

Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs

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Renewed interest on how and why terrorism ends has emerged in parallel with increased visibility of some new and innovative approaches to counterterrorism. These are collectively known, whether for good or bad, as “de-radicalization programs.” However, and despite their popularity, data surrounding even the most basic of facts about these programs remains limited. This article presents an overview of the results of a one-year pilot study of select de-radicalization programs and investigates critical issues surrounding assessment of their effectiveness and outcomes. We argue that Multi Attribute Utility Technology (MAUT) may offer promise for future empirical assessment of what we prefer to designate “terrorism risk reduction initiatives.” Perhaps less obviously, and until more data surrounding the efficacy of such initiatives becomes available, MAUT may also provide a conceptual basis for planning, evaluating, and guiding the development of future such initiatives and may have the unanticipated consequence of facilitating progress by encouraging greater exploration of efforts to change behavior from other contexts.

Keywords assessment, de-radicalization, disengagement, Multi Attribute Utility Technology, prisoner, recidivism, rehabilitation, reintegration, risk reduction, terrorist

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Introduction

Any discussion surrounding the decision to release imprisoned terrorists back into society raises challenging questions—Where will they go? Who will monitor them? Will they re-offend? Can they be turned away from terrorism while in prison? Will any recidivism rate prove acceptable to the public? In addition to the security challenges raised by issues to do with changing terrorist behavior, resentment and feelings of injustice among victims of terrorism accompany even preliminary discussions about these issues.

In recent years, however, a growing number of states have come to accept the view, implicitly or otherwise, that their respective national security interests may be served by exploring how to facilitate and manage the reintegration of convicted terrorists back into society. In particular, a perception has taken root that such efforts might be expressed through attempts to change terrorist behavior, primarily by “rehabilitating” or otherwise “de-radicalizing” those that have been detained as a result of their engagement in terrorist operations.¹ In some situations, these efforts have become manifest through fully-fledged behavior change programs with formal titles and specific terminology. They work in varied ways, and carry context-specific expectations around what constitutes success. But despite their heterogeneity, at the cornerstone of each of these programs is the idea that terrorists can be engaged such that there is a subsequent reduced risk of re-engagement in terrorism upon release.

To date, there is no consensus on what constitutes success in reforming a terrorist, let alone what even constitutes reform in this context. There is, in addition, confusion about whether any kind of rehabilitation is necessarily brought about by “de-radicalization” (itself a term which has not been adequately conceptualized, let alone defined) as opposed to other interventions for eliciting behavior change. Recent research suggests that many of those who disengage (or desist) from terrorist activity are not necessarily de-radicalized (as primarily conceived via a change in thinking or beliefs), and that such de-radicalization is not necessarily a prerequisite for ensuring low risk of recidivism.²

Thus far, however, it has been practically impossible to ascertain what is implied by or expected from programs that claim to be able to de-radicalize terrorists. No such program has formally identified valid and reliable indicators of successful de-radicalization or even disengagement, whether couched in cultural, psychological, or other terms. Consequently, any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any such program is beset with a myriad of challenges that are as much conceptual as they are practical.

That is not to say that there have not been regular claims of success by officials associated with these initiatives. Such claims are based on suspiciously low recidivism rates (with, unsurprisingly, recidivism never clearly defined) touted by those in charge of the programs. It is thus challenging to ascertain not only *if* a program is successful, but *why*. Consequently, programs have faced criticism, one Saudi dissident arguing, “there is no way you can have a scientific study of how successful [the Saudi] programme is.”³

This article provides a basis for systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of extant and future de-radicalization initiatives. To begin, we present brief overviews of five initiatives in five different countries to illustrate the multi-faceted respective approaches taken to de-radicalization in each context. Each case identifies critical issues relevant to both the reactions to that initiative as well as how successful or

otherwise the initiative was deemed. We reflect on the significance of the cases and their heterogeneity for attempts to assess effectiveness within and between programs. To escape the conceptual quagmire associated with evaluation, we present Multi-attribute Utility Technology (MAUT, also known as Multi-attribute Evaluation) as a solution. We argue that MAUT is attractive for drawing not only useful comparative conclusions about the assessment of the initiatives, but much more significantly may also be a framework for guiding the development of future such initiatives that draw lessons from existing programs (effective or otherwise).

Northern Ireland's Early Release Scheme

As part of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998, the Early Release Scheme that ensured the release of convicted terrorists was deemed essential to keep the peace process "moving forward."⁴ In offering release to political prisoners, the GFA provided an incentive for non-signatories to decommission and work towards a peaceful resolution to the Troubles. But release was not equated with outright amnesty: should an individual violate the conditions of release, or the group to which he/she was affiliated break the ceasefire, the member would have been expected to serve out their sentence in addition to any new sentence imposed upon them.⁵ Furthermore, groups that did not respect the GFA and its conditions of ceasefire (e.g., the Real IRA) were ineligible to have their members released from prison.⁶

Upon release from prisons across the UK and Ireland, both Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners found themselves in a position of relative powerlessness and inactivity.⁷ By 2000, it was widely accepted that ex-paramilitaries experienced difficulties finding work or securing travel visas. In addition, they were regularly subjected to police suspicions across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the United Kingdom.⁸ The British and Irish governments were fully aware of the problems that ex-prisoners experienced, as evidenced by a joint letter developed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern. In the letter of May 2000, the prime ministers publicly pledged to take measures that "facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community, and to address related issues."⁹ The aid afforded to ex-prisoners primarily took the form of monetary assistance and facilitation of work procurement. O'Connor¹⁰ details several government-sponsored plans that were established to assist ex-prisoners in acquiring a range of vocational skills.

Despite the support, several parties expressed dissatisfaction with the extent to which those being released were assisted in reestablishing themselves in communities. Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin, claimed that the British government "failed to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners," claiming that former prisoners were being kept as lesser citizens in "all aspects of social and economic life."¹¹ Independent researchers found that the circumstances surrounding the efforts of the governments were less than exemplary. Schulze¹² documented serious doubts on both sides regarding the fairness of reintegration efforts. Republicans suspected that government officials were excluding them from negotiations surrounding the terms of the Belfast Agreement and their subsequent enforcement. On the other hand, Loyalists saw the Early Release Scheme as a form of appeasement for Republicans.

Other entities attempted to facilitate the reintegration process for released terrorist offenders. The European Union took steps to assist community projects that were established to help with the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-prisoners.

