Deradicalization: Pathways to Enhance Transatlantic Common Perceptions and Practices

Introduction

The Middle East Institute (United States) and the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (Paris, France), with support from the European Union, undertook the project entitled "Understanding Deradicalization: Pathways to Enhance Transatlantic Common Perceptions and Practices."

The goal of this project is to compare and analyze transatlantic practices in developing and implementing preventative interventions to minimize violence and the spread of radicalized and violent groups (hereafter referred to as destructive sub-cultures).

Rationale and Core Objectives

The first objective is to compare the guiding principles, priorities, and practices governing current US and EU policies that address destructive subcultures. The project highlighted common and contrasting approaches of the United States and the European Union.

The second objective is to explore the extent of American and European commitments to confronting the challenges associated with destructive subcultures. Although jihadism is the main threat, violence from far-right groups is also a concern shared by the United States and Northern European states. The United States and the European Union have a long history of trying to manage threats from far-right groups, but with mixed results. Prison violence (whether from those imprisoned in Europe as a result of radicalization or in the United States for gang activity) may also require a collaborative approach as the United States has substantial expertise and knowledge in gang prevention, while the European Union and its member states seem to focus their efforts in countering radicalization.

The third objective is to identify existing shared perspectives between the European Union and the United States and to highlight other potential areas for consensus. The issue of citizens leaving their home countries to join the "Islamic State" (ISIS) is shared by many countries, and although the number of ISIS recruits from EU countries is worrisome, the United States is also facing similar challenges on its soil. The recent terrorist attack on May 5, 2015 in Garland, Texas is only the latest example of such threats.

The fourth objective is to recommend precise, and practical steps for enhancing transatlantic cooperation in relevant areas where such cooperation is both desirable and possible. Among the priorities that deserve to be mentioned are the implementation of counter-narration measures and approaches to containing the spread of radicalization in jails, as the former can impact the intensity of online radicalization while the latter is a nearly universal concern.

The fifth objective is to identify ways to foster continued dialogue among policy experts and practitioners from the United States and the European Union. The capstone event organized

by the Middle East Institute and the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, to be held in Washington DC on June 12, 2015, is a great first step toward that goal.

The sixth objective is to highlight and promote the European Unions's best practices in its deradicalization interventions among subculture groups, especially—but not limited to—jihadism. Here, we consider that the American officials on the frontlines of dealing with destructive subcultures may be able to learn from the successes of certain European approaches to dealing with violent extremism. However, there is not yet a robust and systematic way to measure the success or failure of the European CVE (counter-violent extremism) interventions, which are increasing in number. It is anticipated that the EU FP7 research program IMPACT will produce a tool in the next few months capable of evaluating program effectiveness. Due to its long experience dealing with violent gangs, the United States has already developed an evidence-based protocol to measure the success, costs, and pros and cons of gang interventions.

General Context

the European Union and its member states have been particularly active in crafting and implementing policies aimed at preventing terrorism and violent radicalization. Initially, the European Union was primarily concerned with radical Islamism, but the focus has gradually expanded to include violent extremists on the political far-right and far-left, as well as separatist groups and individuals. In order to provide a coherent comparison, we utilize a conceptual term that is considered well-suited for a transatlantic perspective—that of "destructive subculture"—and that covers both gangs and violent extremists.

The term includes all types of subcultures in which violence or self-destructive behavior is part of the socialization process. This relates first and foremost to violent crime and violent extremism. Other variants can be repeat violent offenders, repetitive vandals, or self-harming behaviors. Currently, the European Union's proactive approach and focus on prevention in its deradicalization strategy is a key element in its smart power application. However, the impact of the European Union's various programs and preemptive interventions is often highly underestimated in the United States— a country that generally does not base its counter-terrorism efforts on social prevention and intervention. Recently, however, the Obama administration has put greater focus on terrorism and radicalization prevention.
At the same time, there is recognition on the EU side that member states have, at times, found it challenging to measure the effectiveness of counter-terrorism initiatives and to identify and implement the lessons learned from them.[1]

There is much to be learned by examining the strengths and weaknesses of both the American and European methods, and it is clear that taking a transatlantic approach to the challenge of deradicalization and counterterrorism is highly relevant in today's world.

