Terrorist Rehabilitation:
An Introduction to Concepts and Practices

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Abstract

Pakistani military developed a state-of-the-art capability to rehabilitate insurgents, terrorists and extremists. Community engagement to prevent and rehabilitation to deradicalize are the most humane approaches to countering the ideological threat of politically motivated violence. Spearheaded by Major General Ishfaq Nadeem Ahmad in Swat and by Major General Asim Saleem Bajwa in South Waziristan, Pakistani military working with its partners have created a rehabilitation capability that should be adopted by the police and the prisons. A new frontier in countering political violence, rehabilitation of insurgents, terrorists and extremists is a global challenge. This paper discuss the concepts and practices in rehabilitation shared by Singapore with Pakistan since October 15, 2008. Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research conducted the 1st Strategic Workshop on Rehabilitation and **De-Radicalization** of Militants and Extremists at the FATA Secretariat in Peshawar on 18-19 May 2010. Pakistan's pioneer in rehabilitation, Vice-Chancellor of the Islamic university of Swat, Dr. Farooq Khan was assassinated by the Taliban on October 2, 2010. This paper is dedicated to his courageous and visionary leadership.

Keywords

Rehabilitation, Terrorist, Pakistan, Concept, Practice, FATA

Introduction

Rehabilitation of insurgents, terrorists and extremists is the most humane approach to countering the ideological threat of politically motivated violence. The Pakistani military started to invest in building state-of-the art programs for rehabilitating Pakistani insurgents, terrorists and extremists starting in Swat in 2009. Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research provided assistance to Pakistan to build its capabilities in rehabilitation in 2010[1]. Having visited the rehabilitation centres in Swat and interviewed both the beneficiaries and the officials in 2011, I was very impressed with the administration of the centres, rehabilitation interventions, and the rehabilitation instructors. With its success, the military is expanding its rehabilitation effort both in the Federally Administered Tribal Pakistan and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Today, the challenge is for the Pakistani police and the prisons to embrace rehabilitation as a counter-terrorism strategy. Without seeding a successful prevention and rehabilitation program, Pakistan will not be able to effectively fight

the current and emerging threat of ideological extremism, terrorism and insurgency. This paper seeks to provide an introduction to concepts and practices of insurgent, terrorist and extremist rehabilitation.

The Context

The four pillars of the criminal justice and prisons system are deterrence, incapacitation, retribution and rehabilitation. General deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution have limited impact in discouraging terrorists and others who engage in politically motivated violence. On the contrary, deterrence, incapacitation and retribution can reinforce and strengthen their misguided belief. As such, to meet the challenge of politically, religiously and socially radicalized Muslims, it is paramount for governments to disengage and de-radicalize them. Government success will depend on the strength of the partnership with Muslim community leaders and organizations.

Both protecting communities and preventing relapse of those detained and imprisoned is a government and community responsibility. Towards this, both in the open and inside detention and prison facilities, those vulnerable to radicalization should be engaged politically, religiously and socially. Nonetheless, such de-radicalization initiatives through rehabilitation in detention and in prison and engagement of the communities are new in idea and recent in systematic practice. As radicalization leads to violence, both these complimentary strategies are paramount in the fight against terrorism and ideological extremism.

Background

Today, the threat of political violence, especially terrorism, presents a tier-one national security challenge to most governments and to societies. In the spectrum of threat groups driven by diverse ideologies, the militant jihadis present the single biggest threat to international security. After al Qaeda's attacks on America's most iconic landmarks on September 11, 2001, the threat has escalated globally. The U.S. and European led kinetic and lethal approaches have dominated the global counter terrorism agenda. They include significant investment in operational counter terrorism – catch, kill and disrupt – and anti-terrorism – protection of personnel and infrastructure but not in strategic counter terrorism – change the enabling environment.[2]

The western-centric approaches focusing narrowly on fighting the armed groups have not led to an appreciable reduction in threat. Although the operational capabilities of threat groups have been targeted, their intentions to fight and fight back remain intact. Worldwide, the capabilities and capacities of governments and partners to fight operational terrorism's precursor ideological extremism have been

inadequate. To win the fight, government must build partnerships with academia, the media, community, educational, and religious institutions. The world is still in a very early stage of developing far reaching strategies both to stay ahead of terrorism and to prevent regeneration.[3]

