

Running head: COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: THE PRAC STRATEGY

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAVEN

COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREVENTION, REHABILITATION, AND AFTER-CARE  
STRATEGY (PRAC)

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR of PHILOSOPHY CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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April, 2016

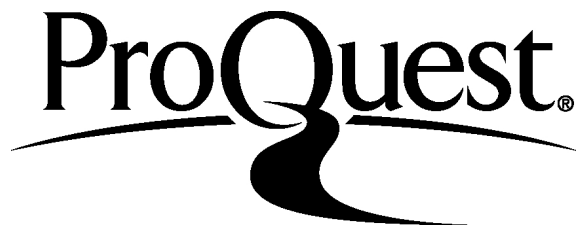
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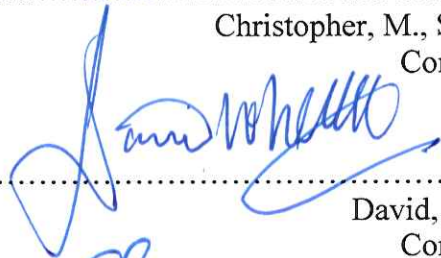
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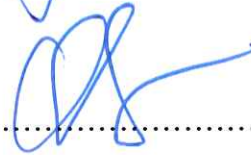
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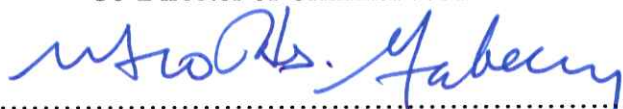
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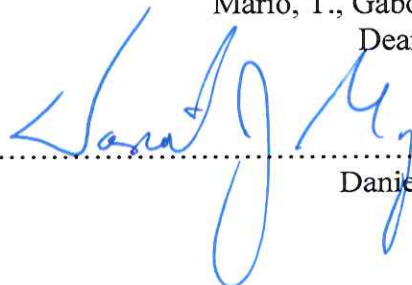
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**DEDICATION**

To all my loved ones: past, present and future

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey towards achieving any Ph.D. is long and challenging yet thrilling nonetheless. I truly believe that I would not be where I am today without the help of the many I have encountered along the way. Indeed, recognition and appreciation is in order. I would like to first and foremost thank The Almighty for giving me good fortune and strength.

Also, I cannot thank enough the leadership of the MOI, beginning with HRH Prince Mohammed bin Naif, the Deputy Crown Prince and Minister of Interior, and the countless dedicated professionals at the ministry who saw the value in supporting this research project. For the latter, anonymity comes with the territory, however your efforts will always be remembered. And among them are the numerous MBNCCC officials who were kind enough to share their time and experiences – your passion was infectious.

Unquestionably, the completion of this project would not have been possible without the unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement I received from my committee. Thank you Dr. Stoffer, Dr. Sedelmaier, Dr. Webb, Dr. Haynes and of course Dr. Gaboury. I could not have accomplished this without you all.

To the graduate faculty at UNH, who not only assisted me throughout this academic journey, but also took the time to provide important input and knowledge – thank you for making this study that much stronger.

To Dr. Ward, may he rest in peace, who passed away before the completion of this study. He was, and will remain, in the hearts of many for all his good deeds, vision, and steadfast support for those he saw himself in – thank you.

Last, and most certainly not least, to my loving family. The sacrifices you made have not gone unnoticed. Thank you for being there.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

### ABSTRACT

Countries across the globe have faced numerous challenges arising from Al-Qaida affiliated terrorist groups. One such challenge is in how to address the threats posed by the growing number of terrorists in their custody. Accordingly, a handful of countries have responded by developing prison based “deradicalization” and disengagement programs. One program that has gained considerable media attention is the Saudi Ministry of Interior’s Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

The present study explored PRAC on site and in-depth using a mixed method *sequential explanatory design – follow-up explanations model*. Stage one utilized an *interrupted time series* design to empirically examine if a relationship exists between the introduction of the PRAC strategy and a decrease in terrorist related activities within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Here, monthly counts of terrorist related operations were collected three years prior to the PRAC strategy’s introduction and three years afterwards. Stage two adopted a *single case study* design using semi-structured interviews with MOI policy-makers and PRAC strategy officials to gain insight into strategy objectives, components, and implementation. Moreover, the subsequent qualitative analysis helped explain the quantitative data through coding and theme development. The results of the quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant decrease in both terrorism and Saudi security casualties after PRAC implementation. Furthermore, the qualitative interviews and ensuing analysis provided a much deeper insight into the PRAC strategy, *how* it reduced terrorism, and *why* the strategy worked based on several emergent themes. Policy recommendations and directions for future research are also discussed. With these results, this study hopes to add to the existing, yet limited, knowledge the field has in respect to these types of programs, and comes at a time when the threats from AQ affiliated terrorist groups appear to be on the rise.

*Keywords:* terrorism, disengagement, deradicalization, risk reduction, Al-Qaida, mixed method, Saudi Arabia

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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Countering terrorism has become a major concern for policy-makers across the globe since the Al-Qaida (AQ) attacks on September 11, 2001 on several American landmarks. The actions and reactions taken have achieved partial success in defeating the core group of perpetrators, yet the threat has evolved and has since increased (Walsh, 2015). Today, AQ affiliated and inspired groups such as Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, *Daesh* (also known as ISIL or ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Humud et al., 2014) have wreaked havoc in their home countries and beyond. In dealing with these new threats, countries have continued to exercise the traditional “kinetic” operations to countering terrorism leading to the killing and capturing of AQ members and its affiliates. Yet the capturing of these members has presented additional challenges for the security and intelligence agencies of these countries – how to mitigate the threat within the prison systems holding them and reducing the risk they present upon release. To meet these challenges, countries – namely Muslim ones – have developed innovative approaches to address both of these challenges. For example, “deradicalization” and disengagement programs have emerged and have shown a certain degree of effectiveness – but questions still remain on how these countries define success, how they measure it and how is it achieved (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). In order to accurately respond to these questions, a closer look at the extant research on terrorism research past and present must take place. Moreover, researchers need to critically examine the practicality (and validity) of the policy recommendations produced to better counter AQ related terrorism. Unquestionably, for decades, researchers have grappled with the question of what causes terrorism and who the terrorists truly are, and accordingly, the best ways to counter both.

Yet, and as Horgan (2014) warns, the terrorism problem “is either mysteriously complex, or devastatingly clear” (p. 166). And even as the study of terrorism continues to grow, gaps in knowledge remain. It is these gaps that must be filled.

### **9/11 and the Global War on Terror**

The 9/11 attacks on the US homeland by AQ was the most devastating terror attack on US soil. Al-Qaida, or the base, successfully struck two of Americas’ most visible pillars of power: the Pentagon and the World Trade Center leaving 2,997 innocent victims from 80 different states dead (Schmid, 2005). The attack on the World Trade Center alone was one of the deadliest ever recorded.<sup>1</sup> These “acts of war” (National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, White House, 2003) compelled the US and the international community to unite to better confront this latest manifestation of terror.

Indeed, the threat posed by AQ pushed countries near and far to come forward and clearly articulate where they stand – States were either with the US or with the terrorists.<sup>2</sup> The attacks were an ominous warning of the changing security landscape forcing the US to address the terrorist threat from a different, and more aggressive, optic. In response, the US abandoned its previous reactive strategy to one of prevention and preemption (Steinberg, O’Hanlon, & Rice, 2002). This was a major shift in thinking considering that the US has been a major target of terrorism at home and abroad, by different ideologically motivated groups, for years (Hoffman, 2006). In retrospect, AQ’s latest act of terror appeared to be the most destructive in a series of escalating and provocative attacks within the US and against its interests abroad. Examples include: the 1992 bombing of a hotel in Yemen where nearly 100 US military personnel were in

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<sup>1</sup> In Rwanda, Hutu militants attacked a church in 1994 leaving nearly 1100 dead.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Bush Address to the Joint Session of Congress and the American People on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Retrieved from the <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

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route to Somalia to participate in Operation Restore Hope;<sup>3</sup> the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 where six people were killed and nearly 1,000 injured (Parachini, 2000); AQ's involvement in the infamous "Black Hawk Down" incident in Mogadishu in 1993 where 18 US servicemen died (Larson & Savych, 2005); in 1994 in Riyadh, where an attack on the Saudi National Guard left seven US personnel dead; the bombing in 1996 of the Khobar Towers in eastern Saudi Arabia,<sup>4</sup> a facility that housed US military advisors resulted in 19 killed and over 400 injured (Reidel & Saab, 2008); the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania where 224 people lost their lives (including 12 Americans) and injured nearly 4,500 (Ploch, 2010); and the 2000 US U.S.S. Cole suicide attack off the coast of Yemen that left 17 American sailors killed in addition to severely damaging the vessel (Rollins, 2011).<sup>5</sup> Indeed the threat was real, yet these earlier attacks by AQ led to what would be considered a limited military response –<sup>6</sup> not the full scale global mobilization that AQ and its leadership could have ever imagined (Sageman, 2008).

