Using Family Counseling to Prevent and Intervene Against Foreign Fighters: Operational Perspectives, Methodology and Best Practices for Implementing Codes of Conduct

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Introduction

Western citizens traveling to fight in battlefields across the world are a serious concern for authorities and security agencies in almost every Western country. The so called "foreign fighters" who come from diverse national and demographic backgrounds are joining the fights in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The Syrian conflict has proven to be attractive to young, Western Muslims in a way that has been unparalleled in the last 20 years. The numbers of those who have traveled to fight in Syria may even surpass the numbers who traveled to fight in the Afghanistan War between 1979 and1989. Global jihadi networks skillfully use modern information technologies and social media to disseminate propaganda and real-time information about the "jihad" on the ground. Hundreds of groups and fractions strive for their various goals in a range of highly complex civil-war scenarios. A recent report released by the United Nations estimates that 25,000 fighters from more than 100 countries are involved in the conflict in Syria and Iraq.[1] German authorities estimate that, on a national level, at least 650 individuals have left Germany to travel to Syria and Iraq since the outbreak of the war in 2011. Of those, at least 200 have returned, 85 have been killed, and about 50 have gained active combat experience.[2]

The main concern of authorities worldwide is that these individuals who are joining terrorist organizations and receiving training in camps will gain battlefield experience and return to their home countries (legally with their Western passports) to become sleepers or to directly engage in terrorist activities on home soil. As the attacks in Brussels in May 2014 and Paris in January 2015 (both of which involved returnees) show, these fears are not unfounded. This could even lead to a potential collapse of the responsible courts and security agencies. In Germany, there are currently more than 500 ongoing preliminary investigations involving more than 1,000 so-called Islamist "Gefährder."[3][4] In April 2015, German authorities claimed to have foiled an Islamist terrorist attack against a cycling race that was allegedly planned by a married couple[5] that had met and consulted with returnees from the Syrian conflict.[6] In general however, the number of returnees, and especially those involved in terrorist plots, remains remarkably small. Of 41 plots involving Jihadis in Europe since January 2011, only ten involved Syria veterans and only one plot was executed.[7] Many scholars and practitioners argue that most foreign fighters usually have specific agendas that are tied to a particular geographic area and its political situation (such as an agenda to bring down the Assad regime

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[1] http://bigstory.ap.org/article/cec52a0dbfab4c00b89bc543badf6c20/un-report-more-25000-foreigners-fight-terrorists (retrieved May 30, 2015

[2] http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/syrien-zahl-der-deutschen-terror-touristen-steigt-weiter-a-1029901.html (retrieved May 30,2015)

[3] An individual classified by the police as highly dangerous and potential terrorist.

[4] http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/islamischer-staat-is-rekrutiert-mehr-deutsche-a-1022075.html (retrieved May 30, 2013)

[5] http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/30/us-germany-security-idUSKBN0NL0YE20150430 (retrieved May 30, 2015)

[6] http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/oberursel-islamisten-paar-hatte-kontakt-zu-syrien-rueckkehrern-1.2461855 (retrieved May 30, 2015)

[7] According to a presentation by Thomas Hegghammer at the 9th Asia-Pacific Programme for Senior National Security Officers (APPSNO) May 2015 in Singapore.

in Syria and to re-establish the caliphate). Many never think of returning because they either want to die in battle, thereby becoming martyrs, or to travel to the next battlefield to deploy the skills they have learned. So far, the most comprehensive quantitative analysis on foreign fighters and their return rates (rate of returning to their home countries) has been conducted by Thomas Hegghammer;[8] his analysis suggests that about one in nine (or roughly eleven percent) of these individuals returns to his/her home country as a potential terrorist. In addition, according to Hegghammer's analysis, these individuals are far more effective in executing attacks as compared to terrorists who have not gained experience fighting abroad.

It has proven extremely difficult to prevent individuals from leaving their home countries to join the conflicts in Syria or other battlefields, as well as to track their movements once they go. The situation is further complicated by the differing motives behind their travels. Not all who travel to these locations have the intention to fight or join terrorist groups; many of them travel to Syria to deliver humanitarian aid or to conduct political campaigning, or go to Egypt to study Arabic before being drawn into the conflict. In addition, some Western countries view the Syrian opposition and their cause to be legitimate, which makes it more difficult, legally and morally, to prevent citizens of these countries from joining them.