A New Frontier

In the spectrum of violence, terrorism is a unique form of violence and presents a multidimensional threat. Although the United Nations is still debating on formulating a universally accepted definition for terrorism, there is broad consensus that terrorism is the threat or act of politically-motivated violence deliberately targeting non combatants. As opposed to violent crime, largely driven by personal need and greed, terrorism is ideologically based. As terrorism is a by-product of ideological extremism, terrorism and extremism is a continuum. Exceeding the bounds of moderation, extremists go to extremes or support extreme doctrines or practice.[4] Extremists are driven by "*political ideologies* that oppose a society's core values and principles." [5] To deprogram the terrorist and extremist population, extremist belief and thinking instilled and indoctrinated by the ideology and narrative is central. Delegitimizing the ideology requires sustained engagement, counseling, rebutting, refuting, and other counter-ideology measures.

Cognitive and non-cognitive factors politicize, radicalize and mobilize Muslims to advocate, support and participate in politically motivated violence. However, contemporary understanding of rehabilitation of terrorists and other extremists is limited. In a recent study, Horgan and Braddock state that, "1. There are no specific criteria for success associated with any initiative 2. There is little data associated with 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."[6] Earlier studies focused including three studies by Horgan, Bjorgo and Horgan, and Ashour, focused on components of rehabilitation notably disengagement and deradicalization. Insurgent and terrorist rehabilitation is a new frontier.

Rehabilitation

The contemporary usage of rehabilitation is contextual. Rehabilitation is to help someone return to normal life by providing education, training and therapy.[7] Derived from the Latin word "rehabilitare"[8], rehabilitation is "to make fit, after disablement, illness or imprisonment for earning a living or playing a part in the world.[9] Criminal and terrorist rehabilitation is about re-engaging, re-educating and re-entry of those who have deviated from the mainstream back to society. Although rehabilitation of offenders falls within the purview of penitentiary science, the developments in penology in the last 50 years is for rehabilitating criminals and not

politically-motivated violent offenders. The multidisciplinary art and science of rehabilitating terrorists in the custodial and community (probationary) settings is at a very early stage. Although mostly conducted in custodial settings due to security considerations, rehabilitation is much more effective in community settings. Called beneficiaries, the rehabilitees selected for reform are engaged by psychologists, social workers, sports instructors, religious and community leaders, and other leaders of influence serving as role models.

There is no universally accepted definition of terrorist rehabilitation. Academics agree that "To date, there is no consensus on what constitutes success in reforming a terrorist, let alone what even constitutes reform in this context."[10] Criminal rehabilitation is defined as any "planned intervention that reduces an offender's criminal activity."[11] As no definition of terrorist rehabilitation exists in the social science literature and within the security community, we seek to develop a working definition. While the goal of both criminal and terrorist rehabilitation is to reintegrate offenders back into society as law abiding citizens, terrorist rehabilitation is designed to wean individuals from violence--terrorist or otherwise--and re-educating them how political change can be achieved without resorting to violence, including terrorism.[12] Rehabilitation is a holistic process that mitigates the drivers of conflict in an individual's life through education, vocational training, counselling or therapy, and may include post-custody aftercare and community connected services.

Radicalization

A working definition of radicalization is "*the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.*"[13] Based on a study of Islamist movements, Omar Ashour argues that "Radicalization is a process of relative change in which a group undergoes ideological and/or behavioral transformations that lead to the rejection of democratic principles (including the peaceful alternation of power and the legitimacy of ideological and political pluralism) and possibly to the utilization of violence, or to an increase in the levels of violence, to achieve political goals."[14]

As ideological extremism is the precursor of operational terrorism, it is essential to counter radicalization, the "process whereby an individual or group adopts extremist beliefs and behaviors."[15] While most radicalized are vulnerable to supporting or advocating violence, categories of activity ignored and tolerated by many governments, only a tiny percentage actually engage in violence. Violent radicalization denotes a transition from radical thought to violent action[16].After radicalization occur either or both in real and cyber space,[17] recruitment into an organization mobilizes an extremist into committing terrorism or other violent acts.[18] The reverse of radicalization is rehabilitation, a non-traditional security tool that has wider applications.

