



# Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

The author of this report is Peter R. Neumann. Its empirical basis are 15 country reports that were written by the following experts: Omar Ashour (Algeria and Egypt); Laila Bokhari (Pakistan); Chris Boucek (Saudi-Arabia and Yemen); Andrew Coyle (United Kingdom); Boaz Ganor and Ophir Falk (Israel); Rohan Gunaratna (Singapore); Bob de Graaff and Eelco Kessels (Netherlands); Arie Kruglanski and Michelle Gelfand (Philippines); Jean-Luc Marret (France); Sidney Jones (Indonesia); Marisa Porges (Afghanistan); Manuel Torres (Spain); and Bert Useem (United States).

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## CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR  
King's College London  
138 – 142 Strand  
London WC2R 1HH  
United Kingdom  
**T.** + 44 20 7848 2065  
**F.** + 44 20 7848 2748  
**E.** mail@icsr.info

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NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE  
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A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE OF THE  
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# Summary

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## *Introduction*

- This report offers a wide-ranging analysis of the role prisons can play in radicalising people – and in reforming them. In doing so, it examines the policies and approaches of 15 countries, identifying trade-offs and dilemmas but also principles and best practices that can help governments and policymakers spot new ideas and avoid costly and counterproductive mistakes.
- Prisons matter. They have played an enormous role in the narratives of every radical and militant movement in the modern period. They are ‘places of vulnerability’ in which radicalisation takes place. Yet they have also served as incubators for peaceful change and transformation.
- Much of the current discourse about prisons and radicalisation is negative. But prisons are not just a threat – they can play a positive role in tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism in society as a whole. Many of the examples in this report demonstrate how prisons can become net contributors to the fight against terrorism.

## *Prison Regimes for Terrorists*

- Terrorists are not ‘ordinary’ offenders. They often use their time in prison to mobilise outside support, radicalise other prisoners, and – when given the opportunity – will attempt to recreate operational command structures.
- There are no hard and fast rules about whether terrorist prisoners should be concentrated together and/or separated from the rest of the prisoner population. Most of the countries that were included in the sample practice a policy of dispersal and (partial) concentration, which distributes terrorists among a small number of high security prisons. Even within such mixed regimes, however, it rarely seems to be a good idea to bring together leaders with followers and mix ideologues with hangers-on.
- The ‘security first’ approach of most countries results in missed opportunities to promote reform. Many prison services seem to believe that the imperatives of security and reform are incompatible. In many cases, however, demands for security and reform are more likely to complement than contradict each other.
- Prison services should be more ambitious in promoting positive influences inside prison, and develop more innovative approaches to facilitate prisoners’ transition back into mainstream society.

## *Prison Radicalisation*

- Prisons are often said to have become breeding grounds for radicalisation. This should come as no surprise. Prisons are ‘places of vulnerability’, which produce ‘identity seekers’, ‘protection seekers’ and ‘rebels’ in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish.
- Over-crowding and under-staffing amplify the conditions that lend themselves to radicalisation. Badly run prisons make the detection of radicalisation difficult, and they also create the physical and ideological space in which extremist recruiters can operate at free will and monopolise the discourse about religion and politics.
- Religious conversion is not the same as radicalisation. Good counter-radicalisation policies – whether in or outside prison – never fail to distinguish between legitimate expression of faith and extremist ideologies. Prison services should invest in staff training, and consider sharing specialised resources (for example, translators).
- In the case of Islamist militant radicalisation, prison imams have an important role to play, but they are not a panacea. Their independence and credibility need to be protected. It is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect them to be spiritual advisers, welfare officers and terrorism experts all at the same time.

## *Collective Disengagement and De-Radicalisation*

- In several cases, the (imprisoned) leaders of terrorist groups have used their influence to pursue collective processes of de-radicalisation and disengagement that have resulted in the standing down of entire armed groups. However, such instances are rare, and the conditions in which they are likely to happen are limited.
- Collective disengagement and de-radicalisation is predicated upon the existence of strong and authoritative leaderships; the existence of hierarchical command and control structures; and, not least, a conducive environment in which the leadership perceives that the armed campaign has faltered or is seen to have become less useful than other means of contention.
- Where such processes are possible, governments should support them. This may involve: opening appropriate lines of communication; providing the right mix of ‘carrots and sticks’ to keep the process on track; and – most importantly – enabling prisoners’ release and facilitating their integration back into mainstream society.
- When political concessions form part of the ‘deal’ between the government and the terrorists, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation can form the basis for a fully-fledged peace process, and requires the necessary skills, resources, and – above all – patience.

## *Individual Disengagement and De-radicalisation*

- Individual de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes aim to reduce the number of active terrorists in a given society by helping individual terrorists abandon terrorism and easing their re-integration into mainstream society.
- One of the biggest difficulties lies in measuring their success, as different local contexts, rules on eligibility and the short period for which they have run, have produced data that is difficult to judge and nearly impossible to compare.
- As long as the political momentum is no longer with the insurgents and other external conditions are conducive, their impact can be significant. Even in the best circumstances, however, they complement rather than substitute other instruments in the fight against terrorism.
- The report identifies the key underlying drivers and principles of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes, which may help policymakers understand the phenomenon and identify elements of best practice. They are:
  - A mix of different kinds of programming, typically combining ideological and/or religious re-education with vocational training.
  - Credible interlocutors, who can relate to prisoners' personal and psychological needs.
  - Emphasis on prisoners' transition back into mainstream society, typically by providing them with the means for a new beginning and by establishing social networks away from extremism.
  - Sophisticated methods for locking prisoners into multiple commitments and obligations towards family, community, and the state.
  - Material inducements, which – while useful – do not seem to be decisive on their own.
- The positive and outward-looking approach of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes is to be commended and should serve as an inspiration for policymakers and prison authorities all over the world.



# Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Argument	8
1.2 Methodology	8
<i>Scope</i>	
<i>Methods</i>	
<i>Structure</i>	
<b>2 Prison Regimes for Terrorists</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Issue	13
<i>Terrorists in prison</i>	
<i>Differences between terrorists</i>	
<i>Challenges</i>	
2.2 Practice	17
<i>Concentration, separation, and isolation</i>	
<i>Containment versus reform</i>	
<i>After-care</i>	
2.3 Recommendations	21
<b>3 Prison Radicalisation</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Issue	25
<i>How big a problem?</i>	
<i>What does it look like?</i>	
<i>Challenges</i>	
3.2 Practice	29
<i>General conditions</i>	
<i>Monitoring and Training</i>	
<i>Prison imams</i>	
<i>Other external influences</i>	
3.3 Recommendations	35
<b>4 Collective De-radicalisation and Disengagement</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 Issue	39
<i>Pre-conditions</i>	
<i>Challenges</i>	
4.2 Practice	41
<i>Leadership and environment</i>	
<i>Repression</i>	
<i>Inducements</i>	
4.3 Recommendations	45

<b>5 Individual De-radicalisation and Disengagement</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 Issue	47
<i>Debates</i>	
<i>Challenges</i>	
5.2 Practice	50
<i>Programming</i>	
<i>Interlocutors</i>	
<i>Inducements</i>	
<i>External stakeholders</i>	
<i>After-care</i>	
<i>Environment</i>	
<b>6 Conclusion</b>	<b>59</b>
Acknowledgements	61
Further Reading	63
<b>Tables and Boxes</b>	
Table 1: Country Samples	11
Box 1: Key Terms and Definitions	12

# 1 Introduction

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In the debate about radicalisation and violent extremism, prisons are often described as ‘hotbeds’ of terrorism. The American criminologist Harvey Kushner, for example, argues that Western prisons are one of the main recruitment grounds for Al Qaeda.<sup>1</sup> So did the late Ian Cuthbertson, who was certain that Al Qaeda had ‘taken full advantage’ of Western prisons and their ‘relatively lax practices’.<sup>2</sup> An American policy report, published in 2006, which drew on the insights and opinions of a 15-strong expert panel, arrived at similar conclusions, stating that prisoner radicalisation posed ‘a threat of unknown magnitude to the security of the [United States]’.<sup>3</sup>

How true are such claims, and what should be done? This report is the first to examine government policies on prison radicalisation and de-radicalisation in 15 countries across the globe. Drawing on the research carried out by more than a dozen experts, it conceptualises, examines and compares the policies and practices of these countries and their prison systems. Avoiding sensationalism, it aims to offer commonsense principles and practical recommendations which may help to reduce radicalisation and, more importantly, turn prisons into net contributors in the struggle against terrorism.

Whether or not one believes that prisons have become Al Qaeda’s ‘universities’ or ‘finishing schools’,<sup>4</sup> there can be no question that prisons matter:

- Prisons have played an enormous role in the narratives of every radical and militant movement in the modern period. No matter how different their causes or backgrounds, Egyptian Islamists, German Marxists and Irish Republicans have all regarded their comrades’ imprisonment as *traumatic turning points in the histories of their movements*. The prisoners and the ways they were treated came to be focal points for their groups’ campaigns, and they significantly influenced their supporters’ attitude towards violence and the state.
- Prisons are highly unsettling environments in which individuals are more likely than elsewhere to explore new beliefs and associations. Confronted with existential questions and deprived of their existing social networks, prisoners with no previous involvement in politically motivated violence are vulnerable to being radicalised and recruited into terrorism. Prisons, therefore, are *‘places of vulnerability’ in which radicalisation can take place*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Kushner (with Bart Davis), *Holy War on the Home Front* (New York: Sentinel, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Ian M. Cuthbertson, ‘Prisons and the Education of Terrorists’, *World Policy Journal*, 22 September 2004, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization’, *A Special Report by The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute and the University of Virginia Critical Incident Analysis Group*, September 2006, p. i.

<sup>4</sup> See ‘Al Qaeda’s British Propagandists on Trial’, *Jihadwatch*, April 2007; available at <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2007/04/al-qaedas-british-propagandists-on-trial.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Neumann and Brooke Rogers, ‘Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe’, *European Commission, Directorate General for Justice*, October 2007. Also Peter R. Neumann, ‘Joining Al Qaeda: Islamist Militant Recruitment in Europe’, *Adelphi Paper 399*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, January 2009, Chapter 3.

- At the same time, prisons have on many occasions been *incubators for peaceful change and transformation*. Whether through individual de-radicalisation and disengagement or as basis for entire peace processes, prisons have made significant contributions towards reversing the process of radicalisation and undermining terrorist campaigns on the outside. Prisons, in other words, have served as engines for positive change whose impact has been felt far beyond the prison walls.

The main part of this report will investigate each of these issues, looking – in turn – at prison regimes for terrorists; policies to prevent prisoner radicalisation; (prison-centred) collective de-radicalisation; and (prison-centred) individual de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. The intention is to understand key dynamics and trade-offs; compare different government policies and programmes; and make practical suggestions for how prisons can play a positive role in countering terrorism.

## **1.1 Argument**

If there is an overall thread – or underlying message – that connects the different parts of the report and the many different national experiences it reflects, it is the idea that prisons can present opportunities for combating radicalisation and terrorism, and that their potential for doing so needs to be fully understood and acted upon.

Much of the current discourse about prisons and radicalisation is negative. For policymakers, prisons are of little interest or concern unless prisoners escape or cause unrest, while prison authorities are mostly concerned about making sure that their institutions do not attract negative attention. As a consequence, many governments' efforts revolve around overly defensive notions of 'reducing' or 'preventing' radicalisation in prisons, but rarely go beyond the basic aim of containing the threat within the prison walls.

None of the de-radicalisation or disengagement programmes in the Middle East or South East Asia is perfect. Still, some of their underlying principles may be relevant and applicable elsewhere. More fundamentally, what they demonstrate is that prisons are not just a threat but can make a positive contribution to tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism in society as a whole: the positive and outward-looking approach that is exhibited in several of these programmes should serve as an inspiration for policymakers and prison authorities all over the world.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Before delving into the analysis, it is important to explain what this study has looked at and how the research was carried out.

### *Scope*

The report is based on 15 country reports that were researched and written by external contributors (see below). The countries were selected because of their significance in relation to the subject, but also to ensure a good representation of different regions, continents

and types of prison system. Not every country with a history of prison radicalisation could be included in the 'sample', but most of the relevant dynamics and national experiences have been captured.

While much of the recent experience with prison radicalisation and de-radicalisation relates to Islamist militants, the investigation has not been limited to this particular expression of the phenomenon. On the contrary, the report will show that valuable lessons can be learned from comparing different kinds of terrorism and how they have played out in the prison environment. In fact, several of the countries contained that were part of the sample – France and Spain, for example – have had to cope with strikingly different types of terrorist prison populations at the same time.

It should also be pointed out that the recommendations in this report are focused on prison policy, not the micro-management of prisons. The author is in no position to tell prison staff how many hours a day to keep prisoners locked up in their cells, or how best to prevent mobile phones from being smuggled in. As a result, most of the attention has been directed at the principles that are underpinning different countries' policies and programmes and how they are implemented. While the report is by no means an operational handbook, it may nevertheless prove valuable for policymakers and prison officials who are hoping to understand the key dynamics and trade-offs that inform operational procedures.

## *Methods*

The report is part of a project that was carried out between May 2009 and May 2010 by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) in partnership with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), based at the University of Maryland. Its empirical basis are 15 country case studies that were written by country experts who were chosen after careful deliberation. They are:

- Omar Ashour (Algeria and Egypt);
- Laila Bokhari (Pakistan);
- Chris Boucek (Saudi-Arabia and Yemen);
- Andrew Coyle (United Kingdom);
- Boaz Ganor and Ophir Falk (Israel);
- Rohan Gunaratna (Singapore);
- Bob de Graaff and Eelco Kessels (Netherlands);
- Arie Kruglanski and Michelle Gelfand (Philippines);
- Jean-Luc Marret (France);
- Sidney Jones (Indonesia);
- Marisa Porges (Afghanistan);
- Manuel Torres (Spain); and
- Bert Useem (United States).

Not all 15 countries were relevant in relation to each area of research (see Table 1), but each author was asked to structure their case study in a similar way, thus making sure that findings from different case studies could be compared.

The countries that were looked at for their prison regimes for terrorists were France, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom,

and the United States. Policies and approaches to deal with prison radicalisation were analysed in Afghanistan, France, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The analysis of collective disengagement and de-radicalisation is based on the experiences of Algeria, Egypt, and Israel. For individual disengagement and de-radicalisation, the report looked at Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Saudi-Arabia, Singapore, and Yemen.

While the analysis and recommendations expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the individual views or any consensus among the contributing experts, their collective insight into the phenomenon – often based on years, if not decades, of study of the countries in question – is its unique strength. Unlike other studies of prison radicalisation, the report achieves depth as well as breadth, drawing on detailed and highly informed assessments of past and current policies in countries as different as Indonesia and Israel.

In the empirical part of the paper, where specific countries are referred to, readers should assume that the information was gleaned from the relevant expert's country report unless a footnote and/or reference points to a different source. (All expert papers will be published in full length as part of an edited volume in 2011.)

In addition to the 15 case studies, the author – assisted by ICSR staff – has carried out an extensive review of the literature on prison radicalisation and de-radicalisation, which has made it possible to contextualise some of the overarching themes and close gaps in the understanding of concepts and theories. The report also draws on many – often informal – conversations with other researchers, representatives from prison services, and policymakers and their staff.

Not least, the author has benefited from attending several international conferences on the topic, including a workshop on prison radicalisation and de-radicalisation at King's College London in November 2009, which ICSR and START organised in order to provide expert contributors with an opportunity to present the first drafts of their papers.

## *Structure*

The structure of the report follows the questions and issues that were set out earlier:

*Chapter 2* deals with prison regimes for offenders who are held for, or have been convicted of, terrorism related charges, concentrating on those countries in which specific policies exist or have been outlined.