Prisoner welfare organizations (often staffed by former terrorists) conducted their own analyses of the types of skills and training prisoners needed.¹³ They identified the need for training courses in “pre-employment, business planning, and social skills development.” Pearson¹⁴ described how such courses were further developed and implemented by professional training organizations within the Maze prison. In addition to occupational and skill-based assistance, financial assistance was afforded by the Northern Irish government.¹⁵

Another organization helping prisoner reintegration is the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO).¹⁶ With a focus on education and vocational training of offenders, NIACRO provides a means by which all ex-prisoners (not just terrorist offenders) can reasonably reintegrate into Northern Irish society. In addition, several ex-prisoners themselves have initiated independent projects to help those that are having trouble reintegrating into the community after their incarceration.¹⁷

In 1996, an all-Ireland charitable trust (dubbed the Educational Trust) was established to “support political ex-prisoners and their families in accessing education/training as part of a resettlement agenda.”¹⁸ Although the Trust was originally developed to directly support political ex-prisoners, there was increased emphasis on the families of ex-offenders. Children often experience discrimination and social barriers to mainstream services analogous to those experienced by their parents.¹⁹ According to the Educational Trust’s evaluation of the Difference and Sameness project, 308 individuals were assisted in getting vocational and educational support through the Trust,²⁰ with over one-third of these participants being children of ex-offenders. NIACRO has recognized the need for training and support for those with direct and indirect ties to the ex-offenders as well.

Recidivism

In May of 2003, the British and Irish governments released a statement calling for the establishment of the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC). To assist in maintaining relative peace, the IMC to this day supervises and reports on the actions of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. In so doing, the IMC is able to (a) confirm that the signatories of the GFA honor their commitments to abandon violence and (b) verify that security measures in Northern Ireland are being normalized.²¹ In a 2008 report, the Commission reported all incidents of politically-motivated violence from March 2003 through August 2008. Of all the groups whose violent activity was documented by the IMC, none were signatories of the GFA. On the surface, this suggested that recidivism rates of those released from Northern Irish prisons were low (though it has to be determined if the composition of dissident groups means that at least some of those released re-engaged with them). The core assumption surrounding assurances of non-recidivism rested on the belief that if the movement was on ceasefire, the leadership would exercise extreme authoritative control over its members to adhere to the conditions of the GFA. Although the IMC detailed which specific political groups were responsible for murders between 2003 and 2008 (at least 24 killings), they neglected to report group identification for incidents where casualties result from shootings or assaults.²² Because the number of shooting and assault casualties far outnumber the number of murders in the time frame specified by the IMC, it is likely that some shootings and assaults were carried about by proxy—i.e., by members of groups that were meant to adhere to the GFA.

McEvoy reported that of the 450 prisoners released early under order of the Belfast Agreement, 20 have had their release licenses revoked. Of these 20, 16 were re-arrested for participating in terrorist-related activity²³—roughly *one-fifteenth* the recidivism rate for “ordinary prisoners” in Northern Ireland.

Generally, it is understood that the Early Release Scheme, despite some setbacks, played a pivotal and successful role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. Former Northern Irish Secretary of State Peter Mandelson conceded that some ex-prisoners would be guilty of wrongdoing, but defended the Early Release Scheme against being represented as a failure on the basis of recidivism. He claimed that ex-prisoners were generally supportive of the peace process and have “overwhelmingly” avoided re-offending.²⁴ This claim was reiterated,²⁵ and the argument followed that a) recidivism among released terrorists had been low, and b) that among those that have benefited from the Good Friday Agreement, recidivism was virtually “negligible.”

Colombia’s Disengagement and Reincorporation Program

Amid persistent hostilities between Colombian revolutionary groups (e.g., Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)) and paramilitaries (e.g., Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC)), recent years have seen the implementation of several disengagement initiatives intended to quell the violence. Many of these initiatives were executed at the group level, designed to facilitate the demobilization of entire terrorist movements rather than enticing one individual at a time.²⁶ This is not to suggest that what the Colombian authorities characterize as demobilization has not occurred at the individual level. Marcy Ribetti²⁷ found that individuals do leave terrorist movements and paramilitaries in Colombia on their own, albeit for largely idiosyncratic reasons. Collective disengagements are typically executed as a result of calculated strategy on the part of the group’s leadership.²⁸ In such cases, fighters have no alternative but to return to society, sometimes still ideologically adherent to their former group’s objectives—those who collectively disengage because they have no other choice are not necessarily “de-radicalized.” In contrast, individual FARC members who decided to leave the movement typically tend to do so because of personal motivations: fear of excessive punishment, disillusionment with the group’s leadership, or recognition of the impossibility of achieving the group’s goals.²⁹ If there is a group that is more likely to fit the idea of what it is to be de-radicalized, it is those that voluntarily disengage.

Demobilization at both the individual and group level in Colombia has been greatly facilitated by the application of Law 418 (1997) and its amendment, Law 782 (2002).³⁰ Generally, these laws assert that individuals who were involved with armed groups may be eligible to receive amnesty for their “political crimes.” Law 418 states, however, that those who partake in “atrocious acts of ferocity or barbarity, terrorism, kidnapping, genocide, homicide committed outside of combat or putting the victim in a state of defenselessness” are not eligible to receive a pardon. If deemed eligible for government-sponsored demobilization and reintegration, former fighters are provided with health, economic, and educational benefits as specified by Colombian Decree 128.³¹

The Colombian initiative is often known as the Reincorporation Program. The process works as follows. The first step involves paramilitary commanders supplying the Office of the High Commissioner with a list of names of those

seeking to demobilize.³² The Office of the High Commissioner then verifies the number of names on the list with the Ministry of Defense. Those on the list are moved to a geographic location chosen by the government where they are questioned and registered with Colombia's Technical Investigative Body. The government registrar supplies them with identification classifying them as "demobilized individuals" to ensure receipt of government benefits. Afterward, each demobilized guerrilla surrenders his or her weapon to government representatives during a ceremony.³³ The Organization of American States (OAS) verifies transfer of weaponry.³⁴

Following the demobilization ceremony, ex-fighters are allowed to return to a place of their choice from where they must frequently check in at government "reference centers."³⁵ Once formally associated with one of these centers, former paramilitaries can receive health care, shelter, clothing, and vocational support.³⁶ Third parties that include the OAS, European Union, and Microsoft Corporation underwrite the provision of such benefits.

In the past, the plan was essentially an umbrella initiative, the main focus of which involved the provision of benefits as a means of sustaining involvement in socially productive activity. In recent years, however, the nature of the program has changed. The government has taken a more person-centered approach to dealing with paramilitaries, and now, government-employed social workers have been introduced to help facilitate a "changing of . . . violent ways."³⁷ This remains in its infancy,³⁸ but for now, ex-paramilitaries are put through individualized workshops, training seminars, and therapy sessions. This evolution of the original program is built on the assumption that individuals who belonged to a paramilitary group lose their individuality,³⁹ and thus, have difficulty making decisions independent of the group's normative influence. This is a major focus of the training for reintegration.

