

Reintegrating Terrorists in the Netherlands: Evaluating the Dutch approach

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Abstract

This article presents an in-depth evaluation of a specialized reintegration initiative within the Dutch Probation Service focused on individuals convicted or suspected of involvement in terrorism. Using 72 interviews with program staff as well as several of their clients, the authors assess the initiative's program theory, its day-to-day implementation and provide a qualified assessment of its overall effectiveness in the 2016 to 2018 period. The results suggest that the initiative is based on a sound understanding of how and why individuals may deradicalize or disengage from terrorism behaviorally, but that it continues to face serious challenges in terms of accurately defining success and systematically gathering objective indicators of its attainment. As terrorism remains a key challenge for societies across the globe, the relevance of these findings extends beyond the Netherlands to all academics, policymakers and practitioners working to design, implement and assess terrorist reintegration programs.

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Introduction

Terrorism² remains a key security concern for societies across the globe, with threats ranging from returned foreign fighters who joined jihadist extremists³ in Syria or Iraq, 'homegrown' elements inspired by groups like Islamic State (IS), and internationally operating terrorist

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² 'Terrorism [is] a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties' (Schmid, 2011, pp. 86-87).

³ Attitudes 'in favour of the use of force to obtain and maintain political power' (Schmid, 2013, p. 10).

networks such as those responsible for the 2015 Bataclan attacks in France (EUROPOL, 2018; Miller, 2018). There is also the underappreciated but highly problematic rise of right-wing extremism and terrorism to contend with (Koehler, 2017b; Mudde, 2017). Against this background, reintegration programs for terrorists and extremists are likely to remain a key element within states' counterterrorism repertoires (Crelinsten, 2014). Such programs are not without the detractors, and a case can be made that the principal response to these issues should focus on criminal prosecution, not reintegration. However, given prosecutors' difficulties with securing sufficient evidence for crimes committed in warzones to ensure lengthy prison sentences (Paulussen & Pitcher, 2018) reintegration initiatives are likely to continue to play a central role in efforts to minimize terrorism-related recidivism (Holmer & Shtuni, 2017).

Independent evaluations of these initiatives are a prerequisite for assessing and improving the design, implementation and effectiveness of reintegration efforts. The enduring scarcity of such assessments, particularly those based on first-hand information, remains a particularly pressing issue (Koehler, 2017a; Silke & Veldhuis, 2017; Sim, 2012; Soufan et al., 2010; Weeks, 2018). The complexity of the issues at stake, the obstacles surrounding the collection of first-hand data and the difficulties of measuring success, mean that considerable work remains to be done. This article contributes to the evidence-based literature on terrorist reintegration programs by detailing the results of a 27-month evaluation of a specialized reintegration initiative run by 'team TER' (Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalization) within the Dutch Probation Service (*Reclassering Nederland*, RN).

Using multiple rounds of interviews with team TER staff and partner agencies such as the Dutch police and public prosecution service, this article evaluates the development of the Dutch reintegration approach between January 2016 and April 2018. It builds on work by Schuurman and Bakker (2016), who evaluated the team's first year of operations in 2012 and 2013. The central research question is to what extent team TER's activities have contributed to a lower chance of recidivism among clients with an extremist or terrorist background. To address it, the evaluation first of all covers the soundness of the assumptions underlying the

program's theory of change, in the sense that it critically reflects on those assumptions by comparing them to the academic literature. Subsequently, the evaluation turns to the initiative's practical implementation and provides a qualified impact assessment.

This paper is expressly intended for academics as well as the policy makers and practitioners who put these programs into practice, who will be able to take valuable lessons learned from the results provided below. The discussion of the evaluation proper is preceded by an overview of the sizeable state-of-the-art on terrorist reintegration efforts, an overview of the Dutch program and a description of the study's methodology.

Key Concepts

Fundamentally, reintegration (or rehabilitation) programs for terrorists strive for disengagement, deradicalization, or both. As the obverse of 'radicalization' and 'engagement in terrorism', subjects still mired in conceptual confusion and poor empirical underpinnings, it is no surprise that widely-accepted definitions are absent (Schmid, 2013; Schuurman & Taylor, 2018). Nonetheless, there is some consensus that disengagement from terrorism entails behavioral change to the effect that an individual no longer participates in or supports this form of political violence. Deradicalization is cognitively oriented, encompassing the gradual dissolution of the extremist worldview that legitimizes and encourages terrorist violence (Ashour, 2007; Bjørge, 2009; Horgan, 2009). People can disengage from terrorism behaviorally without necessarily deradicalizing in a cognitive sense (Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Sukabdi, 2015). Moreover, and particularly interesting for reintegration programs, disengagement can also be initiated *involuntarily*, for instance by removing someone from a terrorist group through arrest and imprisonment (Ferguson, 2011).

How reintegration programs can help bring about disengagement or deradicalization most effectively is still poorly understood. But there is considerable knowledge on the circumstances under which people cease their involvement in terrorism. Similar to involvement, movements away from this form of violence are complex processes driven by

diverse motivations (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Koehler, 2015a). Bjørge (2009) and Altier et al. (2014) usefully distinguish between push factors that drive people from terrorist groups, such as remorse or a flagging belief in the efficacy of violence, and those that pull them out of these entities, for instance the wish to start a family or pursue a different career path. Similar again to involvement in terrorism, disengagement or deradicalization is often presaged by a personal crisis or a critical turning point (Ferguson, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2015; Noricks, 2009).

Disengagement and deradicalization therefore have practical, social as well as ideological dimensions. These different aspects may precipitate but can also *stall* desistance from terrorism. Loyalty to comrades or an inability to see viable alternatives in ‘civilian’ life, are just some potential obstacles to leaving terrorism behind (Bubolz & Simi, 2015; Demant et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2015; La Palm, 2017; Tobor & Shajkovci, 2016; Van der Heide & Huurman, 2016; Yilmaz, 2014). Clearly, disengagement and deradicalization are not just governed by shifting ideological convictions or doubts about the legitimacy of violence (Karpantschhof, 2015). Neither is disengagement only possible at the individual level; it can occur collectively, when entire armed groups, or factions within them, decide to lay down their weapons or seek to address their grievances through non-violent means (Clubb, 2016b; Feddes, 2015).

