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**Deradicalization of Returnees to Jordan and Morocco:
Limitations, Strengths, and Lessons for the Region**

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I. Introduction

In an era that has witnessed the migration of over 40,000 foreign fighters from over 120 countries to Iraq and Syria since 2011, the near defeat of the Islamic State's territorial caliphate has already begun to have outsized effects on the home countries to which those fighters are now returning. The United States, for its part, has led the call for states to repatriate their citizens, knowing full well the risks of leaving regional security to underfunded and under-resourced Middle Eastern governments.¹ While some of these governments have agreed to repatriate their citizens, many are still scrambling to develop policies that provide a comprehensive strategy to reintegrate their returnees.

While much of the Western media has focused on the handful of cases that concern the US and its European allies, the issue of returnees remains far more pressing for the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region which constitute the primary senders of foreign fighters. Perhaps more crucially, for most countries in the region this is not a new phenomenon; many states have witnessed waves of foreign fighters who have gone to fight in various regional conflicts beginning as early as the struggle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. At this point in history, the topic of returning fighters could not be more timely or pressing for policymakers and civil society actors seeking to better understand the efficacy of existing deradicalization and reintegration programs so as to be better equipped to design and implement such programs in their own countries, in the region, and beyond. Specifically, we seek to answer the question: To what extent are policies and programs toward returning foreign fighters in Jordan and Morocco effective

¹ Arsla Jawaid, "From Foreign Fighters to Returnees: The Challenges of Rehabilitation and Reintegration Policies," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 12, no. 2 (2017): pp. 102-107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2017.1323660>.

in achieving deradicalization and reintegration into mainstream society and what lessons can regional governments learn from the limitations and strengths of policies in these countries?

This project aims to provide such clarity for policymakers and add to the existing scholarly literature by providing data sourced from local experts on policies, practices, and stakeholders' (program administrators, government officials, and experts) perceptions of efficacy of deradicalization and reintegration programs currently being implemented in Morocco and Jordan, and highlight what is missing from these programs that can make them more comprehensive. While in recent years, the bulk of the literature focused on secondary sources has been complemented by interviews with stakeholders in these countries, we seek to verify the methodology and examine the efficacy of these deradicalization programs through interviews with local experts and government officials charged with program oversight and formulate a holistic picture informed by multiple perspectives.

Discovering best practices for returned fighters and identifying success in approaches to deradicalization and reintegration is crucial to furthering and improving upon current counterterrorism policy, a topic of particular relevance for a region that finds itself continuously plagued by violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Throughout the course of our research, we found that Jordan and Morocco rely on an overly securitized approach to reintegration of returnees. Thus, our research posits that more holistic, comprehensive, and consistent deradicalization strategies must be implemented. Such strategies should focus on: widening the scope of rehabilitation providers to non-security actors, ensuring that prison sentences are appropriate and prison conditions are humane, providing a comprehensive aftercare program (to include, but not limited to, psychological counseling, educational and vocational training, and employment

assistance), the use of former radicals to engage in dialogues with current radicals, and strong and credible counter-narratives.

A lesson is to be taken from the meteoric rise of the Islamic State from the ashes of Al-Qaeda: a successful deradicalization program is crucial to defeating violent extremism. To deal a military defeat to today's VEOs is no longer sufficient to "win" the war; we must fight the ideology in the minds of their supporters. This ideological defeat cannot take place without meaningful investment in countering violent extremism (CVE) approaches, particularly the deradicalization of existing extremists and their supporters and the reintegration of those individuals back into society.

Background

Many scholars have highlighted numerous programs, policies, or approaches targeting returnees to Jordan and Morocco^{2 3 4} Diez, Renard, and Masbah along with Georgia Holmer and Adrian Shtuni, Daniel Byman, Liesbeth van der Heide and Jip Geenen are just a handful of the prominent scholars who have weighed in on this issue. In general, academics find consensus on a lack of effective programs designed to deal with returnees, asserting that most approaches tend to revolve around imprisonment in an attempt to rehabilitate and reintegrate these individuals. Rightfully so, many scholars have cautioned that this policy may lead to the radicalization of other inmates or facilitate an environment that is permissive to extremist networking opportunities and

² Holmer, Georgia and Adrian Shtuni, "Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative," rep., *Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative*, March 2017, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/sr402-returning-foreign-fighters-and-the-reintegration-imperative.pdf>.

³ Byman, Daniel, "The Homecomings: What Happens When Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 8 (May 1, 2015): pp. 581-602, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2015.1031556>.

⁴ Van Der Heide, Liesbeth, and Jip Geenen, "Children of the Caliphate: Young IS Returnees and the Reintegration Challenge," *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies* 8, no. 10 (August 2017): pp. 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2017.1.09>.

thus exacerbating inmates' own radicalization and the level of risk they pose to their societies upon release.

This existing literature on deradicalization and reintegration programs for returning foreign fighters centers primarily on five distinct categories of deradicalization strategies: limiting strategies, economic strategies, religio-cultural strategies, moderate counter-messaging, and mental health strategies.⁵ *Limiting strategies* refer to those policies adopted by states that seek to limit the movement of returnees via incarceration, passport revocation, or other similar disciplinary measures. *Economic strategies* were found to be primarily geared toward financial rehabilitation of the returnees. Some examples found in the literature include vocational training, provision of employment or housing, and structured programs often including one of the above elements as well as employment and/or financial counseling. A particularly popular group of strategies often adopted either alone or in concert with one of the other policies are *religio-cultural strategies*. This type of strategy often seeks to remedy a perceived cultural or moral deficiency in addition to correcting the unorthodox religious understandings held by many extremists. *Moderate counter-messaging*, often pursued in conjunction with a religio-cultural strategy, seeks to re-establish a moderate religious narrative within a country either via official state functions or, more often, with the guidance or direction of the state but implemented at the local level through mosques or civil society organizations (CSOs). A final strategy found in our review of the literature seeks to address mental health concerns, ensuring that inmates and returnees are provided access to therapy and mental health treatment. *Mental health strategies* focus on the psychological rehabilitation of the individual and are geared toward bolstering his or her emotional intelligence and coping skills as a means of promoting deradicalization.

⁵ Holmer and Shtuni, *Returning Foreign Fighters*

Although the literature does not provide much on the topic of addressing the challenge of returnees in Jordan and Morocco, there are some foundational studies that have attempted to break into this field. These texts have relied on interviews with returnees as well as with experts and researchers. Moroccan researcher Mohammed Masbah critiques Moroccan deradicalization efforts in two prominent works in which he interviewed former participants of deradicalization programs. In one of those works, he notes that, while Moroccan deradicalization efforts “focused mainly on the ideological component of reintegration,” participants expressed their dissatisfaction with how they felt neglected by program administrators after they graduated from the program, without any economic, social, or psychological support.⁶ In the second work, Masbah, through his interviews with former participants, describes how former participants “felt deceived by the program leaders’ unmet ‘promises’ of reintegration.”⁷ These participants explained that they were not provided any economic assistance or psychological assistance and that the program did nothing within the participants’ communities to reduce stigma; instead, the program opted to “rely mainly on routine security monitoring.”⁸ While Morocco has incorporated limiting strategies, socio-cultural strategies, and moderate counter-messaging, the country’s deradicalization strategy as of writing lacks consistent economic and mental health strategies.

For Jordan, conducting studies on the issue of returning fighters faces major limitations. The West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Institute undertook a mapping study of returnees’ journeys from and return to Jordan but were not able to interview returnees. The International Republican Institute in collaboration with NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions were able to

⁶ Masbah, Mohammed. “The Limits of Morocco’s Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism.” Rep. *The Limits of Morocco’s Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism*. Brandeis University, May 2018. <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/pdfs/101-200/meb118.pdf>.

⁷ Masbah, Mohammed, and Souad Ahmadoun. “Morocco’s Failure to Reintegrate Former Jihadis.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 6, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78313>.

