

ABSTRACT

An Ideological War on Terror: Deradicalization Programs and the Future of Counterterrorism

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The rise of radical Islamist extremism has plagued the international community throughout the 21st century. More than 32,000 people died as a direct results of terrorist activity in 2014 alone, and that year terrorism cost the global economy \$52.9 billion. The international community has employed a variety of tactics to try to stop radical Islamist groups from continuing operations or growing in influence, but traditional efforts fail to address the ideological threat posed by radical Islamism. Programs aiming to deradicalize individuals with extremist affiliations seek to fill this gap by reducing the legitimacy of radical organizations and their ideology, which reduces their capacity to operate. Since deradicalization in the context of radical Islamism is a relatively recent concept, I examine both successful and unsuccessful programs in order to determine the elements required to implement a program that effectively graduates deradicalized individuals.

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AN IDEOLOGICAL WAR ON TERROR: DERADICALIZATION PROGRAMS
AND THE FUTURE OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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INTRODUCTION

According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index report, approximately 32,658 people were killed in 2014 as a direct result of terrorist activity. This is an 80 percent increase from 2013, when 18,000 were killed, and almost ten times the 3,300 that were killed worldwide in the year 2000.¹ The global reporting on terrorist attacks has also increased exponentially, demonstrating a worldwide concern for the threat posed by terrorist organizations. The Index also estimated that in 2014 alone, terrorist activity cost the global economy at least \$52.9 billion. These figures include all kinds of terrorism, regardless of political, religious, or organizational affiliation. However, they did find that terrorist acts carried out by radical Islamist extremists did cause the vast majority of deaths and continually draw a “disproportionate” amount of the media coverage.² While 2014 was the peak of terrorism-related deaths in the twenty-first century thus far, two-thirds of countries experienced a terrorist event in the year 2016. In number of worldwide deaths directly resulting from terrorist activity, 2016 was “the third deadliest year since 2000.”³

One of the most prominent groups in global media coverage is the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh. The Islamic State and its affiliates were responsible

¹ Daniel Costa-Roberts, "4 Surprising Facts from the 2015 Global Terrorism Index," PBS, last modified November 23, 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/4-surprising-facts-from-the-2015-global-terrorism-index>.

² Ibid.

³ Institute for Economics & Peace. "Global Terrorism Index 2017." Global Terrorism Index. <http://globalterrorismindex.org>.

for over 11,500 deaths in 2016 alone, which was nearly half of the total terrorism-related deaths that year. The group and its affiliates have been active in some capacity in more than fifteen countries, and are responsible for approximately 43 percent of deaths directly resulting from terrorist activity in the past three years.⁴ This disproportionate trend has inspired fear worldwide, especially since attacks are not limited to any one area in particular. According to a Pew Research poll conducted in early 2017, the majority of people living in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union responded that they were either “somewhat” or “very” concerned “about extremism in the name of Islam” in their country.⁵ Dozens of countries have deployed extensive counterterrorism strategies in response, aiming to promote security within their own borders by preventing the spread of radical Islamist terrorist activity.

In the United States, since the attacks on September 11th, 2001, the government has taken fighting radical Islamist extremists extremely seriously. Seventeen years later, the U.S. still views Islamist extremism as a dangerous threat. According to George Washington University’s report *ISIS in America*, since 2014, “159 individuals have been charged in the U.S. with offenses related to the Islamic State.”⁶ That number excludes arrests of individuals affiliated with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The intention is to prevent groups such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda from gaining any more influence and, ideally, to take down the groups entirely. Enhanced internal security

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Pervasive Concern about Islamic Extremism across Europe and North America," Pew Research Center, last modified June 28, 2017.

⁶ Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," *The George Washington University Program on Extremism*, December 2015, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/isis-america>.

measures seek to prevent terrorist threats from developing in the United States. These measures include heightened surveillance of individuals residing in or attempting to enter the United States.

Countries concerned about terrorism and Islamist extremism have employed several different varieties of counterterrorism measures. Some have taken military action in the key territories of groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, specifically in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. United Nations Member States have attempted to combat the spread of terrorist activity by targeting key organizations' finances, sending peacekeeping forces into vulnerable states, such as Syria, sharing vital information with one another more openly, and implementing stricter standards for international travel.⁷

All of these efforts seek to weaken terrorist organization in their capacity for carrying out attacks and spreading to new territories, but none seek to disarm the radical Islamist ideology actually fueling these groups. These counterterrorism measures fail to address the ideological threat that radical Islamism poses. In the RAND Corporation's extensive examination of deradicalization and radical Islamism, Rabasa et al. define ideology as a set of beliefs which provide "an explanation for the current world order, a picture of a preferred future, and a guide for how to realize the desired state." They argue ideology not only helps with recruitment by giving recruits something to believe in, but also provides a source of legitimacy, justifies violence, and encourages group solidarity.⁸ Unlike organized crime or violent nationalism, the violent Islamist ideology presents

⁷ United Nations, "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," United Nations Office of Counter-terrorism, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>.

⁸ Angel Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists," *RAND Corporation*, 2010, 28, PDF.

individuals with a sense of purpose and fervor that supersedes monetary or domestic interests. It provides followers with a community, an eternal purpose, and a place to openly express frustrations with their government or even society as a whole. While governments can significantly weaken groups spreading ideologies through imprisonment, military action, and funding restrictions, the groups can continue to recruit new members as long as their fundamental ideology remains intact. For that reason, undermining the ideology through deradicalization is essential for combatting the radical Islamist threat.

Because radical Islamism is based on a major world religion, it is a complex form of extremism to address. Religious beliefs can be much more difficult to change than political beliefs because of their deeply personal and existential nature. However, with radical Islamism, there is the unique opportunity to utilize mainstream Islamic thought as an alternative ideology to undermine the extremism of radical Islamism.⁹ This is particularly valuable because it means programs are only required to help militants understand the certain points of divergence that separate peaceful Muslims and radical Islamists. They do not need to dismember an entire set of religious beliefs but simply point radicals in the direction of peaceful, mainstream Islam.

Radical Islamism is also a uniquely politicized version of Islam. There is no clear agreement between radical Islamist groups regarding specific beliefs and goals, but they all broadly aim to establish Islam as a source of political authority to an extreme degree.¹⁰ The line between politics and religion is blurred during radicalization but deradicalization

⁹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 27.

¹⁰ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford, 2016), 169.

programs can aim to extract the political components of the militants' ideology and introduce them to mainstream religious doctrine as an alternative. Although, it is important to also note that separation of the state and religion is not as clear in many non-Western countries, but mainstream Islam can intersect with political beliefs peacefully.

Studies show that very few radical Islamists have had any formal Islamic education, which might have made them more easily swayed by extremist ideas and potentially more willing to listen to an alternative perspective.¹¹ An internal memo written by one of Al-Qaeda's leaders, Abu Yahya al-Libi, specifically outlined the group's strategy of targeting "common' and 'ignorant' recruits worldwide." He goes on to say, "As you know, most of the common people do not realize the truth of the... political analysis, but they are incited by emotions."¹² This highlights the value of giving radicals access to mainstream Islamic leaders and teachers, so they can better understand the foundations of the religion they are claiming and can learn about how politics and Islam can function together peacefully.

The goal of many deradicalization programs is to essentially seek to revert radicalized individuals to peaceful members of society. They do so by creating "pull factors," which are, "opportunities or social forces that attract an individual to a more promising alternative... [such as] longing for the freedoms of a normal life, new employment, or educational prospects... or the desire to establish a family."¹³ Studies

¹¹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 30.

