
Countering Violent Extremism in Prisons



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Introduction

- As the threat of violent extremism (VE) has grown - prevention and counter strategies have focussed on limiting space and opportunity for VE recruiters to work
- A key element to such strategies is understanding the radicalisation process and the conditions and drivers that facilitate people becoming violent extremists
- Venues for radicalisation are many and varied - in person, online, in schools and places of worship
- Prisons may provide a unique “safe haven” where extremists can network, compare and exchange tactics, recruit and radicalise new members
- Prisons may also provide a unique opportunity for authorities, drawing on global best practice, to counter the efforts of violent extremists to radicalise and recruit new members

Important points

- Programs must be tailored to the local conditions, cultures, as well as, local and international law and legal traditions
- Programs should take into account their impact on fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom of thought, opinion, conscience and religion, and the right to fair treatment in accordance with the rule of law
- Incarceration is a key element of the Criminal Justice System's response to VE.
- The Criminal Justice System should also:
 - prevent further radicalisation of prisoners,
 - prevent extremist activities from being directed or supported from within prisons and,
 - provide for the de-radicalisation and reintegration of prisoners into society

Goals and Objectives of Prison CVE Programmes



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Goals and Objectives of Prison CVE Programs

- It is important to first clearly define the program's goals and objectives and identify indicators of success and failure
- Important to define:
 - which actors are involved in the initiative
 - what the desired results are,
 - how progress is measured, and
 - which specific outcomes are expected
- In defining the goals and objectives for program, first conduct a comprehensive risk and threat assessment.
- Key to define from the outset whether the goal of the program is to change the views or merely the behaviour of the inmates (de-radicalisation vs. disengagement)

Goals and Objectives of Prison CVE Programs - contd

- Note, disengagement is easier in the short term but may not have the desired long term impact of reducing VE beyond prison environment
- Important to decide who the key target of the program is:
 - Lower and mid-level extremists
 - Senior leadership
- Important to have a specific plan for each group -generic solutions seldom work effectively
- Programmes and plans should be based on a detailed and through analysis and understanding of the “target group”:
 - their specific ideology,
 - objectives,
 - preferred recruiting/grooming techniques,
 - preferred type of recruit, standing within the prison,
 - Connections outside the prison

Prison Staff

Prison Staff

- Staff are crucial to the success of any Prison CVE Programme. Prisons should:
 - Ensure sound selection and recruitment practices for Prison Staff
 - Ensure proper training of personnel, and specialist training for those dealing directly with violent extremist prisoners
 - Have sufficient staff for the size and nature of the prison population should be a priority
- Staff working with violent extremist prisoners require a good combination of personal qualities and technical skills.
- They need to be able to deal with all prisoners in an even-handed, humane and just manner, including the difficult, dangerous and manipulative prisoners.
- Female staff should be recruited and trained to work with women violent extremist prisoners and to design and deliver gender-appropriate interventions.
- Prison staff should also be representative of the ethnic, racial and religious profile of the prison population. Prisons should also have dedicated spiritual leaders available to minister to prisoners.
- In order to manage VE prisoners effectively, staff need to uphold the highest levels of professionalism and ethics.

Risk Assessments

Risk Assessments

- Proper risk assessment (screening) of prisoners enables the efficient use of resources, sentence management and upholding the human rights of prisoners.
 - Risks assessed during the initial screening should include:
 - Potential harm to self or others
 - Identifying potential violent extremists (particularly where the reason for incarceration is not directly related to violent extremism)
 - Threat to good order in the prison - potential for violence
 - Likelihood of escape
 - Risk of potential recidivism
 - Potential for instigating offences in the community in cooperation with outside associates
- Important to note VE prisoners are often not an homogenous group - it is necessary to evaluate each on their own merits
- It is key to understand the motivations, personal and contextual circumstances contributing to their violent extremist views

Assessing VE potential among prisoners

- Undertaking a detailed risk assessment will enable the prison administration to identify which of the wide variety of motivations and factors have “pulled” and “pushed” individuals towards violent extremism.
- Not all violent extremists are motivated by the same factors, however, the following are well established “push” and “pull” factors to be considered when evaluating individual prisoners:
 - Lack of socio-economic opportunities
 - Marginalisation and discrimination
 - Collective grievances and victimization
 - Poor governance, violations of human rights and a lack of the rule of law
 - Prolonged and unresolved conflicts
 - Distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences
 - Influence of charismatic leadership and social networks

Accommodation



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Accommodation

- Accommodating VE prisoners involves decisions whether to:
 - Separate them from the general prison population (separation),
 - If separated, should they be isolated from each other (isolation), or held together in one unit (concentration), or
 - Should they be dispersed across a small number of prisons (dispersal),
 - Integrate VE prisoners with the general population (integration),
 - A combination of these strategies.
- Prison administrations will need to determine the best approach to accommodation, based on specific factors within the prison population, as well as, the overall security situation in the country.