⁸ Ibid.

conduct a study on local drivers of violent extremism in the Zarqa and Mafraq governorates in Jordan in which they interviewed a number of returnees who had graduated from the state's programs in addition to key informant interviews with experts and stakeholders. The study highlights the importance of using these returnees to showcase their stories within these VEOs to demonstrate the misconceptions that make such organizations attractive for certain susceptible people. The study also looked to distinguish between those who carried arms and those who did not, which can inform the programs to more effectively manage returnees according to this typology. Furthermore, it places major importance on disaggregating returnees from other inmates within prisons to prevent further radicalization, as they simultaneously undergo rehabilitation programs within prisons. Additionally, the study finds that the provision of gainful employment for returnees is integral to preventing them from rejoining VEOs as socioeconomic inclusion is among the most important factors in prevention and reintegration. Moreover, the returnees interviewed highlighted the effects of religious misconceptions as a driving factor for joining VEOs, as religious narratives in the media served to mobilize them, arguing that jihad was a must. The study also found that some returnees were recruited for humanitarian support – either to distribute aid packages or tend to the wounded. They also highlighted the challenges associated with returning, often claiming they had to escape with the support of smugglers. Finally, the study found that an integrated approach between rehabilitation programs within prisons, socioeconomic integration, and aftercare within CSOs and youth centers can provide optimal results.⁹

The literature indicates that a holistic application of these approaches is most effective in achieving deradicalization and reintegration and emphasizes the highly securitized nature of most

⁹ “Violent Extremism in Jordan: Local Governance, Tribal Dynamics and Forced Migration,” 2018, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11-7_jordan_ve_report.pdf.

regional approaches to deradicalization as a significant shortcoming.¹⁰ This was certainly borne out by our findings; a number of interviewees expressed alarm over the monopoly security services hold over deradicalization programs and the lack of willingness or political space to involve the private sector and civil society organizations. The securitization of the issue crept into other spheres as well, affecting returnees' treatment in prisons, their lack of access to effective aftercare, and the reticence to utilize returnees themselves to combat extremist narratives and rehabilitate others.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the programs and strategies adopted for returning fighters in Jordan and Morocco, our research team employed a mixed methodology consisting of reviewing academic sources and practitioner reports to construct a literature review and conducting a small number of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and experts (12 total, 7 In Jordan and 5 in Morocco) to gather primary data. We then conducted a qualitative analysis, examining the findings gathered through both the literature review and the interviews to inform our conclusions.

In reviewing previous research, we focused on a number of important texts addressing policies and programs concerned with the return of fighters to their homes of Jordan and Morocco. In so doing, we reviewed literature on the issue of violent extremism in Jordan and Morocco to provide a background on the topic. Then, we reviewed literature discussing approaches, programs,

¹⁰ Diez, Alberto Caballero. "Jordanian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: How Did They Become Radicalized and How They Can Be De-Radicalized?," Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, July 7, 2016, http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEEE068-2016_CombatientesJordanos_Siria_AlbertoCaballero_ENGLISH.pdf.

Masbah, Mohammed. "Moroccan Foreign Fighters: Evolution of a Phenomenon, Promotive Factors, and the Limits of Hardline Policies," German Institute for Security and International Affairs, October 2015, https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/45490/ssoar-2015-masbah-Moroccan_foreign_fighters_evolution_of.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2015-masbah-Moroccan_foreign_fighters_evolution_of.pdf.

policies, and challenges in relation to the return of fighters to their homes, with an emphasis on Jordan and Morocco. The texts studied informed the questions discussed during our interviews.

We designed our discussion guide, informed by the literature review. The discussion guide was devised for semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing room to ask additional questions. The guide included the verbal consent form, which was read to the interviewees prior to the start of each interview and emphasized the confidentiality of the information gathered; reassured the interviewees of our protection measures; reiterated that during the process, personal information would be gathered from which an interviewee could potentially be identified; highlighted that the information collected was for academic research use only (for the completion of our capstone project); and, indicated that the interviewees were able to skip any question or end the interview at any point.

The discussion guide featured a number of questions designed to answer our research questions. These included a number of open-ended questions and scale questions. It consisted of a number of sub-sections, including questions related to the nature of current programs and policies as well as those designed to ascertain measures of OECD Evaluation criteria, including: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. These questions were incorporated with an eye toward assessing the extent to which the programs studied have been effective in deradicalizing and reintegrating returnees into Jordanian and Moroccan society.

Interviews took place in a private setting in a public area to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of both interviewees and the information collected. Each interviewee was contacted individually. We then familiarized them with our research and requested an interview while emphasizing its purpose - to complete a capstone project. We inquired about the place where they wished to conduct the interviews. We anticipated that many of them would suggest their offices

or a conference room on their premises, particularly former public officials, experts, NGO professionals, and professors. All interviewees remained anonymous throughout the entirety of our research; no names or other identifying information was recorded on the audio recordings or in the transcripts.

Analysis of our interviews relied on the transcripts and notes taken during the interviews. All responses were compiled into a single document from which we could more easily compare the topics raised by each subject. This exercise produced a number of relevant themes which inform our discussion of the programs here, their assessed levels of efficacy, and the extent to which relevant stakeholders play an effective role.

While completing this research we have adapted to a number of limitations. Originally we had intended to interview program graduates themselves; however, a lack of effective protections and the unique vulnerability of this population resulted in the exclusion of this group from our study. Our research team of four was divided into two groups, whereby two researchers conducted the interviews in each country. While our study population was small (12 in total), we believe that the thoroughness of our interviews provided us with sufficient data from which to draw our conclusions. Furthermore, we were aware that conducting research on government projects in countries dominated by seemingly omniscient security services might influence the level of candor with which our subjects were willing to engage on tough questions of efficacy, motivations, and effort. However, we were pleased to find that many of our subjects were willing to be openly critical of state efforts when asked. It is worth noting that we designed our discussion guide with these considerations in mind and crafted our questions as neutrally as possible with an eye toward minimizing our own potential biases and eliciting honest answers.

II. Overview of Existing Programs

Over the course of the last decade, Jordan and Morocco's security establishments have stood up programs to address deradicalization in their respective countries. For the most part, Jordan has vacillated between those in its policy circles who fear returnees and thus advocate a hard-nosed approach heavily reliant on limiting strategies and those who believe Jordan should take on a bigger role in deradicalization, resulting in the adoption of primarily religio-cultural and moderate countermessaging strategies. Morocco, forced to consider deradicalization after the 2003 Casablanca bombings, initially also followed the securitized approach championed by Jordan (marked by limiting strategies) but in recent years has expanded its policies toward returnees to carve out a space for non-security elements within the process. Today, Morocco's model adopts moderate countermessaging, religio-cultural strategies, limiting strategies, and mental health strategies. In the course of our research, we discovered that both programs are plagued by many of the same issues but also stand to learn much from each other's strengths.

Jordan - "Hiwar"

Jordan's policy toward the issue of returnees from Syria and Iraq has been far from consistent. Rather, it has primarily alternated between two opposing narratives: a rejectionist narrative and a concessionist narrative. Advocates of the former approach overwhelmingly feared potential negative repercussions of returnees to Jordan in the form of dormant cells, lone wolf attacks, or further radicalization of others. Advocates of the latter narrative called upon Jordan to take on a larger role in deradicalizing returnees, particularly in light of significant international pressure at the London Conference of 2016. Once Jordan agreed to start receiving its nationals who had left to join VEOs in Iraq and Syria, the state was forced to define its policy and subsequent programs. The public sector extended its control over the case, claiming that private sector

programs were inherently driven by financial gains, whereas the private sector argued that public sector programs were highly securitized and secretive. Our research found that money, security, secrecy, and institutional competition were among the themes associated with such efforts in Jordan.

Thus, in the midst of these many competing efforts, only one tangible program has surfaced to address returnees: a joint effort between the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Public Security Department (PSD) which resulted in the establishment of the Community Peace Center (CPC) in 2015. The CPC, which is one of the primary deradicalization administrators in Jordan, administers an initiative referred to as the *Hiwar*, or “dialogue”, program. In inquiring about the program, most respondents described it as highly secretive, to the exclusion of researchers, civil society organizations, and academic institutions. Our research found that this secrecy is intended to avoid the shame associated with publicizing this population, but our subjects also noted that this shame and secrecy has the unintended effect of solidifying the stigma faced by many returnees as well as limiting the actors involved and thus stunting the evolution of the program.¹¹

For the most part, the PSD’s CPC took complete control of this program, only coordinating with the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) and the MOI.¹² The main tenant of this program is an interactive dialogue between returnees and state-selected religious scholars. The program classifies the returnees into three categories: those whose violent extremist mindset is deeply rooted and thus hard to counter; those whose thoughts are extreme but can be countered; and those who are least extreme and can easily be countered.¹³ This typology was designed in accordance with the findings of multiple studies commissioned by CPC or acquired through open source

¹¹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #4, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹² In-person interview with all Jordanian experts on deradicalization, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹³ Ibid.

research. The program looks to understand the returnees' perspectives in order to formulate a profile for each returnee to baseline their stories, categorize the level of their extremism, distinguish between their reasons and their drivers, and track changes in their thought and behavior.¹⁴

Religious countermessaging is a key tenet of the Dialogue Program; the program's scholars speak with returnees individually and collectively throughout. These sessions are conducted in the corrective facilities/prisons where the returnees are serving out their sentences. It is worth noting that they are not kept in the same prisons as other inmates. This is primarily due to the fact that mixing inmates can result in further radicalization. Our research found that the non-mixing of inmates was also the result of a collaboration between the CPC and Penal Reform International (PRI), which remains the only nongovernmental organization to be consulted on this program.¹⁵ Together they worked on reforming strategies of rehabilitation centers, particularly as concerns the non-mixing of residents (radicalized and non-radicalized) and ensuring fair treatment. PRI also supported the CPC on the design of their strategy, specifically regarding the treatment of returnees while in prison,¹⁶ which was published in 2019.¹⁷

The program assesses each case individually, examining returnees' behavior while incarcerated as well as the extent to which they are considered "deradicalized". Our research found that the program's assessment is straightforward and looks to primarily ascertain that a returnee is ready to reintegrate into society. The selected scholars play a large role in assessing their level of extremism or lack thereof before the final assessment determines how much of a danger they pose

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ الحمود : إستراتيجية [Al-Hammoud: 'Public Security' Strategy Puts the National Interest above All Considerations.] "الأمن العام' تضع المصلحة الوطنية فوق كل اعتبار محليات/الحمود--/10504224/article", Alrai, October 2, 2019, <http://alrai.com/article/10504224/article>.
استراتيجية-الأمن-العام-تضع-المصلحة-الوطنية-فوق-كل-اعتبار

to themselves and to society. Our research also found that this program monitors returnees after their release in an effort to ensure their personal safety, the safety of others, and to some extent their livelihoods.¹⁸ Administrators also work on providing graduates with jobs, with support from Prince Ghazi's Office,¹⁹ though our interviewees were skeptical that this initiative has proven successful.