Recidivism

Whether through the proliferation of individual or collective disengagement, it is clear that in recent years, the Colombian government has taken significant steps toward ending the violence. Since 2002, murder rates have been cut in half and kidnappings decreased by 87%.⁴⁰ McDermott⁴¹ found that the murder rate in Colombia dipped below that of Venezuela. Colombia National Police Commander, General Jorge Castro, suggested that the drop in violence was a direct result of President Uribe's National Security Plan,⁴² of which the Reincorporation Program is part.⁴³ That said, as with the Northern Irish Early Release Scheme, there have been persistent disputes about the legitimacy of a program that, in the eyes of many, allows for the release of terrorist offenders. Ribetti⁴⁴ found that nearly 17% of gang members captured between 2006 and 2007 were formerly demobilized combatants. The International Crisis Group⁴⁵ claimed that warnings about the potential for demobilized individuals to fall back into crime went unheeded. They also asserted that a major shortcoming of the Reincorporation Program was the perceived lack of structural support for cooperation between law enforcement agencies (successful cooperation, it was argued, would potentially limit opportunities for demobilized individuals' chances to re-engage in illicit activity). The Sixth Report of the OAS illustrated similar concerns, claiming that criminal gangs of demobilized combatants enjoyed significant control over the communities in which they operate.⁴⁶

Indonesia's Disengagement Program

Coupled with traditional military counter-terrorism strategies, Indonesia has quietly promoted an ad hoc, police-centered disengagement initiative in response to continued terrorist activity within and around Indonesia. Since his disillusionment with and subsequent disengagement from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI),⁴⁷ former commander Mohammed Nasir Bin Abbas has been part of the public cornerstone of efforts both to prevent radicalization of Indonesian youth as well as to facilitate the disengagement of existing JI members.⁴⁸ Bin Abbas has become a figurehead to rival even Abu Bakr Bashir—to those still loyal to Bashir, Bin Abbas is a hate figure. Bin Abbas claims that to re-educate captured prisoners, he explains to them how they have “misunderstood” the Islamic struggle and “the meaning of Jihad.”⁴⁹ The BBC's Peter Taylor⁵⁰ said that Bin Abbas was actively urging (both in public and in private) JI members to “return to the right path of Islamic teaching.” Furthermore, it appeared that Bin Abbas assisted Indonesian police forces in their searches for his former comrades, even accompanying police on raids and being present in negotiations to offer a reassuring face to his former comrades who may be contemplating confession.

Despite the regular threat of violence from JI, even as early as 1995,⁵¹ and recognition of the benefit offered by talking with captured members of JI (as anecdotal evidence from Bin Abbas and the police—primarily Detachment 88 (Indonesia's counter-terrorism unit)—would suggest), Indonesia has not sought to resource or institutionalize its efforts. This is also despite the recent development of highly publicized similar programs in nearby Malaysia and Singapore.⁵²

Another prominent figure is Ali Imron, imprisoned for his part in the 2002 Bali bombing. Spared the death penalty for expressing remorse for his role in the attack, Imron provided police with extensive logistic and tactical information about JI. In a 2007 interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC),⁵³ Imron revealed the extent to which he cooperated with officials, claiming he “know[s] how they will try to get their weapons and explosives . . . what kind of place they will target for what kind of action and I know how they would carry that out.”⁵⁴ Imron also claimed to be cognizant of “how the terrorists recruit new members and who is most vulnerable to the radical message.” To counter JI's “message,” Imron wrote a book, produced cassette tapes, and publicly described how he would tell family and friends about the “mistakes” he made. In addition, and within the confines of his detainment, Imron has worked closely, just like Bin Abbas, with Detachment-88 to “deprogram other jailed terrorists.”⁵⁵

Select Detachment-88 personnel, while operating chiefly in their role as an elite counter-terrorism unit within the Indonesian National Police,⁵⁶ have also been involved in the attempted de-radicalization of those it captures. JI expert Zachary Abuza⁵⁷ attributed much of Detachment-88's success to the religiosity of its leadership. Brigadier General Surya Dharma has organized prayer sessions among captured JI members. Such demonstrations of adherence to Islam and mutual respect have surprised some prisoners—as evidenced by the operations of Ali Imron and his work with the unit, Indonesian officials believe that the success of their program is heavily contingent on the involvement of former JI personnel.⁵⁸

In addition to assisting police investigations,⁵⁹ Bin Abbas was involved in the “re-education” of arrested JI operatives. In an interview with Tony Jones (ABC),

Australian Federal Police Commissioner (AFP) Mick Keelty claimed that Bin Abbas's former position in JI (operational commander of JI's *Mantiqi 3* and administrator of the *Hudaibiyah* training facility) yields respect from those that have been captured.⁶⁰ Keelty argues that such respect can be harnessed to "convert the others."⁶¹ These claims appear founded. While giving testimony against one of the architects of the second Bali bombing, the defendant smiled and shook the hand of Bin Abbas as a sign of respect.⁶² Bell⁶³ confirmed that once JI members are arrested, Bin Abbas holds talks with them. Unusually, he can even spend up to a week with captured members before Indonesian police get significant access to them.⁶⁴ During that time, Bin Abbas challenges detainees' Islamic justifications for armed action against civilians,⁶⁵ and tries to get detainees to cooperate with police investigations.⁶⁶

The authorities acknowledge the importance of altering both attitude and behavior through prisoner engagement.⁶⁷ Although discussions with Bin Abbas and revelations of good treatment on the part of police can prove helpful in changing the belief structures of captured JI members (Bin Abbas himself recalled his disorientation at *not* being tortured by the authorities upon arrest⁶⁸), Indonesian officials have provided logistic and financial support to prisoners in exchange for cooperation.⁶⁹ Frequently, travel expenses are covered for the families seeking to visit incarcerated loved ones and they are provided with accommodations upon arrival. This is in addition to perks for detainees such as access to distance education.⁷⁰

The Indonesian disengagement initiative defies simple characterization. It is perhaps best considered a loosely-knit array of different soft-line approaches, the various features of which are relevant and potent at particular phases and for particular people. Abuza⁷¹ describes the program as "underfinanced, understaffed, and not terribly institutionalized" (p.198).

