Reintegrating the Radicalized: Challenges, Lessons Learned, and How to Overcome Barriers

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What is NSI Reachback?

The Joint Staff, Deputy Director for Global Operations (DDGO), jointly with other elements in the Joint Staff, Services, and United States Government (USG) Agencies, has established a Reachback capability based on the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team's global network of scholars and area experts. It provides Combatant Commands with population-based and regional expertise in support of ongoing operations. The Reachback team combines written and interview elicitations with additional research and analyses to provide concise responses to time-sensitive questions.

This report responds to one of a series of questions posed by USCENTCOM about the strategic implications of destabilizing population dynamics within the Central Region.[1]

Table of Contents

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[1] Please contact Sarah Canna (scanna@nsiteam.com or sarah.a.canna.ctr@mail.mil) for more details related to SMA's "Assessment of Strategic Implications of Population Dynamics in the Central Region" study.

Question of Focus

[B4] How do you reintegrate radicalized people back into society? Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have centers focused on this problem. What should the international community do with people who cannot be reintegrated into society? Are there lessons from other regions on reintegration and reconciliation that could be applied to the Central Region?

Reintegrating the Radicalized: Challenges, Lessons Learned, and How to Overcome Barriers[2]

## Defining Reintegration and Distinguishing Related Terms

We begin by defining reintegration and distinguishing it from other concepts with which it is sometimes conflated. Reintegration is often discussed in the context of disengagement, demobilization, deradicalization, counter-radicalization, and reconciliation. However, no single, agreed-upon definition exists for these terms in the related literature, which leads to ambiguity regarding their conceptual boundaries (Crowell, 2017; Horgan, 2008; Monahan, 2012; Marsden, 2015). For the purposes of this discussion, we define *reintegration* as a process by which ex-combatants or associates assume functional roles in society. This conceptualization can be contrasted with *disengagement*, which involves a literal movement away from violence; *demobilization,* which is the process of discharging individuals from their roles as active combatants in armed forces or groups; and *deradicalization*,[3] which refers to a cognitive shift away from supporting violence as a means for achieving desired goals. Like deradicalization, *reconciliation* refers to a primarily psychological process that involves healing relationships and creating acceptance for ex-combatants in society. While the "fully realized product" of reintegration is social rehabilitation of former combatants (Schulhofer-Wohl & Sambanis, 2010), "the fully realized product of reconciliation is the achievement of a sustainable peace, including the cessation of violence" (Kuznar, Stevenson, & Pagano, 2018).

In order to successfully execute reintegration and reconciliation (R&R), it is important to understand how R&R fit within an overarching framework for peace. While R&R are the terminal phases of the conflict resolution process and are crucial for an enduring peace, the process may also include disengagement, deradicalization, and counter-radicalization.[4] R&R can occur without deradicalization or where deradicalization is executed at the same time as R&R. Of course, successful R&R is more likely to be achieved if combatants have foregone violence and undergone a psychological shift away from their militant motivations. We provide an overview of these terms and their relationships to one another in *Figure 1* below.

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[2] The following subject matter experts kindly contributed to this analysis: **Dr. Mia Bloom** (Georgia State University), **Dr. Sarah Marsden** (Lancaster University), **Dr. Fathali Moghaddam** (Georgetown University), and **Dr. Siobhan O'Neil** (United Nations University).

[3] More detailed analysis on the various types of deradicalization can be found in the other SMA USCENTCOM Tab B reports. Please contact George Popp at gpopp@nsiteam.com to request the reports.

[4] In some cases, R&R may not require deradicalization or counter-radicalization, as the motivational factors that gave rise to violence did not result in radicalization of the violent individual. For example, a distinction can be made between conflicts where extremist ideology or behavior is prominent (e.g., jihadist insurgencies where deradicalization is critical to post-conflict peace processes) and more traditional conflicts (e.g., inter-state conflicts, where deradicalization may not be necessary).
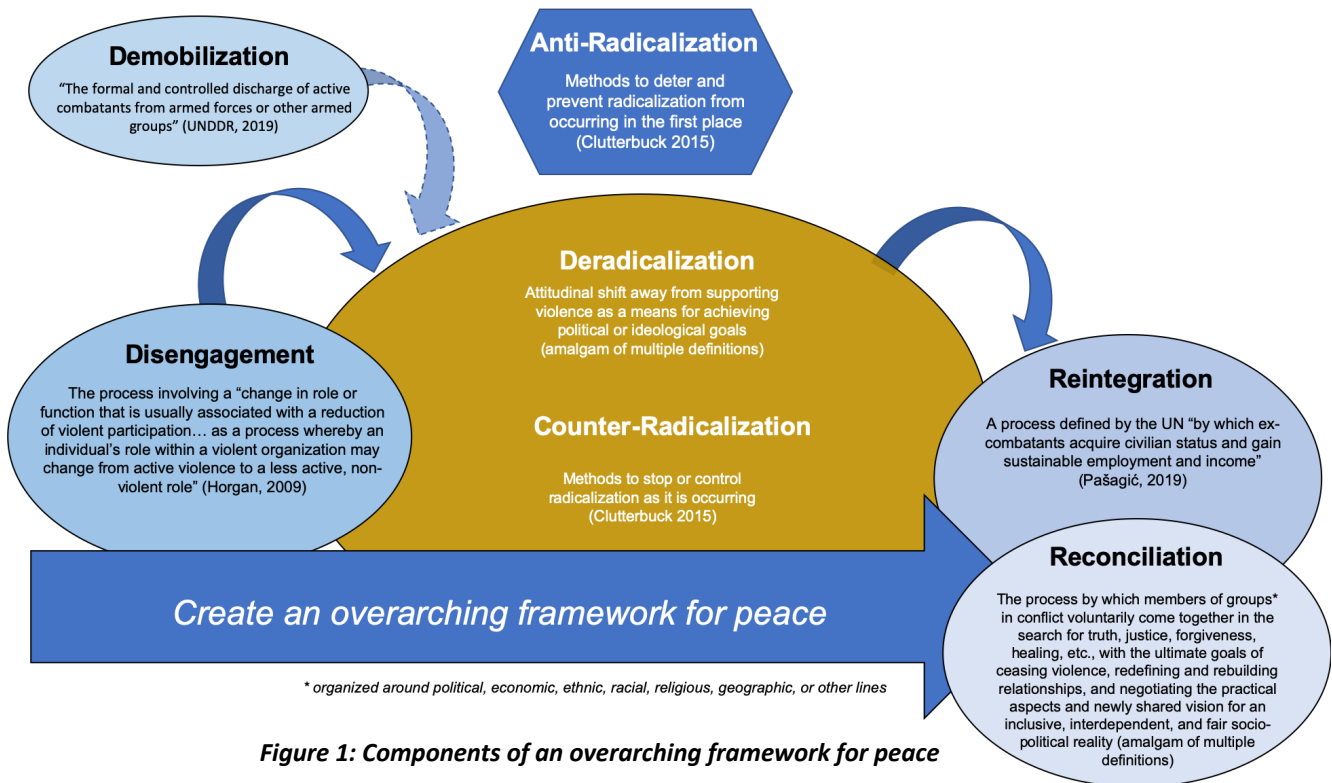
Figure 1: Components of an overarching framework for peace