When asked about the program's success, several subjects noted that success is highly dependent on the extent to which the returnees repented or expressed remorse; those who have can support the program by correcting extremist thoughts among other returnees while those who have not can still spread these thoughts, exacerbate extremism in the country, and organize themselves.²⁰ The program falls short in terms of providing job opportunities, an issue that some of our subjects attributed to lack of funding.

Morocco - "Moussalaha"

Morocco experienced its first major terror attack in May 2003 and in its aftermath chose to confront the new wave of violent extremist activity through its impressive security apparatus. To that end, the Moroccan state has relied heavily on law enforcement and intelligence agencies to dismantle terror cells, arrest violent extremist actors, and bring these individuals to justice. It was not until 2017 that Morocco enacted a comprehensive program to deal with violent extremism. The *Moussalaha* Program claims to be an answer to Morocco's heavy reliance on the security approach. The program "aims to be comprehensive in not only preventing terrorist attacks but also

¹⁸ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #4, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹⁹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #7, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

²⁰ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #4, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

tackling the root causes of radicalization, such as socioeconomic inequality and extremist religious narratives.”²¹

In 2017, the first edition of the program was launched. Since that time, four more iterations have been conducted with more than 139 participants completing the program.²² The last iteration was specific to female prisoners, after a previous four editions dedicated to male prisoners. Sixty-two participants in the program have received royal pardons in recent years, in addition to around fifty new prisoners who were pardoned during the coronavirus crisis.²³ The program is based on a multi-pronged strategy situated on five pillars: the ideological/religious, the legal, the psychological, the socioeconomic, and the practical. Each pillar is led by an expert from one of the stakeholders involved.

The program has seen two versions; the second one was marked by the addition of a new set of partners based on the lessons learned in the first edition. In its current version, the program includes the Mohammadia League of Scholars, which leads the day-to-day operations of the program; the General Delegation of Prison Administration and Reintegration, which manages the prisons where the participants are housed and which launched the program; the High Council of Ulema, which is exclusively tasked with issuing fatwas and includes the highest religious scholars in the country; the Ministry of Habous and Religious Affairs, charged with managing mosques throughout the country; the National Council of Human Rights and the Ministry of Human Rights; the Mohammed VI Foundation for Reintegration of Former Prisoners; and multiple experts in psychology, economics, and other fields.²⁴

²¹ Masbah and Ahmadoun, *Morocco's Failure to Reintegrate Former Jihadis*

²² Boukhasas, Mohammed Karim. “[Details of the ‘Top Secret’ Program for Reconciliation with Jihadists] تفاصيل برنامج سري للغاية للمصالحة مع الجهاديين” *Al Ayam* 24. December 18, 2019.

²³ Reem Bandoud, “[50 Detainees in the ‘Salafiya Jihadia’ File Included in the Royal Pardon] معتقلا في ملف السلفية ٥٠” [Al 3omk] العمق, April 5, 2020, <https://al3omk.com/519034.html>.

²⁴ Boukhasas, *Details of the ‘Top Secret’ Program for Reconciliation*

Participation in the program is voluntary and participants can leave the program at any time. Nonetheless, one Moroccan expert spoke about the timing of the program. He claims that the program should have started right after the 2003 attacks.²⁵ Another criticism towards the program is its failure to assist participants economically after release.²⁶ Despite the late start of the program, Morocco has now engaged 15% of all prisoners linked to VEOs through *Moussalaha*, and three participants who graduated successfully have received training from the Mohammadia League of Scholars and been hired on to work with them in the program.²⁷

III. A Thematic Approach

Throughout the course of our interviews, we noticed that many of our experts and officials emphasized several recurrent themes that they noted were central to the deradicalization and reintegration programs in their countries. Some of these themes were overwhelmingly represented as features that inhibited program success and some were cited as themes that were necessary but lacking in their country's programs. The primary themes we noticed during the course of our interviews included: an overreliance on a highly securitized approach, a stark lack of civil society involvement, the appropriate use of prisons in rehabilitation, the need for aftercare following returnees' completion of and graduation from state-run deradicalization programs, the centrality of religious counter-messaging, and the use of reformed radicals in deradicalization programs. Of note, our subjects often referred to the five strategies mentioned above somewhat obliquely, often identifying the cause of the presence or lack of one strategy or another as an outcome of one of the below themes. These themes surfaced as high-frequency variables throughout the course of our

²⁵ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

²⁶ Masbah and Ahmadoun, *Morocco's Failure to Reintegrate Former Jihadis*

²⁷ Boukhasas, *Details of the 'Top Secret' Program for Reconciliation*

interviews. It is our belief that only by addressing and responding to these critical themes will state-run programs achieve their full potential in successfully reintegrating returnees.

The Security Agenda

One of the starkest features of the deradicalization programs present in both Jordan and Morocco was their domination by the security services of each state, often to the exclusion of other foreign or even domestic actors, resulting in the exclusive adoption of limiting strategies such as incarceration, passport revocation, and limitations on movement. In the early 2000s, both Jordan and Morocco experienced major terror attacks, in Amman and Casablanca respectively, and were forced to act swiftly to respond. As both countries were already reliant on their security agencies for stability, these agencies found themselves on the frontline battling this new phenomenon. This reaction is in line with efforts in many other countries, in which “CVE policy is often shaped less by evidence-based research, and more so by political, cultural and historical factors that are specific to each national government.”²⁸ For Jordan and Morocco, there was no prior experience to rely upon in dealing with this issue; they were not structurally nor intellectually equipped to face the wave of youth who were radicalized or on the path to radicalization.²⁹ Therefore, both countries relied heavily on their security agencies. Even after the shift from a CT approach to a P/CVE approach, the legacy of their heavy-handed tactics lingers. The frontline role played by security agencies has informed the approach used by both countries for many years. Experts from both countries pointed to the overreliance of Jordan and Morocco on the security approach. This approach has focused deradicalization efforts solely in terms of achieving state security as a first-

²⁸ Keiran Hardy, “Comparing Theories of Radicalisation with Countering Violent Extremism Policy,” *Journal for Deradicalization* Summer, no. 15 (June 1, 2018): pp. 76-110, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/150/119>.

²⁹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #5, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

order effect, rather than focusing deradicalization efforts on the welfare of citizens, thereby achieving state security as a second-order effect.

Jordan. A concern that surfaced repeatedly throughout our interviews involved the heavy-handed nature of security services' involvement in deradicalization and reintegration programs. To be sure, the issue of terrorism and violent extremism is certainly a matter of state security. However, our Jordanian experts expressed apprehension over the monopoly exercised by the PSD over CVE in the country and the deleterious effects of this policy on the rehabilitation of returnees. Of particular note, interviewees were unanimous in their condemnation of passport confiscation, noting that it only serves to exacerbate grievances with the state.³⁰

The focus on a highly securitized approach was also cited as leading to much higher feelings of marginalization and societal rejection given that returnees are constantly under surveillance. One expert said that this can actually contribute to returnees' feelings of shame because their freedom of movement is limited and the constant monitoring and harassment by security services affects their families' abilities to navigate daily life as well. One wife said she could hardly stand to go out with her husband because he was stopped so frequently by police. This causes returnees to become an added burden on their families and fractures the family unit, further adding to returnees' isolation.³¹ The secrecy of the deradicalization programs also serves to reinforce the shame felt by returnees and exacerbated by Jordanian society, leading them to feel hopeless about their reintegration process.³²

Adding to the burden placed on families, many returnees who graduate from deradicalization programs are unable to find work and often suffer from discrimination in hiring

³⁰ In-person interview with all Jordanian experts on deradicalization, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

³¹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

³² In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #4, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

as a result of the stigma associated with the programs. Many of our experts claimed that not only does the state discriminate against those who have traveled abroad to participate in conflict, but that the monitoring extends so far as to penalize someone for simply “liking” a post on Facebook, even accidentally.³³ This same apparatus has been known to blacklist individuals from employment for being politically vocal, under the pretext that the individual is engaged in violent extremism.³⁴ Such a lack of semantic distinction leads many to feel marginalized and abandoned by their country and find themselves shut out of the job market. In this way, a heavy focus on state security policies can actually leave otherwise productive contributors to Jordanian society vulnerable to radicalization by extremist groups.

