International Center for
the Study of Violent Extremism

Psycho-social and Islamic Challenge Approaches to in-Prison Treatment of Militant Jihadis

Anne Speckhard, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

The decades of military efforts and loss of human lives on the part of western governments against terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, and most recently ISIS, have proven insufficient to eliminate the threat of militant jihadi terrorist attacks both domestically and abroad, as evidenced in recent attacks in Iraq, Syria, France, UK, Belgium, Spain, and elsewhere. Terrorist

groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to inspire and call for violence, increasing unease among the citizens of many countries worldwide.

This article goes over the history of militant jihadi deradicalization programs, namely discussed in the context of The Arab Peninsula and the Levant highlighting their strengths and weakness and the circumstances in which they evolved. Throughout the article, the term deradicalization will denote measures or programs aimed at changing the mindset and ideological beliefs of those already radicalized. Comparatively speaking, disengagement will refer to measures or programs aimed at behavioral change, including an individual or collective decision to abandon terrorist organizations and cease violent activities. One must note that disengagement may not lead to deradicalization and that deradicalization is not a prerequisite to disengagement.[1]

Given that groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, at least on some level, pose an ideological challenge, in this article the author argues that when dealing with those imprisoned on terrorism charges or detained as potential terrorists, deradicalization should remain a key component of any sound counterterrorism or Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) policy. This is not to say that terrorist disengagement alone is not a worthy goal, however. Indeed, several authors have contributed significant amount of research on terrorist disengagement and deradicalization programs aimed at far left nationalist and separatist organizations between the 1960s and 1990, such as the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the Red Army Faction (RAF), that appeared successful without ever addressing ideology.[2] In addition, individuals belonging to such terrorist groups were not subjected to deradicalization programs, and most of those released from prison were not known to reengage in terrorism. However, in many cases, the terrorist groups themselves were beginning to fade in prominence at the time, unlike the continued social movements of al-Qaeda, and now ISIS, which continue to have a powerful "brand" in terms of selling the idea of bringing a fundamental change to the existing political, social, and economic world order and basing that change on twisting religious principles that are well established and already accepted by many. ISIS has not entirely based its survival on territorial sovereignty and governance. As evidenced in many author discussions and interviews with ordinary citizens and officials in Iraq conducted between 2017 and 2018, the ISIS brand remains appealing as the government of Iraq continues to fail to cater to the basic Sunni Muslim needs, particularly in previously ISIS-run areas. Moreover, current post-conflict mismanagement and widespread corruption in the country seem to mimic grievances and revolts that fueled the Iraqi insurgency in 2003, eventually leading to the emergence of the Islamic State.

Moreover, perhaps unlike terrorist movements that were nationalist or separatist in nature, ideological commitment and sacred values bound up in strongly held religious beliefs become central to those who become ideologically indoctrinated by ISIS and al Qaeda. In fact, ISIS goes to great lengths to ideologically indoctrinate its recruits, requiring them to take weeks long *shariah* training courses to introduce them to the ISIS Takfir ideology and indoctrinate them into believing that all others not adhering to their views can be killed.[3]

While these ideas continue to entice many, failure to address continued ideological commitment to terrorist violence in those who may temporarily or permanently disengage

from it, the author argues, may pose a serious risk that the individual can easily return later to the same terrorist group or to a similarly minded one should circumstances again favor doing so. Likewise, one should note that those programs that addressed ideology alone also often failed, or relied on strict social control and surveillance upon release to ensure non-recidivism. In this regard, when possible, it is best to address both aspects – the reasons for engaging in terrorism and support for disengaging and the possibility of relinquishing and changing one's ideological stance and commitment to terrorist violence—for the greatest likelihood of success.

The primary objective of this article is to discuss measures and programs applied to detainees and individuals convicted of terrorist crimes in the context of the Arab Peninsula and the Levant and specifically to programming in Iraq. A significant portion of this article is dedicated to discussing deradicalization and disengagement efforts applied to twenty-three thousand detainees and eight hundred juveniles held in Camp Bucca in Iraq in 2007. It serves to trace historical components of this deradicalization and disengagement program and clarify its goals, means, and methods of potentially bringing those who have committed to violent extremism back into reengaging and reintegrating into society. While deradicalization and disengagement efforts in this article are discussed in relation to al-Qaeda, the findings could also be applied in the case of deradicalization and disengagement programs aimed at members of other Islamist-driven terrorist groups.

To understand the failures and successes of deradicalization and disengagement efforts, especially in relation to Islamist militants, one must understand both the reasons that motivate one to join and reasons that motivate one to leave, which in fact can be quite different, as are the trajectories into and back out of terrorism.

