

Chapter 10 – DERADICALIZATION/DISENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES: CHALLENGING TERRORIST IDEOLOGIES AND MILITANT JIHADIS

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I've been studying terrorists and extremists for years now trying to understand their motivations and what puts them on, and can take them off of, the terrorist trajectory. In regard to Chechen terrorism, I worked with Nadya Tarabrina after the Moscow incident with the hostages and then worked with Khapta Akhmedova developing psychological autopsies of Chechen suicide terrorists by interviewing their family members and close associates to learn about their life history and what events and experiences led to them becoming terrorists. I also made field research in the West Bank and Gaza studying suicide bombers again using the psychological autopsy method. We spoke with mothers, brothers, sisters, friends and asked, "When did they change?" "What signs did you see?" "What about the last will and testament?" I also interviewed terrorists their family members and their associates, their hostages and their supporters in the United Kingdom, Belgium and France, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Russia. My research is based on interviews and case studies and analyzing basic statistics. My talk today will be on prison deradicalization efforts: looking at attempts by various Nations – including my own – to design and carry out programs in prisons to take individuals off of the terrorist trajectory.

In most countries today, the prisons can't deal with the current situation, they are filled with criminals, and disenfranchised people and it only takes one person to start militant jihadi indoctrination in prison. A key example is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who started out as a thug in Jordan but who became radicalized in prison and later became the leader of AQ in Iraq. There are several prison rehabilitation programs – in Saudi, Iraq, Yemen, Singapore, etc. The Yemen one was the first one, started in 2002. Clerics wanted to address jihadi prisoners and went into prisons and discussed ideology with prisoners. Many prisoners changed their minds after these discussions, with 360 prisoners in all. These programs depend on discussion, gentle and respectful, but the results are dubious, i.e., not as good as the claims.

The rehabilitation program in Saudi Arabia, started in 2004, is focused on internal threats. It began with religious dialogue with respected clerics ("kingdom scholars"). After awhile, they realized they needed to add psychological counselling and art therapy. Those involved are respectful – there is no coercion and they involve family, provide financial support and assist in arranging marriages [for program participants]. It was believed that married persons were less vulnerable to become militant jihadis, but it should be noted that there were militant jihadis from Saudi Arabia preaching that it was important to have a family prior to going on a suicide mission, but that a parent can sacrifice themselves because they've served their purpose, i.e., had a marriage and family. The four to eight week program requires that someone vouch for the prisoner. The Saudis are claiming 80 – 90 % success rehabilitation rate. However, the program is aimed at those caught with propaganda, so they're dealing with "lightweight" jihadis and they're easy to turn. They're not working as effectively with hard-core individuals. These Saudi clerics were asked to go to Guantanamo to rehabilitate prisoners there; they said, "No, we can't turn them". Success wise, they've had some notable failures (e.g., Said Ali al Shihri).

Egypt has had an interesting path to developing counter-radicalization programs. In the last part of the twentieth century, they experienced Muslim insurgency, coordinated uprisings, and assassinations, including Sadat. Since the 70's, many militants were arrested, endured torture in prison and in prison they self-educated about Islam. Those militants who were released or evaded prison left Egypt, (some for Russia) and of these Egyptian expats some became the basis of Al Qaeda (AQ). Their leaders concluded that after many arrests, imprisonments, torture and executions that radicals can't fight the state, so they needed to fight the supporters of the state and they widened their efforts to attacking the US and western powers.

We must understand how important a role torture can play in hardening individuals into the terrorist movement. Last year I was in Egypt and interviewed a Salafi cleric, about the torture he endured five years ago after his arrest. It was really bad. He wasn't violent but did preach against state officials who violate the Quran in their lifestyle choices. Some of the original AQ leaders were former prisoners who radicalized and participated in jihadi groups initially due to social repression and torture. But on the other hand, torture of those who spent long years in prison and never left Egypt may also have broken them. We have now Egyptian militant jihadis who after long years of imprisonment became disenchanted with terrorism. Originally they wanted regime change but they were not in favour of mass killing of civilians. After years of imprisonment some of these concluded that their followers on the outside had gone too far and were killing far too many innocent civilians and had gone off course. First Jemaah Islamiya (JI) in Egypt declared a ceasefire, reneged on their extremist views. They organized large groups in prison. They recanted and taught their followers the proper interpretation of religion. Then in 2007, the Al Jihad leaders followed suit. Some other leaders may have influenced them. They are more closely affiliated with AQ. Al Sharif, who is really respected among militant jihadis, wrote a book about being wrong which deeply challenged Al Qaeda because formerly he had been an ideological leader. Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote a counter-argument book, claiming that the use of electrical torture had coerced these individuals into disengagement. Al-Zawahiri may be partially right although after enduring torture it appears these groups acted of their own accord in renouncing terrorism.

Malaysia has a [prison rehabilitation] program that teaches from the Qur'an. While their spiritual counselling is very authoritative, they also engage in beatings. In Uzbekistan, prisoners have died rather than renounce their beliefs. These programs rely on strong surveillance for monitoring rehabilitated prisoners after their release. Singapore started a prison rehabilitation program in 2002. Rohan Gunaratna, who lives and works in Singapore, has been very active in setting up deradicalization programs globally. He teams with Ustaz Mohammed bin Al (trained in Egypt). The Singapore program is based on Islamic counselling and financial provisions (jobs for wives and prisoners on release) and weekly [maintenance] meetings after release. Their claims of success are high but "small n" [i.e., not many prisoners who have participated in the program] and due in part to the existence of a controlled society. The successes were not serious jihadis (they were plotting, but...).