Two conclusions may be drawn from this brief conceptual discussion. First, reintegration programs should not focus solely on deradicalizing their participants but also see ‘mere’ disengagement as a potentially positive outcome. While abandoning the extremist beliefs that can legitimize and motivate terrorism might seem a more robust way of preventing recidivism, changing deeply-held beliefs is a very difficult undertaking that might not prove feasible in a majority of cases, especially given the practical constraints in terms of time and resources within which reintegration programs operate. Second, whether working towards deradicalization, disengagement or both, programs should have at their disposal a wide array of interventions spanning ideological, social and practical dimensions so that each

participant may be approached in a way that increases their likelihood of actually ceasing involvement in terrorism (Barrelle, 2011; Mullins, 2010; Neumann, 2010).

The Literature on Terrorist Reintegration

Efforts to deradicalize or disengage terrorists can be traced back at least as far as the 1970s (De Vito, 2014; Demant & De Graaf, 2010; Silke, 2011), but have attracted particular attention over the past decade. A fundamental question that this literature poses is whether specialized programs are necessary to begin with. Critics may ask why resources should be allocated to reintegrating terrorists when so many other citizens deserve care (Burke & Collett, 2014; Webber et al., 2018). Such a view may be tentatively supported by the historical record. Most of the 1000s of terrorists imprisoned and released in Europe between the 1960s and 1990s were never specifically ‘deradicalized’ (Silke, 2011). Nevertheless, most appear to have disengaged from terrorism, even if many continue to hold to their radical worldviews (Clubb, 2016a; Ferguson, 2016; Joyce & Lynch, 2017; Reinares, 2011). Similarly, Barrelle (2015) and Horgan (2014) point out that some extremists will cease on their own accord, and Bovenkerk (2011) claims that terrorists are generally much less likely to recidivate than ‘regular’ criminals to begin with. Beyond questions of necessity, reintegration programs have also been criticized for being counterproductive and potentially stigmatizing towards minority communities (Pettinger, 2017).

Generally, however, reintegration programs are seen as key elements within efforts to minimize terrorism-related recidivism (Entenmann et al., 2016; Gunaratna & Rubin, 2011; Horgan & Altier, 2012; Rosland, 2017; Schuurman & Van der Heide, 2016). Moreover, while recent history does suggest that specific reintegration programs for terrorists are not always a prerequisite for their successful reintegration, the role of key structural-level changes that occurred in the 1990s must be kept in mind. The onset of war-weariness in Northern Ireland allowed negotiations to be successful (Schuurman, 2013), and the blow dealt to the ideological underpinnings of many ‘new-left’ terrorist groups by the fall of the USSR proved

fatal to most of these groups (Rapoport, 2004). No fundamental reconsideration of jihadism appears to be within grasp, meaning that convicted jihadists will not be released into an environment in which the pillars propping up their worldview have suffered a crucial setback (Hegghammer, 2016; Maher, 2016). Recent empirical work has also questioned the notion that terrorists are less likely to recidivate than other types of criminals (Altier et al., Forthcoming).

While specialized reintegration programs for terrorists are generally seen as necessary, a recurrent concern is the lack of in-depth and independent evaluations. As a result, there are few objective ways of assessing if these initiatives work, or highlighting particular interventions as more or less effective than others (Gielen & Junne, 2008; Hannah et al., 2008; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Ilardi, 2010; Koehler, 2017a; Morris et al., 2010). Several authors have made suggestions on how such evaluations could be conducted (Gielen, 2017, 2018; Kutner, 2016; Romaniuk & Fink, 2012; Williams & Kleinman, 2014), or how reintegration programs might usefully be designed (Hayter, 2016; Mitchell, 2017; Scott, 2016; Veldhuis, 2012). Welcome as these efforts are, theorizing about designing and evaluating reintegration programs for terrorists still outstrips the actual number of evaluations being carried out.

Although in-depth evaluations remain rare, exploratory work outlining the numerous reintegration programs that have been deployed worldwide has increased significantly in recent years. Interestingly, in a field sometimes critiqued for being too Western-centric (Jarvis, 2016), much of this work is focused on Asia (Banlaoi, 2017; Basit, 2015; Gunaratna & Bin Alli, 2015; Hamidi, 2016; Hettiarachchi, 2018; Kamaruddin et al., 2017; Suratman, 2017; Zhou, 2017) and the Middle East (Gunaratna et al., 2011; Kaya, 2016). North America (Ahmad, 2017; Berkell, 2017; Jacoby, 2016) and especially Europe (Demant & De Graaf, 2010; Demant et al., 2008; Elshimi, 2017; Götsch, 2017; Mucha, 2017) are also well-covered. There are also numerous useful global and regional overviews of reintegration initiatives (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009; Bell, 2015; Ciluffo et al., 2014; El-Said, 2012, 2015; Hill, 2016; Koehler, 2017c; Mabrey & Ward, 2009).

Moving significantly beyond these descriptive efforts has proven difficult, although this statement must be carefully qualified. Considerable in-depth work has been done on whether prisons are settings particularly conducive to both radicalization and deradicalization or disengagement efforts (Decker & Pyrooz, 2018; Hamm, 2013; C. R. Jones, 2014; Neumann, 2010; Silke & Veldhuis, 2017; Veldhuis, 2016). Moreover, the post-detention experiences of (former) terrorists or extremist detainees, and the efforts made to reintegrate them outside of a prison environment, have begun to attract considerable attention (Barrelle, 2015; Weggemans & De Graaf, 2017; Wilkinson, 2014). Nevertheless, Feddes and Gallucci (2015) found that only 12% of the 55 evaluation-focused manuscripts written in the 1990-2014 time frame is based on primary data, a prerequisite for reliable and in-depth assessments. As these 55 studies covered a broader range of preventative efforts than reintegration programs specifically, the situation appears all the more problematic. Why have reintegration programs proven so difficult to evaluate in depth?

The problem is in part a practical one. The controversial nature of terrorist reintegration programs, and the hesitancy on behalf of many government administrators to expose them to outside scrutiny, can make it difficult for researchers to gain the necessary access (Mastroe, 2016; Thornton & Bouhana, 2017). Another issue is the difficulty of defining what ‘success’ means in this context (Irwin, 2015; Marsden, 2015, 2017; Weeks, 2018) and making it measurable (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Rabasa et al., 2010). For instance, when can someone be considered sufficiently ‘deradicalized’ and how would that be reliably measured?

Nevertheless, the number of partial or in-depth evaluations of terrorist reintegration programs has grown and especially so in recent years. The Webber et al. (2018) study deserves particular mention for being the first quantitative evaluation of the efficacy of deradicalization interventions. They found that increasing participants’ sense of personal significance, for instance by providing them with education or professional skills training, increased the likeliness of successful deradicalization. Additionally, numerous qualitative evaluations have recently been conducted. These frequently complement secondary-sources

based analysis with interviews with program staff, participants or both, providing important practice-based insights (Barkindo & Bryans, 2016; Cherney, 2018a, 2018b; Duvall et al., 2012; Istiqomah, 2012; Koehler, 2015a, 2017d; Merz, 2017; Suarda, 2018; Sutrimo et al., 2016; Weeks, 2018; Weggemans & De Graaf, 2017).