Generally speaking, the making of a terrorist comprises of four components: a group, its ideology, social support, and individual motivations and vulnerabilities, which breakdown by conflict and non-conflict zone. [4] For instance, in conflict zones, individual motivations and vulnerabilities for engaging in terrorism almost always encompass some degree of personal and collective traumatization, such as people losing their homes, territory, or other resources. This also includes being subjected to occupation, imprisonment, torture, rape, or killings, followed by a desire for revenge, for which terrorist groups are often very willing to equip and train such individuals.

In contrast, in non-conflict zones, individual motivations and vulnerabilities for engaging with groups like ISIS or al-Qaeda generally involve societal marginalization, discrimination, frustrated aspirations, or identifying with victims in conflict zones. Unemployment, poverty, inability to get married, wanting to escape personal and family problems, or a desire to pursue an adventure or falling in love also play an important role. In all cases, these four factors interact in a multitude of manners, making pathways into and back out of terrorism very contextual. Similarly, the motivations and vulnerabilities for joining a terrorist group differ significantly from person to person. Moreover, deradicalization is not a simple reversal process of getting on the terrorist trajectory; rather, it involves its own process of disillusionment, cognitive changes, and so forth.

Many academics and counter-terrorism researchers[1] have long known and argued that the pathways into terrorism do not always begin on the ideological level but may also involve a match between what the group offers in terms of meeting individual vulnerabilities. In other words, recruits may join a terrorist group because they resonate to its ideology or for the plethora of possibilities and opportunities that it purports to offer: belonging, friendship, purpose, dignity, significance, adventure, romance, financial rewards, or escape from problems—to name but a few. As the needs of such individuals are met, they gradually come to also embracing the group's ideology.

Programs to disengage and deradicalize violent extremists and terrorists have been around for decades and are primarily rooted in identifying and detaining violent extremists and terrorists. The first programs aimed at militant *jihadis* from al-Qaeda and likeminded groups were in the category of, what the author refers herein to as, *Islamic Challenge* programs. One of the first deradicalization programs of this type was introduced in Yemen. The program was based upon the "Committee for Dialogue," where Muslim scholars helped to determine where the detainees strayed from the teachings of Quran*.* [5] Charismatic Islamic scholars met with detainees and tried to guide them back into a nonviolent interpretation of Islam that did not embrace militant jihadi ideals. Detainees were granted amnesty through the program, provided they agreed to denounce violence and did not have blood on their hands from prior terrorist attacks. Approximately 364 detainees were released from this program in 2005. At the time, Yemen officials declared that Yemen was 90% terrorist free. However, it later turned out that at least eight of those who had gone through the program wound up volunteering themselves to al-Qaeda in Iraq. [6]This fact caused many experts in the counter-terrorism field to wonder if the clerics' program, while well-intentioned, was also serving as a means of expelling terrorists out of Yemen to nearby conflicts, as many posed a serious risk in terms of radicalization and weaponization. The prospect of dying in other conflicts also ensured that such individuals would not return to Yemen.

The Saudis also developed a program that they have been continuously revamping over the years. In its inception, the Saudi program was much like the Yemeni program, although it relied on a number of well-respected Saudi *ulema* (religious clerics) who were specifically trained to engage with militant jihadi prisoners. The Saudi program is much better resourced than any other program to date. The new al-Hair Prison, just south of Riyadh, is one of the five prison facilities in the country that houses over 5,000 terrorism-related convicts. It is well-known for being luxurious and modern for any prison setting. In the nearby Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Rehab, participants in the rehabilitation program enjoy the luxury of playing soccer, ping-pong, swimming, video games as well as engaging in art therapy before being released backed into society. [7]

---

[1] See, for example, Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, The Psychology of Terrorism: "Syndrome" versus "Tool" Perspectives. " *Terrorism and Political Violence, 18*, no. 2 (2006):193-215; Randy Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2004).

The treatment also includes some group and individual counseling. Upon their release, some prisoners are given cars, jobs, health care, education for their children, and set up with wives to marry—who watch over and report upon them if things go wrong. [8] These offerings are resources that many other deradicalization programs could not hope to provide. Likewise, the Saudi government can carefully monitor and keep track of released prisoners, creating a strong deterrent to reengaging in terrorist activities. At first, the Saudi program only addressed prisoners with no blood on their hands and who were only found guilty of downloading terrorist propaganda, though such acts might be considered free speech rights in other countries. Their program was also Islamic Challenge in nature and relied on the ulema to create rapport with the prisoners and then argue the Islamic scriptures with the prisoners they were sent to challenge.

