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Deradicalization: A Review of the Literature with Comparison to Findings in the Literatures on Deganging and Deprogramming

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Statement of Problem

This research brief reviews the literature on deradicalization and evaluates the methodology of deradicalization programs, based on the research identifying individual motivations for entering and exiting terrorist organizations, providing comparison with relevant findings in the literatures on "deprogramming" of cult members and "deganging."

Since 2002, "deradicalization" programs, which seek to induce the disengagement of suspected terrorists from terrorist activities, have been established in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Bangladesh, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009). The

United States has established deradicalization programs in U.S. detention facilities in Iraq and, more recently, Afghanistan (Schmitt, 2009).

The deradicalization programs established to date have focused largely on ideological factors—seeking to "deradicalize" program participants through disputation of the content of terrorist groups' doctrines and religious interpretations (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009; Boucek, 2008, 2009; Boucek, Beg, & Horgan, 2009; Abuza, 2009). The Saudi program has a somewhat broader scope that fosters participants' reintegration with their families and affords some economic assistance in the post-program period (Stern, 2010).

Review of the relevant literatures reveals a disjuncture between the largely ideological focus of current deradicalization programs and the factors found to motivate individuals' entry into and exit from terrorist organizations.

Comparison of the deradicalization literature with the literatures on "deprogramming" of cult members and "deganging" suggests possible causes and implications of this disjuncture. Comparative review of findings indicates significant consistency in motivations for entry and exit across the three types of groups (terrorist organizations, gangs, and cults); disjuncture between those factors motivating entry and exit and the design of disengagement programs in all three contexts; potential directions for improving the efficacy of deradicalization programs; and areas for further research. These findings suggest that a shift in the methodology of deradicalization programs may yield substantially improved results.

Background

Terrorist Organizations: Entry, Exit, and Deradicalization

A. Entry and Exit

The most robust findings on individual motivation for participation in terrorist organizations concern the substantial significance of affiliative factors, including personal relationships, social networks, and a sense of community or "belonging" (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Horgan, 2005; Bjorgo, 2009; Benard, 2005; Nesser, 2005; Bakker, 2006; Hegghammer, 2006a, 2006b; Cragin et al., 2006; Noricks, 2009a). As Noricks (2009a) states

> If any area of terrorism studies can be said to have reached a level of consensus,
> it is the role of social networks in contributing to both recruitment and
> radicalization. It is therefore extremely likely that this particular factor will also
> play a key role in deradicalization.

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) identify 12 mechanisms as contributing to radicalization. Of these, 3 concern radicalization at the "mass" level (for instance, a nation's mobilization for war), and 5 concern radicalization at the group level (for instance, the progression toward increasingly extreme actions by a political organization). The remaining 4

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mechanisms identified concern *individuals*' motives for participation in terrorist organizations and activities.

Of the four individual-level mechanisms identified, the first, individual victimization, relates radicalization to abuses against the individual or his or her loved ones by the later-targeted group. Concerning the second mechanism identified, political grievance, the authors note that "cases of individual radicalization to political violence, that is, cases in which the individual acts alone rather than as a part of a group, are relatively rare."

The third mechanism identified actually constitutes not a positive motivation for participation in terrorist organizations but, rather, a potential obstacle to disengagement. Each terrorist act committed by an individual, the authors observe, increases the individual's investment in justifying that behavior and commensurately increases the cognitive-dissonance costs of disengagement. Terrorist activity may be, to this extent, self-perpetuating. (This problem is discussed further in the section on Research Indicated.) The fourth mechanism cited, "the power of love," directly concerns motivations for participation in terrorist organizations or activities. Here, the authors note that

> Individuals are recruited to a terrorist group via personal connections with existing terrorists. . . . Trust may determine the network within which radicals and terrorists recruit, but love often determines who will join. . . . [D]evotion to comrades is not only a force for joining a radical group, it is equally or more a barrier to leaving the group. (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008)

While affiliative factors are, thus, described in varying terms in the research, the literature reflects virtual consensus that such factors play an important role in individual entry and exit decisions (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Horgan, 2005; Bjorgo, 2009; Benard, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Noricks, 2009a; Nesser, 2005; Bakker, 2006; Hegghammer, 2006a, 2006b; Cragin et al., 2006). In analyzing risk factors for participation in terrorist groups, Bjorgo (2009) suggests that deficiency in an individual's primary relationships may prompt the pursuit of substitute familial relationships or the search for identity as a member of a close-knit group or community. Sageman (2004, 2008) contends not only that the desire to establish belonging within a social network is a significant risk factor for participation in jihadist terrorist organizations but also that it is the *primary* motivating factor for joining such groups, particularly among members of Muslim communities in Western Europe.