¹² Huda Al-Saleh, "Secret Al-Qaeda Memo: We Must Recruit and Manipulate 'Ignorant' Muslims," Al-Arabiya, last modified February 2018.

¹³ Darcy Noricks et al., *Social Science for Counterterrorism*, ed. Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin (n.p.: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009), 302.

show that people are more likely to disengage in response to pull factors than push factors, such as imprisonment or physical danger.¹⁴ Many radicals remain part of the terrorist organization despite reservations or push factors because they become isolated from the outside world. The opportunity for acceptance by a peaceful community with opportunities for normalcy can therefore help them overcome the fear of leaving and allows them to prioritize their primary needs differently. They go from prioritizing acceptance within their group to prioritizing their own personal desires, such as the desire for an education or the desire to start a family. This desire to belong drives not only members of radical Islamist extremist groups but was also discovered in case studies of the Irish Republican Army and members of the Red Brigades.¹⁵ According to advocates of deradicalization programs, they refocus this desire to belong and encourage radicals to give in to pull factors through extensive psychological counseling, religious and political discussions, job training, and family support. They give radicals a safe place to renounce violent behavior and terrorist affiliations and then provide them with opportunities to peacefully re-integrate into society.

More than a dozen countries in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia have launched some form of deradicalization program designed to address radical Islamist extremism. These countries recognize the value of deradicalization as part of a larger counterterrorism strategy. While each country's programs have had varying degrees of success, valuable lessons can be learned from each program. Prisons, for example, can

¹⁴ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," xxxvii.

¹⁵ Noricks et al., *Social Science*, 303.

serve as a significant hub of radicalization.¹⁶ Deradicalization programs focusing on imprisoned radicals, therefore, have a strong platform for preventing the spread of radicalization among prison populations. Some programs have even found success in using deradicalized individuals as sources of intelligence for efforts to disrupt the individual's old organization.

Despite the strong potential in using deradicalization as part of a larger counterterrorism strategy, there is still relatively little research into the most effective practices. For that reason, this study examines theories driving radicalization and deradicalization, as well as the most successful and unsuccessful programs that have been set in motion. The goal is to evaluate practices that seem to contribute to successful cases of deradicalization and elements potentially missing from unsuccessful programs. Unfortunately, case studies are limited by the amount of information available to the public regarding successes and failures. Many programs put significant resources into the deradicalization process but fail to monitor released program graduates for more than a year following completion, which gives an incomplete picture of the long-term success of a program. I excluded several promising programs from this study due to lack of information on success and recidivism rates. Nevertheless, even small victories provide valuable insight regarding effective and ineffective practices and speak to which theories might be more accurate than others. This information can serve as a starting point for countries looking to design new deradicalization programs or for those looking to improve upon their existing model. The scourge of domestic and international terrorism

¹⁶ "Indonesia: Extremism and Counter-Extremism," Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/indonesia>.

demands that we evaluate these long-term solutions to the violence perpetrated by Islamist extremists in the name of a religion espoused by millions of people.

By examining programs implemented in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Yemen, the United Kingdom, France, and Indonesia, the value of comprehensive program design and long-term access to resources is highlighted. However, the most ambitious programs are not necessarily the most successful, since it also takes a strong understanding of both radical Islamism and mainstream Islam among program workers and programs for participants to take the program seriously. Proper implementation also requires the right circumstances, which is usually in prisons, in order to encourage active participation and genuine rehabilitation, both ideologically and socially.

CHAPTER ONE

Theories of Radicalization and Deradicalization

Understanding Radicalization

Before examining successful methods of deradicalization, it is first necessary to understand how and why radicalization occurs. It is important to note that each individual radical might have his or her own unique personal reasons influencing their behavior. However, there are common themes and general trends that help us better understand the radicalization phenomenon. While present-day radicalization primarily encompasses radical Islamist extremism, the group psychology behind radicalization in general is similar across the ideological spectrum. There are several important models of radicalization that all seek to outline the most influential factors and key milestones in the radicalization process.

The first model is called the ‘staircase model,’ posited by Fathali Moghaddam in 2005. It highlights how individuals are driven to a more radical worldview distinct from the accepted non-radical worldview around them.¹⁷ He describes a six-step process, beginning with a clear perception of a threat or injustice and then moving to a recognition of the possible responses to that instigating threat. Then, there is usually a verbal manifestation of the threat, followed by a conscious or unconscious decision to morally engage with the threat. The individual then begins considering a response and legitimizes the actions of a terrorist organization, which he or she believes is equipped to address the

¹⁷ Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 72, digital file.

threat.¹⁸ The final step involves a conscious decision to let go of inhibitions to identifying with the terrorist organization and participating in an act of terror. This final step is when the individual views a clear line between him or herself and the ‘enemy,’ as differences are highlighted and the hostility continues to escalate.¹⁹

This process might proceed as follows. A young man becomes frustrated with Western influences in his home country. According to Moghaddam, most people live at this “ground floor” level without progressing any further. However, this young man might not think his country’s government is doing enough to prioritize his native culture, and therefore considers possible responses to this problem. The next step would be his verbalizing this frustration to others. These first few steps might be relatively common but the final three define the radicalization process. They encompass the individual recognizing a terrorist organization as a valid solution to the perceived threat, his integration into the group, and finally his “pushing aside of inhibition” to label the perpetrators of the ‘threat’ as an enemy. This final step is the threshold individuals cross when they begin carrying out acts of violence against the ‘enemy’.

Daniel Koehler proposes an alternative model of radicalization, arguing instead that radicalization is a “process of individual de-pluralization of political concepts and values” in accordance with a particular ideology.²⁰ According to this model, more radicalized, or in this case more de-pluralized, individuals are not necessarily more prone

¹⁸ Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 73.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 74.

to violence.²¹ The key, Koehler argues, is that the radical worldview emerges as a result of a narrowing scope of plausible ideologies, political concepts, and religious beliefs. Koehler suggests, “violent radical ideologies...constantly erase and negate alternative or competing definitions of the ideology’s core values... to establish a monopoly in this regard.”²² A monolithic ideology overemphasizes the urgency of its beliefs to trigger a higher level of commitment and activism among recruits. As the recruits’ scope of possibility shrinks and their commitment to the cause grows, they become more willing to partake in a level of activism and aggression that was out of character before radicalization. Each individual recruit’s turning point for engaging in violent behavior, however, is much more individualized and less predictable.²³

In an article investigating the psychological elements of radicalization, Arie W. Kruglanski and colleagues seek to pinpoint the causes and degrees of radicalization. They argue the first step requires an “arousal of the *goal of significance*.” Usually humans seek survival and general well-being before anything else but in the case of radical behavior, they argue there is some goal that outweighs that individual’s desire for physical safety and security.²⁴ The quest for significance can be initiated in a number of ways. For example, the individual might first experience a “deprivation” of significance, through some instance of humiliation or shame, in the context of a group or individually.²⁵ This

²¹ Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*, 74.

²² *Ibid*, 75.

²³ *Ibid*, 76.

²⁴ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism," *Political Psychology*, January 22, 2014, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

concept is particularly compelling in the context of the rise of radical Islamist extremism in the Middle East, which operates in a shame-based culture.²⁶ Oftentimes the target of their radical behavior, or the ‘enemy,’ is the person, group, or entity that shamed or humiliated them and robbed them of significance. Radicalized groups or individuals could also act out of a desire to avoid a future “loss of significance”, or become motivated by the opportunity to potentially gain significance, which the authors argue correspond with the psychological concept of *incentive*.