To many, 9/11 was a different type of attack occurring at a different time in global politics. For the world watching with horror, any perception of US vulnerability needed to be wiped away. The stage was set with what was to become the longest war in US history. US president George W. Bush unequivocally stated that:

We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of

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<sup>3</sup> Arguably, this was considered the first AQ terrorist attack against US interests abroad. The operation was "unsuccessful" considering no US military personnel were present at the time of attack.

<sup>4</sup> Others note that an Iranian proxy terrorist group committed the Khobar Towers attack. See Michael Morrell's (2015) *The Great War of Our Time: The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism – From al Qaeda to ISIS*.

<sup>5</sup> It has been observed that AQ has been able to successfully attack the US by land, sea and air.

<sup>6</sup> Less than two weeks after the US embassy attacks in the Horn of Africa, president Clinton ordered the launching of cruise missiles against targets in Afghanistan (training camps) and the Sudan (it was believed that Bin Laden was using a pharmaceutical plant to produce chemical weapons there). No ground forces were reportedly deployed. See the *9/11 Commission Report*.

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action. And this nation will act. (US National Security Strategy, the White House, 2001, P. 11)

On September 18, 2001, president George W. Bush signed into law the joint resolution for the Authorization of the Use of Force (AUF) (Department of Defense Fact Sheet, 2002) paving the way for a multinational effort, underpinned by a new US strategy for combatting terrorism, which sought to ultimately defeat, deny, diminish terrorist organizations and to defend the homeland (US National Security Strategy, the White House, 2001). The Global War on Terror (GWOT) began in earnest on October 7, 2001 with air strikes against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and those who provide sanctuary for them – namely the Taliban in Afghanistan (Katzman, 2015). A *coalition of the willing*, comprised of 69 countries, was formed and participated in what was to be known as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Initially, over 16,000 combat troops were involved in roles ranging from support and logistics, to the actual execution of military strikes.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, and for the first time in the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Article 5 was invoked calling on all NATO members to act in defense of one of its members (Post, 2008). Over 31,100 troops from NATO member states participated in what would be known as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). But it was the US that was clearly leading the fight. At its highest troop level, the US had an estimated count of over 100,000 troops on the ground (Whitlock, 2012)

This overwhelmingly military campaign placed enormous amounts of pressure on the AQ leadership and that of the Taliban flushing them out of Afghanistan and into the Federally Administered Tribal (FATA) regions along the border of Pakistan (Zaidi, 2010). High ranking leaders in the organization such as the number three man Mohammed Atef, also known as Abu Hafs Al-Masri; Abu Zubaydeh, the head of recruitment and personnel; and 9/11 mastermind

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Khaled Sheikh Mohammed were either killed or captured (Post, 2008). The latter was captured by the US Central Intelligence Agency in Pakistan and transferred to the detention center at Guantanamo Bay (Filkins, 2014). By some accounts, 75% of AQ's core leaderships have been killed (Cronin, 2015). Indeed, international pressure on AQ impeded them from operating freely consequently limiting their ability to plan, train, and execute attacks from abroad. And although it would appear that many AQ operatives have been taken of the battlefield, the threat still remained.

The Global War On Terror (GWOT), grounded in what was to be known as the *Bush doctrine* of prevention and preemption, sought not only to target the tangible, direct and immediate threat emanating from the mountains of Afghanistan, but would also address the imminent threats arising from the region. Policy-makers in the US began looking at the nexus between terrorist networks, state sponsors of terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD's) as a new and more dangerous threat – a threat that was developing and just beyond the horizon. A new focal point in the GWOT was to emerge. Unlike the initial focus on terrorists and those who harbor them, rogue states were now viewed as part of the threat matrix and would not be ignored (Record, 2003). In a speech at the military academy at West Point, President George W. Bush declared that:<sup>8</sup>

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology – when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. (p. 13)

Iraq would become the newest member of the “axis of evil” and in the cross hairs of an impatient and mobilized international community.

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<sup>8</sup> See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington: White House, September 2002.

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Unquestionably, the allegations that Iraq was providing technical support to AQ were a critical turning point that propelled the US and its allies to act. These allegations, along with the West's concern that Iraq was in defiance of 17 Security Council resolutions regarding WMD's, including the 2002 Resolution mandating full declarations and elimination of its WMD programs, only strengthened the resolve of the international community to intervene. With the Iraqi regime failing to heed the demands (and concerns) of the West – the stage was set for yet another long battle (Copson, 2003). On March 19, 2003 the second Gulf War between the West and Iraq commenced, despite reservations by major players such as France, Germany, Russia, and China who favored more time for UN led inspections of Iraq's WMD stockpiles. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) would last almost ten years.

The death toll and injuries for US servicemen and women in these operations was high. Over 6,000 thousand soldiers lost their lives with nearly 52,000 injured (Fischer, 2014). Moreover the cost for both wars, as of 2014, exceeded 1.6 trillion US dollars (Belasco, 2014). The operations conducted in Iraq alone cost US taxpayers 815 billion US dollars. And although costly, it should be noted that the US has not faced a *major* incident on its homeland since the 9/11 attacks.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, claims of *partial* goal achievement were evident in the 2006 National Strategy for Combatting Terrorism (The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, the White House, 2006). For example, in it were assertions that the US has/is:

- Deprived AQ of their safe havens in Afghanistan and is now working with a willing Afghani government to combat terrorism,

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<sup>9</sup> It should also be noted that since 9/11, the US has created (or reorganized) over 260 government organizations. For example, the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Transportation Security Administration, and the National Counterterrorism Center. By some estimates, the total cost for these domestic security improvements reached one trillion dollars. See Priest and Arkin's 2010 report titled *A Hidden World, Growing Beyond Control* at <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/print/>.

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- Significantly degraded the AQ network and the neutralization of most of those involved in the 9/11 attacks,
- Fighting terrorism in Iraq with a multinational coalition supported by a new democratic regime there,
- Disrupting terrorist financing, and
- Peacefully transformed problematic regimes into helpful regimes in the GWOT.

### **The Threat Remains**

Fortunately, AQ has failed to mount a large-scale attack against the US due to the systematic dismantling of the group's leadership; in addition to creating an inhospitable environment in the areas it once operated in. Nevertheless, despite the absence of a major terrorist attack by AQ on US soil, experts agree that even with reduced capabilities to mount large-scale attacks, and while the leadership – including Osama bin Laden – have been pummeled, the group and its affiliates remain a threat (Cronin, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Walsh, 2015). For example, attacks by AQ and its affiliates resulted in over 3,000 persons killed (mostly non-Western) in 313 attacks between 2004 and 2008 (Helfsties, Abdullah, & al-Obaidi, 2009). These attacks were conducted across the globe, for instance:

- Bali in 2002 (and again in 2005) where nearly 200 Australians and Indonesian were killed and some 300 injured (Vaughn et al., 2009),
- Casablanca in 2003 where near simultaneous suicide attacks killed over 40,
- Istanbul in 2003 where an AQ affiliated terrorist group attacked a synagogue killing 25 worshipers,
- Riyadh in 2003 where 34 people were killed in three simultaneous suicide attacks,

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- Madrid in 2004 where a devastating attack on its transportation system left over 190 people dead, and
- London in 2005 where over 50 civilians were killed (Cronin, 2004).

These are but a few examples of AQ's continued lethality. Closer to home, since the 9/11 attacks, over 50 plots have been disrupted, with several culminating in casualties.<sup>10</sup> The latest attack – although not directly attributed to AQ – occurred during the running of the 2013 Boston marathon causing mass casualties (Zuckerman, Bucci, & Carafano, 2013). Lastly, and worth noting, since 2014, the vast majority of the FBI's 900 investigations of homegrown extremists in the US are ISIS related and are occurring in all fifty states.<sup>11</sup>

The GWOT has been fought from a strictly military paradigm. Yet the GWOT is a war against ideologically driven terrorists – an asymmetrical fight against an enemy (and belief) that is both evolving and adapting. Hoffman (2006) notes that AQ has proven nimble and flexible, slowing the initial progress made in the GWOT. Undoubtedly, the successful strikes against AQ in Afghanistan and Iraq have destroyed the critical infrastructure and operational bases there. However, these setbacks forced the group to adopt a less hierarchical organizational structure becoming a constellation of networks composed of independent cells – a “social movement” that is nearly leaderless (Sageman, 2008). Clearly, the threat today has become more diverse and diffuse. The emerging groups adopt the AQ ideology yet have the freedom to operate independently (Humud et al., 2014). For instance, today's *hydra headed* threat has surfaced in the form of Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah, Pakistan's Lashkar e-Taiba, Somalia's Al-Shabaab, Yemen's Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Iraq and Syria's Daesh (ISIL), and North

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, that numerous AQ plots targeting the US homeland have also been thwarted. For example, AQAP's “printer bomb” plot in 2010, and the failed “underwear” bomb attack in 2012.

