘exit barriers’ that keep the individual from being able to make a clean break with their organization. An example of an affective exit barrier may be that the individual has other family members in the organization.<sup>71</sup> Since the individual is in prison, it makes it easier to isolate them from group discipline and, assuming that they are unhappy with their captivity, begin to

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 85-86

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 96-97

<sup>71</sup> Bjørgo and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, 36-42.

undermine their loyalty to the group's ideology. In certain respects, the process of deradicalization can be seen as 'radicalization in reverse.' Just like in radicalization, the initial steps for deradicalization include the individual being "engaged in dialogue, befriended, and their social, financial, or psychological needs [being] addressed as a means of gaining their trust."<sup>72</sup>

The differences between the prison-based deradicalization programs of different countries will depend primarily on which factors they choose to focus on most.<sup>73</sup> This reflects an important point: there is no one size fits all approach to deradicalization programs. Case studies examining the different prison-based programs that have been attempted or which are currently being executed demonstrate that "programs are too different and too dependent on local context and conditions to measure success and compare their results across the board."<sup>74</sup> For one, as mentioned above, a particular country's program will depend on how they balance addressing the extremist's push and pull factors, and whether they also attempt to help them overcome their 'exit barriers.' This balancing act will depend on not only the country's legal and political tradition but also on the wider social and cultural context. For example, deradicalization programs in most Muslim majority states view the participant as a victim; someone who wanted to be a good Muslim but was deceived by an organization that exploited this desire by indoctrinating him into a corrupted interpretation of Islam.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, in most Western countries, governments are slow to build or expand such programs because the general public expresses outrage at the idea that a terrorist would be 'rewarded' for rejoining the status quo.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup>"A New Approach? Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism," 2.

<sup>73</sup> Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries," 48.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>75</sup> El-Said, "De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States," 37.

<sup>76</sup> John Horgan, "De-radicalization Programs Offer Hope in Countering Terrorism," Los Angeles Times, February 13, 2015.



Nevertheless, key elements to be included have been identified across the more effective programs. Peter Neumann’s analysis of prison deradicalization programs in 15 countries identified the most important measures as being “a mix of prison programming, consisting primarily of religious re-education and vocational training; credible interlocutors who can relate to prisoners’ personal and psychological needs; consistent efforts to facilitate prisoners’ transition into social networks away from extremism; and the systematic fostering of long-term commitments towards family, community, and the state, which aim to reduce opportunities for re-offending and increase the social and material cost of doing so.”<sup>77</sup> Anne Speckhard acknowledges all of Neumann’s factors, and also adds family or tribal participation and involvement in the process, a civil rapport between the interlocutors and prisoners, isolation from non-rehabilitative prisoners, and not only challenging radical Islamic beliefs but also engaging in faith-based critical thinking.<sup>78</sup> Hamed El-Said’s analyzed the deradicalization programs of eight Muslim majority states and concluded that the success of such programs depends on the role of popular support and charismatic leadership, the role of the families, the role of civil society, and the role and quality of the clerics and scholars involved.<sup>79</sup>

The purpose of having singled out these three authors is to make the point that there is more or less a consensus on what factors influence success. Each author has independently come to similar conclusions regarding the key elements, and in fact if one was to produce a more extensive literary review of key factors contributing to the success of a program, the most commonly appearing items would include religious re-education, credible interlocutors, cooperating with the family, and providing after-care. As a result,

---

<sup>77</sup> Neumann, “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries,” 47.

<sup>78</sup> Anne Speckhard, “Prison and Community Based Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs for Extremists Involved in Militant Jihadi Terrorism Ideologies and Activities,” in *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-radicalization and Disengagement*, ed. Laurie Fenstermacher et al. (2010): 358.

<sup>79</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 2.

this article will hold that at a bare minimum all Islamist deradicalization programs should seek to address these four factors.

The ability and depth with which countries will address any of the above factors will depend on societal and political will as well as, to a lesser degree, the amount of resources the country has at its disposal. For example, Saudi Arabia spends more on running and reforming its deradicalization program than any other country in the world.<sup>80</sup> As a result it has created the world's largest deradicalization program and has produced over a thousand graduates. Comparatively, Singapore spends very little on deradicalization and has had less than a hundred participants go through the program and yet its rate of success is very high.<sup>81</sup> While money is very important for the financing and operationalization of the program, making sure that it is tailored specifically for the community that it operates in is even more essential.<sup>82</sup>

As we will see in the next section and in the case studies, simply providing these services will not guarantee success, as mismanaging resources, focusing too narrowly on certain issues, or simply paying lip-service to these criteria will not yield results. However, if skillfully handled, these factors can serve as the foundations upon which a country can experiment with their own deradicalization program.

### **SECTION 3: CHALLENGES IN ASSESSING PROGRAMS**

To be sure, deradicalization programs are not without limitation. As has already been alluded to in the previous section, the debates surrounding the ethical trade-off of such programs are just as heated as the debate surrounding how to define a successful program.<sup>83</sup> Even though officials from countries with such programs will continue to

---

<sup>80</sup> Stern, "Mind over Martyr"

<sup>81</sup> Bjørgo and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, 198.

<sup>82</sup> John Horgan, "What makes a Terrorist Stop Being a Terrorist?" *The Conversation*, November 18, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries," 48.

defend the success of their undertakings, studies have shown that there are a number of problems when it comes to addressing the implementation and evaluation of a successful deradicalization program. Two elements that have already been discussed have to do with the transferability of such programs and the difficulty in proving that they indeed have led to a cognitive shift in the extremist's thinking. Transferability refers to the ability to take one country's model and recreate positive results in another country. As we have already briefly discussed, these programs are very much a product of the political environment in which they are created and as such cannot be easily copied and pasted.<sup>84</sup> As to the issue of proving that a cognitive shift has been the result of the program, it is nearly impossible to be certain that the transformation is genuine and long-term. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, since deradicalization programs usually combine ideological and material components, it is difficult to determine what the extremist is reacting to.<sup>85</sup>

Measuring the rate of recidivism among former participants of deradicalization has been the primary tool for evaluating the success of these programs.<sup>86</sup> The logic is simple: if a prisoner has completed the program, was released, and did not return to their organization or violence (or at least to violence not sanctioned by the government), then it must mean that the individual was deradicalized. However this logic is flawed in a number of ways. First off, as has already been identified, his behavior may have changed due to an expected utility calculation that favors disengagement, while his worldview may have remained the same.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, in countries such as Saudi Arabia, release and after-care go hand in hand with constant observation by security forces which may hinder the extremist's ability to operationalize in the short-term. Third, it is difficult to secure

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>85</sup> Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 6.

<sup>86</sup> John Horgan, and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 22 (2010): 268.

<sup>87</sup> Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*.

reliable data due to the fact that most of these programs are still in their infancy and the governments running these programs are not keen on sharing all of their information.<sup>88</sup> For example, Saudi Arabia has the longest running deradicalization program targeting Islamist extremists and it has only been around since 2004. Although a decade seems like a sufficient span of time to at the very least evaluate the recidivism rate among the earliest graduating classes, such a task is relatively impossible due to the lack of access to information. Furthermore, in the span of these last eleven years that the Saudi government has been running and improving their program, they have only published official results once in 2007.<sup>89</sup> Since specific information is usually not available, results cannot be independently verified. Recidivism rates may also vary by country depending on how selective the respective programs are in determining who is eligible to participate. Some countries will exclude hardcore militants by claiming they are irreconcilable and thus favor those extremists who were only marginally involved in the organization.<sup>90</sup> These countries will thus claim high levels of success even though the most dangerous or influential extremists remain unchallenged and possibly still engaged in radicalizing other inmates. Finally, this measure may be problematic due to the variety of ways that states define recidivism rates. For example, if an individual does not return to violence at home, but joins a terrorist group abroad, the Yemeni government will count it as a successful case of deradicalization.<sup>91</sup>

For proponents of this ‘soft’ approach to counter-terrorism, finding a solution for effectively evaluating the success of such programs is key since time and capital will not be invested into any new program until governments can reasonably justify doing so.<sup>92</sup> This is especially true for Western governments due to the unconventional nature of this

<sup>88</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 40.

<sup>89</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 39.

<sup>90</sup> Neumann, “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries,” 49.

<sup>91</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 41.