Deriving Lessons for Conducting Successful Reintegration and Reconciliation

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the considerable challenges associated with deriving general lessons for conducting successful R&R. First, there is no single approach to R&R; instead, there are many variations in how programs are structured, the fundamental assumptions driving different approaches, program components, and how the program components are implemented. Second, the empirical evidence base is both narrow and based largely on Western populations, limiting the degree to which findings can be confidently generalized (Marsden, 2019).[5] Third, reintegration and reconciliation processes are extremely context dependent (Marsden, 2019; Moghaddam, 2019). Political, cultural, socio-economic, historical, psychological, and ethnic variables relevant to each conflict can all mold the success or failure of R&R programs. Physical, social, criminal justice, and conflict contexts also influence individual and group motivations to engage in R&R processes as well as which opportunities even exist for reintegration (Marsden, 2019). Despite these limitations, however, there are some emergent themes and insights from R&R in other areas of the world that may be applicable to the USCENTCOM area of responsibility (AOR). We begin with a discussion of the conditions and components required for successful reintegration, continue with a discussion on reconciliation, and conclude by considering the barriers to reintegration and how the United States and international community might respond in order to overcome those barriers.

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[5] Capturing the components of R&R processes, as well as their success or failure is plagued by a lack of standardized, transparent, and reliable empirical research. This problem is especially apparent in the Central Region, as many governments either offer little to no public knowledge on their methods for handling former combatants, or publish information that is not verified by a third party. The lack of solid empirical evidence naturally limits the establishment of lessons learned. Summarizing this situation, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction noted in a 2019 report that "There are some lessons learned about what doesn't work [in reintegration], but we don't know with confidence what works, under which conditions, and why."

Reintegration

There is no one-size-fits-all reintegration program. Instead, reintegration is driven by extremely local and individual processes that take place over time. As a result, there are several types of information that must drive design and execution of reintegration programs to assure that, above all, they are relevant to the particularities of the environment and that they are sustainable. A review of the academic literature on reintegration processes can be organized into two categories: 1) contextual conditions supporting successful reintegration and 2) the most effective components of reintegration programs. Both are discussed in greater detail below.

Contextual Conditions Supporting Effective Reintegration

Effective Peace Agreement in Place

The UK Foreign Commonwealth Office (2016) notes that "reintegration cannot save a flawed peace settlement, and can only support a promising one." This is especially true if violence occurs during the reintegration process, as "ongoing conflict further complicates reintegration: civilians are more likely to distrust returnees and defectors when the militant group itself remains active, and returnees themselves may be at risk of retaliatory violence" (Brechenmacher, 2018). As such, reintegration is likely to be most successful when preceded by disengagement and demobilization, which typically occurs early in the peace process[6] (Rufer, 2005). Effective disengagement and demobilization serve as confidence building measures to cultivate mutual trust between both sides of a conflict, reinforce a durable peace agreement, and ensure a conducive environment for reintegration (Rufer, 2005). To help maintain this trust during the reintegration process, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2016) advises that the details of the disengagement, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process should be resolved as much as possible during the peace process.

Political Will Sustained Throughout the Reintegration Process

Reintegration is a politically driven process (UNDDR, 2019). A political environment that is not supportive of reintegration can lead to its stalling or incomplete implementation (Rolston, 2007; UNDDR, 2019). Ensuring the commitment and active participation throughout the reintegration process of all parties concerned is thus critical to establishing and maintaining effective reintegration. Rolston (2007) goes as far as claiming that political will is the chief criterion needed for successful reintegration. He points to the example of Northern Ireland, where a lack of collective socio-political will resulted in both sides being unable to make necessary compromises on the path to successful reintegration. Similarly, political infighting in Colombia decreased political will toward finding a solution and stalled reintegration for decades (Piccone, 2019). Despite its argued importance, political will as a construct has often been criticized on the grounds of being vague, thus losing its utility as a guide for how to shape and implement effective policies or programs. To address this issue, one set of researchers has defined political will as "the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem" (Post, Raile, & Raile, 2010; see also Roberts, 2016). They propose that political will is present when a sufficient number of those in power support, and there are none who can derail, a given solution; stakeholders agree that a problem exists, and agree on its nature and need for a solution; and stakeholders are committed to supporting a generally agreed upon approach that they believe will be effective.

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[6] This sequencing is consistent with conventional strategies of DDR (Özerdem, 2002; Rolston, 2007; Rufer, 2005); however, Knight & Ozerdem (2004) note that in situations of complete standstill, "it may be necessary to begin reintegration before full disarmament." Such flexibility is only possible if sufficient political will is present (Rolston, 2007).

