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**Detainee Release and Global Public Safety:  
Terrorist Disengagement and Deradicalization  
Programs—The Way Ahead**

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In exchange for the release of U.S. Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl on May 31, 2014, the Obama Administration agreed to the release of 5 “senior Taliban figures” being held at Guantanamo Bay. Reactions to this news have varied widely and as noted in a *Washington Post* [article](#) in the immediate aftermath, the exchange begs the question: “How many of the detainees transferred out of the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have returned to the fight?” The piece goes on to cite figures from the latest, congressionally-mandated [report](#) on these matters from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)—which indicates that “about 16.6 percent [of former Guantanamo Bay detainees] are confirmed to have returned to terrorist activity of some kind...”; and further cites “defense officials” who say that “12.1 percent are suspected of engaging in terrorist activities after their release...”.<sup>1</sup> Speaking about the Bergdahl/Taliban exchange in particular, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse for one has suggested that, after the 5 Taliban figures are released into Qatari custody, they will be going into a program for “re-acclimating” them.<sup>2</sup> Yet the effectiveness of such programs, which a number of countries worldwide have stood up, remains much debated; and as we explore below, for considerable good reason.<sup>3</sup> In any case, controversial as it may be, the

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Lamothe, “Guantanamo transfers under scrutiny after deal with Taliban over Bergdahl release,” *New York Times* (June 2, 2014), [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/guantanamo-transfers-under-scrutiny-after-deal-with-taliban-over-bergdahl-release/2014/06/02/dea64ffa-ca60-11e3-b98c-72cef4a00499\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/guantanamo-transfers-under-scrutiny-after-deal-with-taliban-over-bergdahl-release/2014/06/02/dea64ffa-ca60-11e3-b98c-72cef4a00499_story.html); citing ODNI, “Summary of the Reengagement of Detainees Formerly Held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba” (as of 14 January 2014), <http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/GTMO.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> CNN’s *Crossfire* (June 2, 2014), <http://crossfire.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/02/the-bergdahl-debate/>

<sup>3</sup> See for example Massimo Calabresi, “Statistics Suggest Taliban Leaders Freed For Bowe Bergdahl May Remain A Threat,” *TIME* (June 3, 2014), <http://time.com/2814427/taliban-released-bowe-bergdahl-threat/> [“But even well-run programs for released Guantanamo Bay detainees have failed in the past. One notable failure was Said al Shihri, who was released to Saudi Arabia in 2007 and put through the country’s famous rehabilitation program. In 2009, he fled Saudi Arabia and helped form Al

Bergdahl/Taliban exchange is neither the first nor will it be the last chapter in detainee releases worldwide.

Just months ago, on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Afghan authorities released 65 prisoners from the Parwan Detention Center (better known by its previous name, Bagram prison). Despite the Afghan government's insistence that there was insufficient evidence to continue to hold these individuals, [U.S. officials maintain](#): "All of these individuals are people who should not be walking the streets...And we had strong evidence on all of them, evidence that has been ignored..."<sup>4</sup> NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen echoed the U.S. evaluation, stating that he was "'gravely concerned"; and calling the Afghan move "'a major step backwards for the rule of law in Afghanistan.'" While assessments may differ regarding the threat presently posed by each of the 65 persons in question, what is clear is that if any of them venture onto the battlefield henceforth, U.S. forces will consider them "'legitimate targets'."<sup>5</sup>

Whether the freed detainees seek to pursue violent extremist activity will depend on their current mindset and, in particular, whether they remain radicalized and engaged with Islamist militants. The implications of continued support (training, financial, ideological, etc.) for the jihadist cause are substantial and extend well beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Should the released prisoners join the fight on the ground against Afghan, coalition, and U.S. forces, the lives of all such troops as well as those of innocent civilians who simply find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, may be put at risk. Unfortunately, however, the bad news does not stop there. Freed detainees may also attempt to support and facilitate the jihadist cause kinetically, as [foreign fighters](#)<sup>6</sup> in other conflict zones from [Syria](#) (alongside the swell of Westerners—almost 3,000<sup>7</sup>—fighting there) to the Sahel.<sup>8</sup>

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Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the group behind multiple attempted airline bomb attacks against Americans and others"]].

