

Deradicalization in history and psychology: A selective review of the literature

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Summary

Governments continue to pour money into deradicalization programs with the goal of rehabilitating violent extremists. Are there lessons in psychological theory and research, and in historical examples, from which current-day programs could benefit? In this paper we highlight lessons that are consistently found throughout a selective review of the psychology literature, give a brief example of these lessons in the context of four case studies, and suggest a way forward that includes these “soft” approaches to rehabilitation and preventive measures that combat the structural and psychological influence of extremist thought that still too often culminates in extremist behavior. Four important points are emphasized for future programs: the need for clear operational definitions differentiating between disengagement and deradicalization, a need for unbiased definition and empirical measurement of success, the need to incorporate relevant cultural and social factors in analysis and planning, and the need to pay attention to the cognitive processes of radicalized individuals and of participants of deradicalization programs.

Introduction

The number of people killed by terrorist attacks around the world rose sharply every year between 2010 (under 7,900) and peaking in 2014 (44,000). Since, then, the number of deaths has been dropping annually, in 2018 reaching about 16,000 (all of these numbers are arguable approximations). But the psychological impact of terrorism is still high: terrorist events and groups, and their dramatic visibility through news media, continue to capture the attention of governments and the general public. Consequently, ways of countering the problem are proliferating. Engaging in terrorist acts is on a dimension of dissidence that includes radical and extremist beliefs. In the social science literature, studies of extremist personality, mental health, cognitive style, motivation, life experiences, and socioeconomic status are among those trying to explain why some people support or engage in terrorism. Other studies look for the roots of terrorism in environmental factors such as tribal conflicts, ethnic or religious polarization, failed governments, and external threats. There are arguments about definitional and policy questions, such as whether terrorist groups should be regarded and treated as enemy combatants or as criminals, and therefore whether captured members should be confined as prisoners of war or put on trial in civilian courts, and whether foreign terrorists should be treated differently from fellow citizens who have committed terrorist acts at home or abroad.

One important component of this body of studies and arguments is how those who have embraced belief systems that exalt or at least tolerate terrorism might be converted to a less

violent orientation. Program designers must first decide on their goal: do they hope primarily to stop terrorist acts, or are they concerned with changing the beliefs and attitudes that may underlie the decision to participate in such acts? Many authorities feel that there is little hope of bringing about major change in the loyalties and motives of “true believers,” although their behavior can be affected by a variety of methods, including incarceration and force. Therefore, the targets of conversion programs tend to be low-ranking, marginal, or merely prospective terrorists. Strenuous attempts have been made, and are continuing, to “de-radicalize” such individuals. Kelman’s (1961) tripartite classification of attitude change is relevant: *compliance* is primarily behavior change to obtain a reward or avoid punishment; *identification* is a change stemming from wanting to emulate an admired person or assimilate into the culture of an attractive group or society; and *internalization* is the acceptance of a new way of looking at things that is integrated with one’s pre-existing psychological structure. Change based on compliance can disappear once the reward-punishment system of the environment changes; identification can evaporate if the person or group becomes less attractive; but internalized changes tend to persist and are relatively impervious to external factors.

Deradicalization programs generally hope for internalization on the part of their “participants,” although they may use methods that implicitly foster the other two modes of change. The programs have a complex, multilayered and sometimes controversial history, marked by unanswered – and sometimes unasked -- questions. Nevertheless, it is difficult for civil society to accept the alternative of remaining passive while violent extremists recruit new adherents and retain the loyalty of existing ones. As a result, there are many regionally specific deradicalization programs operating around the globe; from prison deradicalization programs in Indonesia, to a religious dialogue committee in Yemen, to the government grant funded EXIT program in Sweden and Germany, to the widely publicized counseling program of Saudi Arabia. These programs continue to operate out of necessity; as a way for government and society to respond to the use of mass violence by groups and, more often today, dispersed individuals.

The spectrum of deradicalization programs is broad and well documented by numerous scholars and organizations such as the Research and Development Corporation (RAND), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), U.S. Naval Post-Graduate School, etc. In reviewing the history of these programs, our purpose is not to provide an overview or description, but to examine approaches based on psychology. In our review of historical cases of successful deradicalization, four imperative lessons have emerged:

- (1) It is necessary, for the sake of clarity and goal-setting, to define terms and definitions related to disengagement and deradicalization;
- (2) There is a need for independent, empirically based assessment of the outcomes of programs, in which program success is operationally defined in terms of changes in thought and behavior, in both the short and long term;
- (3) Analyses should incorporate the roles of (a) social and (b) cultural factors, including technological changes such as the impact of social media; and

(4) There should be greater focus on the cognitive complexity of individual members of radical and violent extremist organization (VEO) groups, including concomitants of the trend toward lone-wolf actors and decentralized organizations.