Recidivism

By late 2007, more than 300 individuals were in Indonesian prisons for terrorism-related activities.⁷² Although conflicting reports exist on the number of detainees that underwent "treatment," it seems that the number of detainees that voluntarily chose to take part in the process was low. Abuza noted that there is actually no evidence to suggest that those who have been released due to sentence remissions or amnesties were in reality exposed to any kind of de-radicalization efforts of the Indonesian government. Further, Woods⁷³ claimed that the decision to renounce extremist views is largely a result of monetary incentive rather than de-radicalized attitudes or cognitions, suggesting that most of those that do leave prison do so with their extremist views intact. Yet, officials continue to assert success.⁷⁴ In his discussion with Southeast Asian security personnel, Oorthijam⁷⁵ reported that only two or three of the 458 arrested on terrorism charges in Southeast Asia turned back to terrorism. Whatever figures are released, it remains unclear what Indonesian officials mean by recidivism, and the lack of transparency surrounding official statistics more generally call this into question.⁷⁶

The Indonesian initiative remains unique in its utilization of ex-terrorists as central to the disengagement process. This affords officials a level of insight they would probably not have been able to cultivate otherwise. Further, due to the credibility and respect commanded by Imron and Bin Abbas, they have been in a strategically

effective position to encourage captives to fully disengage. It is probably inaccurate and certainly premature to consider this true “de-radicalization.” In the past two years, however, infrastructural problems with the prison system have limited the scale of these innovative efforts, while more damagingly, short prison terms and remissions negate the incentive to partake in a rehabilitation program that rewards detainees with shorter sentences.

Yemen’s Religious Dialogue Committee

Following the attacks of the *USS Cole* in 2000 and the French oil tanker *Limburg* in 2002, Yemeni President Saleh was widely criticized. It became clear that new methods for countering terrorism were necessary to suppress al-Qaeda within Yemen’s borders.⁷⁷ To this end, and doubtless encouraged by the view in Yemen that the U.S. government would take matters into its own hands to protect its interests unless Saleh acted fast, a new initiative was born. Five religious scholars were selected to form what would become the *Religious Dialogue Committee* (RDC). Saleh appointed Hamoud al-Hitar, a widely-respected judge, as its head.

The basis of the RDC rests on the idea that because the political killing of civilians has “faulty intellectual foundations,”⁷⁸ the core tenets of terrorism can be disputed, thus weakening attitudes presumed to underpin support for terrorist activity.⁷⁹ To achieve attitude change, al-Hitar and the rest of the RDC debate with those captured and imprisoned. Al-Hitar claims that many of the captured militants have several parts of the Qur’an memorized as justification for their support of and participation in terrorism.⁸⁰ Because of this, the RDC tends to challenge militants not on the content but on their *understanding* of the verses and *Hadiths*. In a published statement explaining the philosophy and operations of the RDC,⁸¹ al-Hitar explains that the subjects that he and the other religious scholars invite the participants to discuss include the place of jihad in Islam and its justifications, the relations of the Muslims and others, the concept of the State, government, and ruler rights within Islam.⁸² The basis for the debates, al-Hitar argues, is mutual respect.⁸³ Al-Hitar engages captured militants in “dialogue at eye level.”⁸⁴ The meetings are small and intimate—between five and seven militants per session.⁸⁵ Once meetings conclude, participants document and sign off on what they have discussed and learned. After weeks of debate, if the prisoners renounce violence and (if applicable) the terrorist groups of which they were part, they are released and offered vocational training and help finding employment.

While the tangible rewards offered at the conclusion of the program provide some of the basis for the program’s claimed success, al-Hitar claimed that argument-based dialogue “has become an essential element of the Republic of Yemen’s policy to countering extremism and terrorism.”⁸⁶ Al-Hitar feels that most militants are ordinary people who were led astray (they are “the deceived”⁸⁷), and that they can be led back to a non-violent existence if only approached with respect.⁸⁸ Some officials share al-Hitar’s sentiment. Faris Sanabani, advisor to Saleh, said that “it is only logical to tackle these people through their brains and heart . . . if you beat these people up, they become more stubborn . . . they will enjoy the pain and find something good in it – it is a part of their ideology.”⁸⁹ Although initial reports on the program claimed great success (al-Hitar travels widely to share his program with interested officials⁹⁰), recent years have seen the RDC’s achievements called into question.⁹¹

Recidivism

Five militants involved in the bombing of the *USS Cole* were released in 2004⁹² to significant concern.⁹³ Although the Yemenis claim that no militants who have directly taken part in attacks are released, the fact that anyone involved in an attack on U.S. interests in any capacity proved challenging for American-Yemeni relations. Some officials tout al-Hitar as a brave figure that has made Yemen a valuable regional player, while others regard him as naïve at best and an apologist at worst.⁹⁴ Abdullah al-Faqih, professor of political science at Sana'a University, concedes that despite the program's perceived success, it is extremely difficult to change beliefs (let alone actual behavior), and to ascertain the extent of that change.⁹⁵ Al-Faqih's concerns resonate widely: how can we know that militants who denounce violence are doing so because they are somehow "changed" and not because they simply want freedom? Because the RDC operated under the auspices of the Yemeni government, and that the Yemeni government has a vested interest in curbing terrorism inside its borders, success and recidivism rates associated with the RDC are difficult to interpret. Most if not all claims of success come directly from the RDC. Al-Hitar claimed that 364 suspected militants had been released since the inception of the dialogue program in late 2002 through 2005.⁹⁶ Additionally, he claimed that the post-release progress of many participants was deemed to be "encouraging" and "positive." In an interview with Abdul-Aziz Oudah,⁹⁷ al-Hitar claimed "50 percent of al-Huthi followers [Believing Youth-Zayidi-revivalists, part of the ongoing Huthi conflict] were . . . convinced with the talks, however there are other factors that made them relapse into violence actions again" and that "those influenced by al-Qaeda were persuaded at a 98 percent rate." Although the number of suspected militants released is verifiable, the number that returned to fight is not. And *where* precisely they returned to fight has proven a further complicating factor.

Most skepticism with regard to the RDC is a result of reports of success rates based on highly subjective views about what constitutes terrorism as opposed to "legitimate resistance." Al-Hitar has been less forthcoming on what actions are justifiable amid conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel-Palestine. Although he claims that the aforementioned conflicts have prompted "unsuitable reactions,"⁹⁸ it remains unclear whether he counts former participants in the RDC fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as "failures."⁹⁹ The current status of the RDC is unclear. Although al-Hitar claimed that he has plans to revive the RDC in the near future,¹⁰⁰ the political climate in Yemen seems to suggest that doing so would be difficult. The September 17, 2008 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a,¹⁰¹ with two, even three of the attackers allegedly graduates of al-Hitar's program, may prompt the United States to eventually abandon support for the initiative.