<sup>4</sup> Eliot C. McLaughlin and Laquasha Bivens, "Pentagon: If freed Afghan prisoners return to fight, they're 'legitimate targets,'" *CNN* (February 14, 2014), citing Rear Adm. John Kirby.

<sup>5</sup> "U.S. Will Target Freed Afghan Militants Who Return To Fight," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (March 24, 2014), citing Rear Adm. John Kirby.

<sup>6</sup> Frank J. Cilluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens, and Magnus Ranstorp, *Foreign Fighters: Trends, Trajectories & Conflict Zones* (October 1, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "Foreign Jihadis Fighting in Syria Pose Risk in West," *New York Times* (May 29, 2014), [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/middleeast/foreign-jihadis-fighting-in-syria-pose-risk-in-west.html?\\_r=1&utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=%2ASituation%20Report&utm\\_campaign=MAY%2030%202014](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/middleeast/foreign-jihadis-fighting-in-syria-pose-risk-in-west.html?_r=1&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=%2ASituation%20Report&utm_campaign=MAY%2030%202014)

<sup>8</sup> Sharon L. Cardash, Frank J. Cilluffo, and Jean-Luc Marret, "Foreign Fighters in Syria: Still Doing Battle, Still a Multidimensional Danger," *Note no. 24/13 – Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* (August 2013).

Thus, while U.S. forces may plan to draw down to 9,800 troops in Afghanistan by the close of 2014<sup>9</sup>, that will not guarantee their insulation from harm elsewhere at the very hands of those just released. Civilians too are at risk, of course; just think of the attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels, recently and allegedly perpetrated by a French foreign fighter returned from Syria, who had served multiple prison terms in French jails, where he is thought to have been radicalized.<sup>10</sup>

Just as concerning, the freed prisoners may undertake to radicalize others, either in person and close to home, or [via the Internet](#) which knows no borders.<sup>11</sup> Keep in mind that [ideology](#) is the lifeblood of our adversaries—it sustains them, facilitating radicalization/recruitment and retention.<sup>12</sup> This ability to inspire others to support the cause and join the fight is crucial; and its effects may be felt here in the United States and in the West (Europe), where so-called “homegrown” and “lone wolf” terrorists may take their cue from charismatic “bridge figures” based overseas—whose cross-cultural fluency permits the successful propagation of violent extremist ideas that may be turned into action by just a single disgruntled individual or small groups. Terrorism is, after all, a small numbers business in that the few (or even one) may cause vastly disproportionate impact.

Given all that is at stake in terms of national, regional, and international security, Afghanistan (and other countries) have designed and implemented programs whose goal is to deradicalize, or at least disengage, prisoners that previously actively affiliated with our adversaries and helped to further their violent extremist ends. In [Afghanistan](#), a multidimensional deradicalization program was introduced at Bagram when the facility was still under U.S. leadership, prior to the transfer to Afghan control in March 2013.<sup>13</sup> Bear in mind that the challenge of integrating released detainees back into society as a whole successfully—which is to say, peacefully, and with minimized risk to public safety and security—is by no means no unique to Afghanistan. To the contrary, the issue spans borders and oceans. Perhaps the most pressing example in the offing springs from Indonesia, where according to media reporting, authorities are expected to release as many as 300 detained

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<sup>9</sup> Christi Parsons and David S. Cloud, “U.S. to reduce troop level in Afghanistan to 9,800 by year’s end,” *Los Angeles Times* (May 27, 2014), <http://www.latimes.com/world/afghanistan-pakistan/la-fg-obama-troops-afghanistan-20140528-story.html#page=1>

<sup>10</sup> Amos Harel, “Background of Brussels suspect confirms West’s worst fears,” *Haaretz* (June 2, 2014), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.596616>. Reuters, “Jewish Museum Shooting Suspect Refuses Extradition to Belgium,” (June 4, 2014), <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2014/06/04/world/europe/04reuters-belgium-shooting-france.html?smid=tw-share>.