Below, we discuss these four lessons in detail. Then, we illustrate these lessons in a practical context by examining four case studies before providing some suggestions for future deradicalization efforts.

Lessons Learned

(1) The Need for Clearly Conceptualizing Disengagement and Deradicalization

Many scholars in the field of radicalization and deradicalization studies have already given meaningful definitions for “disengagement” and “deradicalization”. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock’s view of disengagement amounts to, “the physical cessation of some observable behavior,” whether through changes such as moving between roles within a group or imprisonment (2010, p. 280). McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) identify various roots of radicalization, and McCauley (2011) offers the classification of the “pyramid of ideas” and the “pyramid of action.” The prototypical path from radical ideology to terrorist action raises the question of the extent to which programs of deradicalization can or should be content with pacifying violent individuals and groups, or focus on changing the underlying political and personal factors that spur those radicals into action. In their discussion of significance quests, Kruglanski et al. (2014) point out that disengagement does not have to be a choice, in that it may occur merely because one is physically incapable of carrying out a violent act, perhaps because of an injury or imprisonment (p. 87). In his own chapter on deradicalization, Köhler traces the history of these studies back to criminological desistance, again, reasserting the importance of physical disengagement from violent behavior (pp. 42-21).

Deradicalization refers to psychological changes, in the areas of cognition, emotion, motivation, and values, “long-lasting change in orientation such that there is presumably a reduced risk of re-engaging in terrorist activity” (Horgan & Braddock, 2010, p. 280). Further than a goal of risk-reduction, Dechesne states that, “Deradicalization pertains to the disappearance of radical thoughts, not just radical behavior” (2011, p. 288). Rabasa et al. take this one step further in their definition, adding the importance of adhering to the thoughts or values of the mainstream: “De-radicalization is the process of changing an individual’s belief system, rejecting the extremist ideology, and embracing mainstream values” (2010, p. xiii).

The disaggregation of these terms is an important lesson to learn since future programs will need to decide what they are hoping to accomplish. That is not to say that physical or psychological disengagement and deradicalization are mutually exclusive, or that one has to precede the other, or that both must happen for a radical to stop using or stop believing in violence as a legitimate option for achieving one’s goals.

In fact, well-established psychological theories and research programs have confirmed the idea of bidirectionality. When conditions – for example, a respected role model, or strong positive reinforcement – lead to behavioral change, cognitive dissonance may result in a change in psychological commitment that solidifies and can perpetuate the new behavior pattern. Cognitive dissonance occurs when the individual realizes a contradiction between two equally

strongly held values or ideas, or between a psychological and a factual construct. The prototypical example is standing out in a heavy rain without any protection, and realizing that one is not getting wet. Dissonance is an uncomfortable, motivation-arousing condition, the motive being to eliminate it. Thus, a person holding two ideas, values, or beliefs that contradict each other has an urge to reach compatibility by changing one to bring them into harmony. In the deradicalization example, if the person who believes that armed revolution is a moral way to solve a political problem, but discovers that giving up violence has led to a better life, a change in the original belief may occur to reduce the dissonance. The individual may then come to believe that violence is not in fact a morally acceptable strategy (Bem, 1965; Festinger, 1957). The opposite sequence of change is more intuitively obvious (Cialdini, 2001): e.g., when a terrorist is persuaded (Kelman's hypothesis of internalization) that violence is morally wrong, it is likely that he or she will cease engaging in it, and may even come to be an active opponent of those who persist.

The most comprehensive programs tackle both disengagement and deradicalization, but to be considered successful must also work over a long period (unlike, e.g., only during a term of incarceration), and recognize that the individual deradicalization process can be as complex a social and psychological process as the radicalization process was. Köhler highlights the complexity of deradicalization work, stating that this individual process can be fraught with obstacles and likely will not move along a linear path: it can be disturbed, reversed, reaffirmed, slowed-down and/or re-initiated through unforeseeable events, obstacles, and setbacks (2014, p. 422).