De-Radicalization

One facet of rehabilitation is de-radicalization, a term that academics are still in a stage of conceptualizing and defining. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock argue: "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 In the context of governments engaging, including co-opting Islamist movements, Omar Ashour defines de-radicalization as a "process of relative change within Islamist movements, one in which a radical group reverses its ideology and de-legitimizes the use of violent methods to achieve political goals, while also moving towards an acceptance of gradual, social, political and economic changes within a pluralist context."[19] Extricating the negative ideology that had been imbibed into the mind of the beneficiary selected for rehabilitation, followed by negation of the misunderstood ideology, and subsequently replacing the negative ideology with positive ideology is de-radicalization. ."[20]

De-radicalization is a comprehensive process by which a terrorist's misunderstanding or extremist ideology is replaced with the principles of moderation, toleration and coexistence. Only a small percentage of the population has extremist views that require de-radicalization. De-radicalization involve religious engagements that seek to dissuade violence and extremism. Cognitive skills (sometimes called life skills) training are also employed. Such skill are used to inform terrorists that there are peaceful alternatives to violence. Changing the views and ideologies of terrorists and extremists is difficult and may take more time than education and vocational training.

The final stage of re-education is to input the rightful understanding of theology or nationalism essential for moderation, toleration and co-existence into the mind of the beneficiary. Upon completion of these stages the beneficiary of rehabilitation would have undergone an ideological transformation that qualifies him or her to be reclassified as "no longer pose a security threat". A multifaceted process to meet a multidimensional threat, rehabilitation is much more than de-radicalization. Although de-radicalization is paramount to open the mind of the detainee or the inmate, successful terrorist rehabilitation can be achieved by improving the circumstance of the beneficiary, the immediate family, the extended family and the wider community. By winning the hearts and minds in both through- and after-care phases can enable a beneficiary of rehabilitation to transform. To abandon and reject violence and embrace and advocate peace constant engagement is needed. For successful re-entry, de-radicalization should be continued after the custodial phase in the community phase by ideologically trained and intellectually competent clerics, community and other leaders.

Disengagement

In the counter-terrorism toolkit, there are many pathways out of terrorism. In addition to de-radicalization, there are other tools and techniques for ending violence. They include disengagement, a behavioural change wherein the terrorist agrees to lays down his arms and stops fighting. While in custody, he or she must be persuaded to voluntarily disengage from the fight. Rehabilitation programs provide the skills and tools to voluntarily disengage. Terrorists in custody who are motivated by economic reasons or who were not totally committed to the fight are likely to shift from "compelled" to "voluntary disengagement" by providing them education and vocational training. Those who are motivated by ideology will very likely require additional de-radicalization efforts such as religious engagement and/or cognitive skills training. Omar Ashour argues that terrorists may suspend, abandon or reject the use of violence but may remain ideologically unchanged.[21]

John Hogan defines disengagement as "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 failure to reach the expectations that influenced initial involvement. This can lead to a member seeking out a different role within the movement."[22] As such, disengaging or desisting "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."[23] In return for cooperation with the state, terrorists accepting government offer of incentives such as early release is not rehabilitation.[24] Most academics agree that "Disengagement refers to a behavioral change, such as leaving a group or changing one's role within it. It does not necessitate a change in values or ideals, but requires relinquishing the objective of achieving change through violence. De-radicalization, however, implies a cognitive shift—i.e., a fundamental change in understanding."[25] As such, to reduce the strategic long term threat, whenever possible, it is important for governments to remain involved, de-radicalizing individuals and groups that have disengaged from violence.

Recidivism

Derived from the Latin term recidīvus, recidivism refers to" relapse into crime."[26] Terrorist recidivism is the relapse of terrorists released from custody into participating, supporting or advocating violence. Like some criminals, some

terrorists who are released from custody, are likely to return to violence. In the U.S. where rehabilitation is not a national policy, about 50% of the criminals released from custody return to crime and about 20% of the Guantanamo Bay detainees have returned to terrorism.[27]

As custody is a continuity of their journey for some career criminals and terrorists, recidivism is a major challenge facing many governments worldwide. Categorized as low, high, medium, the rate of recidivism depends on multiple factors. In an ordinary prison or a detention facility, an offender "simply enters the same milieu he existed outside of jail."[28] Such typical conditions in crowded jails may create access to the leadership, reinforce the ideology, harden the belief system as well as create opportunities for networking, learning and sharing new terrorist tradecraft and skills.