Other interviewees argued that Jordan’s myopic focus on the security approach actually discredits the program in the eyes of the participants. While undergoing deradicalization, returnees are only exposed to PSD-approved imams, many of whom lack the respect of the participants, who view them as merely mouthpieces of state propaganda.³⁵ Similarly, an emphasis on security alone reinforces the lack of attention given to aftercare and societal reintegration and precludes the Jordanian government from directing its energies toward prevention.³⁶ Additionally, it allows the regime to avoid any responsibility it may hold for the underlying causes that led returnees to radicalize in the first place (namely marginalization and humiliation at the hands of the state).³⁷ Rather than a hard-nosed security approach, our experts continually emphasized the need to engage returnees as human beings, on an individual level, and to rehabilitate them in a manner in which they can return to being productive members of society.³⁸

³³ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #5, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

³⁷ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #2, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

³⁸ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1 and #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

Morocco. The Moroccan state has managed to keep the issue of violent extremism focused on security, without dealing with the root causes of violent extremism. Before the major 2003 Casablanca attacks that put violent extremism at the top of state security priorities, “radical Moroccan Islamists were involved in a number of violent acts, including attacks against different targets and the recruitment of individuals to travel to conflict zones.”³⁹ Nevertheless, the September 11th attacks and then the 2003 Casablanca attacks that rocked multiple areas of the economic capital forced the country to create a strategy to deal with this challenge. Since then, the country has witnessed multiple smaller attacks that have affected various areas of the country, the latest being the beheading of two Scandinavian tourists by two men who pledged allegiance to ISIS. In light of these events, the country opted for an exclusively securitized approach focusing on the role of law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Since 2001, the number of cells dismantled by Moroccan authorities is around 200 (sixty-two of which were linked to the Islamic State) and the number of prisoners linked to VEOs in 2017 was around 1000.⁴⁰ These numbers highlight the success of Moroccan law enforcement and intelligence agencies in dealing with the byproducts of radical ideology, but simultaneously, “the state’s security-oriented approach does not allow non-state actors to work in this sphere, only tolerating them when they work in collaboration with authorities,”⁴¹ which puts non-state actors at risk of losing credibility by being seen as collaborating with the state.

The state security approach is harmful to the methods used in P/CVE strategies. As one expert explained, P/CVE must be an individualized process; however, the state does not have the

³⁹ Rogelio Alonso and Marcos García Rey, “The Evolution of Jihadist Terrorism in Morocco,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 4 (October 25, 2007): pp. 571-592, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701606580>.

⁴⁰ Boukhasas, *Details of the ‘Top Secret’ Program for Reconciliation*

⁴¹ Masbah and Ahmadoun, *Morocco's Failure to Reintegrate Former Jihadis*

means to personalize the process and deal with each returnee as an individual.⁴² For instance, in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca attacks, the Moroccan security agencies rounded up thousands of people who were linked to Islamist groups, without regard for their human or civil rights or even their level of extremism. The situation was so poorly managed that the King of Morocco admitted in an interview with the Spanish newspaper *El País* that the events of May 16th, 2003 were marred by serious excesses.⁴³

The security approach creates a sense of urgency and pressure that does not allow for a strategic response to VE. For instance, one expert spoke about law enforcement agents who were clueless about many common references the radicals were using.⁴⁴ This challenge is linked to the poor training and unpreparedness of the majority of the officials working on VE cases. P/CVE does not negate the work of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, but it acknowledges the work that can be done with other actors in terms of education, training, and reintegration. Therefore, Moroccan P/CVE efforts would likely become more resilient if they incorporated a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the issue, learning from the best practices of the Danish Aarhus program, which “connects police, state welfare services, and community organizations in providing a range of services to individuals returning from or wanting to travel to Syria.”⁴⁵

⁴² In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁴³ Laetitia Grotti and Eric Goldstein, “Morocco’s Truth Commission: Honoring Past Victims during an Uncertain Present,” Human Rights Watch, November 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/morocco1105wcover.pdf>.

In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #5, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁴⁴ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁴⁵ Tinka M Veldhuis, “Reintegrating Violent Extremist Offenders: Policy Questions and Lessons Learned,” October 2015, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Veldhuis.pdf>.

A Place for Civil Society

P/CVE programs are a development of the state and security-oriented counterterrorism (CT) approach. As outlined above, they are an answer to the shift in state strategies from a security-oriented approach to one inclusive of non-security elements in CVE. “Civil society actors are often better placed, more credible, and more knowledgeable and experienced in working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to violent extremism.”⁴⁶ In both Jordan and Morocco we saw that governments allowed a very limited room for CSOs in P/CVE efforts, with nearly no CSO involvement in Jordan and a slightly more permissible environment in Morocco.

Jordan. In Jordan, there currently exists no meaningful space for civil society in the deradicalization process. As enumerated in some depth above, the primary actors in the CVE arena are state security services. However, many of our subjects spoke of the need to involve various elements of civil society, such as researchers, experts, think tanks, NGOs, IGOs, independent religious leaders and tribal leaders in the deradicalization, reintegration, and aftercare process.⁴⁷

While the government does control or regulate significant aspects of Jordanian society, involvement of civil society would be useful to facilitate elements that the Jordanian program currently lacks, particularly vocational/technical training and job placement.⁴⁸ This, in concert with concerted government effort to enforce elimination of bias in hiring, would help to remedy the isolation, marginalization, and shame experienced by many returnees. Civil society actors, such as trades unions, are well positioned to address this need. Additionally, a more whole-of-society approach to deradicalization would likely be far more successful, ensuring that returnees are

⁴⁶ Georgia Holmer, *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe* (Vienna, Austria: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2018).

⁴⁷ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁴⁸ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #5, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

enmeshed and invested in their home countries and thus less likely to pose a risk to their countrymen.⁴⁹ While there is often an antagonistic relationship with government actors, private actors can bring legitimacy, a sense of belonging to the reintegration process, thereby ensuring greater efficacy. As one expert noted, in his view the Jordanian government has a role in fomenting VE and is therefore ill-equipped to counter it.⁵⁰ Civil society organizations are well positioned to step in and fill this void.

Morocco. Since independence, Morocco has seen the creation of multiple political parties, workers' unions, and other civil society organizations. The last two decades have seen an expansion of the roles played by CSOs in multiple fields. Nonetheless, in the area of P/CVE many experts complain that the state does not allow for a greater involvement of civil society organizations. One expert explained that there is no political space for CSOs to work on CVE in Morocco and posited that the state is more focused on upholding its image as the leader of any P/CVE initiative more than actually working on P/CVE issues.⁵¹

In its second iteration, the *Moussalaha* program saw the addition of multiple partners to broaden the scope of its initiatives,⁵² but it still does not allow for the presence of CSOs in its current configuration. For instance, one of the deficient areas that many experts point to is education, and CSOs can play an important role on this front. One expert from Morocco recalled the work of a local CSO in the northern city of Tangier.⁵³ This local organization organizes soccer games and other activities for youth at risk of radicalization in which they can spend time on

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁵¹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #2, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁵² In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁵³ The Northern regions of Morocco are well-known as a hotbed for young people traveling to join ISIS.

education goals or entertainment.⁵⁴ Such activities are intended to shield young people from social isolation, which many VEOs utilize to their favor.

Another area where the state has total control is the prison system. Many of our experts expressed that reintegration and rehabilitation must begin within prisons.⁵⁵ However, if CSOs are not empowered to contribute to this dynamic while returnees are still in prison, it becomes difficult for them to build rapport with inmates who have solely been engaged by state officials throughout their incarceration. In the same vein, one area in which Morocco is lacking and in which CSOs can play a critical role is in post-release follow-up. One expert warns that many deradicalized persons in Morocco complain that there are no state programs that follow up with them or assist them in their reintegration process.⁵⁶ Another expert confirmed this when he said that many returnees he spoke with never had any formal interaction with state agencies after being released. CSOs usually emanate from the community and are better equipped to perform this aftercare. In addition, Morocco has many experts who can play the role of a mediator between state agencies and returnees, many of whom we interviewed for this study.

Furthermore, employment is one point that many returnees shared with the experts as an area in which they were unable to find any help. The reasoning given for employment as a means of effective deradicalization was that a person with a job might not have enough time to return to old habits after leaving prison. Nonetheless, many returnees are forced to navigate a job market that is set against them. The first hurdle they must overcome is the social stigma of being a former radical. One expert told us of a young woman who was involved with VEOs but managed to find a job after finishing her sentence. She was working as a waitress at a cafe when someone who

⁵⁴ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #2, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

knew her from her past in VE spotted her and told the cafe owner, who fired her for fear of stigmatizing his shop.⁵⁷ Another problem is that “any person who wants to get a job has to bring a copy of their criminal record” in order to apply.⁵⁸ Many employers still fear giving these reformed radicals a chance because of the social stigma surrounding the issue. CSOs can work to assuage this stigma in society and alleviate these fears.