Proper Understanding of the Environment

Effective reintegration must be grounded in the political reality of the related conflict (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016). As a result, it is imperative that those designing a reintegration program have a proper understanding of the environment in which reintegration will occur and use this knowledge to shape program design. There are several types of information that must drive the design and execution of reintegration programs in order to assure that they are both appropriately tailored to the environment and sustainable. Specifically, the literature suggests that effective reintegration of ex-combatants in the USCENTCOM AOR requires consideration of three critical factors: 1) the physical, political, and social contexts within which a conflict has taken place and to which combatants will return, including the capacity and performance of the criminal justice system, 2) the nature of the conflict, including the grievances at issue and the preferences and support for the "sides" in the dispute, and 3) individual perceptions and beliefs, especially what motivated people to become involved with radical and violent extremist groups. These factors will suggest the range of reintegration programs (e.g., social, political, economic, ideological) that are needed and which mechanisms (e.g., prison programs, re-education, skills education, treatments for trauma, etc.) might best enable these (Marsden, 2019).

The way reintegration programs can be structured is also something that should be considered within the context of the operational environment, and may depend on features of that environment. Typically, a centralized, top-heavy approach has been associated with design flaws and an inability to effectively overcome administrative obstacles.[7] In contrast, a decentralized, bottom-up approach is more agile, does not carry the same administrative burden, and can be better tailored to the environment and more individually focused[8] (Reed & Pohl, 2017; UNDP, 2000). Ultimately, whatever organizational approach is used, successful reintegration will be nationally owned, yet executed by a capable and localized authority that has legitimacy within the community (IDDRS, 2006; Marsden, 2019; Moghaddam, 2019).

Presence of External Support

External support is a common element of successful reintegration (Kingma, 2000) and while a lack of it does not inevitably lead to failure, it is however a factor in some failures (Rolston, 2007). Beyond simply providing the financial and other means to bolster institutional capacity, support from the international community (intergovernmental organizations [IGOs], foreign governments, etc.) can come in various other forms. These include general economic assistance and program funding, diplomatic support, mediation, external oversight, and knowledge and intelligence sharing (Bukarti, 2019; Marsden, 2019; Mohaddam, 2019; Rolston, 2007; Rufer, 2005; UNDP, 2015). In the case of the FARC's reintegration in Colombia, Piccone (2019) highlights the importance of the international community's continuation of financial and diplomatic support; he also warned that the

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[7] The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) review of 15 reintegration efforts conducted in the 1990s articulated the drawback of top heavy programs that are "too centralized and bureaucratically inflexible to deal with emergency situations—particularly in [their] procedures for the approval of funds" (UNDP, 2000). Similarly, critics have noted that the Colombian Special Jurisdiction for Peace initiative with the FARC is plagued by bureaucracy and rigidity brought on by centralization, where a local expert described the program as crippled by "budget squabbles, bloated staffs, contract disputes…and lengthy and convoluted proceedings—a Kafkaesque labyrinth…resulting in some FARC members to abandon [sic] reintegration."

[8] The German countering violent extremism (CVE) program used a de-centralized approach that allowed its policies to empower "local actors who are well positioned to win the trust of affected individuals and communities" (Reed & Pohl, 2017). Similarly, the UNDP (2000) also credited the success of a DDR program in the Republic of Congo to its decentralized approach.

international community should be weary of "overplaying its hand," which could result in the delegitimization of local actors and processes.[9]

Common Components of Successful Reintegration

There are several components of reintegration programs that are commonly found in successful reintegration globally. However, any future application of these elements requires proper implementation. Furthermore, it is important to recall that the components that work in one (or even several) post-conflict environments, may not always work in another.

Vocational Training and Other Economic Assistance

Reintegration by definition necessitates the reinsertion of ex-combatants back into societal life. By providing ex-combatants with a means for supporting themselves and their families, vocational training[10] offers these individuals the opportunity to "build self-esteem and exhibit self-determination" and also "encourages integration and greater social inclusion" (Marsden, 2015). Offering ex-combatants such assistance[11] is therefore essential to successfully reintegrating them back into society and supporting an enduring framework for peace and stability (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009; Marsden, 2015; O'Neil, 2019; see also Bloom, 2019 for a related discussion).

Direct funding in the form of material aid, small business lending/grants, or one-off cash payments has also been offered to ex-combatants in order to facilitate their reintegration into society and decrease the likelihood of recidivism. This approach has been taken in Angola and Burundi (via direct disbursement of funds) (Rufer, 2005) as well as in Saudi Arabia (via small business lending/grants) (Boucek, 2008). However, while direct funding may be an effective temporary measure to encourage the disengagement and demobilization that may precede reintegration, it can lead to problems in the long term, such as distorting local economies, misuse by beneficiaries, and the lack of eventual employment (Rolston, 2007).

Without vocational training or other economic assistance, reintegration may be destined to fail. For example, in several instances in Indonesia, jihadist prisoners with little wealth and prospect for employment returned to their extremist communities in order to obtain the support structures they required to meet their socio-economic needs (Schulze, 2008). Moreover, a lack of vocational training is also associated with petty crime and a corresponding increase in instability that undermines an enduring peace process (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2016; Rolston, 2007).

Providing Enduring and Robust Support for Ex-Combatants and their Communities

Especially in the case of former extremists who have undergone deradicalization programs, post-release supervision or after-care is crucial to the continued success of the long process of reintegration (Brechenmacher, 2018; Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016). Establishing continued counseling, community support, and

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[9] Such concerns are likely to translate to the Central Region, where the involvement of Western institutions can disrupt the reintegration process and contribute to extremist narratives.

[10] Vocational training may include assisting ex-combatants with obtaining rudimentary skills in areas such as carpentry, fish or poultry farming, tailoring or sewing, welding, or shoemaking (Bukarti, 2019).