Once the *goal of significance* is present, for radical behavior to occur there must also be a belief that violence or terrorism is the necessary or appropriate response. Then, the group or individual undergoes a “commitment shift,” which instills a new commitment to the goal that overrides previous pressing motivations, such as personal safety, that are viewed as incompatible with their now-dominant goal.²⁷ These shifts oftentimes occur as a result of pressure or encouragement from a radical group. Marc Sageman argues that some terrorist movements are “leaderless jihad,” since they form as a result of a shared community with slightly more radical or extreme teachings that are then taken to an even more extreme degree by community members. As the sub-community forms, it distances itself from the more mainstream Muslim community, united by shared beliefs and frustrations more so than by a single leader.²⁸

²⁶ William G. Baker, *Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East* (Dallas, TX: Brown, 2003), 21.

²⁷ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

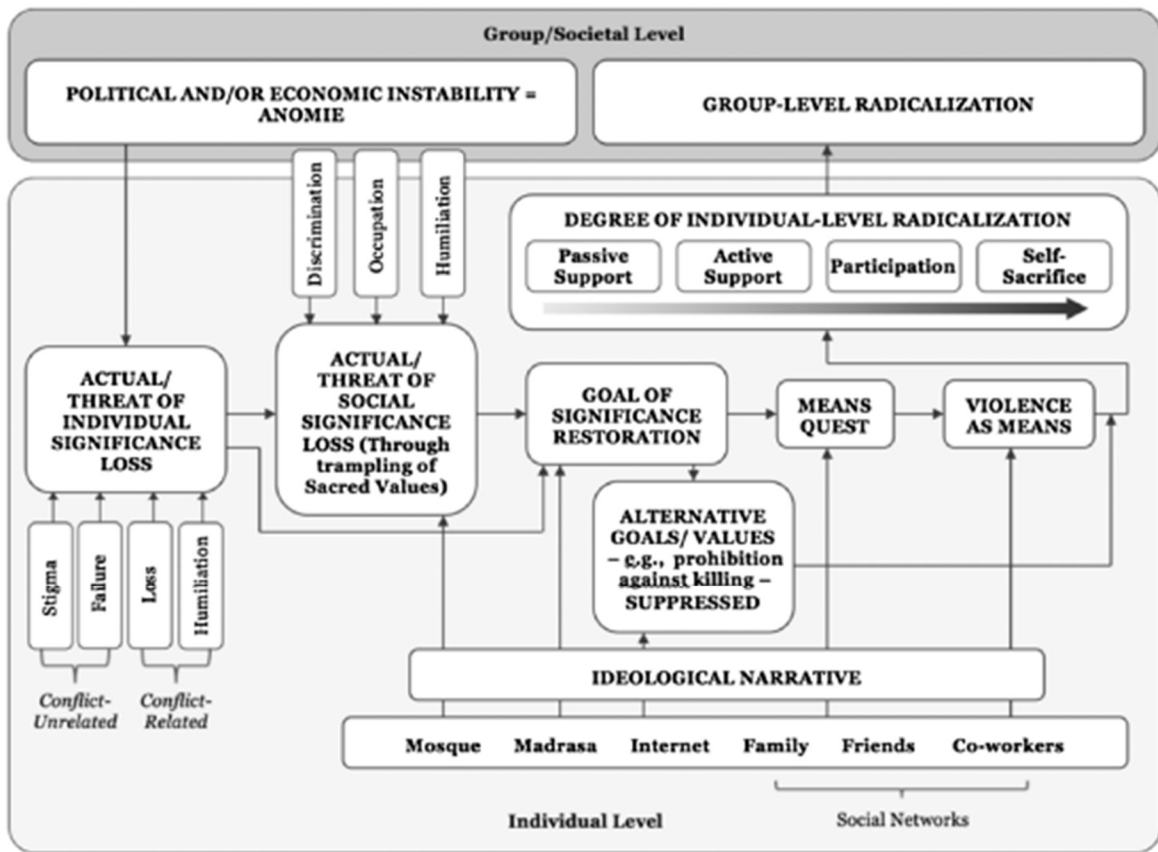


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the different levels of radicalization according to Kruglanski's model.²⁹ He illustrates that the initial significance loss is usually caused by political and/or economic instability, which evolves into a greater threat of radicalization when compounded with social significance loss brought on by discrimination and humiliation. Kruglanski clarifies that while an individual might support the violent acts of a certain terrorist organization, making them passive supporters to that organization's cause, they might not be radicalized enough to actually participate in the violent behavior. This low-

²⁹ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 4.

level of radicalization, however, can evolve into more active forms of support and participation, to the point that the radical might be willing to sacrifice him or herself for the cause – the highest level of radicalization. This evolution usually occurs as their alternative goals and values are overshadowed and “suppressed” by the terrorist ideology and as their social networks are further infiltrated by sympathizers with the ideology. If the individual is isolated from standard social networks and the primary community is the terrorist organization, the ideological narrative is more easily transferred to the recruit and alternative values more easily suppressed. As *Figure 1* shows, the ideological narrative is what fuels the desire to restore significance and pushes violence as the only answer.

Ideology is a critical element to understanding the radicalization process. Kruglanski and his colleagues define ideology as a “shared reality” that is held by members of a common “social network.”³⁰ They further argue that not just any ideology feeds terrorism, but that the ideology must be specifically tailored to justify violent behavior. They outline three primary requirements: an “element of grievance (injustice, harm) believed to have been suffered by one’s group... a culprit presumed responsible... [and] a morally warranted and effective way of removing the dishonor created by the injustice,” which all must point to acts of terrorism. For the ideology to be adopted on a wider scale, there must also be some sort of response to the “killing problem” built into it. There must be some sort of justification or explanation for the inevitable loss of innocent life that occurs during large-scale acts of violence in public locations.³¹ For many radical

³⁰ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 4.

³¹ Ibid.

Islamist groups, that justification is found in their belief in their ‘mandate from God’ requiring them to carry out certain punishments or violent acts.

Understanding Deradicalization

For the purposes of discussing deradicalization programs and theories, it is also important to highlight the difference between deradicalization and disengagement. Disengagement is a change in radical behavior that involves at least a temporary end to violent behavior and a disassociation from the radical group. A radical that has disengaged, however, might still maintain the same radical ideology but simply chooses not to act on it. Alternatively, deradicalization is a fundamental changing of beliefs and ideology, turning away from the radical organization and embracing conventional ideological understandings.³² There are pros and cons of setting either option as a program’s primary goal, such as disengaged individuals re-engaging later on since they never truly let go of the radical ideology, or deradicalization programs ultimately being unrealistic and failing to meet the set goals. Deradicalization is particularly difficult in the context of radical Islamist extremism because the violent ideology is intimately tied to the group’s religious beliefs, which can make the beliefs much more personal and harder to break from. Disengagement is easier to measure short-term but can lead to relapses later on, undermining the long-term success of the program. Alternatively, disengagement can also be seen as the precursor to deradicalization, depending on the long-term goals of the program.

³² Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 15.

In both disengagement and deradicalization, the priority is to persuade the radicals that acts of terrorism and violence are not in their best interest. This requires addressing the underlying motivations driving them to participate in those acts and associated with a radical group. Since humans almost always act according to their primary instincts – safety and security – for people to willingly put themselves at risk, there must be a driving motivation that is stronger than that instinct.³³ Generally terrorist ideologies find some way to instill this motivation in recruits, be it through religious beliefs, political understandings, or some other influence.³⁴ Sometimes recruits are even promised *greater* safety and security by becoming part of the ‘group.’ Once these motivations are activated, to deradicalize, it becomes necessary to either show the recruit that their fundamental goals are not actually being met or to activate new motivations that supersede the dangerous ones. For example, if a recruit joins a terrorist group because of the promise of safety within the group, it might take them finally realizing that they are at greater risk for being captured or killed to finally be willing to leave the group. In that case, the recruit’s desire for security changes their trajectory. Another example might be a recruit joining the group out of a desire for community and to have a defined role, but if that recruit falls in love and gets married, he or she might become more willing to leave the group to protect their new role.