<sup>11</sup> See the US Congress's Homeland Security Committee's *Terror Snapshot for November 2015* at <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/November-Terror-Threat-Snapshot.pdf>.

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Africa's Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to name a few. Indeed AQ's immediate threat to the US homeland has been met, but beyond the horizon appears to be a new generation of terrorists who continue to espouse the AQ ideology – a false ideology that preaches to its followers (and would be followers) the necessity to defend Islam from the invading powers of the West (Hoffman, 2006). A new AQ has emerged, what some have dubbed AQ 2.0, in which the ideology *inspires* those most vulnerable to join what has been termed the global “*salafi jihadi movement*” – regardless of the presence of an overarching group structure (Post, 2007).

### **Beyond the GWOT**

Arguably, the dependence on purely repressive measures in the GWOT has proven to be ineffective and lacking in long-range vision (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009). As has been noted, the GWOT implies the need for a military response, yet this response has not resulted in *overall* success. Moreover, measuring the success of a concept such as the GWOT in unambiguous ways is fraught with difficulties considering the asymmetric nature of terrorism (Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2011). Additionally, research by LaFree and Dugan (2009) shows that a purely military response to terrorism can have a “backlash effect.” For example, using deterrence as a theoretical underpinning for examining counterterrorism policies in the UK, research has found that increased severity of punishments actually increased terrorist acts in most of the cases examined (LaFree, Dugan, & Korte, 2009). della Porta (2009) notes that harsh repressive tactics have been shown to increase solidarity within some left-wing groups. Also, purely “kinetic” operations that target AQ members assume that there are a *finite* number of terrorists operating within a *finite* number of terrorist groups (Stern, 2010). Indeed, and as Horgan (2009) reports, the war on terror “may have disrupted the potential for a large-scale attack by Al-Qaida... but it has not eliminated them completely” (p. 62). Horgan goes on to state that smaller coordinated

attacks will continue to “frustrate” security and intelligence services. The muscular stance embraced in countering terrorism undoubtedly suppresses the *immediate* threat but it clearly does not attempt to undermine its “appeal”. The “hard” approach alone to dealing with terrorism fails to address the terrorist narrative that resonates with many young and vulnerable youth – it arguably amplifies it (Sageman, 2008).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the use of military force has been shown to trigger moral outrage and inspire many to sympathize and join in the “struggle”. As Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated: for every terrorist killed, three more take his place (Pluchinsky, 2008).<sup>13</sup> Clearly, a more comprehensive approach to countering terrorism, and one that complements both the traditional military and security approach, is required to deal with not only the short-term threat, but also the long-term one.

### **Unintended Outcomes: Prison Radicalization and Recidivism**

Undeniably, the GWOT has proven effective in destroying and neutralizing the initial threat posed by AQ – many operatives have been killed, captured or are on the run. Yet one key outcome from the GWOT that poses a significant challenge for policy-makers involved in countering terrorism is the issue of capture and subsequent imprisonment of these terror suspects. Silke (2014) notes that most terrorists will end up in prison and that the vast majority will eventually be released. Pluchinsky (2008) raises a red flag after his initial examination of the matter. He notes that 5,000 terror suspects nationwide were either detained or serving a prison sentence. This figure excludes those detained in Iraq and Afghanistan where the numbers for Iraq alone have exceeded 20,000 (Stone, 2011). The author goes on to estimate that approximately 15% of terrorists in custody will be executed or serve a life sentence. The majority will serve less

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<sup>12</sup> Gunaratna and Rubin (2011) explain that despite the significant investments in purely military and security measures to counter terrorist threats, the intentions and objectives of these groups still remain.

<sup>13</sup> Researchers have proposed that “collateral damage” from military strikes may push communities into the waiting arms of the terrorists.

than ten years.<sup>14</sup> In the US, Representative Peter King, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence cautioned in late 2015 that the US will be releasing, over the next five years, 100 terrorists after they have served their sentence.<sup>15</sup> These statements track with Braddock's (2011) views in which taking operatives off the field is not enough – the issue of recidivism is of paramount importance. Clearly the threat from terrorism does not end with capture alone (Cronin, 2009).

Knowing where and how AQ replenishes its ranks is critical for any counterterrorism policy. Pluchinsky (2008) explains that AQ obtains its manpower from three sources: new recruits, converts, and released “jihadi” extremists. Accordingly, one way to eliminate part of the threat from AQ is to shrink the pool of potential recruits. Thus, strategies to deal with these distinct sources of risk have been implemented by different countries plagued by AQ related terrorism. Today, we observe different programs run by different institutions within different countries; programs implemented in prisons and in jails that aim to rehabilitate, “de-radicalize”, or disengage terrorists (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). These efforts are seen as augmenting existing conventional counterterrorism approaches through – among other things – *counter radicalization* initiatives that focus on preventative measures (El-Said, 2014). Programs have been developed in Yemen, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia respectively and elsewhere to counter the threat that released terrorists may represent to the communities they will eventually return to; and also to prevent radicalization taking place behind prison walls. Unquestionably, with the increase in the number of terrorist behind bars, there is an increase in the likelihood that terrorists will negatively influence others in their proximity. For example,

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<sup>14</sup> Others put the figure of suspects in custody closer to 100,000. See Kruglanski, Gelfand, and Gunaratna (2010).

<sup>15</sup> For more, see Representative King's opening remarks at <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/10-28-15-King-Open.docx>.

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experts have characterized prisons as incubators of terrorism where those in custody serve as captive audiences (Cilluffo, Cardash, & Whitehead, 2007; Hannah et al., 2008). Prisons are notoriously known for the abundance of alienated young men separated from their traditional support networks (Cilluffo, 2006). In this instance, they may become vulnerable to the one-sided narratives peddled by violent extremists in tier midst (Goldman, 2014). Other concerns relate to the fact that those imprisoned will interact with hardened criminals. Here, ideologies mix with criminal expertise allowing for more innovative and deadly terrorist acts (Neumann, 2010; Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007).

Undoubtedly history is replete with cases of terrorist suspects leaving prisons more radical than before they entered. For example, Ayman Al-Zawahiri - AQ's head; Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the former head of AQ in Iraq (Kirdar, 2011); ISIL's leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi (Cronin, 2015); Abu Mohammed Al-Jawlani, the leader of the AQ affiliated Jabhat Al-Nusra (Stern & Berger, 2015); Richard Reid, the failed "shoe bomber"; Joseph Padilla, the "dirty bomber"; and Kevin Lamar James (Hamm, 2007) – are some of the many examples of terrorists who have been implicated in acts of terror while in prison or upon their release (Silke, 2014). Although the above cases apparently reflect both prison radicalization and lack of efforts to rehabilitate prisoners – the outcomes are the same. As for the latter, researchers have documented a plethora of cases where terrorists are imprisoned only to return to terrorism (Pluchinsky, 2008). Understanding the risks these *special* prisoners present has compelled countries to *engage* terrorists through innovative prison based programs before they are released back into society. This has been an important shift in counter terrorism practices.



### **Innovative Approaches**

The need to meet the challenges these prisoners pose has been taken by a host of countries. The majority of these programs have been implemented in prisons where these “soft” approaches to countering terrorism have shown some promise. Indeed, countries have claimed successful outcomes reflected in low recidivism rates of those released. For example, in Saudi Arabia, rates of recidivism are in the single digits (Boucek, 2008; El-Said & Barrett, 2014). In Yemen, most who have participated in the program have refrained from acts of terrorism at *home* (Al-Hitar, 2011). But challenges do persist in interpreting the efficacy of these programs. Scholars have noted different objectives for these programs ranging from terrorist network disruptions in Indonesia to *counter ideological* engagement in Singapore and Saudi Arabia (Abuza, 2009; Boucek, 2009; El-Said, 2014). Others have questioned how success should be measured and at what point after release should recidivism be counted (Boucek, 2009). Still, others have called for more conceptual clarity between program objectives. For example, are these programs aimed at “deradicalization” or disengagement – the former being a change in beliefs while the latter a change in behaviors (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Adding to the confusion, the authors note that even if the objective is to “deradicalize” terrorists, the construct is ambiguous and difficult to gauge. That is, not all disengaged terrorists are in fact “deradicalized”.<sup>16</sup>

### **Terrorism Research: Past and Present**

Clearly the novelty of such programs has drawn the attention of policy-makers and academics trying to understand what is being done and how. For academics, though, the questions run deeper consequently making answers even harder to reach. To begin, the term terrorism has yet to be properly defined (Silke, 2008) with some authors stating that no

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<sup>16</sup> For Horgan and Braddock, “risk reduction” initiatives are a better description of these programs.

definitions of terrorism will ever be agreed upon anytime soon (Shafritz, Gibbons, & Scott, 1991).<sup>17</sup> The lack of consensus on the operationalization of terrorism leads to different interpretations and understandings of terrorist acts performed by different groups with different objectives and motivations. More recently, conceptual ambiguity surrounding the concept of radicalization has also impeded the field's progress (Githens-Mazer, 2012).