The literature is more disparate, less clear (and, perhaps, less rigorous) regarding the influence of economic incentives on participation in terrorist organizations. While a number of researchers suggest that financial incentives (direct payments) are significant or primary factors motivating individuals' (particularly poor individuals') participation in terrorist activity, the support offered for that proposition has been limited to anecdotal material or the assertion of the same proposition by others (Benard & O'Connell, 2005). A conflation of micro- and macro-level economic analysis also has introduced ambiguity into the literature on economic factors. For example, while Sageman (2004, 2008) contends that individual poverty is not

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correlated with likelihood of participation in a terrorist organization, Noricks seeks to support the contrary view with data showing a (negative) correlation between a nation's wealth and its incidence of terrorist activity (Noricks, 2009b).

Ideology, thus, is not indicated in the literature as *the* primary—or perhaps even *a* primary—motivating factor for participation in terrorist organizations (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Horgan, 2009; Bjorgo, 2005; Stern, 2010). Several authors, indeed, note that the individual's adoption of a terrorist organization's ideology typically occurs largely after the individual has joined the organization (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Horgan, 2009; Bjorgo, 2005).

Factors motivating exit from terrorist organizations are conceptualized as functioning either to "push" or to "pull" the individual away from the group. Factors seen to *push* members to exit terrorist groups, in varying degrees, include negative social sanctions within the group, disappointment with the group's efficacy or integrity, rivalries within the group, the group's failure to deliver on inducements or promises made to the individual, desire to escape from pressures associated with membership (Bjorgo, 2009), and revulsion at acts of violence observed within the group or required of the individual as a condition of group membership (Horgan, 2005). Factors observed to *pull* members of terrorist organizations toward a life outside the organization include a desire to preserve or pursue career prospects that may otherwise diminish over time; a desire to marry or establish a family, which may be inconsistent with continued membership in the organization; and a desire for greater freedom that is perceived to be available outside of the organization (Bjorgo, 2009).

In addition to examining the foregoing factors motivating exit, several authors identify factors that may inhibit exit from terrorist organizations, even in situations where the individual's positive motives for participation have receded. Such potentially inhibiting factors include threats from group members of severe sanctions for exit; heightened danger of attack by members of opposing groups, occasioned by the loss of protection by the organization; and the sense that, for practical or emotional reasons, there are no viable alternatives to group membership—that there is "nowhere to go" (Horgan, 2005; Bjorgo, 2009).

In exit decisions, as in entry decisions, ideological factors appear to play a secondary role (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Horgan, 2009; Bjorgo, 2005). Bjorgo suggests that "it is probably more common that beliefs change *after* leaving the group, and as a consequence, rather than before, and as a cause of, leaving the group" (Bjorgo, 2009, p. 37). In this regard, Horgan distinguishes "deradicalization" (the abandonment of terrorist ideology) from "disengagement" (the cessation of terrorist activities) and observes that deradicalization is neither a necessary condition for nor, in many cases, even a significant factor in individuals' disengagement from terrorist activities or organizations (Horgan, 2009).

B. Deradicalization

Notwithstanding the foregoing findings on motivations for entry into and exit from terrorist organizations, current deradicalization programs focus largely on ideology (Barrett & Bokhari,

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2009; Boucek, 2008, 2009; Boucek, Beg, & Horgan, 2009; Abuza, 2009; Ashour, 2008, 2009). The programs consist primarily of "dialogues" between program participants and moderate imams, who attempt to persuade participants, through religious discussion and debate, to abandon terrorist ideologies in favor of a more moderate, nonviolent understanding of Islam (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009). Omar Ashour (2009, p.6) describes deradicalization as "primarily concerned with changing the attitudes of armed Islamist movements towards violence."

No program—other than that of Saudi Arabia, to some extent—addresses the affiliative factors to which the relevant literature consistently attributes great importance in motivating entry and exit. The Saudi program seeks the involvement of participants' family members in the deradicalization process and, reportedly, in some cases also provides assistance in finding a wife (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009; Boucek, 2008, 2009; Stern, 2010). Beyond those features of the Saudi program, current deradicalization programs are designed largely without attention to the very affiliative factors—personal relationships, social networks, and the sense of community and belonging—that, the research suggests, are highly influential in decisions to join such organizations and may remain highly influential in decisions concerning exit (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009; Boucek, 2008, 2009; Boucek, Beg, & Horgan, 2009; Abuza, 2009; Ashour, 2008, 2009).