For policymakers, the organizational component of more comprehensive programs--the amount of time, funding, social support, legal components, and lack of replicability--do not make them an attractive option. This has led some to favor the behavioral deterrent aim and risk-reduction strategy focused heavily on physical disengagement. Critics like French sociologist, Gerald Bronner, and UK psychologist, Christopher Dean, have both made headlines for their argument that it has been impossible to devise successful deradicalization programs. But proponents of a more comprehensive process suggest that ignoring deradicalization in favor of detainment policies that see disengagement as "good enough" is less likely to solve the problem of what to do with current extremists, and could actually only continue to fuel future extremist thoughts and/or behavior. What better place to grow extremist beliefs than in isolation in a prison or an IDP camp, with other "true believers" (Hoffer, 1951) who can serve to validate those beliefs and urge the next step, action? Ginges's (1997) article comparing strategies for deterring terrorism emphasizes the importance of a Reintegrative Strategy, with an end goal of encouraging radicalized individuals to rejoin society. The argument hinges on the rejection of two assumptions made by deterrence strategists that focus too heavily on minimizing benefits and maximizing cost: 1) the deterrent that terrorist action results in certain punishment (which, of course, is not true) fails to address the complexity of terrorism aims or the symbolic benefit that action confers on the perpetrator, and 2) denying legitimacy or recognition feeds the rejection and alienation motivators that led to radicalization in the first place (1997). Ginges states that, "In this matter, understanding the motivations and perceptions of the terrorist is just as important as understanding the political, legal and historical dimensions of terrorism." (1997, p. 182). Therefore, if disengagement is enough for

some, but reintegration is the ultimate goal of any program design (at least for less serious offenders), what alternative is there but to pursue some kind of deradicalization support in tandem with disengagement? With little in the way of voluntary disengagement or deradicalization, prison remains an important tool for physical disengagement and a viable venue for any deradicalization program; even though prison programs remain mired in criticism, unending questions, and disputed rates of success. Prison can provide the physical disengagement necessary for deradicalization to occur (Horgan et al., 2017; Garfinkel, 2007; Muluk et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2010; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018; El-Said & Harrigan, 2013), although there is skepticism about the usefulness of using release from confinement as the incentive for change (Rabasa et al., 2010; Schmid, 2013; Silke, 2010).

(2) The Need to Define and Measure Success

Early in 2020, the United Kingdom once again made headlines in the aftermath of an Islamist terrorist attack perpetrated by a recently released radical, Sudesh Amman. This followed in the wake of three other well-publicized attacks since 2017: Usman Khan's December 2019 knife attack; Ahmed Hassan's 2017 Parson's Green bombing; and, Salman Abedi's 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. Beyond sharing similarities such as ideological commitment, unofficial ties to terrorist organizations, sex, and age range, these radicals also had one more important thing in common: they were either well known to "Prevent," the United Kingdom's government-sponsored anti-terrorism program, or had already completed a deradicalization program (Bostock, 2019).

The definition and measurement of successful deradicalization, and the program features that facilitate it, are unanimously at the forefront of the relevant literature. Authors such as John Horgan, Martha Crenshaw, Mark Dechesne, Arie Kruglanski, Hamed El-Said, and Daniel Koehler have all insisted on the importance of more independent assessments of theoretical deradicalization, and have remained critical of global deradicalization programs. With many deradicalization programs relying solely on self-reported achievements based on recidivism rates, how could objective "success" be claimed if the rate is anything higher than zero? Any recidivism would logically mean that: a) the process was incomplete; b) the process had failed; and/or, c) reporting of the process is flawed. Another choice, which we support, is that a binary criterion based on known recidivism is insufficient for judging the accomplishments of a program. In their discussion of recidivism rates of terrorists, Altier et al (2012) review and discuss a variety of other predictive risk factors for recidivism such as age, varying degrees of commitment, family ties, socio-economic considerations, etc. While still based on recidivism, the acknowledgement of other risk factors provides openings for research that could add context and layers to measurements of success. We already know that many factors go into the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors associated with violent extremism; it makes sense that the measurements of what constitutes successful deradicalization would be just as complex.

Historical as well as current cases have shown that there is a persistent need for greater analysis of the outcomes of deradicalization efforts that extend past terrorist events or prison sentences. Efforts are currently being made to fill this gap in the literature, but the publication of empirically validated assessments has not kept up with the expansion of regional programs. Experts have made suggestions for using Multi-Attribute Utility Technology (MAUT) as an

assessment tool (Horgan & Braddock, 2010), and have designed studies that test both the cognitive and motivational components of the process with the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) or affective conditioning procedures (Kruglanski et al., 2010). In his book, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*, Koehler (2017) included a simple Deradicalization Program Integrity Checklist (DPIC), which could be added to other qualitative and quantitative measures of success. The DPIC is designed to measure the degree to which the program is doing what it is designed to do, and the set of measures should constitute a useful and universal evaluation tool. Webber et al. (2018) published an empirical assessment of the Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Program that focused on the individual extremist's motivation for personal significance. This research team found that the program was a buffer against participants' return to extremist thought. At the same time, the program inculcated positivity toward the Sri Lankan government by providing participants with a feeling of being important and ameliorating their feelings of insignificance that had originally led to identification and behavioral conformity with the extremism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Although these efforts have limitations (lack of universal applicability, restricted access to the most severe offenders, questions of correlation vs. causation, the influence of ongoing insurgencies, etc.), they are a step in the right direction. They provide researchers, program directors, and policymakers with alternatives and empirically based measures rather than relying only on reported recidivism rates as measures of success. The demonstrated efficacy of future programs will rely on systematic efforts by researchers to avoid the pitfalls of erroneous claims that may exacerbate the problem rather than curbing the rise of violent extremism.