This highly complex situation has led international researchers and policy makers to increasingly focus on intervention and prevention programs in order to counter this development.[9] However, most of the programs developed have not yet become coordinated or widely-applied initiatives. Although several state and non-state programs have gained some experience in working with families of members of radical groups (both Islamic and right-wing extremist) especially in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden, arguably one of the most well-known cases comes from Germany, where the author-designed family counseling methodologies as deradicalization tools were included in 2011 and 2012 in the German family counseling network and hotline.

The German Counseling Network

Among European states, Germany has one of the highest numbers of citizens that have traveled to the Syrian/Iraqi battlefields. However, even before the foreign fighter problem became widely evident, Germany had developed one of the most innovative approaches to tackling homegrown radicalization. The German model, implemented in 2012, relies on a strong public-private partnership hosted and financed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugee Affairs,[10] which is part of the Ministry of the Interior,[11] and involves running its own nationwide phone hotline for families and concerned persons (e.g., teachers, employers, social workers). The BAMF hotline provides free-of-charge and anonymous first-line counseling before referring the case to a local non-governmental partner within its own network, which currently includes four NGOs that specialize in the field. These NGOs are then responsible for the actual counseling. Of course families and concerned persons could also contact one of the

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[8] T Hegghammer "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting." *American Political Science Review* (February 2013)1-15.

[9] For example, see Gielen, A.-J. (2014). "Antiradicalisering in België, Denemarken en Duitsland," Tijdschrift voor Sociale Vraagstukken 1(2014): 20-23.; Ranstorp, M. and P. Hyllengren (2013); "Prevention of Violent Extremism in Third Countries. Measures to prevent individuals joining armed extremist groups in conflict zones," Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies - Swedish National Defence College.; Vidino, L. (2014). "Foreign Fighters: An Overview of Responses in Eleven Countries. CSS Studies. Zurich, Center for Security Studies" (CSS), ETH Zurich.

[10] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge BAMF

[11] F. Endres "The Advice Centre on Radicalisation of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees." JEX Journal EXIT-Deutschland. Zeitschrift für Deradikalisierung und demokratische Kultur 2(2014): 24-37.

NGOs directly. Thus, the counseling network relies on a dual-contact structure that aims to maximize its reach into the affected target group. Some families, for example, prefer contacting government structures while others strictly refuse to do so. As each NGO has its own methodological character and approach, the counseling network has a high level of flexibility and the ability to shift cases according the best fit regarding both approach and counselor. As the need for close cooperation and case-based consultation between these NGOs and the BAMF (as part of the government) is evident, regular round tables are held among the network partners. Having received more than 1500 calls[12] since 2012 resulting in more than 420 counseling cases,[13] involving at least 80 cases directly related to traveling to Syria,[14] this model can be seen as highly successful at reaching the target group. On the other hand, the German model so far has not been able to stop or seemingly even to slow the flow of German fighters going to Syria and Iraq. Assessing the real impact of the German model would require in-depth evaluative studies, which still need to be conducted. Another critical aspect that must be mentioned is the lack of coherent standards and adequate training in risk and threat assessment. Combining four very different non-governmental organizations, the German counseling network has so far been unable to establish overarching definitions or standards regarding the necessary minimum training and background experience required for counselors. Therefore one of the network's strengths is also a weakness: the multiple different approaches and methods of the NGOs involved make it difficult to achieve and maintain equal standards in counseling and to create the necessary internal transparency. Within the network, there are no clear-cut guidelines on how, exactly, the counseling should be conducted, and every NGO more or less follows its own philosophy. This requires a great deal of communication and coordination, as well as institutional learning on the part of each NGO. Building trust between the NGOs (which may not use similar methods and may even consider themselves competitors) is another point that needs to be overcome. Training in family counseling, risk assessment, and deradicalization methods is also not conducted at equal levels between the NGOs, and currently only one in-depth weeklong training course in family counseling and deradicalization exists.[15] In general, the German model relies on a constant case-by-case negotiation of necessary approaches, the role of government authorities, and the correct methods. Nevertheless the combined action of government and civil society results in a high level of flexibility and adaptability, making it possible to utilize the full potential of both actors' (government and civil society) strengths and to minimize their weaknesses. Another aspect to keep in mind about the German model is that it was designed to work with the family. The majority of counseling cases do not involve the radicalized individuals themselves but instead try to achieve the desired effect through the family. Although the number of cases with direct involvement of the radicalized person has grown over the last months, the German model nevertheless tries to focus on the family.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In general, tools, programs and approaches to countering violent extremism can be divided into three levels of impact (macro-, meso-, and micro-social) and three types of potential effect (prevention, repression, intervention). While the macro-social level targets an entire country, region, city, or district, meso-social tools typically work at the community, family, or

