Deradicalization Programs in Australia and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT

As increasing numbers of Australians have traveled to Iraq and Syria to fight as “foreign fighters” for Islamist terror groups, the government and civil society have been setting up “deradicalization programs.” These programs seek to prevent or disengage “at-risk” individuals from radical ideologies. This paper surveys Australia’s existing programs and how their efforts relate to the foreign fighter phenomenon. After presenting background on Islamic extremism in Australia and Australian efforts to combat radicalization, it will survey Australian deradicalization programs and analyze how they address radicalization in general and the foreign fighter phenomenon in particular. It concludes that Australian deradicalization programs are currently inadequate in the long-term and recommends closer government cooperation with community leaders.

**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).**
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Introduction

As the Syrian Civil War rages on, growing numbers of Muslims from Western countries have been traveling to the Middle East to fight for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other jihadist groups. This phenomenon has dramatically accelerated over recent years. Although official estimates differ, according to The Soufan Group, or TSG, the total number of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria has risen from about 12,000 in June 2014 to between 27,000 and 31,000 in December 2015, approximately 5,000 of whom hail from Western Europe alone. Furthermore, the return rate for foreign fighters from Western countries has reached 20%-30%, posing a new security threat to their countries of origin.¹

This has affected Australia as well. In August 2014, a press release by Prime Minister Tony Abbott stated that at least 60 Australians were known to be fighting in Iraq and Syria.² By October 2015, the official figure had doubled to 120, though TSG has counted approximately 250.³ In April 2014, Australian Attorney-General George Brandis stated, “Per capita, Australia is one of the largest sources of foreign war fighters to the Syrian conflict from countries outside the region.”⁴ Concerns over increasing numbers of Australian foreign fighters and the progressively feasible scenario of dangerous returnees coordinating attacks at home have prompted the government to address the phenomenon in its counterterrorism policy. Since 2010, Australia has been developing “soft” measures, such as community initiatives and university programs – as opposed to “hard” measures, like police empowerment and increasing reliance on security services – aimed at deradicalization, or the effort to combat radicalization, the process by which

² Counter-Terrorism Measures for a Safer Australia (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).
³ Barret et al, Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, 7.
individuals adopt extremist worldviews.\(^5\) Adopted in 2014, the new Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Program, to which the government has allocated $64 million, has been seeking to further develop these programs. Its main purpose was to address the intensification of the “foreign fighter phenomenon.”\(^6\)

This paper will survey Australian deradicalization programs and relate them to the foreign fighter phenomenon. It will first give an overview of Islamic extremism in Australia and the government’s efforts from 2000 to 2010 to deal with it. Next, it will provide an overview of Australia’s soft deradicalization efforts. Then, it will outline the ideological and logistical mechanisms driving the foreign fighter phenomenon by examining its history. Finally, it will discuss how Australian programs are dealing with the foreign fighter phenomenon. It will conclude that although Australia has noticeably been investing in deradicalization programs since 2010, these programs are still inadequate to address radicalization in the long-term and that reliance on security services remains dominant in Australia’s efforts to combat radicalization. This article recommends increased federal investment in and promotion of community initiatives combined with closer interactions between the government and community leaders, particularly Muslim religious leaders.

**Islamic Extremism in Australia**

One may trace global Islamist terrorism in Australia back to 2000. In 1999, during the time of John Howard’s Liberal government, Australia intervened in East Timor in favor of the latter’s bid for secession from Indonesia. Although this was officially a

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humanitarian intervention, many viewed Australia’s involvement in East Timor as an attempt to divide Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim country. Furthermore, Howard advocated for a “new Australia” in which he envisioned tighter immigration laws, particularly for migrants from Muslim countries. Howard also adopted an adamantly pro-Israel stance. These factors arguably led to Indonesian Islamic extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in 2000 planning an attack on the Israeli embassy and consulate in Australia as well as the assassination of a Jewish Australian businessman. Although JI never carried out this plot, it marked the beginning of active Islamist terrorist activities in Australia. 9/11 spurred terrorist activities globally and JI’s execution of the 2002 Bali Bombings, which killed 88 Australians, galvanized the Australian government’s efforts to address terrorism directed against it. In 2005 and 2009, Australian police foiled terrorist plots in Operations Pendennis and Neath, respectively, that were planned by Australian Muslims, thus indicating a shift from “imported” to “homegrown” terrorism in Australia.7

Australia’s first countermeasure to the growing threat of terrorism was to rely more on its security services. In fact, the empowerment of the Australian police had been taking place since 1988, when gang-related crimes, which were associated with Australia’s Lebanese Muslim community, were on the rise, as well as the ethnic riots that followed throughout the 1990s. Police adopted a “zero tolerance” and “high policing” approach. This entailed higher involvement of police in surveillance and covert operations aimed at undermining terrorist activities.8 Extensive anti-terrorism legislation continued furthering police powers since the 11 September 2001 attacks. Following the Bali Bombings, the government established the National Counter Terrorism Committee (NCTC) and signed the Inter-Governmental Agreement, which facilitated intelligence sharing within Australia and with New Zealand.9 The 2003 Australian Security Organization Legislation Amendment Act included heightened interrogation capabilities.

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8 Ibid., 78.
9 Morris, Islamic Radicalization in Australia, 50.
for the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), revision to the right to habeas corpus, allowance of detention of 48 hours without laying charges, curtailment of the right to remain silent, and broadened surveillance capabilities. In 2004, three more anti-terrorism bills further increased security services’ detention and interrogation powers. The 2005 Australian Anti-Terrorism Act extended the time a terror suspect can be detained without charges and prohibited the media from reporting on detained suspects.\textsuperscript{10}

The empowerment of the police has led to a dilemma: as security services’ powers increase, civil liberties seem to progressively diminish. For example, one may view increased surveillance as an infringement on the right to privacy; one may say prohibiting reports on detained suspects transgresses freedom of the press. This has led many to question whether the threat terrorism poses is proportionate to countermeasures taken against it and, more importantly, to what extent citizens can trust the government to adequately protect both their security and their liberty. Indeed, according to a 2007 survey, only 40\% of Australians felt they could “trust people in government to do what is right.”\textsuperscript{11} Jessica Wolfendale aptly calls this dilemma the “threat of counterterrorism.”\textsuperscript{12}