[11] As seen in the Danish Aarhus program (Bertelsen, 2015), the French centers of reintegration and citizenship (Uhlmann, 2016), the EXIT Sweden program (Intercultural Congress, n.d.), Northern Ireland (Rolston, 2007), Sri Lanka (Souris & Singh, 2018), Mozambique (Edloe, 2007), Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria (Bukarti, 2019), Saudi Arabia (Boucek, 2008), and Pakistan (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

protection from retaliatory attacks (Brechenmacher, 2018) are all vital during the probationary period following release. The benefits of after-care can be evidenced in several examples of successful reintegration, notably in Malaysia (Hamidi, 2016), Singapore (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009), and both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (see *Appendix A*). After-care also allows government authorities to monitor ex-combatants in probationary fashion for potential recidivism, which can also be used to determine the success of their reintegration programs (Marsden, 2019). Finally, after-care is also important for individuals—whether the ex-combatants themselves or their family members—who have experienced trauma.

The success of a reintegration program is also heavily dependent on program engagement with the families and societies to which former radicals belong (Edloe, 2007; Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2016; Hamidi, 2016; Marsden, 2015; Rabasa et al., 2010; Reed & Pohl, 2017; Rolston, 2007; Schulze, 2008; see also Bloom, 2019 for a related discussion). Providing the family and society with reintegrative assistance that facilitates their acceptance of former radicals/combatants emphasizes the links between the individual and community and aids reintegration (Moghaddam, 2019). The EXIT program in Germany that has largely been hailed as a success provided counselling support to "parents, siblings, friends, teachers, employers, and anyone else who has a relationship to a person potentially on the path of radicalization" (Hardy, 2019). In contrast, communities in the failed "Centers of Reintegration and Citizenship" in France actively protested the close proximity of former radicals to their home, and comparable community support was not provided (Souris & Singh, 2018).

Outreach to the communities from which ex-combatants hail may also help to reduce the likelihood that those being reintegrated will be stigmatized. This is important, as a failure to do so can make the social structures of the family and returning beneficiary more vulnerable to extremist networks and subject to adoption of their narratives, as has been the case at times in Malaysia (Schulze, 2008). Recognizing the needs of both the community and the ex-combatant dovetails with or gives rise to reconciliation processes, as community support is crucial to establishing a sense among ex-combatants and the community that they share a common future or fate, which is a key factor in reconciliation processes and crucial for a lasting peace (Bar-Tal, 2000; Marsden, 2019).

Reconciliation

Reconciliation processes across a wide variety of contexts are predicated on what South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu described as the categorization of both "the perpetrator and victim groups within a single inclusive national group" (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Doing so represents a fundamental transformation, moving away from thinking in terms of "us" and "them" to thinking in terms of a superordinate "we." The same understanding of contextual factors required for reintegration, including the precondition of the cessation of violence, are also necessary for successful reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2000). Unlike reintegration programs as they are commonly run, reconciliation typically involves a "whole of government" approach, and it is important to understand where NGOs, the international community and IGOs, civil affairs operators, and the military can best support or implement different components of reconciliation[12] (Kuznar et al., 2018; Marsden, 2015). According to several experts on reconciliation, there are some features of reconciliation initiatives that support the success of such efforts. These include:

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[12] Bar-Tal (2000) also proposes the mobilization of educational, societal, and cultural institutions (e.g., schools, books, films, plays, mass media) to facilitate reconciliation.

- ensuring that local ownership is taken over the reconciliation process[13] (Marsden, 2019);
- ensuring leadership support for reconciliation (Kuznar et al., 2018);
- considering the range of issues that have been dividing groups and giving rise to their ongoing grievances (e.g., ideological, ethnic, religious, inter-state, etc.) (Bar-Tal, 2000);
- instituting a formal mechanism for ending impunity for past abuses and ensuring accountability for perpetrators using a process that includes victims' input (Aiken, 2015);
- establishing a climate wherein actors are willing to accept compromise (Kuznar et al., 2018); and
- addressing comprehensively the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, structural, and external elements of reconciliation required by a given context (Kuznar et al., 2018).

Guidance for effective reconciliation can also be gleaned from other sources. For example, Moghaddam (2019) notes the utility of mining the classic conflict resolution literature. He also discusses traditional reconciliation techniques such as storytelling,[14] which encourage participants to share their stories as a way for each side to better understand the opposing perspective, without reinforcing prejudice and hatred. The storytelling process, by its nature, can cultivate a "a new and less divisive shared truth" that promotes healing and a common identity (Aiken, 2015).

Such grassroots-level activities have produced notably successful results in Timor Leste (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2016), South Africa (Wielenga, 2013), Northern Ireland (Aiken, 2015), and elsewhere. In the case of Sri Lanka and South Africa, reconciliation processes were broad in scope; these processes emphasized a spirit of inclusiveness and settled grievances (e.g., regarding displaced people, land redistribution and other theft, all manner of criminal offences, etc.) that would not usually be addressed in high level settlements (Ranjan de Silva et al., 2011; Wielenga, 2013).

What Should the International Community Do with People Who Cannot be Reintegrated into Society?

The international community is faced with the problem of determining what to do with individuals affiliated with extremist groups who cannot readily be reintegrated into their societies. These individuals include local ex-combatants, who often come from poorer, unstable, and/or non-Western environments; foreign fighters, who often come from relatively wealthier and more stable western environments; and the families (wives and children) of both. Several barriers to their reintegration exist, including states' refusal to repatriate, thus prohibiting reintegration into those communities. A graphic overview of barriers and strategies for addressing them can be found in *Figure 2*.

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[13] However, external mediators can help construct a framework agreed upon by local parties, and external observers can ensure such agreements are adhered to (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kuznar et al., 2018).
[14] It is noteworthy that in the cases of both Sri Lanka (Ranjan de Silva et al., 2011) and South Africa (Colvin, 2000), storytelling provided an important therapeutic component of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) that occurred in tandem with the fact finding, restorative justice dimensions of TRC.

What are the Barriers to Reintegration?