Radicalization

[1] See official and scientific documents: European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization (2008) Radicalization Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism; Home Office (2011) United Kingdom PREVENT Strategy, London: Home Office; Reding, A. et al. (2011) SAFIRE inventory of the factors of radicalization and counter-terrorism interventions, Santa Monica; RAND Europe; Rabasa, A. et al. (2010) Deradicalizing Islamist extremists, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation; Disley, E. et al. (2010) Individual disengagement from Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorist groups: A rapid evidence assessment to inform policy and practice in preventing terrorism, London: Home Office; Horgan, J. and K. Braddock (2010) 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22: 2, 267 – 291.

Radicalism is a surprisingly old term, partly coined by the British, and again later during the French Revolution. Radicalization can be defined as "practices and speeches that tend to divide and separate a group, a network, or a community from the rest of the society." This clear-cut definition may include organizations with revolutionary goals against the current social order and values that are opposed to or contradict mainstream, peaceful opinions. In many ways, in-group values of such organizations may contradict the outside world. Under this conceptualization, group radicalization can be perceived as the collective process that produces and supports a new and violent ideology that favors the creation of what was called (during the 1960s) a counter-society, or now a caliphate (in the case of Islamic radicalization). By contrast, individual radicalization refers to a personal and deep change in beliefs and way of life that leads an individual to utilize violence. The degree and nature of radicalization can vary. Individual radicalization, as demonstrated by existing research, is a non-linear process that can be stopped at any time (if taking an optimistic perspective). However, recidivism cases show that success is never guaranteed.

Destructive Subculture Intervention: Lessons from the Past?

It should not be forgotten, despite the current and constant buzz around "radicalization," that many aspects of radicalization that are discussed today are actually old debates. For example, many of the tools and theories used in present-day EU programs were arguably developed in the 1960s in the United States. They seem to be particularly linked to experiments and recommendations that emerged as the Kennedy administration attempted to use social programs to reach disenfranchised youth and minorities in danger of becoming violently destructive.

Furthermore, certain EU methods seem to be particularly similar to those previously tried in the United States. For example, the focus on the importance of basing European deradicalization approaches on the needs of the individual is consistent with other American interventions designed to manage vulnerable groups (desocialized youth, youth gang members, or the prison population). There are likely also similarities in methods for detecting destructive behaviors and challenges faced by front-liners during interventions with vulnerable clients (in particular physical and verbal violence). While the word "deradicalization" (or CVE, as discussed above) is commonly used in Europe but far less in the United States, many initiatives, interventions and programs on the two continents may be very similar. In both the European Union and the United States, the intervention programs to prevent destructive subculture behaviors tend to be influenced by local and national characteristics—though EU directives or guidelines have often had decisive influence. However, deradicalization programs and other interventions aimed at destructive subcultures are typically a hybrid of multiple approaches (including those utilizing public policy) in that they are linked to other types of social interventions, such as adult integration programs (e.g., partnering with adults in the process of radicalizing or who are already radicalized and assisting them in their journey toward reintegration), youth and immigrant integration programs, social/cultural development programs, medical-social interventions, general violence prevention programs, juvenile legal protection programs, and judicial intervention.[2]

[2] See for instance: DiMaggio, P. J. (1988).Interest and agency in institutional theory. In L. Zucker (Ed.),Institutional patterns and culture (pp. 3-22). Cambridge, MA ; Kingdon, J. W. (1984) (1995). Agendas, alternatives, and public policies, 2nd ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company ; Mintrom, M., & Vergari, S. (1996). "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs, and Policy Change." *Policy Studies Journal*, 24(3), pp. 420–434.

Toward Reciprocal Transatlantic Understanding

A transatlantic comparative approach could help both sides to enhance their reciprocal understanding of each other's practices and build on the lessons learned to maximize the effectives of intervention programs. Such a comparative approach could also help disseminate European best practices across the Atlantic. The United States has long been skeptical of the utility of preemptive strategies aimed at deradicalizing vulnerable groups before they carry out acts of violence. This skepticism seems to be diminishing and can be further allayed by providing US-based practitioners and policy-makers with a robust evidence-based intervention program.