(3a) Culture Matters

Deradicalization efforts have come a long way in recognizing the importance of culture; but the temptation or outright insistence on universal applicability of deradicalization techniques still lingers in modern program designs. This could be attributed to the criminological roots of deradicalization theory and the national security importance placed on it, or persistent beliefs about some kind of psychopathology as an explanation for extremism. Martha Crenshaw (2000) has reviewed the history of efforts at profiling, which include studies of personality disorders, mental illness, developmental factors, and even the specific psychology of women and the "maternal-sacrificial code." Crenshaw blames reactive policymakers for these persisting views, and argues that "Shared ideological commitment and group solidarity are much more important determinants of terrorist behavior than individual characteristics." (p. 409). Kruglanski, Gelfand and Gunaratna (2010) take this one step further and suggest that although ideological commitment matters, so too do social ties, credible interlocutors with epistemic authority and certain life priority shifts or incentives, all coupled with an individual willingness to accept alternative arguments. These important factors could never be universal and would be nearly impossible to replicate in a variety of settings.

Individual ideological components, values, religious influence, social roles or alienation--all of these communal cultural impacts on radicals mean that deradicalization efforts must be tailor-made and content-specific to some degree. European programs based on the Danish Aarhus Model, the Saudi Arabian counselling program and the resulting U.S.-run Iraq effort modelled

on this program, Yemen's religious dialogue committee, Indonesia's prison program, and other soft-line approaches have already managed to integrate country-specific culture into their procedures for deradicalization and reintegration (Butt & Tuck, 2014; Horgan & Braddock, 2009; El-Said & Barrett, 2013). Other efforts, including some in the U.S. and France, have been criticized for their more hard-line, law enforcement-based approaches. In her article comparing and contrasting American and French responses to jihadi radicalization, Dorle Hellmuth attributed the slow recognition of cultural influences on deradicalization to secularism (2015). Hellmuth explained, "In a nation of immigrants of all races, ethnicities, and religions, there is a heightened cultural sensitivity, a reluctance to single out particular groups or segments of society, and an emphasis on political correctness and inclusiveness (the latter, ironically, ends up undermining the very notion of freedom of speech)." (p. 33). In their theory of violent radicalization, Sara Savage and Jose Liht argue that in the U.K., young Muslims may experience increased "death anxiety" as Western secularism challenges their cultural defense. Additional exclusion from the secular view in society compounds their anxiety and low self-esteem, leading to intensified religious identity rather than ethnicity-based or communal identities (2008, p.85).

The topic of culture is mentioned frequently in the literature on radicalization and, in more recent publications, deradicalization. Motivations grown from shared cultural beliefs, values learned through cultural teachings, or new identities built upon cultural rejection mean that culture is an indomitable force that may constantly challenge deradicalization efforts. Programs aimed at recognizing the importance of this theme may be more likely to thrive where others have failed. Kruglanski et al. note, "...we know that a novel argument that shares a basic overlap with an old view is likely to be more persuasive to individuals than a highly discrepant argument." (2010, p. 3). What better common ground to rest persuasive arguments on than shared cultural ties, experiences, and knowledge? Again, if the goal is eventual reintegration, the practice of culture within the scope of any deradicalization process seems intuitive; especially if support is to extend past detention or short-term assessment of individual risk.

(3b) Social Circumstances Matter

We have alluded before to the difficulty of generalizing across cultures about deradicalization programs. The same is true of generalizing across specific situations. A frequently-cited example of successful deradicalization is Germany following the Allied victory in 1945. The specifics of that situation were unique, and are unlikely to serve as a useful example now or in the foreseeable future. After the war, Germany was a nation whose indoctrinated belief in its own superiority had been smashed, whose people were shamed before the world as torturers and mass murderers, whose economy and infrastructure were in tatters, and that was now split in half, occupied, and governed by former enemies and the doctrines they brought. Those doctrines permeated the educational system, public media, entertainment, and government; rewards went to those who conformed. In West Germany, extensive individual freedom replaced a punitive tyranny, orderly peace replaced war and chaos, and the system was monitored by the powers that could direct where rewards were bestowed. The tenets of philosophy, economics, and society that had been enforced by the Nazi regime were replaced by others that had long been familiar, some from actual practice and others from the classic works and records of European civilization.