<sup>11</sup> Special Report by the George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute and the University of Virginia Critical Incident Analysis Group, *NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy* (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Frank J. Cilluffo and Sharon L. Cardash, “It’s the Ideology, Stupid,” *The National Interest* (June 3, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Straw, “New U.S. Deradicalization Effort Shows Promise, Expert Says,” *Security Management* (March 26, 2010).

terrorists by the end of 2014, when their prison sentences will have been completed (some of these releases have already taken place).<sup>14</sup> Open-source material estimates further that in excess of 100 such releases may also occur in 2015-2016.<sup>15</sup> For comparative purposes, consider that 240 members of Jemaah Islamiyah were released in the period 2000 to 2013; and note that 40 of these cases relapsed.<sup>16</sup> In the judgment of Australia's Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), moreover, the 2014 "spike" in releases in Indonesia "is likely to inject significant capability into extremist networks"; and raise the "threat to Australia's domestic security."<sup>17</sup>

In the balance of this paper, we explore the programs aimed at deradicalization and disengagement developed by selected countries, and tailored to their particular circumstances and setting. Before proceeding however, it is important to define what exactly we mean by each of these two key terms. For present purposes, we understand deradicalization to be "the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use [or support or facilitate] violence as a means to effect social [societal] change."<sup>18</sup> In turn, we understand disengagement to be "a process where 'an individual experiences a change in role or function which is usually associated with a reduction in violent participation'." In short, deradicalization is understood to focus on "a psychological process" whereas disengagement is understood to focus on "a behavioural process."<sup>19</sup>

The programs discussed below consist of similar key components, hence, we compare like with like in our qualitative case study approach. Notable successes and failures are examined; and policy prescriptions, drawn from these lessons observed, follow. While admittedly imperfect—consider

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<sup>14</sup> Ben Collins, "More Than 300 Terrorists To Be Released From Indonesian Jails In The Next Year: Report," *Business Insider* (November 21, 2013), <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/more-than-300-terrorists-to-be-released-from-indonesian-jails-in-the-next-year-report-2013-11>. But note that the 300 figure is contested. See, for example, Sidney Jones, *Prison Problems: Planned and Unplanned Releases of Convicted Extremists in Indonesia*, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) Report No. 2 (September 2, 2013), p. 1.

[http://www.academia.edu/4419321/Prison\\_Problems\\_Planned\\_and\\_Unplanned\\_Releases\\_of\\_Convicted\\_Extremists\\_in\\_Indonesia](http://www.academia.edu/4419321/Prison_Problems_Planned_and_Unplanned_Releases_of_Convicted_Extremists_in_Indonesia) [contending that, "A more reasonable estimate is about 80 releases in 2013-2014..."].

<sup>15</sup> Sidney Jones, *Prison Problems: Planned and Unplanned Releases of Convicted Extremists in Indonesia*, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) Report No. 2 (September 2, 2013), p. 1.

[http://www.academia.edu/4419321/Prison\\_Problems\\_Planned\\_and\\_Unplanned\\_Releases\\_of\\_Convicted\\_Extremists\\_in\\_Indonesia](http://www.academia.edu/4419321/Prison_Problems_Planned_and_Unplanned_Releases_of_Convicted_Extremists_in_Indonesia)

<sup>16</sup> Personal interview conducted by Laura Khor, with subject matter expert Noor Huda Ismail (May 21, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Ben Collins, "More Than 300 Terrorists To Be Released"; citing ASIO's "most recent annual report."