One result of high policing was lower transparency and accountability between communities and police, leading to alienation of the former. Since the 1970s, community-police relations comprised a cornerstone of Australia’s “multiculturalism” policy, which relaxed immigration laws, particularly for Muslim refugees of the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War, and encouraged the existence of multiple cultural communities within Australia. “Police and community programs” were crucial in garnering trust between newly established communities made up of immigrants and the government. The shift to

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 92.
high policing undermined the effectiveness of these programs as communities, especially the Muslim community, generally began losing trust in the security services.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Programs Addressing Deradicalization}

In 2010, the Australian government shifted its focus from high policing to “soft” deradicalization methods that attempted to prevent radicalization and disengage those that had already become radicalized. This approach became policy when Julia Gillard’s government adopted a national CVE Strategy with a $9.7 million budget that sought to disengage radicalized individuals, support “at-risk groups and individuals,” increase “community cohesion and resilience to violent extremism,” and present a counter narrative to “challenge extremist messages.”\textsuperscript{14} The Gillard Government sponsored the Monash Radicalization Project, a four-year research project headed by the Global Terrorism Research Center (GTRCe) meant to “generate new understandings of radicalisation that will be of benefit to scholarly, policing, policy-making and prison system counter terrorism stakeholders,” initially using legal documents based on police surveillance information gathered during Operation Neath.\textsuperscript{15} The government invested over half of the CVE funding of 2010-2011 in the seminal Building Resilience Grants Program (BCRGP), which awarded money grants to independent Australian youth mentoring programs. By 2013, BCRGP had awarded about $5.3 million to 59 disengagement and prevention projects run by local councils, universities, sports clubs, religious organizations, and other NGOs. In 2014, Tony Abbott’s government continued and expanded the grants program under a new CVE program for community organizations with a $13.4 million budget over four years and part of the larger CVE

\textsuperscript{13} El-Said, \textit{New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs}, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{14} Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of De-Radicalisation Programmes in Australia,” \textit{Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs} 33, no. 4 (2013): 455-456; Barker, “Australian Government Measures to Counter Violent Extremism: A Quick Guide.” Although this approach became policy only in 2010, it was in 2005 when the Howard Government first identified these three areas of concern after convening the Muslim Community Reference Group – a group of Australian Muslim community leaders – to advise the government on its interactions with the Muslim community.

package allocated $64 million. The Abbott Government sponsored the Living Safe Together Grants Program (LSTGP), which has awarded grants to over 40 organizations linked to Australian communities. The government’s “Directory of CVE Intervention Services” was established in order to facilitate coordination efforts and more effectively direct identified at-risk individuals to the programs that could most appropriately address their needs.

These organizations have been involved in three areas: youth engagement, social cohesion, and education. Targeting Muslim youths at risk of radicalization has become crucial to deradicalization since the radicalization process often begins at a young age. As of 2011, about 46.5% of Muslims in Australia are below the age of 25 compared to 32.6% of the entire population. TSG reported that most foreign fighters are “in their 20s, but some much younger.” Also, second generation Australian Muslims are more prone to radicalization than their immigrant parents.

Improving social cohesion – “the belief held by citizens… that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other” – has been important for CVE because the Australian Muslim community has experienced persistent socioeconomic grievances and political marginalization. Hassan has noted that in Australia, “Muslims are more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty or in prison” than the average Australian. A 2014 survey found that the vast majority of Australian Muslims perceive

20 El-Said, New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs, 58.
22 Hassan, Australian Muslims: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia, 15.
Australia’s Middle East policy as “misguided and detrimental to their interests.”  

Tim Aistrope notes that isolated Muslim communities are more prone to radicalization due to feelings of alienation and disempowerment experienced globally by Muslims. 

Finally, education, particularly in Islamic institutions, has become a cornerstone of Australian efforts to counter the extremist narratives propagated by radical Islamist groups. Schools, universities, and NGOs have set up curricula, websites, workshops, and other programs to formulate and disseminate a moderate counter narrative.

Youth Engagement and Social Cohesion Programs

Most Australian programs targeting youths tend to also promote social cohesion. This subsection will discuss grassroots programs, many of which were funded under the BCRGP, that address these issues. Many of these programs were onetime events and are no longer running.

In 2011, the Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) ran the Australian Muslim Youth Leadership and Peer Mentorship Program. This program sought to teach leadership qualities to its participants, who would hopefully later return to their communities as mentors. As mentors, the program’s graduates would use their new skills to identify and mentor members of their own communities. The foundation ran similar programs as two-day workshops: the Youth Leadership Program and Oromo Community – Youth Leadership Program. In 2012, the Aubrun Community Development Network developed the Dream Big mentoring program in which youths from various backgrounds

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23 Akbarzadeh, “Investing in Mentoring and Educational Initiatives: The Limits of De-Radicalisation Programmes in Australia,” 460.


26 One can find a complete list of BCRGP recipients here: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1415/Quick_Guides/Extremism

aged 16-24 would manage a shared business venture. It was meant to garner social cohesion as well as to develop skills among youths.28

The Sydney charity, Youth Centre will run Building Community Resilience in Canterbury/Bankstown, a program aimed at disengaging at-risk and radicalized youths aged 13-25. It will do this by challenging extremist ideologies, teaching nonviolent means of expression, and encouraging participation in democratic society. The Youth Centre’s website features a forum in which questions are put before a Muslim spiritual leader. The forum offers explanations for various concepts in Islam, such as jihad and the Islamic notion of nonviolence.29

In 2011, the Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ) ran a similarly themed event in which famous figures in Islam, including Islamic scholars Dr. Mohammed Abdalla and Maulana Uzair Buksh as well as World Featherweight Champion Bilal Dib, gave speeches to Muslim youths on Islam’s peaceful message based around the Prophet Muhammad as a figure that brought “peace amongst warring communities for the greater good.” It sought to raise awareness among youths of the dangers of radicalization, the available assistance for those at risk, and the benefits of democratic participation. It also addressed the “passive resistance” of Muslim communities to extremism and tried to spur proactivity.30 The NGO Pace e Bene Australia periodically hosts the Nonviolent Interfaith Leadership Program, a gathering of youths from different backgrounds that attempts to teach nonviolent leadership qualities through both education and spirituality. It operates as a five-day retreat to Melbourne’s Amberly retreat and spirituality center, where facilitators with intellectual and spiritual backgrounds conduct the program.31