These circumstances are not likely to be replicated in today's world. Most wars are no longer fought to total victory and unconditional surrender; and even victorious armies seldom stay in occupation for decades followed by staying as defenders throughout half a century or more; and invaders have not shown themselves to bring order and prosperity after overthrowing previous governments. Imported ideas and policies of human rights and freedoms, democratic elections, "loyal oppositions," are not necessarily welcomed by people whose traditional folkways have never included those ideas and policies. Nazism had been dramatically proven an abject failure both as a philosophy and as a governing system; religious beliefs concerning a divinely ordered governing structure and rewards to be obtained after death are not subject to worldly evaluation and thus resist being disproved.

One part of this analysis may be unduly optimistic: the current resurgence of Nazi-like ideology and activism may mean that even secular movements can to some extent resist disconfirmation.

(4) The Need to Apply a Cognitive Focus

Another lesson we can draw from historical cases of deradicalization is the importance of cognition and the difference between the content and structure of thought. For example, the content of thought for radicals might include ideological dogma: religion, cultural influences, social connections, group history, etc., while the structure of thought concerns flexibility of thought, openness to new information and new ideas, integrative relationships between alternatives, synthesis between them and higher-order concepts (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992), and so on. Cognitive complexity, not always labeled or identified as such, has been one core psychological factor in theories and studies of extremism. The first and still most widely known analysis of this relationship appeared in Adorno et al.'s classic *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), and has been followed by hundreds if not thousands of examples, improvements, critiques, and updates. There is a plethora of evidence concerning the association between changes in integrative complexity and the peaceful or violent resolution of political conflict, including terrorism and civil war as well as international war (Conway et al., 2011; Stewart & Suedfeld, 2012; Suedfeld, 2010).

Many scholars have discussed the importance of a cognitive complexity element to deradicalization efforts. Studies of this relationship include attempts to analyze or create openness to alternative viewpoints in radicals or at-risk individuals (Dechesne, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2010; Garfinkel, 2007; Savage & Liht, 2008; Koehler, 2017), and the inclusion of psychologists rather than solely religious content-based interlocutors in programs (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Boucek, 2008; El-Said & Barrett, 2013). Recent publications have focused on individual attitudes and intentions (Wolfowicz et al., 2019), the effects of emotionally based strategic communications (Ćosić et al., 2018), and the application of repertory grid techniques influenced by Kelly's personal construct theory (1955) to show that radicals' views of themselves and the world are open to reconstruction (Winter & Muhanna-Matar, 2018). It seems clear that individual psychology and cognitive complexity remain promising fields for improved deradicalization efforts. How does thought influence the acceptance or rejection of terrorist methods for the attainment of goals or the resultant likelihood of violent behavior?

Our own study of the orientations of activists, militants and terrorist groups showed that on average, lower integrative complexity and higher power motivation imagery were associated with a group's acceptance of, support for, and participation in, violent acts (Suedfeld et al., 2013). While this study focused on groups, the same measures could easily be applied to individuals if verbal material were available.

Historical Case Studies

Using Incapacitation as a Venue for Re-education: Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland historical example of deradicalization is focused predominantly on the experiences of efforts to reintegrate prisoners and ex-prisoners. With both religious and political ideology cited as motivational explanations for Northern Ireland intrastate conflict from the late 1960's until the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998, the reintegration process began with incapacitation leading to physical disengagement from the conflict. Prison also gave many of the tens of thousands of politically motivated offenders the environment needed for deradicalization—reassessment of their priorities, consideration of alternative strategies for achieving their political goals, and access to educational resources and experiences with other prisoners that served to further solidify these changes (Ferguson, 2014). But the accounts of post-prison experiences seem to be less encouraging, reaffirming the need for greater support and study outside of predetermined limits such as prison sentences. Efforts to make up for the financial, educational, work procurement, and social issues ex-prisoners face has been predominantly led by government officials, organizations like the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) and even individual ex-prisoner-run programs (Horgan & Braddock, 2010).