For instance, Bastug and Evlek (2016) collected data on the disengagement rates among participants in a Turkish reintegration program, indicating that left-wing and faith-based extremists are least likely to disengage. In the UK context, Elshimi (2017) concluded that reintegration practitioners have differing views on what deradicalization looks like, again underlining the need to clearly stipulate what success means. Azam and Fatima (2017) found that a Pakistani program that claimed a high success rate was in fact suffering from lack of funding and a shortage of staff, especially religious experts. Its apparent success stemmed from an admission policy that excluded hardcore militants with blood on their hands. These kinds of findings, critical though they may be, are absolutely essential to improving the design and implementation of reintegration efforts.

To that end, several authors have begun to collate best practices. These include the need for extensive post-release care alongside surveillance and deterrence capabilities, the importance of including family members in reintegration efforts, ensuring sufficient public support for reintegration programs, using independent clerics to conduct religious deradicalization interventions, the utility of dialogue-based interventions to challenge extremist convictions, and the potential to use financial incentives to instigate and ensure continued desistance (Aarten et al., 2018; Combes, 2013; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Johnson, 2009; M. Jones, 2013; Koehler, 2015b). Authors have also stressed the importance of establishing good working relationships between program staff and clients, the need to offer tailor-made approaches and the necessity of effective cooperation between all parties involved in reintegration efforts (Demant et al., 2009; Moghaddam, 2009; Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; Speckhard, 2011; Stern, 2014; Williams & Lindsey, 2014).

The importance of evaluating reintegration efforts is increasingly acknowledged by academics as well as the governments that frequently sponsor or run these initiatives

(Mastroe, 2016). At the same time, a few notable exceptions notwithstanding, the detailed evaluations necessary to effectively design, implement and assess reintegration efforts are still few and far between. Unless this shortcoming is addressed head-on, reintegration programs' effectiveness will be suboptimal, which is unacceptable given their vital role within terrorism prevention efforts. This study fits within that effort by providing an in-depth qualitative evaluation based on primary data gathered over a 27-month period, making it the largest study of its kind in terms of interviewees and length known to the authors.

An Overview of the Dutch Reintegration Program

In 2012, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) and the Dutch Probation Service (RN) developed a plan to improve the reintegration of extremist offenders in the Netherlands. This initiative was intended to a) improve efforts made to reintegrate terrorist prisoners while still in detention, b) provide better aftercare upon their release, and c) create a central and coordinated approach for dealing with this offender class in the future. This latter point stems from the fact that three separate organizations are involved in probation and parole work in the Netherlands, that clients are allocated to units within these organizations based on where they are incarcerated or live rather than the expertise (or lack thereof) of those units to work with a particular type of criminal offenders, and because a wide range of stakeholders are involved in reintegration efforts, ranging from municipalities to the police, the security and intelligence service AIVD, the public prosecution service, mental healthcare providers, etcetera.

As part of RN, team TER has a legal mandate to work with people suspected or convicted of involvement in terrorism-related criminal offenses. These individuals might be assigned to RN oversight as part of a probationary sentence awaiting trial, or, as is more likely with team TER's particular group of clients, when incarcerated individuals are coming up for release on parole. Additionally, individuals under regular RN oversight for non terrorism-related crimes who are flagged as showing signs of radicalization or potential involvement in

terrorism-related offenses can also be assigned to team TER. Like their colleagues within the broader RN organization, team TER staff has two primary tasks; assessing and reporting on recidivism risk and suggesting strategies to minimize it, and supervising clients to put these mitigation strategies into practice.

To carry out these tasks, team members have access to all of the tools available to RN as an organization. These include risk-taxation instruments (e.g. ‘RISc’ and VERA-2R),⁴ specific guidelines and protocols for working with parolees and probationers, as well as oversight measures such as electronic (GPS) monitoring systems. There are also several aspects that are unique to the team’s work. Every TER-client is supervised by two staff members (‘duo approach’) in order to increase assessment accuracy. Moreover, the team holds bi-weekly meetings to exchange knowledge, share experiences and discuss best ways forward with particular clients, and often invites external speakers to increase the team’s subject-matter expertise. Additionally, team members receive additional training, for instance on engaging in dialogue on matters of ideology. The team also utilizes a specific radicalization risk-assessment tool and cognitive skills trainings, discussed in more detail later on.

Another important difference is that the traditional distinction between assessment and supervision work is suspended, meaning that team-TER staff do both based on the idea that this will allow them to most effectively build rapport and assess their clients. The team also begins work with incarcerated clients at an earlier stage than the usual 105 days prior to release or probation as another way to increase their work’s effectiveness. To cover the costs incurred by team TER staff spending many more hours working with their clients than is available for ‘regular’ assessment or oversight work, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security provides annual funding.

⁴ For further details on these risk taxation instruments, please see <https://www.cep-probation.org/risk-assessment-dutch-way-scalable-easy-use-tool-probation-reports/>.

When the specialized RN program got underway in early 2013, it consisted of five staff members and two employees providing managerial assistance. As of August 2018, it had grown to 14 staff members supported by two managers, and specialized expertise provided by theologians. As of August 2018, the team had played a role in the assessment or supervision of 189 clients suspected of or sentenced for terrorism-related offenses. By contrast, during its first year of operation from 2012 to 2013, the TER-team supervised only five clients.

Spurred by the conflict in Syria, 32 new clients came to the team's attention in both 2014 and 2015. These were mainly individuals who had been stopped from travelling to Syria or Iraq, as well as several returnees and facilitators of such travels who operated out of the Netherlands. At 17, a significant portion of 2015's new clients were individuals sentenced for 'regular' criminal offenses but who showed signs of radicalization and thus came to the TER-team's attention. The peak year in terms of new referrals was undoubtedly 2016, with 53 new clients. Of these, 14 were 'regular' clients who showed signs of radicalization as well as a new category of individuals characterized by apparent mental-health issues. The number of new referrals declined somewhat in 2017 and 2018, with 39 and 24 new clients being reported for those years respectively.