<sup>18</sup> Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, Christopher Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists* (RAND 2010), at pp. 1-2, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG1053.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Emma Disley, Kristin Weed, Anais Reding, Lindsay Clutterbuck, Richard Warnes, *Individual disengagement from Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorist groups* (RAND 2012), at p. 11 [citing J. Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism. Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*. London: Taylor and Francis (2009), p. 152]

[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical\\_reports/2012/RAND\\_TR785.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2012/RAND_TR785.pdf)

recent reports of recidivism, with reference to Saudi Arabia, for example<sup>20</sup>—deradicalization and disengagement programs are a useful counterterrorism instrument that may yield gains when adopted in conjunction and complementarity with a range of other tools. For the sake of transparency, we should emphasize before moving any further forward, that the disengagement aspect is in our view the more important of the two strands, with the greater likelihood of success (as versus deradicalization). While the latter may be likened to an ideal state, which some have suggested is difficult if not impossible to attain authentically, the most crucial aspect in our minds is that the detainee not take action (violent, extremist) again—hence, the primacy of disengagement. Having said that however, our review and analysis, below, includes both components.

### **Country-Specific Programs, After-Care, and Reintegration**

Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Yemen all have terrorist rehabilitation and disengagement programs that have been adapted to their specific security threats, legal framework, context, and culture. As Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan and Kenneth George Periere argue, “[c]ounterterrorism and counter-ideology work needs to take into consideration different cultural and contextual realities.”<sup>21</sup> Terrorist rehabilitation and disengagement program implementation and practices also require practicable and realistic time frames and expectations. Deradicalization and disengagement take time. Success of these programs further depends on their ability to address the detainees’ motivation in the first instance—whether ideological, psychological, political, or some combination thereof; and on the programs’ effectiveness in trying to bring these individuals back into the mainstream. As Rohan Gunaratna observes,

To counter the threat posed by a group, its operational infrastructure must be dismantled and its conceptual infrastructure eroded. As terrorism is a vicious byproduct of ideological extremism, government and society

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<sup>20</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer, “Saudis Allege Rebels in Syria Plotted Attacks in Kingdom,” *Wall Street Journal* (May 11, 2014) [“The Saudi government alleged that Saudi recruits of a radical Islamist group in Syria plotted with others inside the kingdom to assassinate leading religious figures and security officials. The alleged plot, and another involving al Qaeda’s Yemen branch, were behind the arrests of 62 terror suspects in Saudi Arabia. Those arrested included 35 previously convicted Saudis, some of them graduates of the kingdom’s rehabilitation program for militants, Interior Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Mansour al Turki said on Sunday. Saudi officials haven’t said when they were arrested”]. But note that some analysts contend that recidivism rates are themselves an imperfect metric in this context. See: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries*, Policy Report Produced in Partnership with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2010), pp. 48-49. <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1277699166PrisonsandTerrorismRadicalisationandDeradicalisationin15Countries.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan and Kenneth George Pereire, “An Ideological Response to Combating Terrorism – The Singapore Perspective,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17, no. 4 (December 2006): 459.

must develop an ideological response to make it difficult for terrorist groups to replenish their human losses and material wastage.<sup>22</sup>

Deradicalization and disengagement programs are an important instrument in the counterterrorism toolkit, as they directly challenge the violent extremist ideas and ideology disseminated by terrorist organizations and their narratives. As Tariq Parvez suggests, “[t]he regenerative dimension of the terrorist groups and networks, especially the capability to sell ideology to the gullible youth, needs to be taken into account.”<sup>23</sup> Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Yemen have all taken into account the power of ideology and counter-ideology in their programs and security policies. Each of their programs accord to scholars of religion the space that is necessary to engage with detainees and, in turn, allow for detainees to discuss their views.

Since 2004, Saudi Arabia has operated one of the most high profile terrorist deradicalization and disengagement programs in the world. The Saudi approach blends coercion with an appeal to family/clan honor by integrating detainees’ family members into the deradicalization and disengagement effort, in part by holding a close male relative responsible for keeping the released prisoner out of trouble following release. Significant financial resources are likewise invested in the case of each detainee in order to provide the individual with the tools necessary (such as a car and a job) to succeed outside of prison and the realm of violent extremist groups. Regarding the counseling component, Muslim clerics meet with detainees and prisoners as part of the Saudi program. To facilitate reintegration back into society and after-care, both governmental and non-governmental agencies are involved. Despite an estimated 10 to 20% of those released returning to terrorism, the Saudi Government remains committed to the effort.<sup>24</sup> The relapse rate is significant though, especially from a U.S. perspective and when placed in context. Most notably, consider the case of Said al Shihri (detailed in note 3 above), who went on to co-found Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—which has targeted both the United States and Saudi Arabia, and which retains both countries squarely in its crosshairs.