30 Qld Muslims say no to Extremism and Reclaim Islam from Radicals (Islamic Council of Queensland 2011).
JobQuest hosts Community Engagement programs that aim to assist migrant families in acquiring schooling and employability skills. It also attempts to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide them with support to encourage them to participate more actively in their communities. Its Ready Arrive Work (RAW) program works with schools in Sydney and, in 2010, was extended to schools with high refugee enrolments.32 The Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) hosts the Self-esteem, Identity, Leadership and Community Program (SILC). This program works with schools to teach leadership skills to youths struggling with settling after migration and contextualizing their Muslim identity.33 Since 2010, The North Melbourne Football Club (NMFC) has hosted the Huddle, another program that attempts to teach leadership skills and engage migrants. It utilizes primarily sport to promote social cohesion, engagement in society, and a feeling of belonging among its participants.34

The Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency (HARDA) is an NGO that provides assistance to members of the Horn of Africa community in Australia, particularly to migrants from the Horn of Africa who are in the process of settling. Between 2011 and 2013, it ran a program for Somali youths called the Somali Youth Outreach Program. This program had aimed to increase leadership skills among Australian Somali youths, many of whom were considered at-risk, through community activities. The program recruited a personal mentor for each participant for a 6-9 month time period and provided workshops that addressed issues like law enforcement and employment and sought to inspire youths to realize what they could gain from participation in society. It also included a seven-day trip to Melbourne in which the Sydney Stars Somali soccer team competed in a local version of the African Cup of Nations. Football United ran coaching clinics that included workshops on health, law

enforcement, and leadership. The program concluded with a soccer tournament. Yusuf Hersi and Tarek Elriche of the Western Sydney Wanderers attended and conducted talks about success with the players.35

Under its Engage, Challenge, Grow (ECG) scheme, the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA) currently runs fifteen programs based in Sydney aimed at addressing youth issues and improving social cohesion there. The Engage section includes six programs that are meant to promote youth leadership and participation within the community and cultivate a “sense of belonging”. The Challenge section hosts five programs concentrated on improving social cohesion by improving relations between the Sydney Muslim community and other communities. Finally, the Grow section includes four programs that attempt to reach out to other Australian Muslim communities that are “considered to be continuously under significant pressure due to their religious or racial diversity” and offer “targeted education” to dispel “misconceptions and misunderstandings.” The LMA also hosts the Thrive Youth Transition Services, a program that provides support for migrants transitioning to the Australian community.36

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) has its own grants program called Project Mosaic. The program offers 10 grants of $500-$1,500 to various events. The Al-Ehsan Youth 2015 End of Year Social Event brought together 70-80 youths and conducted activities for them with the purpose of garnering a sense of belonging. The Muslim Women’s Forum featured a gathering of Muslim women and representatives of the Victoria police to address the needs of the Muslim community vis-à-vis the authorities. Issues discussed included the readiness of Muslims to contact police, the community’s feeling of safety, and concerns over the portrayal of Muslims in the media. The AAFRO Community Engagement Forum addressed the importance of education before 90 members of the local African community with the aim of conveying the value of school

attendance to parents from the community. Member of Parliament Adam Bandt attended as the keynote speaker.37

In 2005, a Muslim police officer in Melbourne named Sam al-Mugrabi started the Community Outreach (COR) initiative after noticing Muslim youths aged 12-16 wandering the streets, often dropouts involved in drugs and/or with little to no family connections. Al-Mugrabi’s initiative employs three-member “liaison communities” – consisting of a social worker, psychologist, and police officer – to identify these youths. One of the liaisons will usually approach these youths and attempt to engage them on topics such as employment, education, and family with the aim of reintegrating them.38

Efforts to Construct a Counter Narrative

A major focus of Australian efforts to combat radicalization has been challenging the narratives of Islamic extremists and promoting a counter narrative that advocates “peaceful” or “moderate” Islam. Primarily, religious and academic institutions, rather than grassroots NGOs and local governments, are leading the effort to formulate this counter narrative and also run programs for youths, partly in order to disseminate their message. This subsection will examine how these institutions have been promoting this narrative.

The Forum on Australia’s Islamic Relations (FAIR) is Australia’s first Islamic think tank. Established in 2003 in response to 9/11, FAIR’s goal is to improve the image of Islam and status of Muslims through media and education. It monitors media and provides seminars and other programs on Islam for journalists to “ensure accurate and ethical media reporting of events concerning the Islamic community” and to counter “misinformation and myths about Islam”. Its website features a discussion on media and outreach to journalists as well as instructions on how to complain about “a breach in the

38 El-Said, New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs, 87.
code of practices and ethics in the print and broadcasting media”. The website’s “Islamarama” section outlines FAIR’s narrative of Islam. It portrays Islam as an ideology that rejects war, condemns all forms of violence, supports the rule of law, accepts pluralism, “teaches the path of moderation”, and holds democracy as a core value. FAIR has run a number of programs, most recently the Southern Crescent Online Peace Initiative, which has built an interactive website ([http://www.islamate.org.au/](http://www.islamate.org.au/)) that provides information on Islam based on FAIR’s narrative.39

In 2007, as a result of an $8 million government plan requested by the Muslim Reference Group, the Universities of Melbourne and Western Sydney and Griffith University established the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS). Its original purpose was to serve as Australia’s first imam training center, but instead became a center of scholarly studies on Islam open to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.40 The NCEIS boasts an internationally recognized staff and aims to educate its students about Islam, particularly those aspiring to religious leadership roles, and “advance Australian and international understanding of Islam.” The center runs a number of programs, including Education with Muslims, an initiative launched in 2009 that gives workshops to Australian teachers on Islam with the goal of incorporating Islam into school curricula and encouraging schools to engage Muslim communities. Practicing Diversity: Engaging Muslims in Australian Schools launched in 2011 as an extension of Education with Muslims that sought to address interfaith issues in general with Islam as a case study. The NCEIS also hosts the National Imams Consultative Forum (NCIF), a group of over twenty imams representing different strands of Islamic thought that regularly discusses radicalization and violent extremism and develops workshops to address these issues. The NCEIS website features the group’s work, including various resources that challenge Islamic extremist narratives, such as fatwas (authoritative

religious rulings) condemning attacks conducted in the name of Islam and statements by former radicals rejecting Islamic extremism.  