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[12] http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-18/berlin-muslims-battle-potential-jihadists-in-their-midst (retrieved May 30, 2015)
[13] http://www.hessischer-landtag.de/icc/Internet/med/3b9/3b923b4e-2b4c-a41d-669b-1c202184e373,11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111.pdf page 26, (retrieved May 30, 2015)
[14] http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-18/berlin-muslims-battle-potential-jihadists-in-their-midst (retrieved May 30, 2015)
[15] Offered by the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies (GIRDS) www.girds.org

peer group level. Micro-social programs target the individual. Prevention methods can be generalized (e.g., educating a population about human rights, elections, and civil society activities) or targeted (such as dealing with the specific treatment of a group at risk of being drawn into radical ideologies or groups). Both naturally imply different aims and methods.

Within each cross section, between level of impact and effect, different tools, methods and programs can be designed and carried out by state or non-state actors, but for some methodologies or requirements, one might be more beneficial than the other. For example, repressing violent extremism at the macro-social level can only be achieved through law enforcement, while deradicalization programs working at the micro-social level might be carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Ideally, a national strategy to counter extremism (both violent and non-violent) should implement methods and programs in every "square" that complement each other.

The Network of Counter-Extremism

	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Prevention	Education, Research, Civil Society, Youth and Social Work	Community Cohesion Programs	Workshops with Former Extremists in Schools
Repression	National Law Enforcement Architecture	Community Policing, Group Banning	Incarceration, House Searchings
Intervention	Counter Narrative Projects	Family Counseling	Deradicalization Programs

Graphic by: Daniel Köhler

Previous studies comparing various deradicalization programs have identified several dimensions of impact in order to achieve sustainable results. These dimensions can be differentiated into three main groups or types: affective, pragmatic, and ideological.[16]

Ideological Dimension

As part of the ideological dimension, any effective deradicalization program must emphasize the delegitimization and invalidation of an individual's or group's narratives and interpretations, as well as dismantle the previously learned radical ideology, helping the

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[16] A. Rabasa, et al. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists. Santa Monica, RAND Corporation. (2010) 42

individual reach a critical self-assessment of his/her past.[17] Although the aspect of ideological deradicalization is highly debated among both practitioners and academics, some criminology research backs this approach by emphasizing the identity change as essential in desisting from crime.[18] In addition, several sociological studies show that behavioral change is achieved most effectively when there are changes in the cognitive framework as well.[19] Ideologies should not be understood as complex philosophies that are absorbed and reflected by every member of the radical milieu. Rather, ideologies, provide a singular viewpoint of current problems and political systems, a particular desired future and the methods by which to achieve it.[20] This can be transmitted very easily and effectively using tools that appeal to emotions and aesthetics (e.g., music, videos, clothing) and lend themselves to the formation of a particular "pop" subculture or contrast society[21]—in this case a specific "pop" Jihad.

Family counseling programs help to dismantle these ideological frameworks by establishing a "living counter-narrative" within the family. By teaching the relatives of radicalized individuals about arguments and ideological narratives used by radical groups, the family will be able to counter them. This does not necessarily require them to engage in theological debates (for that purpose a scholar and/or respected authority may be brought into the counseling process), and indeed such debates are likely to encourage the radicalized person to dig even deeper into the radical ideology or seek guidance from his or her (radical) mentors. The family should instead become an alternative example, portraying a lifestyle or mindset different from the one portrayed within the radical ideology. By educating the family on how to recognize provocation, how to deescalate conflicts, and how to create compromises that show respect to the faith of the relative while maintaining clear boundaries, s/he may come to question the stereotypical black and white picture drawn by radical ideologies.

Pragmatic Dimension

Within the pragmatic dimension, emphasis is placed on the discontinuance and/or prevention of courses of action that individuals or groups have established or are working to establish in order to reach their goals. Practically, this means providing alternate ways to achieve a result roughly as satisfying as the original goal would have been for the individual. In addition, exclusive personal relationships within the radical group could potentially be opened up by introducing new perspectives, such as those from religious authorities.