Oftentimes it takes not just a shift in motivation but also a shift in means. Many successful programs focus on equipping radicals to reenter mainstream society through

³³ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism," *Political Psychology*, January 22, 2014, 218.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 219.

supplying them with resources to do so.³⁵ This change in their situation might be the driving force behind their disassociation with the radical group. These resources might come in the form of jobs, education or vocational training, or other means of helping them successfully reenter society. Disarming the ideology can also be accomplished through meetings with counselors, religious leaders, and loved ones. These individuals can help the radical understand safer, alternative ideologies that conflict with the radical ideology, helping them understand the need to disassociate.³⁶ They can also help the radicals understand how the extremist group might not actually be accomplishing its goals or following through with promises to members.

According to Koehler's model of radicalization, deradicalization is a process of re-pluralization. Kate Barrelle proposes a model of that process, describing "a non-linear process of disengagement or deradicalization... along three identity changes."³⁷ These identity changes require a "reduction in the intensity of their commitment to the extremist group, [the] development of a new self-identity, and finding a new person or entity to identify with." According to Barrelle, such changes occur in five primary areas: ideology, social relations, identity, action orientation, and coping. Her model specifically outlines that each individual going through the deradicalization process might choose to evolve in each area differently, with certain areas being more critical to some individuals but not

³⁵ Ibid, 225.

³⁶ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 225.

³⁷ Ibid, 80.

others. She clarifies that a critical phase for all deradicalized individuals involves re-engaging with a non-extremist environment.³⁸

Koehler goes on to say that for the re-pluralization process to be successful, it must be unique to the ideological and psychological needs of the individual. Methods must aim to reduce the radical's ideological urgency to act while also introducing viable alternative concepts and solutions, in order to help the individual disengage from violent behavior and begin considering a complete shift in ideology.³⁹ Deradicalization can then be measured according to the dissolution of the desire for violence and the evolution of ideological beliefs and priorities.⁴⁰ Some programs do choose to exclude the measure of ideology and focus more on disengaging radicals from violent behavior rather than deradicalizing them entirely. This can be successful but runs into the danger of re-engagement since their operational ideology is still intact.⁴¹ However, for some members of terrorist or radical groups, disengagement could be sufficient to lead to their leaving the group if they are actually "accidental guerrillas," as the insurgency theorist David Kilcullen describes them.⁴² These are individuals who engage with radical groups because of circumstances rather than a deep seeded ideological commitment. For such radicals, disengagement coupled with economic opportunity could suffice to end their sojourn as a terrorist or insurgent.

³⁸ Ibid, 81.

³⁹ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 83.

⁴¹ Ibid, 84.

⁴² Kilcullen, David, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Ideology in this context can refer to political ideas, religious beliefs, moral understandings, or ethical beliefs, which mobilize the individual or group to act. David A. Snow, an expert on social movements, argues that such ideologies ultimately range on a spectrum “from a...rigidly connected set of values and beliefs at one end to a loosely coupled set of values and beliefs at the other... that can function in either case as both a constraint on and a resource for the kind of sense-making, interpretative work associated with framing.”⁴³ This clarification points out that ideology is ultimately a complex social phenomenon, of which it is hard to define the exact parameters, so in the deradicalization process, each group’s ideological beliefs must be evaluated individually.

Moghaddam does not provide a model of deradicalization, but he might argue that deradicalization is simply the staircase model of radicalization in reverse. According to his model, this would require the radical going back down each step of the staircase, beginning with the radical again developing reservations about the use of violence, either in general or in response to the initial threat or injustice. This could be a result of imprisonment, recognition of negative effect on the radical’s family, or fear of some other punishment likely to occur. Some level of amnesty for former terrorists or insurgents would likely need to be part of any successful program. The next step would be the individual no longer seeing the terrorist group as legitimate, maybe because they are seeing no positive results or because most of the group members are imprisoned. At that point, disengagement has occurred because the individual is no longer engaging in violent behavior. The final few steps would require helping the individual understand more peaceful ways to address the threat or injustice, or even helping them understand

⁴³ Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology," 86.

that what they perceived as a threat is not actually a threat to them, leading to deradicalization.

All of these theories provide potentially valuable insight into the radicalization and deradicalization process. However, their true accuracy can only be evaluated through the examination of deradicalization programs that have already been put into place. By studying the successes and failures of these programs and collecting information about the participants who did and did not disengage or deradicalize, the factors truly driving deradicalization become more apparent. These theoretical models then have the potential to serve as the foundation for new deradicalization programs to ensure that the critical needs are being addressed in a way that promotes genuine deradicalization.

CHAPTER TWO

Successful Programs

Case Study: Singapore

Singapore was motivated to implement a deradicalization program after a branch of Jemaah Islamiyah, a group associated with Al-Qaeda, was discovered operating within its borders in 2001. Over 30 militants were arrested shortly thereafter, which inspired them to address the problem by attempting to prevent the ideology from spreading further.⁴⁴ Today, Singapore's program is an example of a strong model that has low recidivism rates and effectively incorporates all of the major methods of deradicalization. It is an individual deradicalization program that separates organization members and bases graduation on a case-by-case basis. They employ reliable Islamic teachers and religious leaders to help radicals gain a deeper understanding of the peaceful form of Islam recognized by the majority of Muslims. Addressing theological misrepresentations is key for helping subdue radical behavior and is the first step for instigating a significant shift in ideological perspective.

They also provide significant resources, such as job training and familial support, to prepare radicals for a stable life after release and to prevent them from feeling hopeless or desperate enough to return to the radical group. Many programs choose to actively involve the families of radicals being detained in order to ensure those released have

⁴⁴ Sidharth Shekhar, "Can India Learn from Singapore's De-radicalization Programme?," *Diplomacy & Beyond*, <http://diplomacybeyond.com/articles/can-india-learn-singapores-de-radicalization-programme/>.

supportive, or at least stable, family to return to, which encourages more accountability and gives released detainees a stronger support system.⁴⁵ This helps replace the sense of family that is being lost if radicals choose to leave their extremist group. Singapore's process for release is extremely thorough, consulting case workers, religious teachers, counselors, and prison officials, in order to get a full picture of each detainee's progress. Detainees are only released if each department is confident in the detainee's ability to abstain from rejoining violent groups and in their likelihood of reintegrating into society effectively.⁴⁶ Their goal is to graduate deradicalized individuals who will not only abstain from violence but have renounced their radical beliefs and no longer pose an ideological threat to the community.