Accommodation contd

Factors for consideration would include:

- The size of the VE prison population to be segregated or dispersed,
- The state of the prison infrastructure and the administration's ability to ensure secure custody of VE prisoners in a dispersed model,
- The capacity, size and skills level of staff to manage challenges posed by different models,
- The financial resources available to manage the VE prisoner population,
- The cultural, political and social context of the country,
- The risk that an individual presents for being further radicalised, or for radicalising others to violence
- The modus operandi and organisational structure of the violent extremist group

Enablers of radicalisation to violence in prison and Identifying VE recruitment efforts



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Enablers of radicalisation to violence in prison

- The main factors that can drive, or create opportunities for radicalisation to VE in prison, are as follows:
 - *Ideology*: Exposure to an ideology that sanctions or legitimises violence, often by providing a compelling but fabricated narrative of contemporary politics and recent history,
 - *Grievances*: A range of grievances, some real and some imagined, to which there may seem to be no credible and effective non-violent response. This may include attribution of their imprisonment or their treatment in prison to discriminatory policies or efforts by the government to humiliate members of their group,
 - *Charismatic leaders*: Exposure to people or groups who can directly and persuasively articulate an extremist ideology and then relate it to aspects of a person's own background and life history.
 - *Physical and protective needs*: Prisoners may be motivated (or forced) to join a violent extremist group to obtain food, somewhere to sleep, and protection, regardless of whether they identify with to the group's violent extremist ideology or not,
 - *Religion*: Imprisonment can lead to renewal or finding of religious faith. New converts may initially be less well-informed about their faith and may be vulnerable to radicalisers who seek to push a distorted version of theology on them.

Identifying VE recruitment efforts in prisons

- VE recruiters in prisons target or seek out individuals whose attitudes, emotions, preconceptions and motivations match their own.
- Recruiters may also seek to recruit individuals with specific skills (engineers, communications specialists etc) that could be useful to their cause in the longer term.
- A recruiter will assess the political, social or physical interests/concerns of targets that might predispose them to take part VE activities.
- The recruiter may entice the recruit with various gratifications or incentives, such as food, clothing and protection - very similar to grooming.
- Note that recruiters may seek to maintain a low behavioural profile, conforming with the overall prison disciplinary regime and carry out their work quietly or even through surrogates.

Responses to recruitment efforts in prisons



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Responses to recruitment efforts in prisons

- Information and intelligence sharing should be standard, including with external law enforcement partners, to understand VE issue in the prison and to identify and manage any behaviours of concern,
- Intelligence sharing should also be nationally coordinated among prisons and prison authorities,
- Staff working directly with prisoners should be empowered to react swiftly and appropriately to signs of radicalisation and be given tools procedures assess such risks promptly and professionally,
- Where there is evidence of effort at radicalisation to violence VE prisoner/recruiter prompt and decisive action should be taken - May involve moving the individual to another part of the prison or to a different prison completely,
- Prisoners identified as recruiters to VE should be prevented from engaging with other vulnerable prisoners,

Responses to recruitment efforts in prisons - contd

- Highly motivated / educated VE prisoners may present a greater management challenge than prison staff can handle - these should be referred to specialist response staff including psychologists and conflict mediators,
- Prisoners who are the target of VE recruiters should be counselled and where possible diverted from VE related activities and engagements. Diversion programmes should be designed and could include:
 - Counselling, faith guidance, civic engagement and working with support networks
 - Involvement in the prison regime; life skills; mentoring support
 - Cognitive/behavioural therapies; general work on attitudes and behaviours
 - Health awareness and assessing and addressing any physical or mental health issues.
- In some cases, removing the targeted prisoner from the environment could be warranted,
- Targeted prisoners receiving counselling should be regularly reassessed to ensure that diversion activities are effective at an individual level

Reintegration

Reintegration of VE Prisoners into Communities

- Supporting the reintegration of VE prisoners into communities should be a key element in any strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism,
- Individual release plans should identify the VE prisoner's reintegration needs and circumstances, and determine the specific interventions that the prisoner should access in order to maximize their chances for successful reintegration,
- The release plan should evaluate the VE prisoners progress towards more acceptable behaviours, and based on regular individual risk assessments, should move them to progressively less restrictive settings,
- Social reintegration of VE prisoners must be based on a holistic and multidisciplinary approach requiring coordination all stakeholders, including the family and community, civil society organisations and NGO's, public and private institutions such as service providers and potential employers,

Reintegration of VE Prisoners into Communities - contd

- The role of the prisoners family is essential is successful reintegration and they should be included in all steps of the release/reintegration plan,
- Community education and involvement, focussing on (at least) neutral public opinion can ease the reintegration process by ensuring that stigmatisation is minimised to the greatest extent possible,
- It may be necessary in the initial phase to provide the newly released prisoner and their family with additional protection, particularly if public opinion is negative,
- Post release monitoring is an essential element in ensuring successful reintegration and in early detection of recidivism,

Conclusions

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- The broad principles of effective prisoner management of non VE prisoners is also applicable to VE prisoner management,
- However, some distinct challenges, issues, and features associated with VE prisoners, and noted above, require such principles to be nuanced for this particular group of prisoners,
- Prison authorities should use the principles to inform their ongoing design, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs intended to prevent VE recruitment in prisons,
- In each country and prison these principles need to be examined, tested, and refined to enable prison authorities to understand what works in their environment and how successful strategies and programmes can be enhanced to reduce the possibility of VE recruitment in prisons to a minimum.

Head of Unit: Mark Albon
Email: m.albon@commonwealth.int
Tel: +44 20 7747 6540

Presented by: Patricia Crosby
Email: p.crosby@commonwealth.int
Tel: +44 20 7747 6278

Presented by: Assan Ali
Email: assan.ali@commonwealth.int
Tel: +44 20 7747 6539