Finally, our interviews found that one critical failure of these programs is that the state lacks the trust of returnees from conflict zones. CSOs can fill this gap because of their proximity to people in their community and can therefore generate rapport with returnees more easily than officials linked to the state. One expert mentioned the work that a former radical is doing in Sale. This person has undergone self-deradicalization and is trusted by many young radicals who are thinking about reintegration. According to this expert, “we should expand what this person is doing and create a structure for him to link it with what other young people who are doing the same in Tangier and Casablanca.”⁵⁹ The state needs to create a network of CSOs who work on the same aspect in different regions to share best practices and learn from each other’s challenges. The situation in Morocco raises the need for a CSO ecosystem working on multiple aspects of P/CVE from research to monitoring, accompaniment to follow-up, and finally from training and education to aftercare programs.

However, inclusion of civil society organizations within the security orbit brings with it concerns of undue influence in the eyes of the targets of these programs. Moreover, CVE programs that instrumentalize CSOs run the risk of endangering these organizations and threatening their safety, while sweeping CSOs up into the security umbrella, resulting in perpetuation of the same

⁵⁷ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #4, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

overly securitized approach. In addition, this approach may be “co-opting the energies of those who were trying to work for the interests of conflict-affected societies.”⁶⁰ Many practitioners working in peace building, conflict resolution, education, women’s empowerment and other fields complain that their organizations might become compromised when working in the CVE realm, without receiving any support beyond these programs. To be able to work with states on P/CVE programs without fearing repercussions of such cooperation, CSOs organizations should feel “genuinely empowered to challenge the problematic approach of all actors responsible for conflict and violence.”⁶¹

The Role of Prisons

Across both countries, our experts seemed to agree on the necessity of prisons but emphasized their proper place in the deradicalization process. While prisons can be an incubating environment for radical thought, they are often the starting point and sometimes the sole site of deradicalization and reintegration programs. As such, proper utilization of this limiting strategy is key to the success of such programs.

Jordan. Since Jordanian authorities initially debated the merits of allowing reentry to returnees, it was evident that prisons were going to be the primary destination for those returning from conflict zones. Such a policy is indicative of the way Jordanian authorities viewed the matter: Jordan looked merely to solve the contemporary wave rather than the core of the issue. Placing returnees in prisons, for previous waves as well as this current wave of returnees, is a reactionary

⁶⁰ Larry Attree, “Shouldn’t YOU Be Countering Violent Extremism?,” Saferworld, March 14, 2017, https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/shouldnt-you-be-countering-violent-extremism?utm_source=smartmail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Shouldn%27t%2BYOU%2Bbe%2BCVE

⁶¹ Ibid

policy: imprisonment and punishment devoid of meaningful sociopolitical and economic reintegration.

This approach was seen as somewhat ineffective by our interviewees, stating that previous programs situated in prisons did not achieve the intended results as graduates would immediately rejoin VEOs upon release. They cited that many violent extremists who were imprisoned in Jordan grew more extreme in their ideology, which offset the number of those deradicalized by boosting terror recruitment numbers. Moreover, individuals from the most recent wave of violent extremism in Syria and Iraq saw Jordan as a target for attacks and recruitment.

Some of the primary challenges associated with the return of these individuals from conflict zones were the choice of venue for imprisonment and the appropriate sentence to be served. These challenges were particularly acute given Jordan's previous experiences teaching it that inmates were often susceptible to radicalization and recruitment. Adding to these challenges, prisons in Jordan have become overpopulated in recent years. This can be attributed to stricter measures, especially as concerns drug-related crimes. According to the PSD, the number of arrests for drug abuse cases has increased from 4,023 in 2011 to 13,621 in 2016, an over 230% increase in just 5 years.⁶² As such, placing thousands of returnees in prisons alongside them would only lead to staggering radicalization. Jordan is keenly aware of this risk; famed ISIS founder Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was reportedly radicalized through such means.⁶³

In addition to drug-related convictions, one expert noted that escalations in the state's limiting strategies are themselves part of the issue, exacerbating the issue of radicalization in prisons.⁶⁴ These escalations have been both procedural and legislative. Procedurally,

⁶² “[Combatting Drugs in Jordan: A Strategic Policy Framework] العامة للسياسات الاستراتيجية للأردن: مكافحة المخدرات في الأردن: 2016, <http://www.esc.jo/Documents/932fa26f-abe8-4cca-9447-21e8f07c8e7c.pdf>.

⁶³ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #2, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁶⁴ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

administrative officials have the power to detain any citizen without trial or successful conviction. Legislatively, the recently revamped antiterrorism law included amendments escalating the penalties for cybersecurity-related offenses, including stipulations that posts or likes on social media are not only monitored but could be used to obtain a conviction in a court of law.⁶⁵ Our research found that these revamped laws even played a role in preventing certain individuals from returning to Jordan. Nonetheless, the new legislative and procedural changes provide fertile ground for further overpopulation in prisons. Perhaps more importantly, this newly-expanded incarcerated population is characterized by those who are likely to hold grievances against the state.

Our research found that these amendments need to be clarified. Terrorism is vaguely defined in Jordan, especially as concerns the virtual realm and social media, which results in oppressive legislation. A WhatsApp message or a simple “like” could lead to 5 years imprisonment. One interviewee labeled this law as “inciting terrorism” given that incarceration of these individuals is likely to lead them down the path of radicalization.⁶⁶ Another interviewee concluded that such individuals should be placed in separate prisons and that inmates generally need to be disaggregated by age and issue.⁶⁷

Our research found low levels of effectiveness of imprisonment for addressing the return of fighters to Jordan. However, we found that imprisonment is a necessity for both security reasons and to deter others from following a similar path. Thus, prison housing arrangements must be duly considered given the potential for radicalization and their centrality as the site of deradicalization programs. Of critical note, this does not minimize the importance of rehabilitation and post-release or aftercare programs, which are integral to effective deradicalization and reintegration.

⁶⁵ Alrai, *‘Public Security’ Strategy Puts the National Interest above All Considerations*

⁶⁶ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #5, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Additionally, our research found that the overall environment within prisons ought to be welcoming to dialogue. This would give returnees a chance to voice the reasons behind their defections, both to and from conflict zones, and further assist in their deradicalization.

Morocco. In Morocco, we found that prison can be the starting point of a robust and effective deradicalization program provided that sentences are issued appropriately and prison conditions elevated to focus on human rights. One interviewee stressed prison as the necessary starting point of the deradicalization process, both in order to protect Moroccan society from returnees but also as a way to take an inventory of the returnee's ideology and the extent of his radicalization.⁶⁸ Prison can also serve as a transitional stage on the way from the conflict zone to reintegration in society. After radicals are assessed and housed in the proper units, deradicalization experts seek to start the reconciliation process while simultaneously building detainees' mental resilience.⁶⁹ While the *Moussalaha* program's main goal is to reconcile the radical with themselves, religious texts, and their community, it also seeks to establish "internal cohesion" within the radical.⁷⁰ According to one expert, this process of "internal cohesion" is conducted to "restore the esteem of [the radical] and highlight a way for their return from extremist and violent thought," while preparing them to return to the community.⁷¹ Although numerous experts stress the individualization of a successful deradicalization intervention, prisons can also be a place to deal with common grievances and misconceptions held by many radicals. One Moroccan deradicalization expert spoke about the importance of "helping young people reconcile together,"

⁶⁸ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, #4, and #5, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁶⁹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁷⁰ Rezrazi, El Mostafa. "Insights Into Morocco's Approach to Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism." Essay. In *De-Radicalization in the Mediterranean: Comparing Challenges and Approaches*, edited by Lorenzo Vidino, 81–92. Milano, Italy: ISPI, 2018.

https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/mediterraneo_def_web.pdf.

In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁷¹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

while dismantling religious misconceptions that are commonly deployed by violent extremist organizations.⁷²

Many of our subjects also emphasized the need for provision of educational and vocational training to returnees. According to one interviewee, these programs are readily available in Moroccan prisons, with prisoners completing numerous programs and earning a number of certifications before they are even released.⁷³ However, prison authorities need to make sure these educational and vocational programs are made just as available to radicals as they are to the general population to ensure their successful reintegration. This expert also warned that program administrators must follow standard criteria for admissions, which *Moussalaha* currently lacks, leading to some potentially undeserving individuals benefiting from the program (i.e. buying their way in) and leaving otherwise deserving radicals without any specialized support. While the interviewee did not mention any specifics about the reason for the ambiguous selection standards, he warned that only the most deserving should participate because of one of the top privileges that a former radical might earn: a pardon from the king.⁷⁴ Should someone that was “deradicalized” receive a pardon and commit violent acts in the future, it could completely undermine the credibility of the program and inhibit future deradicalization efforts.