Non-Rehabilitation

By mere physical warehousing detainees or inmates, their belief system that determines behavior is unlikely to change. When released from custody, if the pull factors are stronger than the push factors, they returned to the terrorist networks. Central to reducing recidivism is to identify the main driver(s) of radical thinking and behavior and provide post release treatment to those not de-radicalized during imprisonment. Rather than mere incarceration, identifying the radical pathways and developing tailor-made rehabilitation initiatives reduces the probability of return to terrorism and to other forms of violence. Similar to the through care program, a carefully crafted and strategically guided aftercare program can reduce the susceptibility of the released detainee or inmate to reoffend.

Even if a released terrorist is not de-radicalized, if other facets of rehabilitation especially community engagement are in place, he or she can disengage or desist from relapsing to violence. In addition to continued monitoring, the other facets include the released detainee or inmate playing an active role: taking on a key responsibility in the community; engagement with a family and a network of friends, peer and other support groups supporting the ideals of non-violence; and to facilitate reentry economic and social incentives.[29] The engagement programs, through the community elite - elders, teachers, religious and other influential and visionary leaders –should reinforce the idea of reaching out, invest in building broken bridges, and promoting the values of reconciliation, healing, and forgiving.

Re-Entry

Re-entry is defined as the peaceful transition of the rehabilitated detainee or inmate from custodial to civilian life. The final and the most crucial phase of rehabilitation of the beneficiary and his or her family is the relocation to a

community of destination, reinsertion socially and economically, and protection from threats. The safety net should include emergency relief - cash, access to credit, and land, benefits – housing, employment, food, education and health support, and other interventions.[30] For sustained and long term support, social and economic linkup with local government leaders and institutions, professional and social networks, and NGOs is essential. Paramount for successful reentry is an improved security environment, where the security of the former detainee or inmate, his or her family and loved ones are government guaranteed. Dependent on the threat level, communication and interaction with their extended family, relatives and friends should be managed by government.

As the rehabilitated terrorists need to be protected psychologically, government should support the creation of groups, groupings, or an association of the rehabilitated. For successful and sustainable reintegration, the rehabilitated inmate or detainee must be convinced that their interactive participation with government and community working. Until they are empowered to take in charge of their live, the rehabilitated must be assisted, impediments removed, and monitored continuously. As they adapt to their new life, the aftercare program should guide, mentor and assist the beneficiary to rebuild their life in a new environment. In the case of the disabled, support will need to be continuous.

Terminology

As the term rehabilitation and rehabilitee have negative connotations, practitioners prefer to use the term re-education and beneficiary respectively. Rather than standardizing terminology, what is important is to select and use terms that are acceptable to government and society so that the program will be supported and sustained. The term militant or rebel as opposed to terrorist or insurgent is used in Pakistan and India because government is aware that at some point the government will have to negotiate with the threat groups. The meaning and usage of certain terms is also changing.

While many use the term reintegration to denote the entry phase, the emerging usage of the term reintegration refers to the entire process of wide-ranging activity to assimilate terrorists peacefully back to society. The three operation level subsets to reintegration are disengagement, rehabilitation and reentry. Among both the practitioners and academics, it is very likely that the usage of the term reintegration pioneered by Joint Task Force – 435 in Afghanistan will become popular and supersede the term rehabilitation in the future.[31]

Community Engagement

Governments working with community partners must counter terrorist propaganda seeking to politicize, radicalize and militarize the Muslim

communities. Known as community engagement, government should facilitate Muslim clerics and scholars to build platforms to counter the extremist ideology of radical and violent groups. Unless the Muslim elite working with the government immunize Muslim communities from terrorist and extremist propaganda and indoctrination, both recruits and support for group and homegrown terrorism will be inevitable. Furthermore, when released from custody, the repentant terrorist who has rejected extremism and embraced peace will be at odds with the views of the very community.

The narratives of al Qaeda, JI and other threat groups articulate the real and perceived injustices against the Muslims. The narratives make some minds, especially of the youth, susceptible to ideology. Like clay, they can be influenced, moulded and shaped by charismatic leaders selectively citing verses from the Quran. The ideology is the trigger. Islam itself has theological arguments that explicitly exhort or forbid the use of violence against civilians.