Singapore's program is very effective and has an extremely low recidivism rate. This is due to the extensive program they have developed by addressing psychological, religious, and social issues radicals face. However, Singapore's model may be difficult to export. The program would not be of the same caliber without the significant resources the government is able to dedicate to this cause. Less financially stable and organized nations might not be able to effectively institute such a program. Singapore is also a very small country with a smaller-scale problem with radical Islamism, making it easier to comprehensively address the issue. Poorer and larger countries with more rampant extremist groups would have trouble dedicating the energy and resources necessary to

⁴⁵ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 102.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 103.

maintaining such a program. Such countries would also struggle with continually monitoring detainees after their release in order to ensure continued disengagement.⁴⁷

Case Study: Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's state-sponsored deradicalization program, which began in 2004 and continues today, is also widely considered successful. The initial program research was initiated in response to explosions carried out by Al-Qaeda in Riyadh in 2003. In many ways, those explosions were the tipping point for the Saudi government, which quickly decided the counterterrorism pursuits in place at the time were simply not enough.⁴⁸ The Saudi government discovered after examining the lives and motivations of 700 detained radicals that the majority of them did not receive a 'proper' Islamic education when they were growing up.⁴⁹ The examiners isolated this gap in their religious understanding as making them susceptible to radical ideas out of touch with mainstream Islam, inspiring them to create a deradicalization program equipped to address the issue. The government designed a three-step process including prevention, rehabilitation, and aftercare.⁵⁰

Their prevention element focused on creating educational programs to inform the public of a 'proper' peaceful understanding of Islam and the realities of extremist beliefs

⁴⁷ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 104.

⁴⁸ *Assessing the Effectiveness of Current Deradicalization Initiatives and Identifying Implications for the Development of U.S. Based Initiatives in Multiple Settings* (College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2009).

⁴⁹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 57.

and lifestyles. They aim to help citizens develop a grounded understanding of Islam able to withstand extremist propaganda. The programs also discuss the disposable nature of recruits in the eyes of such organizations as Al-Qaeda and how the narrative they present is warped to manipulate and radicalize their target audience.⁵¹ The government also instituted afterschool and community programs designed to engage youth in safe activities and prevent them from associating with groups that might lead them to radical beliefs.⁵²

The Saudi program is an example of a program successfully applying Koehler's re-pluralization theory of deradicalization. The rehabilitation program aims to deradicalized participants using "a complex process of religious dialogue and instruction, psychological counseling, and extensive social support" to help reorient the worldview of participants.⁵³ Counselors and religious leaders help participants come to a less single-minded, simplified understanding of Islam. By adding more cognitive depth and diversity to the participants' worldview, the program helps them understand the repercussions of their actions and that the understanding of Islam peddled by their radical leaders is not necessarily the only one. Their primary method of combatting the extremist ideology is to offer radicals an alternative Islamic narrative as context for their experience that is in line with mainstream Islamic theology. They emphasize that the extremist organization does not act in their best interest and remind participants how isolated they have become from their families and communities. The Saudi government aims to demonstrate that

⁵¹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 58.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

participants' needs will be better met outside of the organization, using family members as part of the rehabilitation process and making sure that all of the participants' immediate needs are taken care of. The program reported that participants, "are typically in their twenties and come from large lower- or middle-class families, with only 3 percent coming from high-income backgrounds."⁵⁴

Christopher Boucek, a researcher who studies Middle East security challenges argues that because participants are particularly young and come from disadvantaged backgrounds, "job training, career counseling, and assistance in finding productive work may be the best counter-radicalization strategy – at least as important as religious reeducation."⁵⁵ He praises the Saudi Arabian program's social support programs that are continually available to released participants in order to ensure they are actively integrating back into a peaceful community and contributing to society. The government encourages wedding and family-building through generous financial assistance because they acknowledge that men who are supported by family members and who are responsible for supporting their own families, are less likely to return to militancy.⁵⁶ Boucek argues this plays to several of Saudi Arabia's cultural concepts, such as the idea of honor, familial responsibility, and familial hierarchies.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jessica Stern, "Deradicalization or Disengagement of Terrorists: Is It Possible?," *Future Challenges in National Security and Law*, March 2010, 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's," 20.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Rabasa, et al. emphasize the Saudi program's treatment of deradicalization as a "war of ideas."⁵⁸ Andreas Capstack in his article for the *Middle East Institute* argues, "the main objective of the course is to persuade the inmates that their jihadist interpretation of the Qur'an is incorrect."⁵⁹ The religious leaders first talk to each inmate to understand their beliefs and then systematically address each idea that diverges from mainstream Islam.⁶⁰ The government does not intend to convert inmates to a particular sect of Islam necessarily, just present a general understanding of the religion that quells their extremist understanding. Participants undergo regular assessments throughout their time in the program to see how each participant's ideas and beliefs evolve and to assess which subjects require more attention.⁶¹

In an interview with a graduate of the Saudi program, reporter Holly Williams asked if the graduate, Mr. Abdul Rakhman al-Huwati, would have previously held violent hostility for her as a Westerner. He replied, "Of course. I would have killed you. But now I see that you and I can live together in peace."⁶² The Saudis giving Ms. Williams the tour emphasized that the program seeks to teach participants that Muslims and non-Muslims need not be in violent combat with one another, but that they can coexist peacefully with their different beliefs. This mode of re-pluralization delegitimizes the idea that Islam calls for the killing of all non-Muslim infidels and reinforces the idea that

⁵⁸ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 69.

⁵⁹ Capstack, "Deradicalization Programs," Middle East Institute.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 73.

⁶² "Terrorist Rehab: Rare Look inside Saudi Deradicalization Program," CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/terrorist-rehab-rare-look-inside-saudi-de-radicalization-program/>.

there are various valid worldviews, and those differences should not drive them to violence. The New York Times spoke with Imam Khalid al-Abdan, who was employed by the program as a religious counselor. He said, “the inmates could hold whatever views they liked, as long as they were not violent. ‘If someone says that Shiites are infidels, that is his opinion and is not important for us... [but] if he wants to kill them, that is a problem.’”⁶³

The Saudi program is careful about which participants are released. Usually only low-level organization members and sympathizers are eligible for release after successfully completing the counseling program. Individuals who have perpetrated violent acts are restricted from being released but are able to participate in all other parts of the program. The wisdom of this policy is supported by Angel Rabasa’s theory that “the probability that an individual will disengage or deradicalize appears to be [directly] related to the degree of commitment to the group or movement.”⁶⁴ Those who are willing to carry out violent acts are often considered most committed to the cause and most difficult to deradicalize.

Anyone who is selected for release must first be cleared by program counselors and doctors, as well as Interior Ministry officials, in order to be certain that the individual is genuinely deradicalized and unlikely to commit violent acts in the future.⁶⁵ Released graduates of the program then move into a “halfway house” where they continue to have

⁶³ Ben Hubbard, "Inside Saudi Arabia's Re-education Prison for Jihadists," *New York Times*, April 9, 2016.

⁶⁴ Theresa N. Eckard, "Prison-based Deradicalization for Terrorist Detainees: An Analysis of Programmatic Religious Re-education and Systematic Institutionalization and Their Impact on Achieving Deradicalization" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2014), 50.

⁶⁵ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 64.

access to counseling, vocational training, and other resources to ease their transition and maintain their support systems.⁶⁶ The program even aims to hire many of the graduates as government workers, which is an interesting test because according to the RAND study, “many of these individuals would previously not have considered accepting employment with what they regarded as an illegitimate government.”⁶⁷ In addition, such deradicalized individuals would clearly be an important intelligence asset to the government in their ongoing counterterrorism campaign. Graduates are then essentially released into their family’s custody, which enlists the community-oriented and honor-driven Arab culture to encourage the graduate to truly embrace a new, non-violent lifestyle.⁶⁸

According to Rabasa et al., the Saudi counseling program is particularly strong because it is, “based on a presumption of benevolence,” giving selected participants the benefit of the doubt within the program and assuming their radical beliefs are not truly their own but are a result of contact with the radical organization.⁶⁹ This allows equal treatment for all participants and equal opportunity to feel comfortable with the counselors and religious leaders with whom they are working. Counselors and religious experts tasked with working with the participants on a regular basis are selected extremely carefully. They are evaluated based on their ability to engage in open dialogue

⁶⁶ Andreas Capstack, "Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study," Middle East Institute, last modified June 10, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study>.