<sup>92</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 2.

approach to counter-terrorism. As Peter Neumann points out, deradicalization programs run the risk of being terminated in their infancy since they are subject to high levels of public scrutiny.<sup>93</sup> Opponents, such as those against Minnesota's recent deradicalization experiment, will be carefully tracking these programs and waiting to exploit the slightest hiccup as a reason to decry the whole program.<sup>94</sup> Extremists and their supporters will observe, and publicize every action undertaken by prison authorities as proof that there is a war happening. While those stakeholders with a vested interest in the success of such a program may try to micromanage every aspect to fulfill their short term interests, whether political or otherwise. Therefore governments must have clear and realistic objectives established prior to beginning any efforts and must be careful to maintain a balance of transparency and secrecy.

According to one publication by Angel Rabasa, Stacie J. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, and Christopher Boucek, new and existing deradicalization initiatives should strive to “clearly define recidivism and success, carefully monitor ex-radicals, and increase the transparency of their operations [to allow for independent verification of results].”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore they propose that a minimal definition of success could be disengagement, while a more robust definition could be that the majority of participants remain disengaged and deradicalized. “Subsidiary considerations that may contribute to the degree of success [could] include whether the reformed militants provide intelligence about their former group, whether they encourage other radicals to moderate and discourage others from radicalizing, and whether the program seeks to reform hard-core militants as well as peripheral members.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Neumann, “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries,” 15.

<sup>94</sup> Patrick Poole, “Minneapolis Terror ‘Deradicalization’ Program Fails After Just Months, ‘Test’ Case Back in Jail,” PJ Media, May 12, 2015. and, “Minnesota terrorist recruit back in custody after allegedly violating conditions of his release” Star Tribune, May 11, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 41.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 42.

Braddock and Horgan, on the other hand, stress that in evaluating the success of a program it is equally important to identify who the major stakeholders of these programs are, how they understand success, and how they conceptualize the main objectives.<sup>97</sup> They argue that Multi-attribute Utility Technology (MAUT, also known as Multi-attribute Evaluation - ME) can be used to systematically evaluate the claimed success of individual programs and then allow for the comparison of their common elements. They thus propose that the goals of deradicalization are not universal and that the perception that these programs have a common endpoint is the reason why proving success and creating transferable programs has been difficult. They argue that the term ‘deradicalization program’ “is a misleading category for what these diverse and innovative programs aspire to do, and [that] the significance of how this unhelpful term has led us to a false start should be recognized explicitly.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, in building a program, a country should first identify which country’s existing program goals most closely resemble their own, and evaluate how successful that country’s deradicalization approach has been to achieve those goals.

Deradicalization programs have the potential to be of an enormous benefit to governments worldwide, especially when they are professionally managed and their results are verifiable. And although as of yet there is no common framework to systematically evaluate programs, such efforts, however limited, are nonetheless necessary. In coming up with a measurement it is not enough to ask *if* a program is successful, but also *why*.<sup>99</sup> The case studies presented below will try to shine some light on these two questions. The next section will attempt to make the case that regardless of criticism, to be successful deradicalization programs have to counter the affective,

---

<sup>97</sup> Horgan and Braddock, “Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs,” 282-284.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

pragmatic, and ideological component to extremist organizations. They cannot simply refute ideology, but must also provide counseling, identify what made the individuals join, and what is preventing them from exiting. Success will also depend on breaking any remaining ties to their past organization, which can be achieved through post-release monitoring and providing after-care.<sup>100</sup>

## **SECTION 4: CASE STUDIES**

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia has long been hailed as having one of the most comprehensive and successful deradicalization programs. It has also served as a model that other states have attempted to emulate (albeit with varying levels of success). Highly centralized under the Interior Ministry and heavily resourced, the program employs a prison-based individual level approach to disengage and deradicalize participants. However, the Saudi program goes a step further than other prison-based programs by reaching out and supporting the families of detainees as well as by providing aftercare programs for participants once they have been released.

The Saudi deradicalization program began in 2004 under the government's PRAC Strategy (Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare). PRAC was the government's response to the wave of terrorist attacks that struck Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004.<sup>101</sup> While the Prevention element of the strategy focused on countering radical ideology by monitoring radical websites and by promoting more moderate views through education, media, and entertainment, the Rehabilitation and Aftercare strategies focused on persons already detained. A group set up by the Interior Ministry, known as the Advisory Committee, was tasked with implementing and administrating the comprehensive

<sup>100</sup> Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 42-43.

<sup>101</sup> Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," Carnegie Papers No. 97 (2008): 4.

counselling program. The Committee is further subdivided into four smaller subcommittees: The Religious Subcommittee, The Psychological and Social Subcommittee, the Security Committee and the Media Committee.<sup>102</sup>

According to the Interior Ministry, the aim of the program is to “deal with the wrong convictions of the detained person in order to change and substitute them with correct convictions that agree with the middle way of Islam and its tolerance.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, they believe the prisoner has been duped and their ignorance has been taken advantage of. The prisoner is seen as a misguided victim and therefore the belief is that through reeducation, rather than punishment, they can be redeemed. However, it is important to understand that the government does not extend this program to all of its prisoners. With the exception of prisoners from Guantanamo Bay, who are required to participate, the program is generally voluntary and targets those security prisoners who have not participated in violence against the Saudi government. If a terrorist that has blood on their hands completes the program, it does not result in an early termination of sentence, as it may for other prisoners.<sup>104</sup>

The counseling process begins with one-on-one meetings with the detainees. This is called the al-Munasah (advice) scheme and is administered by clerics, scholars, and psychologists.<sup>105</sup> During the initial meeting, the role of the counselor is twofold. First he must assure the participant that he is not a government agent, but an independent and righteous scholar. This is an important step because the interlocutor must be seen as legitimate and reputable in order to command the respect and attention of the detainee. Secondly, during the first meeting the counselor’s primary job is to listen. He asks the detainee what actions led to their imprisonment, why they did it, what their religious

<sup>102</sup> Christopher Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (New York: Routledge, 2009), 217.

<sup>103</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 37.

<sup>104</sup> Ansary, “Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia’s Approach,” 119.

<sup>105</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 38.



justifications were, and how they feel about their actions.<sup>106</sup> Based on the information gathered at this initial meeting, the Advisory Committee can deduce whether the detainee will participate in the program, and strategize how best to approach their deradicalization. Prisoners who are deemed as irreconcilable are physically separated from the rest of the prison population so that they do not jeopardize the progress of those willing to participate in the program. This initial meeting also opens the door for the counsellor to begin a religious debate, in which he explains how the participant's religious justifications have been based on a corrupted understanding of Islam.<sup>107</sup>

The rehabilitation program is split into two types of classroom-structured courses. There is a short term (lasting up to two weeks) and a long term (up to six weeks) course during which the participants are engaged individually and in groups.<sup>108</sup> Most participants are placed in the long study program during which they cover ten subjects and discuss topics such as: *takfir*, *walaah* (loyalty) and *bay'ah* (allegiance), terrorism, the legal rules for jihad, psychological courses on self-esteem, concepts of religious leadership, the centrality of scholarly jurisprudence, the importance of authority, the need to recognize legitimate sources of knowledge and topics of treason, sedition, and the permissibility of violence.<sup>109</sup> Although there is some lecturing involved, the religious scholars and clerics prefer to engage with the participants in discussions and debates in order to more effectively root out false convictions, as well as to track shifts in their beliefs. Successful completion of the course requires the participants to pass exams in each subject. If successful, the participant is evaluated for release and if eligible is moved out of prison to a 'half-way house' for the next step in the process.

<sup>106</sup>Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," 16

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>108</sup> Amanda K. Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," (Post-graduate thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009): 31.

<sup>109</sup>Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," 17.

Upon release from prison the participants are transferred to the Mohammed bin Nayef Centre for Counselling and Care.<sup>110</sup> They usually spend anywhere from 8-12 weeks at the Centre participating in a number of recreational, religious, social, and professional workshops and programs, which are meant to facilitate successful transition back into society.<sup>111</sup> Life in this Centre is more similar to that of a commune than of a prison. Guards are plain-clothed and oftentimes engage the residents in recreational activity or sport, while the residents live in dormitory-styled housing, cook and prepare meals together, and enjoy grassy courtyards.<sup>112</sup> There is also an art therapy class, which is one of the most revolutionary elements of this program since “getting radicalized young men who previously would have rejected any type of visual art as forbidden by Islam to participate in art therapy is a major accomplishment.”<sup>113</sup>

Throughout this time, the resident is in constant contact with a social worker, psychologist, and/or cleric. Although regular counselling and classes still take place, there are also informal meetings during which the professionals are more engaged in a process of befriending than educating the resident. The goal is to cultivate healthy relationships and trust between these persons and the participants so that upon release the participant feels he has someone to turn to in case of any trouble. Sufficiently satisfied that the participants’ views have been altered enough to no longer claim their past religious justifications as valid, the Centre strives to solidify these gains by increasing disengagement-focused elements.<sup>114</sup> In other words, the government believes it can further decrease the likeliness of recidivism by distracting the former participant with responsibilities such as a job and family life - activities that don’t allow for idle time. Participants receive job training and are encouraged to break off toxic relationships.