Regional Islamic bodies feature a variety of resources meant to support a positive image of Islam. The ICV website contains an FAQ on Islam that answers basic questions about the religion in order to explain it to non-Muslims. It stresses Islam’s support for the rule of law, gender equality, and nonviolence. One answer states that Muslims in Australia prefer “to be just called Australians” rather than “Australian Muslims.” The ICV keeps close contact with the media and attempts to shed light on issues pertaining to the portrayal of Muslims in it and, in its press releases, consistently denounces terrorist attacks conducted by Islamic extremist groups and their sympathizers. The ICQ focuses its narrative-building efforts on becoming the “central source of information in relation to any matters involving Islam and/or Muslims” through influencing the representation of Islam in the media and government. It keeps ties with the media in Brisbane in order to “ensure that the Muslim perspective is heard” and seeks to establish a formal lobby group to advocate Muslim interests before the federal government. A unique initiative of the Islamic Council of New South Wales (ICNSW) is the Voice of Islam Radio, a 24-hour live broadcast that attempts to counter the “anti-Islamic bias” of the mainstream media as well as to present a Muslim perspective on current events to the Australian public and “share Islam with non-Muslims.”

A number of community initiatives address the narrative issue. In 2009, the mufti and imams of the New South Wales (NSW) Muslim community introduced the Counter Narrative Program, which aims to challenge Islamic extremist narratives and offer an alternative one by inviting renowned Muslim figures, such as John Esposito and Hamza

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Yusuf, from around the globe to address youths. In 2011, the Victoria state government launched Youth Forums, a similar program meant to teach “proper Islam” through structured courses running up to 8 weeks. It invites Muslim role models, such as famous soccer players, to talk to its participants about success.45

Other Initiatives

Aside from youth and counter narrative programs, a variety of initiatives conducted in prisons, social services, and independent research also address radicalization in Australia. This section will discuss several of these initiatives.

Programs aiming to deradicalize prisoners, particularly Muslim ones, of Australian prisons convicted of crimes related to violent extremism are still in their nascency. Muslims are overrepresented in the Australian correctional system. As of 2011, in NSW, where Muslims comprise 3.2% of the general population, they make up 9.3% of the prison population while in Victoria, they comprise 2.9% of the general population and 8% of the prison population.46 NSW’s Goulburn super-max prison, which contains a considerable number of inmates convicted of terror-related charges, is one notable example of deradicalization in prisons. This prison utilizes a method of selective dispersion and concentration of Muslim inmates, in which it separates Muslims and non-Muslims to avoid prison radicalization. It also conducts a 14-day assessment period for new inmates in order to determine their initial cause for radicalization and how best to provide specific services to ensure they do not return to violent extremism. The prison has a chaplaincy that provides religious services, such as counseling and meetings with religious leaders. As part of the chaplaincy, an imam visits the prison monthly and talks with the Muslim inmates.47 The ICV hosts a prison chaplaincy program for Victoria’s prisons. This program has ten trained chaplains that cater to the prisoners’ spiritual needs

45 El-Said, New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs, 89-90.
46 Hassan, Australian Muslims: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia, 34-35. About 80% of Australia’s Muslim population is concentrated in NSW and Victoria.
47 El-Said, New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs, 82-85.
and visit them several times a month. The chaplaincy works in collaboration with Victoria’s Muslim community to help ensure that detainees involve themselves in community activities once released. In 2010, as part of a developing “religious rehabilitation” program, the ICV, Victoria Police, and federal government introduced the Lecture and Open Discussion Forum (LoD). This program attempts to continue the rehabilitation efforts of the chaplaincies and diminish recidivism by bringing former detainees together monthly to hear a lecture on a topic of their choosing by an ICV scholar. Common topics include identity, Islamic protection of life, and the Islamic view on citizenship.

Programs that provide social services to Muslim communities do not directly address radicalization, but still help to address its socio-economic aspect. Victorian Arab Social Services (VASS) is an NGO that provides a variety of services for members of Arabic-speaking communities, from youth to palliative care. It offers counseling and referral to increase access to services as well as assistance in education, employment, and settlement. HARDA offers similar services to integrate migrants from the Horn of Africa. Its Job Search Program provides ten training sessions for Horn of Africa migrants aged over 20 geared to give them employment skills. The African Men’s Education Program offers free classes in English and computer skills for African men usually between the ages of 25 and 45.

On a smaller scale, private initiatives devoted to better understanding violent extremism have appeared recently in Australia. Perhaps the most notable example is People Against Violent Extremism (PaVE), an independent NGO founded by Dr. Anne Aly in 2013 and devoted solely to “addressing violent extremism in Australia and the region.” PaVE operates toward three goals: raising public awareness, identifying research

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49 El-Said, New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs, 89.
needs, and influencing government policy. With respect to the first goal, PaVe utilizes social media, film, and education to teach the public about the issues surrounding violent extremism. PaVE and its research partners cooperate to find out where more research is needed. In this way, it serves as a linkage between the various levels of society that are working toward countering violent extremism and helps ensure that, on the one hand, “policy is informed by evidence” and, on the other hand, that community programs are effective.\(^{52}\)

Assessing Australian Deradicalization Efforts

An analysis of Australian deradicalization efforts would be incomplete without an assessment of their effectiveness. It is challenging to gauge these efforts since most of Australia’s current programs’ nascency and lack of permanence. This entails that meaningful statistics are as yet unavailable. Also, few programs are devoted solely to the issue of radicalization and many treat it as a secondary concern. Nonetheless, this section will attempt to assess these programs by examining the challenges they face.