The challenges go beyond concept definitions though. Unlike criminal justice research, terrorism is low-volume and perpetrated by a small number of actors (Horgan, 2014) who are resistant to participating in studies by those they deem as part of the hostile "other" (Dernevik et al., 2009). This is due to the covert nature of terrorist groups and how the "underground status ... presents tremendous obstacles to objective forms of open-source data collection, given terrorists are, by necessity, secretive about their operations, personal details, and membership" (Altier, Horgan, & Thoroughgood, 2012, p. 86). Not surprisingly, research on terrorism lacks a valid data set (Gupta, 2012) where the dependence on secondary sources for analysis lacks credibility and "precision" (Silke, 2001).

Nevertheless, research has continued despite these methodological and conceptual difficulties. For example, David Rappaport (1984) looked at terrorism from a historical perspective detailing religious violence committed by Muslim Assassins, Jewish Zealots-Sicari's and Hindu Thugs. In another study by the same author, and continuing with the historical approach to examining terrorism, the author reveals four waves of terrorism that overlap and are traced back to the late 19th century (Rappaport, 2011). The analysis of this "modern" form of terrorism begins with Russian anarchists in 1880, moving to anticolonial violence in the 1920's,

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<sup>17</sup> Over 100 different definitions of terrorism have been proposed by both policy-makers and researchers alike. See Schmid (1983) for more.

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followed by the new left terrorism of the 1970's and finally a return to the "religiously" motivated terrorism we see today.

Other researchers have attempted to create typologies of the different terrorist groups and of group membership. For example, Hackers' (1976) early work titled *Crusaders, Criminals, and Crazies* is still relevant today. Nesser (2007) categorized AQ related terrorists as *entrepreneurs, protégés, misfits* and *drifters*. Moving from the individual to the group, Schmid's 1983 typology clarifies the heterogeneity of terrorist groups. In it, the author shows how terrorism is perpetrated by both state and sub-state actors motivated by separatist/nationalist goals, religious objectives, right and left-wing ideology, and single-issue terrorist groups (Schmid, 1983). Indeed terrorism is composed of heterogeneous groups with heterogeneous memberships (Post, 2008) making generalizations based on studies of specific groups questionable. Other avenues of exploration in terrorism studies focused on *why* an individual would become a terrorist. Researchers using a psychodynamic framework and psychological analysis began looking for personality types, traits, mental illness and profiles (Borum, 2004). Terrorism as a field of study was, and is, slowly taking shape.

Not surprisingly, terrorism research has dramatically increased in recent years, although the quality of this research remains questionable (Ranstorp, 2007). Since the 9/11 attacks, 65% of articles concerned with terrorism are no more than reviews of previous literature (Silke, 2006). Some of the *best* research on AQ related terrorism has been based on secondary data analysis, such as court documents and archival records (Bakker, 2006; Sageman, 2004); and over 80% of all data is gathered primarily from other books, the media, or journal articles (Silke, 2001). Moreover, Silke (2008) notes that only 20% of research articles actually add new knowledge to

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the field. Lastly, Schmid and Jongman (1988) claim that of all the social science research, terrorism researchers have written so much yet based on so little research.

Again, despite the lack of rigor in most terrorism studies, the field has continued to move forward. Researchers have begun to move away from the question of *why* one becomes a terrorist to the *how* involvement occurs (Horgan, 2008). Instead of focusing on terrorist personalities that are static and profiles that lack specificity, a look at processes has become the accepted line of enquiry. One reason for this shift is that terrorist research has shown that no terrorist personality exists (Sageman, 2008) and that profiling is fraught with limitations both from an academic standpoint and a policy perspective. For example, these explanations do not account for the gradual nature of becoming involved with terrorism nor do they account for why some decide to leave (Horgan, 2009). Researcher who have previously espoused the personalities and traits perspective, on the other hand, fail to consider the different and fluid roles expected of members within each group (e.g., leader, sympathizer, suicide bomber etc.). The use of profiling by those tasked with countering terrorism may result in both false negatives and false positives (Bjorgo, 2011). It also has limited explanatory value on how or why someone would become a terrorist (Horgan, 2009). As for the mental state of terrorists, research has concluded that, in general, they are not psychologically abnormal (Horgan, 2014; Sageman, 2008; Silke, 2003), and that they are, by and large, healthier and more stable than other violent criminals (Lyons & Harbinson, 1986). Lastly, in explaining terrorism involvement, researchers have ignored “pull” factors (Bjorgo, 2009; Horgan, 2009). That is, the lures associated with terrorism such as becoming part of a “social movement”, the need for protection (in the case of right-wing groups and sectarian conflict), the search for excitement, friendships and camaraderie etc. are overlooked.

### **New Perspectives on Terrorism**

Recent terrorism research has unequivocally shown that profiles that look at age, sex, education, and marriage are of limited utility – that is, they suffer from what Sageman calls a lack of specificity (Sageman, 2008). Moreover, the use of terrorist personalities such as pathological narcissism, and paranoia are weak predictors of AQ or other terrorist group involvement (Sageman, 2004). Clearly, the psychological explanations of the 1970's for terrorism involvement have been refuted. This new understanding (or lack thereof) of terrorist behaviors has opened the door for researchers to explore other aspects of terrorism. A transition from *why* to *how* is seen as a worthy research agenda. For these researchers, conceptual development of *how* one becomes a terrorist (instead of *why*) may very well lead to more practical policy prescriptions (Sageman, 2004; Taylor & Horgan, 2006).

Today, more interest is allotted in the literature to *routes* and *pathways*, instead of discrete *profiles* and “root causes” (Horgan, 2008). Indeed for the latter, questions as to why so many are subjected to the same societal influences, while only so few actually engage in terrorism, has damaged their argument (Sageman, 2004; Silke, 2008; Taylor & Horgan, 2006). Instead, researchers have begun to look more at a combination of contextual and personal factors that create opportunities for the most vulnerable to become “open” to involvement in terrorism (Taylor & Horgan, 2006).<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, governments and researchers have begun developing models of *radicalization* to explain the process of becoming a terrorist (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Yet, even here, questions arise as how best to conceptualize this label: is it a case of cognitive radicalization or behavioral radicalization (Neumann, 2013)? The danger in

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<sup>18</sup> In realizing that broad structural influences change at a slow pace, distinctions can be made among preconditions (that set the stage for terrorism in the long-term also described as ‘root causes’) and precipitants (triggering events that immediately precede a terrorist act) (Crenshaw, 1981), along with risk factors that are present in the “potential” terrorist (Horgan, 2009).

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these models is the assumption that a linear *casual* pathway exists from radical thought to radical behavior (Horgan, 2014). Moreover, research has shown that many who are engaged in terrorism do not actually espouse violent beliefs.

Indeed, explaining why someone becomes a terrorist has given way to a more process-oriented approach. Questions of *how* allow for policies to be crafted that target the different stages of becoming a terrorist. When terrorism is looked at as a process that begins with involvement, and is followed by engagement, and ends with disengagement (in many cases), policy-makers can develop specific interventions that target individuals at different phases of becoming and remaining a terrorist (Horgan, 2009). And, considering that terrorism experts are – perhaps – far from certain on *why* and *how* initial involvement develops, researchers have instead chosen to take a closer look at disengaging from terrorism. Reasons for this latest interest include the presence of, and greater access, to “former” terrorists, and to acquire better insights about terrorist group’s vulnerabilities to better disrupt their networks and activities (Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan, 2014). Still, as with the other realms of terrorism studies, research on disengagement is still in its infancy and lacks the conceptual clarity on how disengagement and “deradicalization” should be defined (Altier et al., 2014). Additionally, Horgan (2009) notes that much research on disengagement has been conducted using secondary sources of data such as autobiographies or personal interviews with released terrorists who had previously surrendered to the authorities, or those who simply walked away from their groups. The author notes that these individuals might not be representative of the movement as whole. Also, “former” terrorists may allow interviews to be conducted for personal gain or for propaganda purposes. Lastly, without a control group (those that still remain in the terrorist group), researchers may

never know what variables actually cause a person to desist from terrorism. Clearly, much of the disengagement research can be described as exploratory – at best.