As noted, the Saudi program has been continually revamped over the years and now includes both psychological and religious interventions. The Saudi government officials maintain that their program is voluntary and not at all coercive, although there is a strong incentive to enroll in such program as it leads to release over time. Furthermore, those following their designated 8-12-week stay who fail to pass the psychological evaluation necessary for release are compensated monetarily (e.g. $267 reported in 2015) per each day they are not released back into society, with the "option of legally challenging the decision." [9] Those who have done more than simply download terrorist materials and who have committed actual acts of terrorism also take part in the program, but are not released after completing it, as they must serve their sentences despite having taken part in the program. Arguably, the many perks and amenities offered to those participating in the program, such as access to a pool, gym, etc., coupled with the Saudi government emphasis on both financially supporting the families of the incarcerated and actively engaging them in the rehabilitation program, remains central to their rehabilitation and voluntary enlistment in the program.

The Saudis take pride in their deradicalization efforts and have invited international scholars to come and review their deradicalization program. The Saudi program is highly respected, although it was heavily criticized after two high-value Saudi detainees they received from the U.S. Guantanamo Bay detention facilities, who went through the program with claimed success, traveled to fight with al-Qaeda in Iraq after their release. Specifically, Said al-Shihri successfully went through the Saudi deradicalization program and re-entered society, but then went on to become the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in Yemen. He was responsible for the 2008 American Embassy bombing in Sana'a, Yemen. [10] Understandably, U.S. authorities and its allies were dissatisfied with such an outcome.

The Saudis systematically study their results and tout them proudly, claiming to have de-radicalized over 90 percent who took part in the deradicalization program. In 2007, it was reported that 1,500 out of 3,200 participating in the program had been released back into society. [11] The Saudi program has had high success with those early on the terrorist trajectory—downloaders of terrorist propaganda and the curious exploring terrorism online and offline—but is not as effective with those who they referred to as the "hard-core"

committed types. Approximately 10 percent of those participating in the prison program are defined as "hard-core" prisoners.[12] Clearly, the Saudi program failed with several of the Guantanamo Bay detainees who likely represented the "hard-core" population.

The Detainee Rehabilitation Program, discussed in the ensuing section, may serve as a model of what could work and what does not work in terms of deradicalization and disengagement programs carried out in detention and prison facilities.

Camp Bucca

In 2006, the U.S. military in Iraq had taken into its custody 20,000+ adult male and 800 male juveniles, all arrested in raids and sweeps in the immediate aftermath of terror attacks in the country. Mandated by U.N. regulations at the time, the detainees were housed communally in blocks of 100 or more. The numbers continued to grow while the U.S. military were noticing alarming trends among the detainees, including among the self-appointed *emirs*, garnering a following of adherents and teaching and enforcing their militant version of *shariah law*. Those with bomb-making skills were training youth, in particular, in how to make and carry out Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks. As the numbers grew, it became harder to sort out serious violent actors and ideologically indoctrinated into al-Qaeda from those who had simply been picked up in sweeps for minor terrorism-related infractions, namely transporting guns for money in a taxi, handing off messages, or being a money courier. Those not involved in violent terrorist groups were being recruited, while those who were already part of al-Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist groups were consolidating relationships and forming deeper bonds during their detention.

In 2006, General Garner attempted to create a deradicalization program aimed at pulling those in groups like al-Qaeda away from it, and, at a minimum, turning them away from their commitment to enacting violence against the U.S.-led coalition forces and the newly formed government of Iraq. The author was called in, along with Rohan Gunaratna and Ustaz Mohmammed, to consult on whether the detainees could be reached with such programming and to decide what it should entail. Following their initial assessment, the author, leading a team of experts, wrote for the U.S. military what became known as the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program*. The program was designed with a multi-prong approach that considered the psycho-social, religious, and socio-economic factors involved in radicalization into violent extremism. The author designed the psychological and Islamic Challenge part of the program (with the writing of the Islamic portion carried out by Salafi imams) and suggested also holding a school for the 800 juveniles, so they would not be released back into society with serious educational deficits, making them vulnerable to recidivism.[17] The U.S. military also planned a skills training program to increase the likelihood of employment for all detainees.

The psychological part of the program explored the trauma and revenge aspects of being motivated to join a terrorist group. It also explored anger over being held for lengthy periods of time in U.S.-run detention facilities and without any formal charges; anger over being beaten at the time of arrest, possibly tortured while in Iraqi hands; and anger over the U.S.-led coalition

invasion of Iraq and the effect it had in terms of human loss, human suffering, and economic affliction. The program also clearly spelled out if charges against detainees would be leveled and offered them a means of working their way out of detention by participating in the program, as not knowing their sentence or how long they would be held created anxiety for many of them.

Detainees were invited to discuss with psychologists the reasons for believing that engaging in terrorism would lead to desired results for themselves and their loved ones, particularly in light of it having resulted in imprisonment. It also redirected detainees to other solutions to real and pressing problems in Iraq, including in their personal lives. The Islamic Challenge portion of the program used trained clerics to address and attempt to debunk the Islamic justifications (as propagated by terrorist groups) for engaging in militant jihad and redirect detainees into nonviolent solutions to their real or perceived grievances.