---

<sup>110</sup>El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 38.

<sup>111</sup>Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” 18.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>114</sup> Marisa L. Porges, “The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment,” Council on Foreign Relations (2010).

Upon release the government provides each participant with a one year stipend, and intervenes to help them find a job, resume their education, find housing, or even help plan a marriage.<sup>115</sup>

The Saudi rehabilitation program also heavily focuses on extending social support to the family of the individual being de-radicalized. His family is kept informed about the conditions of the detention and participates in certain aspects of the program. The Psychological and Social Subcommittee meets with the family and devises a strategy to offset the social and economic hardships that they may be facing as a result of the incarceration of their primary breadwinner. This can include setting the family up with an alternate salary or helping cover tuition or healthcare costs for children.<sup>116</sup> This approach strives to prevent further radicalization in the family as well as serves to soften the individual. The State casts itself in a positive light by showing that it is more concerned for the wellbeing of the individual and his family than the terrorist organization that he belonged to did. In doing so, the state strives to show that the terrorist organization had manipulated and used the individual to fulfill its own agenda.

While the participant is in the half-way house facility, families are encouraged to visit as often as possible, and are even allowed to have their family member temporarily released into their custody.<sup>117</sup> The Saudi government also makes the family a stakeholder in the individual's deradicalization by holding respectable figures from their clan or tribe responsible for guaranteeing that once released, the individual will not re-engage.<sup>118</sup> Most assessments conclude that "the involvement and treatment of an individual's family and extended social network are central to successful demobilization."<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup>Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," 35.

<sup>116</sup>Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," 15.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>118</sup>Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," 35.

<sup>119</sup>Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," 22.

It is also notable to mention that the Advisory Committee is constantly adapting to effectively counter the extremists in ‘the war of ideas.’ For example, “in response to a new concern about al-Qaeda efforts to manipulate Arabian Peninsula history to recruit followers, the Rehabilitation Center updated classes on history and culture to counter this influence.”<sup>120</sup>

Although the Saudi government claims that low recidivism rates among the participants of the program are testimony to the success of its deradicalization efforts, in reality there exist a number of criticisms of both the program and the way it is evaluated. According to the Saudi government, the program enjoys a success rate of 80-90 percent; with the remaining 10 to 20 percent including those prisoners who refused to participate, those who failed the program, and those who reoffended upon release.<sup>121</sup> According to a 2007 report, only 35 of the 1,400 prisoners who completed the program and were released had been rearrested.<sup>122</sup> Due to the secrecy around the program, and the unwillingness of the government to release information regarding reoffenders, these are numbers that are difficult to independently verify. Suspicions as to the validity of such figures were also heightened by the recidivism of detainees from Guantanamo Bay. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, at least eleven of the Saudi detainees of Guantanamo Bay that have completed the deradicalization program have returned to prominent roles in terrorist organizations.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, most participants and graduates of the deradicalization program are not ultra-committed jihadi fighters, but sympathizers, low level support personnel, and people who have been caught in possession of propaganda material.<sup>124</sup> As for the hard-core militants, criticisms usually follow two lines of thought. The first is that the Saudi

<sup>120</sup> Porges, “The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment,”

<sup>121</sup> Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” 21.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>123</sup> Porges, “The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment.”

<sup>124</sup> Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,” 22.

government is too quick to label someone as irreconcilable, and therefore the most dangerous extremists are left unengaged. Proponents of the deradicalization approach argue that the government is making a mistake because if it were to successfully ‘flip’ some of these more dangerous extremists, it could undermine future recruitment and radicalization. The second argues that since deradicalization engages the extremist at a cognitive level, we cannot be sure that there has been a true shift in belief. Since the detainee is immediately informed that participation may lead to an early termination of sentence (granted the detainee has not committed a violent act), the participant may just be playing along.<sup>125</sup> Thus, critics claim that recidivism rates do not accurately reflect the success of deradicalization because they do not prove a cognitive shift. Low recidivism rates may simply reflect the inability to act out due to constant monitoring by security forces, or a failure of detection.

Nevertheless, the Saudi government is proud and confident in its program, arguing that even if the majority of participants are not hard-core militants, the government’s efforts in the ‘war of ideas,’ in Prevention, and in deradicalization thins the pool of potential future recruits, and it prevents those persons who currently seem harmless and are only auxiliary members from progressing further down the path of radicalization and violence. The government also points to high levels of public support for the program as putting a check on further violent attacks, since as Prince Mohammed bin Nayef has said, “If a man reverts to violent extremism, having been given everything by the state, he attracts little if any public support, whereas if a man returns to violence because he has been tortured or otherwise mistreated he is likely to take others with him.”<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>126</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 40.

## Yemen

The Yemeni deradicalization program is yet another example of a Muslim-majority state's approach to countering the extremist threat with 'soft' countermeasures. Although far less successful than the Saudi initiative, and in fact abandoned in 2006 due to unrest in Yemen, it is nevertheless beneficial to evaluate the program for lessons learned.

The Yemeni initiative was launched following the 9/11 attacks as a way to debate and engage those individuals who had been arrested on suspicion that they may be collaborating with al-Qaeda.<sup>127</sup> It was recognized that the extremist ideologies that these groups held were at the root of terrorism, and that if these could be successfully debated and moderated the threat would be reduced. In 2002, by presidential decree, a Dialogue Committee (or Committee of Religious Dialogue) was established and prominent scholars and clerics were invited to participate in these deradicalization efforts. However, fearing participation would endanger their lives and undermine their reputation, only three clerics agreed to participate, with the most notable being the former Supreme Court Justice Judge Hittar (or al-Hitar).<sup>128</sup> A firm believer in the initiative, Judge Hittar's launching strategy was to go after the most hardened and radical extremists as a way to prove the benefits of deradicalization and gain further support for the program.<sup>129</sup>

The first meeting, held on September 5, 2002 was between the Dialogue Committee (henceforth simply DC) and four or five of the most radical detainees. It began with the DC informing the prisoners that they are there to engage them on order from the President, that participation may lead to an early release, and that the program is an all or nothing endeavor; that the detainees should try to convince the DC why their

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 41.

interpretation of Islam is correct, and the scholars will attempt to persuade them of the opposite.<sup>130</sup> Or, as Judge Hittar put it: “We tell them, if you are right we will follow you, but if what we are saying is right, you have to admit it and follow us.”<sup>131</sup> The actual religious debates, however, did not begin until the clerics won the respect and trust of the detainees. Then the parties agreed on a general agenda and on guidelines based on mutual respect.<sup>132</sup>

Debates were mostly held on religious issues such as the Islamic nature of the state, the responsibilities of the Muslim ruler, the meaning of jihad, relations with non-Muslim states, and who has the right to issue fatwas in Islam.<sup>133</sup> The Quran and the Sunnah were used to facilitate the debate. The clerics would ask the participants to point to the passages in these bodies of text that justified their actions or understandings, and then attempted to show how they had misunderstood the meaning and how other passages refute their claims. Yet one of the most interesting components of the program was the way it attempted to use these religious texts to demonstrate to the participants that the Yemeni government was legitimate and that it was their duty as Muslims to obey it.<sup>134</sup> For example, when challenged that Yemen was not an Islamic state and therefore against the interests’ of its Muslim population, Judge Hittar brought in copies of the Yemeni Constitution and penal code and asked participants to find which parts contradict the religious texts. Hittar further encouraged them by saying that if they succeed in finding anything that runs counter to these religious texts, the laws would immediately be changed.<sup>135</sup> This process was repeated for the legality of international treaties and the

---

<sup>130</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 49.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>133</sup> El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 41.