Although community programs do attempt to address radicalization among community youth, they still have not been able to significantly restore the inter-communal and police-community relations that prevailed before the Howard Government came to power. In fact, anti-immigration sentiments and distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia seem to have only risen. Between 2011 and 2013, the share of respondents in a Scanlon Foundation survey who indicated that asylum seekers’ “boats should be turned back” has risen from 23% to 33% while only 18% supported their “eligibility for permanent residence” in 2013, down from 23% in 2012.\(^{53}\) In a 2015 survey, the Australian Institute for Progress (AIP) found that 48% of Australians think

\(^{52}\) “PaVE: People against violent extremism,” People Against Violent Extremism, accessed October 27, 2016, \url{http://www.pave.net.au/}.

immigration of Muslims into the country is “bad for Australia.” At the same time, the Scanlon Foundation survey found that between 2009 and 2013, the share of respondents who “think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people” has fallen from 39% to 27.2% and, in another survey, many Muslim participants reported feeling that they and their communities were “under constant suspicion.” For its part, the federal government has arguably intensified community divides. For example, in 2015, Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott caused controversy when he stated, “I’ve often heard western leaders describe Islam as a ‘religion of peace’. I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often, and mean it.” More recently, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has voiced support for a bill that would disqualify asylum seekers arriving by boat from eligibility for visas. The sentiments expressed by Australian communities and government officials seem only to validate feelings of alienation in Australia’s Muslim community and leave it more vulnerable to radicalization.

Another challenge faced by Australian deradicalization programs is maintaining credibility. The panel that assesses at-risk individuals for referral to the Directory of CVE Intervention Services is comprised entirely of law enforcement officials, forcing communities to involve security services should they wish to refer an individual to the Directory. Notwithstanding the Muslim community’s uneasy relationship with the police, this seems to discourage use of the government’s intervention services by Australian Muslims who already feel disempowered partly because of continuing legislation broadening police powers as well as an increase in police raids. Indeed, the government already does not disclose the names of the organizations involved in the directory for fear

55 Hassan, Australian Muslims: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia, 30-31; Markus, “Trust in the Australian political system.”
of discrediting them.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, government funding of the NCEIS has discredited the latter in the eyes of many Muslims. Perhaps worse, the distrust with which many Muslims view government institutions has allowed the Islamic extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir to use the NCEIS as a symbol of anti-Islam in its propaganda.\textsuperscript{59} Some Muslim community leaders have even rejected government-led deradicalization programs altogether. The head of the LMA, Samier Dandan, stated in 2015 that the government “continues to use taxpayer dollars on pointless programs that do little to address the genuine concerns of both the Muslim, and the wider Australian community.”\textsuperscript{60} It seems Australian deradicalization programs have yet to earn public trust and credibility.

Deradicalization in Australian prisons has proven to be not only inefficient, but also counterproductive at times. Despite studies showing that families have played an important role in deradicalization (though, sometimes, also radicalization), Australia’s super-max prisons discourage family visits and, on the occasions they do occur, insist that a detainee converse exclusively in English with his visitor. In contrast, experts have attributed the success of prison deradicalization programs in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to the involvement of family in a detainee’s rehabilitation. Australian prisons also do not have post-release deradicalization programs for former inmates.\textsuperscript{61} Experts and government officials from Western countries have expressed concern over growing numbers of Muslim radicals leaving their prisons.\textsuperscript{62} Gabriele Marranci, an academic who studies Islam in UK prisons, has noted that prisons aged 17-29 have a higher chance of becoming radicalized through rediscovering or converting to Islam. It is important to

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Gaetano Joe Ilardi, “Prison Radicalisation – The Devil is in the Detail,” (paper presented at the GTReC ARC Linkage Project on Radicalisation Conference – Understanding Terrorism from an Australian Perspective: Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter Radicalisation, Melbourne, Australia, 2010), 1; Tinka Veldhuis, \textit{Prisoner Radicalization and Terrorism Detention Policy: Institutionalized Fear or Evidence-Based Policy Making?} (Abingdon Routledge, 2016).
\end{thebibliography}
avoid immediately equating Islam in prisons with radicalization; indeed, devout Muslim inmates, including converts, at Goulburn are reportedly more well-behaved than other prisoners. At the same time, Marranci’s research has shown that many Muslims in UK prisons “are not your standard mosque-goer”, but rather have little understanding of Islamic theology, are part of gangs, and abuse drugs.63 Prison gangs are relatively less prevalent in Australian prisons, although there have been instances of Muslim inmates forming radical groups, such as one in 2007 when NSW Corrective Services disrupted an al-Qaeda-inspired network of 40 Muslim inmates from different prisons who aimed to interfere with prison activities and interrogations. Furthermore, there is evidence that Australia’s policy of dispersing and isolating detainees charged with terrorist-related offences actually hinders efforts to rehabilitate the latter.64

Australian deradicalization efforts suffer from inefficiency. The government currently offers community-based programs that meet its criteria one-time grants of up to $50,000, not enough money to effect meaningful change when one takes into account the logistical expenses demanded by such programs. Furthermore, since the Abbott Government has announced the four-year $13.4 million budget for community programs in August 2014, only $1.8 million has as yet actually reached communities.65

**Outlining the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon**

Before showing the relationship between Australia’s deradicalization efforts and the foreign fighter phenomenon in the next section, this section will discuss the history and significance of the foreign fighter phenomenon in general. The purpose of this section is to provide the background necessary to better understand the relationship between Australia’s deradicalization efforts and the foreign fighter phenomenon.

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65 Sumpter, “Countering Violent Extremism in Australia: Is State Control Effective?”
Thomas Hegghammer defines a foreign fighter as an unpaid agent that lacks citizenship and kinship links to the faction he joins and who is not part of an official military organization, i.e. a fighter whose allegiance is based on solely ideological affinity to his faction’s cause.\(^{66}\) The foreign fighter phenomenon is not new and has existed, for instance, in the international brigades of the 1936 Spanish Civil War. A shared “transnational identity” seems to be the most powerful force attracting Muslim foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq today, as it did communist foreign fighters in 1936. However, Muslim foreign fighters differ in that they fight “not to protect a territory but to recreate a community,” namely the caliphate, or a super-state encompassing the entire Muslim world as it had existed in the early history of Islam.\(^ {67}\) Retired U.S. Department of Defense analyst, Thomas R. McCabe notes that many foreign fighters lack serious religious identification and join foreign conflicts for a variety of personal reasons, including revenge for perceived victimization, delusions of grandeur, and a desire to prove oneself.\(^ {68}\)