According to internal documents (Reclassering Nederland, 2017), the team's clients were between 16 and 52 years of age (average age 29) and with young adults between 20 and 24 years of age being the most prevalent cohort. At 87%, a majority of clients were male. A small number of individuals did not finish high school, suffered from slight mental handicaps (i.e. low IQ) or suffered from psychiatric problems. Some had completed intermediate vocational education, but most had attained higher general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university education (VWO). Table 1 provides an overview of the sample demographics (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Sample demographics⁵

Age	Minimum	16	Charge	Returned foreign fighter	14%
	Maximum	52		Attempted travel to Syria / Iraq	29%
	Average	29		Preparing terrorist attack	14%
				Incitement/ recruitment	11%
Gender	Female	13%		Financing terrorism	4%
	Male	87%		Threat with terrorist intent	8%
				Regular criminal offenders	31%

In terms of the crimes for which they had been convicted or suspected of, 14% were returned foreign fighters, 29% had attempted to travel abroad as such, 14% had engaged in preparatory acts for a terrorist attack, 11% had engaged in incitement or recruitment, 4% financed terrorism, 8% had made threats with terrorist intent and 31% had come to team-TER's attention through 'regular' RN colleagues who began to suspect their own clients of extremist views or terrorist involvement.⁶ The rapid growth of team TER reflects the persistent and increased threat posed by extremism and terrorism in the Netherlands between 2012 and 2018. It also underlines the importance of using evaluations to ensure that a program of this size, and with the potential to influence a sizeable number of terrorists and extremists, is as effective as it can be.

Research Design

The authors utilized the same research design as deployed in their initial evaluation of the Dutch reintegration program. This meant that an evaluation framework as outlined by Nelen et al. (2010) and by Veldhuis (2012) was used to study three aspects of team TER's work. First of all, this entailed uncovering the initiative's underlying 'program theory'; what goals were being pursued, how was their attainment measured and which assumptions were made regarding cognitive and operational logic; that is, the effectiveness and practical feasibility of

⁵ The total surpasses 100% as some clients were suspected or convicted of multiple offenses.

⁶ Ibid.

the measures being employed to attain success. This is essentially about uncovering the ‘casual channels through which specific activities are thought to work to counter radicalisation’ (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018, p. 97). The authors also conducted a process evaluation to assess the day-to-day implementation of team TER’s work.

Finally, a qualified impact evaluation was conducted to assess the program’s effectiveness as perceived by staff members and, whenever possible, participants. While using quantifiable survey instruments to assess metric such as participants’ degree of radicalization over time would have been decidedly preferable, as Webber et al. (2018) have done to great effect, this was infeasible for practical reasons. Principally, the fact that access to program participants could not be guaranteed at the evaluation’s outset. Instead, the possibility of interviewing participants was conditional on staff member(s) judging this to be possible without interfering with program work such as rapport building. In practice this meant that the authors first had to gain the trust of staff members, and then request access to participants for interviews, an approach that ruled out conducting a longitudinal quantitative survey-based study. Instead, the present paper reports on the expert judgments of RN staff and the wider network of organizations involved in the Dutch reintegration efforts regarding the program’s effectiveness.

In order to evaluate team TER’s development over time, three rounds of semi-structured interviews were held. The first interview round took place in May 2016 with the team’s 11 staff members; its two managers, one policy officer, the RN manager overseeing the team’s activities at the national level, three public prosecutors and one NCTV policy advisor. The second round of interviews took place between November 2016 and January 2017 and included 13 staff members (two new colleagues had joined the team), five clients, and three employees of partner agencies closely involved in the reintegration work; the terrorist-wing of the Vught penitentiary, The Hague municipality and the Dutch Institute for Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology (NIFP). A third round was held between May and June 2017 with the same respondents as in the first session. After initial assessment of the collected data, a smaller fourth interview round was held in April 2018 to get a clearer picture of the

cooperation between the RN team and various stakeholders in the reintegration process; namely, the municipalities of Amsterdam, Den Bosch and Venray, and the National Support Centre for Extremism (LSE). Interviews lasted approximately two hours each and a total of 72 were conducted.

To ensure the privacy of all respondents, the start of each series of interviews was presaged by an explanation of their purpose and how they would be used in the larger project. Next, respondents who were willing to cooperate were asked to provide written consent. Among other provisions, this form laid out essentials such as the anonymization of any information provided, ensured their ability to provide feedback on the evaluation to ensure no factual errors or misrepresentations occurred, and it also clarified that the data gathered through the interviews would not be re-used for other projects without their consent.

Closing this section, it is important to underline the authors' position as independent scholars without any conflicts of interest. The NCTV asked the authors to carry out this evaluation and provided the financial compensation necessary to do so, while RN provided access to staff members and, where possible, clients. However, neither NCTV nor RN had any say over the research design, the way the study was conducted or the documentation and publication of the results. This independence was deemed vital for the project's success and carefully maintained throughout.

Results and discussion

The presentation and discussion of the most important results is structured according to the threefold focus on program theory, process evaluation and impact evaluation outlined above.

Program Theory

In terms of the assumptions underpinning team TER's formation, a distinction can be made between operational and cognitive logic (Nelen et al., 2010). Cognitive logic refers to the mechanisms assumed to make a particular policy effective, whereas the operational logic

concerns the degree to which the organization tasked with putting a particular policy into practice is actually suited to do so. Most team TER staff saw success in similar terms as RN as a whole; namely, reducing the likeliness of recidivism. But how this was interpreted in practice varied from the relatively limited aim of ensuring a client adhered to the conditions stipulated for his or her parole or probation (e.g. meeting supervisors on a weekly basis), to attempting to effectuate cognitive deradicalization.

These variations stemmed in part from the different degrees to which clients were assessed as amenable to deradicalization or disengagement, but also from team members' own views on the feasibility of reaching those goals in principle. All TER-staff members agreed that what set their clients apart from regular criminal probationers are the elements of ideology and network. To indicate the role of ideology, one of the team members said about a client:

'He is very preoccupied with his religion, to an extreme degree. The first time I met him [in prison], he had two calluses on his forehead as a result of prayers and he told me that he pushes his head into the ground quite forcefully to show God that he experiences his faith very intensely'.⁷

A core principle underpinning the team's work is their dedication to building a strong working relationship with clients. Establishing a bond of trust is seen as a prerequisite to an effective analysis of the client, their social network and ideological views, and thus as essential to any attempt at recidivism-risk reduction, disengagement or deradicalization. A good working relationship is also seen as enabling team TER to effectively inform partners in the police, public prosecution service and local government. While the dedication to building a good professional bond between staff and clients matches a frequently found recommendation in the literature, putting theory into practice has sometimes proven difficult.

⁷ Interview TER-staff member 2, Utrecht, 2017.

Team TER staff indicate that some clients are so hostile or uncooperative that there is effectively no way of working towards the overarching goal of recidivism prevention. Still, even in those cases, they see value in RN oversight as it does provide at least a modicum of oversight and control over the behavior of individuals who might pose a terrorist threat.