### **Saudi Arabia, the AQ Threat, and an Innovative Response**

The efforts to develop greater conceptual clarity between “deradicalization” and disengagement should not prevent countries from tackling terrorism through both traditional operational approach’s and more innovative means that target those most vulnerable to terrorism involvement. This is a logical step.<sup>19</sup> AQ and its affiliates have been increasingly active in targeting countries around the globe (Rollins, 2011). One country that has been a major target of the group is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Usama bin Laden, beginning in the late 1990’s conspired to overthrow the Saudi ruling regime and shatter the strategic US/Saudi relationship (Cordesman & Obaid, 2007). For Bin Laden, the control of Islam’s holiest cities and its vast oil wealth would provide the needed legitimacy and the resources to maintain their terrorism activities (Reidel & Saab, 2008). Indeed, from the early 1990’s, the kingdom has experienced significant terrorist attacks. For example, the 1994 attacks on the Saudi National Guard where seven US personnel lost their lives, and the 1996 Khobar Tower bombings where 19 were killed and over 400 injured. But it was in May of 2003 that the kingdom witnessed the beginning of a bloody AQ campaign that would last for several years (Boucek, 2008). AQ attacks ranged from simultaneous suicide bombings on a housing complex killing 34 and wounding 200, to attacks on diplomatic facilities, the Ministry of Interior Headquarters and other security related

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<sup>19</sup> In April of 2015, a judge ordered Abdullahi Yusuf, a US born Somali arrested at the Minneapolis St. Paul airport for his intentions to join ISIL, to enter a newly established reintegration program similar in ways to the “deradicalization” and disengagement programs that will be discussed later. For more, see Kingsbury, A. (2015) Deprogramming ISIS recruits comes with high stakes. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2015/04/11/deprogramming-isis-recruits-comes-with-high-stakes/2VxnP55IAJ6pZrpy1PqBII/story.html>.

facilities,<sup>20</sup> oil facilities and even individual foreigners (Cordesman & Obaid, 2007). Indeed the security and stability of the kingdom, and the region, was at stake. Not surprisingly, the response was unequivocally forceful (Hegghammer, 2006). AQ's campaign lasted for several years leading the Saudis to arrest approximately 9,000 suspects by 2008, with that figure reaching 11,500 by 2011 (Boghardt, 2015). In light of the Saudis firm approach to counterterrorism, it was recognized that the kingdom needed to address the growing number of suspects in custody to prevent those that would be subsequently released from reengaging in terrorism and to contain the spread of the AQ ideology. The "softer" approach of Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) was thus developed (Al-Hadlaq, 2011; Boucek, 2011) as a *counter radicalization* initiative that sought to undermine the appeal of AQ and address the underlying factors that lead to terrorism.

### **The Current Study**

Few academics from outside the region have thoroughly examined the Saudi strategy (e.g., Boucek, 2011; El-Said, 2014; Porgess, 2011; Stern, 2011) and much of this research has been exploratory at best and relying mostly on secondary non-Arabic sources. Additionally, researchers have described the program in different ways, at different times and based on different sources of data adding to confusion as to what is actually being achieved and why. Moreover, and understandably, access to the program and to those who administer it, is difficult due to the sensitivity of terrorism research in general. Consequently, the available public data and observations regarding the program have are incomplete and outdated. Lastly, the field of terrorism studies has evolved with concepts becoming better refined, while others are developed or leveraged from existing knowledge (e.g., criminological theories) to explain terrorist behavior. Thus, a need to better examine one of "best funded and longest running programs" (Boucek,

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the Saudi Special Emergency Forces and the Traffic Department respectively.



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2008, p. 3) to understand its different components, why and how they are implemented, and its effectiveness in reducing both terrorism and victims of terror, is required. A closer look at how the Saudi's are dealing with terrorism as it relates to those terrorists in custody is critical in light of the thousands of "foreign fighters", from over 50 countries, now flocking to Iraq and Syria to join the so-called Islamic State (Blanchard, Humud, & Nikitin, 2014) – including the many Saudis who joined in the "battle" there. Those that are not killed may very well inspire others to join their cause or worse return fully indoctrinated and seething with hate.

Clearly, there is a need to examine alternative ways to mitigate the terrorist threat in conjunction with ongoing security approaches. Thus, this study will attempt to add to the existing knowledge regarding the kingdom's approach and the effect it has had on terrorism within it. The choice of design for this study will be a mixed method *sequential explanatory design – follow-up explanations model*. In the first stage of the study, an *interrupted time series design* will be used to chart the official data provided by the Saudi MOI followed by the necessary statistical analyses. Then, a preliminary conclusion can be made on the impact the (PRAC) strategy has had on terrorism in the KSA. To achieve this, the study will look – empirically – for differences in terror related incidents before and after program implementation; and will also examine if differences exist in civilian and security forces casualties before and after PRAC implementation. A *single case study design* will be adopted for the second stage of the study to explain the results of the first stage. Here, a closer look at the PRAC strategy, through primary sources of data, will be conducted, on sight, through interviews with senior policy-makers, counterterrorism specialists, and those involved in implementing PRAC. A better (descriptive) understanding of why the program was implemented; how it is delivered; what constitutes success and how it is determined are some of the questions that this study hopes to answer.

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Moreover, the *single case study design* will allow for a qualitative analysis to take place. Here, richer context will be added, and more importantly, a better understanding of *why* and *how* the PRAC strategy is associated with levels of terrorism in KSA can occur. Although causation cannot be determined with this quasi-experimental (arguably a pre-experimental) design correlation may be established. Indeed, with the GWOT at its end, and with its consequent increasing terrorist prison population, along with the proliferation of AQ affiliated/inspired groups appearing in the US and abroad, and in response to the existing gaps in the terrorism literature (Cronin, 2006; Horgan, 2009), this study hopes to provide much needed insight on how to deal with future problems associated with AQ related terrorism specifically, and to other forms terrorism in general.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Background

Terrorism research has mushroomed following the September 11 attacks on an unprecedented scale. Although, Schmid and Jongman (1988) observe that roughly 90% of all terrorism research was conducted since 1969,<sup>21</sup> Silke (2008) estimates that 90% of all terrorism research will have been conducted following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Moreover, he notes that over 1700 books on the subject were published in 2002 in contrast to only 150 in 2000. Indeed, and as Cronin (2008) states, terrorism research is event driven, descriptive; narrowly focused on a single group, their organization, tactics, leadership and other aspects, which are determined – in part – by the policy-makers’ urgent needs to make informed decisions. Unquestionably, AQ has generated a renewed interest in terrorism. The following chapter will look at AQ and its ideology; the existing research on the “causes” of terrorism at the *micro* level; the alternative views developed to explain terrorism; and innovative programs to countering terrorism through “softer” approaches. What shall appear is an evolving body of literature to counter the changing threat post by AQ and its affiliated groups.

**Al-Qaida.** Al-Qaida (AQ)<sup>22</sup> evolved from what was originally a religious based movement endorsed by Western and Arab (and Islamic) powers in the early 1980’s to face the growing threat of Communism in Central Asia (Bajoria & Brun, 2012). Specifically, the USSR entered the Afghanistan Democratic Republic after its ally began facing growing opposition from a restless Afghani population because of the aggression and oppression they faced from the Russian-backed regime. To address this growing discontent, and also the need to counter the

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<sup>21</sup> The authors note that these studies were conducted by *only* 39 terrorism researchers.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Qaida is an Arabic word for the base.

threat developing in Central Asia, Western and Arab/Muslim nations collaborated by sending young Muslim men to the region to fight not only Russian soldiers, but also to resist the ideological Communist expansion that could undermine the interests of Western and regional players (Beg & Bohkari, 2009). Muslim countries began encouraging young men in the name of Islam to fight a “Holy War”<sup>23</sup> against the creeping threat of the “atheistic” Communist superpower.<sup>24</sup> Thousands of impressionable young men, many later known as Afghan Arabs, heeded the call of jihad – joining, training and fighting alongside one another to expel the Communist occupation in Muslim Afghanistan (Post, 2008).

Unquestionably, the Mujahedeen made great strides, with the aid and assistance of the international community, in pushing back the Soviets (Alexiev, 1988). The growing success of the Mujahedeen was even recognized by the Reagan administration who met with them in the White House in 1985.<sup>25</sup> Remarkably, they were one of the few who, at that time, were provided with highly advanced stinger missiles that eventually changed the balance of the war (Silverstien, 2001). By 1989, and after pushing back the “mighty” Soviets,<sup>26</sup> the group found themselves – at that time – with no other cause or common goal (Krivosheev, 1993). What began as a resistance movement against the Soviet Union began to slowly evolve into what has been labeled today *violent militant political Islam* (Beg & Bohkari, 2009).