⁶⁷ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 67.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 66.

with the participants that encourages a genuine relationship rather than a one-sided lecture.⁷⁰

The Saudi government has publically claimed an 80 percent success rate within the program and a 10-20 percent rate of recidivism among those who have successfully completed the program.⁷¹ However, since the general recidivism rate for freed criminals in the United States is more than 40 percent, many experts question the accuracy of such a low percentage. The Saudi program could very well be that successful, or the number might only be representative of a handful of graduates, or it could just represent graduates within a certain number of years after completing the program. Since the details regarding how they came up with such a number are not made public, recidivism rates should only be one factor in the process of evaluating the program.⁷² Regardless, the Saudi program is considered, “the most expansive, best funded and longest continuously running counter-radicalization program in existence.” Singapore’s deradicalization program is even partially based on this model, which further suggests that the Saudi model is one worth emulating.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid, 67.

⁷¹ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 75.

⁷² John Horgan and Mary Beth Atlier, "The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs," *The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs* 13, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2012): 85, accessed November 2017.

⁷³ Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 97 (September 2008): 23.

CHAPTER THREE

Unsuccessful Programs

Due to the limited research about deradicalizing radical Islamists, coupled with the shortage of successful deradicalization programs, unsuccessful programs become a necessary source of information regarding effective and ineffective methods. Many unsuccessful programs have certain similarities, such as a short-sighted approach that simply does not provide participants with the resources necessary to genuinely disengage and deradicalize. However, it is also important to note that each radical group is different. The culture and political circumstances in which terrorist organizations arise vary greatly, which can hinder certain effective elements of one program from successfully being applied to radical groups in another country. For example, one program's methods might successfully deradicalize adherents of a radical ideology which developed in response to a government's close relations with Western nations and policies that did not reflect the best interests of its large Muslim population. Yet that program framework might not successfully deradicalize another country's radical death cult seeking to rid the country of all non-Muslims. The unique cultural, political, and religious needs of each country must be taken into account when determining the best methods for deradicalization.

Case Study: Indonesia

Indonesia has been dealing with growing radicalization for years, but has been particularly determined to fight it since the bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005. The primary group operating in the country and responsible for the bombings is Jemaah

Islamiyah, a group with ties to ISIS. Their primary stated goal is to “establish a regional caliphate in Southeast Asia,” but they have also been tied to several attempted attacks against the United States. Indonesia also faces a significant radicalization problem within their prison system, especially since they began convicting so many extremists after the government crackdown on extremism in 2002.⁷⁴

The deradicalization program in place in Indonesia has the potential to succeed, considering its success in bringing many detained radicals to a place where they were willing to publicly denounce support for their terrorist affiliations and even aid in police efforts to capture other members. The government, “seeks to turn the militants’ respect for seniority and hierarchy into a means of deradicalization,”⁷⁵ by incorporating them into the network of individuals attempting to combat extremist activity. The program “interrogators” work with prisoners charged with terrorist affiliations and work to build rapport and gain trust, in order to garner greater influence over the detainees’ decision to disengage or not. Their program even had one particular participant, Nasir Abas, who began encouraging fellow detainees to cooperate with program officials. Abas helped some of his fellow detainees understand that the government was not working against Islam as they believed.

While the program claims success in the form of a few high-profile militants experiencing genuine deradicalization, it fails to have widespread success amongst participants.⁷⁶ Current reports estimate that while around half of participants initially

⁷⁴ "Indonesia: Extremism," Counter Extremism Project.

⁷⁵ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 140.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 116.

disengaged and were willing to provide information to Indonesian authorities about fellow radicals, only approximately 20 graduates of the “several hundred” detained are still officially considered deradicalized and continuously willing to help the Indonesian government catch other extremists.⁷⁷ The program ultimately lacks any significant elements of psychological or religious support, where detainees could work through specific vulnerabilities and issues that might cause them to re-engage later. It also fails to provide most graduates with the necessary resources – such as financial support, job training, or relocation assistance – that would help them turn over a new leaf and become functioning members of the community outside of their radical group. As noted above, these economic elements of deradicalization are especially important for disengaging “accidental guerrillas” or midlevel radicals from extremist groups. If the Indonesian government incorporated such elements into their existing framework, the program might find more success in deradicalizing a broader range of detainees and with lower rates of recidivism. However, even their small-scale success illustrates the value of in-depth discussions as a key element in a successful program. Moreover, their successes show the important role that deradicalized individuals can play in a government’s counterterrorism initiatives.

A study conducted by Zora A. Sukabdi, a psychologist from the University of Indonesia, for the *Journal of Terrorism Research*, used in-depth interviews with convicted radicals associated with Jemaah Islamiyah to determine how to better format a deradicalization program.⁷⁸ She interviewed radicals still in prison and some who have

⁷⁷ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 115.

⁷⁸ Sukabdi, "Terrorism in Indonesia," 8.

already been released, and essentially asked them which factors influenced their decision to disengage or not. For interviewees who had made the decision to disengage and renounce terrorist affiliations, they were able to share their own personal turning point in the rehabilitation process and reflect on which elements of the process had an impact on them. For interviewees who had not yet made the decision to disaffiliate with their radical organization, their input came in the form of criticisms regarding how the process failed to meet their needs and feedback regarding elements that turned them off to the idea of renouncing their affiliations.

One of the biggest themes of her interviews was an emphasis on the need for adequate access to jobs post-incarceration. Many of the men she interviewed suggested that without a job fitting their financial needs and general interest area, they would be more likely to re-join a radical organization after release. A participant elaborated,

“Changing the jihad spirit is difficult, but changing the behavior by focusing on economic jihad, now, this is important. Still a jihad, but if before it was a physical jihad using arms, now it is an economic jihad, because our children and wives need a living and we don’t want to remain jobless like this. What we need now is jobs and being occupied, so we will be disengaged from violence.”⁷⁹

This highlights a key missing factor in the Indonesian program – even if jobs are provided for graduates, they are usually government positions helping the police find and catch other radicals. The issue with this approach, however, is that participants might not be interested or willing to take part in that process. That does not mean, however, that they should not still be supported in their journey to deradicalize and reintegrate into mainstream society. Opening up a wider variety of job opportunities might allow graduates to integrate into peaceful society according to their own interests. This would

⁷⁹ Sukabdi, "Terrorism in Indonesia," 8.

also increase their capacity to try and truly leave the world of radicalization and start fresh. Participants also mentioned the need for counseling both during and after the deradicalization process for continued support and guidance. This is another area where the Indonesian program needs to focus on improving. The radicalization process targets psychological vulnerabilities, like loneliness, stress, anger, and hopelessness, so consistent counseling should be implemented.

Another popular response regarding the factors that truly made a difference in the process was that working with law enforcement and deradicalization program leaders who were genuine and sincere about their attempt to help the individual had a significant impact on the individual's willingness to participate and deradicalize. Participants also agreed that having religious elements is key to a successful program, with 93 percent of interviewees stressing the importance of program facilitators with significant knowledge of Islam. With radical Islamist extremism being a religiously-based ideology, it is unsurprising that successful programs employ such in-depth knowledge of Islam. The absence of this religious element is often the downfall of programs outside of the Middle East. Ultimately, programs treating participants' radical beliefs as nothing more than a political ideology, without understanding the religious influences, are limiting their ability to gain the trust of those they are trying to help. They are failing to understand their participants' thought processes on a fundamental level and losing credibility with the participants in the program.