Program End-Users and Practitioners

The target audience for our work and the potential end-users of this research come from both analytical and applied backgrounds. They are composed of researchers, practitioners of social interventions and education, security and legal professionals, and political authorities from the European Union and the United States at both the national and local levels. Because public opinion is key to influencing policy end users, the project will emphasize public outreach.

Researchers and academics

The community of researchers and academics is composed of many disciplines. Research on destructive subculture/radicalization can be found in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, cultural and anthropological sciences, and security studies. These different fields each have their own distinctive, and sometimes competing and contradictory, approaches to conceptualizing radicalization and to developing deradicalization strategies and recommendations.

Our program analyzes existing approaches both inside and outside of Europe, especially with a transatlantic focus, identifies best practices, promotes EU excellence in the areas detailed above, and expands the scope of the research by taking into account the norms, policies and best practices both in the United States concerning such groups as ex-inmates, youth gangs and ethnic gangs and in other countries in regard to deradicalization/disengagement programs (namely in Saudi Arabia).

Practitioners of social programs and education

The social work profession promotes social change and problem-solving in human relationships. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the point at which people interact with their environments and society. Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practical evaluation, including local knowledge specific to its context. It recognizes the complexity of interactions between humans and their environments, as well as the capacity of people to both be affected by and to alter these interactions. As a result of the accelerating globalization process and its influence on social developments, social policy, and social work, there is a growing awareness that social work is an international profession. Social workers around the world are confronted with comparable developments, seek the same types of solutions, use similar forms of intervention, and play a similar role in society.

From a destructive subculture/radicalization perspective, social workers are at the forefront of detection. The professional practices, challenges, and "terra incognita" of those in social work and similar professions are sometimes very similar to those experienced by practitioners of interventions appropriate for countering radicalization. Front-line workers face some of the daily challenges of those who work to prevent radicalization, and practitioners involved in deradicalization programs act according to a guiding philosophy similar to that of social work. For the social work community and other field practitioners, questions surrounding detecting and dealing with radicalization include how to recognize radicalization, how to deal with verbal and/or physical violence, and how to prevent it? This broad and heterogeneous category of field practitioners has daily operational requirements for which our program's theoretical and practical findings will be of interest. Deradicalization practitioners have, or should have where possible, a global awareness of existing best practices, and our program will help provide this awareness by bringing together a broad scope of knowledge in one convenient place.

The security and legal professions

Professionals such as lawyers, security officials, and other law enforcement personnel have characteristics, roles and interests that differ from those regularly associated with social practitioners. For example, the problems of detection of and maintaining a secure environment (e.g., how to detect and remove dangerous radicals from public spaces) are crucial to this broad community. At the same time, some concerns inherent to this community appear similar to those faced by social front-liners, such as disengagement of individuals from violence or radicalization, as this can decisively contribute to successfully reintegrating individuals previously identified as dangerous or violent.

Political authorities: US, EU, national and local

Individuals and organizations with political and social agendas have a great interest in defining the public debate on important social and national issues, such as how to deal with destructive subcultures and the effectiveness of deradicalization interventions and social reintegration methods. Such political individuals and organizations are often the ones to determine budgetary priorities, including fund allocations to deradicalization interventions and social reintegration programs.

This project as a whole (the complete book) is intended to answer the following questions for a multi-level audience using a dual top-down and bottom-up approach:

Top-down:

- What are the reasons for having or not having interventions targeting destructive subcultures?
- What impact did 9/11 have on the US prevention policy?
- Is deradicalization a "leftist" concept and counterterrorism a "rightist" concept (i.e., repression vs. prevention)?
- What were the origins of anti-violence interventions in Europe (in the 2000s) and in the United States (in the 1960s)? What is the history of gang-intervention policies?
- What impact have diasporas had on the growth of destructive subcultures and prevention programs (e.g., gang prevention among Latin-American individuals and deradicalization interventions among Muslim individuals)?

Bottom-up:

- What are the actionable variables?
- What are the best practices in interventions?
- How do we measure success in interventions? Failure?
- How to compare interventions among different clients that ultimately share similar perspectives or approaches?
- What might be the best focus for monitoring ex-clients (i.e., short-term, mid-term, or long-term)?
- What are the best practices in dealing with physical or verbal violence in interventions?