To better understand the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon, one might examine its roots. During the 1960s, Saudi Arabia was undergoing rapid expansion in education and adopting increasingly Islamist policies. This led to the establishment of several Islamic institutions, including the Muslim World League in 1962 and Abd al-Aziz University in 1967, in the Hejaz region, namely in Mecca, Medina, and Jidda. At the same time, the persecution of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its affiliates in other secular Arab states caused an influx of its members and sympathizers seeking refuge in Saudi Arabia. Many of these migrants took prominent positions in the new institutions of the Hejaz. There, they developed a nuanced discourse on pan-Islamism — the idea that Muslims should unite — that emphasized external threats to Islam and self-victimization, calling on all Muslims to defend Islam through “jihad” (literally “struggle”)

in Arabic), Islam’s mandate for personal and universal betterment through effort. This term has held various meanings to different ideologues, but was manifest for the Hejazi pan-Islamists in their establishment of charities to support Muslim communities around the world.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Saudi Islamic institutions sent humanitarian workers to provide aid to Muslims in Afghanistan. Despite this initial approach, a Palestinian Muslim scholar and teacher at Abd al-Aziz University named Abdallah Azzam quickly shifted the focus to militant jihad, or the physical external struggle against non-Muslims, in 1981, after joining the newly established, Muslim League-funded International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan. Azzam stated that each Muslim had an individual duty (fard ayn) to defend Islam by physically fighting against its perceived enemies wherever they may be, in this case Afghanistan.69 Throughout the 1980s, Azzam published “recruitment literature”, gave lectures, and set up facilitation networks, namely the Services Bureau (Maktab al-Khidmat), a logistics office that assisted Muslims in traveling to and fighting in Afghanistan. By the middle of the 1980s, non-Afghan foreign fighters began arriving in force to assist the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviets.70

Azzam’s work provided two major components that helped initiate the foreign fighter movement: ideological legitimation and practical facilitation. His foremost contribution to the former was his formulation of militant jihad in foreign lands as fard ayn and declaration that the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan was jihad, a fight that was sanctioned by Allah. As noted earlier, many Muslims who joined the foreign fighter movement seem to have done so for personal reasons, such as a desire to prove oneself or delusions of grandeur. Azzam’s ideology legitimized violence as a means to express

69 Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad,” 74-76. Most mainstream pan-Islamists, such as Sayid Qutb, emphasized Islam’s internal struggle against “un-Islamic” regimes in Muslim countries, like Egypt and Iraq, and viewed the external fight against non-Muslims in foreign lands, at best, as a collective duty (fard kifaya) that did not oblige the individual Muslim to fight on behalf of his coreligionists outside of his home country. Azzam’s pan-Islamism can, therefore, be seen as distinct from earlier 20th century conceptions.

70 Ibid., 79-89 for above two paragraphs.
these impulses. More importantly, he provided also the practical mechanisms of facilitation through which would-be jihadists could make the journey from their homelands to fight in Afghanistan. Azzam’s two major works, *Defense of the Muslim Lands* and *Join the Caravan*, published in 1984 and 1987, respectively, served as guidebooks for those seeking to join the Afghan jihad, giving practical advice, such as how to consider one’s parents, family, and financial issues prior to leaving and even how to deal with police should one return. In addition, his Maktab al-Khidmat facilitated the influx of foreign fighters into Afghanistan by providing training to new recruits and raising funds. These two factors shaped the Afghan foreign fighter movement and continue to serve as the basis for the foreign fighter movement today.

**Combating the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in Australia**

Australia is facing an increasingly tangible threat from the foreign fighter phenomenon, with an estimated 13 foreign fighters per capita. When it presented the 2014 CVE program, the Abbott Government had tasked it with “identifying and intervening with individuals who perhaps were contemplating traveling to participate in foreign conflicts, had returned or perhaps had been frustrated in their attempts to travel overseas.” In light of the Australian government’s current focus on the threat of the foreign fighter phenomenon in its counterterrorism policy, this section will analyze the different aspects of the phenomenon that Australia’s current deradicalization efforts address. It identifies three stages of foreign fighting: the radicalization process, the entrance into a conflict zone, and the prospect of returning to the country of origin. This section seeks to examine in turn how Australian deradicalization programs are addressing the foreign fighter phenomenon at these stages.

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The Radicalization Process

The radicalization process comprises the first stage of a foreign fighter’s career. Radicalization typically involves concluding that the current socio-political system is inadequate and that only violence will bring about desirable results. Another model, “group polarization”, involves the radicalization of a group of people holding similar views following discussion of these views.76 Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher have found that in radicalization, religion plays a lesser role than “sustained exposure to extremist ideologies combined with incremental withdrawal from ‘mainstream’ groups and acknowledgment from [the] new social group.”77 Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins have identified five major radicalizing factors:

…grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures. *Grievances* include economic marginalization and cultural alienation, deeply held sense of victimization, or strong disagreements regarding the foreign policies of states. Grievances could also entail personal disaffection, loss, or crisis that leads one to seek a new path in life. *Networks* refer to preexisting kinship and friendship ties between ordinary individuals and radicals that lead to the diffusion of extreme beliefs. These milieus not only offer opportunities for socialization with radicals, they could also satisfy psychological needs such as the search for meaningful relationships and a quest for significance… *Ideologies* refer to master narratives about the world and one’s place in it. Usually they frame personal and collective grievances into broader political critiques of the status quo. They also demonize enemies and justify violence against them, and they incentivize sacrifice by promising heroic redemption. *Enabling environments and support structures* encompass physical and virtual settings such as the Internet, social media, prisons,

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76 Morris, “Islamic Radicalization in Australia,” 17.
77 Aly and Striegher, “Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism,” 859.
or foreign terrorist training camps that provide ideological and material aid for radicalizing individuals, as well as deepen their commitment to radical milieus.\textsuperscript{78}

McCabe has noted that many ISIS recruits truly believe in the group’s extremist version of Islam or have naturally malicious intentions, i.e. they are radicalized from the beginning and simply use the jihadist group as a means of legitimizing and realizing their intentions.\textsuperscript{79} As one may discern, there are many paths to radicalization.