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<sup>22</sup> “Ideology in Terrorism and Counter Terrorism: Lessons from combating Al Qaeda and Al Jamaah Al Islamiyah in Southeast Asia,” 1. [http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/Ideology\\_in%20Terrorism\\_Rohan.pdf](http://www.rrg.sg/edisi/data/Ideology_in%20Terrorism_Rohan.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Tariq Parvez, “Challenges of establishing a rehabilitation programme in Pakistan,” Rohan Gunaratna, Jolene Jerard and Lawrence Rubin, *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New approaches to counter-terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Marisa L. Porges, “The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 22, 2010. <http://www.cfr.org/radicalization-and-extremism/saudi-deradicalization-experiment/p21292>

Taken in tandem with the threat posed to the U.S. homeland (and to allies) by foreign fighters in the Syrian civil war, who may return to their country of origin with newfound skills and intent to do harm—as part of a push by al Qaeda to build capacity to strike the United States and Europe<sup>25</sup>, we would all do well to keep our eye on the ball and engage in concerted efforts to track the activities of detainees post-release, who may take up arms once again.

However, the Saudi program constitutes relative success in comparison to the Yemeni Program for Dialogue, which was instituted before the Saudi program launched. The first meeting of the Dialogue Committee with the five most radical detainees took place on September 15, 2002. The logic of meeting with and verbally contesting the most radicalized individuals is explained by Yemeni Dialogue Committee member, Judge Hattar, as follows:

After taking the green light from the president, I asked the head of the Political Security Organisation (PSO) to arrange a meeting with the five or six most radical detained individuals. The rationale was that if we could convince the most radical individuals to repent, then it would be easier to convince the rest of the prisoners. Better still, if we could convince the most radical elements to repent, then we could ask them to talk to their colleagues and deradicalise them, since the detainees are more likely to listen to their leaders than to us. It was like a trial, a pilot project.<sup>26</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with this decision to grapple and reason directly with the toughest cases first, the Yemeni deradicalization and disengagement program was short-lived, operating from 2002 to 2005. The collapse of the program was due to design flaws, evident from inception, that were compounded by the Yemeni Government's lack of financial resources, and inability to provide adequate after-care for released detainees. The program did not adapt to the changing age and experiences of detainees in the program. Over time, those newly detained proved to be younger than their predecessors, from different backgrounds, and possessed of different views than their forebears, who had fought (participated in "jihad") against the Soviet Union, when it intervened in Afghanistan and war ensued. A further structural problem was the narrow focus and approach of engaging and discouraging detainees on acts of violence within the country—but not acts of violence in other countries.

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<sup>25</sup> Eric Schmitt, "Qaeda Militants Seek Syria Base, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times* (March 25, 2014), [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/middleeast/qaeda-militants-seek-syria-base-us-officials-say.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/middleeast/qaeda-militants-seek-syria-base-us-officials-say.html?_r=0)

<sup>26</sup> Hamed El-Said, "Yemen's Passive Approach to Countering Terrorism," in Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan, eds., *Deradicalizing Violent Extremists: Counter-radicalization programmes and their impact in Muslim majority states* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 247-248, citing personal interview with Judge Hattar, Sana'a, June 2010.

