



Deradicalization Programs and Counter-Terrorism

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Abstract

The study of terrorism is important because terrorism poses a serious physical threat to the security of citizens and to the open society. Radicalization is a process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets to achieve behavioral change and political goals. Deradicalization is a process in which people reject the ideology they once embraced. Findings of study suggest that deradicalization comprises on multiple methods and techniques to fight against terrorism. Reduction of manpower is perceived the effective and sound strategy of deradicalization for eradicating terrorism. A successful deradicalization program potential eliminates the strength of terrorist organization. Ample of studies reveal that outcomes through deradicalization programs are not satisfactory worldwide and there is no scientific way to deal with radicalization. Successful deradicalization depends upon an understanding of radicalization itself. The reduction of manpower within terrorist or violent extremist organizations is one of the more important and one of the first effects that deradicalization programmes have on the fight against terrorism. Every deradicalization process that is completed without failure results in the elimination of one potential member of an extremist group in the years to come. World still lacks a national counter-radicalization policy that could serve as a holistic framework for the reintegration and rehabilitation of former militants. Hence all deradicalization projects must follow international best practices with full transparency.

Keywords: Deradicalization, Counter-Terrorism

1. Introduction

Deradicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes are often mentioned in the context of policies and strategies to fight terrorism (El-Said, 2015; Gunaratna & Bin Ali, 2015). Deradicalization initiatives aim to reduce the number of people involved in terrorist or violent extremist organizations, which is one of the most immediate and visible ways in which they help fight terrorism. Every successful deradicalization method eliminates one potential future extremist group member. Even though these programmes focus on early intervention—that is, “deradicalization” before the participant gets to the point of violence and crime—the main effect is still a drop in the number of people who join the extremist group. Pluchinsky (2008) estimated that, excluding Afghanistan and Iraq, there were around 5,000 individuals who were arrested and were connected in Islamic extremist organizations in some capacity or another. This was based on an examination of detained jihadist radicals around the world. This (very rough) estimate from 2008 is likely to be much higher now, since groups like Islamic State have set new standards for terrorist propaganda and recruitment, as well as the start of the Syrian civil war and the sharp rise in foreign fighter travel. Susan (2012) projected 14,000 to 24,000 detained al-Qaeda sympathizers between 2002 and 2012, while EUROPOL estimated 3,000 to 5,000 combat-experienced, indoctrinated returnees from Syria/Iraq to Europe by early 2016 (Koehler, 2016). Considering that these people in prison or on their way back are very important to their own or other terrorist groups, either because of what they will do when they get out, which Pluchinsky (2008) says will happen to most of the detained in the next 10 to 15 years, or because they recruit and radicalize others and plan and carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries.

Concentrating on radicalization that takes place behind bars, the presence of this component continues to be one of the most essential reasons why so many deradicalization programmes were developed in the first place. A first insight of how these programmes can effectively dry out prisons as a source of recruiting and radicalization accelerator for valued group members can be gained by focusing only on the area of incarceration, if these programmes are successful. In many instances, arrested terrorists or supporters do possess essential skills, contacts, and, most importantly, commitment for the cause. This commitment is something that most terrorist organizations strive to harvest by providing financial or emotional support to their imprisoned members. It was even conceivable, in many instances, for terrorist organizations to orchestrate attacks from inside prisons where they were being held (Hamm, 2013). As a direct result of this, rehabilitation and deradicalization programmes are aimed at an essential source of manpower for terrorist organizations.

When one or more individuals are removed from a terrorist or extremist organization, it is naturally extremely difficult to evaluate the actual impact that this has on the organization’s manpower. There are a great number of internal and external variables that are relevant, and they overlap to a considerable degree. If we use the position of the defector in the extreme organization as a starting point, we can hypothesize that members of the group who hold middle or high-ranking positions will have a considerably greater influence when they leave than “foot soldiers”. By taking away a person’s skills, experiences, or personal networks from an organization, the effect is made worse by the person’s rank and status. Because of this, the departure of a high-ranking member of the group could cause doubts, which could eventually lead other members to leave as well. Highly charismatic group leaders