Australia’s three-pronged approach to deradicalization – youth engagement, social cohesion, and education – attempts to address radicalization throughout its process. As noted earlier, TSG has found that most foreign fighters are in their 20s, though can be even younger.\textsuperscript{80} This finding is in line with the fact that many jihadist recruiters focus their efforts on “recent immigrants, second- and third-generation “born-again” Muslims, and converts to Islam.”\textsuperscript{81} In Australia in particular, “second-generation immigrants… are more susceptible to violence, crime and illegal activities than their fathers and forefathers.”\textsuperscript{82} Hence, it is sensible to concentrate on integrating children of immigrants. This paper has presented a variety of programs that directly target Muslim youths with the goal of making them feel a sense of belonging. These programs aim to foster youth engagement through nonviolent expression and leadership skills among youths. Garnering this sense of belonging as well as teaching nonviolent leadership skills can help ensure that youths will not adopt, or at least will know how to cope appropriately with, the feelings of alienation from and dissatisfaction with the Australian socio-political system that may lead to radicalization.

\textsuperscript{79} McCabe, “A Strategy for the ISIS Foreign Fighter Threat,” 143. McCabe states that these two groups of people, who he refers to as the “murderously devout” and “devoutly murderous”, comprise the typical Western recruits to ISIS.
\textsuperscript{80} Barret et al, \textit{Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq}, 13.
\textsuperscript{82} El-Said, \textit{New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs}, 58.
Because social relations have proven to be such an important aspect of the radicalization process, social cohesion is crucial to stopping radicalization within communities. The Australian government’s theme of “community resilience” addresses trust within and between communities with the goal of strengthening these communities to “resist the development of any form of violent extremism.” The programs of the AMF and ICQ discussed above are examples of programs that address social cohesion. Daniel Byman posits that communities that feel “a strong sense of loyalty to their countries” are more likely to “turn in potential terrorists” and that they can deter the threat of returnees. Moreover, improving trust between communities can diminish collective sentiments of alienation and group polarization to which isolated communities, namely the Muslim community of Australia, are more prone. El-Said notes that families can be just as detrimental in the radicalization process as they can be beneficial in deradicalization while Hafez and Mullins assert, “One of the most robust findings in the literature on… religious extremism is that preexisting friendship and kinship ties facilitate recruitment.” Therefore, one may see that Australia’s community resilience programs seek to improve social cohesion to mitigate the threat of radicalization.

An aspect of radicalization that has received particular attention is countering extremist ideologies through education. The NCEIS and regional Islamic organizations of Australia have been the leaders of this endeavor. These organizations have set up curricula, online platforms, and forums meant to inform Australians of a moderate Islamic narrative. This work is important in relation to the foreign fighter phenomenon since ISIS and other jihadist groups actively utilize various media to propagate their ideologies globally. ISIS features two online magazines – Dabiq and Rumiyah – that serve a similar function to Azzam’s recruitment literature, providing ideological

legitimation for ISIS. Experts have also identified ISIS’ use of Twitter to disseminate its ideas and actions as a buttress to ISIS’ military capabilities. Hafez and Mullins note that extremist ideologies mitigate the doubts of potential foreign fighters who may be uncertain as to the group’s probability of success; they paint the “jihad” as a struggle between good and evil, a fight against Allah’s enemies – “imperialists”, “Zionists”, and “Crusaders” – emphasizing that Allah is on the side of the jihadists and will ensure their victory. Furthermore, although ISIS may be defeated in the future, its ideology, if left unchecked, will likely survive in subsequent extremist groups. Indeed, one may see a continuation of Azzam’s ideology within ISIS. It is, thus, sensible for Australian organizations to continue promoting an alternative ideology to diminish the threat of radicalization.

Entrance into a Conflict Zone

Once radicalized, an individual must decide whether to operate in his own country or enter a conflict zone and aid an extremist organization on the ground. Hegghammer, proposes that jihadists from the West are more likely to choose the latter for three reasons: 1) it is easier to operate in a conflict zone where domestic constraints, such as security agencies, are a nonissue, 2) it is more effective since they will receive training abroad, and 3) with respect to Islam, they view it as more legitimate since radical Muslim scholars condone foreign fighting over domestic attacks. Byman notes that jihadists prefer foreign fighting because they do not wish to harm their immediate

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90 Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” Science Review 107, no. 1 (February 2013): 6-8. As foreign fighting has become more difficult, radical Muslim jurists have begun to advocate domestic attacks, though preference for the former is still strong among jihadists.
communities, recalling a statement by a Somali American who later became a foreign fighter that he would not attack America because his “mom could be walking down the street.”

Malet attributes the modern preference among Western jihadists for foreign fighting to the recent developments in communication and transportation as part of globalization, which have produced a “transnational identity” for Muslims around the globe at the expense of traditional communal identities. This transnational identity, in turn, has offered individual Muslims fearing estrangement from their origins the opportunity to take action through radical Islamic ideologies. Global Islamic institutions, such as those established by the Hejazi pan-Islamists, as well as the Internet, have facilitated the accessibility and practicability of these ideologies.

Australia’s efforts to deter radicalized individuals from traveling to conflict zones has focused on a combination of soft engagement and physical disruption of facilitation networks like those of Azzam’s Maktab al-Khidmat. Facilitation has played an important role in mobilizing foreign fighters and connecting the “local to the transnational.” One may associate the relatively high rate of foreign fighters from Europe with the level of facilitation. Prominent transnational Islamic organizations in Europe, such as Sharia4, have been known to spread radical ideologies and engage in facilitation activities, most notably Sharia4Belgium, which has helped to make Belgium the largest Western source of Muslim foreign fighters per capita at 46 militants per million people. Andrew Zammit notes that in Australia, the comparatively low number of foreign fighters is the result of law enforcement’s success in disrupting facilitator activities since 2003, when jihadist facilitation had taken root following Australia’s involvement in the Iraq War. Despite this success, the persistence of the foreign fighter phenomenon in Australia has

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95 Andrew Zammit, “Explaining a Turning Point in Australian Jihadism,” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 36, no. 9 (March 2013): 750.
prompted the development of Australian identification and diversion programs aimed at engaging “at-risk” and radicalized individuals. The government created the Directory of CVE Intervention Services explicitly to more effectively engage these individuals. Community mentorship programs as well as some local initiatives, such as the COR, also focus their efforts on identifying and engaging at-risk individuals, particularly youths.