Ultimately, the program released 364 detainees, with reports of some retaking up arms and dying in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Notably, the financial weakness of the program directly and negatively impacted released detainees. As one former prisoner put it,

Marriage became a liability; we were no longer able to support our own family. Worse, we became a burden on our own parents and family members. Instead of supporting them, we began relying on them, but they are poor and had little to give. We started to feel that we lost our dignity as men. Al-Qaeda became an attractive option because it continues to give \$300 for each member, much more than the state could give. Hence, several detainees rejoined Al-Qaeda after their release.<sup>28</sup>

Despite these mixed results, evidencing recidivism and other problematic outcomes, Yemen is still regarded as “one of the first Muslim States to consider and openly acknowledge dialogue with militants as a central component in any counter-terrorism strategy.”<sup>29</sup>

By comparison to Saudi Arabia, the Indonesian deradicalization and disengagement programs operate on a smaller budget and scale. Yet Indonesia has been relatively successful, managing to live up to the maxim of doing more with less—and with substantial numbers of detainees scheduled for release in the near to medium term (see above for details), one certainly hopes that Indonesia’s pre- and post-release measures and efforts will prove effective. Indonesia’s deradicalization program was developed and implemented after the 2002 Bali bombings. The country’s counterterrorism police unit (Detachment 88) together with the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) led this effort. A unique aspect of the Indonesian initiative is the use of former militants. In this model, police interrogators and former militants work side by side. Some of the latter, including ex-Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militant Nasir Abbas, have also been taken into the country’s schools to speak directly to students for the purpose of dispelling “the cool factor” that young people may attach to violent extremism. Indonesia’s program has also drawn upon ex-JI militants (such as Abbas) to engage detainees and encourage them to follow a different path henceforth.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, *Combating Terrorism in Yemen through the Committee for Religious Dialogue* (2011) p. 10 [http://www.pvtr.org/pdf/Report/RSIS\\_ICPVTR\\_Yemen\\_2011.pdf](http://www.pvtr.org/pdf/Report/RSIS_ICPVTR_Yemen_2011.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Hamed El-Said, “Yemen’s passive approach to countering terrorism,” in Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan, eds., *Deradicalizing Violent Extremists: Counter-radicalization programmes and their impact in Muslim majority states* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 252, citing personal interview with a former detainee, Sana’a, June 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Boucek, Shazadi Beg and John Horgan, “Opening up the jihadi debate: Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue,” in Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and collective disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, *Radical Pathways: Understanding Muslim Radicalization in Indonesia* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2009), p. 175.



In Malaysia and Singapore, counter-ideology is a strong component to each program. Both of these countries have decades of experience in combating an ideologically-based communist insurgency. Malaysia, in particular, defeated a communist insurgency that lasted from 1948 to 1989; and in both Malaysia and Singapore, communist forces employed terrorist tactics throughout their insurgency campaigns. This history of counter-insurgency requirements has shaped Malaysia's approach to modern-day security threats; and the transition to combating today's ideologically-driven terrorists/terrorist groups thus requires a tailoring of security response measures, rather than wholesale building from scratch. In the words of the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad:

Malaysia can claim to know how to deal with terrorists be they Muslims or non-Muslims. We have been successful so far and we believe we can successfully handle future problems. In fact, we think that we can be of help in dealing with modern terrorism elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

Adequate and sustained funding and resources are also important to the success of deradicalization and disengagement programs and policies. In contrast to some of their counterparts in other countries, the terrorist rehabilitation and disengagement programs and policies of Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore are not underfunded, understaffed, or underutilized. Rates of recidivism vary across programs and countries, however, and acquiring reliable data remains a challenge.

Also of particular importance are after-care programs and policies that take effect following release of the detainee. These measures are crucial to successful reintegration back into society. As Bruce Hoffman explains:

Attempts at rehabilitation of a terrorist along strict ideological or political lines may be ineffective, if not a waste of time. Instead, his reintegration into society should probably be predicated upon reducing or neutralizing his sense of alienation. This might be accomplished by providing the terrorist (and potential terrorist) with opportunities for gainful employment, and with that, upward economic and social mobility.<sup>32</sup>

Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore have strong after-care programs and policies to ease the transition back into larger society. Each country has approached the concept of after-care based on

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<sup>31</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "The Prevention of Terrorism and the Rehabilitation of Terrorists: some preliminary thoughts," P-7059, August 1985, <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2005/P7059.pdf>

its own context and culture. Saudi Arabia's after-care program focuses on the importance of family, and extends to paying for weddings (and dowries) for released detainees. In an interview with Sheik Ahmed Jelani, the importance of family in the program is emphasized:

The family plays an extremely important role in our programs. We encourage families to visit the centre and we facilitate those visits. The aim is to let them see for themselves how we treat their sons. Some have not seen their sons for years, which means that their sons will have changed. Therefore, we introduce them to the new habits of their sons, their ideas and behaviour, and we teach them how to deal with them. We also provide for the social and economic needs of the family. What we try to do is win their hearts and minds. Once their trust is won, the families start to provide information on their sons before, during and after they are released, whether positive or negative, especially when they know that such information will not be used against them.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, there are Government programs to help released detainees find jobs or receive training for employment.<sup>34</sup>

Singapore, in turn, prioritizes reintegration and building societal resilience. Following the 7/7 bombings in London (2005), Singapore's Government expanded its own counterterrorism initiatives and community outreach efforts to increase societal resilience to terrorist attack. An official from the country's Ministry of Home Affairs explains the underlying thinking thus:

After the reactions toward Muslims in the UK after the London bombings in July 2005, we asked ourselves then whether we should do more to enhance our social resilience. While we think that our good communal relations built up over the years would stand us in good stead, we realise that this cannot be taken for granted. We know that, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, it could be difficult for communities to remain calm and avoid knee-jerk reactions. Race

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<sup>33</sup> Hamed El-Said and Richard Barrett, "Saudi Arabia: The master of deradicalization," in Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan, eds., *Deradicalizing Violent Extremists: Counter-radicalization programmes and their impact in Muslim majority states* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 215, citing personal interview with Sheikh Ahmed Jelani, Riyadh, August 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Angel Rabasa et al., "Deradicalizing Radical Islamists" (Santa Monica: RAND, 2010), 74  
[http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG1053.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf)

and religion remain highly personal and emotive issues, which, if not managed properly, can degenerate into communal unrest and conflict.<sup>35</sup>

The measures introduced with the aim of reinforcing societal resilience included the Community Engagement Partnership, reflecting a bottom-up, population-centric approach to addressing threats such as violent extremism. Terrorist organizations and recruitment are rooted in communities, after all; and these larger communities can play a powerful role in terms of threat prevention and mitigation.<sup>36</sup>

Years earlier moreover, after meeting with arrested JI members in Singapore in 2001, it was determined that these detainees had been greatly influenced by the ideology of JI. Singapore's Government had therefore approached two of the country's clerics, Ustaz H. Ali H. Mohammed and Ustaz H. Mohamed Hasbi Hassan, to request that they speak with and evaluate the detainees, in order to help officials formulate next steps. The clerics reached a disturbing and forceful conclusion; Ustaz H. Ali H. Mohammed explains:

Their ideology is like “cancer” needing the right treatment to prevent it from spreading and causing more harm. The minds of the detainees are in crisis—they fail to understand the context and importance of certain terms and terminologies in Islam. They have failed to return to the righteous path of Islamic intellectual tradition and heritage. They see jihad as a perpetual warfare against the non-Muslims and have hostilities against the West and its allies.<sup>37</sup>

Later, these same two clerics founded the Religious Rehabilitation Group, comprised of volunteer scholars and teachers of religion, who meet with Singapore's detainees.

## Implications and Recommendations

In sum, as one analyst notes, “Research into rehabilitation on terrorists and insurgents during the last decade has provided preliminary evidence that community engagement and rehabilitation

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<sup>35</sup> *Supra* note 23, *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New approaches to counter-terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 46, fn. 27 - Senior Official, Community Engagement Directorate, Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, 10 June 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, “Countering Extremism and Building Social Resilience,” p. 4, in Rohan Gunaratna, Jolene Jerard, Salim Mohamed Nasir, eds., *Countering Extremism: Building Social Resilience through Community Engagement* (London: Imperial College Press, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Feisal Bin Mohamed Hassan, “Terrorist Rehabilitation: The Singapore experience,” in *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New approaches to counter-terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 41, fn. 13 - Interview with Ustaz H. Ali H. Mohamed, 1 November 2009.