With regard to bringing about disengagement, interventions focused on offering alternatives to extremism through a combination of incentives and prohibitions. For instance, by stimulating clients to enroll in (vocational) education, take on internships or find work, RN staff increased their job market prospects and provided alternative sources of self-esteem and direction in life that would hopefully act as bulwarks against renewed engagement in extremism or terrorism. Simultaneously, prohibitions on meeting former extremist friends, visiting neighborhoods or cities where those networks were still active, or accessing extremist material online, were intended to prevent clients from being pulled back into a radical social milieu. Recognition of both the considerable attractions offered by participation in extremism, such as a sense of adventure and self-esteem, and the need to provide alternatives to those environments as well, corresponds with academic insights into disengagement processes.

Team TER's approach to effectuating deradicalization, whenever deemed appropriate, remains wedded to a narrative approach (Braddock, 2014). The core assumption is that, by getting clients to speak about their convictions, RN staff can begin to subtly challenge the extremist underpinnings of their worldview. One of the respondents said:

'The ideology provides a different starting point for the trajectory with these clients from the start; after all, the client does not view the offense committed as wrong at all, but rather, they view it as something that is justified. With a regular criminal without ideological convictions this is not the case. Our approach therefore focuses very much on triggering doubt and ensuring that clients start asking questions'.⁸

⁸ Interview TER-staff member 10, Den Bosch 2018.

As such, the deradicalization approach does not necessarily focus on changing ideas per se, as the staff members all emphasized how difficult – and in some cases impossible – that is. Nonetheless, they view discussing client’s worldviews as a way ‘to focus on a (different) future perspective (...) with the hope is that someone ends up in a ‘different flow’.⁹ The ideological aspect thus can be characterized as focusing on identity formation and critical thinking skills to enable clients to reflect on their own worldview. Through offering alternative or competing interpretations, the hope is that clients will, over time, begin to question the foundations of views that legitimize and encourage the use of violence. Team TER staff, particularly those who have been there since the initiative’s 2012 start, have received specific training and on-the-job expertise in ideological matters, allowing many of them to engage in such discussions themselves. However, they usually defer to Islamic theologians; external experts brought in to engage with those clients deemed willing to discuss their worldviews. Whereas the use of such external experts attracted some skepticism when the team started in 2012, its members have since come to see the use of theologians as central to the initiative’s overall efforts (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016).

While the overall objective of the TER-program is to reduce recidivism of violent extremist offenders (which is viewed as a behavioral outcome), the focus on ideology seems somewhat paradoxical. When asked how to bring about disengagement, one of the team members said they try to do so through ‘creating distance between the person and their extremist worldview and extremist network’.¹⁰ As such, the TER-team does not view a behavioral outcome as contingent on deradicalization per se but rather, as providing a larger chance at long-term success when the client distances himself from extremist ideologies and influence.

Overall, the program’s operational logic is predicated on pragmatism and flexibility. By embracing both disengagement and deradicalization as means of achieving the overall goal of recidivism prevention, and deploying them if and when they are deemed suitable,

⁹ Interview TER-staff member 3, Interview R1-3, Den Haag 2016.

¹⁰ Interview TER-staff member 6, Utrecht 2017

team TER's work takes a broad perspective on the factors that may lead to desistance from terrorism and extremism. By avoiding a one-sided focus on either disengagement or deradicalization as the only suitable way to minimize recidivism risk, the team has a set of tools at their disposal that enable the personalized approach so often deemed essential to reintegration success. Team TER's assumptions regarding bringing about disengagement and deradicalization are thus theoretically sound, but the evaluation of the initiative's operational logic also revealed two important issues linked to a key point in the literature review. Namely, that there are plentiful ideas about how to make disengagement and deradicalization work, but little empirical data on the degree to which they actually do so.

The vaguely delineated overall goal of recidivism prevention makes assessing the program's success distinctly subjective. Defined in a narrow sense, for instance, success does not require any progress towards disengagement or deradicalization, but simply that clients make it through their designated period of parole or probation without reoffending. Secondly, team TER does not systematically collate metrics that could be used to provide a quantifiable measure of effectiveness. Clients are not subjected to longitudinal structured risk-assessment to assess the development of, for instance, their views on the legitimacy of terrorism. Neither is recidivism tracked once clients are no longer subject to RN oversight. As a result, the efficacy of the interventions underpinning the program's operational logic cannot be assessed empirically. This underlines a similar conclusion noted after the program's first year of operations, in early 2014, and thus points to the presence of a key and enduring obstacle not so much in the Dutch program's design, but its implementation. This will be explored in more detail as part of the process evaluation.

Assessment of the program's operational logic leads to more straightforward conclusions. When team TER was first envisioned in 2012, the operational logic assumed that RN was the most suitable Dutch agency for undertaking reintegration work and that the team would be able to grow into an independently-functioning group of experts recognized as such by key partners such as the police and public prosecution service. Given that RN's *raison d'être* is working to minimize recidivism, assumptions about its organizational suitability for

carrying out specialized reintegration-focused work were, then as now, deemed to be well-founded. But Schuurman and Bakker (2016) also noted that the program's first year revealed that it had not yet gained the necessary visibility and reputation among partner agencies to always ensure their effective cooperation. Through interviews with such partner agencies, the current evaluation established that this obstacle has been overcome. RN's team TER is widely recognized as having relevant expertise and has thus been able to occupy the central role in the Dutch reintegration framework that was originally envisioned.

Process Evaluation

This section considers the practical implementation of the specialized RN initiative. What worked, what obstacles were encountered and how did these issues develop over time? The evaluation uncovered a wide range of topics affecting the program's implementation, both negatively and positively. In the latter category, for instance, the increasing use of theologians who could be 'flowed in' as external experts was repeatedly highlighted. Staff also remarked on the good working relationships within the team; the duo-approach to supervising clients was particularly appreciated, partially because it the staff's sense of safety. The availability of a psychologist for staff to speak with was similarly valued as an effective way of dealing with the stress caused by the job.