<sup>134</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 49.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 49.

legitimacy of the president's rule. Each time the participants were unsuccessful in proving their beliefs.<sup>136</sup>

Other significant features of the deradicalization program were the use of neutral space to host the program, the inclusion of the family in the process, and providing government aid upon release. Although there has been some contradictory reporting as to the location of the meetings, it is clear that at least some of them have been carried out outside of prison in neutral facilities.<sup>137</sup> The benefit of engaging the participants on neutral territory outside of prison is that it puts the two parties on equal footing. According to Judge Hittar, it is conducive to building mutual trust and respect.<sup>138</sup>

As in the case of the Saudi program, families were encouraged to visit their incarcerated loved ones as often as possible for three reasons. First, the authorities wanted to demonstrate to the families that their loved ones were not being tortured or treated inhumanely and thus prevent further radicalization within the family. Second, having witnessed that their loved ones were treated fairly, the authorities hoped the families would persuade other sympathizers of al-Qaeda to give themselves up without fear of government reprisal. Third, they counted on the families to exert tribal pressures on the detainees and encourage them to repent and disengage.<sup>139</sup>

Upon successful completion of the program, it was determined whether the detainee was fit to be released. If the detainee had not participated in a violent attack within Yemen, he was made to sign a pledge promising not to carry out future violence against the state and was granted amnesty.<sup>140</sup> The released detainee was then provided with up to 20,000 YR, and the government offered to help restore them to their former jobs or cover the costs of marriages. Some also received cheap loans to establish private

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>137</sup> Robert F. Worth, "Yemen's Deals with Jihadists Unsettle the U.S." The New York Times, January, 28 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," 21-22.

<sup>139</sup> El-Said, "De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States," 42.

<sup>140</sup> Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 51.



businesses.<sup>141</sup> As in the Saudi case, the rationale behind these gifts was that it would allow the released detainee to build a life outside of the terrorist organization and that the responsibilities of running a business and caring for a family would distract them from returning to their former activities.

Although the program enjoyed some limited success, a number of underlying and situational problems eventually led to its collapse. One of the biggest criticisms was that the program may not have truly sought to (and succeeded in) combating extremist ideology. The government points out that many former participants of the program are now working in the security forces, or have provided high-value intelligence that has led to the capture of high-level targets such as Hamdi al-Ahdal, the alleged mastermind behind the USS Cole bombing.<sup>142</sup> However Nasser al-Bahri, a former driver of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, believes the program was more about political expediency than about changing worldviews. He describes the program as a raw bargain between the participants and the government: “Exempt Yemen from your jihad and you will be left alone.”<sup>143</sup> In a 2008 interview with the New York Times, Mr. Bahri professed that he still supports al-Qaeda’s global goals even though he had graduated from the religious dialogue program and upon release obtained government help to set up a taxi business and go back to school. He states that the only thing that is keeping him safe from government reprisal is that he actively urges other Islamists to avoid carrying out violence in Yemen.<sup>144</sup> It has been found that the religious dialogue challenged extremist ideology only as far as to prevent attacks in Yemen. Judge Hittar himself was quoted saying that the participation in operations in Iraq constituted legitimate resistance.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup>El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 42.

<sup>142</sup>Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 52.

<sup>143</sup>Worth, “Yemen’s Deals with Jihadists Unsettle the U.S.”

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 53.

A second criticism of the program was that it was inadequately set up and underfunded, and was thus incapable of producing the desired results. On this point, two aspects immediately come to mind: the program was grossly understaffed and the program did not prepare prisoners for the transition back into society. The majority of the work done by the DC was undertaken by Judge Hittar and two or three other clerics. As a result, when dialogues occurred they were limited in scope and in length. According to interviews with former participants of the program “detainees had more conversations and discussions with each other than they did with official clerics, and it was this which convinced most imprisoned individuals to moderate their views and tactics.”<sup>146</sup> Such facts lend further probability to the claims that the program was more focused on striking political deals than on achieving cognitive shifts in its participants. The lack of educational courses or vocational training also meant that after their release, the government was only able to secure jobs for a very limited number of prisoners. This inability to gain employment, taken together with the general situation in Yemen greatly contributed to the ultimate collapse of the DC.

The culmination of factors such as high unemployment, rebellion in the North by the Houthis, sentiments for secession in the South, poor infrastructure, high illiteracy, and more than 50% of the population living below the poverty line, all created a niche in which al-Qaeda could compete with the government for the loyalty of its released detainees.<sup>147</sup> Unable to find a job and with the government stipend running out, many former participants decided to re-join al-Qaeda out of economic necessity. “Most felt that they had to assist their families. Of those who got married, many quickly became short of money and marriage and family became a liability, rather than an asset. Under such

---

<sup>146</sup>El-Said, “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,” 43.

<sup>147</sup> “How Does al-Qaeda Attract Yemenis?” BBC News, May 4, 2015.

circumstances, many re-joined al-Qaeda, which pays its cadre around \$300 monthly.<sup>148</sup> And with government funds diverted from monitoring former detainees to fighting the Houthis, reengagement is quite simple.

In the final years of the program, success was further declining due to a new type of detainee. At the onset of the DC, most detainees had been participants in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, or had fought in Bosnia. As a result they appreciated hierarchy and authority, and as soon as respect was established between themselves and the DC they were willing to be engaged. However, by 2005 most of the detainees had been young Saudi extremists who had fled their country after the Saudi government began to crackdown on their activities in 2004. These younger detainees were not only unwilling to recognize the authority of the interlocutors, but were also less willing to honor their pledge to refrain from violence against the state.<sup>149</sup> Understaffed and poorly financed, the DC was unable to modify their approach to properly address the new development.

Thus with faith in the program already very low, a breakout of 23 detainees from a prison in 2006 resulted in its cancellation.<sup>150</sup> Due to the continued civil war in Yemen, it is unlikely that the program will be revived anytime soon. Although a failure, Yemen's Dialogue Committee nevertheless provides an excellent case study, as it allows us to identify some important factors. First of all, any such program must be sufficiently financed. More money doesn't necessarily guarantee better results, but it may allow a program to develop a range of strategies, and therefore be more flexible in its approach when it is suddenly faced with a new type of prisoner. Secondly, deradicalization cannot be based upon political bargaining as external circumstances may quickly alter the extremist's cost-utility analysis. Disengagement must be solidified by creating adequate

<sup>148</sup>El-Said, "De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States," 43-44.

<sup>149</sup>Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 53.

<sup>150</sup>Worth, "Yemen's Deals with Jihadists Unsettle the U.S."

after-care programs and by working towards helping the released participant build positive social networks. Thirdly, the quality and reputation of the clerics and scholars is crucial to the success of such a program. In order to increase the credibility of the program in the eyes of the detainees, it may be beneficial to recruit and involve former extremists, especially those who had previously held significant positions in their respective organizations. And finally, the involvement of the family in the process is crucial to prevent further radicalization in the individual's immediate social circle, and to further soften the target of deradicalization.

## United Kingdom

Unlike the above examples of deradicalization efforts undertaken by Muslim majority states, where the government plays a central role in shaping and running the programs, the approach in the UK is mostly piecemeal and relies extensively on partner community organizations to carry out the actual deradicalization. Although a more centralized approach would make it easier to clearly define and evaluate the deradicalization strategy, there are a number of significant reasons why this may very well be impossible under the current understanding of radicalization. No other aspect more clearly exemplifies this as the need to provide religious re-education. As a democratic and secular state, the government lacks Islamic legitimacy and therefore would not be seen as credible to provide religious re-education.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, unlike in the case of Saudi Arabia or Yemen, where the government deals with one or two, more or less culturally, religiously, and ethnically homogenous populations, radicalization in the United Kingdom is emerging out of a plethora of different ethnic communities. By partnering with vetted community organizations that reflect the cultural make-up of these

---

<sup>151</sup> Sarah Johnson, "Is the Deradicalisation of Islamist Extremists Possible in a Secular Society Such as Britain?," *POLIS Journal 2* (2009): 28-29.

neighborhoods, the government hopes to more effectively and efficiently stem radicalization.