Given the large number of detainees, growing at one point to over 24,000, the Detainee Rehabilitation Program was designed for large-scale application, with group versus individual counseling as the main mode of treatment. To facilitate moving large numbers through the program, it was designed for a psychologist and imam to jointly treat 20 detainees daily in a group setting, over a six-week period. The twenty detainees were divided into groups of 10 detainees each, with one group treated by a psychologist in the morning and the other ten seeing the imam, with the two groups switching in the afternoons. During lunch, the imam and psychologist were to consult carefully with each other about crossovers between their psycho-social and religious concerns, as well as about detainees of concern. The most worrisome and alarming cases were to be treated individually for one hour in the late afternoon. While the sheer numbers of detainees needing to be put into the program precluded treating many of them individually, individual sessions were to be scheduled for the most difficult cases each day.

Participation in the program was voluntary but necessary to be considered for accelerated release. Human rights were carefully observed throughout. The detainees were informed not to share any self-incriminating information that could potentially lead to them being charged and handed over to the Iraqi authorities for criminal proceedings. The military personnel holding the detainees also began to hold hearings to explain to the detainees the reasons for their detention and give them an opportunity to clear their names.

Terrorists in Camp Bucca, including in Camp Cropper, had implemented their militant version of shariah law among their followers. In Bucca, they even set up shariah courts operating secretly late at night. It is in such courts that traitors were being punished by having their arms broken. In this context, fear of punishment was also rendered as a cause of radicalization. Due to concerns of retaliation for agreeing to take part in the program, detainees who agreed to undergo treatment were separated out from the other detainees. Likewise, there were concerns that daytime efforts to deradicalize and disengage terrorists from their groups and ideology could be undone at night if they continued to mix with the others.

The pairing of an imam or religious scholar and psychologist worked well. One Islamic scholar, for instance, reported to the first author that he managed to talk an Algerian foreign fighter out of his belief that the teachings of Islam condoned the killings of other Muslims in support of al-Qaeda's goals and objectives. The scholar quickly felt out of his depth, however, when the foreign fighter began having traumatic responses and feeling as though he was no longer a hero but rather a murderer. His posttraumatic symptoms of extreme fear, inability to sleep, and traumatic reinterpretation of his experiences were shared with the psychologist for treatment. Moreover, the psychologists were able to turn to the religious scholars for help in unpacking adamant insistence that adherence to al-Qaeda and violent extremist ideologies was religiously ordained, opening the detainees to the possibilities of exploring more freely their reasons for joining as well as alternative pathways to achieving similar end states without a commitment to violence.

The situation in Camp Bucca was unique in the sense that detainees who went through the program were to be released back into an active war zone, where sectarian violence was still rife and it was extremely difficult to keep track of released detainees' whereabouts and activities.[2] The chances of encountering politically motivated violence aimed at themselves, or their group, was a serious likelihood. In this regard, the recidivism rates could be expected to be higher, compared to other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, where careful surveillance upon release is possible.

Equally important, the tribes in Anbar province who were being re-empowered through negotiations with the U.S.- led coalition and tribal leaders joining the Awakening movement were insisting on release of their detainees. This resulted in changes in the planned for program and resulted in mass releases, which meant accelerated treatment for those less ideologically indoctrinated while most of the hardcore detainees did not receive the planned for treatment. When the government of Iraq took over these detainees, and many were ultimately freed—some later through a jail break carried out by ISIS—many were still highly ideologically committed. They also faced continued sectarian violence and an oppressive political and security situation that became intolerable for many Sunnis. These factors also led to the support of the repeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq in the form of Islamic State terrorists on the part of the Sunni population of Iraq.

While carrying out the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program*, it was difficult to find and recruit native Iraqis with sound psychological and social work skills, as many with such skills had fled the country and had relocated to better-paid jobs and safety in Jordan and the Gulf states—an issue that is likely to plague any conflict torn environment. Therefore, the psychological part of the program relied on using introductory scripts written to assist less experienced clinicians to

---

[2] It is important to note that Camp Bucca took place at the time of ongoing deadly sectarian violence and under a U.S.-led occupation of Iraq. The then newly built Shia-centric Iraqi security and penal system made Camp Bucca quite unique, meaning it was both a detention and prison facility during a full-blown sectarian conflict. This particular context affected the program and the manner in which it ended. The post-ISIS rehabilitation programs may or may not run under a different programing structure.

help open up the detainees on particular topics related to violent extremism and help them explore their thoughts and feelings about it. It was judged that this approach would make it easier for less experienced psychologists to engage effectively on these difficult topics.