The Prospect of Return

McCabe notes that Western foreign fighters typically do not expect to return and accept that they will die when they embark on their journeys to conflict zones. However, the number of foreign fighters who have returned home has only increased over time and the return rate today is between 20% and 30% for Western countries. The potential threat posed by returnees is a double-edged sword since not all returnees wish to continue jihadist activities, but those who do are significantly more dangerous than homegrown jihadists. Hegghammer has found that one in nine foreign fighters return to commit attacks in the West. Their newfound skills in weapons and explosives and ties with international jihadist circles make them hardened veterans with the ability to cause considerable damage at home with support from extremist groups abroad. Returnees may alternatively become more effective recruiters since many are treated as heroes upon their return, inspire other members of their communities, and may aid newly radicalized individuals in contacting jihadist groups. Some who return may well have no intention to continue carrying out jihadist activities, yet others who remain extremist but disappointed with the progress of the jihad abroad may find the democratic societies of the West fertile ground to more easily publicize their radical beliefs and create new jihadist circles. Hence, despite the fact that many returnees repudiate jihadism, others may use the abilities and connections they acquire abroad to execute attacks in their

97 Barret et al, Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, 4.
100 Byman, “The Jihadist Returnee Threat: Just how Dangerous?” 75-76.
countries of origin, become facilitators, and establish new jihadist circles. In the case of Australia, the threat of returnees has not gone beyond encouragement and inspiration for homegrown radicals.\textsuperscript{101} Nonetheless, the potential threat remains.

The current Australian approach to returnees involves both security services and deradicalization programs. One might credit effective Australian law enforcement with mitigating the threat of returnees. Byman notes that jihadists tend to avoid countries that have relatively strong security services and the latter play a crucial role in apprehending, monitoring, or otherwise deterring returnees deemed as threats.\textsuperscript{102} However, a balance is needed between reliance on security services and deradicalization programs because foreign fighters have historically flowed out of countries perceived as oppressing Islamists as they had from Syria to Afghanistan in the 1980s when the former had cracked down on Islamism. In addition, even returnees who are apprehended may return to extremism after being released. Individuals disillusioned with an extremist group and seeking an exit often face a number of barriers to returning: they may feel as if they have nowhere to go and fear imprisonment, stigmatization, and dubious employment prospects.\textsuperscript{103} It is in addressing these barriers that deradicalization programs provide support. Community programs can assuage fears that there is nowhere to go and diminish stigmatization. Social services programs, such as those of VASS and HARDA, can ease fears of uncertainty and aid returnees in reintegration through providing employment assistance and financial support. Security services themselves may partake in the deradicalization process by treating returnees more leniently and working with prison chaplaincies and setting up post-release programs to ensure returnees deemed as threats do not recidivate.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{103}Rabasa et al, “Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,” 15-17.
This article has examined Australia’s deradicalization programs and how they apply to the foreign fighter phenomenon in the Australian context. It started by giving an overview of Islamic extremism in Australia and the initial reliance on security services to meet Australia’s counterterrorism objectives. Then, it surveyed a variety of Australian deradicalization programs that arose in the past decade. It went on to outline the foreign fighter phenomenon before showing how Australian deradicalization programs address this phenomenon.

One may categorize Australia’s deradicalization programs under two main groups: those that address youth engagement and social cohesion and those that work to advance a moderate Islamic narrative to counter the extremist narratives of radical groups. Other programs seek to advance research on radicalization, develop deradicalization in prisons, and provide social services that mitigate the socioeconomic factors of radicalization. The federal government has taken an active role in financing and promoting these programs through grants and direct funding, though it has not seriously attempted to initiate its own schemes. In light of the deterioration of relations between Muslim communities and the federal government, the role of the government in these programs has called into question their credibility. In consequence, extremist groups have been able to deride government programs as anti-Islamic while even moderate Muslim community leaders have voiced disapproval for the government’s hand in deradicalization. These programs have also been unable to return inter-communal and police-community relations to their highpoint during the heyday of Australian multiculturalism. Inefficiency has been another impediment to deradicalization efforts while efforts aimed at rehabilitating prisoners have often proved counterproductive. Nonetheless, it seems that Australian deradicalization efforts may have some influence within Muslim communities, specifically among youths, since most of these programs target youths specifically. It is still too early to say whether these programs have had positive effects.

Australia’s deradicalization programs offer ways to address the foreign fighter phenomenon. Since these programs are naturally focused on the radicalization process,
they host a variety of methods to prevent radicalization, including youth programs that target at-risk youths and the efforts of some Islamic organizations to directly challenge Islamic extremist narratives. Law enforcement is more active in preventing radicalized individuals from traveling abroad and disrupting facilitation networks as well as identifying, apprehending, and monitoring returnees and assessing the potential threat they pose. Nonetheless, deradicalization programs have a place in engaging individuals who seem as if they may want to join a jihadist group abroad, providing social services that may aid at-risk or radicalized individuals in integration, and potentially helping to rehabilitate imprisoned returnees. These programs serve to complement the efforts of security services at this stage.

Based on these findings, the present author recommends closer collaboration between the government and the organizations that conduct the deradicalization programs and deemphasizing the role security services play in Australia’s efforts to combat radicalization. Although law enforcement has proved its value in preventing attacks, continued reliance on and empowerment of it may ultimately impede long-term deradicalization efforts by further alienating the Muslim community. The generally amicable relations between communities and police during Australia’s multiculturalism days were largely a result of the government’s promotion of these relations. Thus, the federal government should seek to repair these relations by increasing the almost token support it provides to communal programs today in order to encourage the initiation of more permanent schemes and take a strong stance renewing the spirit of multiculturalism. Statements like Prime Minister Abbott’s laying blame on Muslim communities are not constructive. For their part, Muslim communities should continue trying to reach out to other communities and Muslim religious leaders should take a more active role in this process as well as in engaging at-risk individuals in their own communities since they often know these individuals well and can provide them with more credible and meaningful guidance. The turn to deradicalization programs and away from high policing
was a positive one, but it still requires considerable investment from both the federal government and from within Muslim communities to effect real change.
Bibliography


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