Although the effort to counter extremist activities in Northern Ireland is complicated and largely country-specific, this historical example still reflects the lessons we have already outlined, such as the importance of differentiating between disengagement and deradicalization, obvious cultural considerations, and endless discussions about success. Even with an impressive figure of only 16 of the 450 early release prisoners under order of the Belfast Agreement having been rearrested for participation in terror-related activity (Horgan & Braddock, 2010, p. 271), the use of recidivism as a measure of success remains problematic. The count of known reoffenders does not necessarily reflect the risk of reoffending or acknowledge the importance of other predictors (Altier, Horgan, & Thoroughgood, 2012). Institutional attempts at assessing risk, such as the structured risk assessment administered by the Sentence Review Commission (SRC), have had to adapt their measures to account for the political situations prisoners are embroiled in by using a more subjective "politicalized risk assessments (PRA)" (Dwyer, 2007, p. 795). Claire D. Dwyer explains this difference: "Under 'normal' penal arrangements, risk assessment may be based on clinical assessment or aggregated scoring of individual characteristics such as employment, education and so on. However, under penal arrangements in Northern Ireland (when dealing with 'politically motivated' prisoners), risk was primarily assessed on the individual's affiliation to certain paramilitary organizations—in other words, the behaviour of their collective grouping." (2007, p. 785). This criterion of success may be applicable to this limited case, and may have contributed to better estimates of treatment outcomes or a reduced recidivism rate; but it

further illustrates the necessity for tailor-made intervention strategies and assessment procedures. Consideration of another unique element of the Northern Ireland case, the overwhelming willingness of ex-prisoners to engage in preventive efforts, is also worthy of exploration.

There is an active literature on the role that individual ex-prisoners play in Northern Ireland and the impact they can have on helping with reintegration efforts (Ferguson, 2014; Gormally, 2001; Joyce & Lynch, 2017). A theme that has emerged recently (likely as a result of historical distance) is the generational contribution ex-prisoners can make to ending, or at least defusing, a particular movement. In his study of what ends terrorist movements at a social, inter-generational level, Clubb (2016) uses the example of Irish Republicanism to explain the role that credible interlocutors can play in helping de-legitimize and de-glamorize violence (p.149). Clubb explains: “The conditions now have changed because there is parity of esteem between Nationalists and Unionists, British soldiers are no longer on the street, and there is a political route toward a united Ireland. The armed struggle was fought so the younger generation do not have to experience discrimination or conflict. As the conditions have changed so much now, there is no justification for armed struggle as (1) tactically it is ineffective; (2) there are better alternatives; and (3) the perpetrators are criminals, drug dealers, and are heavily infiltrated.” (2016, p. 141). The impact of open cross-generational communication, shared through dialogue and the credibility of those who were there and had endured the struggle, could be an overlooked element of deradicalization success in cases like Northern Ireland. The individual, group and societal motivation for rejecting the use of violence to achieve political ends related to the inter-generational trope, “I went through this so you wouldn’t have to,” may just be an underdeveloped element of historical deradicalization efforts worthy of further research.

From Disengagement to Reintegration: Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabia-based program is a good example of a relatively comprehensive approach. It is decentralized, and makes use of lessons learned. Founded on a soft policy of Prevention, Rehabilitation and Aftercare (PRAC), the Saudi efforts under the direction of the Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, represent a contemporary approach to addressing the broader range of current radicalization concerns (domestic threats, prisoner release, and foreign fighter returnees). The program draws from several agencies and utilizes experts from several disciplines, including psychologists and psychiatrists, and has a comprehensive aim whose endpoint is to support offenders on their path to eventual reintegration into society (Boucek, 2008). Many of the promising components of deradicalization we have reviewed – fostering disengagement in conjunction with deradicalization, the use of credible interlocutors, sensitivity to culture, the importance of care and monitoring beyond prison sentences, psychological elements, etc. -- are included in this program’s organization, aims and outcomes.

The Saudi program is highly regarded by many researchers. Its success, using the rates of known recidivism, is impressive although reports vary. Altier (2012) indicates that 5-7% of released participants are arrested for re-offending, while others have cited 3-4% (Lankford &

Gillespie, 2011), and still others claim 1-2% (Boucek, 2008). Of course, rates of known recidivism may miss many reoffenders who are not identified or caught, and in some cases do not even count those who are not actually convicted. Other problems, such as the diverse definitions of recidivism, the exclusion of the most extremely violent offenders from programs, the lack of multiple measures of success, and the paucity of objective third-party assessments, exemplify the prevailing confusion around measuring success.