Affective Dimension

The affective dimension addresses the need for individuals to be emotionally supported and to find an alternative reference group. Family counseling is considered vital to addressing these needs. Relatives or friends who oppose the new ideology adopted by a family member are empowered in their ability to argue their position and provide an alternative dialogue. Through counseling, families learn to assess situations and determine best ways to react in

[17] D Gadd"The role of recognition in the desistance process: A case analysis of a former far-right activist." Theoretical Criminology 10(2) (2006) 179-202.
[18] S. Maruna, et al. "Pygmalion in the reintegration process: Desistance from crime through the looking glass." Psychology, Crime and Law 10(3) (2006) 271-281.
[19] I. Ajzen "The theory of planned behavior." Organizational behavior and human decision processes 50(2) (1991). 179-211; M. Fishbeinand I. Ajzen Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: an introduction to theory and research. (Massachusettes: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1975).
[20] M/ Seliger, M. Ideology and politics (London, Allen & Unwin, 1976).
[21] For a detailed account see: D. Koehler "Contrast Societies. Radical Social Movements and their relationships with their target societies. A theoretical model." Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression 7(1) (2015). 18-34.

order to avoid further conflict, enabling them to strengthen emotional bonds and to create a positive living counter-narrative to the radical environment, as discussed above. In this way, the reference group (family) is placed in opposition to the radical structures. Since conflicts within the family play a central role in radicalization processes and are often exploited by radicalizing groups and individuals,[22] it is absolutely vital to help the family avoid and resolve conflicts in order to prevent further radicalization, decelerate the current radicalization process, and induce an individual deradicalization process.

Operational Perspectives and Codes of Conduct

These types of approaches to counseling depart from a basic analysis of networks and structures to deal—at the individual level—with the question of whether or not there is the potential for violent radicalization or rather just a devotion to a (conservative) strand of Islam. In order to make this determination, a detailed and highly complex assessment of networks, ideologies, and risks needs to be conducted by experts with special training in radicalization, Islamic extremism, and terrorism to evaluate the nature of the relative's radicalization process (e.g., violent or non-violent radicalization). When counseling is determined the best course of action in cases of Islamic extremism, there is always a fundamental dilemma of weighing the freedom to practice one's religion and the potential to prevent security-relevant radicalization. In addition, there is the possibility that the radicalization taking place is non-violent.[23] The counseling team must also deal with potential grief felt by relatives (when they have lost a family member) and encourage them to make room for the understanding and appreciation of new life courses (e.g., different faiths) of their relatives even if it might not align with their familial or personal views. In the case of possible non-violent radicalization, the counseling should shift towards a "family therapy" style approach that aims to improve the family context as much as possible, while respecting the faith and religious freedom of the relatives.

The next step is to determine any personal dispositions or motivations of the radicalized individual (such as what makes the radical group so appealing), which is essential in order to structure further counseling efforts and to provide positive alternatives. Potential conflicts within the family should be detected and resolved when possible. Reestablishing family bonds that may have been severed has been proven to be one of the most important elements in this type of counseling. Access to other, more innocuous forms of community that share a similar religious background can also be helpful, as one of the most important messages in counseling radicalized individuals is that leaving an Islamic extremist ideology or group does not equal leaving Islam behind altogether. It is crucial that radicalized individuals still have access to and education about positive ways of articulating their views and changing society. In this respect, assisting these individuals in finding jobs suitable to their educational levels or providing access to advanced training is also essential.

Generally, the key thing to remember is that this type of counseling was designed by the author first and foremost to work with relatives, and consequently the affective environment of a radicalized person. Even though family counseling represents a way to initiate change at the level of the individual person, the goal of any deradicalization strategy should be to strengthen these affective environments in a way that targets society as a whole, rather than the individually radicalized person. The counseling approach presented here should strengthen the affective environment—the family—in relation to the radical group and ideological

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[22]See, for example, E. Bakker "Jihadi Terrorists in Europe - Their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad: An exploratory study. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael" (2006).
[23] J. Bartlett, J. and C. Miller "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization." Terrorism and Political Violence 24(1) (2012). 1-21.