*Chapter 3* looks at the issue of prisoner radicalisation, exploring the conditions under which non-terrorism related (that is, 'ordinary') prisoners may be exposed to radicalisation and what has been done to counter this.

*Chapter 4* explores the potential and limits of collective de-radicalisation and disengagement.

*Chapter 5* examines past and ongoing efforts at promoting individual de-radicalisation and disengagement within prison, identifying similarities and differences between programmes as well as establishing factors that contribute to their effectiveness.

*Chapter 6* sums up the findings and highlights key recommendations that were identified in the course of the research.

<b>TABLE 1 COUNTRY SAMPLES</b>			
<b>PRISON REGIMES FOR TERRORISTS</b>	<b>PRISON RADICALISATION</b>	<b>COLLECTIVE DE-RADICALISATION</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL DE-RADICALISATION</b>
France	Afghanistan	Algeria	Afghanistan
Netherlands	France	Egypt	Indonesia
Spain	Netherlands	Israel	Philippines
United Kingdom	Pakistan		Saudi-Arabia
United States	Philippines		Singapore
	Spain		Yemen
	United Kingdom		
	United States		

## BOX 1 Key terms & Definitions

**RADICALISATION** Most of the definitions currently in circulation describe radicalisation as the process (or processes) whereby individuals or groups come to approve of and (ultimately) participate in the use of violence for political aims. Some authors refer to ‘violent radicalisation’ in order to emphasise the violent outcome and distinguish the process from non-violent forms of ‘radical’ thinking.

**DE-RADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT** The terms de-radicalisation and disengagement describe processes whereby individuals (or groups) cease their involvement in organised violence and/or terrorism. However, while de-radicalisation aims for substantive changes in individuals’ (or groups’) ideology and attitudes, disengagement concentrates on facilitating behavioural change, that is, the rejection of violent means. According to John Horgan, ‘the disengaged terrorist may not be “deradicalized” or repentant at all. Often physical disengagement may not result in any concomitant change or reduction in ideological support’.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, many authors distinguish between collective and individual de-radicalisation and/or disengagement, depending on whether the process is led by, or aimed at, individuals or entire groups.<sup>7</sup>

**POLITICALLY MOTIVATED OFFENDERS** The principal difference between politically motivated offenders and ‘ordinary’ criminals lies in their intention. While ‘ordinary’ criminals commit crimes in pursuit of selfish and/or personal goals, politically motivated offenders believe that they are acting on behalf of a certain group, society or humanity as a whole. Politically motivated offenders commonly distinguish between ‘legality’ and ‘legitimacy’, arguing that breaking the law is justified when a particular policy or the entire political or legal system are illegitimate.<sup>8</sup> Not all politically motivated offenders are terrorists, but all terrorists are politically motivated offenders.

**TERRORISM** The definitional problem, which has haunted terrorism research for decades, is unlikely to be resolved by this report. As a tactic, terrorism typically consists of symbolic acts of violence which are intended to influence the political behaviour of a target group via the deliberate creation of fear.<sup>9</sup> The formula which many governments and international organisations have chosen to adopt describes terrorism as politically motivated violence that intentionally targets civilians and/or non-combatants.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this report, the term terrorist is used for all individuals who have been charged with, or convicted of, offences that are proscribed under their countries’ anti-terrorism laws.

**EXTREMISM** The term can be used to refer to political ideologies that oppose a society’s core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies, this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and human rights. However, the term can also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realise their aims, that is, by using means that ‘show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others’.<sup>11</sup> Many governments refer to terrorists as ‘violent extremists’.

<sup>6</sup> John Horgan, ‘Individual disengagement: a psychological analysis’ in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (London and New York: Routledge 2009), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Omar Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See Nikos Passas, ‘Political Crime and Political Offender: Theory and Practice’, *Liverpool Law Review*, 8(1) (1986).

<sup>9</sup> See Peter Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2007).

## 2 Prison Regimes for Terrorists

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**F**or Gudrun Ensslin, one of the founders of the West German Red Army Faction, life in prison was a microcosm of the injustices, inequalities and oppression which she believed characterised the capitalist system as a whole. Responding to a letter from the father of her child, she wrote that ‘nowhere else do the workings of the system become more obvious [than in prison]: the two classes – those with keys, and those without’.<sup>12</sup> Her attitude – especially the acute sense that the prison system had to be fought and struggled against – typifies one of the ways in which terrorists and other politically motivated offenders respond to being incarcerated.

Constructing prison regimes for people like Ensslin is not a new challenge, nor is it confined to particular expressions of terrorism. Governments everywhere have had to ask themselves how terrorists are different from ‘ordinary’ prisoners and what this means for how they should be treated in prison. Their experiences have resulted in prison regimes that mirror countries’ particular histories and experiences with extremism, but also bring out many common and recurring problems.

This chapter argues that prison regimes for terrorists need to be informed by a sophisticated understanding of the motivations and behaviours of politically motivated offenders, who – unlike ‘ordinary prisoners’ – may want to mobilise outside support, radicalise other prisoners, and (in the case of terrorists) recreate operational command structures. With some notable exceptions, the five countries that were examined – France, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States<sup>13</sup> – have addressed these challenges in similar ways. Most practice a policy of dispersal and (partial) concentration, which distributes terrorists among a small number of high security prisons. The overall approach can be characterised as ‘security first’, with little attention or effort expended on attempts at rehabilitation and reform. Furthermore, with just one exception, no particular provisions have been made for ‘after-care’ – sometimes for entirely understandable reasons.

Even so, the chapter argues that the emphasis on containment and security – however justified and appropriate in many cases – means that opportunities to pursue reform and rehabilitation are missed. The analysis shows that it would be mistaken to see a contradiction between the dual demands for security and reform, and prison authorities should be more ambitious in pursuing both and at the same time.

### 2.1 Issue

In an effort to deny terrorists legitimacy and popular support, one response of governments all over the world has been to refuse to

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper, 11/1/69’ in Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper, *‘Notstandsgesetze von Deiner Hand’: Briefe 1968/1969* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> The authors of the country case studies were Andrew Coyle (United Kingdom), Bob de Graaff and Eelco Kessels (Netherlands), Jean-Luc Marret (France), Manuel Torres (Spain), and Bert Useem (United States).

acknowledge the political motivation behind their actions. In public messages, terrorists are labelled 'criminals' and their actions are portrayed as 'crimes'. The same principle applies to prisons, where governments are quick to point out that terrorists are dealt with like all other criminals. Terrorists, in the words of a senior prison official from Britain, are 'regard[ed]... as we regard all prisoners'.<sup>14</sup>

At first glance, this approach appears to make good sense, especially when considering negative experiences like the conflict in Northern Ireland where prisoners were granted what, in essence, amounted to 'political status' and could run their own prison wings with little interference from the authorities. What it fails to acknowledge is that, however much governments would like to deny it, terrorists' political motivation does make a difference: it alters their self-perception, behaviours, and – for good reasons and throughout history – has produced different kinds of prison regimes.

Beginning with the Republican Jacobins in the early 19th century, most European countries have made 'exceptions' for politically motivated offenders,<sup>15</sup> often based on the assumption that they were of 'good character' and that their crimes – however misguided – had resulted from an 'altruistic motivation'.<sup>16</sup> Politically motivated prisoners were the first ones to be given amnesties or released once hostilities had ended or particular rights had been granted. At the same time, during their incarceration, it was common for such offenders to be separated from 'non-political' prisoners, knowing that the former could exert a 'subversive' influence on the latter – a phenomenon which, in today's circumstances, would probably be described as radicalisation.<sup>17</sup>

Even today, most criminal justice systems recognise – sometimes explicitly – that individuals charged with or convicted of terrorism related offences are different from 'ordinary' criminals. They are investigated by special sections of the police forces and brought to court by special prosecutors. The laws under which they are charged – anti-terrorism laws – were created specifically for them, and the courts at which they stand trial are special (or specialised) courts. This – governments argue – reflects the particularly serious nature of their crimes, which are directed against the state and society as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Yet it also demonstrates that the idea of 'criminalising' and 'de-politicising' terrorist offences – if taken seriously and fully internalised – is contradictory at best, and may in fact prevent prison authorities from developing a sophisticated understanding of the particular challenges posed by politically motivated offenders, including terrorists, in prison.

## *Terrorists in prison*

In the prison context, most difficulties in dealing with terrorists are caused *precisely* by the fact that these offenders do not see themselves as criminals. Rather than quietly serving their sentence,

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<sup>14</sup> Phil Wheatley, Director General of the Prison Service for England and Wales, cited in Josh Lefkowitz, 'Terrorists Behind Bars', *NEFA Report*, 5 May 2008, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> See Christine van den Wijngaert, *The Political Offence: Exception to Extradition* (Deventer: Kluwer, 1980), pp. 29-30. For the case of the Jacobins, see Michael von Tangen Page, *Prisons, Peace and Terrorism* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Von Tangen Page, *Prisons*, pp. 5, 31-3, 46.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 46.

many regard their time in prison as an opportunity to continue the 'struggle', and involve themselves in activities ranging from passive resistance to turning prison into a 'battleground' from which to support the wider campaign. Typical behaviours include:<sup>19</sup>

- **Refusing to cooperate with the prison authorities.** Politically motivated offenders believe that they have been incarcerated for their beliefs rather than their actions, and that the process that led to their incarceration is illegitimate. As a result, they may choose not to cooperate with prison staff, or even attempt to establish parallel structures.
- **Developing the movement's strategy and ideology.** Unable to participate in operations and planning, imprisoned terrorists may want to use their time in prison to help develop their movements' strategy or ideology. From Gerry Adams' Brownie columns to Mohammed Al Maqdisi's theories of 'jihadist' warfare, some of the most influential tracts and articles in the history of militant and/or terrorist movements were written while their authors were in prison.
- **Mobilising supporters.** Prisons can provide an environment from which to continue the confrontation with the state, especially by highlighting and/or exaggerating the kinds of grievances and injustices that are also fuelling the movements' campaigns on the outside. This can involve allegations of discrimination, mistreatment and torture, and result in negative media coverage, protests and even dramatic confrontations such as hunger strikes.
- **Participating in violent campaigns.** Terrorists will consider it their duty to attempt to contribute to their movements' violent campaigns. The most obvious way is to try to escape from prison and rejoin their groups.<sup>20</sup> Where this is impossible, they may seek to become involved in strategic and operational planning, or issue operational guidance or authorisation.

Implicit in this description is a further difference between politically motivated offenders and 'ordinary' prisoners, namely that political offenders are more likely to have a constituency in the form of vocal supporters on the outside, who – like the offenders themselves – refuse to accept the legitimacy of their incarceration and regard them not as perpetrators of crimes but as victims of injustices and discrimination.

As a consequence, prisons will be subject to a higher level of public scrutiny;<sup>21</sup> that is, the number of people who take an interest in politically motivated prisoners is certain to go well beyond their families and immediate associates: it may include thousands of political supporters – often organised in transnational support groups – who will observe, respond to and publicise every action undertaken by the prison authorities.

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<sup>19</sup> The typology draws on Andrew Coyle's case study report on the UK as well as a recently published RAND Corporation study. See Greg Hannah, Lindsay Clutterbuck and Jennifer Rubin, *Radicalization or Rehabilitation: Understanding the Challenge of Extremist and Radicalized Prisoners* (Cambridge: RAND, 2008), p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Von Tangen, *Prisons*, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

## *Differences between terrorists*

The political motivation is what makes terrorists different from the rest of the prison population. But not all terrorists are the same. In constructing prison regimes, it is vital to account for the unique characteristics and behaviours of particular terrorist groups and networks.<sup>22</sup>

For example, terrorist groups differ in relation to their *internal structure and cohesion*. Terrorist groups are no longer always coherent, firmly structured entities, but – like Al Qaeda – they may constitute loose networks which revolve around personal relationships rather than military hierarchies. Some of these groups are said to have implemented the idea of ‘leaderless resistance’ whereby a movement’s leadership and its followers have no direct contact but are expected to act on their own initiative and without support from other parts of their ‘organisation’.<sup>23</sup> When imprisoned, different members of such networks are unlikely to have met – in many cases, they will not even have heard of each other. By contrast, members of more cohesive and hierarchically structured groups like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) will not only know each other, but seek to maintain or recreate operational command structures within the prison walls.

Likewise, not all terrorist groups have the same *attitude towards radicalisation and recruitment* inside prison. The IRA, for example, wanted nothing to do with ‘ordinary’ criminals, who were seen as unreliable, ill-disciplined and potentially harmful to the group’s image of a liberation army seeking to attain political objectives. As a result, its emphasis was on gaining autonomy within prison, with no deliberate efforts to radicalise and/or recruit among the general prison population. Many Al Qaeda affiliated prisoners, on the other hand, see it as their duty to propagate their faith and political ideology (*dawa*). They realise that prison constitutes a potentially fruitful place for conversion and radicalisation (see Chapter 3), and will consequently exploit whatever opportunities they are offered to approach other offenders and turn them into followers of the group.

## *Challenges*

The points raised in this section demonstrate that the prison behaviours of terrorists and other politically motivated offenders are different from the rest of the prison population. Understanding those differences helps in conceptualising the particular challenges in dealing with terrorist inmates. They are:

- Preventing the radicalisation of (non-terrorist) inmates;
- Preventing the maintenance and/or recreation of operational command structures;<sup>24</sup>
- Preventing the exploitation of the prison environment for the purpose of mobilising outside support.

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<sup>22</sup> As in the previous section, this typology draws on Andrew Coyle’s case study report on the UK.

<sup>23</sup> See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); also Neumann, *Old and New*, Chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> The one exception is if the leadership has turned against violence and wants to pursue a process of collective de-radicalisation and/or disengagement (see Chapter 3).

In addition, prison regimes for terrorists should also aspire to:

- Provide opportunities for de-radicalisation and disengagement; and
- Make a positive contribution to reducing terrorism and radicalisation on the outside.

If and how governments have managed to reconcile these (sometimes competing) demands will be explored in the following section.

## 2.2 Practice

This section uses data from five countries that have no formal disengagement or de-radicalisation programmes but established practices, policies or approaches towards dealing with prisoners who have been charged with, or convicted of, terrorism related offences. They are: France, the Netherlands, Spain,<sup>25</sup> the United Kingdom (UK),<sup>26</sup> and the United States of America (US).<sup>27</sup>

While similar in many respects, it should be noted that comparisons between the countries in question are not as straightforward as it seems. Their respective terrorism laws and justice systems are very different, and – as a result – produce different terrorist prisoner populations. Numbers differ too: whereas French and Spanish prisons currently deal with several hundred suspected and convicted terrorists from various backgrounds (Basque, Islamist, and – in the French case - Corsican), the Netherlands hold exactly five. All these factors are likely to influence the nature of countries' prison regimes and make them more difficult to compare.

At the same time, there are several dilemmas that are similar to all the countries in the sample, no matter what background or size their terrorist prisoner population. They follow from the challenges and dilemmas that were highlighted in the previous section, and will be explored – one after the other – in this section. They are: the question of whether to concentrate, separate and/or isolate terrorist prisoners; whether the emphasis should be on containment or reform; and to what extent provisions have been made for after-care.

### *Concentration, separation and isolation*

All prison services that deal with terrorists need to decide how to distribute this prisoner population around their systems. In most cases, this boils down to three related questions, namely whether they should all be held in one place (concentration); whether they should they be separated from the general prison population (separation); and if they should be isolated from each other (isolation).

Concentration, separation and isolation may be good ways of stopping efforts to radicalise and recruit the general prisoner population, and they will prevent any emerging links between

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<sup>25</sup> All Spanish data excludes figures for Catalonia.