Another commonly cited issue that Morocco seems to have mastered and many other states have struggled with is the development of a typology to aid in the differentiation of housing for radical prisoners. Prisoners are either housed: separately from the general population (in specialized wards reserved solely for those who’ve been radicalized), integrated with the general prison population, or in a hybrid housing program. Upon recognizing the threat of radicalization

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

of otherwise nonradical inmates and the fear that VEOs may intentionally order agents to get arrested so that they can radicalize from within prison, Moroccan prison officials launched their “Immunization” program.⁷⁵ This program uses a tailored risk assessment analysis of radical inmates to ensure that the most radicalized are housed in specialized, isolated wards, while gradually providing additional freedoms to those who display less radical ideology, including mixed housing.⁷⁶

While a robust deradicalization and reintegration program is absolutely necessary in prison, it must continue beyond the radical’s sentence. If the support and initiatives end with a radical’s release from prison, then so does their deradicalization journey. It is imperative that the state recognize the importance of providing continued support after release because, as one of our experts noted, recidivism is not only the radical’s problem, but “society’s as well.”⁷⁷ It is in light of this need that we turn to the critical necessity of aftercare, encompassing economic, mental health, and religio-cultural strategies to achieve complete reintegration.

The Need for Aftercare

One glaring gap in the existing deradicalization programs as recounted by our subjects was a lack of aftercare programs to complement and reinforce the gains achieved in the prison-based programs. When speaking of aftercare, our experts referred to several different objectives, to include: legal support; psychological, family, and job counseling services; economic programs to ensure effective job training, placement, and retention; continued engagement with moderate

⁷⁵ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁷⁶ Ahoujil, Soufiane. “UNAFEI 167th International Training Course.” In United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders. Tokyo, 2018:47-51
https://www.unafei.or.jp/publications/pdf/RS_No104/No104_11_IP_Morocco.pdf

⁷⁷ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

religious figures and institutions; and societal change to be more accommodating of program graduates and returnees writ large.

Jordan. In Jordan, our experts emphasized the need for rehabilitation and reintegration, but especially aftercare.⁷⁸ In particular, interviewees stressed that returnees require psychological, religious, and social support in addition to legal support and support to their families.⁷⁹ Another item of particular importance was vocational/technical training and support finding jobs, which interviewees noted was not currently being provided.⁸⁰ Assistance with job placement and training would alleviate returnees' feelings of being burdensome to their families, increase their self-respect and grant returnees a sense of purpose. It would also increase the likelihood of rehabilitating returnees as valuable contributing members of their society, giving them a sense of agency. This desire for agency was cited as one of the primary drivers that led these individuals to radicalize in the first place.⁸¹ To confront and repurpose this need would represent a great victory for deradicalization and reintegration in Jordan.

Another major arena for improvement lies in the community. Several experts alleged that Jordanian society is in many cases not ready to welcome returnees back and that to overcome this, work must be done with the communities to educate them on the programs and reintegrate returnees more effectively.⁸² This would require lifting the veil of secrecy over Jordan's deradicalization efforts and educating the public on successful reintegration. Doing so would decrease the prevalence of heightened marginalization upon return and lower the risk of recidivism.⁸³ One expert claimed that, "We need to stop destroying the human being."⁸⁴ One

⁷⁸ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #3, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁷⁹ In-person interview with Jordanian experts on deradicalization #3 and #7, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸⁰ In-person interview with all Jordanian experts on deradicalization, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸¹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸² In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

quoted a program graduate, at the close of his program, as saying “You gave me my humanity back.”⁸⁵ Jordanian officials must ensure that this resurrection of identity does not evaporate upon graduation of the program and returnees’ reentry into society. Rather, they must work to ensure a positive change in society and a culture change toward accommodating returnees, an effort which will take far more outreach and education to achieve.⁸⁶ For these reasons, a holistic and sustainable aftercare program will ultimately be critical to Jordan’s reintegration success.⁸⁷

Morocco. Previous research has shown that strong aftercare and support programs are necessary to solidify the deradicalization process and ensure a successful reintegration into society and should be seen as the final step in achieving full deradicalization. While there are many different types of programs that can be used to aid with reintegration, the types of programs that Moroccan experts deemed the most critical are: educational support, vocational support, and psychological support. Educational and vocational support, whether in the form of allowing former radicals access to vocational and technical education, forming employment initiatives with local business, or allowing the former radicals to begin a secondary or post-secondary education while still in prison, should be highly prioritized.

In an interview with a Moroccan deradicalization expert, the interviewee told us a story about a young former radical who was released from prison and sought to cement his deradicalization so that he could achieve full reintegration. He described how committed this man was to the path of deradicalization, so much so that he even met with senior Moroccan officials and experts in the hopes that they would be able to help him. Ultimately, however, he found no help from these officials. After being turned down by the officials and exhausting his job search,

⁸⁵ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #3, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸⁶ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #4, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁸⁷ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #3, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

having no skills, education, or job prospects, he found an opportunity to carry out a suicide attack in Syria, which resulted in his death.⁸⁸ While our interviewee told us that these programs are already readily available in Moroccan prisons, he alleged that their biggest downfall is that there is no system in place to ensure that former radicals are able to continue their training after release and put the skills they learned to use to benefit society. He believed that this type of support should continue for a number of years, until the former radical achieves a certain level of education or employment. However, it is worth noting that Morocco has recently started to increase vocational support to former radicals. In an interview with another expert, we learned that the King of Morocco had helped fund 30 different start-up ventures headed by former radicals.⁸⁹ The interviewee explained that the King aided these ventures under the premise that having strong work commitments “keeps people from thinking about extremist thought” by keeping them focused and gainfully employed, developing ideas and products about which they are passionate.⁹⁰

Education should also be seen as the foundation of other aftercare programs. Providing former radicals with an education not only makes them competitive in the job market but also expands their worldview, allowing them to think more critically about themselves and their place in society. This can help former radicals develop higher levels of thinking and begin to understand religious concepts and other current events in the broader historical and sociological context. Then some of the deeper psychological counseling can begin to help address previous traumas that led them down a path of radicalization or the de-contextualized religious education that extremist groups propagandize. For example, one former radical turned deradicalization expert briefly recounted his personal experience about how his master’s level education aided in his

⁸⁸ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁸⁹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #4, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

deradicalization journey. His previous readings on various historical, religious, and sociological topics helped him understand and confront the religious propaganda that these radical groups were feeding him.⁹¹ Although he had a master's degree and was preparing for a doctorate while caught in the midst of his radicalization journey, he says that this deeper level of understanding and resilience can be achieved "with a minimum of education and understanding."⁹² This interviewee also expressed hope for further education reforms as "the best way to immunize future generations against extremism."⁹³

However, education and vocational initiatives also need to incorporate ways to fight the stigma associated with terrorism-related crimes. Many jobs perform criminal background checks before a job offer is extended; naturally, this background check prevents many former radicals from obtaining jobs, regardless of their level of deradicalization. While the background check is a necessary safeguard and will likely remain as a form of pre-employment screening, education and vocational initiatives should also seek to educate the public, employers in particular, about the deradicalization process and the importance of their role in it. Stigmatization, if left unaddressed, can be a major threat to successful deradicalization.

While strengthening the education and vocational skills of former radicals is key to deradicalization, counseling and psychological solutions are also a critical, albeit lacking, tool for deradicalization in Morocco. While the need for strong psychological counseling was not a primary feature of our interviews, notable academics involved with Moroccan deradicalization efforts have recently called attention to the absence of such efforts in deradicalization and the damaging effects of this oversight on Moroccan deradicalization efforts.⁹⁴ This is somewhat ironic

⁹¹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Masbah, *The Limits of Morocco's Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism*

given that Morocco's primary deradicalization program, *Moussalaha*, translates to "reconciliation", with one of the main goals of the program being reconciliation with oneself. Furthermore, while it seems there is currently a lot of focus on educating and training former radicals, these initiatives lack follow-through. When these education and vocational initiatives are implemented, they are done so in a nonstandard way, or are ceased once a former radical is released from prison. The administrators of deradicalization programs need to ensure that education and vocational initiatives are extended to all eligible participants and that the support continues after they are released from prison. Finally, while the role of therapy and other psychological programs were not mentioned during the course of our interviews, prominent researchers, such as Mohammed Masbah, have criticized current deradicalization programs for their lack of such efforts and underscored their importance.⁹⁵

Reformed Radicals

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has cautiously approached the issue of former or reformed radicals in their recommendations for South-Eastern Europe in dealing with VE.⁹⁶ The OSCE acknowledges the risks associated with the use of formers in any P/CVE programs due to the possibility that these individuals still hold radical ideas, support radical groups, or have ties to radical individuals or organizations. Nonetheless, the OSCE considers them an important stakeholder for their level of firsthand knowledge of the inner workings of VEOs, including recruiting methods, the spread of ideology, and the process of movement to conflict zones. "Formers can therefore have a useful role in a wide range of P/CVE efforts, from raising awareness and communicating credible counter-narratives, to supporting

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Georgia Holmer, *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*

programs of CSOs focusing on disengaging or rehabilitating and reintegrating convicted violent extremists.”⁹⁷

Jordan. One of the prevalent themes of our research is the underutilization of stakeholders and actors beyond state and security institutions. Of these actors, the returnees themselves have a large role to play to contribute to program efficacy. Our research found two colliding narratives in this regard: those who do not favor utilizing or cooperating with returnees beyond intelligence purposes and those who believe returnees have a major role to play to the benefit of programs and research. Coincidentally, those who support the first narrative tend to be from the private sector or security apparatus while those who favor the second narrative are generally researchers and practitioners.