Knowing what works well is important for being able to come to best practices, but identifying what needs to be improved is of greater urgency for maximizing program effectiveness. Particularly pressing is the workload team TER staff are confronted with; while the team has grown from two in 2012 to 14 'front-line' employees in 2017, the same time period saw the number of clients jump from five to 189. Unsurprisingly, overwork was a key source of stress and dissatisfaction. Addressing this is not just important for employee health, it is also necessary to guarantee the intensive, personalized approach to client reintegration that is at the program's heart. Doing so, however, will likely prove challenging from a financial perspective. When team TER was launched in 2012, it was provided with a virtual financial 'carte blanche' by the NCTV to make sure staff could spend as much time with

clients as was deemed necessary. This arrangement has not persisted, however, and the team was faced with persistent financial shortages, arising in part from the use of external experts such as the theologians who carry out an important part of the deradicalization interventions. New arrangements with the Ministry of Justice and Security are, however, intended to alleviate this problem.¹¹

Another set of practical challenges concerns client oversight and information sharing. Tools such as electronic monitoring of clients' locations using GPS allows RN staff to verify that they are not in areas forbidden to them as part of the terms of their parole or probation, intended for instance to ensure they do not meet with former comrades in extremist groups. Similarly, social media prohibitions are intended to ensure clients do not consume or disseminate extremist propaganda or to enforce a contact ban with other extremists. The trouble lies in actually verifying that these conditions are being met. GPS monitoring, for instance, is not available in real-time but requires RN staff to piece together where clients were in hindsight and this is a time-intensive procedure. That is even more so the case for social-media monitoring, for which staff does not have access to specialized tools. Moreover, the legal basis for what RN can and cannot monitor in this respect is unclear, as are the conditions under which such information may be shared with partner agencies such as the police.

While RN's assumptions about disengagement and deradicalization appear to have been translated into a theoretically effective set of tools, their practical implementation has proven challenging. In terms of effectuating disengagement, providing suitably exciting and meaning-giving alternatives to groups like IS, where participants can reinvent themselves as holy warriors fighting an apocalyptic battle against the forces of evil, is no small task.

¹¹ The TER team faced two separate financing issues: (1) the use of a theologian for clients could not be covered from the usual (Ministry) budget for external interventions in the reintegration process as it did not qualify as psychological care; and (2) the TER-team works with two people per client rather than one (as they would with regular criminal offenders), however the internal software used by Probation Netherlands does not allow two TER-team staff to write hours 'simultaneously' as it were. From 2018 onwards, arrangements have been made with the Ministry of Justice and Security that allow for both the financing of the theological expertise as well as the dual-approach.

Especially when the alternatives on offer, such as nine-to-five jobs or schoolwork, are considerably more mundane. Team TER also faces the challenge of providing an alternative to the (former) extremist network of their clients, which more often than not include family members and friends. In response, five team TER staff received training in the use of ‘Inclusion’,¹² a cognitive skills method specifically adapted to address recidivism risk among extremist clients (Verweij et al., 2016).

Moreover, the team investigated whether the Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) method, originally designed for facilitating the reintegration of sex-offenders by having citizen volunteers supervise them, could be adapted to their specific clients (Wilson et al., 2007). Finally, team TER has been trained in the use of the VERA-2R instrument, intended to assess the degree to which an individual represents an extremism or terrorism-related risk (Pressman et al., 2016).

To date, the outcomes, let alone the effectiveness, of these tools and interventions have proven mixed. In late 2017, RN’s national-level management decided to discontinue the CoSA experiment, citing a drain on organizational resources out of step with the relatively small group of clients. Moreover, some team TER staff indicated that extremist clients are often not as socially isolated than sex offenders, making them much less inclined to work towards the acquisition of new social networks. While the VERA-2R instrument makes an objective risk assessment possible, respondents indicated uncertainty about its day-to-day applicability despite being trained in its use. Its implementation was perceived as necessitating gathering so much information as to make it too time-intensive to deploy. As a result, a tool which could be used to improve the systematic gathering and monitoring of information on client’s terrorism-related recidivism risk is left underused.

The role of extremist ideology is often apparent from the first conversations team members have with their clients, and it influences all aspects of their work. For instance, many clients fail to see their behavior as wrong or criminal, but instead, view it as justified by

¹² Inclusion is a tailor-made programme that consists of three modules: practical help, a network approach and cognitive behavioral training. For further details, see https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/11685_en.

their particular convictions. Injecting a sense of doubt, or opening up clients' otherwise black and white worldview to the possibility of 'grey tones', is thus seen as an important aspect of team TER's work. Despite the clearly acknowledged importance of ideology, however, a majority of interviewees indicated that actually addressing their client's convictions too often remained underemphasized. In part this is due to a (perceived) lack of expertise; despite the training provided to them and their experience-based expertise, many team TER staff still felt effectuating cognitive change to be too difficult, or even unattainable, and would rather focus on behavioral change. As a result, the team relies heavily on the support of external theologians. The problem also has an organization aspect, with respondents indicating that whether or not to discuss clients' ideology in the first place was left to the assessment and initiative of staff, rather than being a mandatory aspect of the reintegration trajectory. Implementing a more systematized approach to incorporating deradicalization-focused interventions is therefore an important recommendation.

This latter point deserves further nuance. An interesting finding, noted by one of the team's longest-serving employees, was a trend whereby extremist ideological convictions have become relatively less important as an explanation for clients' involvement in terrorism and extremism. Whereas clients entering the program in its first years (2012-2014) appeared to be strongly driven by their convictions, more recent parolees and probationers' ideology (post 2015) seemed to play a lesser role. Instead, these individuals appeared to be characterized more strongly by their criminal backgrounds and/or their psychological problems. This fits with recent academic work on the so-called 'crime-terror nexus' as a particular aspect of the latest generation of both homegrown jihadists and those who (attempt to) travel to groups like IS in Syria and Iraq (Basra & Neumann, 2017; Thijs et al., 2018). Although the previous paragraph underlined the need for a more systematic approach to deploying reintegration approaches, this finding emphasizes that the *degree* to which they influence a client's reintegration trajectory must remain cognizant of the importance he or she attached to ideology in the first place.

The first evaluation of team TER placed particular emphasis on cooperation between RN and other key stakeholders in the Dutch reintegration process, such as municipalities, police and the public prosecution service. Although RN shoulders the main responsibility for the reintegration of probationers and parolees, close and effective cooperation with partners was seen as fundamental to a successful outcome. Through interviews with those partners, the present evaluation assessed the degree to which this cooperation had evolved. In general, team TER was widely acknowledged as being a key player in reintegration work, occupying a special position on account of its ability to talk about as well as with the clients in question. At the same time, several relationships were difficult or strained and negatively affected the team's work. One challenge for RN is the feeling that they are to some extent used as a last resort. In the words of one of the staff members:

‘When no-one knows anymore what to do with a person, for lack of a better alternative they send him our way. Even when we advise the court against it, a judge can decide to put a client under our supervision. Too often we are being used as the drain of the criminal justice chain’.¹³

The Netherlands has developed a localized approach to dealing with extremism, which means that municipalities are in the driver's seat when it comes to stipulating reintegration trajectories for their citizens. It also means that team TER has to deal with a large number of municipalities, which inevitably reveals differences in partnership effectiveness. Team TER saw cooperation with the cities of The Hague, Arnhem and Delft as particularly effective. On the other hand, as both team TER and local government representatives acknowledged, some municipalities lacked specific expertise on extremism or terrorism, or did not want to acknowledge that they may face such a problem. The municipalities of Den Bosch, Almere and Gouda, as well as several within the province of Limburg were often mentioned in this

¹³ Interview TER-staff member 9, Interview R2-9, Rotterdam 2017.

regard. However, by early 2018 RN staff noted that cooperation with these partners had notably improved. The biggest problem lay with the team's relationship with Amsterdam.