Barriers to reintegration tend to be one of two types—those related to the individual and those related to society. First, some individuals simply cannot be rehabilitated[15] and are subsequently not good candidates for reintegration given their high risk for re-engaging in violence. After an initial assessment period,[16] it should be possible to distinguish between individuals who are rigid and cannot be reformed and those who can be reformed and are likely to cooperate (Moghaddam, 2019). Moghaddam estimates that the former group may compose between ten and twenty percent of those being assessed, noting that "once you've identified individuals who are not changing, you have got to stop wasting resources on them." For such individuals, rehabilitation and reintegration are no longer options, though criminal prosecution can still be pursued. Ultimately, it is necessary to establish two tracks—one for rehabilitation and reintegration (for low-risk ex-combatants and others affiliated with the extremist group) and another for criminal justice (for higher-risk combatants and commanders) (Brechenmacher, 2018).
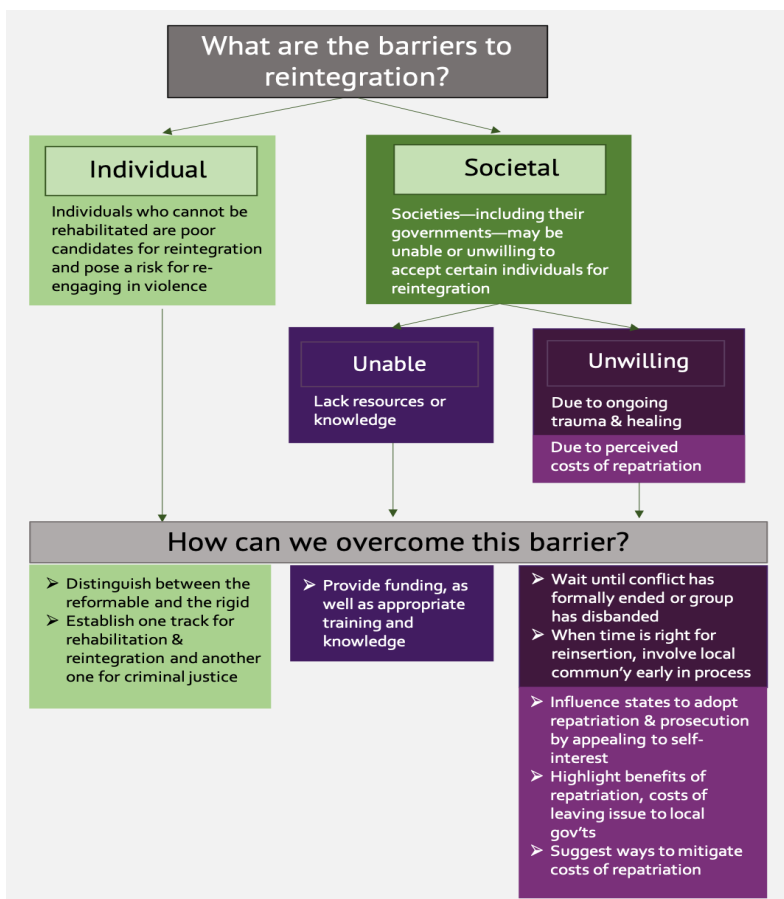

Figure 2: Barriers to reintegration and how to overcome them

"Not all returnees are the same—they are a heterogeneous group that includes those willing to commit attacks, those disillusioned with life under Daesh, and even those who could be seen as 'victims' of terrorist recruitment, such as children and family members of foreign fighters." – Reed & Pohl (2017)

Second, societies—including their governments—may be *unable* or *unwilling* to accept certain individuals for reintegration. Governments in poor and war-torn countries may be unable to develop and execute effective reintegration programs, as they may lack the expertise, economic resources, and institutional capacity. These governments and their societies are likely to be unstable and may buckle under the weight of reabsorbing local or returning foreign fighters, as well as their families. For example, local economic conditions (e.g., job availability) may be poor, decreasing the likelihood that ex-combatants will be able to provide for themselves and their families by working in the licit sector. Conflict in these countries may also be ongoing, putting ex-combatants in close proximity to the groups from which they have disengaged. Both of these conditions put ex-combatants at greater risk for recidivism. The international community can address

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[15] Here, rehabilitation refers to the process by which individuals, following a period of illegal or other societally undesirable activity, are rendered capable of re-assuming their role in society; this goal is accomplished through psychological, social, educational, vocational, or other forms of training, therapy, or program participation. Thus, rehabilitation describes the overarching process by which individuals may be successfully reintegrated (i.e., re-assume civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income).

[16] This assessment might include, for example, an exploration of whether the ex-combatant is capable of shifting away from categorical thinking (e.g., us vs. them, good vs. evil, etc.) (Moghaddam, 2019).

this barrier by sharing the burden of providing funding, appropriate training, and knowledge to these governments to assist in the successful execution of reintegration programs.

> **"The local administration lacks the resources to deal with [individuals in the Al Hol camp] and worries that the paucity of international support could help the Islamic State reconstitute itself." – Hubbard (2019)**

Societies may also be unwilling to accept ex-combatants (e.g., Nigerians and local Boko Haram ex-combatants). The literal and figurative wounds may be too fresh for community members to forgive transgressors, and victims may require time to rebuild their own lives (Bukarti, 2019).[17] In these cases, it may be necessary to wait until the conflict has formally ended and/or the specific group to which the combatants belonged has been disbanded or is otherwise no longer active (Bukarti, 2019). Moreover, a reconciliation process addressing the full scope of emotional (e.g., distrust), cognitive (e.g., in-group vs. out-group categorization), and behavioral (e.g., acts of discrimination) elements involved may be needed *prior* to any attempts at reinsertion or reintegration. Finally, when moving toward reinsertion of ex-combatants, it is advisable to involve community members early on in the process (Bukarti, 2019). This might include holding town hall meetings or inviting leaders (political, religious, traditional) to visit camps where rehabilitation and reintegration training is occurring in order to make their own assessments and inform their communities (Bukarti, 2019). As Bukarti notes, "deradicalization seems virtually pointless if deradicalized individuals cannot be reinserted at the end of it all" (Bukarti, 2019).

Governments may also take an official stance that prohibits reintegration, particularly in the case of repatriating foreign fighters. The issue of repatriation is a contentious one in the international community—with states varying on what they consider appropriate. For example, European countries are largely opposed to repatriation,[18] while Turkey and the United States are strongly in favor (Bernstein, 2019; Dworkin, 2019; El Deeb & Lee, 2019; Renard & Coolsaet, 2019).[19] Given the nature and difficulty of this issue, reconciling states' contrasting policies will necessitate a predominantly diplomatic effort.