Islamic scholars were Sunni, as those already adhering to the al-Qaeda doctrines rejected Shia outright and would unlikely listen to them. Those with a solid understanding of conservative streams of Islam were most likely to be able to engage with hardcore ideologically indoctrinated al-Qaeda cadres which bore out in experience. In the program, we were able to employ three former al-Qaeda scholars who had defected from the group. We found these defectors to have an excellent rapport and "street credibility" with the hardcore, as they had joined for similar reasons and were well acquainted with the manner in which such groups twist Islamic teachings and scriptures on behalf of justifying terrorist violence. The downside of using former al-Qaeda cadres, however, was that some among the U.S. military and staff, including the Shia local contractors, feared them and were constantly uncertain of their loyalty. This made relationships difficult and replicated the Shia-Sunni divide inside the prison that was happening outside the prison as well.

Other difficulties included staff worrying about their own and the safety of their families, while al-Qaeda operatives were able to communicate outside the prison to threaten them. One of the three al-Qaeda defectors who worked with the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program* was killed afterward by al-Qaeda in retribution for his participation with the U.S. forces. Many other staff members worried about their own and safety of their family members. In addition, some skilled local staff offered their services to the program, but it quickly became evident that they were angling for the possibility to be paid large amounts of money to design and carry out their own programs. We also learned of prison guards carrying out schemes to trick and bribe prisoners' family members into paying huge amounts of cash to obtain the release of their loved one or communicate with him.

Discussion and conclusion

In the aftermath of horrific Islamist-driven terrorist attacks in many parts of the world—and given the increase in frequency of such terrorist attacks—many countries struggle to understand why and how some of its citizens become radicalized into extremism and violence. The problem of addressing violence and terrorism becomes especially complicated given that enemies are no longer confined to a clear, discernible territory; rather they have morphed from local insurgencies to global networks, increasing both the enormity of the threat and difficulties in addressing prevention and rehabilitation efforts. In response to such a growing threat, a number of government and civil society led initiatives were introduced to target vulnerable Muslim populations, ranging from programs that interlink law enforcement, education, health and human services and religious leaders' efforts to promote dialogue and introduce vulnerable Muslim populations to different prevention and rehabilitation programs. Likewise, we witnessed the rise of rehabilitation programs that sanction convicted or detained jihadists to mandatory or voluntary counseling as a condition of avoiding incarceration, accelerated release, or release at all.

While it is acknowledged that not all terrorists become ideologically indoctrinated, nor do they necessarily join for ideological reasons, the author has found in her over 700 in-depth interviews of terrorists, that many do take on the ideology of the group they join. This is particularly true with the terrorist groups like ISIS, as they require those following in their footsteps to take shariah training and heavily indoctrinate them in militant jihadist ideologies, including intimidating them into compliance. Therefore, rehabilitation of ISIS cadres or soldiers likely requires the ability to address ideological indoctrination and psychological hooks that drew them into the group, as well as the psychological support necessary to help them withdraw from it.

Central to this article was the discussion on deradicalization programs designed to be applied to twenty-three thousand detainees and eight hundred juveniles in Camp Bucca, Iraq. The primary objective was to shed light on the rise of deradicalization efforts carried out in the Arab Peninsula and the Levant that relied first on simply Islamic Challenge programs but over time recognized the need for psychological interventions as well, as the author designed for the U.S.-run prison detention facilities in Iraq in 2006-2007. While the program that eventually became known as the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program* was carefully and sensitively crafted, it was never fully carried out as designed. The politics in Iraq shifted so quickly that General Stone in charge of the program in 2007 began scheduling mass releases to the tribes in Anbar who were participating in the Awakening Movement to fight al-Qaeda in their areas. The six-week long program designed to include actual counseling became more of a fast-paced program applied to the least dangerous detainees, who after going through it were released en-masse, while the hardcore militant *jihadis* were never, for the most part, invited into the program to be treated before being handed over to the Iraqis following the U.S. troops withdrawal from Iraq.

General Stone's staff kept recidivism statistics during the year in which detainees went through the program. They found an extremely low recidivism rate, which led him to conclude the program was a success. However, one could argue that once caught and detained by U.S. forces, a detainee would be much more likely operationally careful in his or her terrorist activities upon release. In addition, arguably, the tribes were more accountable than the program itself for holding terrorist recidivism in check during the time of the Awakening Movement when participation in al-Qaeda and other Sunni terrorist movements lost social support. The program was tested in a dynamic and active conflict zone environment; thus, it initially reflected a success. However, the program could have had even more profound impact had it been carefully and consistently applied to the hard-core detainees as well, many of whom unfortunately later became ISIS cadres wreaking havoc in the region and throughout the world.