Porges (2010) offers three explanations for the ongoing attention the Saudi program receives. She attributes the program's prestige to its ongoing self-reflection and refinement that includes disengagement and deradicalization support, an expanded role for participant's families, and further ongoing evaluation of the program -- although this does not include much outside independent access. Additionally, another explanation for the purported success of this program may be the attention paid to values and motivations associated with personal identity or heuristic constructions; even though these remain heavily reliant on content in the form of discussions with religious figures about Islam and interpretations of the Qur'an (Williams & Lindsey, 2014). The Saudi program is on the right path to acknowledging the importance of identity, a component of radicalization mentioned by authors such as Horgan, Crenshaw, El-Said, Kruglanski, Ashour, and Rabasa, but its efforts almost exclusively relate to content-specific arguments and teachings. From a cognitive-structural point of view, focusing heavily on the content of these heuristics may inadvertently reaffirm binary thinking on religious topics. In fact, the program has been criticized in that it may result in intransigence by reinforcing the participants' initial ideological beliefs. Instead, it might be useful for programs such as the Saudi program to challenge *how* one thinks about religion, rather than countering the points of interpretations themselves. Research initiatives like this already exist. In a Global Center policy brief, Nemr and Savage (2019) advocate the inclusion of this distinction in intervention efforts: "Given that IC [integrative complexity] is a measure of how people process information versus what they think, IC interventions avoid stigmatizing any group, transcend contested definitions about violent extremism, and offer a content-agnostic way to address the lower cognitive complexity that can render individuals vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies."

Highlighting positive components of the Saudi Arabian deradicalization program does not equate to a total endorsement of the program, which still faces criticism and doubt, partly due to its lack of transparency. Nevertheless, a program like this one, that is introspective, comprehensive, and continuously evolving, seems to be worthwhile as a source of components to be tested by other programs because it seems to be paying attention to its own, and potentially others', mistakes. While the Saudi program is unlikely to be replicable in its entirety, the lessons we have learned from it -- as well as the lessons they have learned and applied -- are certainly worthy of acknowledgement. Further empirical study of this program and its participants would certainly produce useful data to inform and help shape the direction of other deradicalization efforts.

Political Change through Identification: Tunisia

A historical example of deradicalization that can further illuminate certain lessons is the complex and extended evolution of the Ennahdha party of Tunisia. Tunisia's political history is steeped in religious tension, violent revolt, violent repression, and eventual heterogeneous

growth. From exile, to recognition as a legitimate political party, to inclusion in a coalition cabinet, to the election of Ennahdha leader, Rached Ghannouchi, to Speaker of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People in 2019, the Islamist party has come a long way from its fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood roots. A major departure from these beginnings came in the 1990's, when Ghannouchi insisted on an Ennahdha policy of denouncing all uses and condoning of violence. This was formalized in 1995 at a congress in Switzerland, and marked a turning point for the movement away from other leadership that saw violence as sometimes necessary (Wolf 2017, p. 13). But what led to this decisive and extensive rejection of violence, even in cases of self-defense?

The previous Tunisian government's strategy of detainment, exile, and torture of tens of thousands of Islamists coupled with broader societal rejection is credited by some as the reason why the group sought a more moderate position (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013), while others noted that the weakening of the party's structures and membership forced the movement to adopt a more conciliatory stance toward the Ben Ali government in the mid-2000s (Wolf, 2017, p. 22). Marks (2015) has argued that the increasingly moderate stance of Ennahda is a product of pressures from within the region, such as the rise of ISIS and the Egyptian coup of 2013, which forced Ennahda to become more introspective and defensive for the sake of survival. She explained that, "Ennahda itself is 'rethinking Islamism' as a local and long-term project predicated on canny compromise, a malleable message of cultural conservatism, and the survival of a democratic – if not necessarily secular-liberal – political system" (p. 1). While the impact of cultural pressures is certainly a theme mentioned throughout discussions of the history of Ennahdha, so too is the constant mention of Ghannouchi and his vision.

Structural forces, such as surroundings, demographics and events all played their role in building the Ennahdaha party that today participates in the Tunisian government, but an indispensable part of this evolution was informed by Ghannouchi himself. In terms of content, the ideological underpinnings of the Ennahdha movement remain the same today--democracy in tandem with religion; but what has evolved regarding Ghannouchi's beliefs and long-term goal is his warning against back-and-white thinking about these topics. In 2016, Rached Ghannouchi wrote an article praising Tunisia for avoiding the Arab world's propensity for binary thinking when it comes to political structures. He wrote, "People across the Arab world need a genuine alternative, not a false choice between ISIS and the kinds of dictatorships, like Bashar al-Assad's, that helped produce the terrorist group" (Ghannouchi, 2016). Well known as a charismatic leader, it is not surprising that Ghannouchi's message about openness to alternative thoughts and recognition of the connections between different layers of Islamist movements would be well received. As someone with an activist history, born in Tunisia and raised within its culture, he has been viewed by many as a credible interlocutor.