Some countries that refuse repatriation have the necessary economic and other resources to absorb returnees, but nonetheless object based on the presumed costs to their societies. These include costs to short-term security, such as the potential for attacks on the home country's soil. Returning fighters may also present a radicalization risk to others, either when incarcerated or otherwise (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019; Reed & Pohl, 2017). Finally, prosecution in the countries of origin may be hampered by several factors, including an inability to rely on the cooperation of Syria or Iraq or travel to war-torn areas for evidence collection (Dworkin, 2019; Mehra & Paulussen, 2019; Reed & Pohl, 2017).

Given these perceived costs, governments have taken several approaches to avoid repatriation, including revoking combatants' citizenship[20] and instituting entry bans to prevent their return (e.g., as in Australia, the UK,

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[17] Many reintegration and reconciliation programs are criticized on the grounds of giving economic support or psychological support (e.g., to overcome trauma) to ex-combatants, but giving little to nothing to the communities to assist in rebuilding or healing (Bukarti, 2019; Piccone, 2019). Thus, as also described above, it is important to address both the needs of the former combatants and the needs of the communities from which they came (Brechenmacher, 2018; Bukarti, 2019).

[18] As Dworkin (2019) notes: "Officials from European governments, speaking off the record, conceded in recent months that the policy of leaving their citizens in these conditions was not sustainable in the longer term. Yet European countries delayed taking action, because they were determined not to bring their citizens back home but did not have any alternative proposal for dealing with them. European countries have taken back only small numbers of people, almost all of them children."

[19] Additionally, Central Asian states have accepted the return of large numbers of ISIS supporters, but otherwise have ambiguous policies that are evolving, though increasingly allowing foreign fighters to return (Dworkin, 2019).

[20] Another approach taken is to question the validity of individuals' initial citizenship.

> **"…the evidence shows us that it would be a better strategy to deal with foreign fighters at home." – Malet (2019)**

and Bahrain) (Dworkin, 2019; Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).[21] Another approach is to affirm the right of return, but nonetheless limit individuals' consular assistance (as in the case of Norway or the Netherlands) (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). A third approach is exemplified by France, which has argued that foreign fighters should be dealt with by the authorities where the crimes were committed[22] (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).

Influencing States to Adopt Active Repatriation and Prosecution

> **"…non-repatriation and prosecution constitutes a bar to accountability and the obligation to fight impunity." — (Paulussen, 2019)**

Mehra and Paulussen (2019) instead recommend active repatriation (including for families) and prosecution, which they argue is the best option from a legal, ethical, and long-term security perspective (see Dworkin, 2019 for a similar recommendation).[23] A refusal to repatriate foreign fighters in fact runs afoul of international legal obligations.[24] Several applicable international and counterterrorism conventions, as well as binding UN Security Council Resolutions,[25] obligate states legally to bring terrorists to justice through prosecution, as well as to develop and implement appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for returning foreign fighters (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).

Mehra and Paulussen's discussion also underscores the imperative[26] to repatriate, protect from further harm, and promote the physical and psychological recovery of children. While many governments have generally been amenable to the repatriation of children, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) insistence on keeping children and mothers together is a red line for many European countries, as the mothers are still believed to potentially be dangerous (Renard & Coolsaet, 2019).[27] However, courts may order their own governments to repatriate individuals, particularly children (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).[28] In response to these orders, some countries (e.g., France, the Netherlands) are reconsidering repatriation on a case by case basis (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). Others (e.g., Belgium) have agreed to repatriate those under a certain age (e.g., ten years old) (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). However, as of March 2019, only a small number of countries (e.g., Russia, Kazakhstan) have done so (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).

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[21] Yet revoking individuals' citizenship may result in further radicalization if individuals perceive that their group (e.g., ethnic, religious) as a whole is being unfairly targeted; as such, this approach ultimately may be ineffective as a counterterrorism measure (Paulussen, 2018).

[22] Mehra and Paulussen (2019) also discuss the possibility of states leaving ISIS fighters to be dealt with by an international tribunal that may be established under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to try Islamic State fighters—though they cite several difficulties with such a tribunal. These include legal complexities, obtaining the necessary support among Security Council members, and deficits in time, resources, and cooperation. Further, "the idea has garnered little international support and the Syrian government would probably block it" (Hubbard, 2019). See Dworkin (2019) for a discussion of a potential international tribunal.

[23] Note also that the situation is evolving; Turkey has begun deportation of ISIS militants, many of whom are being returned to European Union states (Euronews with Reuters, 2019).

[24] Namely, the UN international covenant on civil and political rights. Note also that the Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 27, indicates that "revoking citizenship as a measure to prevent the return of foreign fighters is a violation of international law…"

[25] These include 2178 (2014) (United Nations Security Council, 2014) and 2396 (2017) (United Nations Security Council, 2017).

[26] Via article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of Children and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963.

[27] As noted in Jensen (2019), the "counts and categories remain slippery," though UN officials estimated that the main SDF camp at Al Hol (as of April 2019) held 75,000 individuals; of these, 43 percent were Syrian, 42 percent were Iraqi, and 15 percent were foreigners. A notable ninety percent of these were women and children, with children accounting for 66 percent of the total. According to another source (Hubbard, 2019), the Syrian camps hold 12,000 foreign women and children as of March 2019.

[28] Note, however, that opposition may be strong; for example, Belgian politicians have sued to block court orders to enable minors to return home (Malet, 2019).

While states will naturally continue to exert their sovereignty in making the decision to repatriate or not, a diplomatic strategy appealing to states' self-interest may prove effective (see Marsden, 2019 for a related discussion on repatriation and reintegration support). This can include emphasizing that the overall cost-benefit assessment appears to be in favor of repatriation and reintegration (e.g., Dworkin, 2019). As part of this strategy, it will be necessary to highlight the costs of leaving local governments to deal with ex-combatants and the benefits of repatriation. It will also be important to provide counterpoints to, or suggest ways to offset, the perceived costs of repatriation.