While some European countries had introduced deradicalization programs to address threats emanating from al-Qaeda and other terrorist related groups, they began designing community prevention and prison deradicalization programs in earnest following the travel of nearly 5,000 European citizens to the conflicts zone in Syria and Iraq. [18] Given that many returned to Europe—some to mount attacks in France and Belgium particularly—governments began proactively working on prevention and intervention efforts. The example of Camp Bucca,

including the recent attacks in France where ties made in prison led to later terrorist involvement, highlights the importance of adequately addressing terrorism emanating and accelerating from prisons, primarily due to the networking potentials in prisons, and should serve as powerful enough motivators for governments to introduce rehabilitation programs with deradicalization components as an important step in fighting terrorism. Having said that, good governance, including controlling terrorist activity and recruitment outside the prison, is equally important, as the psycho-social, political, and economic environment in which one is released back into will likely be determining factors whether the individual remains interested in and engages in terrorism.

As terrorist groups like ISIS continue to lose significant swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, many more foreign fighters are likely to return. In many cases, the process of decommissioning from the battlefield is likely to occur naturally. Some are likely to deradicalize on their own after becoming disillusioned and having defected from the group.[19] Others, against whom strong incriminating evidence exists, will be imprisoned, and these may choose to engage in rehabilitation efforts to demonstrate their commitment to abandoning the violent cause or out of genuine desire to redirect themselves to a better life.

One of the key aspects of the deradicalization program in Camp Bucca was the ideological component, or an effort to inoculate and turn detainees against the appeal of ideologies of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and offer them counter-narratives to such ideologies. In addition, psychological issues were addressed—the key vulnerabilities and motivations for engaging in terrorism and the need to offer psychological, social, and economic support to withdraw from terrorism. Similar to many detained in Camp Bucca whose radicalization process into Al-Qaeda in Iraq was intertwined with religion, the process of deradicalizing those imprisoned from terrorist groups like ISIS will require rehabilitation efforts focused on introducing moderate interpretations of Islam while addressing their extremist ideological beliefs by those who can understand that mindset.

Measures focused on psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration are required as well. These efforts must be carefully balanced with punitive measures, so as to motivate participation and to avoid the potential for return into violence upon release. Our research with ISIS defectors and ISIS prisoners worldwide suggests both possibilities—that is, of sliding back into terrorism while in prison and receiving the ideological and psycho-social support necessary to walk away from it. [20] In this regard, adequate religious education, psychological counseling, job placement, and monitoring upon release are all useful to ensure success. Equally important, in seeking to reintegrate and rehabilitate returnees and detainees, governments and civil society organizations must refrain from direct intrusion into the spiritual space of individuals to redefine their religious beliefs, as it may prove counterproductive in the long run. Rather, the focus should be on engaging in philosophical and intellectual aspects of religion and offering tools to understand one's religion and how to judge the legitimacy of terrorist claims about it to counter the use of violence.

As discussed in the article, three former al-Qaeda scholars who had defected from the group helped with the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program* in Camp Bucca. While using “formers” in deradicalization efforts can often be problematic, defectors and returnees from the so-called Islamic State may also play a crucial role in not only educating vulnerable populations on the dangers of joining terrorist groups like ISIS, but also creating counter-radicalization and deradicalization programs to deter potential future recruits. [21] Defectors and formers have a unique cache in that they have been there themselves and understand what it means to be part of a terrorist group. In such capacity, they can play a crucial role in dissuading or convincing vulnerable individuals not to follow a violent path, provided they are well trained and supported for that role.

It is often easier to convince ideologically committed individuals to change their behaviors than their beliefs.[3] While it is often difficult to change the ideological beliefs of committed individuals, behavior-focused deradicalization components, such as psychological counseling, education, vocational training, etc., as discussed in the context of several countries’ deradicalization and rehabilitation efforts, can also be the factors that lead to spontaneous ideological and doctrinal reform on the part of prisoners and detainees. The author has in-depth interviewed over 225 ISIS defectors, prisoners and returnees, some who benefited from the ability to work through traumatic issues they encountered in the battle zone and many others who expressed the need for such support. Lastly, the value of deradicalization programs will depend on local political circumstances to which a prisoner is released. When putting together the psychological and Islamic Challenge portions of the *Detainee Rehabilitation Program* in Camp Bucca, the author advised caution and not to expect high success rates in those instances when detainees are released back into active conflict zones, where they cannot be supervised and are likely to again encounter sectarian violence aimed at themselves and their families.