structure. Therefore the inclusion of the radicalized relative into the counseling process needs to be done very carefully. A blowback could lead to the collapse of the counseling process if the relative, for example, comes to interpret or view the counseling process as an ideological tool used by an adversarial system (of the faithless/"kuffr") for manipulation. Even worse, in this case every effort made by the relatives involved would be interpreted as being externally controlled with the goal of forcing the individual to abandon his/her faith. However, in cases where security is less of a concern and in the pre-stages of the radicalization process, the inclusion of the relative might be a very important tool for the reestablishment of family bonds and in order to diminish potential communication difficulties within the affective environment that could serve as motivation for further radicalization. The perceived positive change within the affective environment could, ideally, open up the opportunity for the individual and family to work together on other levels as well. If family and relatives approach the counseling service together, they can co-operate and work together right from the beginning.

Necessary practical assistance for the family in such cases might include:

- Preparation for and, if applicable, help with administrative formalities
- Legal information and advice, as well as access to mediation from qualified lawyers and psychologists
- Information and family-oriented counseling that addresses potential personal or societal security issues
- Procurement of or mediation regarding state institutions and assistance
- Psychological assistance and referral to other family counseling services, such as youth welfare offices
- Mediation with security agencies
- Specialized risk and threat assessment

Parent meetings and groups to exchange experiences regarding radicalization within the family are also part of this methodology and can be highly effective. One initiative created by the author and the Hayat Family Support Foundation Canada[24] (the staff of which were trained by the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies GIRDS, making them the first ones to receive that training course[25]) is called "Mothers for Life" and brings together mothers from eight countries (as of May 2015) who all have lost their relatives and want to help other families going through the same process.[26]

As a first step, counseling should address the question of whether or not a radicalization process is becoming violent and should be countered. The counselor should then—together with the family—introduce a specific step-by-step plan of action tailored to the individual case and family to reduce—as far as possible—any potentially problematic or dangerous factors within the family structure (as well as at work and school, and within other environments) and to educate and empower the family to work toward a self-reliant and positive relationship with the concerned relative.

According to the accepted code of conduct for this special field of family counseling, maintaining close cooperation with security agencies is essential due to the potentially high

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[24] http://hayatcanada.webs.com (retrieved May 30, 2015)
[25] http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32539638 (retrieved May, 30, 2015)
[26] http://www.girds.org/projects/mothers-for-life-network (retrieved May, 30, 2015) or www.facebook.com/mothersandlife (retrieved May, 30, 2015)

security risks of some cases. This cooperation, however, must be maintained without compromising the privacy and safety of the family, as well as their trust, which is the very foundation of the counseling relationship. Thus, counseling programs should operate under clear guidelines and in close partnership with the authorities. If the situation requires government involvement, counseling providers must be very transparent about when and how security agencies will be brought in. Families must also be aware of the criteria the counselor uses to assess security risks and the illegality of any actions that might be committed. In those cases, the counseling program/provider should serve as a moderator between security agencies and the family to achieve the best outcome for both parties. Security agencies, in turn, must be able to trust the risk-assessment capabilities of the counselor and to recognize the value these programs add to their own work. Non-governmental organizations may be able to have an impact on the family and radical individuals in a way that security agencies cannot achieve. However, the Danish model ("Aarhus model"), for example, is based completely within the local police, which is traditionally accepted in this community.

For such programs to succeed, providers must adhere to an accepted code of conduct:

- Guaranteeing the absolute confidentiality and privacy of the help-seeking individuals if necessary (as long as no security-relevant factors become visible)
- Transparency regarding work procedures, criteria for risk-assessment, and institutional organization
- Respecting that participation in counseling is fully voluntary
- Provide its services free of charge
- Involving security agencies only when necessary, using clear criteria to establish "necessity," and communicating these criteria to the families and institutions involved

Foreign Fighters

The methodology described above is general in nature. The following section explains how such programs might work in cases involving security issues, such as foreign-fighter cases (before their departure, during their time abroad, and after their return).

As in the more general process described above, the first step is for an expert team to evaluate the risk that the individual will radicalize in a violent manner, if the situation is not already clear (e.g., the person has already left his/her country to fight in another or has clearly expressed the plan to leave with the intent to fight). Once the team—using a combination of concrete indicators[27] and experience—has determined that the individual poses a security-related risk, the mode of counseling should shift toward risk prevention. It is important to differentiate between various motivations an individual might have for leaving his/her home country. Some may want to leave to study Arabic in Egypt or to live in Turkey. Such moves could represent first steps to later recruitment into more actively radical groups, but they could also represent a legitimate and/or benign wish on the part of the individual and/or family. In cooperation with the families, and using the expertise of a counseling team comprised of experts from a range of disciplines, these programs should assess each individual to determine whether s/he fits the typical profile of a foreign fighter case.