Emphasizing Costs of Leaving Local Governments to Deal with Ex-Combatants

A failure to repatriate effectively leaves local governments—which often are poor and under-resourced—to deal with the ex-combatants. Such "passing of the buck" to local or other authorities not only abrogates national responsibilities, but also results in loss of control and other undesirable consequences (Paulussen, 2018). Local prosecution (if it happens at all) can be fraught with problems, including the lack of transparency in proceedings, the use of torture, and limited (or no) access to defense counsel (Capone, 2019; Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). This decreases the likelihood of effective prosecution and justice for the victims, which is inconsistent with Western countries' emphasis on the rule of law (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). Local deficiencies in evidence gathering and prosecution can also lead to the release of potentially dangerous individuals, who then become difficult to track (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019). Following Turkey's recent incursion into northern Syria, several detainees have already escaped or been freed (Dworkin, 2019). The situation is likely to worsen, given increasing instability and unrest, and decreasing numbers of security guards for the camps (Dworkin, 2019).

Failure to repatriate and deal proactively with foreign fighters also poses a number of additional risks, including to home countries, which may be increasingly targeted as a result of their refusal to repatriate. If released, ex-combatants may "find other places to go and will potentially increase the security risk that they then pose" (Marsden, 2019). This can include finding a way to reconstitute the Islamic State or form similar groups (Hubbard, 2019; Renard & Coolsaet, 2019). Moreover, foreign fighters may be in the best position to radicalize others if they are *not* returned home to be processed by the legal system (Malet, 2019). Finally, family members who spend time in unsanitary and crowded camps may be vulnerable to further radicalization (Dworkin, 2019; Renard & Coolsaet, 2019).[29] This includes children, whose ongoing trauma may result in grievances that set the stage for future radicalization, and may give rise to the next generation of fighters.

Offsetting Costs and Emphasizing Benefits of Repatriation

States opposing repatriation tend to emphasize the perceived costs to their societies—both in terms of resources and in terms of risks for future attacks. However, statistical analyses suggest that "a large majority of returning foreign fighters are unlikely to foster hostile intent" (Lister, 2015). Moreover, the risks that returning ex-combatants pose decrease sharply with time. For example, one study indicates that a vast majority of attempted plots occur within a year of foreign fighters' return to their home countries (Malet, 2019; see also Dworkin, 2019). As such, the identification of potential threats may not be an "open-ended drain on resources," but instead may require a "manageable investment in law enforcement and homeland security" (Malet, 2019).

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[29] See NSI's B5 Reachback report on protecting at-risk populations from extremism for a related discussion.

> **"Of course, it is not possible to guarantee 100% security and returnees may be implicated in attacks upon return but, from a long-term security perspective, a controlled return of foreign fighters and their families is more desirable than having foreign fighters released, escape prison and justice, join another terrorist group, fuel yet another conflict, or return unseen years later." – Mehra and Paulussen (2019)**

Similarly, while countries may feel limited in their ability to obtain the evidence necessary to enable successful prosecution of returning ex-combatants, initiatives focused on increasing a state's ability to use military (or battlefield) evidence should increase the likelihood that a sufficient amount and kind of evidence can be gathered. While limited in current application, military evidence has been used successfully by the UK, the Netherlands, and the United States.[30] Using this additional source of evidence can minimize the likelihood that returnees will end up being freed to pursue nefarious activities. Some foreign fighters can also be linked to crimes in their home states, further widening the evidence base (Dworkin, 2019). For any individuals that cannot be either prosecuted or rehabilitated, governments may have broad authority to track and restrict their movement and activities (e.g., through electronic surveillance or house arrest) (Dworkin, 2019). Monitoring of these individuals is much easier if it does not need to be accomplished from a distance (Renard & Coolsaet, 2019).

> **"Hundreds have already returned from the dystopian caliphate with tales of the lies and barbarity at the foundations of the Islamic State, some suffering from severe PTSD. These returnees are far more credible and powerful spokespersons against ISIS than any government's counter-narrative public outreach could ever be." – Malet (2019)**

Returning fighters to their home country may instead present a key opportunity—to capitalize on their greater credibility among the radicalized population in order to most effectively execute counter- and anti-radicalization programs and hybrid reintegration programs (Jenkins, 2019). Repatriating detainees also opens up the opportunity for home states to question these individuals in order to obtain information about their groups' methods and activities (Dworkin, 2019).

What Can USCENTCOM Do?

USCENTCOM is best positioned to play an advisory role in the design and implementation of reintegration or reconciliation programs in its AOR—a point emphasized both by Marsden (2019) and Moghaddham (2019). As such, partnerships will be crucial (Kuznar et al., 2018; Marsden, 2019). Key partners may include the host nation, UN peacekeeping forces, NATO allies, and various organizations and offices within the US Government (e.g., State, USAID, DOJ) (Kuznar et al., 2018). Playing an advisory role rather than a central one will also assist the USG in avoiding the appearance that it is promoting religious indoctrination and/or Western ideology (e.g., as a part of hybrid deradicalization/reintegration programs), which could contribute to extremists' narratives (e.g., as evidenced by France's failed approach to deradicalization).[31] USCENTCOM may also be able to assist more directly by, for example, aiding in the attainment of military evidence.

As part of the diplomatic effort to influence countries to repatriate their foreign fighters, it is important to emphasize the benefits of repatriation and costs of avoiding repatriation, while also suggesting how costs to repatriation might be mitigated. However, it is also important to provide the proper support where necessary (e.g., by helping to establish appropriate structures or providing necessary resources) to countries in order to

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[30] Depending on individual states' rules regarding admissibility in court, other forms of evidence can of course also be used, including social media posts or testimony from victims, colleagues, or family members (Dworkin, 2019).