In attempting to turn militant jihadis back off the terrorist trajectory, it is important to understand that such individuals will likely need both psychological and ideological intervention to be able to unhook from the terrorist group. While disengagement is a worthy goal in itself, those who remain ideologically indoctrinated remain at risk for return to terrorist activities with the same or future similarly minded groups—as the author has found with defectors that she has interviewed. Many will not return to terrorist activities, but a comprehensive change, both behaviorally and ideologically, is likely the best goal to aim for in reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

Anne Speckhard, Ph.D. is Director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) and serves as an Adjunct Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine. She has interviewed over 700 terrorists, their family members and supporters in various parts of the world including in Western Europe, the Balkans, Central

[3] See, for example, Andrew Silke, Disengagement of Deradicalization: A Look at Prison Programs for Jailed Terrorists, available at https://ctc.usma.edu/disengagement-or-deradicalization-a-look-at-prison-programs-for-jailed-terrorists/

Asia, the Former Soviet Union and the Middle East. In the past three years, she and ICSVE staff have been collecting interviews (n=236 and counting) with ISIS defectors, returnees and prisoners as well as al Shabaab cadres (n=16 and counting) and their family members (n=25) as well as ideologues (n=2), studying their trajectories into and out of terrorism, their experiences inside ISIS (and al Shabaab), as well as developing the *Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter Narrative Project* materials from these interviews which includes over 150 short counter narrative videos of terrorists denouncing their groups as un-Islamic, corrupt and brutal. She has also been training key stakeholders in law enforcement, intelligence, educators, and other countering violent extremism professionals on the use of counter-narrative messaging materials produced by ICSVE both locally and internationally as well as studying the use of children as violent actors by groups such as ISIS and consulting on how to rehabilitate them. In 2007, she was responsible for designing the psychological and Islamic challenge aspects of the Detainee Rehabilitation Program in Iraq to be applied to 20,000 + detainees and 800 juveniles. She is a sought after counterterrorism experts and has consulted to NATO, OSCE, foreign governments and to the U.S. Senate & House, Departments of State, Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, Health & Human Services, CIA and FBI and CNN, BBC, NPR, Fox News, MSNBC, CTV, and in Time, The New York Times, The Washington Post, London Times and many other publications. She regularly speaks and publishes on the topics of the psychology of radicalization and terrorism and is the author of several books, including *Talking to Terrorists*, *Bride of ISIS*, *Undercover Jihadi* and *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Her publications are found here: https://georgetown.academia.edu/AnneSpeckhardWebsite: and on the ICSVE website http://www.icsve.org

Follow @AnneSpeckhard

Reference for this Article: Speckhard, Anne (February 10, 2020) Psycho-social and Islamic Challenge Approaches to in-Prison Treatment of Militant Jihadis. *ICSVE Research Reports*. https://www.icsve.org/psycho-social-and-islamic-challenge-approaches-to-in-prison-treatment-of-militant-jihadis/

References:

[1] John Horgan and Tore Bjorgo, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, "Countering Radicalization in Europe," *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 2012, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ICSR-Report-Countering-Radicalization-in-Europe.pdf

[2] Andrew Silke," Disengagement or Deradicalization: Look at Prison Programs for Jailed Terrorists," *CTC Sentinel,* January 1, 2011, https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/disengagement-or-deradicalization-a-look-at-prison-programs-for-jailed-terrorists; John Horgan and Kurt Braddock," Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programmes," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2 (2010): 267-291.

[3] Angel Gomez et. Al, The Devout Actor's Will to Fight and the Spiritual Dimension of Human Conflict," *Nature and Human Behavior*(2017); URL https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-

017-0193-3; Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, ISIS *Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate* (McLean: Advances Press, LLC, 2016);
[4] Anne Speckhard, "The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism," The *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016, http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/.
[5] Arie W. Kruglanski, Michelle Gelfand and Rohan Gunaratna, "Detainee Rehabiliation." *Association for Psychological Science,* January 2010, https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/detainee-deradicalization
[6] Gregory D. Johnsen, "Yemen's Passive Role in the War on Terrorism." *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 4 (February 23, 2006). https://jamestown.org/program/yemens-passive-role-in-the-war-on-terrorism/
[7] Ben Hubbard, "Inside Saudi Arabia's Re-education Prison for Jihadists." *The New York Times,* April 9, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/world/middleeast/inside-saudi-arabias-re-education-prison-for-jihadists.html; Paul Sperry, " "Gitmo Prisoner Reveals that Saudi 'Terrorist Rehab' Center is a Scam." *New York Post,* November 28, 2016, http://nypost.com/2016/11/28/gitmo-prisoner-reveals-that-saudi-terrorist-rehab-center-is-a-scam/
[8] Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. "*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* September 2008, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp97_boucek_saudi_final.pdf
[9]Andreas Casptack, "Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study." *Middle East Institute*, June 10, 2015, https://www.mei.edu/content/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study
[10] "Said al-Shihri," *Counter Extremism Project,* 2017, https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/said-al-shihri
[11] Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. "
[12] Ibid.
[13] Katharina K. Lestari," Indonesia's Deradicalization Program under Fire." *UCA News,* November 24, 2016, http://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesias-deradicalization-program-under-fire/77698
[14] See, for example, UCA News article reporting on the success rate of deradicalization programs in Malaysia. http://www.ucanews.com/news/malaysia-offers-europe-proven-deradicalization-program/77524; The recent interviews in Malaysia conducted by the first and second author also revealed criticisms about the scope of Malaysia's deradicalization program, including criticisms regarding relevant legislation that forms its basis.
[15] Anne Speckhard and Stefanie Mitchell, "Possibilities of Peace-Building in Iraq: Questions of Deradicalization and Reintegration amidst Sectarian Conflicts. *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism,* 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anne-speckhard/possibilities-of-peacebui_b_14191234.html; Anne Speckhard, *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers and "Martyrs"* (McLean: Advances Press, LLC, 2012).
[16] Ibid.