Individuals who were not in favor of collaborating with returnees reiterated the states’ earlier rejectionist policy. They view returnees as fanatics, asserting that it is rather difficult to cooperate with someone who was willing to die.⁹⁸ One expert who held this belief went so far as to allege that countering violent extremism is a failure - “a weapon of the failed,”⁹⁹ indicating that countering means that preventive policies have failed. As such, proponents of this theory argue that if the situation requires countering, only security approaches are appropriate and that returnees are to be treated as criminals, a cancer to be removed before spreading to others.

On the other hand, those who believe in the importance of incorporating returnees see them as an invaluable resource. They argue that these individuals have prized experience and should consequently be consulted as a primary source. Some interviewees went even further to argue that refraining from this approach, in fact, results in further radicalization of returnees or exacerbation

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

of their grievances. They assert that more dialogue with returnees supports programs by understanding their narratives in order to devise means to debunk these narratives. They assert that returnees provide the strongest and most compelling tools to provide alternative narratives.¹⁰⁰ In addition to their own experience, they have access to primary sources as well. As such, they can and should be utilized as active and positive agents in fighting the issue.

Furthermore, researchers and nongovernmental organizations have faced difficulties accessing returnees for research or programming purposes. If state and security institutions are not engaging with them other than countering religious narratives and they do not provide nongovernment actors the chance to do so, then it is just a matter of time before yet another wave of radicalization breaks out. One researcher noted that it took their institute over 9 months to acquire security clearances to interview returnees.¹⁰¹ In their research, they looked to map returnees' journeys from their first exposure to violent extremist narratives, pinpoint their drivers toward joining VEOs, understand the reasons behind their defection and return, and finally, evaluate their experience with programs in prisons. Though the limited number of interviewees halted their research, the concept is not without merit; only returnees themselves can answer all of these questions.

Morocco. In the case of Morocco, there was unanimous consent among all experts and officials interviewed for this study on the necessity of some form of inclusion of former radicals in any P/CVE effort in Morocco.¹⁰² Former radicals can play an important role in mediating between the state and the radical youth in prisons or after their release. As in the case of the former

¹⁰⁰ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² In-person interview with all Moroccan experts on deradicalization, Morocco, January 2020.

radical in Sale discussed above, many “formers” are already doing their part in accompanying youth in their journey back from radical ideology and behavior.

One example that is already in place in Morocco is from the Mohammadia League of Scholars who hired three former radicals after their completion of the *Moussalaha* program. After their release, the three formers - Mohammed Damir, Mohammed Benayyad, and Abdellah al-Yassafi - underwent extensive training within the Mohammadia League in subjects ranging from human rights and psychology to theology and communication, all with the goal of training them to participate in the *Moussalaha* program as stakeholders.¹⁰³ One point raised by one expert from Morocco was the issue of trust. Violent extremist youth do not trust the state or the state’s institutions, and “formers” can play the role of a mediator between the state and returnees.¹⁰⁴ Another expert raised the same issue, pointing to the fact that “formers” can play a major role as an intermediary, but warned that the state should make sure to incorporate “formers” who have credibility with radicals and not what he called “burned cards” or formers who lost credibility among radical youth.¹⁰⁵ Finally, radicals do not suspect all state institutions to the same degree, so they choose one institution that might be seen as less tough on them compared to other institutions (such as the Interior Ministry or the intelligence agencies). One expert posited that the Mohammadia League had generated some credibility with radicals, and that therefore it could be the avenue through which to work with former radicals.¹⁰⁶

One person interviewed for this study is considered the archetype of a former radical turned moderate and even advocate and actor in P/CVE, albeit within civil society. This individual spent over 9 years in prison before receiving a royal pardon and claims to have made ideological

¹⁰³ Boukhasas, *Details of the ‘Top Secret’ Program for Reconciliation*

¹⁰⁴ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #4, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

¹⁰⁵ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #2, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

¹⁰⁶ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #3, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

revisions in prison. When asked about the role that “formers” can play, he warned against using “formers” as a prop and not allowing them the space necessary to interact with radical youth.¹⁰⁷ The issue of using “formers” was raised by experts in conjunction with the importance of CSOs in any P/CVE efforts.¹⁰⁸

Controlling the Narrative

A further aspect of deradicalization programs that needs refinement in both Jordan and Morocco is the use of moderate counternarratives. It is clear that the way in which these counternarratives are drafted and who they are presented by is critical to their success in appealing to the hearts and minds of radicals. Robust counternarratives can also be successful in preventing radicalization at the earliest stages. Counternarratives must be carefully crafted and thoughtfully delivered in order to achieve the highest degree of success in combating the narratives that extremist organizations have developed over generations.

Jordan. In the case of Jordan, deradicalization counternarratives center almost exclusively on religion. The Jordanian government has put a lot of stock in the notion that the most recent wave of extremism runs counter to Islam, particularly in the realm of *takfir* or the branding of some other Muslims and non-Muslims as infidels.¹⁰⁹ However, many experts we spoke to emphasized that religion and ideology are not necessarily huge drivers toward radicalization and that often other factors (grievances, corruption, undemocratic governance, lack of agency) take center stage with religion playing a secondary role, if any.¹¹⁰ Despite this awareness of the relatively insignificant role of religion as a driver, Jordan’s deradicalization program centers

¹⁰⁷ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #5, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

¹⁰⁸ In-person interview with Moroccan experts on deradicalization #3 and #4, Morocco, January 2020.

¹⁰⁹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #3, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹¹⁰ In-person interview with Jordanian experts on deradicalization #1, #2, and #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

around “dialogue” between returnees and imams who have been approved by PSD in an attempt to remedy radicals' ill-informed religious ideals. Adding to the inefficacy of this initiative in addressing the causes of radicalism, state-trained imams are often seen as illegitimate and merely pawns of the state.¹¹¹ Perhaps in an effort to remedy this, some experts claimed that the Jordanian government has brought in Moroccan clerics who are “more enlightened” to aid in the process.¹¹²

Other experts have alleged that pointing to religion as the root of the problem alienates returnees and the Jordanian public alike while the real focus should be placed on the actual drivers of radicalization.¹¹³ Still others say that the production of religious counternarratives is in itself counterproductive, merely replacing one ideology with another without developing within returnees the critical thinking skills necessary to make their own decisions about which narrative to follow.¹¹⁴ Some see this as replacing one form of brainwashing with another. Rather than providing a counternarrative, several of our experts argued for alternative narratives; instead of “dying for God”, teach returnees how to “live for God”.¹¹⁵ This refocuses their religious zeal while avoiding legitimizing an extremist narrative by engaging with it, even if only to rebut it. Interviewees added that reformed returnees themselves can and should be leveraged to provide an alternative narrative, a point covered in some detail above.¹¹⁶

One expert noted that the mosque has a role to play in radicalization as well.¹¹⁷ This view is in keeping with Jordanian government efforts in recent years to clamp down on mosques and religious education to ensure that they all preach a unified (and government-approved) religious message. To this end, the government has ensured that licensure of all religious clergy falls under

¹¹¹ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹¹² In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #7, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹¹³ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #6, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #1, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #7, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

its purview. Imams in Jordan must be certified by the government to be legally eligible to preach in the country's mosques, with announcements of closures of illicit mosques ahead of Friday prayers.¹¹⁸ Some figures estimate that these illegal mosques constitute up to a third of all mosques in Jordan.¹¹⁹ Still others estimate that over 4,500 of the 8,600 mosques in Jordan are illegal, representing more than half.¹²⁰ In recent years, the government has required that imams use approved sermons sent to them by mobile phone for Friday prayers.¹²¹ This both helps to explain the illegitimacy of PSD imams in the eyes of many radicals and demonstrates the importance the Jordanian government places on the narrative of moderate Islam as a counternarrative to radical ideology.