<sup>26</sup> All UK data relates to the Prison Service for England and Wales, which comprises well over 90 per cent of the prisoner population of the United Kingdom.

<sup>27</sup> Our study considers US domestic prisons only. It excludes US detainees abroad, such as those held at the facilities in Guantanamo or Bagram airbase in Afghanistan.

terrorists and ‘ordinary’ criminals. At the same time, concentration, separation and isolation provide a focus for public attention and protest;<sup>28</sup> they emphasise the different (that is, political) nature of their crimes; and – if prisoners are concentrated and separated but not isolated – they enable prisoners to re-create operational structures and confront the prison authorities as a united force.

Of the five countries in the sample, only one – the Netherlands – has implemented the principle of concentration fully – most likely because of the small numbers involved: all five are located in the ‘terrorism wing’ of the high security prison in Vught. In the US’ federal prison system, almost all terrorists are held in just three prisons, yet – in contrast to the Netherlands – there is no dedicated ‘terrorism wing’ within those prisons.<sup>29</sup> One may argue, therefore, that the US government has opted for a mix of dispersal and concentration, allowing the authorities to establish clusters of terrorist prisoners within a small number of (mostly high security) prisons. This policy – dispersal and (partial) concentration – is even more pronounced in the remaining countries: the UK, France, and Spain all practice dispersal policies, meaning that most terrorists are classified as ‘high security’ upon conviction and then dispersed across their respective countries’ high security prisons. Doing so enables prison services to avoid clear focal points for public protests and, simultaneously, makes it possible for governments to maintain the idea that terrorists are treated just like any other prisoner.

None of the countries have implemented regimes that involve the permanent isolation of terrorist prisoners, which would be illegal under various international and European human rights conventions. This means that, in the Dutch case, terrorist prisoners can communicate and interact with other terrorists, and – in all other countries – that they are also exposed (albeit to a limited degree) to the general prisoner population. The extent to which this is true varies, however. Whereas Spanish practices differ between prisons and depend on the nature of the terrorist prisoner population (see below), French and American high security prison regimes can be very harsh. The French practice of moving the most hardened terrorists from one prison to another, together with its notorious DPS regime,<sup>30</sup> has been strongly criticised by human rights organisations. The UK practice seems less ‘isolationist’, although – like the French DPS regime – it also provides for a special regime in the form of so-called specialist units, which law enforcement staff have described as ‘prisons within prison’.<sup>31</sup>

The Spanish approach is particularly interesting. Whereas the country’s 75 charged or convicted terrorists with an Islamist background are concentrated in a small number of high security prisons, Basque separatists, which mostly belong to the group ETA, have been dispersed across the country. The reasons are, first, that the Basque group ETA is a tightly structured organisation which, if permitted to concentrate their prisoners, would attempt to re-create its operational command structures, make desertions more difficult, and present the prison authorities with a united front. Second, and even more importantly, prison policy in relation to ETA is considered

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**28** Examples include Stammheim prison in Germany, where all members of the Red Army Faction (RAF) were held; and, more recently, the American detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay.

**29** Prisoners with terrorist ties may nevertheless be subject to different rules, especially regarding contact with the outside world.

**30** DPS stands for *Détenu Particulièrement Signalé*, which translates as Specially Designated Detainees.

**31** Conversation with British police officer, 20 January 2010.

a potential bargaining chip, which may be used in future peace negotiations. In fact, Spain is perhaps the best illustration of how terrorist prison regimes have been adapted to reflect the needs and risks of particular terrorist prisoner populations while being part of a comprehensive political strategy.

### *Containment versus reform*

Prison everywhere serves the triple aims of *punishment*, *incapacitation* (preventing individuals from committing further crimes), and *reform* (making sure that offenders will not return to crime after being released).<sup>32</sup> Prison regimes need to achieve a sensible balance between those aims, especially when it comes to 'reform' which public opinion and the popular press often portray as a 'luxury' that can be dispensed of when costly, inappropriate, or otherwise inconvenient. How have the countries in the sample resolved the dilemma?

No doubt, incapacitation and containment are the overwhelmingly dominant considerations for the prison services in all the countries. With very few exceptions, terrorists are considered 'high risk' and are, therefore, treated in similar or identical ways to non-terrorist offenders in this category. This not only means that they are sent to 'high security' prisons but also that – compared to the general prisoner population – they are sometimes locked up in their cells for longer; they are monitored more closely; and their communications are subject to greater scrutiny. Indeed, some of these regimes are fairly harsh and have prompted judicial challenges.

Even the most restrictive regimes, however, do not provide total security. For instance, even under the United States' high security system, and despite being subject to 'Special Administrative Measures', the so-called Blind Sheikh, who served as the inspiration behind the 1993 World Trade Center attacks, managed to send inflammatory messages from his prison cell to his followers in Egypt.<sup>33</sup> Similar examples can be found in all the countries in the sample, including Britain, where an imprisoned supporter of Al Qaeda used a mobile phone to direct the construction of an extremist website,<sup>34</sup> or Spain, where Algerian terrorists planned a terrorist attack for the first anniversary of the 2004 Madrid train bombings from their prison cells.<sup>35</sup> Even in the best run prisons, such incidents will occur (see Chapter 3). That, however, does not make them acceptable.

In all the countries observed, high security regimes have left little space for activities geared towards reforming prisoners. Three of the countries in the sample – the UK, France, and Spain – have provided incentives for separatist prisoners who are willing to turn against their comrades, but this rarely involved any conscious efforts or programmes on behalf of the prison authorities.<sup>36</sup> As far as Islamist militants are concerned, France's and the United States' legal, political and even constitutional traditions make it difficult for prisons

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<sup>32</sup> Additional aims may include deterrence and retribution. See Tangen, *Prisons*, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> See Lefkowitz, 'Terrorists behind', p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 25. For other examples from the UK, see James Brandon, *Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist Extremism in British Prisons* (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2009), pp. 26-32.

<sup>35</sup> Julio Lazaro, 'Absueltos 14 de los 20 condenados en la Operación Nova', *El Pais*, 7 October 2008.

<sup>36</sup> In addition, there are several instances of 'collective disengagement' – initiated by the group's outside leadership and often embedded in wider peace processes (see Chapter 4) – which led to prisoners being released on licence (Northern Ireland), 're-inserted' into society (Spain), or full-scale amnesties (France).

to engage in attempts to 'de-radicalise' prisoners, confront offenders with political and/or theological challenges, or even recognise the concept of 'radicalisation'. In other countries – especially Spain and the UK – sporadic efforts have been made, but there exists no systematic programme.

When it comes to reform, the lack of ambition is obvious and – in many cases – perfectly understandable. Constitutional constraints aside, expending money and effort on reforming terrorist prisoners is not just a political minefield but widely regarded as futile. In Spain and France, for example, most of the Islamist inmates are foreign nationals, who will be sent back to their home countries once they have served out their sentences. In the United States, no terrorist in any domestic prison will be released for several years; and in the Netherlands, the numbers are so small that a major investment would not be justified. In the absence of compelling reasons for change, the 'security first' approach is likely, therefore, to continue.

### *After-care*

One lesson that emerges from the de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes that are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 is the importance of preparing prisoners for their release, and – once they have been released – providing 'after-care' to facilitate their transition into stable environments and make them less vulnerable to being re-recruited into extremist activities. To what extent do such arrangements exist in countries that have no formalised de-radicalisation programmes?

In all the countries in the sample, prisoners are entitled (or obliged) to participate in the same probationary arrangements that are available to other prisoners. This means that, prior to an offender's release, risks and needs will be assessed, resulting in a probationary regime which may include a list of conditions (ranging from prohibitions to see or communicate with certain people to the requirement to enrol in full-time education or training) and will be supervised by a probation officer whom prisoners are likely to have met prior to their release. While, in most countries, probationary arrangements are made and supervised by a dedicated Probation Service (which, in turn, collaborates with other state bodies, including the police and local authorities), Spain has no agency for this purpose, and in France, many of the functions are entrusted to a group of non-governmental organisations (*Associations*), which 'specialise' in particular needs or types of prisoner (for example, foreign inmates; drug users, etc.).

The absence of special arrangements or programmes for terrorist prisoners reflects some of the issues and circumstances that were mentioned in the previous section. In the US, for example, no terrorists are likely to be released from domestic prisons any time soon, which means that probationary or after-care arrangements are not high on the list of priorities. The same is true for Spain and (to a lesser extent) France, where – although prison sentences are shorter than in the US – a high percentage of Islamist militants are foreign nationals, who will be deported to their countries of origin after serving their sentences.

As far as separatists are concerned, the prevailing wisdom seems to be that the provision of sophisticated, reform oriented post-release

programmes makes little sense when prisoners are released back into communities – be it in Corsica or the Basque Country – which are overwhelmingly supportive of the cause that led to the offender's conviction. The result here, as in other countries, is to have a 'security first' approach towards 'after-care', which is to ensure that prisoners are under tight supervision and monitoring by the police and intelligence services.

The one exception is Britain, where the prison authorities are beginning to put in place more ambitious structures. With several dozen 'home-grown' terrorists up for release in the coming years, relationships have been forged with several community groups who were given active roles in the implementation of prisoners' probationary regimes. In addition to providing vocational training and, in some cases, academic education, these groups take an active interest in shaping former prisoners' social environments and attitudes, including – where necessary – psychological counselling and the discussion of theological and political issues. Similar to the de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries, the aim is to provide former prisoners with stable and healthy environments in which a return to extremism becomes undesirable and high cost. Arguably, the emerging British approach towards after-care comes as close as anything that has been observed in the countries in the sample to drawing on the principles and experiences of de-radicalisation or disengagement programmes (see Chapters 4 and 5).

## **2.3 Recommendations**

This chapter has shown that – despite the 'criminalisation' doctrine – most prison authorities understand that terrorists and other politically motivated offenders represent a distinct prison population which presents particular risks and, consequently, requires different kinds of prison regimes.

There are no hard and fast rules about whether terrorist prisoners should be concentrated or separated and isolated. It all depends on how a policy is implemented and, more importantly, on the nature and dynamics of the particular group in question. If, like Al Qaeda in the West, the group is dispersed and largely leaderless, bringing together its followers in prison would help to create structures that had not existed before, and should be avoided where possible. If, on the other hand, concentration serves the purpose of bringing together terrorists who have turned against their former comrades and enable them to support each other, it could have a positive impact.

The current mix of dispersal and (partial) concentration, which is practiced in most of the countries in the sample, balances the high risks inherent in this prisoner population with the desire not to create focal points for public protest or human rights concerns. But it may not be appropriate in all cases: for instance, where a group undergoes a process of collective de-radicalisation (see Chapter 4) or where governments are engaged in peace processes, bringing together the prisoners in one place may contribute to the wider aim of furthering conflict resolution.

The lessons are both obvious and simple:

- The importance of developing a sophisticated understanding of the terrorist prisoner population cannot be overstated. This includes a thorough understanding of the groups and movements to which terrorist prisoners belong, as well as regular assessments of each individual in question, ensuring, for example, that ‘fellow travellers’ and marginally involved foot soldiers are not mixed with hardcore terrorists and charismatic leaders.
- Training and educating frontline staff is a priority. Prison staff need to ensure that terrorists – like other prisoners – are treated correctly and fairly at all times, which will make it more difficult for terrorists and their outside supporters to exploit the prison environment for propaganda purposes, including, for example, allegations of discrimination and mistreatment. Furthermore, where terrorist and non-terrorist prisoners have opportunities to mix, it is important for prison staff to be able to detect changes in behaviour, including attempts to influence others or assume leadership roles, but also signs of disillusionment with the group and its ideology (see Chapter 3).

The ‘security first’ approach, which dominates many prison services’ thinking in relation to terrorists, is understandable and not entirely without justification or merit. For example, prisons need to make sure that terrorist prisoners are closely monitored. This is particularly important when it comes to their communications – after all, it is in this respect that such prisoners, who are otherwise unable to contribute to their movements’ campaigns, are potentially most problematic. Even the best prisons cannot be hermetically sealed, but prison staff must know and understand how central the monitoring of communications is to dealing with convicted terrorists and other politically motivated offenders.

‘Security first’, however, should not be mistaken for ‘security only’. Whether or not a terrorist can be rehabilitated or de-radicalised depends on many factors, and it may well be true that – in certain cases – such attempts are futile. In others, however, signs of disenchantment with the movement, its methods or ideas should be taken seriously, and – where possible and appropriate – they should be encouraged, nurtured, and capitalised upon.

Reform does not need to come at the expense of security. In many situations, in fact, the two imperatives go hand in hand. For example, making sure that the prison is not flooded with extremist or inflammatory literature is a security issue, but it also represents a pre-condition for reform and rehabilitation. Going one step further, if ‘negative’ influences ought to be kept out of prison, ‘positive’ influences need to be more actively promoted.

The fostering of positive influences does not necessarily require a formalised de-radicalisation programme or even a fully-fledged de-radicalisation centre, but – again, depending on the nature of a particular movement and the needs of individuals prisoners – may consist of ‘soft’ interventions, such as providing ideological challenges to the extremist ideology, bringing in speakers who can debate relevant issues and present alternative viewpoints, or making more educational or vocational opportunities more available.

There may be perfectly good political, constitutional, and practical reasons for not wanting a formal de-radicalisation programme. That

does not mean, however, that the principles and positive practices that have been gleaned from such schemes should not be adapted to local circumstances, including the above-mentioned attempts to offer prison programming and enable challenges to extremist beliefs and justifications of violence, but also – and importantly – their emphasis on ‘after-care’.

Again, the demands of security and rehabilitation are more likely to complement than contradict each other: the more former prisoners are engaged with support structures and programmes after their release from prison, the easier it becomes to monitor them. At the same time, for ‘after-care’ to succeed in facilitating the transition from prison to society and minimising the risk of re-recruitment, it needs to begin while offenders are still in prison. For that reason, it may well turn out that establishing effective after-care will lead to a more systematic approach towards reform and rehabilitation overall.



## 3 Prison Radicalisation

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In a recently released statement, Abu Qatada – often referred to as Osama bin Laden’s ‘Ambassador to Europe’<sup>37</sup> – talked about ‘see[ing] the signs of Allah’ within British prisons, where – in his own words – ‘young men enter into Islam and then... learn Arabic and the Sharia in a short number of months’.<sup>38</sup> Similar observations have been made by extremists all over the world, and it is no exaggeration to say that prisons – for all kinds of movements and in all periods of history – have been fruitful places for radicalisation and recruitment.<sup>39</sup>

This chapter focuses on Islamist militants, because they represent the most widespread manifestation of the phenomenon globally. Examining eight countries – Afghanistan, France, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States<sup>40</sup> – the chapter looks at underlying drivers as well as the policies and approaches that have been adopted by governments to counter prison radicalisation. It demonstrates that prison radicalisation is driven by behaviours and conditions that are typical of the prison environment – especially religious seeking, defiance, and the need for protection – and that efforts aimed at preventing radicalisation should seek to address and mitigate these factors.

The difficulties are considerable. Distinguishing between legitimate expression of faith and extremist ideologies can be difficult, and training and detection in this area is highly uneven. The desire to deny extremists the ‘religious space’ from which to radicalise and recruit has led to renewed interest in the institution of the prison imam, but its role and influence are at risk of being overrated. Furthermore, the gap between the vision of creating ‘stable prison societies’ and the reality of disorderly, overcrowded and under-staffed prisons is sometimes quite stark, especially in developing countries.

The chapter suggests that more needs to be done to confront the challenges of detecting and preventing prison radicalisation, but that prescriptions differ depending on country and circumstances. In fact, many of the issues that play out in the prison environment are not actually ‘prison issues’ at all, but touch on wider and more fundamental question of counter-radicalisation policy.