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or commanders may also be good at bringing in new members. If they leave the group, this could make the group less appealing to new members in the future. Other features of the organization's interior that need to be evaluated include its hierarchy, ideology, and the frequency with which members leave. It is more likely that a group that often experiences defections and turnover has adapted to the situation and established ways to quickly reduce the negative effects of the defections and turnover. The circumstances surrounding the individual's departure, the length of time that has passed, and the subsequent actions taken by the departing member are all examples of external variables. It is possible that the consequences on the personnel of that extreme group will be minor if the deradicalization processes take place more or less silently over a prolonged length of time and the defector does not actively engage in counter-radicalization activity. Due to the fact that living an extremist or terrorist lifestyle may be extremely taxing and dangerous, many extremist organizations experience a natural turnover rate of members transitioning from active to passive or supportive positions. Nevertheless, if concentrated efforts are made to treat the entire group, the loss of just one member of the group can dramatically undermine group structures and, in some cases, even eliminate small, isolated extremist organizations or networks. It is possible to say that deradicalization programmes all over the world have reduced the manpower of extremist and terrorist groups to the size that the al Qaeda franchise in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had when it was at its strongest, especially if one assumes that each individual would recruit and radicalize one or two new members during their whole subsequent career (as a very conservative estimate) (Koehler, 2016; Senturk & Ali, 2022).

De-radicalization initiatives not only help cut down on the number of people willing to join extremist or terrorist groups, but they also shed light on previously inaccessible social processes for academics and policymakers. Case managers and academics can learn about the people and places that foster violent extremism and terrorism by getting to know defectors and their stories. Numerous helpful studies have been based on interviews with former terrorists, including those that examine the radicalization processes of the former terrorists themselves (e.g., Horgan, 2009), the group's reaction to defectors (Koehler, 2015a), the Internet's role in recruitment and radicalization (Koehler, 2014), and the reasons for disengagement and the underlying processes of staying away from radicalism and violence (Chernov Hwang, 2017).

Although it is necessary to recognize that this source of information can always be an additional one to the resources that are already available, these biographical insights contribute very important perspectives and processual pathways to the scientific study of terrorism and violence. Retrospective accounts, regardless of the amount of time that has passed between the event in question and the interview, is always prone to bias and can be distorted, either consciously or unconsciously. Memory loss, shifting perspectives and priorities, and individual incentives to depict oneself differently out of either remorse or guilt or tactical reasons to avoid further punishment are all important factors that need to be taken into consideration. It was seen, for instance, that the accounts of joining neo-Nazi organizations changed significantly between active and post-defection members, as well as in comparison with biographical data that could be verified (Blee, 1996, 2002). This effect, which may be referred to as recall or retrospective bias, is well known from many different domains that research both typical and aberrant behaviours. Corporate management studies, for example, have had a hard time because interviews with strategic-level managers after the fact often gave inaccurate data (Huber & Power, 1985). Even though there have been no systematic studies that have attempted to validate the influence of recall bias with former terrorists or extremists, there is no reason to expect significantly less bias in these retrospective accounts than there would be with any other form of abnormal or typical behaviour. It was suggested, and to some extent proved, that methods like diary interview models are good ways to get rid of at least a lot of recall bias. In practise, it might be hard to use these methods in fields where there is almost no or very little control over the client or when leaving terrorist groups requires putting security concerns first.

On the other hand, the majority of deradicalization programmes need to collaborate with some kind of case documentation and management system in order to simply arrange and keep track of the case as well as the measures that are taken. Theoretically, this information may be used to verify past statements and eliminate recollection bias. Yet, the programmes would still devote substantial resources to research or employ highly qualified academics to accomplish this goal. Additionally, the research component of the deradicalization therapy would need to be applied from the initial stages onwards, which may be difficult to accomplish. Research potential of deradicalization programmes is still in its early stages and has not yet been fully realized. In general, however, the possible insights into radicalization processes, behaviour, recruitment strategies, and escalation of violence might yield substantial and highly valuable knowledge for policy makers and practitioners, which can be used to formulate more effective counter-radicalization, counter-terrorism, and counter-narrative programmes. One example of this would be the rare opportunity to measure the impact of kinetic counter-terrorism measures through the accounts of former terrorists, who could provide an evaluation on how the operation affected the internal dynamics of the targeted group. This would be an extremely valuable opportunity. This could give authorities in charge of security the ability to validate and modify their strategies. Only a small number of experts have looked directly at the link between programmes to de-radicalize and rehabilitate terrorists and the gathering of intelligence for counter-terrorism. It was pointed out that "all government run obviously have as an immediate priority, the collection of intelligence to neutralize threats and build up a knowledge base of the nature of the threat" (Susan, 2012), and it was also mentioned that knowledge is the most important resource that can be used to win wars.