The United Kingdom's first broad counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST, was implemented in 2003 and kept confidential until 2006.<sup>152</sup> The strategy consisted of four components: Pursue, Protect, Prepare, and Prevent. Pursue dealt with the kinetic response of the government to locate and disrupt or destroy terrorist networks and their sponsors. Protect dealt with reducing vulnerabilities to UK interests overseas, and with strengthening security at home in order to decrease the number of available soft targets for attack. The Prepare component was mainly concerned with building up the capabilities to effectively deal with the consequences of a potential attack, and with continually evaluating and gauging the country's level of preparedness. The Prevent component, the government's counter-radicalization response, is intended to address the factors that lead to home-grown radicalization.<sup>153</sup>

Initially, counter-radicalization efforts were limited to countering specifically "violent extremism." As a result the United Kingdom sought out non-violent Salafi organizations to lead the counter-radicalization campaign. The government believed that such non-violent, yet fundamentalist, organizations as the Muslim Council of Britain would be perceived as credible by the extremists and therefore able to exert influence over their behavior.<sup>154</sup> However, in the aftermath of the 2005 London Bombings, the government realized the short-sightedness of a strategy that focuses on immediate security threats posed by violent extremists, while simultaneously tolerating and sponsoring organizations that fomented radical world-views.

---

<sup>152</sup> House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee, *Project CONTEST: The Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, HC 212 (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2009).

<sup>153</sup> HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy*, Cm 6888 (London, The Stationery Office, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>154</sup> Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 125.

In 2009, the United Kingdom released a revamped strategy known as CONTEST-2. Whereas the first version of the strategy stressed the first three P's, CONTEST-2 placed much greater emphasis on the Prevent component. This shift in primary focus of the government's counter-terrorism strategy reflected the growing number of publications that warned about the threat of homegrown terrorism.<sup>155</sup> The government realized that in order to eradicate the threat of terrorism, at least as much emphasis must be placed on better assimilating the Muslim population, as is placed on combating existing terrorist networks. A recurring theme in the discourse was that extremism was flourishing in the UK in part because of "Britain's failure to assert superiority of its national values [and] due to a flawed concept of multiculturalism."<sup>156</sup> Prevent, therefore, was to strengthen social cohesion by promoting Britishness in those identified as either espousing extremist views or at risk of radicalizing.

The Prevent strand of CONTEST was to be executed by "partnering with the police, local governments, and NGOs to challenge radical Islamism, disrupt those who promote violent extremism, support individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization or who have begun to radicalize, increase the capacity of communities to resist violent extremism, and address grievances that violent extremists exploit."<sup>157</sup> Having recognized that Salafi organizations, while non-violent, still undermine national unity and harmony, the government sought out Muslim partners that could effectively counter those organizations and promote a moderate understanding of Islam.<sup>158</sup> This desire to tackle not only the problem of violent extremism, but also extremism in general, was reflected in the language of the revamped strategy. CONTEST-2 stated that partner organizations

<sup>155</sup> See for example: Marc Sageman, "The Next Generation of Terror" *Foreign Policy*, February 19, 2008. or, Robert S. Leiken, "Europe's Angry Muslims" *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005.

<sup>156</sup> Arun Kundnani, "A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalization and Extremism" *Claystone* (2015): 17.

<sup>157</sup> HM Government, *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England*, Ref: 288324 (London, 2008), 16.

<sup>158</sup> HM Government, *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, Annual Report*, Cm 7833 (London: The Stationery Office, 2010), 12.

should also seek to “challenge views which fall short of supporting violence and are within the law, but which reject and undermine shared values and jeopardize community cohesion.”<sup>159</sup> Although not an exhaustive list, two such partner organizations are worth mentioning for the purposes of this study. They are the Quilliam Foundation and the Active Change Foundation.

The Quilliam Foundation is a London based counter-extremism think tank that is quite possibly the most active and visible Muslim partner organization involved in counter-radicalization. It was founded in 2007 by two former members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ed Hussain and Maajid Nawaz, after they had become disillusioned with the organization’s agenda and realized the distinction between Islam and Islamism.<sup>160</sup>

The Quilliam Foundation’s goal is to create an inclusive discussion on how to counter the ideological basis of terrorism, to foster a shared sense of belonging by creating an inclusive civic identity, to advance liberal democratic values, and to encourage Islamists to return to mainstream Islam, while simultaneously providing policy recommendations for specific counter-terrorism and extremism related measures.<sup>161</sup> The organization, therefore, is not only involved in engaging the Islamists, but has also positioned itself as a medium through which the general population can understand Islam. Hussain has said that before Quilliam began operating, Islam in the United Kingdom was perceived as synonymous with Islamism.<sup>162</sup> Since then the organization has committed as much effort towards countering Islamophobia and making Muslims feel at home in the West, as it has towards debating the Islamists.

Since its inception in 2007, the Foundation’s work has reached a broad spectrum of audiences. The Foundation has held “radicalization awareness” training sessions meant

<sup>159</sup> HM Government, *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, Annual Report*, Cm 7547 (London: The Stationery Office, 2009), 88-89.

<sup>160</sup> Maajid Nawaz, “Why Leave the Radicals?” *Quilliam Foundation*, June 16, 2008.

<sup>161</sup> “About Us,” Quilliam Foundation.

<sup>162</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 131.

to educate police officers, local authorities, and even school teachers on how to effectively identify behaviors that could indicate that someone was being radicalized.<sup>163</sup> They have released books and articles with policy recommendations for how to create a UK prison-based deradicalization program and offered advice on what to do with returning foreign fighters.<sup>164</sup> They release counter-narratives targeting the teachings of Islamists on social media, organize community events with local imams, and tour university campuses to discuss issues such as freedom of conscience and the Muslim community's relations with wider society.<sup>165</sup> Some former senior security service employees even maintain that the current government has oftentimes sidelined their agencies in favor of input from Nawaz and the Foundation.<sup>166</sup>

While the Foundation's work is undoubtedly important and necessary to counter both the threat of radicalization in the United Kingdom and the anti-Islam fear-mongering of groups such as the British National Party, its snug relationship with the current government has undermined its credibility with many British Muslims. According to a Foreign Affairs article by Jessica Stern, the fact that the Quilliam Foundation received over 1 million pounds from the government in just two years has made many ordinary Muslims perceive it as a government puppet.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, rumors that Ed Hussain's autobiography *The Islamist*, which tells the story of his participation and eventual exit from Hizb ut-Tahrir, was purportedly ghostwritten by Whitehall, has done further damage to their reputation.<sup>168</sup> Although the Foundation continues to nevertheless be active in shaping the conversation on Islamist ideology in the United Kingdom, it may be beneficial for both governments and partner organizations to be less open about their ties,

<sup>163</sup> Kundnani, "A Decade Lost," 6.

<sup>164</sup> James Brandon, "Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist Extremism in British Prisons," *Quilliam Foundation* (2009).

<sup>165</sup> Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," 132.

<sup>166</sup> Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, "UK's flawed counter-terrorism strategy," *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 2013.

<sup>167</sup> Stern, "Mind over Martyr"

<sup>168</sup> Ahmed, "UK's flawed counter-terrorism strategy."



or at the very least, less boastful about the benefits of their cooperation. For example, in Bangladesh the government also partners with NGOs for a variety of counter-terrorism and community-building initiatives, but this cooperation is not openly celebrated.<sup>169</sup>

While the Quilliam Foundation is most actively involved in countering the Islamist ideology and advising on counter-radicalization efforts, the Active Change Foundation can be described as more involved in deradicalization. The Active Change Foundation was opened in gang-infested Waltham Forest, a borough in London's North End, in 2003. It was started by Hanif and Imtiaz Qadir and Mike Jervis. Hanif Qadir is a former extremist, who was recruited by al-Qaeda and who traveled to Pakistan in 2002 to join the fight in Afghanistan. However, once there he quickly became disillusioned by the experience and returned to the UK to help prevent others from falling victim to the jihadist's appeal and becoming "cannon fodder." Today, he encourages youth to "express their rage about the mistreatment of Muslims in Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere and channel it into peaceful political action."<sup>170</sup> Having been involved in both the Waltham Forest gang culture and radicalized by al-Qaeda, he is seen as a credible interlocutor for challenging the religious extremist message.

According to the Foundation's mission statement, Qadir wanted to create a safe space where young people could come and chat about the issues that were troubling them, and where messages of hatred and violence could be challenged.<sup>171</sup> The Foundation gives teens and young adults aged 12-24 a place to go, hang out, and stay out of trouble, while simultaneously giving them opportunities to better themselves and channel their talents through initiatives like the Young Leadership Programme. Membership to the Foundation and use of its equipment, social center, and gym is free but conditional upon

<sup>169</sup> El-Said, "De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States," 13-16.