### 3.1 Issue

When experts and policymakers speak about the dangers of prison radicalisation,<sup>41</sup> they typically raise two kinds of concern. One is

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, ‘Britain “sheltering al-Qaeda leader”’, BBC News, 8 July 2002; see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2115371.stm>.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in ‘An Address to the Muslims from Abu Qatada’, *NEFA Foundation*, 23 March 2009; available at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaabuqatada0309.pdf>. The quotation was originally found in Brandon’s *Unlocking Al Qaeda*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Anti-Defamation League, ‘Dangerous Convictions: Extremist Activities in Prisons’, *Topics in Extremism*, 2(2002).

<sup>40</sup> The authors of the country case studies were Laila Bokhari (Pakistan), Andrew Coyle (United Kingdom), Bob de Graaff and Eelco Kessels (Netherlands), Jean-Luc Marret (France), Arie Kruglanski and Michelle Gelfand (Philippines), Marisa Porges (Afghanistan), Manuel Torres (Spain), and Bert Useem (United States).

<sup>41</sup> Among the policymakers who have warned of the potential threat from prison radicalisation are US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and former UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith. See Gonzales, quoted in Mark S. Hamm, ‘Terrorist Recruitment in American Correctional Institutions: An Exploratory Study of Non-Traditional Faith Groups – Final Report’, *US Department of Justice Commissioned Report*, December 2007, p. 10; Smith, quoted in Raffaello Pantucci, ‘Britain’s Prison Dilemma: Issues and Concerns in Islamic Radicalization’, *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 24 March 2008.

that prison brings together politically motivated offenders, including terrorists, with 'ordinary' criminals, creating the potential for an 'unholy alliance' between the two. Instead of reducing the risk of terrorism, prison may thus help to produce an even more serious threat by combining the terrorists' ideological fervour with 'ordinary' offenders' criminal energy and skills. It is this concern – among others – which underlies the dilemma between 'concentrating' imprisoned terrorists or allowing them to mix with 'ordinary' criminals (see Chapter 2).<sup>42</sup>

The second point is that prison represents a '*place of vulnerability*' in which individuals are more likely to be radicalised and go on to become involved in extremist and/or terrorist activities. The term 'place of vulnerability' depicts locations in which individuals experience social isolation or personal crises, both of which are widely believed to be factors that increase a person's responsiveness to extremist messages and/or approaches.<sup>43</sup> Prison matches this description: offenders are removed from their friends and family; they are confronted with their past; and they need to find their way in a new (and often hostile) social universe.

Accordingly, the two motivations that are most likely to make inmates susceptible to new faith and belief systems – including extremist and militant interpretations of Islam – are *the search for meaning and identity* (which new prisoners experience in particularly intensive ways) and *the need for (physical) protection*, which is offered by traditional gangs and Islamic groups alike.<sup>44</sup> In addition, prison also seems to breed a *desire to defy the authorities*, which means that 'identities of defiance' – enabling prisoners to articulate their grievances and rebel against the system – are in high demand.<sup>45</sup>

### *How big a problem?*

Anecdotal evidence of prison radicalisation is easy to find. The most spectacular (and, by extension, most frequently cited) cases are those in which 'free world' terrorist plots had their origins in the prison environment. They include:

- Khalid Kelkal, who was radicalised in a French prison in the early 1990s. Recruited by radical Algerians, he went on to become involved in the murder of a moderate imam in Paris and the attempted bombing of the high-speed rail link between Paris and Lyon.
- Operation Nova in Spain, which involved supporters of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA), who recruited new followers during their stay at a prison in Salamanca. By 2004, they were planning a terrorist attack against the Spanish Central Court.

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, FBI Director Robert Mueller's speech in Ohio in 2006; quoted in Hamm, 'Terrorist Recruitment', p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Neumann, 'Recruitment and Mobilisation'.

<sup>44</sup> Hamm, 'Terrorist Recruitment', Chapter 3. See also Gabriele Marranci, 'Faith, Ideology and Fear: The Case of Current and Former Muslim Prisoners', *IQRA Annual Lecture – House of Lords*, 26 June 2007.

<sup>45</sup> See Bert Useem's case study report on the United States; Hamm, p. 5. In Farhad Khosrokhavar's words, radical Islam is fast becoming prisoners' preferred ideology of resistance – 'the religion of the oppressed' – beginning to play the role that once belonged to Marxism. See Khosrokhavar, cited in Craig S. Smith, 'French Prisons – Radicalizing Large Muslim Populations', *New York Times*, 20 December 2004.

- The Authentic Assembly of God (JIS) – an Islamist group which formed in a California state prison in 1997. Seven years later, its leader was recruiting inmates who were instructed to attack Army recruitment centres, synagogues and other targets.<sup>46</sup>
- Kevin Gardner – later known as Abbas Shafiq – who turned towards extremism during his stay at a Young Offenders' Institution in England in 2006-07. He became obsessed with the British Army and plotted an attack on a military base from within his cell.<sup>47</sup>

Instances of prison radicalisation in non-Western countries are less well-documented, but they are not hard to find. To take the most dramatic example, numerous attacks by Al Qaeda and the Taliban are said to have originated from within Afghan prisons, where terrorists and insurgents mix freely with 'ordinary' criminals and instances of radicalisation are said to be extremely frequent. As the Commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, pointed out, there are 'more insurgents per square foot in corrections facilities than anywhere else in Afghanistan'.<sup>48</sup>

However, it is difficult to generalise based on anecdotal evidence alone, and neither governments nor researchers know exactly how much their respective prison systems are affected. Some of the problems in quantifying the phenomenon relate to different ideas about the concept as such and how it should be measured. A number of commentators and even government agencies, for example, confuse 'conversion' with 'radicalisation', implying that prisoners who take up purist strains of Islam – often described as Salafi – are all at risk of becoming terrorists.<sup>49</sup> In reality, the two are not always connected. While prison conversions to Islam are frequent, and significant percentages of converts and 'born again Muslims' are attracted by the purity and rigour of the Salafist tradition, no serious researcher claims that this automatically translates into support for terrorism. More importantly, freedom of religious expression is not something that prison authorities can (or should) criminalise.

Furthermore, it is not always clear whether an individual's radicalisation took place in prison or happened before. Take, for example, the case of Richard Reid, the 'shoe bomber' who attempted to blow himself on board a transatlantic flight in 2001. He converted to Islam while imprisoned at a Young Offenders Institution in England, but many believe that his interest in Al Qaeda only started when he became involved with a group of extremists at Brixton Mosque.<sup>50</sup> The same can be said of Jose Padilla, the American terrorist who was accused of plotting to detonate a 'dirty bomb'. He converted to Islam in prison, but followed a moderate interpretation of that faith until his release. His radicalisation is said to have been prompted by a friend whom he had met at a local mosque.<sup>51</sup> Both cases are frequently held up as evidence of prison radicalisation,<sup>52</sup> yet – under closer scrutiny – turn out to have little to do with prison. (If anything these cases are a good illustration of why the systematic provision of after-care is so critical.)

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<sup>46</sup> For the most extensive analysis of the JIS case, see Hamm, 'Terrorist Recruitment', Chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> Brandon, *Unlocking Al-Qaeda*, p. 18; also Ben Goldby, 'Al Qaeda recruiting at Midlands prison', *Sunday Mercury*, 10 January 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Gen. McChrystal, cited in Melisa Porges' case study report on Afghanistan.

<sup>49</sup> See Jean-Luc Marret's case study report on France.

<sup>50</sup> See Andrew Coyle's case study report on the UK.

<sup>51</sup> Deborah Sontag, 'Terror Suspect's Path From Streets to Brig', *New York Times*, 25 April 2004.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Alex Wilner, 'We must make sure that prison isn't terrorism school', *Globe and Mail*, 19 October 2009.

Equally, radicalised prisoners may not necessarily go on to become involved in extremism once they are released. This is particularly true for those who became part of a radical group – or prison gang (see below) – for the purpose of seeking protection. They are not always ‘authentic’ conversions, which are likely to be followed up or acted upon in the ‘free world’.<sup>53</sup> This is not to downplay the problem, but – rather – to emphasise the particular conditions of the prison environment which increase the potential for radicalisation, but may also produce behaviours that are no longer relevant or appropriate when offenders have been released.

### *What does it look like?*

Prison radicalisation comes in many guises. In categorising its most frequent manifestations, it is useful to distinguish between ‘channels’ of radicalisation that emanate from outside the prison environment and those that come from within.

Among the external drivers of radicalisation are extremist *books, videos or websites*, which are sent to the prison or made available to inmates. External ‘channels’ of radicalisation may also include *outside visitors*, who promote extremist messages. Most prisons will seek to prevent prisoners from having the opportunity to interact with known extremists, but such individuals are not always easy to recognise, especially when they claim to look after prisoners’ religious needs and the prison authorities have no way of distinguishing ‘moderates’ from extremists. As a result, there have been a (small) number of cases in which ‘radical imams’ have gained access to prisons and spread their message among the inmates.

Internal sources of radicalisation include *terrorist inmates* who – unless they are completely separated from the general prison population – may approach ‘ordinary’ inmates, befriend them and ‘convert’ them to their beliefs and ideology. A typical behaviour is for convicted terrorists to attempt to assume leadership roles among the wider prison population, for example by leading Friday prayers or taking the lead in negotiating concessions on behalf of particular prisoners or ‘Muslim prisoners’ as a whole.

A different phenomenon are so-called *Muslim prison gangs*, which are more typical of Western prisons (where being Muslim is a marker of identity) than prisons in Muslim majority countries. Like traditional prison gangs, Muslim prison gangs are based on religious (sometimes also ethnic) affiliation and provide members with a strong sense of identity and in-group loyalty. Moreover, they allow members to articulate their grievances and protect them against other gangs or groups of prisoners. Muslim prison gangs rarely include convicted terrorists, nor do they generally seem to have a good grasp of the Islamic faith or extremist ideology, and it is questionable to what extent their members have internalised, or genuinely committed themselves to, either. Nevertheless, ‘cut and paste’ versions of radical Islam frequently form the basis of their ‘ideology’, and particularly notorious terrorists are frequently glorified and held up as heroes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Hamm, ‘Terrorist Recruitment’, Chapter 1.

<sup>54</sup> See ‘Out of the Shadows’, *Special Report*, p. iv.

## *Challenges*

Prison radicalisation results from – and is related to – the conditions inherent in the prison environment, including: the presence of terrorist inmates; the need for protection; the search for meaning and identity; and the desire to defy a system which may be perceived as unjust.

The challenge for policymakers and prison authorities is to mitigate those conditions, so they are less likely to feed into radicalisation. It follows that prison policies should be geared towards

- Recognising radicalisation;
- Monitoring the activities of terrorist inmates
- Controlling external influences;
- Encouraging prisoners to embrace ‘inmate identities’ rather than defy the authorities;<sup>55</sup>
- Mitigating conflicts between ethnic, racial and religious groups;
- Channelling prisoners’ search for meaning and identity into productive directions.

To what extent current policies have addressed these objectives will be shown in the next section.

## **3.2 Practice**

This section uses information from eight case studies in order to examine how different countries and their respective prison systems have dealt with the issue of prison radicalisation. The countries are: Afghanistan, France, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, the UK, and the US.

As in the previous chapter, it is important to be conscious of the differences between these countries and their prison systems. For example, two of the countries in the sample – Pakistan and Afghanistan – are Muslim majority countries in which ‘Muslim prison gangs’ are unlikely to be relevant and issues such as anti-Muslim prejudice are insignificant or non-existent. It also needs to be kept in mind that prison radicalisation in Afghanistan – and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan and the Philippines – takes place in the context of ongoing insurgencies, with wider political conflicts spilling over into the prisons regardless of what kinds of policies the prison authorities have decided to adopt.

The first two parts of this section look at internal drivers (general conditions, and monitoring and training), while the following two examine external drivers (the role of prison imams and external influences).

### *General conditions*

Many experts believe that there is a correlation between potential for radicalisation and the degree to which prisons are safe and orderly. In Useem’s view, for example, ‘stable prison societies’ – which require sufficient space and staffing but also work and educational opportunities – minimise the space for sub-cultures

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55 See Bert Useem’s case study report on the US.

and conflicts between inmates, and they facilitate the emergence of ‘inmate identities’, with prisoners being ‘mere prisoners, not rebels with a cause’.<sup>56</sup> Importantly, safe and orderly prisons also make it easier for the authorities to collect intelligence and pick up on emerging signs of radicalisation.<sup>57</sup>

With the exception of the Netherlands (which has recently started leasing spare capacity to neighbouring Belgium), all the prison systems in the sample suffer from over-crowding and, in most cases, a shortage of staff as well as work and educational opportunities. This does not always result in chaotic conditions, but – following Useem’s analysis – it increases the potential for conflict and reduces the authorities’ ability to pick up on extremist activities. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from France, Spain and the UK suggests that ‘radicalisers’ *do* take advantage of poorly run and overcrowded prisons, and that Muslim prison gangs tend to form in environments in which resources are scarce, ethnic and religious conflicts are rife and the prison management can no longer ensure the safety of inmates.<sup>58</sup>

The contrast between the well-resourced and well-staffed prison system in the Netherlands, where the authorities were able to stop instances of radicalisation from spreading at an early stage, and those in Afghanistan, the Philippines and Pakistan could not be starker. In all three countries, prisons are not only understaffed and over-crowded, there are no provisions for monitoring terrorist inmates who – with the possible exception of the Philippines – are free to mix with ‘ordinary’ inmates. Bribery and corruption are common, meaning that militant groups can frequently count on the complicity of prison staff when targeting inmates for radicalisation and recruitment. Furthermore, instead of preventing the use of violence and ensuring the safety of all inmates, it is the prison staff who initiate many violent attacks.

Arguably, such conditions not only provide the ‘breeding ground’ for radicalisation but may represent one of its causes. Take Pakistan, for example, where 92,000 prisoners share 41,000 prison places, often mixing juvenile with adult offenders and making no distinction between minor offenders, hardened criminals and politically motivated militants. Staff are in short supply and badly trained, with the result that reports of mistreatment and even torture are frequent. Moreover, the government’s recent successes in fighting domestic militancy have produced 4,000 additional inmates, of which 3,700 are thought to be affiliated with Al Qaeda or the Taliban. Together with detainees from Guantanamo, which have recently been sent back to Pakistan, militants of all kinds now represent the fastest growing part of the Pakistani prison population, making the overcrowding worse and exposing ‘ordinary’ inmates to increasing numbers of battle-hardened ‘jihadists’.

The Pakistani case shows that it would be neither fair nor appropriate to look at prison radicalisation as a problem of the prison system alone. In Pakistan and the Philippines, the ‘root cause’ of the overcrowding are highly inefficient judicial systems, which often produce verdicts only years after the accused have been

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Useem believes it may be no accident that the one terrorist plot that emerged from an American prison (see previous section), occurred in California, whose state prison system is notorious for overcrowding and its general lack of resources, staffing, and programming. See *ibid.*

thrown into prison.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, corruption and mistreatment in prisons are indicative of political systems in which access to justice is limited and the rule of law is weak. In cases such as these, it seems clear that dealing with prison radicalisation requires governments to consider (and tackle) wider structural problems rather than attempting to 'fix' the prisons alone.

### *Monitoring and training*

Islamist militant prison radicalisation is a relatively new phenomenon which prison authorities the world over have only recently started to grapple with. Everyone agrees that improving the capacity to spot radicalisation is vital, but that doing so represents one of the most difficult aspects of dealing with the phenomenon.

As far as the five Western countries in the sample are concerned, three trends could be identified. First, all five have recognised the issue and have determined that raising awareness among prison staff should be a priority. While some (such as the UK) have developed high-level strategies and created new, often centralised structures, others (such as the Netherlands) have relied on less formal mechanisms and permitted local stakeholders – individual prison governors, for example – to take ownership of the issue and lead nationwide efforts.