Ghannouchi has been able to take his own experience and vision of a non-secular state and translate them into a wider vision for Tunisia and beyond. He recognizes the obstacles that people of this region face, but he says, "The legacy of dictatorship continues to weigh heavily on us -- changing this culture of despotism to one of critical thinking and political engagement will require long-term educational reform." (Ghannouchi, 2016). In that particular statement, Ghannouchi's answer to dictatorship and extremist thinking is a mix of changing both the structure of thought and the behavior needed to make long-lasting change. It will not be quick

or simple, but Tunisia and the example of Ennahdha gives other countries hope that certain lessons may be transferable if they can adjust for or transcend case-specific differences.

Internalization via Cognitive Change: Cambridge

A program based in Cambridge, UK, is unusual in its emphasis on changing cognitive structure (Liht & Savage, 2013; Savage, Khan, & Liht, 2014; Savage & Liht, 2008; Savage, Liht, & Williams, 2018). The program is also rare in using basic psychological theory, collecting a variety of psychological outcome data, and addressing the problem of prevention rather than cessation. That is, the target audience consists of people, especially youths, considered at risk for joining extremist groups. The program is designed to move the participants toward higher levels of integrative complexity. Higher-level thinking is characterized by the ability to perceive as legitimate a number of dimensions and perspectives on a topic, flexible thinking, openness to new or discordant ideas, and tolerating lack of closure. The next step is recognizing relationships among those dimensions and perspectives: e.g., possible synthesis, trade-off, prioritizing, and so on and, at the highest level, subsuming them as examples or parts of a superordinate cognitive schema (Suedfeld, Tetlock & Streufert, 1992).

Changes in complexity are not necessarily related to changes in content: i.e., the tenets of any philosophy, political party, religion, etc., can be held as personal values at any level of complexity. By the same token, any level of complexity can generate a wide variety of value patterns. It is easier to change the content of beliefs than the cognitive structure of the individual or group – for example, circumstances can force a change from low-complexity, dogmatic right-wing politics to low-complexity, dogmatic left-wing politics or vice versa (e.g., members of early 1930s members of the German Communist Party becoming fervent members of the Nazi Party when Hitler came to power, or Nazis becoming loyal Communists under the German Democratic Republic -- East Germany – after 1945). The change from dogmatism to open-mindedness is more difficult and less common, but that is the goal of the Cambridge program. One crucial aspect of the structural change is that the individual may not change in loyalties, religion, political allegiance, and so on; it is the way the beliefs are held that changes, not the belief itself. A recent summary of the work concludes that (a) participants' measured complexity increases as a result of the procedure, and (b) that "high IC significantly correlates with participants' choosing of pro-social activism rather than violent mobilization" (Savage et al., 2018). The program, which has been adapted and applied in several places, is cited in a review as aimed at increasing the participants' ability to acknowledge and understand multiple values and views, and judges it as having had positive results (Kelly, 2019).

Where Do We Go from Here?

The number of deradicalization/disengagement programs around the world seems likely to continue growing even as the number of victims drops. To the extent that these programs contribute to further decreases in the casualty counts, as well as to the public's feelings of security, this trend is a positive one. But with the increase in the number of programs, major attention needs to be paid to improving their proven quality. Reducing the death count is of course important; but if the psychological makeup of the now-quiescent former terrorist remains unchanged, the possibility (and in some cases, the near certainty) of repetition persists. As former terrorists of ISIS and other organizations trickle back into civic life, many in their

native country in various parts of the world, and as the lone or small-group perpetrators become the standard, replacing large, complex operations, attacks are likely to grow in number even as the impact of each may objectively decline.

It may be thought that the first hurdle is to reach wide agreement on which programs, and which components of each program, make a measurable impact on success rates. But there is a needed step before that, an agreement on defining success itself. Should we concentrate on the difficult goal of changing “hearts and minds,” or should we exert the primary effort on disengagement – i.e., behavioral change whether voluntarily on the part of the potential attackers, or by incapacitation? How long must we continue follow-ups (for researchers) or surveillance (for law enforcement) before we can declare a success? What constitutes relapse or recidivism, short of participating in actual terrorist actions?

If the social science and security communities ever come to an overall agreement on how to answer these and similar questions, it will be easier to assess the programs themselves. In this paper, we consider projects with different emphases and methods, concentrating on “soft” approaches to persuasion and conversion. Those that consider individual, group, and culture-wide factors in radicalization, and attempt to roll back the changes that led to extremism in all those domains, seem more likely to result in long-term, sustainable reform. As in many similar problem situations, it is probably important to provide support for those individuals who are at risk for re-radicalization – for example, those who by necessity return to the social, economic, and geographical milieu that led to their original recruitment. It may be overly optimistic to expect a large-scale return to peaceful integration into society, but increasing the percentage of those ex-radicals who accomplish it would be a feasible goal.

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