<sup>170</sup> Stern, "Mind over Martyr"

<sup>171</sup> "About Us," Active Change Foundation.

the need of members to attend its classes and workshops on Islam, extremism, and radicalization.<sup>172</sup>

Although the Foundation is active in countering the Islamist message, cleaning up the community, and holding workshops on the dangers of radicalization and how to be safe on the internet, the Foundation has also created its own deradicalization program. Using an approach that they term “chaos management” ACF staff works in direct personal contact with disaffected or disturbed young people.

The deradicalization approach is as follows: The services provided by the foundation, which include a social center, a gym, boxing club, etc., are used as a filter to identify local young people at risk of radicalization. The ACF staff then works to gather as much information as possible on the individual. They learn who his friends are, what his interests, beliefs, and motivations are, and then on the basis of this information they develop a target intervention. Each intervention is supposed to be tailored to the particular nature of the problem and to the beliefs of that individual. The Foundation then organizes a group activity (for the individual and some of his friends) that lasts for three or four days, and has them do physical and intellectual tasks that are designed to build group cohesion. These activities allow the staff to gather more information on the target individual, which eventually leads to the identification of what Hanif calls the individual’s Achilles’ heel: the main driver of the individual’s radicalization. Once that driver is identified, the individual is confronted about his beliefs and the consequences of those beliefs.<sup>173</sup>

Hanif uses whatever means are appropriate to combat the specific driver of radicalization. He draws on cultural and emotional arguments, theology, and even on his own experiences in Afghanistan to get his message across. He cites examples from the

---

<sup>172</sup> Emily Buchanan, “The Foot Soldiers of Deradicalisation,” *BBC News*, November 3, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Rabasa et al., “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 134.

Prophet Muhammad's life, questions the legitimacy of the jihadi commanders, suggests that a legitimate jihad would have a proper leader and proper rules of engagement, and questions whether the individual is or would be hypocritical in using the privileges he has as a British citizen while simultaneously calling for the destruction of Britain. Ultimately, he stresses that there are other nonviolent means through which the individual can address his grievances.<sup>174</sup>

The Foundation derives its legitimacy not only due to the founders' extremist pasts, but also because the ACF's primary concern is to work for, and with, the local community. Any radicalization identified is first handled in-house rather than reported and handed off to a government agency, and this definitely has helped it to build trust within the community. Its grassroots approach has allowed it to expand considerably over the past decade, growing from three staff members to 14, and boasting a membership that numbers in the thousands. Although the Foundation is open about the fact that it has been subsidized by the Government since 2006, it nevertheless tries to limit its dependency on these payments by fundraising and reaching out to private donors.<sup>175</sup>

The other notable component of the Prevent strategy is called the Channel Project. The Channel Project essentially gives the government the ability to take action against individuals who may be moving towards violent extremism, but who have not yet broken any laws. Instead of imprisoning at-risk individuals, the government stages local and voluntary interventions designed to prevent radical beliefs from escalating to violent extremism.<sup>176</sup> The government defines extremism as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Calls for the death of

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>175</sup> "About Us" Active Change Foundation.

<sup>176</sup> Audit Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, *Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Developing Exercise*, (London, 2008), 46.

members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas are also defined as extremism.”<sup>177</sup>

Channel depends on the cooperation of the police, local community, and local authorities such as school teachers, youth workers, and health workers. These groups are instructed to be on the lookout for persons who exhibit alarming behavior, and then to refer those persons to Channel. Channel, which is led by a multi-agency task force, then assesses the referred individuals to determine whether they are likely to become involved in violent extremism, or whether they have the ability to influence others into extremism. If found at-risk, the multi-agency panel and police create a course of action which may encompass anything from mentoring to religious instruction designed to challenge that person’s ideology.<sup>178</sup> In more serious cases, the individual may be relocated to a new neighborhood in order to disconnect them from toxic local influences.<sup>179</sup>

Although the Channel project is currently the closest thing the UK has to a centralized deradicalization program, it has come under considerable criticism over the years for disproportionately targeting Muslims and for essentially being a form of community surveillance. According to information released by the Association of Chief Police Officers, between 2007, when Channel was introduced, and 2014, 153 children under 11, another 690 aged 12-15 and 554 aged 16-17 have been referred to the program along with 2,196 adults. However, out of these 3,593 referrals, only about 22% of them were deemed as requiring an intervention.<sup>180</sup> According to a former senior Prevent practitioner, the reason for this disparity between referrals and actual at-risk individuals is that the Channel Project uses a vague assessment criterion of vulnerability that focuses on

<sup>177</sup> HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092 (London: The Stationery Office, 2011), 107.

<sup>178</sup> HM Government, *Channel: Supporting Individuals Vulnerable to Recruitment by Violent Extremists, A Guide for Local Partnerships*, (London, 2010).

<sup>179</sup> Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (Verso Books, 2014).

<sup>180</sup> Simon Hooper, “Exclusive: Sharp Increase in Under-18s ‘At Risk’ of Being Radicalised into Jihadists,” *Independent*, March 23, 2014.

“issues that don’t necessarily pose a potential security threat, such as a person’s views about democracy or foreign policy, for instance.”<sup>181</sup> Scholars warn that while the premise behind Channel is good, the vagueness in defining extremism, and the disproportionate targeting of Muslims even as far-right extremism surges, is ultimately proving counter-productive and reinforcing the Islamists’ arguments that there is a ‘war against Islam.’

On February 12, 2015 the government formally passed a new Counter-Terrorism and Security Act which significantly strengthened and expanded existing Prevent and Channel powers, while also introducing new instruments to tackle the foreign fighter phenomenon.<sup>182</sup> Among other things, the new act introduced temporary travel restrictions for individual’s suspected of attempting to join a foreign conflict, created exclusion orders for those attempting to return to the UK, and ordered public institutions, such as universities, to implement tighter limitations on freedoms of expression in order to combat the spread of radical views.

Although the effects of these new powers are yet to be seen, it is already possible to highlight some of the shortcomings and critiques of this new law. One of the major criticisms of the new act is that it creates a missed opportunity to effectively handle and deradicalize returning foreign fighters. Under the new act, all returning fighters will first be sent to serve out their prison sentences and only afterwards may be engaged in a deradicalization program. According to a Home Affairs Committee report, the committee is “disappointed that the Home Office has not implemented a programme [similar to Denmark’s Aarhus process] for individuals returning to Britain where there is evidence that they have fought in Syria. It is vital that the Government works with mental health practitioners and also assesses the Aarhus process to ensure that the UK’s programme best integrates those returning from conflict zones such as Syria.” Furthermore, even

---

<sup>181</sup> Ahmed, “UK’s flawed counter-terrorism strategy.”

<sup>182</sup> Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (c. 6)

though there are Muslim prison chaplains who attempt to challenge small numbers of prisoners on their theological arguments, the Home Affairs Committee is concerned that the government is not working effectively enough to expand nor fund such initiatives.<sup>183</sup>

Another concern related to foreign fighters is that the government operates under the assumption that all returning fighters will present a threat to national security. Peter Neumann, Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Violence (ICSR) at King's College, has said that he has been in contact with a number of jihadists who have grown disillusioned or feel that they have been tricked and would like to escape, but feel that they are trapped because the government is threatening to lock them up for maximum term sentences. "If you only have a law-and-order message then you risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy where they simply go to the next battlefield and become really hardened extremists."<sup>184</sup> Similarly, Charles Winter, a researcher at the Quilliam Foundation, argues that since deradicalization relies upon the dismantling of the narratives that justify violence by credible interlocutors, then the government's response to returning fighters must be more varied than just sweeping incarceration for all. "Former jihadists themselves are some of the most effective deradicalizers because they know the ideology inside-out and they know the arguments that will try to be used to defend it. That is why, despite the risks involved, we should allow jihadists to return from the Middle East...they are a potentially significant resource for deradicalization."<sup>185</sup>

Keeping with the above arguments it is beneficial to consider that if these exclusion orders existed in the early 2000s then neither Ed Hussain, Maajid Nawaz, nor Hanif Qadir would have been able to return and establish the organizations that are currently leading the fight against radicalization. Also this law-and-order approach has

---

<sup>183</sup> House of Commons, House Affairs Committee, *Counter-Terrorism: Foreign Fighters*, HC 933 (London: The Stationery Office, 2015), 2-3.