Saudi Arabia's Counseling Program

Although Saudi Arabia has faced sustained domestic insurgency for several years,¹⁰² after the Riyadh compound attacks in May 2003 the Kingdom instituted a series of new security measures. In addition to traditional counterterrorism methods, the Saudis developed a series of measures intended to de-legitimize what the Kingdom deemed incorrect and/or violent interpretations of the Qu'ran.¹⁰³ One of these approaches saw the development of a special program intended to change insurgent behavior through a combination of open dialogue and socio-psychological

intervention.¹⁰⁴ Although the program was started in secret, it has since become well known both within and outside Saudi Arabia. Unlike Yemen's RDC, the Saudi program (dubbed the "Advisory Committee Counseling Program") operates in a more formalized and structured manner, and is coordinated through the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁰⁵

Prince Muhammed bin Nayef, the third-highest ranked official in the Ministry, oversees efforts.¹⁰⁶ He has become internationally renowned for his dedication to fighting terrorism within Saudi Arabia. According to Christopher Boucek's¹⁰⁷ extensive and detailed portrayals of the committee and its administrators, Prince Muhammed's office organizes several components of the Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare (PRAC) programs. One office under the Prince is responsible for family social and logistical care while participants are detained, with another responsible for the organization and coordination of several social scientists, psychologists, and psychiatrists dedicated to assessment, treatment, and management of participants.¹⁰⁸ The primary purpose of the Counseling Program is to reintegrate individuals into society after they have forfeited their views about the legitimacy and appropriateness of violence in particular situations.¹⁰⁹ Although individuals who successfully carried out a terrorist attack (i.e., those who have "blood on their hands") are eligible to participate in the program, they are not eligible for early release (contrary to much of the popular commentary about this program).¹¹⁰

Boucek¹¹¹ and Murphy¹¹² described four subcommittees that make up the counseling program. These subcommittees include the Religious Subcommittee, the Psychological and Social Subcommittee, the Security Subcommittee, and the Media Subcommittee. Each is charged with different aspects of the counseling process. The Religious Subcommittee is comparable to the Yemeni RDC in that it is composed of clerics, other religious experts, and university scholars charged with engaging the participants in open discussion about their experiences and interpretations of the Qu'ran and Islamic duty. The Psychological and Social Subcommittee is comprised of psychologists and psychiatrists who evaluate participants for psychological problems and gauge participant compliance with the counseling. In addition, they ascertain participants' needs and family needs as a result of the participant's detainment. One of the cornerstones of the counseling program is to help reintegrate the participant into society not only via ideological change, but in terms of practical logistic support as well.¹¹³

According to Boucek, the Security Subcommittee is responsible for monitoring program detainees during and after their participation.¹¹⁴ In coordination with the Religious and Psychological/Social Subcommittees, the Security Subcommittee makes recommendations on which prisoners are safe to release. Furthermore, the Security Subcommittee advises program participants about how to avoid repeating the actions that got them into trouble. Although the Security Subcommittee informs program participants that they will be monitored after they complete counseling, Boucek claimed that "not all [functions of the Security Subcommittee] are publicly known" (p. 13), suggesting that monitoring activities transcend what officials publicly claim.

The majority of the counseling is performed by the Religious Subcommittee. Upon their first meeting with participants, participants are told that they may take part in a rehabilitation program and renounce the terrorist movement of which they are a part or face time in prison.¹¹⁵ If participants choose to undergo the rehabilitation process, members of the Advisory Committee ensure them that they are not

officials from the Ministry of the Interior or security officials, but are independent scholars that wish to help them.¹¹⁶ Although hostility between program participants and counselors was initially widespread, as the reputation of the Advisory Committee and Saudi Arabia's programs became more well-known, the animosity of participants toward counselors dissipated. Because participants in the program are treated as victims rather than offenders, the Advisory Committee's first order of business is to simply listen to participants.¹¹⁷ Committee members offer structured responses to participants by explaining how their interpretation of Islam is misguided, and thus begins the process of teaching participants the Saudi-approved interpretation of the Qu'ran.

Boucek noted that although many participants verbally abandon their beliefs after a single session, they are typically subjected to several short sessions beyond their recanting. The other program is akin to a six-week workshop in which two religious clerics and a social scientist work with up to twenty participants.¹¹⁸ During the course of this six-week class, participants are taught about relevant topics such as loyalty, terrorism, and the state-sanctioned rules of jihad. At the conclusion of the six-week course, participants are given an exam and a psychological evaluation. If they pass both, they proceed to the program's aftercare phase.

Several sources¹¹⁹ reported that the aftercare program itself is comprised of various initiatives, each of which is designed to meet a specific need. Participants are taken to an external rehabilitation facility—the Care Rehabilitation Center (CRC)—where detainees enjoy a more relaxed setting. Detainees have access to fresh air on a regular basis, they live communally with other inmates, play sports on the facility grounds, and engage in art therapy. Because Saudi officials recognize that individuals become radicalized for different sets of reasons, the CRC treats individuals on a highly individualized basis. For example, detainees at the center consist of domestic offenders, fighters going to (or returning from) Iraq and other foreign locations, and former Guantanamo detainees. Whereas domestic offenders and those heading to Iraq spend their time in dialogue with counselors, those who were detained in Guantanamo are afforded both this and special instruction intended to reintegrate them into a Saudi Arabia that may have changed since they were imprisoned.¹²⁰ In sum, the CRC exists as a logistical extension of the six-week counseling program, but participants are afforded opportunities that they would not otherwise receive.¹²¹ In addition to the psychological and social support on offer, Boucek¹²² and Verma¹²³ describe how graduates are helped to secure employment, transportation, funds, and a place to live. Participants' families are also recruited as a source for their recovery and are used in two ways: (a) the Ministry of the Interior offers social support programs to participants' families and trips to visit detainees and (b) families are held financially and socially responsible if a participant falls back into terrorism.

The Saudi program is perhaps most publicly associated with de-radicalization efforts in no small part due to highly publicized claims of success as well as extensive media attention paid to the content of the aftercare phase. Boucek¹²⁴ claimed that Saudi officials have said that participants are successfully rehabilitated 80–90% of the time. Those who do not successfully rehabilitate, it is argued, either chose to forgo the rehabilitation program or effectively failed the program (e.g., were screened out for insincerity). Of the approximately 3,000 individuals to participate in different portions of the counseling program, Prince Muhammed claimed in

2008 that 1,400 have given up their terrorist beliefs and were subsequently released, while another 1,000 remain in the program.¹²⁵ In his interviews with Boucek,¹²⁶ the Prince claimed that fewer than 35 individuals fell into recidivism, making for a rate of less than 3 percent. Accurate figures date from November 2007, so the progress of the program continues to be closely watched,¹²⁷ particularly to detect examples of recidivism.¹²⁸ It appears, from preliminary study, that the Guantanamo returnees have higher relapse and re-arrest rates than others.