All these initiatives emphasise the need to train prison staff, recognising that prison guards and other frontline staff who interact with prisoners on a daily basis are critical in making early detection work. In Andrew Coyle's words, '[Only frontline staff] can sense when there is a change of atmosphere in a prison wing. They can "smell trouble" before it begins'.<sup>60</sup> It is not always clear, however, to what extent such announcements have been translated into practice. In the United States, for example, where 50 state prison systems and the federal Bureau of Prisons all enjoy autonomy, implementation is very uneven. In France and the UK, radicalisation training programmes have only recently been embarked upon, and – in some cases (such as Spain) – they are still at a conceptual stage.

(Relevant training does not necessarily need to address the radicalisation issue directly. Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Philippines, for example, have intensified their efforts – often with Western help – to educate their staff about basic practices of good prison management, helping to avoid the worst excesses and instances of mistreatment. Likewise, Muslim minority countries such as Britain have come to understand that instances of discrimination, or the perception thereof, feed into the extremist narrative of victimisation, and have adopted racial and/or religious equality training as part of the counter-radicalisation agenda.)<sup>61</sup>

A second trend among the Western countries in the sample is the development of indicators for radicalisation. France/the European Union (EU),<sup>62</sup> the UK and the Netherlands have all produced leaflets

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<sup>59</sup> In Pakistan, an astonishing 80 per cent of the prison population are held on remand. See Laila Bokhari's case study report on Afghanistan.

<sup>60</sup> See Andrew Coyle's case study report on the UK.

<sup>61</sup> James A. Beckford, Daniele Joly and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Muslims in Prison: Challenge and Change in Britain and France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Chapter 5.

<sup>62</sup> The French manual is the result of a joint initiative by France, Germany and Austria during the French Presidency of the European Union in 2008. See Jean-Luc Marret's case study report on France.

or manuals with instructions on what prison staff should look out for. The Dutch booklet stresses changes in behaviour and beliefs, including '(sudden) interest in religion', 'an exaggerated distinction between what is "pure" and "impure"', and 'a desire to convert fellow inmates', together with expressions of defiance such as 'challenging the words of an(other) imam' and 'displaying Messiah-like behaviour'. By contrast, the British, while covering much of the same ground, are more careful to downplay the religious and/or Islamic aspect, emphasising not only that there are other kinds of extremists (dissident Irish Republicans, far right activists, etc.), but also that – rather than looking for potentially benign behaviours, such as sudden interest in religion – prison staff should act on expressions of 'support for radical extremist causes or leaders', look for 'materials... that express sympathies to extremist behaviours/actions', and 'contacts with people involved or suspected of involvement with extremist activity'. The French/EU handbook falls somewhere in the middle, with a mixture of indicators that address religious practice, physical appearance and political expression. It also provides a 'traffic light' system, with 'yellow' marked by the appearance of Islamist propaganda, graffiti, and changes in prisoners' appearance, and 'red' consisting of acts of outright defiance, including the destruction of public property and attacks against prison staff.

Well-intentioned and worthwhile in principle, such leaflets may have unintended consequences. The Dutch, for example, with their emphasis on religious practice and changes in outward appearance, may encourage an over-reporting of religious conversions, which are not necessarily indicative of radicalisation. Indeed, when conversions to Islam are met with harsh and overly repressive responses by prison staff, this not only violates prisoners' freedom of religious expression, it also creates the impression that the prison authorities – and, by extension, the state – are against Muslims in general, feeding into the extremist narrative of the West at war with Islam. On the other hand, the British leaflet – in trying to avoid this 'trap' – has become almost circular in its logic. There are numerous references to 'extremist behaviours/actions' and 'extremist expressions' without actually explaining what such behaviour consists of: British prison guards, in other words, are asked to detect extremist behaviours by looking for extremist behaviours. The only useful and truly reliable indicators, which are contained in all three booklets, relate to acts of open defiance, including attempts to replace and marginalise the prison imam. At that point, however, it may already be too late for early interventions.

A third trend among Western prison authorities is for more centralised and professional intelligence systems to be put in place. All countries have recognised that it is vital for information and resources to be pooled, because individual prisons on their own are unlikely to possess the ability to monitor communications in foreign languages, assess the content of suspicious books and videos, or evaluate the credentials of external visitors (see below). In Spain, France and the Netherlands, it is the security services which have taken the lead and work closely with prisons' security departments (France, Netherlands) or 'observation and control groups' (Spain). In Britain, in addition to the Prison Service's high security directorate, the National Offender Management Service now houses an extremism unit. The United States' federal prison service is the most advanced system, having established a close relationship with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the form of the Correctional

Intelligence Initiative. This partnership enables the collection and sharing of information about prisoners and prison imams, but also deploys centrally located resources such as translators and information on extremist literature.

### *Prison imams*

One of the most interesting recent developments is the upsurge of interest in the institution of the prison imam. In all the Muslim minority countries in the sample, Muslims in prison are over-represented relative to the country's overall population, sometimes significantly so: in the US by a factor of 3; in Spain, the Netherlands and the UK by a factor of 4; and in France by an estimated factor of 10.<sup>63</sup> Yet, until the mid-2000s, little attention had been paid to the provision of religious services for this segment of the prison population. Only recently have prison services begun to embrace the institution of the prison imam as a counter-radicalisation tool, realising that prison imams can help to minimise, if not deny, the space available to extremists who – rightly or wrongly – have used religious language and motifs to establish their credibility and recruit followers, for example by leading Friday prayers or providing spiritual care.

Before their recent renaissance, prison imams were regarded with indifference or suspicion in most of the Muslim minority countries in the sample. Numbers were small, and little was done to support their work. The element of suspicion related to a small number of cases in which radical imams had gained access to prisons and established themselves as legitimate providers of religious services, with the result that – following the terrorist attacks in September 2001 – many governments' initial reaction was to 'crack down' on prison imams, reducing their numbers further and making life more difficult for those who remained within the system.

With the possible exception of the Netherlands, whose government had invested in the provision of prison imams throughout the 1990s, the realisation that prison imams could be helpful in combating radicalisation and that their role should be strengthened occurred only in the mid-2000s. Today, even countries such as France – which had long been reluctant to support prison imams based on the suspicion that doing so would violate the state doctrine of *laïcité* – are fully committed to the institution. Indeed, only Spain seems not to have changed its (indifferent) attitude, with all the other Western countries in the sample being enthusiastic 'converts'.

The sudden enthusiasm for the prison imam has gone hand in hand with an expansion of their role. Not only are today's 'new' prison imams supposed to be competent in the provision of religious services and spiritual care, they are also expected to be counsellors, social workers, experts in radicalisation and extremism, and – more generally – act as interlocutors between the prison authorities

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<sup>63</sup> The US number is based on the number of individuals seeking Islamic religious services in the federal prison system; state figures are not available, but are thought to vary considerably. See Hamm, 'Terrorist Recruitment', Chapter 1. In Spain, the number relates to prisoners who are citizens of Muslim majority countries, as the number of Spanish citizens of Muslim faith is believed to be very small. See Humberto Trujillo *et al.*, 'Radicalization in Prisons? Field Research in 25 Spanish Prisons', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21(2009), p. 559. In France, no official statistics on religious affiliations are kept, but Khosrokhavar's figure of 70 – 80% is widely quoted and thought to be a reliable estimate. See Beckford, *Muslims in Prison*, Chapter 1. The figures in the UK and the Netherlands are based on official statistics, quoted in Andrew Coyle's case study report on the UK and Bob de Graaff and Eelco Kessels' case study report on the Netherlands.

and Muslim prisoners for all kinds of everyday concerns. To make sure that all those services are delivered effectively, France, the Netherlands, the UK and – to some extent – the US have started to institutionalise and professionalise the position as well as formalise the processes through which prison imams are appointed, with the result that imams now have to fulfil a language requirement, provide evidence of religious competence, and commit to ongoing training exercises. In France and the Netherlands, there are state-funded Islamic Prison Chaplaincies, while the UK has created the position of Muslim Advisor. In the US, the federal prison service has forged closer relationships with a number of religious service providers.

Despite governments' best intentions, the institutionalisation of the prison imam has prompted the concern that Western authorities are introducing a state-sanctioned form of Islam, which can easily be undermined by extremists and fails to reflect the diversity of the Islamic faith, especially when prison services' faith advisors are all drawn from the same religious tradition.<sup>64</sup> Another concern is that the prison imam's ever increasing mandate will lead to Muslim prisoners having to define themselves as 'Muslim' in order to gain access to welfare services and pastoral care for which non-Muslim prisoners would rely on the prison management. Overall, however, there can be no question that Western governments' recent attempts to improve the provision of Islamic services compares favourably with the situation in the remaining countries in the sample, where no systematic efforts have been made to offer religious services and it is – more often than not – left to the prisoners themselves to lead Friday prayers and perform other spiritual duties. In places like Pakistan and Afghanistan, which have significant numbers of extremists in their prison systems and allow 'ordinary' prisoners and extremists to mix, the consequence is that extremists are free to lead Friday prayers and use their supposed religious authority to radicalise and recruit.

### *Other external influences*

In his extensive study of Islam in American prisons, Mark Hamm found that prison radicalisation is an essentially social phenomenon, drawing its strength primarily from the personal interaction between inmates.<sup>65</sup> Attention, however, must also be paid to external influences, which can inspire, reinforce, direct and substantiate the interactions in which prisoners participate.

All the countries in the sample claim to have strict policies on prisoners' communication with the outside world: mail deliveries are said to be screened; phone calls and the use of the internet are meant to be restricted. In reality, however, individual prisons often lack the capacity to perform these functions effectively, and instances of external infiltration could be found in each of the eight countries. The explanation for such failures typically lies in insufficient staff numbers (in Spain, for example, the staff/prisoner ratio is 1:160), or prison guards who have no idea how to distinguish between 'legitimate' religious and political information and extremist materials. For prisons in Muslim minority countries, whose Islamic inmates are mostly foreign nationals or the descendants of immigrants, an

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<sup>64</sup> See Brandon, *Unlocking Al-Qaeda*, p. 113.

<sup>65</sup> See Mark Hamm, 'Prisoner Radicalization: Assessing the Threat in US Correctional Institutions', *National Institute of Justice Journal*, October 2008; available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/261/prisoner-radicalization.htm#note8>.

additional obstacle lies in the fact that communication often takes place in foreign languages.

While countries such as Britain have started training prison staff in basic Islamic concepts and expressions, the US federal prison system's Correctional Intelligence Initiative will enable prisons to access federal resources (for example, translators) and share and access information on external visitors and literature. Despite such activities, the wider question of what constitutes 'extremist' material and to what extent prisoners' freedom of expression and access to information should be restricted in the name of counter-radicalisation remains unaddressed. In one country in the sample, prison governors have been advised to 'reject "gifts" from foreign embassies', which probably refers to Saudi-sponsored translations of the Quran that are frequently criticised for being overly militant and sectarian. Would other countries be prepared to go as far as sidelining particular interpretations of the Quran?

### **3.3 Recommendations**

In dealing with radicalisation, prison services are confronted with two challenges: preventing radicalisation, and detecting radicalisation where it has occurred. The analysis of the problem and the policies adopted by the eight countries in the sample showed that running safe and orderly prisons is critical to addressing both. In fact, doing so is the pre-condition for all other measures that may be taken to address one or the other:

- Overcrowded, chaotic prisons make it difficult for prison staff to understand what is happening 'on the ground' and, as a result, will allow extremists to operate at free will. Under such conditions, effective monitoring and detection of radicalisation becomes impossible.
- Unsafe and disorderly prisons aggravate the conditions that make prisoners vulnerable to radicalisation. Extremists will find it easier to fill the (spiritual and material) vacuum created by prisons that fail to provide prisoners with a perspective and a set of meaningful activities towards which their energies can be directed. They also create a 'security dilemma' in which inmates feel compelled to turn to extremists – or organise themselves as prison gangs – for protection.

This highlights the need for sufficient numbers of well-trained staff, and it reinforces the fundamental importance of prison programming in creating 'inmate identities' that will reduce the occurrence of defiant, hopeless and vulnerable prison populations. This may seem like an obvious priority for developing countries, where prison systems are often in a desperate state, but it also applies to Western countries in which problems with disorder have arisen too.

Another important element in combating prison radicalisation is to deny religious space to extremists. The recent upsurge of interest in the institution of the prison imam shows that prison services have understood the significance of preventing extremists from monopolising the Islamic narrative. Even so, the professionalisation of the position and its ever increasing role have led to a number of

concerns, which should be taken into account when developing their role further:

- As much as their revival is welcome, prison imams are not a panacea. It is neither reasonable nor possible to expect imams to be spiritual advisers, welfare officers and terrorism experts all at the same time. Their primary role and responsibility is to look after prisoners' spiritual needs and ensure the provision of adequate religious services – they are not a substitute for services which can and should be delivered by the prison service.
- Prison imams' independence and credibility needs to be protected. This requires a difficult balancing act: while wanting to professionalise and 'control' the institution, prison services have to make sure that prison imams reflect the diversity of the Islamic faith and are not seen as corrupted by the authorities.

More generally, the analysis demonstrated that the prison environment poses challenges and problems that are similar – if not the same – as those encountered in society at large:

- Discrimination and anti-Muslim prejudice (sometimes referred to as 'Islamophobia') are often said to provide the pretext for – and one of the drivers behind – radicalisation and extremist recruitment in Muslim minority countries. This is also true for prisons, except that in prisons, the confrontation between Muslims and the state (represented by the prison service) is more direct, frequent and immediate than outside. Needless to say, there should be zero tolerance for any form of racism and anti-Muslim prejudice among prison staff.
- Conversion is not the same as radicalisation, and good counter-radicalisation policies – whether in or outside prison – never fail to distinguish between the two. Changes in religious practice, especially the adoption of strict and literalist varieties of the Islamic faith, need not pose a security problem, and prisoners' freedom of religious expression should always be respected. In fact, efforts to 'clamp down' on Salafi Islam in the name of counter-radicalisation may have the opposite effect, namely to create the impression that prisoners are singled out for negative attention by the prison authorities on account of their (Islamic) faith alone.<sup>66</sup>
- Given the nature of Islamist extremism, which combines political and religious motifs and consciously uses the language and symbols of faith, it can be difficult to distinguish between legitimate expressions of faith and politically inspired extremism. To take the best known example, the term 'jihad' can have vastly different meanings depending on who it is used by and for what purpose.<sup>67</sup> Training for prison staff can go some way towards making basic differences and subtleties understood, but it would be unrealistic to expect prison guards to become experts in Islamic theology and/or 'jihadist' ideology. Making shared resources available to individual prisons, enabling them to seek advice and access

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<sup>66</sup> It should be added that religion per se can be of great benefit for a prisoner's psychological well-being, especially when being deprived of freedom, friends, family and other things to hold on to. See Hamm, 'Terrorist Recruitment', Chapter 1. The author also wishes to thank Marc Linning for emphasising this point.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Jared M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 5; John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Chapter 1.

specialised services (for example, translators and experts), clearly has an important role to play too.

However, many of the issues that play out in the prison environment are not actually 'prison issues' at all. They touch on fundamental questions of counter-radicalisation policy, such as: what constitutes radicalism and/or extremism? Is any discussion of foreign conflicts in Islamic terms problematic, or should it be encouraged? Where should authorities draw the line between acceptable yet radical political views and political extremism? Can non-violent Islamists ever be partners in combating radicalisation? Should prison authorities try to limit, ignore or even encourage the spread of 'quietist' Salafi Islam?