Indonesia has a rehabilitation program. It is unique in that it uses former militants to talk to the prisoners, as scholars are not seen as credible. Nasir Abbas, who trained those who carried out the Bali bombing, became disenchanted with civilian deaths. He believed that it was OK to fight in Afghanistan, but not to bomb a nightclub. He argues with jihadis. Sidney Jones, of the International Crisis Group, says the Indonesian program is moderately successful.

The United Kingdom has a new program, started in 2005 – 2006. The clerics, who are Salafi, are respectful, gentle and work with converts to Islam, identified by prison authorities, discussing Islam. The clerics focus on enabling a critical examination of the prisoner's understanding of Islam – if it is correct or not. They believe that if you know how to examine a text and learn what is truly Islamic and what is not, the successes in terms of rehabilitation will come. The program needs a psychological component.

In Iraq, I was involved in the design and start up of a detainee rehabilitation program at Camp Victory and Camp Bucca with 23,000 detainees, including 800 juveniles. I was responsible for the design of the treatment aspect of the program which was both psychological and involved Islamic challenge. The program developers were challenged by military requirements balanced by what was needed to change the detainees. Initially, the military found militant jihadis in 5% of the prison population (AQ type philosophy) – mostly Sunni Muslims competing for resources who were angry and trained and easily co-opted by AQ to engage in sectarian violence. Some prisoners were picked up in (arrest) sweeps, not all of them were radical. A program with half day of psychological counselling [developed by Speckhard and her team] and half day of Islamic counselling [developed under Speckhard's supervision by clerics] was utilized in the Iraq program. The developers made lessons, anticipating the counter arguments to the militant jihadi point of

view. It was a huge challenge to run the program in a conflict zone. The Qur'an does say it's OK to fight occupiers, but Muslims are supposed to refrain from violent activity if too many will be killed. Many of the radicals believe they can work [cooperate] with the US, get the troops out and then reorganize. One of the additional challenges of carrying out a rehabilitation program in a conflict zone involves releasing prisoners back into chaos. There were sharia courts in prison; therefore, prison participants couldn't be sent back into the prison population because of the personal risks. Speckhard referred the participants to recent papers she has written on the experience for a more in depth analysis (e.g., Speckhard, Anne (2010) "Prison and Community Based Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs for Extremists Involved in Militant Jihadi Terrorism Ideologies and Activities" Pre-publication Version – Conflict and Terrorism found at www.AnneSpeckhard.com).

In terms of psychological issues, there were many prisoners that had experienced trauma. Many had experienced brutal arrests, and/or had family members and/or friends killed and/or tortured. It is important to address the traumas and psychological vulnerabilities that make one susceptible to being recruited for jihad, motivations – especially to ensure they won't reengage in collective violence – after prison and reorient their sense of self-efficacy. The program needs to be tailored to treat separately: extremists and those that aren't extremists and kids. All the program participants were warned about admission of crimes as that could end in them being sent to the Iraqi prisons, ethics were clear and important. The developers put a school program together for detained kids including sports, school and counselling. The length of the program, six weeks, was dictated by the military and group counselling was necessary in groups of ten due to the large numbers involved. The outcomes [success rate] are preliminary and not necessarily proven, but the program did result in huge releases of prisoners (6000 in 2008 with only 12 rearrested). It's important to keep in mind the political situation may be as responsible for the lack of re-arrests as the program itself. Based on interviews with detainees, there are issues with program maintenance. Also, we need to think about strategies for Internet, communities and military (screening, education and support) for deradicalization.

10.1 DISCUSSION

Have you been in contact with the Norwegian Police Academy that has dealt with radicals, jihadis, Nazi?
Yes thank you, I am aware of the book in which this is mentioned. The book talks about Nazis, etc., and applies to radicals in a general way.

There have been studies on deradicalization, but an exit strategy is needed, especially for those who are not so ideologically committed. They are there in prison because they are on the street, etc. I have a paper that is much more in depth on these topics. We need to think about whether to offer amnesty or not. We need to think it through. If we keep people in prison, they get radicalized. With amnesty, the victims aren't happy, but we need an exit path.

Since the new Obama administration and the debate about what to do about the prisoners – there are different categories of prisoners. At the same time, the US is building a new prison in Afghanistan. Is that your new effort? No, I am no longer involved. The military works through contractors and that was a very difficult issue in Iraq as their goals differ from those of the military – one is working for money, the other for ideological change. Many in the military believe that we can't change the extremists. I don't believe that. I like to see what works to reach them. The cleric I was working with was former AQ and he said some of these radicals need a psychologist, and even asked to see me. I don't agree you can't reach them – they're very passionate and can be reached. You must hook them in the treatment with the same passions and concerns that brought them to joining AQ and other terror groups. What about those doing it for money? How do you reach them? In my opinion they are more difficult. Some in Guantanamo can't be turned. Guantanamo is bad for the image of US. If they keep it open it can be exploited by the militant jihadis.

Do you rely on mediation? Do people go to prisons in Islamic countries (is this only applicable there)? There are some prisoners in Romania, Poland where there aren't Islamic scholars. How do you deploy

your program without knowledge of ideology? Are you referring to the “secret prisoners”? I have nothing to do with them. Soft and hard torture is in my opinion not useful – people make stories up and AQ teaches people to make up false stories and withstand torture. Some prisoners said they didn’t break during torture. Just as often you get good results from good treatment. In our group some had asked for medical treatment but were ignored. When they finally encountered a caring interrogator, they turned. We have to be psychologically savvy and understand what is important to them – what brought them into this in the first place, what their concerns are now as well – for their families, their country, and for themselves. Then we can begin to move them off their extreme ideological stance.