Reflections on Case Studies

At this point, it may be useful to reflect on the broader context in which these initiatives may be considered. Given the lack of detailed research on the underlying social and behavioral processes involved, it might appear premature to comment on the success of programs that in some cases appear to attempt to secure sustainable disengagement from terrorism, with or without the accompanying objective of achieving “de-radicalization.” At present, it is practically impossible to know exactly how many such initiatives exist. What constitutes such an initiative may be defined quite broadly, while it would also seem that many existing programs were once shrouded in secrecy and were never originally intended for analysis of any type. Early signs of success, particularly in the Saudi case, appear to have spurred on host countries to showcase their efforts. This is despite the lack of any clear sense of evaluation, and as a result, many programs appear threadbare with little if any cognizance of how behavior change is obtained in other (e.g., criminal) contexts, and how those might inform the development of interventions for changing terrorist behavior. As a consequence the skepticism that surrounds these initiatives is not only to be expected, but also welcomed.

The five case studies very briefly described here were chosen in part to highlight their striking heterogeneity and the fact that they have been widely discussed in open sources, as well as the fact that there is at least some limited data beginning to emerge from them (e.g., on recidivism rates) that may in time be subject to further analysis. Before we can progress, however, there is an urgent need for some terminological clarity that may anchor some key concepts implicitly explored in these programs, and may help guide discussion. In a recent book, Horgan¹²⁹ offered the following operational definitions and distinctions:

Radicalization: the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology. Radicalization may not necessarily lead to violence, but is one of several risk factors required for this (p. 152).

Violent radicalization: the social and psychological process of *increased* and *focused* radicalization through involvement with a violent non-state movement. Violent radicalization encompasses the phases of a) becoming involved with a terrorist group and b) remaining involved and engaging in terrorist activity; it involves a process of pre-involvement searching for the opportunity to engage in violence and the exploration of competing alternatives; the individual must have both the opportunity for engagement as well as the capacity to make a decision about that engagement (p. 152).

A critical distinction is made between radicalization and violent radicalization because radicalization alone is not a reliable predictor of engagement in violent activity. We do not yet have a reliable risk assessment protocol to adequately establish the relationship between radicalization and violence, but we know that not all those who are radicalized seek to express that radicalization through engagement in terrorism, just as not all those who are involved in terrorism are necessarily “radical” themselves.

Disengagement: the process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation. It may not necessarily involve leaving the movement, but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change. Additionally, while disengagement may stem from role change, that role change may be influenced by psychological factors such as disillusionment, burnout or the failure to reach the expectations that influenced initial involvement. This can lead to a member seeking out a different role within the movement (p. 152).

De-radicalization: the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity. De-radicalization may also refer to any initiative that tries to achieve a reduction of risk of re-offending through addressing the specific and relevant disengagement issues (p. 153).

De-radicalization implies a different change than those associated with disengagement alone: it implies change at the cognitive level, not simply the physical cessation of some observable behavior. Discussions about de-radicalization imply long-lasting change in orientation such that there is *presumably* a reduced risk of re-engaging in terrorist activity. However, while clearly identifiable as a component in particular programs (perhaps most obviously in the Saudi case), it would appear that a pre-occupation with de-radicalization may be both premature and naïve. Certainly it does not adequately characterize the programs under examination. At the very least, it might be more appropriate to *collectively* refer to these programs as “risk reduction” initiatives—regardless of the operational differences, resources, and expected outcomes (let alone terminology), attempting to reduce re-engagement in terrorism is the one unambiguous common thread between these initiatives. In the absence of convincing data, whether reliable de-radicalization is a requirement remains highly questionable.

As highlighted by Bjørgo and Horgan,¹³⁰ participation in these initiatives appears to offer an equally varied and numerous list of potential benefits ranging from full amnesty, partial amnesty and reduced sentencing, improved prison conditions, serving in prison with other ex-members, job training and education for reintegration, ideological dialogue and redressing of core beliefs deemed conducive to engagement (and possible re-engagement in risky behaviors), economic subsidies to participants and their families, assistance at forming a new family, developing new social networks, attaining a job, and cultivating the development of a new identity. A related issue here also documented by Bjørgo and Horgan is that the range of resources required for the development of such programs is extensive: from qualified

practitioners (e.g., clinical psychologists, subject matter experts (e.g., terrorism)), reformed ex-terrorists, economic resources, networking between and within agencies, NGOs and civil society, participants' families, and so on. It is clear that the expectations associated with disengagement programs are not homogenous. The case studies presented here, along with others, illustrate that individuals who participate in such programs can be expected to engage in one or more of the following activities (slightly amended from Bjørge and Horgan's original list):

- a. Disengagement from terrorism and related activities (direct operational activity);
- b. Disengagement from radical movements and associated politics (indirect activities, including subversion);
- c. Accepting and serving reduced sentences for crimes committed;
- d. Providing intelligence and/or serving as a witness in court, which may or may not result in delivering testimony that may see the subsequent imprisonment of former comrades;
- e. Meeting victims as part of reconciliation and restorative justice initiatives;
- f. Distancing themselves publicly from terrorism and extremist activity as well as symbolic figures associated with these;
- g. Taking part in activities aimed at reducing recruitment and radicalization to extremist groups as well as taking part in activities aimed at encouraging disengagement for those currently involved (e.g., counter-radicalization efforts).

As far as the programs themselves are concerned, a major concern must be the issue of how to deal with the risk of insincere participants and the possibility of recidivism to terrorism and/or related activities. It would also appear that there is no one specifically targeted group intended for disengagement and/or (where relevant) de-radicalization. On the surface, former terrorists represent the immediate and most obvious target for such initiatives, though the broader gamut of participants appears to extend to imprisoned terrorists, terrorists at large, direct participants more generally, leaders and ideologues (e.g., indirect participants), peripheral direct and indirect members that occupy supporting roles, sympathizers, as well as parents and family members of those who have participated in subversive and terrorist activity.

Critical areas for exploration include not only clarity around the selection process and screening procedures for admittance to the program, monitoring participants in a meaningful and effective way post-release, and developing meaningful and valid (i.e., empirical) indicators for reduced risk of re-engagement: in sum, there is an urgent need for reliable risk assessment procedures for use with a terrorist population.