The wider significance of these issues should be understood and acknowledged by prison services. It is not up to prison governors or even the heads of prison services to decide matters of national policy, but they have every right to convey their views and experiences, and expect their governments to issue clear guidance and direction where national policy is not clear or consistent.



## 4 Collective De-radicalisation and Disengagement

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**W**hen Bobby Sands and other IRA prisoners went on hunger strike in 1981, this galvanised Irish nationalist opinion across the island. Many Catholics saw them not as murderers but as decent men – patriots even – who had been locked up for acting on their convictions. In the words of Mairead Corrigan, who founded the Northern Ireland peace movement and had a strong record of opposing IRA violence: ‘They were men from our community. We know how they have come to be there. And above all, we don’t want them suffering within the prisons’.<sup>68</sup>

Governments often fail to grasp the powerful position of terrorist prisoners vis-à-vis their supporters and constituencies. In several instances, the leaders of terrorist groups have used their standing and influence as ‘living martyrs’ in order to pursue collective processes of de-radicalisation and disengagement (for definitions of these terms, see Box 1), which have resulted in the declaration of permanent ceasefires and the standing down of armed groups. However, this chapter will show that such instances are rare, and the conditions in which they are likely to happen are limited.

Using data from Egypt, Algeria and Israel,<sup>69</sup> the analysis provided in the following demonstrates that collective disengagement and de-radicalisation is predicated upon the existence of strong and authoritative leadership; the existence of hierarchical command and control structures; and – not least – a conducive environment in which the leadership perceives that the armed campaign has faltered or is at risk of inflicting unacceptable losses to the group or its wider constituency.

The chapter argues that – if those conditions are in place – governments can (and should) play an active role in facilitating the process, for example by supporting the dialogue between leaderships and their grassroots; easing repressive measures for those willing to join the process; and, importantly, making available early release, financial support and other measures of socio-economic reintegration. Depending on the nature and character of the process, even measures of political reform and reconciliation may be appropriate.

### 4.1 Issue

Collective de-radicalisation and disengagement shares a number of characteristics with the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), which international institutions – especially the United Nations (UN) – have long practiced in former conflict zones. In essence, DDR is about facilitating the process whereby armed insurgent groups cease to engage in organised violence and their members are (re-)integrated into (post-conflict) civilian

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<sup>68</sup> Mairead Corrigan, quoted in Padraig O’Malley, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* (Belfast: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 268.

<sup>69</sup> The authors of the country case studies were Omar Ashour (Algeria and Egypt), and Boaz Ganor and Ophir Falk (Israel).

life, thus creating the foundations for economic recovery and development.

The literature on DDR is extensive,<sup>70</sup> and some of its concepts and practices are relevant to collective de-radicalisation and disengagement. It is equally important, however, to recognise the differences:

- DDR happens in the context of transitions from war to peace, and its instruments are aimed at assisting the implementation of existing peace agreements. This is not necessarily the case for collective de-radicalisation and disengagement, where ceasefires may have been declared but wider conflicts often remain unresolved and no formal political negotiations have taken place.
- DDR deals with issues that result from the standing down of an armed group, whereas collective de-radicalisation and disengagement focuses on facilitating the process whereby armed groups decide to stand down in the first place. In other words, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation happens before DDR has even started.

What DDR and collective disengagement and de-radicalisation share is their concern for the successful reintegration of insurgents and/or terrorists, which both regard as an essential benchmark for success. Unsurprisingly, then, it is in the areas of reinsertion and reintegration that lessons from DDR are most relevant to collective disengagement and de-radicalisation.

### *Pre-conditions*

Collective disengagement or de-radicalisation attempts to bring about a process which leads to large numbers of terrorists – typically, the vast majority, if not all, of the members of an armed group – changing their attitudes towards the use of violent means or the pursuit of extremist aims. Two conditions are critical:

- The armed groups in question need to have *functioning leaderships* which support and facilitate the process. To some extent, therefore, the process of collective disengagement and de-radicalisation is ‘top down’, because it typically emerges from, and is actively pursued by, groups’ leaderships.
- Armed groups have to be *hierarchically structured*, so that any decision to abandon violence – taken by the leadership and negotiated in partnership with the grassroots – will be adhered to by the organisation as a whole. Collective de-radicalisation and disengagement is less likely to succeed in networked or ‘leaderless’ organisations where leaderships find it harder to influence, or even reach, their membership.

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Mark Knight, ‘Guns, Camps and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 41(4) (2004), pp. 499 – 516; Robert Muggah, ‘No Magic Bullet: A Critical Perspective on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Weapons Reduction in Post-conflict Contexts’, *The Round Table*, 94(379) (2005), pp. 239-52; Peter Swarbrick, ‘Avoiding Disarmament Failure: The Critical Link in DDR’, *Small Arms Survey*, February 2007; Sigrid Willibald, ‘Does money work? Cash transfers to ex-combatants in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes’, *Disasters*, 30(3) (2006), pp. 316-39.

Ideally, therefore, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation requires most of the group – including its leadership – to be incarcerated and their command and control structures to have remained largely intact.

## *Challenges*

Governments rarely provide the initial impetus for processes of collective de-radicalisation and disengagement, but they can be critical in assisting the process and leading it to a successful conclusion. In doing so, governments need to:

- Recognise changes in attitudes and beliefs among armed groups' leaderships;
- Open appropriate channels of communication through which collective de-radicalisation and disengagement efforts can be supported;
- Provide the right mix of sanctions and inducements (the proverbial 'carrots and sticks') that will keep the process on track and move it towards a successful conclusion;
- Enable the release and re-integration of terrorists and/or insurgents, ensuring that any return to violence remains unlikely.

How a number of selected countries have addressed these challenges will be examined in the next section.

## **4.2 Practice**

This section looks at three countries which meet the pre-conditions for collective de-radicalisation and disengagement: they have all been confronted with armed groups whose structures have been hierarchical and whose imprisoned members are concentrated in so-called 'security prisons', where the groups maintain command and control structures.

Even so, only two of the countries – Algeria and Egypt – have seen actual disengagement and de-radicalisation processes succeed. The third case – Israel – was included in the sample to demonstrate some of the difficulties and obstacles in making collective disengagement and de-radicalisation processes happen. Indeed, the analysis will show that the advantages of dealing with leader-led, hierarchically structured organisations can easily turn into stumbling blocks when the wider environment is negative and/or leaderships are reluctant to end their campaigns, making both collective and individual disengagement and de-radicalisation efforts impossible.

The section is divided into three parts, dealing with leadership and environment, repression, and inducements respectively.

## *Leadership and environment*

The case studies in the sample show that authoritative leadership and a conducive environment are essential to making collective processes of disengagement and de-radicalisation work. Equally important, however, is governments' ability to recognise these conditions and help facilitate the implementation of programmes.

The Egyptian Islamic Group (IG) is the best known example of prison-based collective disengagement and de-radicalisation. Faced with defeat, the loss of popular support and the prospect of an 'Algerian-type' civil war, the IG's leadership decided to embark on a comprehensive re-interpretation of the group's doctrine on the legitimacy of using armed force, which resulted in the publication of 25 volumes. In 2002, the leaders – who had themselves been imprisoned – toured prison facilities across the country, holding discussions (first) with middle-ranking commanders and (then) the group's foot soldiers. By the end, nearly 15,000 militants had agreed to follow the new course. The process led to no significant splits, and no terrorist attacks or armed operations have been attributed to the IG since 1999.

The Egyptian government's initial response to the process, however, was marked by a lack of interest, if not suspicion. For four years after the group first declared a ceasefire in 1997, there was little support. Only after the September 11 attacks in 2001 did the government – now under intense pressure from the United States – begin to help the IG's leadership in promoting the new course, mostly by organising the leadership's ten month tour of the country's security prisons. Even so, the government's initial lack of response and even tacit support had not only slowed down the IG's collective process, it also (unnecessarily) prolonged the group's campaign of violence.

The disengagement of the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in Algeria took place in the second half of the 1990s and concluded with the standing down of the group in 2000. In contrast to Egypt, it was the government which first approached the group in 1993. Three attempts to negotiate a settlement with the imprisoned leadership of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS; the AIS' political parent organisation) led to nothing, partly because the FIS' leadership still felt confident about its chances of toppling the government. By 1997, the situation had changed dramatically, with Algeria having descended into outright civil war and the various insurgent groups rapidly losing support among the population (see below). This time, the decision to embark on a process of collective disengagement was taken by the AIS' *military* leaders, who had hidden in the group's mountain strongholds. In the end, the political leadership, though reluctant, had little choice but to accept the outcome of a process which most of their imprisoned comrades (and their families) supported.

In Israel, neither the political nor the military leaderships of the most important Palestinian groups – Fatah and Hamas – have showed any interest in pursuing collective de-radicalisation or disengagement outside the context of a negotiated political settlement. Even when they were under military and political pressure, the groups always insisted on being treated as equals, negotiating on behalf of 'their people' and achieving the settlement of the conflict as a whole. As a consequence, there have been no known attempts by the Israeli

government to facilitate prison-based collective disengagement or de-radicalisation efforts.

## *Repression*

The question of whether government repression helps or hinders disengagement and de-radicalisation efforts touches on wider debates about the relative benefits of 'hard' and 'soft' counter-terrorism approaches, which this report will not be able to resolve.<sup>71</sup> In the three cases that form part of the sample, government repression has triggered conflicting responses, which – depending on context and environment – have led to further radicalisation or intensified efforts at promoting disengagement and de-radicalisation.

In the Egyptian case, government repression in the 1990s – which involved the mass arrests of Islamist sympathisers and their systematic mistreatment in prison – further radicalised sections of the Egyptian population as well as the prisoners themselves. At the same time, it seems clear that – over time – the government's excesses contributed to the IG leadership's decision to re-think and, eventually, change their mind on the use of violence. Violent jihad, the group's leadership argued, could be justified only if it furthered the movement's aims, yet the group's violent campaign had achieved the opposite: mosques had been closed, preachers banned, the families of activists were suffering, and most of the movement had ended up behind bars. According to one of the group's leaders, if God was on their side, none of this would have happened, which meant that something had to be 'theologically wrong' with the decision to confront the regime.

In Algeria, AIS' response was similar, even if the context was entirely different. The country had slid into civil war, with massacres of civilians being committed by all sides, principally the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the government. The massacres often took place in AIS strongholds while most of the group's active members had been arrested and deported to detention centres in the Algerian desert, leaving their families defenceless. The public, on the other hand, often failed to distinguish between different Islamist groups, with the (paradoxical) result that the AIS, whose supporters had been among the principal victims of the GIA and government repression, felt it needed to disengage from violence in order to stop the massacres and prevent the loss of public support. In the leadership's view, the situation had become untenable – the 'jihad', in the words of an AIS leader, 'was about to be buried by its own sons'.

In Israel, despite the ongoing conflict, the situation never reached a point at which repression alone would have 'broken' any of the Palestinian groups. Palestinian security prisoners in Israeli prisons have not been exposed to the kind of systematic mistreatment that used to be common in Egypt. Unlike Algeria, the situation in the Palestinian territories has never quite reached the point of sliding into civil war, even if the conflict has imposed significant strains on the civilian population for several decades. Moreover, the Israeli government's practice of releasing prisoners in return for kidnapped Israeli soldiers or as 'goodwill gestures' in the context of peace negotiations has not encouraged armed groups to change their

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<sup>71</sup> See Ronald Crelinsten, *Counterterrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), Chapters 2 and 4.

behaviour but – rather – allowed them to ‘sit tight’ and wait until it is their turn to be set free.<sup>72</sup>

## *Inducements*

Inducements and aftercare are important elements of most disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes, because they provide incentives for engaging with the process and then sustain the transition from prison back into mainstream society. In certain cases, collective programmes may go as far as offering political concessions as part of a negotiated ‘package’ that, more typically, includes promises of early release and cash payments.

Once the Egyptian government started embracing the IG’s disengagement initiative, it quickly moved from suspicion towards active facilitation. Not only did the repression stop and prisoners were offered relaxed prison regimes (including, for example, better meals, more visits, better opportunities to mix with other inmates, etc.), the government organised the leadership’s tour of the country’s security prisons and even helped with the publication of its books. Also, for the first time, the group’s efforts were covered, and praised, on state television.

Critical was the promise of early release for those who had joined the programme. Of the 15,000 IG prisoners in 2002, 13,000 had been released by 2006. In 2007, only a few hundred were left. Furthermore, those who have been released now receive ‘pensions’, which – though administered by the IG – are widely thought to be funded with the assistance or, indeed, direct support from the government.

In Algeria, the government went even further. Not only were the AIS’ prisoners released back into society, they received promises of employment (which, however, were not always kept). Families of FIS activists who had been victimised by the government were paid compensation, and some former members were given permission to wear guns in order to protect themselves against revenge attacks.

Political concessions formed an essential part of the ‘package’ that had been negotiated with the Algerian government. It committed to reducing the military’s influence over public life, and gave assurances that former members of the AIS would be allowed to establish political parties and participate in political life. Again, not all these promises have been kept, but they illustrate the scale of the government’s commitment and the very wide-ranging nature of the process, which – in many respects – resembled a more traditional peace process.

Once more, the Israeli case demonstrates why it is impossible to separate disengagement and de-radicalisation efforts – whether collective or individual (see Chapter 5) – from the wider political environment. Even if inducements were to be provided to prisoners belonging to certain armed groups, or factions within those groups,

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**72** That said, the Israeli government’s rapprochement with Fatah, and the consequent relaxation of prison regimes for Fatah prisoners, especially when compared to supporters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, has made a significant contribution to stabilising the relations between Israel and the (Fatah led) Palestinian Authority. It provides a good illustration of how prison policy can serve wider political imperatives, and may – at some point – provide an important element of peace negotiations. The author wishes to thank Marc Linning for this insight and idea.

it is far from clear whether they would convince them to engage in collective disengagement or de-radicalisation. Short of a comprehensive settlement, participating prisoners would be released back into hostile communities, with participants likely to be shunned by their families and neighbours. For such programmes to work, all participants would have to receive resettlement aid and move to entirely different locations, which neither the prisoners nor their families would find acceptable.

### 4.3 Recommendations

Processes of collective disengagement and de-radicalisation have proved powerful and effective in facilitating insurgents' and terrorists' transition from violence to non-violent activism. However, it should be remembered that the circumstances in which they are likely to succeed are quite limited:

- They seem to work best when the group's military leadership and most of their followers are behind bars.
- They also presuppose that groups have strong and authoritative leaderships, which are able to exercise a degree of hierarchical control.
- Most importantly perhaps, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation tends to happen when the feasibility and/or viability of the armed campaign has come into question. The process, therefore, requires a conducive environment, that is, a situation in which the leadership perceives that the armed campaign has faltered or is at risk of inflicting unacceptable losses to the group or its wider constituency.

Even when those conditions are met, the local and historical context may dictate different kinds of approaches. For instance, the Israeli case shows that collective disengagement or de-radicalisation are unlikely unless they are accompanied by a full settlement of the conflict. In fact, it may at times be difficult to distinguish the two, especially when – as in the Algerian case – political concessions form part of the 'package' that is offered to the terrorists and/or insurgents.

When success is judged to be likely, governments should help facilitate the process:

- They can support the process of reform and dialogue, for example by allowing reforming leaderships to meet with their followers; relax prison regimes for those who have signed up to the programme; and disseminate their writings and publications.
- Repression is a double-edged sword. While it may be useful in 'breaking' an armed group's will to carry on and shift their perception from 'possible victory' to 'certain defeat' and 'unacceptable losses', it may also have radicalised many prisoners in the first place.