Case Study: Yemen

Yemen's prison-based program is an example of a small program that used potentially effective tools for deradicalization but failed to implement those methods to the degree necessary for significant change. The Yemeni Government implemented the program shortly after 9/11, right before Saudi Arabia initiated their own deradicalization program.⁸⁰ Yemen is currently home to branches of both the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, and several other smaller radical groups.⁸¹ Their deradicalization program was dialogue-based, giving detainees an open forum to talk with government officials about grievances regarding the Yemeni government. This addressed issues that were paramount to the radicals' ideology, such as the idea that the Yemeni system of government was designed contrary to the Qur'an and that the government was ultimately a threat to true Islam. The discussion leader was also able to bring up why killing non-Muslims is actually contradictory to the Qur'an, and how the mainstream understanding of the holy book actually presents a peaceful religion that can act harmoniously within non-Islamic governments and communities.

The biggest critique of the Yemeni program is that the government focused more on short-term political goals, such as disengaging radicals from carrying out violence against the state, and did not spend enough time addressing the root issues that were causing so many people to radicalize in the first place. Calling it a deradicalization program is actually a misnomer since the program emphasized disengagement rather than deradicalization. There was no long-term follow-up or aftercare after detainees were

⁸⁰ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 47.

⁸¹ "Yemen: Extremism," Counter Extremism Project.

released, so information regarding the genuine disengagement of radicals cannot be examined. Authorities monitored them for up to a year following their release and family members were required to vouch for them, but no resources were provided to help vulnerable individuals find a more peaceful way to contribute to society. Therefore, even if radicals genuinely did disengage, there was nothing to prevent them from re-joining a radical group after their release.

Case Study: France

Radicalization became a significant concern for France after the violent attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices in 2015.⁸² The attack garnered worldwide attention as Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the twelve deaths, only a few days before a member of ISIS claimed another public shooting spree. Since the attacks, there have been at least eight more incidences of extreme violence carried out by individuals claiming allegiance to a radical Islamist group in France. In response, the government developed a unique program intended to prevent and reverse radicalization through higher education and discussion. They created a center where individuals could voluntarily live and go through an extensive education program including classes in literature, religion, French history, and philosophy, along with creative therapy sessions. They brought in a Muslim imam, social workers, psychologists, and “special educators.”⁸³ The ten-month program provided completely separate residences free from outside influences – immersing

⁸² "France: Extremism and Counter-Extremism," Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/france>.

⁸³ Maddy Crowell, "What Went Wrong with France's Deradicalization Program?," The Atlantic, last modified September 28, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/>.

participants in new ideas and giving them a strong foundation to withstand radical influences. A social worker from the program explained, “You can’t tell someone, ‘What you think is bad, here’s good information... we worked with each person on their [personal] history... all to help them understand why they believe what they do and question whether it’s really the truth.’”⁸⁴ They did not necessarily push secularism, but did encourage participants to look at how a secular government can operate without threatening religious freedom.

The French government intended the center to be the first of a dozen across the country – the national response to France’s growing population of convicted and suspected Islamist extremists. However, the center only drew in nine brave residents. While the program was publicly deemed a failure, there were some minor successes. Only a few months into the program, participants were eating non-halal food and singing the French national anthem each morning.⁸⁵ A willingness to partake in such activities does suggest a relevant shift in mindset, and possibly even a better understanding of a world where faith and civil society do not necessarily need to be one and the same.

The primary failure here is the assumption that radicalized individuals, or those particularly vulnerable to radicalization, would voluntarily partake in this program. It is reasonable to assume that most radical Islamist extremists are not actively looking for someone to come along and reform their ideology. Therefore, this program might have more tangible success if implemented in prisons or as a prison-alternative for individuals suspected or convicted of extremist affiliations. Such circumstances would create the

⁸⁴ Crowell, "What Went," The Atlantic.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

necessary pull factors to encourage radicalized individuals to participate. France's deradicalization strategy also included centers intended to support and assist families of radicalized individuals but many complained that they were staffed with unqualified workers who were simply seeking jobs.⁸⁶ This further emphasizes the need for having a high standard of knowledge and training for all program workers, to ensure they are interacting with radicals and their families in the most productive manner possible.

Case Study: United Kingdom

Taking a different approach to deradicalization, the United Kingdom has developed an extensive program called *Prevent* – which seeks to arm vulnerable members of the population with the necessary information and tools to refuse violent radical ideas. It is under the umbrella of their counterterrorism strategy CONTEST, which was first enacted in 2005. *Prevent* is one of the most comprehensive radicalization prevention programs ever implemented, encompassing a wide-range of partnerships such as working with local police, incorporating relevant NGOs, and government involvement. The program aims to nationally encourage a modern view of Islam, hinder the spread of radical ideologies, and support individuals who are particularly vulnerable to radicalization.

The British government seeks to facilitate deradicalization and counter radicalization by “criminalizing actions that support terrorism... [and providing] mentoring programs and training opportunities for young Muslim leaders so that they

⁸⁶ Witold Mucha, "Polarization, Stigmatization, Radicalization: Counterterrorism and Homeland Security in France and Germany," *Journal for Deradicalization* 10 (Spring 2017): 235.

have the knowledge and skills to counter radicalism.”⁸⁷ They also attempted to bolster organizations and create public forums that provided opportunities to discuss extremism, Islamophobia, and the “Radical Middle Way” that the British government emphasizes.⁸⁸ If any *Prevent* officials encounter someone they believe is embracing a violent form of extremism, they set up an intervention with the individual’s loved ones, local police, and an imam.⁸⁹

While the British prevention program is the most comprehensive of its kind, the program has not brought about any statistically significant decrease in radical Islamist extremist activity in the United Kingdom in its ten years of operation.⁹⁰ One of the biggest criticisms of the program is that program officials coming into contact with the community do not have a well-developed understanding of Islam or Islamism, which has reportedly affected their ability to gain a positive reputation in the community and amongst members of their target audience. However, due to the high level of sophistication and the extensive reach of *Prevent*, if the agencies, organizations, and workers involved with the program were more extensively educated and more conservative Muslims were brought in as leaders, the program would likely have a greater capacity for success. One of the primary issues with non-Middle Eastern programs is the officials’ lack of understanding of Islamism and conservative Islam in general. In its present state, *Prevent* has the most potential to make a significant

⁸⁷ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 125.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 126.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 125.

difference in hindering the radicalization process within a single country and improvements should continue to be made until the program sees more progress.

While the programs in Yemen, Indonesia, France, and the United Kingdom do have many issues preventing them from achieving long-term deradicalization or meaningful radicalization prevention, there are relevant lessons to be learned from each program's successes and failures. Many, such as the British program, have the resources and drive to make changes that would significantly increase the impact of their program. With interviews and studies like the one done by Zora A. Sukabdi, programs can garner a better understanding of their pitfalls and learn specific ways to make improvements. If programs also continue to become more diligent about collecting recidivism rates and publishing data about their process, they will be able to better learn from one another and begin implementing new elements that have been successful elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen through the examination of deradicalization programs in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, France, Yemen, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom, we can gain valuable insight from existing deradicalization programs. Since deradicalization programs designed to combat Islamist extremism is a relatively recent concept, some of the most valuable research comes through trial and error. Theories play a key role in developing a program framework, but it is not until those theories are put into practice that they can be evaluated as an accurate or inaccurate representation of the deradicalization process.