HUMINT, which stands for human intelligence, has always been a vital role in addition to intercepting or deciphering sent messages (SIGINT). Interrogation, which is the process of getting important information from someone who is being held, has been a standard part of both war and the fight against terrorism for a long time. In addition, the work done by modern police and prosecutors is dependent, in a significant part, on the accounts and statements supplied by suspects or witnesses, who are interrogated according to legally established processes. Programs to deradicalize or rehabilitate terrorists are similar to witness protection programmes, in which criminals can get a shorter sentence or no sentence at all in exchange for giving important information that helps the court reach a verdict for other defendants. In fact, many government-run programmes to stop people from becoming radicalized, especially those in prisons, have always had a strong intelligence gathering component. However, it would be wrong to say that this is the goal of every government programme. As a consequence of this, there are a number of examples of high-level government bodies that have relied on information provided by former terrorists or detainees in order to form their assessments of the situation. These examples include, for instance, the Singapore White Paper on Jemaah Islamiyah from 2003, the 9/11 Commission Report from 2004, and the NATO Report on the state of the Taliban from 2012. These are just a few of the examples that exist (Susan, 2012). However, Western deradicalization and rehabilitation programmes are based on a different philosophy of the goals of incarceration, the rule of law, and the right of a defendant to remain silent regarding the charges. Because of this, information sharing and the provision of specific intelligence have not been required features of these programmes for the most part in the West. The right to keep silent is not a right that can be utilised against the defendant in Western countries; this is a fundamental principle of Western judicial systems (Silke, 2014; Bibi & Ali, 2021). Therefore, obligatory testimonials and information sharing as criterion for participation in any rehabilitation programme would be in violation not only with law but also with moral considerations. In addition, it is generally acknowledged that the practical value of intelligence that was collected by the use of force or coercion is typically not very high. Another question is whether or not specific information from former extremists can be considered up-to-date enough. It has been demonstrated through the escalation of situations such as the one that occurred in Abu Ghraib that interrogation methods or the gathering of intelligence in violation of the rule of law can quickly backfire and become a serious reason for violent radicalization and insurgency on a global scale. In general, the benefit of collecting intelligence needs to be weighed against the possibility that it would undermine other programme objectives. Credibility and strict adherence to legal requirements may, in the long run, produce additional benefits for intelligence gathering as well. If participants are made to feel comfortable sharing information on a voluntary basis, it is possible that the particulars offered will be more pertinent and up to date (Silke, 2014).

However, any deradicalization programme that is charged with information gathering, even if it is a lower priority, must plan for the provision of personal protection measures, as it is to be expected that the former group will retaliate against the traitor. Because of this, many non-governmental deradicalization programmes in the West have made it a standard policy not to demand or even ask for any other information other than that which pertains to the individual defector and the particulars that are necessary for the successful deradicalization of the defector. Anti-fascist or left-wing extremist groups, for example, have rejected the option of an exit without a comprehensive confession and the provision of personal information about former comrades as “proof” of the defector’s honesty in relation to programmes that focus on right-wing extremists as an example. In the end, any good deradicalization or rehabilitation programme will face the question of whether or how to harness specific intelligence connected to counter-terrorism against the previous groups of their clients. This is a question that must be answered in order to be successful. This information may even be shared against the choice of the participants and against the intended design of the programmes if it is deemed necessary. The aspect of gathering intelligence, the relationship to authorities, the handling of personal (and potentially incriminating) data, as well as the expectations placed on each participant, must all be incorporated into the programmes, regardless of whether or not information is required to be provided. In this regard, the adoption of open standards and legally defensible norms for the processing of data is one of the most essential components. The mandatory exchange of information as well as the compulsory participation in deradicalization programmes offers the least effective method of maintaining the credibility of the programmes and benefiting from the potential anti-terrorism effects of these activities. But it is important to note that, regardless of the intelligence value; the receiving community might expect the former extremist to have fully cooperated with the police and helped fight his or her old group in order to be “forgiven” (Rosenau, 2014).

2. Conclusion

Today’s world is characterized by radicalization, which is not likely to go away anytime soon. Deradicalization initiatives, which aim to peacefully transition people and groups away from violent extremism, have expanded in popularity and reach in recent years, even in the last five years. Understanding radicalization is necessary for successful deradicalization. The reduction of manpower within terrorist or violent extremist organizations is one of the more important and one of the first effects that deradicalization programmes have on the fight against terrorism. Every deradicalization process that is completed without failure results in the elimination of one potential member of an extremist group in the years to come. In spite of the fact that some radicals may never

abandon their extreme views, deradicalization programmes are the most effective way to advance soft counterterrorism if the majority of them can be convinced to do so and if more of them can decide not to use violence. While many aspects of each programme can be successfully replicated around the world, much work remains to be done in fully understanding and improving soft counterterrorism, of which deradicalization is a critical component. The majority of the projects that are undertaken by the world are carried out on an adhoc basis, which creates limitations in ensuring that the disengagement and deradicalization programmes are successfully implemented. In order for any deradicalization programme to be successful, the drivers or motivational factors behind joining violent organizations need to be investigated and treated. Failing to do so may even lead to further radicalization and recidivism if such programmes are implemented.

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