Almost all team TER employees remarked on their difficult relationship with the municipality of Amsterdam. Amsterdam was seen as following its own course, developing very different counter-radicalization initiatives than the rest of the country. While that need not be problematic, TER staff qualified Amsterdam's system as very time-intensive but inefficient and even 'childish', and perceived the municipality's primary concern to be presenting its own approach in a positive light. Amsterdam was seen as keeping partners at a distance while simultaneously being liable to abdicate responsibility for its own approach to one of thirteen local agencies or parties tasked with putting it into practice. The difficult working relationship with Amsterdam was also acknowledged by employees of the NCTV and the public prosecution service. Interviews with representatives of the municipality of Amsterdam indicated few substantive differences with team TER's approach, but pointed to an organizational imbedding that impeded effective cooperation with outside parties. Given Amsterdam's size, its political clout and the issues it faces in terms of addressing extremism, improving its relationship with partners like RN should be given priority. Perhaps most importantly, the city should become less insular and more outward looking to benefit from the considerable expertise parties like team TER have acquired.

In 2015, RN and team TER were joined by the Family Support Center (*Familiesteunpunt*) and 'Exits', two organizations that have since been subsumed in the National Support Center for Extremism (*Landelijk Steunpunt Extremisme*, LSE). The Family Support Center offers advice on dealing with radicalized or radicalizing family members, while Exits provides disengagement and deradicalization assistance. A key difference with team TER is that the LSE operates on the basis of *voluntary participation*; clients are not assigned mandatory LSE oversight by a judge, as is the case with team TER. Whereas team TER works within the Dutch criminal justice system, LSE is usually engaged by municipalities or directly approached by (families of) citizens engaged in extremism.

Because of its similar mandate, LSE has become a competitor of sorts to team TER. In part, as LSE staff concurs, this is due to an unclear mandate including under which circumstances one or the other organization should take the lead. Additionally, because it operates outside of a criminal justice framework, LSE puts the privacy of clients first, making it a difficult party for others engaged in reintegration work to cooperate with as information sharing is impermissible. LSE bills itself as independent from government but receives funding from the NCTV and is currently led by a former employee of that organization, something that is perceived as contradictory by many team TER staff. Another issue is that some clients attempt to exploit the existence of similar organizations with at least partially overlapping mandates, for instance by refusing to work with one or the other or insisting on following the advice given by one party, even if that goes against the wishes of the other. As one of the LSE-staff members indicated:

‘Some clients deliberately play both parties and put them at odds with each other. We call this ‘counter-indication’ – something we mainly see with hardened violent extremists where we get the feeling the main reason for them to accept treatment from us is to gather information rather than to seek help’.¹⁴

An in-depth evaluation of the LSE in terms of its functioning, its mandate and its positioning vis-à-vis other organizations involved in reintegrating extremist and terrorists in the Netherlands is recommended.

Relationships with other partner agencies can be summarized more succinctly. Because police and the public prosecution service also operate on local and regional levels, team TER has to deal with a variety of representatives of these organizations, which invariably leads to fluctuations in the perceived quality of that cooperation. Anecdotal evidence aside, however, cooperation with these agencies appears to be generally effective.

¹⁴ Interview LSE-staff members, 1 and 2, Den Haag 2018.

The NIFP and its forensic psychiatrists are uniformly lauded for their expertise and the good working relationship, even when there are disagreements about a particular client or the best management strategy.

Finally, the NCTV has historically been a key partner for team TER in terms of funding and providing the impetus for its creation. In recent years, however, the relationship has undergone some changes. While RN management perceives cooperation with the NCTV to be functioning well, team TER staff tasked with assessing and supervising clients have seen the NCTV take more of a background role where they would prefer closer cooperation. In terms of subject matter expertise, team TER staff, as well as interviewees from the public prosecution service, found that their NCTV counterparts were often young and inexperienced, while others had the impression that the organization was sometimes more focused on keeping the Minister of Justice and Security ‘out of the wind’, rather than on achieving tangible outcomes. Team TER was always envisioned as evolving to a point where it would be independent of the NCTV’s support, so some of these complaints are simply a matter of adjusting to a new situation. However, the more substantive criticisms will need to be addressed if cooperation with a key partner in the Dutch counterterrorism community is to remain effective.

Impact Evaluation

At first glance, team TER seems to have been effective at achieving its goal of minimizing terrorism-related recidivism. Of the 189 clients that the team has supervised between 2012 and 2018, eight showed terrorism-related recidivism. Another three cases of non terrorism-related recidivism were reported. Compared to research on general recidivism in the Netherlands, which found that, as of 2013, 45,3% of ex-inmates and 56% of juvenile offenders recidivate, team TER’s 4,2% terrorism-related recidivism rate and 5,8% overall recidivism rate appear strikingly low (Weijters et al., 2017). But several important qualifications apply.

First of all, recidivism is only tracked while the client is under RN supervision. What happens after that time is not recorded and thus unknown to the team. Second, a number of clients are under the supervision of the TER-team awaiting their trial, which often leads them to display good behavior with the hope to positively influence the trial. This so-called ‘trial-attitude’ could decrease levels of recidivism during TER-supervision. Third, a number of clients are (re-)incarcerated after TER-supervision which limits levels of recidivism directly after their supervision period. And finally, many of these 189 clients had not yet completed their supervisory periods at the time this research was completed. Especially because terrorism-related offenses tend to carry multi-year probationary periods, it is thus still too early to assess recidivism rates even as measured within the confines of the program.