[31] In the case of Saudi Arabia, a major component of religious re-education taught by designated Imams is to steer away from the Jihadist narrative that Saudi Arabia is anti-Islamic or otherwise bending to the culture of the West.

enable effective reintegration and reconciliation (Marsden, 2019). This is especially the case for countries outside of the West that may lack the necessary knowledge, financial means, and other resources to put these types of programs in place or to monitor returning foreign fighters and their families (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).[32] There is a significant body of knowledge that could be transferred to willing actors who have the legitimacy and cultural expertise to implement R&R practices (Moghaddam, 2019). Toward this end, USCENTCOM and its partners can play an active role.[33]

Ultimately, the issue of reintegrating ex-combatants and their families into the societies from which they came is an international problem that requires an international solution—accomplished through solidarity across affected states that are willing to accept both their individual and mutual responsibility (Paulussen, 2019).

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[32] Moreover, some countries have only begun thinking about how to deal with returning ISIS fighters; as such, their primary tactic may be to simply eliminate them rather than develop viable plans for reintegration (Moghaddam, 2019).

[33] For example, see Kuznar, et al. (2018) at https://nsiteam.com/reconciliation-and-reintegration-in-afghanistan/ for an analysis of the barriers to and drivers of R&R in Afghanistan, as well as suggested mitigating actions.

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Appendix A: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan Deradicalization/Reintegration Overview

Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan counterterrorism strategies contain DDR (disengagement, deradicalization and reintegration) initiatives that are well known and studied for their disengagement, deradicalization, anti-radicalization, and counter-radicalization components.[34] Some form of disengagement and deradicalization are vital prerequisites to the successful reintegration process of radicalized individuals; moreover, these processes overlap significantly. The rehabilitation element of deradicalization programs is important both during and after the graduation of program participants and occurs throughout the after-care/post-release phase that denotes the beginning of reintegration (Azam & Fatima, 2017). Reintegration in the context of Pakistan's Swat district programs and Saudi Arabia's DDR initiatives is thus incorporated through deradicalization programs as the transitory process into normal society. Detailed research on the deradicalization elements of initiatives in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia exist in great detail;[35] however, the reintegration element is considered a component of the more comprehensive deradicalization process that also includes disengagement (per the definitions in *Figure 1*).

The Swat district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkwa province boasts the most well-studied deradicalization or "militant rehabilitation program," which came about following the defeat of Pakistani Taliban forces in the Swat district of the same province. These programs are based on a "three-pronged strategy of prevention, rehabilitation and aftercare" and contain four modules of "psychological rehabilitation, religious counselling, vocational training and social reintegration" (Basit, 2015). The rehabilitation element occurs throughout the duration of the program and into the aftercare; whereas the first element of reintegration begins prior to graduation from the program through the vocational module that provides beneficiaries with employable skills.[36] The attainment of employable skills serves the mutually reinforcing relationship of rehabilitation and reintegration, as the ability of former extremists to provide for themselves and their families helps to dissuade them from relapsing into radical beliefs (Temple-Raston, 2013).

As the detainees of the programs pass various assessments prior to release, social reintegration programs are incorporated through a "three-month syllabus of curricular and extra-curricular activities" where beneficiaries participate in various community level activities[37] (Basit, 2015). Assessments and monitoring of the beneficiaries continue during these community activities, as well as gauging the response of the corresponding community to the presence of the beneficiary in social settings. A specific institution known as the "Sparley" center was also developed for the families of the beneficiaries to "create awareness about aftercare initiatives for rehabilitated individuals" (Basit, 2015). Upon release/graduation of the rehabilitation program, graduates must enroll in education or enter formal employment. Post-release programming continues for a variable amount of time where graduates report to a designated military official on a 2-week basis for the first three months and then on a monthly basis thereafter (if the graduate absconds, an arrest warrant is issued) (Azam & Fatima, 2017).

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[34] For a more detailed overview of the prior disengagement and deradicalization processes, see NSI's Reachback reports for questions B1, B2, and B5 of this study. Contact George Popp at gpopp@nsiteam.com for the reports.

[35] For more detailed research on the deradicalization programs see Azam and Fatima (2017), Basit (2015), and Rabasa et al. (2010), and Boucek (2008) for Pakistani and Saudi Arabian programs respectively.

[36] Such skills include: "electronics, computing, carpentry, automobile mechanics, welding, appliance repair, basic electrician skills, masonry, and poultry farming" (Basit, 2015).

[37] Examples of such activities include "religious and cultural festivals as well as debate competitions" (Basit, 2015).

Comparable to parole, this supervision includes random "spot checks" by officials, where graduates are not allowed to move from their recorded area of residence without reporting appropriately.

Pakistan has modeled their deradicalization programs on the Saudi approach, which is in and of itself a "unique Saudi solution to a Saudi problem, incorporating many traditional Saudi methods of conflict resolution and conflict management;" furthermore, this approach evolved secretly within the Kingdom and free from external influences (Rabasa et al., 2010). Comparably, the Saudi approach also stresses the care of the family impacted by the detainee's arrest, "so as to not encourage extremist narrative of the state" (Rabasa et al., 2010). This care is extensive, and provides the families with a source of income as well as schooling for children and healthcare (Boucek, 2008). After the rehabilitation process concludes with the successful completion of a religious counseling program, the Saudi government emphasizes socio-economic support, whereby beneficiaries receive "assistance in locating jobs and other benefits, including additional government stipends, cars, and housing"[38] (Boucek, 2008). A parole-like system similar to the post-release structure of Pakistan's Swat valley programs are also a part of the reintegration strategy, where graduates must meet with government officials regularly and are "encouraged to continue meeting with the scholars they had spoken with while in prison" (Boucek, 2008). Once again emphasizing the importance of family/social integration, the Saudi government also encourages younger and unmarried graduates to start a family by "paying for weddings, donating dowries, and covering other essential pre-marriage costs such as furnishing apartments" (Boucek, 2008).[39]

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[38] Moreover, assistance for beneficiaries to start their own businesses are provided and, in some cases, government jobs are even afforded to graduates. This is significant as many of the previously detained militants would find government employment anathema to their religious beliefs (Boucek, 2008).

[39] Boucek (2008) also notes that, "senior officials from the Interior Ministry and the Advisory Committee frequently attend the weddings of former detainees."