<sup>184</sup> Shane Croucher, "When ISIS Jihadists Return Home: How to De-radicalise Islamic Extremists," *International Business Times*, November 15, 2014.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

had the unintended consequence of further ostracizing and potentially radicalizing British Muslims. A recent story by the Guardian reported that a family felt betrayed by the government after the mother turned to the state for help; her son, Yusuf Sarwar, had deserted a rebel group and wanted to return to the UK. The government helped, but as soon as Sarwar landed in the UK he was arrested and sentenced to a twelve year prison term.<sup>186</sup> The consequence has been that families trying to convince or help their relatives to return are refusing to cooperate with the government. The Home Affairs Committee report also highlighted the problem of not enough support being given to families, and that families of detained individuals are oftentimes kept in the dark about their loved one's status.<sup>187</sup>

The other major criticism of the new powers has emerged from the academic community. Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, universities will have to bar more speakers from university events, and will be obliged to refer students with strong, yet non-violent beliefs, to Channel. According to a letter signed by 526 university professors and published by the Guardian, this new rule essentially amounts to university censorship and to a severe curtailing of the freedom of expression. The professors uphold that universities already have in place well-defined rules to prevent inappropriate or hateful speeches and demonstrations from taking place, and that the new rules prevent universities from serving their intended purpose:

One of the purposes of post-compulsory education is to foster critical thinking in staff, students and society more widely. Part 5 of the new legislation places a statutory duty on those same institutions to prevent students being drawn into terrorism. We share the concerns raised by the joint committee on human rights about how this duty would work

---

<sup>186</sup> Tracy McVeigh, "Police betrayed me,' says mother of imprisoned British jihadi," *The Guardian*, December 6, 2014.

<sup>187</sup> House Affairs Committee, *Counter-Terrorism: Foreign Fighters*, 8-9.

alongside existing requirements to ensure freedom of speech. The best response to acts of terror against UK civilians is to maintain and defend an open, democratic society in which discriminatory behavior of any kind is effectively challenged. Ensuring colleges and universities can continue to debate difficult and unpopular issues is a vital part of this. Draconian crackdowns on the rights of academics and students will not achieve the ends the government says it seeks.<sup>188</sup>

In pursuing future counter-radicalization and deradicalization projects the United Kingdom should take such critiques seriously. Disproportionately targeting the Muslim community and imposing a particular version of national identity through an aggressively top-down approach will ultimately prove counterproductive. Especially when it is found that in protecting the liberal values that the government says define British society, it violates those same rights in one racially or religiously defined section of society.

Although partnering with many organizations to fight violent extremism is arguably the right approach since radicalization is a highly individualized phenomenon, the government also has to do more to address the societal factors that contribute to radicalization. Islamophobia, racism, and economic discrimination on the part of wider society are both the fuel that keeps the Islamist's fire burning, and the grievances that make the Islamists' message of a "war on Islam" seem legitimate. While the government claims that it handles all cases of extremism equally, the reality seldom reflects this stated policy.

For example, the mother of Yusuf Sarwar is baffled as to why her son received twelve years in prison for being an ambulance driver in Syria, while the far-right extremist Ryan McGee was sentenced to only two years in prison for possession of

---

<sup>188</sup> "Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill is a threat to freedom of speech at universities," *The Guardian*, February 2, 2015.



homemade explosives, knives, and axes.<sup>189</sup> Similarly, even though between 1990 and 2012, at least 249 people were killed by far-right extremists, compared to the 263 killed by al-Qaeda inspired violence, the June 2011 Prevent policy review dismissed a far-right threat stating that there have only been “a small number of relevant cases, and that there was no extreme right-wing terrorist organization and formal groups.”<sup>190</sup> Recently, Prime Minister Cameron has called for an Extremist Bill that would tackle both far-right extremism and religiously-inspired extremism, but it remains to be seen what concrete proposals such a bill would put forward.

## CONCLUSION

As the above case studies have shown, successful ‘soft’ approaches to counter-terrorism cannot simply strive to transplant one country’s model to another. Deradicalization and counter-radicalization programs have to be specific to the countries’ cultural, societal, and legal traditions. Yet this lack of transferability does not mean that common key factors cannot take on a local dimension. Each of the above countries has found that credible interlocutors and religious re-education are crucial to combat the extremists’ message. In each of these countries, this was implemented by either partnering with credible scholars, organizations, or deradicalized former extremists. Furthermore, it has been found that providing after-care is essential to mitigate the threat of recidivism. Although the UK has not yet implemented a systematic after-care regime, the fact that the House of Commons is lobbying the Home Office for a program that would reintegrate returning fighters shows that the merits of after-care are not lost on certain members of the government. The need to work closely with the family of a potential extremist has also been highlighted in each of the three case studies. The Saudi

---

<sup>189</sup> McVeigh, “Police Betrayed Me”

<sup>190</sup> Kundnani, “A Decade Lost,” 23.

and Yemeni models have shown how close cooperation with families can help check recidivism and simultaneously prevent further radicalization within a family unit, while the current UK approach has shown how ignoring the family can undermine the credibility of the government's promises and further isolate the British Muslim community.

The other point that these case studies make clear is that the success of a given approach cannot be gauged by a single metric. The extent to which a deradicalization program can claim to be successful will depend on how it defines its objectives. Broadly defined objectives, as in the case of the UK, targeting 'extremism' and promoting 'Britishness' will be prone to much criticism due to vague assessment criteria. On the other hand, the DC's belief that deradicalization is achieved when the individual promises to only partake in action in foreign countries, may be easier to evaluate but unsatisfactory if Islamist extremism is defined as a global threat.

Overall these 'soft' approaches will likely continue to play a significant role in counter-terrorism strategies. Currently there may be as many as 40 deradicalization programs worldwide, with more and more states experimenting with such initiatives. This is partly because of the realization that after declaring a Global War on Terrorism more than a decade ago, we are not any closer to eliminating this threat today than we were in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. As General Peter Pace once stated "We can keep killing them, but if somebody's not working on draining the swamp, we're never going to be finished with this."<sup>191</sup> Addressing and countering the extremists affective, pragmatic, and ideological messages, and providing reasonable after-care to reintegrate these individuals back into society, may indeed create the necessary conditions to bring about an unsuccessful generational transition away from radical Islamist extremism.

---

<sup>191</sup> Melissa Jane Kronfeld, "Killing Them With Kindness: A Softer Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Radicalization in the War on Terrorism," *The 2012 Richard A. Clarke National Security & Counter-Terrorism Monograph Competition* (2012), 2.

## WORKS CITED

- Active Change Foundation. "About Us."  
<http://www.activechangefoundation.org/about-us/>
- Ahmed, Nafeez Mosaddeq. "UK's flawed counter-terrorism strategy." *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 2013. <http://mondediplo.com/blogs/uk-s-flawed-counter-terrorism-strategy>
- Al Raffie, Dina. "Straight from the Horse's Mouth: Exploring De-radicalization Claims of Former Egyptian Militant Leaders." *Perspectives on Terrorism vol. 9. no. 1* (2015): 27-48.
- Allen, Charles E. "Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland" (written testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Washington D.C, March 14, 2007).
- Ansary, Abdullah F. "Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach." *Middle East Policy* 15 (2008): 111-142.
- Ashour, Omar. "Islamist Deradicalization in Algeria: The Case of the Islamic Salvation Army and Affiliated Militias." In *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-Terrorism*, edited by Rohan Gunaratna, Jolene Jerard, and Lawrence Gawrin, 11-25. New York City: Routledge, 2011.
- Ashour, Omar. *The De-radicalisation of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Audit Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary. *Preventing Violent Extremism: Learning and Developing Exercise*. London, 2008.
- Birnbaum, Michael. "French Prisons, long hotbeds of radical Islam, get new scrutiny after Paris attacks." *Washington Post*, January 28, 2015.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/paris-killers-radicalized-in-prison-now-leaders-want-to-fix-that-problem/2015/01/28/52271e28-a307-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/paris-killers-radicalized-in-prison-now-leaders-want-to-fix-that-problem/2015/01/28/52271e28-a307-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458_story.html)

Bjørge, Tore, and John Horgan. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Blair, David. "Al-Qaeda Founder Launches Fierce Attack on Osama bin Laden." *The Telegraph*, February 20, 2009.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/4736358/Al-Qaeda-founder-launches-fierce-attack-on-Osama-bin-Laden.html>

Boucek, Christopher. "Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia." In *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, edited by Tore Bjørge and John Horgan, 212-223. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Boucek, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare." *Carnegie Papers* 97 (2008): 1-25.

Brandon, James. "Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist Extremism in British Prisons." *Quilliam Foundation* (2009).