But perhaps the most immediate issue here is one of evaluation—how will these programs and their outcomes be evaluated? There is little expectation that internal evaluation would result in negative outcomes being made public, while external evaluation raises other challenges. A principal issue is the question of who it is that performs that evaluation, and whether or not access to information and real transparency can accompany such evaluation. Perhaps most challenging (and similar to the issue of whether or not we have unnecessarily entangled issues by misleadingly referring to these initiatives as “de-radicalization programs”), we should ask if collective evaluation is realistic given both the glaring lack of any kind of data as well as how context-specific these initiatives appear to be? Assuming there is agreement on the need for some kind of evaluation, we offer a potential model for that evaluation below.

Multi Attribute Utility Technology

Although it is reasonable that different societies with unique cultural characteristics tailor their expectations to fit their particular needs, formal comparison of the initiatives, as well as systematic effort to evaluate claimed success of individual initiatives, requires a scheme that permits assessment across common program elements. One particular evaluation technique, Multi-attribute Utility Technology (MAUT), affords us this ability by systematically and quantitatively assessing the aspects of each risk reduction initiative.

MAUT, also known as Multi-attribute Evaluation (ME), is an assessment technique developed and popularized by Edwards and Newman.¹³¹ MAUT facilitates identifying and weighting the goals and objectives held by a set of stakeholders, and assesses how well a given program meets those goals or objectives. MAUT is based on six fundamental assumptions described by Edwards and Newman:

1. When possible, evaluations should be comparative in nature. MAUT assumes that the best decisions are made when programs are put in competition with one another to determine which provides the most benefit for the least cost.
2. Any initiative normally serves multiple constituencies: any program will have a number of individuals or groups that have a vested interest in the form the program takes.
3. Programs typically exist to serve multiple objectives, and those objectives are very rarely of equal significance.
4. Making judgments is an integral part of any program evaluation.
5. Judgments of great consequence (e.g., what types of methodologies should be implemented in a risk reduction initiative) should have underlying evidence to inform them.
6. Finally, evaluations of programs typically are, or at least should be, directly relevant to policy decisions about those programs.

There are a number of reasons why one would want to perform a multi-attribute evaluation on any program. There may be interest in examining the ongoing performance, particularly when or if the criteria for success associated with that program (implicit or otherwise) changes. Furthermore, MAUT can be applied if a program requires fine-tuning to alter the overall effectiveness of the program. Perhaps most salient for issues raised in this article, however, is the utilization of MAUT for the sake of programmatic choice. MAUT can be used to help determine which of a number of initiatives or programs is the most appropriate given needs, goals, and available resources. Ultimately, MAUT is useful in any situation in which one or more programs require comparative assessment.

MAUT in Practice: Possible Use and Value in Evaluating Risk Reduction Initiatives

There are distinct steps in performing an analysis using MAUT. First, and most obvious, it is important to identify which objects are to be evaluated and what functions the evaluation itself should perform. In principle, MAUT would be employed to (a) monitor the performance of these programs, (b) identify any problems associated with the individual initiatives, and (c) select which attributes in each program would be most appropriate for the development of an effective risk

reduction initiative if one were implemented elsewhere. Second, those who hold a stake in the evaluation need to be identified. Stakeholders, in the context of MAUT, are those individuals or groups with a reason to care about the decisions to be made and have enough political power to influence those making a decision about the program under evaluation. In the case of risk reduction initiatives, stakeholders may include: officials from the governments that are operating the program, influential citizens, representatives from affected extremist groups, etc. Third, relevant attributes about the initiative under evaluation *must* be elicited from the identified stakeholders and organized into a hierarchical structure called a “value tree.” For example, if after talking to stakeholders, we develop a list of attributes including “lowers rates of domestic terrorism,” “low rates of recidivism,” “develops higher morale within the host country,” and “provides political capital for the host government,” we can develop a simple value tree that looks as follows:

Rate of Terrorism		Domestic Esteem	
Domestic Terror Rates	Recidivism	Boosted Morale	Political Capital

“Rate of terrorism” and “domestic esteem” can be used to identify constructs that represent all attributes that fall under it on the value tree. Of the four attributes identified in our example, domestic terror rates and recidivism both relate to the rate of terrorism in the host country. As such, “rate of terrorism” is a potential umbrella construct to envelop both attributes. Similarly, boosted domestic morale and political capital for the host government both relate to esteem for those in the host country. As such, “domestic esteem” is one possible umbrella construct to encompass these attributes.

Obviously, this is a very simplified example. If ME would ever be conducted on any or all of the aforementioned risk reduction initiatives, a large number of attributes would be identified. For the sake of pragmatic utility, Edwards and Newman suggest that no more than fifteen attributes be identified at each level of the value tree. Using our example, this means that if after eliciting relevant attributes of a risk reduction initiative, and we find that twenty attributes have been identified that are related to “domestic esteem,” we must either consolidate “like” attributes or drop those attributes that can be designated as unimportant relative to those that are retained in the value tree. In addition, when utilizing MAUT, we must be careful to distinguish relevant attributes from those things that some stakeholders are only curious about or are impossible to evaluate. By only including those attributes that have repercussions for the implementation of an effective risk reduction initiative, we avoid wasting time and resources assessing traits are largely irrelevant. Critically, with regard to the elicitation of relevant attributes from stakeholders, terminology must be standardized. When more than one stakeholder identifies the same value attribute using different terminology, the words/phrases used should be standardized so as to avoid double counting that particular attribute when evaluating programs.

To evaluate the five aforementioned risk reduction initiatives, a standardized value tree must be constructed. Specifically, there must be one version of the overall value tree that can be applied to all risk reduction initiatives so as to evaluate them on equivalent terms. Because certain attributes may be relevant for some initiatives

but not for others, it is important to remember that some stakeholders, when assigning value to certain attributes, will assign some attributes a value of 0. For example, the Saudi program places a large emphasis on psychological evaluation and psychosocial care of participants. The Northern Irish Early Release Scheme places no official emphasis on psychological well-being of its participants and certainly does not require “de-radicalization” as conceptualized in the Yemeni, Saudi, and Indonesian efforts. Because we want to use a standardized value tree to compare these two programs, if “psychological well being” was included as an attribute in the value tree, stakeholders associated with the Northern Irish program may very well assign a value of 0 to that particular attribute. Note that this is not a negative outcome; it is simply an indication of the divergent goals of the Saudi and Northern Irish programs, respectively, and is an explicit recognition of the necessary contextual issues.