While narrative is not the only factor for radicalisation, it is one of the most compelling factors that propel people to extremist ideologies. The drivers for terrorist mindsets are ideology and narratives and these can be countered by a multi-pronged approach. As terrorism is a vicious by product of ideological extremism, all governments and their partners should develop a strategy to dismantle the conceptual infrastructures of terrorism. As narratives can be fact or fiction, only some narratives can be countered. Similarly, the components of ideology that either corrupt or misinterpreted, they too can be correct. Furthermore, the Quran and the Hadith has passages that promote moderation, toleration and coexistence. In parallel with countering the misinterpretation and disinformation, such passages should be promoted. To prevent politicization, radicalization and mobilization of vulnerable Muslims, the counter strategy should be targeted at centres of such extremist activity.

Moving Forward

There should be a whole-of-government strategy involving the schools, the religious establishment, the media and others to counter the inclination of indoctrinated youth towards violence. The campaign should be conducted not only in real space but also in cyber space. The website of the Religious Rehabilitation Group and <http://www.rrg.sg/> and private sites such as <http://counterideology.multiply.com> can provide a good model for future on-line counter-ideological work. Otherwise sympathies and support for terrorist causes will grow resulting in a series of support activities.

To prevent misinterpretation by radical and violent leaders, there must be efforts to explain the circumstances in which certain passages were mentioned. As there are verses forbidding the use of violence against civilians irrespective of

circumstance, it is paramount to harness these passages to immunize the vulnerable segments of Muslim communities. The militant groups are more often led by charismatic leaders who may at the same time are credible and very knowledgeable in the religion but use it for the wrong purposes. In their misguided views, they probably think they are doing what is right.

Conclusion

The post 9/11 world is in a very early stage of global rehabilitation of both terrorists and other politically motivated extremists. Nonetheless, some correctional rehabilitation programs have led convicted and suspected terrorists to express remorse, repent, and recant their violent ideologies and re-enter mainstream politics, religion and society. Although operational counter terrorism initiatives have received both investment and attention, strategic counter terrorism initiatives that ultimately end violence including terrorism but require patience and sustained efforts have been neglected by governments and received inadequate public coverage.

The rehabilitation of terrorists and extremists is a new frontier in restorative justice. Surrendered and captured terrorists and extremists should be offered the option of prosecution or rehabilitation. To encourage individuals and threat groups to genuinely reject violence and embrace peace, government should create the environment for engagement with incarcerated militant jihadis. If released before they repent and express remorse, they will not be properly reintegrated. To prevent recidivism, government should build multifaceted programs to rehabilitate the detained and imprisoned.

End Notes

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[2]Daniel Benjamin, Strategic Counterterrorism, Foreign Policy at Brookings, Paper No. 7, October 2008 and Rohan Gunaratna, "Strategic Counter-Terrorism: Part 1 Understanding the Threat" Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy's Jebsen Centre for Counter Terrorism Studies, Research Briefing Series, Vol.1, No. 1 (December 2006)

[3]Although a few governments and their partners have made headway, most are still struggling to understand the strategic threat and develop countermeasures.

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[6]Horgan, John and Braddock, Kurt(2010) 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs', Terrorism and Political Violence, 22: 2, pp. 285-86

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[8]The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, New York, Random House, 1981, p. 1209

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[17]Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), January 2009, p. 10

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[21]Omar Ashour, "The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements" (London Routledge,2009), 205 pp

[22]John Horgan, Walking away from terrorism : accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements (New York: Routledge, 2009), 152-153

[23]Horgan, John and Braddock, Kurt(2010) 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs', Terrorism and Political Violence, 22: 2, 267 — 291

[24]In dealing with left wing terrorism in Italy in the 1980s, government's repressive policies were interwoven with policies facilitating leaving the group. Although "facilitating departure through reduction of prison sentences and the creation of homogeneous areas in prisons" is not rehabilitation, the strategy contributed appreciably towards ending violence. "While repressive policies operate with a view to increasing the price of staying committed, rewarding the open abandonment of the armed struggle reduces the price (especially emotional and cognitive) of leaving, allowing collective paths towards changes in solidarity and identification." Donatella della Porta, *"Leaving underground organisations: a sociological analysis," In, Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement, Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (eds.) (London, Routlege, 2008).*

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