Looking at the different models of deradicalization, Koehler and Barrelle's understanding of how deradicalization occurs seems to be the most applicable. They emphasize the individual nature of deradicalization, which the best programs anticipate and address through a diverse range of services available to program participants. Both the program in Saudi and in Singapore utilize an individual, prison-based model, which leaves more room for each participant's unique needs to be addressed. Barrelle specifically addresses how some 'realms,' such as ideology, coping, identity, and social relations, are more critical for some radicals to address than others. Programs such as the one in Saudi Arabia overcome this unpredictability by addressing all of Barrelle's five key realms thoroughly through extensive counseling, job services, and religious discussions. She clarifies that the critical phase for every individual going through the deradicalization process is the point where they re-engage with a non-extremist environment. Koehler describes this turning point as the individual accepting the

existence of a plurality of ideologies, and recognizing alternative viewpoints as valid. Both authors highlight the importance of those going through the process finally engaging with a larger community and a greater diversity of ideas, in a way that allows for healthy relationships and participation in normal daily activities.

The most effective programs tend to be the most comprehensive, providing the most long-term support and aftercare, and the largest variety of resources. These resources include counseling, discussions with Islamic teachers, job training, and assistance finding jobs, as seen in the programs in Saudi Arabia and Singapore. Each of these elements aids radicals in letting go of violent, extremist ideas, and helps them piece together a more peaceful view of their religion, government, and communities. Job resources can help provide graduates with long-term stability after leaving the program, giving them a productive way to contribute to society and provide for their families. This can oftentimes help them feel more integrated into their communities and less frustrated with their situation. Continued counseling is also beneficial because “deradicalization doesn’t take place in a vacuum.”⁹¹ Regardless of how different a participant’s beliefs are at the time of release, many released detainees return to communities influenced by extremism. Continued counseling can provide an additional source of support for withstanding potential pressures to reengage, encourages graduates to hold on to the decision to deradicalize, and helps them move in a healthier direction.

The authors of the study conducted by the RAND Corporation found that the most common “trigger” for both groups and individuals deradicalizing, is a realization that the

⁹¹ Daniela Stefanescu, "Deradicalization: Different Approaches," *International Scientific*, 2015, 87, ProQuest.

group's goals are unlikely to come to fruition. Their research also shows that, "when presented with credible interlocutors – usually accomplished Islamic scholars or militants – mainstream Islamic theology served to push the militant leaders to disengage and deradicalize by raising questions about their ideology."⁹² This suggests that helping radicals understand the futility of their efforts by helping them better understand the issues they are trying to combat, will cause them to face the question of whether or not their allegiance to their group and ideology is worth maintaining. A leader of Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, an Egyptian Islamist group, argued, "Jihad is not an end by itself. It is just a means to attain other ends. If you cannot attain these ends through jihad you should change the means."⁹³ Therefore, helping participants understand how ineffective violence has been can be a crucial step in the deradicalization process.

While the highest goal for deradicalization programs is to disarm the radical Islamist ideology, most programs also have more specific goals in mind. Daniel Koehler outlines the most common goals as: "manpower reduction, employment of former extremists in counter-radicalization and prevention work, intelligence and knowledge gathering about radical and terrorist milieus, [and] destruction of internal group hierarchies and narratives."⁹⁴ In that context, deradicalization programs become less of an 'idealistic' endeavor, as critics argue, and more of a practical pursuit to systematically weaken the radical Islamist ideology by methodically reducing the legitimacy of active extremist groups and their ideology. By capturing and disengaging individual extremists,

⁹² Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," 162.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*, 167.

they lessen the groups' capacity for violence. Using deradicalized participants as a source of intelligence fuels a country's ability to capture and combat the participant's former organization. Most importantly, targeting the hierarchies and narratives feeding the extremist group delegitimizes the ideology the group is promoting.

The unsuccessful programs were not as successful as they could have been for a variety of reasons. France's program, while well-funded and fairly comprehensive, simply failed to garner enough participants to give the program a chance. This might be remedied by shifting it to a prison-based program, so more extremists would be willing to participate and motivated to truly work through the program. Participants found in prison-based programs simply have greater push and pull factors working on them, since they are motivated to genuinely commit to the program in order to be released and are also motivated to deradicalize long-term in order to avoid being caught again. However, prison-based programs also have greater pressure to ensure released participants are in fact genuinely deradicalized since their participants have already demonstrated a desire and willingness to carry out violent behavior.

The authors of the RAND study found that employing religious teachers and discussion leaders who the participants respect, or at least find credible, is key for success.⁹⁵ Similar feedback was given during Sukabdi's interviews of extremists in Indonesia.⁹⁶ This is especially true in discussion-based programs, and is cited as the primary downfall of the United Kingdom's program. Critics argue the *Prevent* program fails to see significant results, despite the comprehensive nature of the program, because

⁹⁵ Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Islamist," xvii.

⁹⁶ Sukabdi, "Terrorism in Indonesia."

those in charge of the ideological and theological direction of the program have an incomplete or even incorrect understanding of Islam and Islamism. This is a unique obstacle faced by non-Muslim majority countries attempting to implement deradicalization programs. While Saudi Arabia can easily employ well-respected Islamic teachers of the state sponsored sect, Western countries have trouble finding such teachers in the first place, and especially finding ones that would be respected or considered legitimate by radical Islamists. France's program also struggled with this obstacle, as they designed a particularly secular program that used nationalism as the antidote for radical Islamism, rather than mainstream Islam. They failed to provide reputable Islamic teachers for the participants to have discussions with, which simply furthered the stigma that France is "anti-Islamic," and discouraging other extremists from taking the program seriously.⁹⁷

The lack of widespread success in the Indonesian and Yemeni programs seems to highlight the value of significant aftercare and resources continuing after release. As one participant of Sukbadi's study argued, those released begin facing an "economic jihad," which can quickly cause a certain level of desperation that can lead to bad decisions.⁹⁸ By giving released participants access to job training and various kinds of job leads, the program sets them up to support themselves and their families, and prevents them from feeling desperate enough to turn to illegal behavior as a crutch again. Jobs also keep them busy, giving them an opportunity to engage with their community in a productive way. The Indonesian and Yemeni programs also failed to provide long-term counseling, which

⁹⁷ Crowell, "What Went," The Atlantic.

⁹⁸ Sukabdi, "Terrorism in Indonesia."

restricts participants from having access to the psychological and emotional support needed to withstand temptations to rejoin their old group.

This research is particularly relevant in the face of the international community's growing concern about the threat posed by radical Islamist extremism. Millions of dollars are put into military operations aiming to take down groups like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, but many counterterrorism strategies lack a means of addressing the ideological threat these groups pose. Deradicalization provides a means of addressing this threat in a more peaceful way, providing an opportunity for radicalized individuals to renounce their affiliations, re-integrate into their community, and possibly even serve as a source of intelligence for their country in its attempt to capture other radicals. Successfully deradicalized individuals can also be used as leverage while trying to deradicalize their peers, either as a source of encouragement regarding the value of deradicalization or as evidence that the ideology is not in their best interest because it keeps them in prison instead of going home to their family and becoming a productive member of society. Countries like the United States, which are deeply concerned about radical Islamism, can use this information to implement deradicalization programs of their own. In addition, this study has shown that one key to deradicalization is economic opportunity. Therefore, it would be a wise use of U. S. resources to provide funding to deradicalization programs in less affluent countries. Using military means to deal with the Islamist terrorist threat will only ever be a partial solution. Viable deradicalization programs can confront the threat at its ideological and socioeconomic roots and could provide a long-term solution to the scourge of radical Islamist terrorism.

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