A final step is that after eliciting relevant attributes and constructing a uniform value tree that can be applied to all risk reduction initiatives, we assess the relative importance of the value dimensions. Because the risk reduction initiatives will include attributes of differing levels of significance, it is important that we weight the attributes at every level of the value tree so the more important ones carry more influence in the evaluation of the program being investigated. To standardize the values of each attribute so they are relative to one another, all assigned weights at each level of the value tree should sum to 1.00. There are several methods by which we could assign weights to the attributes in a value tree. The most valid, however, is by performing what Edwards and Newman call ratio weighting. For a detailed guide to performing multi-attribute evaluation, the reader is guided to the original research report on which this article is based.¹³²

Why MAUT?

Although we believe MAUT to be the most suitable evaluation framework with which to examine terrorism risk reduction initiatives, there are also other frameworks that could be used to evaluate them. For example, one type of framework is the so-called “planning model” for analytical evaluation.¹³³ This is typically applied by developing an abstract model for a particular system or program. Facets of this model can be represented by equations with particular parameters that reflect relevant both controllable and uncontrollable variables that may affect the outcomes associated with the system or program. For example, one particular kind of planning model called JUSSIM (Justice System Interactive Model) was developed to determine the overall costs associated with a court system that deals with a given number of particular crimes. This model was manipulated by developing a mathematical algorithm for costs at each level of the jury trial process for a given crime.

Models like this have the obvious benefit of being timely and cost efficient. The development and application of a planning model generally consists of generating and running mathematical algorithms through a computer terminal. Although the simplicity of applying such an evaluation framework may be attractive, the relative inflexibility associated with it brings limitations. Planning models can provide feedback regarding a particular type of outcome given an established set of parameters. To evaluate a particular system or program on the basis of multiple attributes, model simulations must be run multiple times. The influence of multiple stakeholders

further confounds an evaluation using a planning model. The parameters of a planning model are essentially under the control of the program planner. As such, if multiple stakeholders are to be accommodated, consensus must be reached prior to determining the parameters. Consensus among stakeholders with sometimes differing interests may, in an obvious sense, be difficult to obtain, but the model simply cannot accommodate flexibility in this regard.

Another type of framework is called “process evaluation.”¹³⁴ These are generally of use when the phenomenon of interest is the *impact* of a particular intervention. Process evaluations focus on those steps that were taken to implement a particular program by describing the content, the quality, and the immediate products associated with the program. In addition, process evaluations are typically used to determine if resources are being acquired and applied properly, if the target population is being adequately affected, and whether program activities are being conducted in accordance to plans. As such, process evaluations can reveal how or why a particular program succeeds or fails. To answer questions associated with how a program is implemented, Grizzle and Witte¹³⁵ suggest interviews, observation, surveys and questionnaires, and analysis of existing documents. Such a framework would encompass nuance from a variety of sources regarding the most efficient and effective way to implement a particular program. However, most of this information will be necessarily qualitative in nature. This may open the evaluator up to scrutiny, particularly if program stakeholders hold opposing viewpoints.

MAUT avoids the problems associated with these and other evaluative models. By including a number of stakeholders in the process of developing a program rather than only evaluating an existing one, it can be ensured that multiple constituencies are accommodated. In addition, evaluations are based on mathematical calculations rather than qualitative survey or interview data. Although MAUT may not be *the* ideal for any program evaluation, the unique nature of risk reduction programs (i.e., multiple stakeholders with sometimes opposing views, goals, insights, etc.) requires the application of a framework that is multifaceted, comprehensive, and resistant to accusations of bias or tampering by virtue of the way in which the developmental process comes about. The MAUT process is unique in that it represents a numerically-based method by which to appraise the success of the kinds of initiatives described here. By employing MAUT as a tool to evaluate the aforementioned programs and their unique, context-specific attributes, we are able to draw general conclusions regarding (a) which goals are important, (b) the relative difficulty in achieving certain goals, (c) where efforts should be focused to develop a successful de-radicalization initiative, and (d) the differences in the priorities of the initiatives we have mentioned here.

Conclusions

Despite the highly publicized claims for success associated with some of these risk reduction initiatives, there are major barriers to even the most tentative of evaluations:

1. There are no explicit criteria for success associated with any initiative.
2. There is little data associated with any of these initiatives that can be reliably corroborated independently.

3. There has been no systematic effort to study any aspect of these programs, even *individually*, let alone collectively.

On the one hand, there is an obvious sense in which attempting to evaluate the collective success of such programs represents a naïve task. What works in one region could not necessarily be expected to work in another and the internal expectations of the initiatives vary considerably. From this perspective alone, it may be that attempting to identify lessons across programs, while noble, may produce more limited knowledge than originally anticipated. At the very least, we can assert that “de-radicalization programs” is a misleading category for what these diverse and innovative programs aspire to do, and the significance of how this unhelpful term has probably led us to a false start should be recognized explicitly. However, even here there is room for optimism. By careful evaluation of multiple features associated with these programs (whatever we call them), we can tentatively identify lessons learned from experiences of these initiatives, both within specific programs as well as across them. For this reason alone, we should explore further the promise offered by MAUT as one possible guiding framework for the development of risk reduction programs and their assessment. Given the glaring lack of standards associated with verifiable outcomes and success measures associated with the programs, it would appear that there are substantial benefits to be exploited.

A final issue for further consideration relates to the fact that the ongoing development of terrorism risk reduction programs appears not to be informed by an understanding of how other prison offender programs work. Though the extent to which these initiatives are themselves effective is highly questionable, there are at least some well-developed technologies of behavior change that have been implemented in various settings with non-terrorist populations. In particular, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approaches represent a useful yardstick not only for evaluation purposes, but for reasons outlined by Taylor and Horgan,¹³⁶ offer useful foundations for conceptualizing interventions to change the behavior of terrorist offenders. In turn, Horgan’s¹³⁷ recent analysis of the disengagement process for individuals highlights the similarities between terrorist de-radicalization and the notion of “secondary desistance” from criminal lifestyles. The similarities in terms of the challenges for conceptualizing behavior change between terrorism and crime are striking, though both Gadd¹³⁸ and Maruna¹³⁹ suggest that in some ways, several core questions of what it means to be “rehabilitated” are regrettably no clearer in the criminological literature. Consequently, for our purposes here, there are no easy answers as to whether efforts to assess rehabilitation initiatives for “ordinary” offenders are more or less useful than MAUT (or others).¹⁴⁰ To end on a positive note, however, these questions would at least attest to there being no shortage of ground for further exploration and fruitful development of these issues. The innovation and creativity that led to the original development of terrorism risk reduction initiatives must not be lost.

Notes

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