While the literature is equivocal on the role of economic incentives in motivations for joining terrorist organizations, some deradicalization programs seek to reduce potential economic barriers to disengagement through the provision of social services such as job training or placement, educational opportunities, or modest cash stipends (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009; Boucek, 2008, 2009; Stern, 2010). Seeking to diminish the influence of factors potentially inhibiting exit and to foster social reintegration, some governments provide amnesty from criminal prosecution, or protection from dangers posed by their former organizations, to participants who "successfully" complete the deradicalization program (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009).

That "deradicalization" programs would focus on de-radicalization is not surprising. But the data on motivations for entry into and exit from terrorist organizations raise the question of whether deradicalization programs that are heavily focused on ideological transformation are likely to be effective in achieving participants' disengagement. The literature on terrorist motivations, reviewed above, would indicate that deradicalization—the transformation of ideology—should not be the primary focus of programs seeking to foster disengagement from terrorist activities. If the findings on entry and exit motivations are accurate, then programs seeking to effectuate disengagement from terrorist organizations by disputing terrorist ideology would be expected to have limited efficacy.

The efficacy of current deradicalization programs is essentially unknown. Scant data are available on recidivism among terrorists. Based on anecdotal evidence, recidivism is known to occur among both those who have and those who have not undergone a program of

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deradicalization. But no currently available data measure the incidence of recidivism in either population or compare the recidivism rates of the two.

Comparator Groups: Gangs and "Cults"

A disjuncture appears between the largely nonideological factors identified in the literature as motivating entry into and exit from terrorist organizations and the largely ideological focus of current deradicalization programs. Comparison of the deradicalization literature with the literatures on "deprogramming" of cult members and "deganging" may help to illuminate the causes and implications of this disjuncture. As discussed below, the relevant literatures suggest substantial similarities in motivations for entry and exit across the three types of groups. And, in all three contexts, there is a marked disjuncture between the findings on motivation and the design of disengagement programs.

The literature on gangs and deganging presents strong evidence that affiliative factors play a central role in individual decisions concerning entry into or exit from a gang (Decker & Van Winkel, 1996; Tobin, 2008; Cottam, Huseby, & Lutze, 2008; Curry & Decker, 1998). Gangs frequently are said to serve as "surrogate families" for their members (Decker & Van Winkel, 1996; Tobin, 2008). Related research identifies low bonding to family and low commitment to school as significant risk factors for gang participation (La Fontaine, Ferguson, & Wormith, 2003: Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotee, Smith, & Tobin, 2003).

The research does not suggest ideology as a significant factor influencing decisions on entry into or exit from gang membership. While the literature does note increasingly ideological political or religious themes in the doctrines or "codes" of some gangs (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004; Kontos, Brotherton, & Barrios, 2003), current research does not address the relationship between such ideology and identified risk factors for gang participation.

A voluminous literature examines the relationship between economics and the prevalence of gang participation at the aggregate (generally, community) level (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004; Jones, Roper, Stys, & Wilson, 2004; La Fontaine, 2005; Tobin, 2008; Venkatesh, 2003). Research to date has not, however, examined the role of economic or financial factors in individual-level motivations for gang participation, although some findings indicate that low income in an individual's family of origin is correlated with increased *duration* of gang membership (Tobin, 2008; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Research findings on individual motivations for participation in religious, utopian, and psychotherapeutic "cults" largely reiterate the patterns found in the literatures on gangs and terrorist organizations. Affiliative motivations are found to predominate in entry and exit decisions (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Gerlach & Hine, 1968; Lofland, 1977; Richardson & Stewart, 1977; Downton, 1980; Barker, 1983; Roberts & Davidson, 1984; Garterell & Shannon, 1985; Snow & Phillips, 1980; Bjorgo, 2009). Research to date has not systematically examined the role of economic or financial factors in individual motivations for participation in cults. Notwithstanding the prominent role of ideology in the rhetoric and daily activities of religious,

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utopian, and psychotherapeutic cults, ideology is not identified in the literature as a significant factor motivating individuals' entry into or exit from those organizations (Richardson, 1993).[1]

Thus, the literatures on individual motivations for participation in gangs and cults—like the literature on terrorist groups—point to the highly significant role played by affiliative factors in individuals' motives for participation. However, despite those findings on the affiliatory motivations of gang members and cult members, neither deprogramming nor deganging programs focus on those affiliative factors.