[17] Speckhard, Anne. *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers and "Martyrs"*. McLean, VA: Advances Press, 2012.
[18] See, for example, estimates by *The Soufan Group*, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf
[19] Anne Speckhard and Ahmet S. Yayla, ISIS *Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*; Anne Speckhard, Ardian Shajkovci, and Ahmet S. Yayla, "Defected from ISIS or Simply Returned, and for How Long? Challenges for the West in Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters." *Homeland Security Affairs 14,* article 1 (2018). 1-22.[20] Anne Speckhard, Ardian Shajkovci, and Ahmet S. Yayla, "Defected from ISIS or Simply Returned, and for How Long? Challenges for the West in Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters.
[21] See discussion by Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci on the role of defectors vis-à-vis counter messaging, http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/confronting-an-isis-emir-icsves-breaking-the-isis-brand-counter-narrative-videos/

Bibliography

Borum, Randy. *Psychology of Terrorism* .Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2004.Boucek, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. "*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* September 2008. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp97_boucek_saudi_final.pdf
Casptack, Andreas. "Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study." *Middle East Institute*, June 10, 2015. https://www.mei.edu/content/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study
Gomez, Angel et.al." The Devout Actor's Will to Fight and the Spiritual Dimension of Human Conflict." *Nature Human Behavior* (2017); URL https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-017-0193-3
Horgan, John and Bjorgo, Tore. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
Horgan, John and Braddock, Kurt. "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programmes." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2 (2010): 267-291.
Hubbard, Ben. "Inside Saudi Arabia's Re-education Prison for Jihadists." *The New York Times,* April 9, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/world/middleeast/inside-saudi-arabias-re-education-prison-for-jihadists.html
Johnsen, Gregory D. "Yemen's Passive Role in the War on Terrorism." *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 4 (February 23, 2006). https://jamestown.org/program/yemens-passive-role-in-the-war-on-terrorism/
Kruglanski, Arie W., Gelfand, Michelle and Gunaratna, Rohan. "Detainee Rehabilitation." *Association for Psychological Science*, January 2010. https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/detainee-deradicalization
Kruglanski, W. Arie and Fishman, Shira. " The Pscyhology of Terrorism: "Syndrome" versus "Tool" Perspectives. " *Terrorism and Political Violence 18,* no.2 (2006): 193-215.Lestari, Katharina K." Indonesia's Deradicalization Program under Fire." *UCA News,* November 24, 2016. http://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesias-deradicalization-program-under-fire/77698

"Said al-Shihri." *Counter Extremism Project,* 2017. https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/said-al-shihri
Speckhard, Anne. *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers and "Martyrs"*. McLean, VA: Advances Press, 2012.
Speckhard, Anne. "The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism." *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016. http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/.
Speckhard, Anne and Mitchell, Stefanie. " Possibilities of Peace-Building in Iraq: Questions of Deradicalization and Reintegration amidst Sectarian Conflicts. *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism,* 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anne-speckhard/possibilities-of-peacebui_b_14191234.html
Sperry, Paul. "Gitmo Prisoner Reveals that Saudi 'terrorist rehab' center is a scam." *New York Post,* November 28, 2016. http://nypost.com/2016/11/28/gitmo-prisoner-reveals-that-saudi-terrorist-rehab-center-is-a-scam/
Silke, Andrew. "Disengagement or Deradicalization: Loot at Prison Programs for Jailed Terrorists." *CTC Sentinel*, January 1, 2010. https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/disengagement-or-deradicalization-a-look-at-prison-programs-for-jailed-terrorists
Speckhard, Anne. *Talking to Terrorists: Understanding the Psycho-Social Motivations of Militant Jihadi Terrorists, Mass Hostage Takers, Suicide Bombers and "Martyrs"* (McLean: Advances Press, LLC, 2012).
Speckhard, Anne and Yayla, Ahmet S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate* (McLean: Advances Press, LLC, 2016).
Speckhard, Anne, Shajkovci, Ardian and Yayla S. Ahmet. "Defected from ISIS or Simply Returned, and for How Long? Challenges for the West in Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters." *Homeland Security Affairs 14,* article 1 (2018). 1-22.
Vidino, Lorenzo and James, Brandon. " Countering Radicalization in Europe." *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence,* 2012. http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/ICSR-Report-Countering-Radicalization-in-Europe.pdf