Morocco. One aspect of deradicalization strategies on which some countries miss the mark is incorporating a strong, effective alternative or counternarrative to fight the propaganda sold to vulnerable populations by extremist organizations. Extremist organizations, especially ISIS, have proven to be extremely skilled at “selling a dream” to Moroccans via a narrative that utilizes various appeals (rational, emotional, and behavioral) in order to give the recruits “the sense of being and love that they lacked” as well as “a sense of brotherhood and community.”¹²² ISIS's rational appeals explain “why you should join ISIS,” and employ religious ideology (Quranic verses, *ahadith*, etc.) and decontextualized historical narratives.¹²³ ISIS's emotional appeals utilize “Sufi hymns as background music in their videos of fighters (especially ethnically diverse fighters)

¹¹⁸ Jenna Consigli, “Countering Radicalization Efforts in the Middle East and North Africa,” in *De-Radicalization in the Mediterranean: Comparing Challenges and Approaches*, ed. Lorenzo Vidino (Milano, Italy: ISPI, 2018), pp. 59-79, 72.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Maria Abi-Habib, “Jordan Plans Crackdown on Unauthorized Mosques to Combat Radical Islam,” September 19, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jordan-plans-crackdown-on-unauthorized-mosques-to-combat-radical-islam-1411157776>.

¹²¹ “Muzzling Mosques: Jordan's Novel Approach to Islamist Militancy,” *The Economist*, September 8, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/09/08/muzzling-mosques>.

¹²² In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #2, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

hugging” and welcoming each other to showcase the sense of belonging, love, and community that they are trying to sell.¹²⁴ Finally, ISIS’s behavioral appeals communicate to potential recruits that “this is what you need to do.”¹²⁵ The simultaneous deployment of all three of these appeals to support an overarching narrative, in conjunction with the use of social media and new technologies, has led to an unprecedented number of recruits. The state, or a credible stand-in (i.e. a CSO), must completely overhaul their current narrative if they hope to stand a chance of countering the ISIS narrative.

According to the same interviewee, the Moroccan government has only focused on countering the rational appeals (why one should not join ISIS) while completely ignoring the emotional and behavioral appeals.¹²⁶ The remedy to emotional appeals must focus on how one can find those same emotions (belonging, love, a sense of community, etc.) within one’s family or community, or help awaken them to the sense of community that already exists. The behavioral appeals could then help refocus a potential recruit's energy towards bettering themselves and/or the community through hard work and perhaps volunteering. However this interviewee warned that while the use of counternarratives are helpful in deradicalization programs, they need to be used in conjunction with other deradicalization strategies.¹²⁷ Most importantly, our interviewee stated that these counternarratives should not come from the government because they do not have enough credibility to deliver them; rather, “the delivery of counter narratives needs to be left to the people with boots on the ground that have credibility (e.g., those that directly deal with radicals).”¹²⁸ State alternatives could take the form of CSOs, former radicals, or independent

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

religious leaders. However, above all, the person(s) that deliver the counternarratives need to be seen as credible in the eyes of the audience and, ideally, share an identity with the people to whom they are delivering the counternarrative.¹²⁹

Given the overutilization of religious institutions and officials in deradicalization programs (e.g., the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the High Council of Ulema, and the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulema,¹³⁰ to name a few), it is apparent that Moroccan deradicalization counternarratives are not coming from those that may be the most credible to deliver them (e.g., former radicals, CSOs, and other non-government actors). As one interviewee notes, many youths don't receive their religious education from state-sanctioned imams, they receive their religious education online.¹³¹ This point highlights the need for independent religious officials, when necessary, to be involved in deradicalization efforts. Finally, a heavy reliance on religious officials may also lead to an overinflation of the role of religion in both the radicalization/deradicalization process. If deradicalization efforts insist on establishing a religious foundation to combat radicalization, then they will be fighting an uphill battle to deradicalize those that may not have strong religious beliefs or those who were radicalized by religious ideology. Additionally, an unwarranted focus on religion as both a cause of radicalization and a path to deradicalization may make moderate Muslims in Morocco feel targeted.¹³²

IV. Policy Recommendations

Many of the themes discussed above reflect a similar situation in many other MENA countries. Many states in the region rely heavily on their security agencies to lead any

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rezrazi, *Insights Into Morocco's Approach to Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism*

¹³¹ In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #2, Casablanca, Morocco, January 2020.

¹³² In-person interview with Moroccan expert on deradicalization #1, Rabat, Morocco, January 2020.

counterterrorism and CVE efforts. As elaborated above, security agencies are most likely to follow a highly securitized approach, which stunts any hope of trust between the state and the targeted populations. In addition, many states in the Middle East do not allow CSOs to share a responsibility in the development of P/CVE strategies despite their firmer grasp on community dynamics and the benefits they can bring to the process. MENA countries also do not appreciate the critical role that prisons play. For instance, Camp Bucca, a U.S. prison in Iraq, “provided a unique setting for both prisoner radicalization and inmate collaboration — and was formative in the development of today’s most potent jihadist force.”¹³³ After incarceration, prisoners from Camp Bucca in Iraq and most other prisons housing returnees in the MENA region do not have the capacity or access to provide adequate aftercare programs that constitute the best path towards reintegration. We present the following policy recommendations as imperative to the success of any regional deradicalization and reintegration initiative:

- While well-trained and equipped law enforcement and intelligence agencies should play a central role in P/CVE, Jordan and Morocco should elevate the role of non-security P/CVE approaches to tackle the root causes of radicalization.
- In light of their proximity to the communities they serve and their myriad resources, civil society organizations (CSOs) must be permitted to work within the deradicalization arena alongside traditional security actors.
- Prisons are often the first stop for returnees and can be either a hub for further radicalization or an avenue to commence deradicalization. Therefore, appropriate prison sentences and prison conditions must be the starting point of an effective P/CVE strategy.

¹³³ McCoy, Terrence. “How the Islamic State Evolved in an American Prison.” *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/11/04/how-an-american-prison-helped-ignite-the-islamic-state/>.

- To complement the work done within prisons, successful P/CVE programs must include robust and comprehensive aftercare programs, including psychological and educational/vocational/technical counseling, employment assistance, and social reintegration.
- In a comprehensive and holistic approach, former radicals who are extremely vetted and well trained should have a role to play in any P/CVE efforts because of the first-hand knowledge they have about VEOs and more importantly about the paths they took to come back from these organizations and their ideology.
- VEOs have perfected the use of narratives deployed through multiple mediums. Therefore, counter-narratives must be included in any successful P/CVE effort and should be generated using a cross-society approach to lend credibility.
- In Jordan and Morocco, the United States should assist these countries in their P/CVE strategies through different avenues; such assistance can be in training, education, best practice sharing, support to implementation, and funding. The United States should also be aware that many MENA countries seek to emulate US policy vis-a-vis returnees. Thus, the US must consider its role as a global leader in the deradicalization arena and act accordingly by establishing a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach similar to the one outlined above.¹³⁴

V. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The initial scope of our project was heavily focused on obtaining a measure of efficacy from the graduates of deradicalization programs themselves in both countries of study. However, after numerous conversations with George Washington University's Institutional Review Board

¹³⁴ In-person interview with Jordanian expert on deradicalization #5, Amman, Jordan, January 2020.

and in light of an inability to provide sufficient protections for this population within the time frame dictated by our project requirements, we were ultimately forced to exclude this group from our study. While the inclusion of this population would have likely presented its own issues in terms of data collection and validation, we ultimately believed that the participants themselves would have provided us with our most valuable insight into the nuances of these programs and particularly the areas in which they excel and those in which they fall short. Nonetheless, fortunately we believe that we were still able to obtain reliable data, which provided us with hitherto unparalleled “on the ground” insight into the state of deradicalization efforts in both Jordan and Morocco.

Additionally, since we had planned on focusing the bulk of our in-country time on interviewing the program graduates themselves and were only informed that we would need to amend our plans about three weeks prior to our arrival in our respective countries, we were left with some gaps in our schedule that we found difficult to fill with additional expert interviews on such short notice. Future studies should include a much larger sample size, including the wide range of all actors involved in deradicalization programs, both formally and informally. After returning to the US at the conclusion of our in-country interviews, we considered conducting additional interviews with in-country experts via Skype. However, we ultimately decided not to utilize this method due to issues surrounding ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of our data. When conducting interviews in-person, the interviewers were able to ensure that the interviewees were, for the most part, not providing scripted answers or were under the influence of an off-camera individual. However, when conducting interviews via Skype or other online platforms, the interviewers could not completely ensure that the answers and data collected are solely those of the interviewee.

Given the outsized influence of the state security and intelligence apparatus in both Jordan and Morocco, we did anticipate a measure of state influence, or at least deference to the state, in the responses to some of our interview questions. We also expected our subjects to avoid criticism of the regime and/or monarch. Somewhat surprisingly, we found that in both Jordan and Morocco, many of our subjects spoke freely and were relatively open in their criticism of the state without prodding or provocation by our researchers. However, in other interviews, the instilled sense of reverence for the regime and the monarch was more apparent and we must assume that for some, a sense of loyalty or of toeing the party line may have won out over their willingness to answer questions of efficacy about government-administered programs honestly. Similarly, we also understood that our subjects were, in many cases, officials and experts who oversaw the implementation of the programs in question and thus may be inclined to represent them more positively to a team of foreign researchers. However, in light of these considerations we still feel that we were able to get an accurate gauge of program successes and shortcomings.

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