Deprogramming focuses virtually exclusively on challenging the ideology of the cult in question. As described by Shupe (1977), "the efficacy of deprogramming rests in the deprogrammer debating with the cult member, convincing the latter that they were deceived by cult leaders and had lost their 'sense of reality' through exclusive exposure to cult perspectives."

In the deganging context, there is one program that might appear, on first blush, to address affiliative motives. The "detached worker program" seeks to establish affective bonds between gang members and social workers placed in the community. In an effort to gain the trust of the gang members, the social worker conducts club activities, athletic teams, and social fundraising events (Klein, 1995). However, the members of a gang typically participate in these social activities as a group. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in light of the gang members' group participation in program activities, the programs are cited as "having no positive effect" (Jones et al., 2004) and appear only to have increased the cohesion of the gangs (Klein, 1995).

Synthesis

The literatures on deradicalization, deganging, and deprogramming each indicate the central importance of affiliative factors in individual motivations for entry into and exit from the respective organizations. Yet, none of the disengagement programs instituted within those three contexts meaningfully addresses those affiliative motivations that are found to influence entry and exit decisions. Rather, the disengagement programs focus largely—though not exclusively—on ideological disputation (in deradicalization and deprogramming), or on more generalized social regulation, including crime control (in deganging). In each instance, the disengagement program adopts an approach that may be readily accommodated and implemented in the setting in which it is to be carried out (government-run detention facilities in the case of deradicalization, short-term abduction conditions in the case of deprogramming, and longer term municipal and federal project structures in the case of deganging).

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[1] The other major theory offered in the literature to explain individuals' membership in cults is the "thought reform" or "brainwashing" model, which is based on Lifton's (1963) model of the methods of "ideological totalism." That model is inapposite in the current context, because it describes events occurring after the individual has already joined the group and, therefore, does not address the motivations for so doing.

Future Directions

A. Systematic research is required to evaluate the efficacy of existing deradicalization programs and to identify the factors that contribute to or diminish their efficacy.

B. Research is indicated on the causes, consequences, and (if appropriate) remedies for the observed disjuncture between the motivations for participation in terrorist organizations and the methodologies employed in the "deradicalization" programs designed to induce disengagement from those organizations.

C. Research is required to ascertain the effects of detention on the processes of both radicalization and disengagement. Such research should seek to isolate the effects of distinct features of detention, such as physical conditions, ideological discussions or interventions, and interactions with others (including security personnel, interrogators, psychologists, prosecutors, defense counsel, judges, other detainees, and family members).

D. While the literature suggests that ideological factors are not of primary significance in motivating individuals' entry into or exit from terrorist organizations, ideological beliefs adopted while in the organization—and the cognitive dissonance that may be engendered by the abandonment of such beliefs—may be among the factors that may inhibit exit by an individual whose other motives for participation have receded. This effect may be particularly pronounced for an individual who has participated in violent acts justified by the organization's ideology. Research is required to determine whether and how such an inhibiting factor operates and what mechanisms may be effective in reducing that inhibitory effect.

E. Finally, research is required to ascertain the effects of a variety of conditions of release. Such research should be designed to identify the effects of specific conditions of release, such as monitoring and reporting requirements, employment status and assistance, social networks, and follow-up counseling or other aftercare or post-program management.

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In her work on counterterrorism detention and prosecution, Morris has served as chief counsel to the Office of the Chief Defense Counsel for Military Commissions, U.S. Department of Defense; consultant on the Brief for the Petitioner in *Boumediene v. Bush* (U.S. Supreme Court, 2008); *amicus curiae* in *U.S. v. Hamdan* (U.S. Military Commission, Guantanamo Bay) and in *U.S. v. Khadr* (U.S. Court of Military Commissions Review); and as an expert witness in *U.S. v. Jawad* (U.S. Military Commission, Guantanamo Bay). In 2005, Professor Morris founded the Guantanamo Defense Clinic, which she directs. Morris has written extensively on

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Madeline Morris received her JD from Yale Law School in 1989 and her BA from Yale, *summa cum laude*, in 1986. She clerked for Judge John Minor Wisdom of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

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