Strikingly, other parties in the criminal justice system also lack precise recidivism information, or could not share it with team TER or the authors for privacy and confidentiality-related reasons. While the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), part of the Ministry of Justice and Security, collates annual recidivism data, it does not specifically categorize terrorism-related offenses, making that information unsuited to tracking team TER’s clients.¹⁵ A recurring theme in this evaluation, therefore, is that opportunities for objectively quantifying success through a) standardized assessments of client’s terrorism-related recidivism risk or b) tracking their (terrorism-related) recidivism are present but not utilized or only partially so. Although Horgan and Braddock (2010) rightly argue that this metric is susceptible to a variety of biases and therefore remains imperfect, it could function as a rough baseline for assessing reintegration program’s effectiveness. At a national level, comparing extremism-related clients’ recidivism rates to the country’s average could provide an indication of how well the program is doing compared to general reintegration practices. Comparing the terrorism-related recidivism rates of these specialized programs at an international level provides at least some basis for assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses.

¹⁵ <https://www.wodc.nl/cijfers-en-prognoses/Recidive-monitor/>.

Another important obstacle to carrying out an impact assessment is team TER's own varying views on what success looks like in practice. In the absence of more objective metrics, the degree to which a client is deemed at risk of recidivism is assessed based on the professional expertise of the RN staff conducting the assessment and supervision. The staff does not use a model to assess changes in attitudes or behavior, yielding an unhelpful degree of subjectivity to the assessment of the program's success. For instance, team TER staff were found to disagree on whether success depended on an absence of terrorism-related recidivism, or *any kind* of recidivism; a difference with considerable implications for success measurement. Moreover, because many clients were still awaiting the outcome of their trials or appeals, many were perceived as trying to make a good impression for purely instrumental reasons, which further problematizes success-evaluation based on professional judgment as there is a chance that individual team members may be misled or overly pessimistic in their assessments.

Nonetheless, the staff indicated they do follow general principles to determine success with re-offending with terrorist intent being the worst possible outcome and a cooperative attitude towards staff members and progress on indicators such as work, education, housing and social connections are viewed as the most positive outcomes. The TER-staff are also aware of the fact that it is difficult to determine the impact of their own work on a client, as one of the staff members said:

'It is impossible to determine whether a client deradicalized or is disengaged because of the work of RN, or as a result of other (external) factors as well. Expectations should not be too high; after all, this is a difficult group of clients'.¹⁶

In the first evaluation of team TER, Schuurman and Bakker (2016) found that it was too early to draw conclusions on the initiative's success because the number of clients was very small

¹⁶ Interview with TER-staff member 12, Utrecht 2016.

and the program had only just begun. This evaluation concludes that team TER's work appears to be successful when judged by the low recidivism-rates among clients who are still on probation or parole. This is a very important qualification, however, as the lack of data on whether clients recidivate *after* RN stops monitoring them is crucial to ascertaining whether the program is able to achieve longer-term success. Moreover, numerous qualifications make the current recidivism rate of 4,2% for clients under team TER's supervision a very soft figure to be interpreted with a considerable degree of reserve.

Additionally, the recidivism statistics do not speak to the deradicalization aspect of the TER-program. Given that aiming to distance a client from their extremist ideas and network is viewed by the TER-staff as one of the main instruments to prevent long-term recidivism, the question remains to what extent the (success of the) deradicalization aspect is reflected in the recidivism rates. Based on the research, it can be concluded that the behavioral aspects of the program, such as assisting clients with finding housing and a job or education and clients' participation in psychological treatment programs, are both more successful and easier to assess as such compared to the impact of the theological interventions and the interventions aimed at challenging clients' ideology.

Team TER and RN more generally, together with partner agencies such as the police and public prosecution service, are urgently advised to begin collecting more objective information on recidivism in a structured manner so that more reliable and longer-term success-rates can be assessed. Still, the preliminary and qualified impact evaluation presented here does suggest a low risk of terrorism-related recidivism from individuals subjected to team TER oversight.

Conclusion

This study detailed the most important findings from a 27-month evaluation of the Dutch Probation Service's specialized reintegration program for terrorist parolees and probationers.

Although research on terrorist reintegration initiatives has blossomed in the past years, evaluations, particularly those based on primary sources, remain scarce. As such evaluations are critical to the effective design, implementation and assessment of these specialized reintegration efforts, this is a deficiency that urgently needs to be addressed. Based on extensive interviews with program staff, as well as a number of their ‘clients’, this study makes a unique contribution to the creation of an evidence-based body of literature on the evaluation of specialized reintegration programs for terrorists and extremists. Although specifically focused on the Netherlands, the ongoing international terrorist threat makes these findings relevant for the wide range of countries facing the challenge of minimizing the chance of terrorism-related recidivism.

The specialized reintegration program ran by team TER has come a long way since its inception in 2012. Not only has the program undergone remarkable growth, going from five to 189 clients as of August 2018, it has been able to occupy the central position in the Dutch constellation of agencies involved in reintegration work originally envisioned for it. The cognitive and operational logic underpinning its work is sound, the working relationships within the team are rated positively, as are, for the most part, those with other partners involved in reintegration work. Overwork, budgetary challenges, a lack of systematically deployed deradicalization interventions, a complicated relationship with the municipality of Amsterdam and the LSE; these are examples of numerous challenges that need to be addressed to increase the program’s effectiveness and lessen the professional and personal burden placed on staff members. But none of these are likely to have long-term adverse effects comparable to the ongoing inability of objectively assessing the effectiveness of team TER’s work in general and specific interventions in particular.

Like its predecessor, this evaluation noted RN’s lack of a specific target in terms of what recidivism rate would be deemed a success. This precludes effective outcome measurement and leaves the impact evaluation too dependent on the subjective interpretations of program staff. Aside from an imprecise definition of success, the program is held back by a lack of access to data on clients’ long-term recidivism rates that could provide an, albeit

imperfect, baseline for judging program effectiveness. Currently, however, recidivism rates are only tracked while clients are under RN supervision, leaving it unclear whether they re-engage in terrorism-related activities once no longer under the probation service's watchful eye. Finally, while team TER has been trained in a risk assessment tool specifically tailored to terrorism, it is not systematically applied. This robs the team of one of the few tools they have of objectively charting terrorism-related recidivism risk among their clients.

Systematically gathering quantifiable data on the risk of terrorism-related recidivism is likely to be the foremost challenge for reintegration programs; not just in the Netherlands, but worldwide. Much of this work will fall on agencies like RN, but responsibility must also be shouldered by partners with access to information on recidivism-rates like the police, the public prosecution service or national counter-terrorism coordinating agencies. Just as important is maintaining an ongoing discussion between researchers and practitioners. While the measurement of success in terrorism reintegration efforts will remain a difficult undertaking subject to various confounding influences, ultimately too much depends on it for research not to engage in such work. If the research and policy communities are to avoid asking the same questions of efficacy in ten years' time, a turn to more quantitative evaluations of terrorist reintegration programs needs to be embraced.

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