Yet, when speaking of the Afghan war against the Soviets, it should be made clear that AQ had not yet formed. Indeed Bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan in the early 1980’s, but his role was strictly logistical. Initially, Bin Laden and Dr. Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood member, and arguably the spiritual “godfather” of the Afghani jihad (Hegghammer,

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<sup>23</sup> These “Holy Warriors” were also known as the “Mujahedeen” in the Arabic language.

<sup>24</sup> It should also be noted that Muslim men from non-Muslim countries were also recruited.

<sup>25</sup> See “President Ronald Reagan Meeting Some Mujahideen” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3f9mlUQzJA>.

<sup>26</sup> Krivosheev (1993) notes that Soviet casualties reached nearly 15,000 killed and 54,000 wounded.

2013), created the Maktab Al-Khidemat<sup>27</sup> to organize and coordinate the influx of volunteers (Sageman, 2004). Although influential and charismatic, Bin Laden lacked the religious qualifications to be considered an ideologue, unlike the Sayyid Qutb<sup>28</sup> inspired Azzam who held a doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence from Al-Azhar University (Post, 2007). Thus, he was not in the position to offer religious edicts that could, for example, justify indiscriminate killing – especially of their fellow Muslims. Abdullah Azzam on the other hand was clearly the intellectual and theological voice behind the Afghani jihad. He was one of the first to call for a defensive jihad<sup>29</sup> and one of the first to arrive there (Sageman, 2004). He was a revered spiritual leader of the Mujahedeen who held strong convictions on how best to conduct the jihad – and what actions to avoid during the present conflict and afterwards. And considering that the pool of jihadi fighters contained a mixture of differing ideologies and personal experiences, critical issues would arise during and after the forced Soviet withdrawal. Specifically, for some of these committed fighters, apostate regimes should be targeted next, for others, ridding “occupied” Muslim lands of foreign forces is the logical choice of action. Yet for Azzam, *fitna* or dissention was forbidden at all costs. He stood against the *takfiri*<sup>30</sup> thought and efforts by hardliners to overthrow governments in Islamic countries. Yet as the war began to wind down, it became evident that Azzam’s views conflicted with the more radical Qutbi influenced “jihadis” who sought a more global jihad as opposed to Azzam’s ambitions to “reclaiming” his Palestinian homeland. Azzam and two of his sons were killed in Pakistan in November of 1989 by a remote controlled car bomb – the murder remains a mystery (Mendelsohn, 2009; Sageman, 2004).

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<sup>27</sup> Maktab Al-Khidemat is an Arabic phrase that translates to The Service Bureau.

<sup>28</sup> For more, see Eikmeie’s (2007) work titled *Qutbism: An Ideology of Islamic-Fascism* at <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/07spring/eikmeier.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Here, the *defensive jihad* is a religiously bounding personal obligation that commands each able Muslim to fight the Communists either through financial or moral support, for instance, or through direct participation against the “enemy” in Afghanistan.

<sup>30</sup> *Takfirism* is the practice of excommunicating Muslims.

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With the Soviet withdrawal in February of 1989, and the ensuing civil war that took place, most of the “Mujahedeen” chose to return home considering the jihad had ended (Sageman, 2008). Others, though, chose to stay fearing government reprisal upon their return. Some sought to continue the “jihad” elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> For those who remained, a pledge of allegiance to Bin Laden culminated in what would later be known as AQ.<sup>32</sup> And it was the events occurring in the Muslim world during that time that created the needed platform for Bin Laden and his followers to mobilize violently. For example, the first Gulf War (1991)<sup>33</sup> and the US’s humanitarian efforts in Somalia (1993), led Bin Laden and his nascent AQ to shift their “jihadi” priorities. For AQ, a conspiracy against the Muslim world was occurring (Sageman, 2004). It became quite clear that AQ had set their eyes on a new set of targets – the United States and the “corrupt” Muslim regimes that host them.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Muslims had now become a legitimate target for terrorism due to AQ’s adoption of the *takfiri* ideology that justifies terrorism against any, and all, who stand against them (Blanchard, 2009).

AQ’s terrorist agenda was clearly voiced when two major declarations of “jihad” against

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Azzam advocated operations to “liberate” Muslim lands such as those in the central Soviet Republics, the Philippines, Kashmir and Palestine etc. Egyptian radicals, on the other hand, wanted to focus their terrorist activities in Egypt. Clearly, there was no consensus, at that time, on where and why the “jihad” should take place.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that many of these early AQ operatives, including Bin Laden, left Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal and subsequent civil war that occurred there. The *core* of AQ regrouped in the Sudan in the early 1990’s only to return back to Afghanistan after the Taliban assumed control of the country.

<sup>33</sup> Despite diplomatic attempts by Arab and Western leaders to de-escalate the volatile situation in the region, Saddam Hussain invaded Kuwait in 1991. Bin Laden appealed to the Saudi government to allow “his” fighters to confront Hussain’s marching forces to no avail. In the end, coalition forces comprised of more than 30 nations, joined the US’s massive troop buildup in the region to expel Iraqi forces from occupied lands. During that time, 550,000 US service men and women were stationed in Saudi Arabia. For more, see Otterman, S. (2003) Saudi Arabia: Withdrawl [sic] of U.S. Forces. *Council of Foreign Relations*.

<sup>34</sup> Researchers have noted a shift in “jihadi” strategic thought in which distinctions between the “far enemy” and the “near enemy” occurred. AQ, in leveraging the *takfiri* ideology can now “legitimately” target Islamic states – the “near enemy”. For more see Sageman’s (2004) analysis of the Egyptian Jemaah Islamiyah and Islamic Jihad.

the West were released in 1996 and 1998 (Quiggin, 2009). Since then, AQ has executed numerous terrorist attacks across the globe. In fact, between 1998 and 2004, AQ related terrorism accounted for 19% of all terrorism related deaths despite committing only 0.1% of all terrorist acts during that time frame (Hoffman, 2006). Clearly, AQ had emerged from the ashes of Afghanistan, evolved, and persevered despite years of international military, intelligence, and counterterrorism operations. AQ, and its affiliates today, have become the foremost international terrorist organization since its establishment in the foothills of Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistan. Its strategic objective is devastatingly clear – changing the established world order by meticulously executing indiscriminate deadly attacks all across the globe. The end result: rivers of blood, piles of rubble, and despair for those innocent victims who crossed their path. Yet one question still remains. How has AQ continued to exist despite the relentless pressure and unwavering resolve by the West and its allies in the region? One answer can be found in the mystifying appeal of the group's ideology.

**Al-Qaida's ideology.** Many of the significant figures initially dispatched to Afghanistan were former radicals released from Egyptian prisons (Sageman, 2004; 2008). By some accounts, the overwhelming majority of the group's leadership were Egyptian. For example, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, AQ's deputy leader (before Bin Laden's death in 2012) and one of the most influential ideologues in the terrorist group (Drennan, 2008; Harrigan & El-Said, 2014). These radicals brought with them the *takfiri* ideology, an ideology foreign to many of these fighters and one that lacked strong foundations in Islamic theology (Sageman, 2004). Indeed, this latest manifestation of the *takfiri* thought called for the adoption of a different *political* worldview for those who espoused it; a dichotomous view where their perceived Islamic state rose in one part of the world and where the rest of world existed in another (Brykczynski, 2005). For those individuals from

across the Muslim world who heeded the call for jihad, a powerful interaction and cross pollination of religious schools of thought would take place, last for several years, and ultimately facilitate the emergence of the AQ ideology (Sageman, 2004) – an ideology that was heavily influenced by radical Egyptian figures.

Unquestionably, much of the radical “Islamist” thought witnessed today can be traced back to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood (MB) founded in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna. While this group was radical in belief, it was initially nonviolent<sup>35</sup> (Harrigan & El-Said, 2014; Sageman, 2008). But it was the MB’s Sayyid Qutb, through his influential writings (namely *Milestones* and *In the shade of the Qu’ran*), who had the most influence on the thinking of radical groups today (Hannah, Clutterbuck, & Rubin, 2008; Sageman, 2008). Indeed, subsequent clandestine groups operating in Egypt such as the Islamic Jihad, and the Egyptian Jemaah Islamiyah were steadfast believers of Qutb’s writings; and it was members of these groups, in turn, that were heavily represented in the original cadre of AQ leaders. It was Qutb who believed in a more violent revolutionary approach to save the Islamic *ummah*<sup>36</sup> he perceived to be on the verge of collapse – a view that was in contrast to the initial vision of the group’s founder Hassan Al-Banna (Sageman, 2004, 2008). For Qutb, Western values, as manifested in Capitalism or Communism, were not conducive to the development of a healthy Islamic state, and could not provide the necessary *guidance* to restore the *golden age* of the Islamic caliphate.<sup>37</sup> These views would gain broad appeal due to the changing global landscape during that time. For example, world events such as the end of World War Two, subsequent decolonization in Africa and Asia,

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<sup>35</sup> However there are cases of violent Muslim Brotherhood offshoots, such as HAMAS in Palestine, assuming political power in recent years. For more see Hoffman (2006).