- Whatever role repression plays prior to the beginning of a process of collective disengagement and de-radicalisation, the cases that have been looked at seem to show that – once a process has begun – the easing of repressive measures provides an immediate reward for those who have signed up to the programme.
- Inducements and aftercare can make an important contribution to sustaining the success of collective disengagement and de-radicalisation. Early release is by far the most important inducement for those still in prison, while financial support and/or employment appear to be critical in ensuring that armed groups and their members remain peaceful.

The case of Algeria showed that political reform and reconciliation may form part of a 'deal' that brings about collective de-radicalisation and disengagement. This raises important questions about the nature and identity of the process: if a full 'package' is negotiated that includes the standing down of the armed groups in return for political concessions, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation may turn into a fully-fledged peace process and benefit from drawing on the full set of instruments provided by conflict resolution and peace-making.

## 5 Individual De-radicalisation and Disengagement

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A small sign at the Bagram detention facility in Afghanistan sums up the approach that underpins individual disengagement and de-radicalisation. It reads: 'Turning Taliban into productive citizens of Afghanistan one detainee at a time'.<sup>73</sup> Afghanistan has only recently started 'rolling out' individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes across the country's Afghan-run prisons, but programmes in other countries – aimed primarily at Islamist militants – have been in existence for several years. Nearly a dozen countries are believed to have carried out such programmes, yet – despite the considerable publicity they have attracted – systematic evaluations of their content and underlying principles are rare.

Examining programmes in Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Saudi-Arabia, Singapore, and Yemen,<sup>74</sup> this chapter demonstrates that programmes are too different and too dependent on local context and conditions to measure success and compare their results across the board. Nevertheless, some of the key 'ingredients' that seem to be underlying the more effective and sophisticated programmes have been identified. They include: a mix of prison programming, consisting primarily of religious re-education and vocational training; credible interlocutors who can relate to prisoners' personal and psychological needs; consistent efforts to facilitate prisoners' transition into social networks away from extremism; and the systematic fostering of long-term commitments towards family, community, and the state, which aim to reduce opportunities for re-offending and increase the social and material cost of doing so.

The chapter stresses that no one size fits all. What works in one case may be counter-productive in another, which means that programmes always need to be adapted to the specific context in which they are run. Equally important, programmes cannot be judged in isolation from the wider social and political context in which they take place. Whether they can make a substantial, strategic contribution to ending a campaign of terrorism often depends on whether the external conditions are conducive. Even if they are not, their positive and outward-looking approach can send a powerful message, which will prevent extremists from exploiting prison as a grievance.

### 5.1 Issue

The programmes that are discussed in this chapter aim to provide structures through which individual de-radicalisation and disengagement can be facilitated. These structures can be fairly loose and ad hoc, but they all share the aim of reducing the number of active terrorists in a given society by helping individual terrorists

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Marisa Porges' case study report on Afghanistan.

<sup>74</sup> The authors of the country case studies were Chris Boucek (Saudi-Arabia and Yemen), Rohan Gunaratna (Singapore), Arie Kruglanski and Michelle Gelfand (Philippines), and Marisa Porges (Afghanistan).

abandon terrorism and easing their re-integration into mainstream society.<sup>75</sup>

As Bjørgo and Horgan have pointed out, all individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes consist of measures that deal with 'push' and/or 'pull' factors. Push factors are the reasons why individuals may have started having doubts about their involvement in terrorist groups, including, for example, disillusionment with the group's goals, its methods, leaders, social relations, their own status within the group and the pressures of being underground. Pull factors, on the other hand, are comprised of the 'incentives' that may attract individuals to life outside terrorism, such as the availability of amnesties or reduced sentences, education and training, financial inducements, as well as the possibility of establishing new social networks and a family.<sup>76</sup> Where programmes differ is in emphasis, implementation and in how various measures are combined.

The difference between individual and collective disengagement and de-radicalisation lies in the former's focus on dealing with individual members rather than insurgent or terrorist groups as a whole. This explains why individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes are all based in prisons, where individuals can be assumed to be unhappy about their situation (that is, being in captivity), and it may be easier to isolate them from group discipline and other external influences.

## Debates

Individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes have caused much debate and controversy in recent years.<sup>77</sup> The most obvious point of contention is the idea behind such programmes. Not everyone agrees that terrorists, who have been found guilty (or are strongly suspected) of the most heinous crimes, should be released back into society and receive 'rewards' for ceasing an activity they should not have started in the first place. By contrast, the programmes' supporters maintain that individual disengagement and de-radicalisation is effective in reforming individuals, that it saves lives and prevents future atrocities from taking place. There is no simple solution for the *ethical trade-offs* involved in this debate, nor can one or the other view be dismissed easily. Indeed, as will be shown, the limits of what is ethically and politically acceptable in a given society plays a significant role in shaping the programme and may determine its sustainability and effectiveness.

A more practical debate revolves around *measuring the success of programmes*. Policymakers – understandably – want to understand how programmes compare and have researchers tell them which ones are most effective. Such comparisons, however, are not as straightforward as they seem. As Chris Boucek points

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<sup>75</sup> Tore Bjørgo, remarks at the 'Countering Violent Extremism' conference in Amman, Jordan, 16 March 2010.

<sup>76</sup> John Horgan, 'Individual disengagement', pp. 21-2; Tore Bjørgo, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right' in Bjørgo, *Leaving Terrorism*, pp. 36-40. Also Michael Jacobson, 'Terrorist Dropouts: Learning From Those Who Have Left', *Policy Focus #101*, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, January 2010, Chapter 2.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Shiraz Maher, 'A Betty Ford Clinic for Jihadis', *The Sunday Times*, 6 July 2008; Peter Neumann, 'Table Tennis for the Taliban', *Spiegel Online*, 28 January 2010; Marisa Porges and Jessica Stern, 'Getting Deradicalization Right', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2010.

out, recidivism rates ‘may not be the best metric with which to measure [relative] success’<sup>78</sup>, especially when many programmes have started only very recently and many years may be needed to gauge whether or not an individual has been fully ‘rehabilitated’. Moreover, programmes differ in relation to who is eligible, with many programmes excluding hardcore militants in favour of those who were only marginally involved. This skews the results and makes programmes which are open to all offenders look less successful than those which concentrate on the ‘easy’ cases.

The most significant obstacle to measuring success is undoubtedly the (often overlooked) fact that individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes do not occur in a political and societal vacuum, and that – consequently – the effectiveness of such programmes cannot be judged without considering the political circumstances in which they take place. For example, the disengagement programme in Iraq, which is widely seen as a success, may have produced entirely different results had it been introduced in 2006, when Iraq was on the brink of a civil war and the Sunni insurgency was gaining ground, instead of 2008, when the Sunni population had turned against the insurgents. In fact, General Douglas Stone, who commanded the U.S. detention facilities in the country at the time, went as far as conceding that ‘improved security’ – not the programme itself – had been critical in reducing recidivism rates.<sup>79</sup> Programmes’ effectiveness, therefore, may at times have little to do with any of their individual components but – rather – be related to the broader environment in which they are carried out, making comparisons that are based on the programmes’ content alone methodologically questionable.

A related debate concerns the *transferability* of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes. Many countries, including several Western states, have been playing with the idea of running their own ‘de-rad’ programmes. However, there is no one ‘template’ or ‘blueprint’ that could be copied and pasted. Not only do programmes depend on the context and (political) environment in which they are implemented, they often rely on uniquely local dynamics and structures – tribal customs in the Middle East, for example – that may be difficult to recreate elsewhere. Indeed, there seems to be an emerging consensus that no one size fits all: while certain general principles may apply everywhere, even the most appealing programmes have to be adapted to go with the grain of the societies in which they are set.

Perhaps the most thorny question is what role individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes can (and should) play in *relation to countries’ wider counter-terrorism strategies*. Are they a substitute for ‘hard’ counter-terrorism measures, or should they be treated as complementary? Can the difference they make be strategic, or are they more like ‘clean-up’ operations which should only be used once a particular terrorist campaign or insurgency is winding down anyway? In other words, are they worth all the money, effort, and attention they have recently received?

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<sup>78</sup> See Chris Boucek’s case study report on Saudi-Arabia.

<sup>79</sup> Anne Speckhard, ‘Prison and Community Based Disengagement and De-Radicalization Programs for Extremists Involved in Militant Jihadi Terrorism Ideologies and Activities’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, forthcoming.

## *Challenges*

Needless to say, this report will be unable to resolve all the dilemmas and debates that were outlined above. Nevertheless, in examining the programmes that formed part of the sample, a number of specific questions and challenges may help to inform the discussion:

- How have programmes addressed – and been conditioned – by the wider environment in which they were implemented?
- What kinds of incentives and instruments are deployed and in what combination?
- Who leads the programmes and how?
- How do programmes ensure that prisoners' disengagement and/or de-radicalisation is sustained after their release?

These questions will guide the analysis of six individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes in the next section.

## **5.2 Practice**

As Anne Speckhard and others have pointed out, prison-based disengagement and de-radicalisation has become 'fashionable' in recent years.<sup>80</sup> For reasons of time and scope, not all the existing programmes have been included in the sample – missing, for example, are Jordan, Iraq, Malaysia, and Qatar. In selecting the case studies, the intention was to ensure a good range of older and newly emerging programmes, and combine programmes that seemed highly sophisticated with those that appeared looser and more ad hoc. Hence, the sample includes the two most developed and best resourced programmes (Saudi-Arabia and Singapore) and two which relied mostly on individual initiative and had only limited resources at their disposal (Yemen and Indonesia). In addition, it comprises two programmes which – at the time of writing – have only been piloted and are yet to be rolled out across their respective countries (Afghanistan and the Philippines).

As always, it is important to keep in mind that this report can only provide the briefest insight, and that – for a full understanding – they need to be considered in greater detail and on their own merit. The first three variables that have been examined are often thought to be the core, prison-based elements of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes, namely the actual programming (vocational training and ideological/religious 're-education'); the role of interlocutors; and the availability of inducements and material incentives. The remaining variables look beyond the prison walls, considering the involvement of external stakeholders; after-care provisions; and the likely impact of the wider political and social environment.

## *Programming*

One of the most contentious debates among students of radicalisation is about the role of (religiously inspired) ideology in the process that leads to violent extremism. Does ideology matter, or has its role and significance been overrated at the expense of more

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

important factors, such as group relations and/or grievances?<sup>81</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that different approaches towards finding the right combination of religious and ideological 're-education' and other instruments of prison programming, especially education and professional training, can be found among the programmes in the sample.

Four of the programmes contain a substantive element of religious and ideological re-education – partly, one may argue, because they were inspired by each other. All of them share the notion of terrorists as 'victims' whose religious ideas are based on misinformation and a lack of proper knowledge about Islam, making re-education and reform both necessary and possible. The programme in Yemen, for example, which ran from 2002-05, consisted of a series of religious dialogues between prisoners and religious clerics, which aimed at convincing the prisoners that their justification for taking up violent 'jihad' had no basis in scripture. The Saudi programme, which emerged in 2004, initially adopted Yemen's strong emphasis on religious 're-education', with prisoners having to attend courses in which contentious religious concepts are discussed. Formally launched in 2003, the Singaporean Religious Rehabilitation Group has been led by religious clerics and understood religious re-education to be its core mission. The programme in the Philippines, which is about to be rolled out, will be modelled on the Singaporean experience and have a similar approach.

Despite the similar emphasis, the scope and content of the religious re-education efforts differs significantly. In Saudi-Arabia and Yemen, the authorities' ambitions have been fairly modest. In both cases, their focus has been on re-affirming the Islamic legitimacy of their respective regimes, avoiding more complicated questions such as the permissibility of 'jihad' abroad and/or against un-Islamic regimes. In Muslim minority countries, where the case for 'Islamic legitimacy' is more difficult to make, religious re-education has been more far-reaching and comprehensive. In Singapore and, by extension, the Philippines, the aim is to challenge and de-construct the full range of concepts that underlie and inform the Islamist militant movement.<sup>82</sup>

With the possible exception of Yemen, however, none of the programmes consist of religious or ideological re-education alone. As the Saudi programme has evolved, more emphasis has been put on fostering 'social responsibility' among prisoners, resulting in the creation of job training and education schemes, which are meant to provide the basis for a meaningful and socially secure existence. Furthermore both Saudi-Arabia and Singapore have recently added artistic classes to their programming.

By contrast, neither Indonesia nor Afghanistan pay much attention to religious re-education. Indonesia's first full programme, which ran from 2005 to 2007, had former terrorists (rather than religious clerics) as interlocutors (see below), and their central argument revolved around the strategic utility of armed force, not questions of principle or religious legitimacy. In Afghanistan's emerging programme, the assumption is that (Taliban) foot soldiers carry little ideological baggage, and that they are best served by

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Tore Bjørgo (ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*.

<sup>82</sup> For an overview of these concepts, see Brachman, *Global jihadism*, Chapter 2.

– in the first instance – separating them from the ‘ideologues’ and  
– then – providing them with useful skills (beginning, in many cases, with reading and writing) which will allow them to become valued, respected and socially responsible members of their communities upon their return.

Given the complexity of the programmes, it is difficult to say whether religious re-education or skills training, or any combination thereof, works best. The Yemeni programme, for example, is widely considered a failure, but – as will be shown – this cannot be explained by its reliance on religious dialogues alone. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, as the Saudi programme has evolved, it has progressively adopted additional instruments, indicating that the strong initial emphasis on religious re-education was no longer seen as sufficient.

Furthermore, the sample illustrates that the type of programming offered is informed, at least to some extent, by the needs and nature of the prisoner population. The creators of the Singaporean programme, for instance, assumed they were dealing with ‘ideologues’, who had been indoctrinated in the religious schools of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), whereas Taliban foot soldiers in Afghanistan are thought to be mostly untouched by ideology. If those assumptions are correct, both approaches – though different – may be correct.

## *Interlocutors*

Almost all of the programmes in the sample have come to recognise the critical role played by those who deliver the programme. The principal interlocutors in most of the programmes are religious clerics, who have been confronted with varying degrees of suspicion because of their association with the government.

In Yemen, the solution to this dilemma was for the clerics to challenge the prisoners to enter into a ‘dialogue of equals’, with both sides pledging to accept the other side’s arguments if they were seen as more plausible and convincing. (Needless to say, the government’s clerics won all rounds of this ‘competition’.) In Saudi-Arabia, Singapore and the Philippines, the approach has been to compensate for the clerics’ lack of perceived legitimacy with added social and psychological skills. In Singapore, for example, as well as being competent scholars of Islam, clerics need to train as counsellors and demonstrate their ability to relate to prisoners’ psychological needs. In Saudi-Arabia, clerics who are not seen as ‘brotherly’ are ruthlessly screened out, regardless of their religious qualifications or knowledge.

The two notable exceptions to having clerics as the principal interlocutors are Indonesia and Afghanistan. In Indonesia, the programme was run by former terrorists, who may not have possessed much religious knowledge but were nevertheless regarded as ‘credible’, if not ‘charismatic’, by many of the prisoners, in particular those they had personally recruited or trained.<sup>83</sup> The fledgling programme in Afghanistan, on the other hand, does not seem to have given much thought yet to identifying any principal interlocutor. Given how important their role in establishing credibility and social bonds, this may turn out to be a major shortcoming.

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**83** However, they were much less successful with prisoners who belonged to other groups or had no prior relationship to them.

## *Inducements*

The inducements offered to prisoners are the most public, and in many ways the most controversial, aspect of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes. Typically, inducements come in the form of more comforts during participants' time in prison; early release or amnesty; and financial assistance during and after their stay in incarceration. In the public's eye, these incentives are often perceived not as essential ingredients in the process of rehabilitation but, rather, as 'rewards for terrorism'.