Buchanan, Emily. "The Foot Soldiers of Deradicalisation." *BBC News*, November 3, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29872054>

Chowdhury, Naureen Fink, and Ellie B. Hearne. "Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement From Violent Extremism." International Peace Institute (2008).

Clubb, Gordon. "Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: The Case of Fatah." *Perspectives on Terrorism vol. 3 Issue 3* (2009): 25-34.

Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (c. 6)

"Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill is a threat to freedom of speech at universities." *The Guardian*, February 2, 2015.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/02/counter-terrorism-security-bill-threat-freedom-of-speech-universities>

Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

- Croucher, Shane. “When ISIS Jihadists Return Home: How to De-radicalise Islamic Extremists.” *International Business Times*, November 15, 2014.  
<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/when-isis-jihadists-return-home-how-de-radicalise-islamic-extremists-1474905>
- El-Said, Hamed. “De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States.” *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence* (2012).
- El-Said, Hamed. *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- European Policy Planners’ Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN). “The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalization and De-radicalization: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners’ Network on Countering Radicalization and Polarization (PPN).” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*.
- Ganor, Boaz. *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers*. Herzliya: The Interdisciplinary Center for Herzliya Projects, 2008.
- Hannah, Greg, Lindsay Clutterbuck, and Jennifer Rubin. “Radicalization or Rehabilitation: Understanding the Challenge of Extremist and Radicalized Prisoners.” *RAND Corporation* (2008).
- HM Government. *Channel: Supporting Individuals Vulnerable to Recruitment by Violent Extremists, A Guide for Local Partnerships*. London, 2010.
- HM Government. *Contest: The United Kingdom’s Response Strategy for Countering Terrorism*. Cm 8123. London: The Stationery Office, 2011.
- HM Government. *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy*. Cm 6888. London: The Stationery Office, 2006.
- HM Government. *Prevent Strategy*. Cm 8092. London: The Stationery Office, 2011.
- HM Government. *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, Annual Report*. Cm 7547. London: The Stationery Office, 2009.

HM Government. *Pursue Prevent Protect Prepare: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, Annual Report*. Cm 7833. London: The Stationery Office, 2010.

HM Government. *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England*. Ref: 288324. London, 2008.

Hooper, Simon. "Exclusive: Sharp Increase in Under-18s 'At Risk' of Being Radicalised into Jihadists." *Independent*, March 23, 2014.  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/exclusive-sharp-increase-in-under18s-at-risk-of-being-radicalised-into-jihadists-9211135.html>

Horgan, John. "De-radicalization Programs Offer Hope in Countering Terrorism." *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0215-horgan-terrorist-deradicalization-20150215-story.html>.

Horgan, John, and Kurt Braddock. "Rehabilitating the Terrorist?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs." *Terrorism and Political Violence Vol. 22* (2010): 267-291.

Horgan, John. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Horgan, John. "What makes a Terrorist Stop Being a Terrorist?" *The Conversation*, November 18, 2014. <https://theconversation.com/what-makes-a-terrorist-stobeing-a-terrorist-33119>

House of Commons, House Affairs Committee. *Counter-Terrorism: Foreign Fighters*. HC 933. London: The Stationery Office, 2015.

House of Commons. Home Affairs Committee. *Project CONTEST: The Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. HC 212. London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2009.

- Johnson, Sarah. "Is the Deradicalisation of Islamist Extremists Possible in a Secular Society such as Britain?" *POLIS Journal* 2 (2009).  
<http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/students/student-journal/ma-winter-09/sarah-johnson-winter-09.pdf>
- Johnston, Amanda K. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists." Post-Graduate thesis., Naval Postgraduate School, 2009.
- Jones, Clarke R. "Are Prisons Really Schools for Terrorism? Challenging the Rhetoric on Prison Radicalization." *Punishment and Society* 16, 2014.
- Jones, Clarke R. *Testing the Notion that Prisons are Schools for Terrorism: Examining Radicalization and Disengagement in the Philippine Corrective System*. Conference Paper, Abu Dhabi: Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2014.
- Kendal, Elisabeth. "How Does al-Qaeda Attract Yemenis?" *BBC News*, May 4, 2015.  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32488389>
- Kronfeld, Melissa Jane. "Killing Them with Kindness: A Softer Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Radicalization in the War on Terrorism." *The 2012 Richard A. Clarke National Security & Counter-Terrorism Monograph Competition* (2012).  
[http://www.firstamendmentstudies.org/wp/pdf/1st\\_pl\\_kronfeld.pdf](http://www.firstamendmentstudies.org/wp/pdf/1st_pl_kronfeld.pdf)
- Kundnani, Arin. "A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism." *Claystone* (2015). <http://www.claystone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Claystone-rethinking-radicalisation.pdf>
- Kundnani, Arin. *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. Verso Books, 2014.
- Leiken, Robert S. "Europe's Angry Muslims." *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2005.  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2005-07-01/europes-angry-muslims>
- McVeigh, Tracy. "Police betrayed me,' says mother of imprisoned British jihadi." *The Guardian*, December 6, 2014.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/06/yusuf-sarwar-mother-british-jihadist-police-betray-syria>



- “Minnesota Terrorist Recruit Back in Custody After Allegedly Violating Conditions of His Release.” *Star Tribune*, May 11, 2015. <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-terrorist-recruit-back-in-custody-after-allegedly-violating-conditions-of-his-release/303346131/>
- Nawaz, Maajid. “Why Leave the Radicals?” *Quilliam Foundation*, June 16, 2008. <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/uncategorized/why-leave-the-radicals/>
- Neumann, Peter. “Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries.” *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence* (2010).
- Nye, Joseph S. Jr. “Soft Power.” *Foreign Policy* 80 (1990). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1148580>
- Paris, Jonathan. “Approaches to Anti-Radicalization and Community Policing in the Transatlantic Space.” *Hudson Institute* (2007).
- Poole, Patrick. “Minneapolis Terror ‘Deradicalization’ Program Fails After Just Months, ‘Test’ Case Back in Jail” *PJ Media*, May 12, 2015. <http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2015/05/12/minneapolis-terror-deradicalization-program-fails-after-just-a-few-months-test-case-subject-back-in-jail/>
- Porges, Marisa L. “The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment.” *Council on Foreign Relations* (2010).
- Quilliam Foundation. “About Us.” [www.quilliamfoundation.org/about/](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/about/)
- Qureshi, Asim. “Taking Away our Children: The Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill 2014.” *Cage*, January 5, 2015. <http://www.cageuk.org/article/taking-away-our-children-counter-terrorism-and-security-bill-2014>
- Rabasa, Angel, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, and Christopher Boucek. “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists.” *RAND Corporation* (2010).
- Riise, Thomas. “Let’s Argue! Communicative Action in World Politics.” *International Organization Vol. 54* (2000): 1-39.



- Sageman, Mark. "The Next Generation of Terror." *Foreign Policy*, February 19, 2008.  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/08/the-next-generation-of-terror/>
- Silber, Mitchell D., and Arvin Bhatt. "Radicalization in the West. The Homegrown Threat." *New York City Police Department* (2007).
- Spalek, Basia. *Counter-Terrorism: Community-Based Approaches to Prevent Terror Crime*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Speckhard, Anne. "Prison and Community Based Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs for Extremists Involved in Militant Jihadi Terrorism Ideologies and Activities." In *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-radicalization and Disengagement*, edited by Laurie Fenstermacher, Larry Kuznar, Tom Rieger, and Anne Speckhard, 347-362. 2010.
- Stern, Jessica. "Mind over Martyr." *Foreign Affairs* 89 (2010).  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/saudi-arabia/2009-12-21/mind-over-martyr>
- Storer, Jonas Gahr. "Learning From Norway's Tragedy." *New York Times*, July 19, 2012.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/opinion/jonas-gahr-store-learning-from-norways-tragedy.html>
- "Tackling Extremism: Deradicalization and Disengagement." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* (2012).
- United Nations, Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. *First Report of the Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism: Inventory of State Programmes*. New York: UN/CTITF, 2008.  
<http://www.un.org/en/terrorism/pdfs/radicalization.pdf>
- Vidino, Lorenzo. "Countering Radicalization in America: Lesson from Europe." *United States Peace Institute* (2010).
- Worth, Robert F. "Yemen's Deals with Jihadists Unsettle the U.S." *The New York Times*, January, 28, 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/28/world/middleeast/28qaeda.html?pagewanted=all>