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[27] Different risk indicator scales are in use in different countries. For the specific family counseling methodology the author reviewed the most common risk assessment protocols and designed a specific one for family counselors.

There are three types of foreign-fighter related cases:

A) The individual is about to leave his/her country.

In this stage every effort to prevent the person from leaving must be made. Understanding his/her motives for leaving for another country is crucial in order to provide alternatives. Using the methods explained above, the family is counseled on how to try to prevent their relative from leaving.

B) The individual has already left.

The main task in this situation is to establish or stabilize communication between the relative abroad and his/her family. In such cases, the family counselors act as a bridge between the family and the authorities, ensuring that the rights and responsibilities on both sides are respected and coordinated. Through counseling the family on their communication with the person abroad, it might still be possible to affect his/her decisions and to induce a process of deradicalization (via the family) before the person has engaged in criminal or terrorist activities. In some cases, the counseling may have to shift again to family therapy to help the family handle the possible loss of their relative.

C) The individual has returned.

In many cases, a returning suspected foreign fighter will be picked up at the airport or immediately after his/her return and interrogated by the police or intelligence services. Here again the role of the family must be strengthened in order to provide a stable, affective environment for the individual to return to, in case s/he is interested in leaving the radical group and ideology. To prevent further radicalization, traumatic experiences from the battlefield must be addressed with the help of the family and specialized psychologists trained to handle PTSD. In general, the closer and stronger the positive affective environment around the radicalized person is, the more difficult it will be for him/her to radicalize further, or to engage in undetected behavior that poses a security risk. However, if the person has engaged in or received training in fighting, has joined a terrorist group, and has expressed no interest in leaving the group, the only thing that can be done by the family counseling program at that point is to help the family cope with the situation and provide the option of a deradicalization program in prison, if desired later on.

In short, the goals of family counseling programs in regard to foreign fighters are: 1) to prevent (or voluntarily dissuade) the individual from leaving, 2) to motivate those who do leave to return or to desist from fighting, 3) to facilitate the process of deradicalization and help the individual to reintegrate into a positive and controlled social environment.

Conclusion

Family counseling programs used as deradicalization tools may be considered the most innovative approach that has been designed in the field during the past few years, especially when it comes to approaches that deal with the potential threat posed by Al Qaeda-inspired radicalization and foreign-fighter involvement. Although many countries have at least pledged to establish specialized family counseling programs, most do not include the necessary expert training or adhere to quality standards. The evaluation of these initiatives, which are sometimes difficult to conduct due to the high levels of secrecy about organizational

procedures and finances, as is the case with some German NGOs, is another important topic and cannot be addressed in-depth here.[28] However, specialized training, and clear standards and evaluations are absolutely essential in order to achieve positive results. Only a handful of experts in the field of deradicalization and family counseling currently exist within the quickly growing field. The danger of inadequately trained counselors and programs based on ineffective or even dangerous assumptions regarding radicalization and deradicalization is therefore growing as well. Nevertheless, families and friends are highly important allies in combating violent extremism, radicalization, and terrorism. Even in regard to phenomena usually considered highly inaccessible by definition— e.g., lone wolf terrorism— those in social environment of the latter perpetrators are usually far from unaware of the radicalization process.[29] In consequence, practitioners of family counseling programs in the area of deradicalizaton and counter-extremism should be trained and the programs evaluated by experts to avoid potentially acutely harmful mistakes.

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[28] A.J. Gielen. "Supporting families of foreign fighters. A realistic approach for measuring the effectiveness." JD Journal for Deradicalization 2(Spring 2015): 21-48.

[29] "In 82.4% of the cases, other people were aware of the individual's grievance that spurred the terrorist plot, and in 79%, other individuals were aware of the individual's commitment to a specific extremist ideology. In 63.9% of the cases, family and friends were aware of the individual's intent to engage in terrorism-related activities because the offender verbally told them." P. Gill, et al. "Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists." Journal of Forensic Sciences 59(2) (2014). 429