Such perceptions exist not only in Western countries, where de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes are frequently regarded with suspicion, but also in the (non-Western) countries in which the programmes are carried out. Indeed, the governments that are currently running programmes have always had to gauge what level of 'generosity' towards terrorist prisoners would be acceptable, and this has undoubtedly played a role in preventing certain kinds of prisoners from taking part. In Yemen, for example, terrorists who were suspected to be guilty of 'serious offences' were excluded from the religious dialogues. In Saudi, individuals with 'blood on their hands' may participate in the programme but will not be released early.

Furthermore, there have been significant variations in the way in which material inducements have been delivered. At one end of the spectrum is the Indonesian approach, which saw former terrorists going into prisons with cash in their hands, handing out money to everyone who seemed willing to cooperate. By contrast, the Saudi programme provides very significant material incentives too, but it calibrates them more carefully, offering financial assistance to prisoners' families during their stay in prison as well as providing prisoners with the means for a new beginning (including cars, houses, and flat screen TVs) after their release. The Singaporean programme is more modest, but – like the Saudi programme – it combines support for prisoners' families during their incarceration with 're-settlement' aid after the prisoners have been released. It is safe to assume that the emerging programme in the Philippines will follow a similar model.

The only programme in which material incentives do not seem to play a major role is that in Afghanistan. Here, the thinking seems to be that early release, combined with the long-term effects of equipping prisoners with practical skills, education and the means to earn an independent livelihood, will more than outweigh any amount of (short-term) financial assistance. If this is seen to work, it could represent an interesting counter-point to the Saudi and Indonesian approaches. In either case, what clearly does *not* work is the Yemeni tactic of promising financial assistance and then not paying up, which is cited by many observers as one of the reasons why many participants in the Yemeni dialogues returned to violence.

## *External stakeholders*

All the individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes in the sample acknowledge that, for offenders to desist from deviant behaviour, it is essential to facilitate their re-integration into mainstream social networks, encouraging them to establish stable commitments outside extremist circles. Simply

put, the more committed a former terrorist is to social networks away from extremism, the fewer opportunities there will be to return to violence and the higher the (social) cost of re-offending.

The nature of the social networks which are being leveraged by individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes differ from country to country. Even so, all the programmes have identified the family as an important focal point. The most basic way of involving prisoners' families in the process of disengagement and de-radicalisation is by providing economic assistance or employment opportunities for wives and relatives, which – for instance – a more recent iteration of the Indonesian programme has incorporated. In Yemen, families were meant to vouch for the good behaviour of a former terrorist by signing a 'contract' with the government. In both cases, the involvement of families has been rather crude and rested on questionable assumptions, such as the idea that prisoners' wives and families are necessarily in need of economic assistance, or that families are always pro-government and will honour their commitment to ensuring 'good behaviour'.

More sophisticated mechanisms exist in Saudi-Arabia and Singapore. In Saudi, families' needs are individually assessed and tailored to their particular needs. Throughout the programme, 'family reconciliation' is a priority, and their active participation in aspects of the programme is actively encouraged. (Where prisoners are unmarried, the authorities are known to have helped finding wives and paid for weddings.) Similarly, Singapore seeks to include prisoners' families in religious re-education and psychological counselling sessions and, thereby, make them active stakeholders in the process from day one. The underlying approach and emphasis, however, is markedly different: whereas the Saudi programme assumes prisoners have been abandoned by their families and are in need of 'reconciliation', Singapore believes that prisoners' families are radical too and should be 'reformed'. Though different, both approaches may be effective in their respective environments, reflecting the peculiar dynamics of violent extremism in the two countries.

Going beyond families, many programmes have aimed to mobilise larger social networks. In Saudi and Yemen, for example, prisoners' tribes are expected to vouch for a prisoners' good behaviour. Singapore has involved community and professional bodies in its rehabilitation programme, and a similar approach is likely to be adopted in the Philippines. The case of Afghanistan, on the other hand, demonstrates the very substantial obstacles to reaching out to external stakeholders when a country is effectively in a state of civil war. Despite attempts to involve village elders and organise symbolic 'welcome ceremonies', the programme struggles to overcome tribes' hostility and the difficulties involved in travelling around the country.

### *After-care*

In the context of disengagement and de-radicalisation, after-care is designed to help prisoners ease back into society and sustain their newfound commitment to refraining from terrorism. Accordingly, the more sophisticated programmes invest considerable resources in making after-care provisions effective.

The Saudi programme is undoubtedly the most extensive. It creates so many obligations and personal commitments on behalf of the former prisoners that it would seem almost irrational – if not physically impossible – for anyone to return to violence. In addition to periodical ‘check-ups’ with members of the security services, Saudi-style after-care involves the above-mentioned social and economic assistance for former prisoners and their families, help with finding wives, jobs and even start-up funds for budding entrepreneurs. Equally important are regular meetings with their interlocutors, the religious clerics (see above), whose continued association with the former prisoners eases their transition from prison to society and allows them to carry on a social relationship which is likely to have been critical in their transformation.

Singapore uses a similar approach, even if the ‘golden handcuffs’ on offer are less generous than the Saudis’. In Indonesia, the approach towards after-care seems to have evolved. Initially, little systematic after-care was provided, except for former prisoners’ relationships with the former terrorists who had convinced them to abandon their commitment to violence. More recently, the Indonesian authorities have put into place extensive ‘livelihood’ programmes, which make former prisoners and their wives participate in co-operative enterprises. Whether this will deliver the expected benefits remains to be seen: while providing former prisoners with a stable income, the scheme does not replace their social networks. On the contrary, it cements their relationships with other former extremists and may expose them to the danger of ‘re-radicalisation’.

Yemen is the best example of how *not* to do it. The government showed little interest in after-care and made few resources available. Rather than receiving the support and assistance which they had been promised, former extremists often ended up being the victims of police harassment. It became obvious that the government’s commitment to the programme was low, and this – as well as many other factors – explains why many of the programme’s participants returned to violence. In Afghanistan, on the other hand, the government and the Coalition forces would very much like to provide after-care, but are prevented from doing so by the turbulent conditions in the country. As even the authorities admit, systematic follow-up will be difficult, if not impossible, and this may well turn out to be the programme’s Achilles heel.

## *Environment*

As noted above, individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes cannot be looked at in isolation from the wider social and political environment in which they are carried out. In judging their success, it is vital, therefore, to consider external conditions and how they are likely to have influenced the programmes’ outcomes.

Afghanistan, for example, launches its programme in the worst possible conditions. Not only does the ongoing insurgency prevent the implementation of after-care and the building of relationships with external stakeholders (see above), former prisoners will be exposed to all kinds of radicalising influences when they return to their villages. Unlike Iraq, where the US introduced a similar programme in 2007-08, the communities from which Taliban are recruited have not yet turned against the insurgents. On the contrary, as long as the Taliban seem

to be winning the wider conflict, it is doubtful whether any strategy that relies on ‘turning Taliban into productive citizens... one detainee at a time’ will make a meaningful contribution to turning the tide.

Contrasting the programmes in Indonesia and Yemen provides further compelling insight. Both programmes were highly unstructured, and they both relied on the personal initiative of a small number of individuals. In many ways, in fact, they were both deeply flawed, yet the Indonesian programme and its successors are widely considered successes, whereas the programme in Yemen is seen as a failure. The difference lies in the external conditions under which they were taking place. In Indonesia, local conflicts in Poso and Maluku were winding down, with the programmes serving as ‘clean-up operations’, dealing with men who were unlikely to return to violence now that their respective causes had gone away. In Yemen, by contrast, local conflicts were starting to intensify when the programme was launched, and global developments – especially the invasion of Iraq – appeared to confirm rather than contradict the former prisoners’ earlier beliefs.

Even on the Saudi programme, which has attracted most of the attention in recent years, the jury is still out. Hailed as a success by the Saudi government itself, it is likely to have benefited substantially from the Saudi population’s increasing rejection of Al Qaeda and its methods. Whether its overall success can be sustained, and how this will affect recidivism rates, remains to be seen.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The emergence of individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes has added a new – and hitherto unknown – instrument in countering terrorism. Their novelty means that experts and policymakers still do not know enough about how these programmes work, and what contribution they can make to the fight against terrorism.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, one of the biggest difficulties lies in measuring success, as different rules on eligibility, changing external conditions and local contexts, and the short period for which most of these programmes have been running, have produced data that is difficult to judge and nearly impossible to compare.

This report has found no solution to this problem – in fact, if anything, it argues that a solution is unlikely to be found. Nevertheless, based on the sample, the following observations can be made:

- The more developed programmes contain a mix of different kinds of programming, typically combining ideological and/or religious re-education with vocational training.
- Credible interlocutors are key. Also important is their ability to establish ‘brotherly’ relationships and relate to the prisoners’ personal and psychological needs.

- Good programmes pay attention to facilitating prisoners' transition from prison back into mainstream society, typically by providing them with the means for a new beginning and by establishing (or re-establishing) social networks away from extremism.
- One of the overriding aims is to reduce opportunities for re-offending and increase the social and material cost of doing so. Much of the activities in sophisticated programmes are consequently geared towards locking prisoners into commitments and obligations towards family, community, and the state.
- Inducements play an important role in every programme, but material incentives do not seem to be decisive on their own.

These principles can help guide country's efforts in bringing elements of disengagement and de-radicalisation to their own prison systems, even – and especially – when they are reluctant, for political or other reasons, to establish a full and formalised disengagement or de-radicalisation programme of their own.

Another important finding is that seemingly effective programmes cannot be simply 'copied and pasted'. One size does not fit all. What works in one case can be counter-productive in another. For programmes to be effective, their scope, structure and instruments must reflect local contexts and conditions, in particular:

- the prisoner population, and their individual and collective needs and motivations;
- the nature and ideology of the groups to which prisoners used to belong;
- the society from which they originate, its structure and customs;
- the dynamics of the wider conflict and other external conditions, which may affect the programme's outcome.

Furthermore, in order for programmes to be sustainable, they need to consider what the societies in which they take place find politically and ethically acceptable.

Finally, what contribution can such programmes make? How important are they as instruments in the fight against terrorism? The analysis in this chapter shows that they can be significant when both external conditions and the wider political environment are conducive. In particular, they can play an important role in facilitating the transition from conflict to peace when the political momentum is no longer with the terrorists and/or conflicts are winding down.

Whether they can make a substantial, strategic contribution on their own remains to be proven. The difficulties in Afghanistan show that an over-reliance on individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes as the primary means of conflict resolution or counter-terrorism would be disastrous as long as the overall situation continues to deteriorate. More generally, it should always be remembered that disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes can never be judged in isolation from the wider political and social context in which they are carried out.

That, of course, does not mean that they are pointless:

- Even when external conditions are adverse and programmes are unlikely, therefore, to make a substantial contribution to reducing the number of people engaged in terrorism, they may prevent extremists from exploiting prison as a grievance.
- Examples of individuals who have abandoned terrorist groups are a powerful tool in discouraging others from joining, especially by offering a credible counter-balance to the radical narrative.<sup>84</sup>
- De-radicalised or disengaged individuals are more likely to cooperate with the authorities in a meaningful way. They may aid on-going investigations, serve as government witnesses or work with prison authorities to encourage other prisoners to abandon violent associations.<sup>85</sup>
- Like terrorism and radicalisation, successful disengagement and de-radicalisation can be contagious. Only recently, the example set by the Saudi programme has prompted Islamist militant prisoners in neighbouring Jordan to ask for religious counselling and opportunities to 'de-radicalise' of their own.<sup>86</sup> The impact of disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes, in other words, can be truly global.

Most importantly, individual de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes show that prisons are not just about locking people away, but that they can make a real and positive contribution to tackling problems of radicalisation and terrorism in society as a whole.

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<sup>84</sup> The author's report is grateful to Vanessa Haas Hood for this idea.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Hamed El Said, remarks at the 'Countering Violent Extremism' conference in Amman, Jordan, 16 March 2010.

# Conclusion

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Prisons matter. Often ignored by the public and policymakers, they are important vectors in the process of radicalisation, and they can be leveraged in the fight against it.

Much of the public debate about prisons and terrorism is about locking people away. This report has aimed to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the role prisons can play in radicalising people – and in reforming them. In doing so, it has analysed the policies and approaches of 15 countries, identifying trade-offs and dilemmas but also principles and best practices that will help governments and policymakers spot new ideas and avoid costly and counterproductive mistakes.

Take, for example, prison regimes for terrorists. Governments everywhere have had to address a trade-off between wanting to treat terrorists ‘just like other prisoners’ and preventing them from mobilising outside support, recreating operational command structures, and radicalising others. The report showed that there are no hard and fast rules about whether terrorist prisoners should be concentrated, separated and/or isolated. In fact, most of the countries that have been looked at practice a policy of dispersal and (partial) concentration, which distributes terrorists among a small number of high security prisons. Even within such mixed regimes, however, it rarely seems to be a good idea to bring together leaders with followers and mix ideologues with hangers-on.

The wider, and perhaps even more important, problem is that – in most of the countries that have been looked at – prison regimes for terrorists are informed by the demand for security before everything else. While understandable, the ‘security first’ approach has resulted in missed opportunities to promote reform. Many prison services seem to believe that the imperatives of security and reform are incompatible. In reality, though, reform does not need to come at the expense of security. Prison services should be more ambitious in promoting positive influences inside prison, and develop more innovative approaches in facilitating prisoners’ transition back into mainstream society.

Another issue which this report has devoted much attention to is that of prison-based radicalisation. Prisons are often said to have become breeding grounds for radicalisation. This should come as no surprise. Prisons are ‘places of vulnerability’, which produce ‘identity seekers’, ‘protection seekers’ and ‘rebels’ in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish. While the extent of the problem remains unclear, the potential for prison radicalisation is significant, and the issue clearly needs to be addressed.

Based on the research, it seems obvious that over-crowding and under-staffing amplify the conditions that lend themselves to radicalisation. Badly run prisons also create the physical and ideological space in which extremist recruiters can operate at free will and monopolise the discourse about religion and politics.

For many prison systems, therefore, the first and most important recommendation is to improve general conditions, avoid overcrowding, train staff, and provide meaningful programming that allows prisoners to develop stable inmate identities. Prison imams are important in denying religious space to extremists, but they are not a panacea.

Not all the findings in this report are negative. The report shows that, while certain countries fall short of even the most basic good practices, others have recognised the enormous potential for prisons to become net contributors in the fight against terrorism, and have encouraged – sometimes sponsored – initiatives that seek to promote disengagement and de-radicalisation.

For example, where groups are hierarchical and have strong, authoritative leaderships, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation becomes possible. Such processes have to be carefully managed. When political concessions form part of the ‘deal’ between the government and the terrorists, collective disengagement and de-radicalisation may, in fact, assume the character of a fully-fledged peace process, and requires the necessary skills, resources, and – above all – patience.

Individual disengagement and de-radicalisation, on the other hand, remains understudied and is often misunderstood – despite all the publicity that programmes have attracted in recent years. Looking at six individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes in the Middle East and South East Asia, the report has identified key principles, which will help policymakers understand the phenomenon and identify elements of best practice that can be adopted in their own prison systems.

Whether individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes can make a strategic contribution to bringing a terrorist campaign to an end remains to be proven. The programmes that have been examined suggest that they can – as long as the political momentum is no longer with the insurgents and other external conditions are conducive. An over-reliance on individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes as the *primary* means of fighting terrorism should be avoided, therefore – they complement rather than substitute other instruments in the fight against terrorism.

In bringing together the experiences of 15 countries, the report has attempted to show the diversity of policy and practice across the world. Not every lesson may be relevant or applicable in every context, but – taken together – they demonstrate the enormous possibilities for prisons to make a positive and significant contribution to countering terrorism.

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Needless to say, any and all mistakes in this report are the author's alone.



## Further Reading

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