programmes are cost effective.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, some (though not many) released persons have worked together with officials in order to dupe actual and aspiring terrorists for the purpose of protecting public safety. Nevertheless, programs and policies regarding imprisoned terrorists raise a series of challenging questions, including the following:

- Will these individuals re-offend after release from prison?
- Were they further radicalized in prison?
- Where will these detainees go when released back into society?
- How to monitor them?
  - Does law enforcement have the necessary tools (technological, legal, etc.)?
  - Other means and mechanisms to monitor, beyond law enforcement?
- How to garner and allocate necessary resources, such as to support law enforcement monitoring?
- How can community and societal resilience be built and fostered?
  - What measures can be taken through the Internet?
  - And in the (physical world) community?
- How to provide for the “practical” and “basic needs” of these individuals (e.g., “income, housing, health care and education”) so that these persons do not turn for assistance to radical groups or persons with whom they may have affiliated in past?
  - How to provide for the basic needs of the families of the released?
- How to provide “emotional support” to help released individuals “locate peers who are opposed to radicalism,” so that the released do not fall back into bad company?<sup>39</sup>
- How best to address the “lone wolf” threat posed by some of those released from Parwan Detention Facility?
- How best to address the threat posed by skilled experts released from Parwan, such as explosives expert [Mohammadullah](#)?<sup>40</sup>

While there is no “silver bullet solution” that will assuredly yield 100% success rates, globally, for counterterrorism and law enforcement officials on the above questions, it is clear that well-funded deradicalization and disengagement programs with government and community support have produced more success stories than those programs lacking institutional and community support

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<sup>38</sup> *Supra* note 36, “Countering Extremism and Building Social Resilience,” p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Rabasa *et al.*, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, at pp. 42-44.

<sup>40</sup> “Details on four detainees released from Parwan from U.S. Forces-Afghanistan,” *Washington Post* (February 13, 2014). According to a news release from U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (reprinted in the *Washington Post*): Mohammadullah “is believed to be a Haqqani network IED specialist who builds and emplaces IED’s. Mohammadullah was biometrically linked to an IED and tested positive for four types of explosives in an explosive residue test.”

and funding. In addition to individual families, local communities and society as a whole in each country can help undergird and sustain deradicalization and disengagement efforts. In the absence of such broader involvement which, ideally, would be encouraged by the nation's leadership, it is easier for deradicalization programs and disengagement measures to fail. Here, the Saudi and Yemeni cases are a study in contrast.<sup>41</sup>

The Yemeni example also offers a cautionary tale to Afghanistan, which would be well advised to prioritize its program by providing it financial support and sustainability; and by offering robust after-care (if/when decisions to release detainees are taken) for those who are let go, including their families as part of that process. Other factors affecting program effectiveness include multidimensionality, meaning the use of a combination of measures rather than over-reliance upon any one program strand or sub-component. For instance, as noted by Hamed El-Said, "Religious dialogue alone will not eliminate violent extremism. Programmes must not ignore the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to radicalization and consider them in their mix of programming."<sup>42</sup> In this respect, deradicalization and disengagement programs and policies are like counterterrorism strategy and initiatives writ large, meaning that a varied portfolio of instruments offers the most prudent course (although the relative importance of each such tool in the kit may vary over time).

When will the next release of detainees that is not on our radar screens occur? The date may not be fixed and widely known; and the host country may or may not be one that has in place relatively robust measures for deradicalization, disengagement, and after-care. What is certain, however, is that we should stand ready for that eventuality (release), as well as the continued existence of the phenomenon of radicalization—the next set of detainees will not be the last, and both release and continued radicalization have the potential to significantly impact U.S. national security and beyond.

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<sup>41</sup> *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (January 2012). <http://icsr.info/2012/02/de-radicalising-islamists-programmes-and-their-impact-in-muslim-majority-states-2/> and <http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1328200569ElSaidDeradicalisation1.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

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