<sup>36</sup> The *ummah* is an Arabic word used to describe the worldwide community of Muslims.

<sup>37</sup> A caliphate is a political-religious state encompassing the whole of the Islamic *ummah*.



and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, all presented the MB with opportunities to further their religious/political objectives.<sup>38</sup>

Yet diverging tactical and strategic objectives prevented the MB from forming a unified front leading the group to fragment into more hardline and violent subgroups (Harrigan & El-Said, 2014). For these radical MB members, the group, as a political movement, did not achieve its objective of toppling the “apostate” Egyptian regime through political means. Consequently, in the years that followed, drastic reevaluations of the previous non-violent actions were considered (Sageman, 2008). For these radical elements within the group, a view that the inability of the successive governments of Jamal Abdul Nasser (1956-1970) and Anwar Al-Sadat (in the early 1980’s) to restore the Islamic *ummah* to its *golden age*, was due to the government’s moral corruption and its un-Islamic practices. This perceived political reality necessitated change – as a duty – and by force (Sageman, 2008). Not surprisingly, the group was outlawed in 1954 by president Nasser (after surviving an assassination attempt), and was followed by swift and severe government security measures in the following years resulting in the execution (e.g., Sayyid Qutb in 1966, Salih Sirriya in 1974), or imprisonment (e.g., Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Mohammed Abdalsalam Al-Farag) of many leading MB members (Emerson, 2008).<sup>39</sup> Arguably, the forceful government crackdown on both the Brotherhood and those that bought into their vision further radicalized them.

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<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the poverty in rural areas of Egypt, contrasted with the perceived lavish lifestyles of Westerners operating the strategic chokepoint of the Suez Canal Egypt, attracted many to the MB’s narrative and also reinforced the messages they were promoting: that of exploitation and powerlessness. See Youssef. Aboul-Enei’s *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen: The Muslim Brotherhood at* <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/abo.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> While efforts by the Egyptian regime in the 1950’s through the 1970’s to contain the MB did result in a renunciation of violence, radical elements within the MB maintained their views rejecting the engagement approach adopted by the leadership of both sides. See Harrigan and El-Said (2014).

As expected, the radical political thought adopted by the MB was followed by an aggressive response by the Egyptian government. However, instead of extinguishing the MB threat, the government's response appeared to have created even *more* extreme offshoots. For instance, Shukri Mustafa, a formerly imprisoned radical MB member, established the Takfir wa-al-Hijra group in 1971. Unlike those before him such as Salih Sirriya, who advocated the violent *top down* overthrow of the “infidel” Egyptian regime, and Al-Banna who sought to transform Egyptian society through a slower political approach, Shukri sought to create a parallel Islamic state (Sageman, 2004). This radical vision and practice can be explained by the group's name: *Takfir*, which for Shukri not only included the excommunication of Muslims but also the whole of Egyptian society, and *Hijra*, meaning migration or exile. Shukri's view that Egyptian society was in a state of *jahiliyya*<sup>40</sup> and immorality justified (and even compelled) the group to *migrate* to the outskirts of town rejecting to live under the “apostate” rule of the Egyptian government. Known as the people of the cave, Shukri and his followers created “communities of believers” far removed from the corrupting influences of Egyptian society. One of the basic beliefs of the group is the theological rationale to kill other Muslims (which occurs after excommunication)<sup>41</sup> in order to achieve a purified state (Anzalone, 2012). Unfortunately, they did not hesitate to act upon their beliefs. For example, Shukri ordered the killing of former members of his group for trying to create their own, in his view, “apostate” offshoot. Egyptian security forces responded by capturing and detaining several Takfir wa-al-Hijra members (Sageman, 2004). Later, and in an attempt to secure the release of his captured followers, group leaders ordered the kidnap and

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<sup>40</sup> *Jahiliyya* or ignorance, in Arabic, is a term used to describe pre-Islamic times in the Arabian Peninsula. The term was revived by Qutb and used to justify the violent action against non-Muslims to restore the golden age of Islam.

<sup>41</sup> For these violent radicals, the presence of “so-called Muslims” (or *munfageen* in Arabic) is just as dangerous – if not more so – than the threat posed by non-Muslims. Apparently, the rationale here is that the former may act as gateway for un-Islamic influences to enter their communities.

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subsequent killing of a former Egyptian Minister after the group's demands were not met. In the end, Mustafa, along with other members of the group, were arrested and convicted for the kidnapping and murder of the Egyptian minister. Shukri was executed in 1977 (Daymon, 2013). Indeed, Shukri, who was a disciple of Sayyid Qutb and had spent time with him in the Egyptian prison system (Gleis, 2005), is still considered among the most influential AQ ideologues. Today, AQ and its affiliates, by *migrating* out of "apostate" societies and by targeting other Muslims have adopted the ideology articulated by Shukri. Although not a new ideology, it is unquestionably considered part of the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood's desire to establish an Islamic state – whether peacefully or by force.

It is worth noting that one recurring theme in the MB's history is that of imprisonment and maltreatment of group members. Researchers have noted that the Brotherhood's prison experiences within the Egyptian prison systems drove the ideologically committed members even deeper into their own newly created subculture – one of further radicalism and resistance (Hannah et al., 2008). The experiences of the group's members in Egyptian prisons further shaped the ideology that AQ would eventually use for years to come (Dawaan, 2009; Zambelis, 2008). For example, the Jemaah Islamiyah and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad refined and developed many of their radical beliefs concerning "jihad" while serving time in prison for involvement, or suspicions of involvement, in President Sadats' assassination in 1981 (Dawaan, 2009). Specifically, new literature was produced behind prison walls. Writings built on previous works by Qutb. For example, it was the rearticulated notion of *jahiliyya*, first suggested by Qutb, and the "un-Islamic" actions by agents of the state within the Egyptian prison system, that nurtured and intensified the moral anger among these prisoners further cementing their radical theological underpinning. For those detained radicals, questions surrounding their fellow countrymen (i.e.,

the agents of the State) would arise. How could a Muslim treat a fellow Muslim in such a brutal and inhumane way? The treatment they received at the hands of these agents typecast the latter as an enemy of Islam. This would *appear* to be a logical characterization since these radical members considered themselves as *only* trying to purify Egyptian society from the perceived decadence and unrighteous way of life it had become accustomed to. If the actions of prison and security officers are un-Islamic, then those who condone their actions must also be un-Islamic. And since these officers are all government employees, then the whole of government must be un-Islamic. This was in essence a systematic excommunication starting from the bottom leading to the top – a reaffirmation of the woeful state of the Islamic *ummah*. In the end, the whole of the Egyptian government was seen as un-Islamic and must be confronted in any manner necessary to re-establish the *golden age* of the Islamic *ummah*. For the MB and its radical offshoots, violence would be a religiously justified method to achieve its political means.

### **Understanding Terrorism: Who are the Terrorists?**

The need to counter AQ requires a better understanding of not only the group but also its ideology. Yet despite the threats faced, a review of the existing literature concerning terrorist groups – in general – reveals a perplexing dearth in knowledge on *why* one becomes involved in terrorism and *how*. Moreover, it is not known if the available knowledge about terrorists and violent groups such as the IRA in Ireland, ETA in Spain, and left-wing movements in Germany and Italy is transferable to AQ and its “religiously” motivated violence. As will become clear, the field of terrorism has expanded at an unprecedented pace in an effort to fill these gaps in knowledge.

**Terrorist profiles.** A common perception within counterterrorism and academic circles is the existence of a terrorist profile (Horgan, 2014). By developing terrorist profiles, security

and intelligence officers believe they can better detect a terrorist within our communities, and even anticipate who may be a likely candidate for future involvement. Yet the profiles of AQ leaders and members (and terrorists in general) seem unremarkable and even counterintuitive. For example, Usama Bin Laden, the disgruntled, self-professed leader of the “Mujahedeen” around the globe, was the 17th son of a multibillion-dollar construction magnate who had previously immigrated from Saudi Arabia’s southern neighbor – Yemen (Post, 2003). As the only son of his father’s fourth wife, Hamida, and the only non-Saudi wife of the father (she was a Syrian), Bin Laden often felt as an outsider within his own family (Falk, 2001). For Bin Laden, money was never an issue. When he was ten years old, his father died in a plane crash (in 1967) leaving behind millions of dollars for both him and his many siblings (Zernike & Kaufman, 2011). At the age of 17, he married a relative of Syrian decent – one of four wives he would eventually have. As a teenager, Bin Laden was described as pious, fasting twice a week in imitation of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)<sup>42</sup> (Bergen, 2010). Even his neighborhood friends were careful not to tell dirty jokes or use offensive language near him.<sup>43</sup> In 1979, Bin Laden graduated from King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah Saudi Arabia with a degree in Economics and Public Administration (CNN Wire Staff, 2011). The profile of Bin Laden is unusual in that he lived the life of privilege and wealth – a life that seems to contrast with public perceptions about AQ terrorists.

Bin Laden’s former deputy and now leader of AQ, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, appears as, well, to eschew the terrorist profile that has been imagined. Al-Zawahiri was born into an upper-class Egyptian family; he would subsequently receive a Master’s Degree in surgery from the

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<sup>42</sup> Peace Be Upon Him.

<sup>43</sup> Other accounts paint a less “rosy picture” of Bin Laden. Falk (2001) notes that Bin Laden has been described as a heavy drinker and womanizer in his teenage years. By some reports, Bin Laden was on the path of inevitable self-destruction.

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University of Cairo (Finn, 2011; Sageman, 2004). As a prominent political activist in Egypt, he spent years in Egyptian prisons – an experience that would further shape his attitudes towards intolerance and bloodletting. Both Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri appear to have exceptional upbringings. To many, these terrorist leaders seem to have been well adapted to the societies they once lived in – unlike so many violent criminals failing to attach, integrate, and lead fulfilling lives. Indeed, at first glance, these AQ leaders might appear to be anomalies in the world of terrorists, but it would later emerge that they are no exception to the rule – a rule still in the process of development.

Looking more broadly for a terrorist profile, research by Sageman (2004) of 172 AQ affiliated terrorists revealed that 18 were from the upper-class and 56 from middle-class households. Moreover, 60% had some college education, with the author observing that, on average, they were more educated than the worldwide average. His research also showed that over 110 held professional jobs (e.g., physicians, architects, teachers etc.) or were semi-skilled laborers. Additionally, 63% were married, with most fathering children (others were too young to be married). Bakker's (2006) research on 242 European "jihadis" reached similar results, although his sample had an age range between 16 and 59.<sup>44</sup> Most of this European sample was also married. In Saudi Arabia, research conducted by the Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI) on a sample of 639 AQ affiliated members found that these prisoners were in their mid-twenties, most came from large families (ranging from 7 to 15 family members), and were raised in middle and lower class households. Roughly 3% came from the upper-class (Al-Hadlaq, 2010; Boucek, 2010). The study notes, that poor supervision and parental guidance could be a factor in their involvement with the group. The study also found that 25% of the sample had previous criminal records (13% for drug related offences). Lastly, very few had worked in religiously oriented

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<sup>44</sup> Most of those in Bakker's sample were in their teens to mid-twenties.

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professions, and many had limited knowledge of Islam. Merari's (2010) research on Palestinian terrorist groups included a sample 15 failed suicide bombers and 14 terrorist recruiters, with a control group of 12 others involved in terrorism. He found that suicide bombers were more likely to have finished high school (as compared with the control group); were better placed economically than the control group; were less involved in violence prior to attempting a suicide mission; and were characterized with avoidance dependence issues along with depression and suicidal behavior.<sup>45</sup>

In the US, domestic terrorists paint an even clearer picture of "normalcy". Dyer and Simcox (2013) examined 171 AQ terrorists convicted in the US and found similar results: 95% were male, 57% were under the age of 30 at the time of offense; 52% were college educated with 23% educated to graduate or post graduate levels; 44% were employed at the time of attack; and that 24% were former Christians who had converted to Islam. Again, the AQ terrorist profile is contrary to existing perceptions of those perpetrating these acts. For example, Anwar Al-Awlaki, a US citizen and prolific radical preacher<sup>46</sup> who would later become a senior commander of AQAP until his neutralization in 2011 by a US led operation in Yemen (Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2011), was the son of a former agriculture Minister in Yemen. He attended Colorado State University and would subsequently graduate in 1994 with a degree in Civil Engineering (Shane & Mekhennet, 2010). Nidal Hassan, the Fort Hood attacker, was a Virginia Tech graduate and psychiatrist in the US Army (Ross et al., 2009). Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani American who was indicted for attempting to detonate a bomb in Times Square in 2010, received his Master's degree from the University of Bridgeport. He was married with two children (Chuang & Roemer,

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<sup>45</sup> Horgan (2014) notes that these psychological interpretations should be viewed with caution since it is not known whether these symptoms occurred before their affiliation with AQ or were a consequence of it.

<sup>46</sup> Quite worryingly, Al-Awlaki's hate speeches, in fluent English, allowed him to reach a broader target audience.

2013). Omar Shafik Hammami – known as Abu Munsur Al-Amiriki – hailed from Daphne, Alabama, where he was raised a Southern Baptist. Hammami was described as intelligent and excelling in sports and was once enrolled at the University of Alabama (Roggio, 2010). He was involved with an AQ affiliated group that operates primarily in Somalia known as Al-Shabaab. Even the perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack seemed “normal” enough (Sageman, 2004). They were a relatively older group with ages ranging from 28 to 33, and came from stable households. Moreover, most held higher education degrees. For example, the group’s ringleader, Mohammed Atta, who was 33 at the time of the attack, came from a middle-class household and had earned a Master’s degree from the University of Hamburg (Post et al., 2009). More recently, a 2014 study on 119 lone-actor terrorists (also defined as lone wolf terrorists) finds that the 25% were married; 32% had some university experience, with 22% obtaining an undergraduate degree (15% received a masters or higher); nearly half of the sample was employed,<sup>47</sup> and 26% had served in some form or other in the military (Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014)

Looking at other research on terrorism, we see a similar trend. In 1976, Russell and Miller (1983) examined 350 members of 18 terrorist groups operating in Europe, the Middle East, South America and Japan between 1966 and 1976. The researchers found that most came from middle-class families, were between the ages of 23 and 31, and all had some college education. The results of the biographical data are comparable to the FBI’s most-wanted terrorist list with respect to age. The list reveals that 90% were males between the ages of 22 and 34 when they committed their first terrorist acts (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2001). Even gender differences seem negligible. Weinbergand and Eubank (1987) conducted a study of 451 Italian female terrorists and found that the majority were aged 20 to 29. Students represented 35% of the

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<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, roughly 40% were unemployed despite their varying academic achievements.



sample and 43% held white-collar jobs or were teachers. They also discovered that 41% were considered upper-middle class.

Indeed, the profiles presented of these terrorists do not appear to track with the psychosocial explanations of terrorism. For example, researchers developed a frustration aggression theory to help explain these acts of “desperation” in the face of an oppressive force (Dollard, Doob, Mille, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939). As research has shown, however, many involved in terrorist groups (especially leftists groups) come from privileged and financially stable families.<sup>48</sup> These observations bring to mind yet another theory of terrorism – the relationship between terrorism, poverty and education. Surprisingly, however, the connection between poverty and poor education seems low at best (Krueger & Maleckova, 2002; Sageman, 2008); while others propose that the evidence could even lead to the opposite conclusion (Von Hippel, 2002). In other words, the more educated and financially stable, the more likely an individual may become involved in terrorist activities (in certain contexts). Lastly, the 2014 Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014) concludes that poverty and “many other economic factors have little explanatory power for the onset of terrorism” (p. 3). The study explains that other factors such as state sponsorship of terrorism, weak political systems, and a desire for political legitimacy are better at explaining the rise of terrorism. Indeed, it appears that many “terrorisms” exist (Laqueur, 1986) due to the heterogeneous nature of groups and its members. Specifically, the varying backgrounds of these members influence how they become involved in terrorism in ways that are different from other group members and even other groups in general (Silke, 2008).

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<sup>48</sup> Based on these observations, Gurr (1970) refines this explanation of political violence with the introduction of his *relative deprivation theory*.

**Expanding the terrorist profile: A look at traits and personalities.** Researchers have also looked more closely at the personal histories of terrorists to understand *why* individuals join terrorist groups. For example, several studies have been conducted in Europe and the US in an attempt to determine if certain traits exist among terrorists. One, conducted in 1971 by David Hubbard (an American psychiatrist), was based on unstructured interviews with a sample of known terrorists (skyjackers). The author observed five common traits that persisted in the sample and concluded that skyjackers were by and large: violent with an alcoholic father; had devout religious mothers; were sexually shy, timid, and passive; had younger sisters (whom the terrorist was quite protective of); and lastly, had poor overall achievement. Ferracuti and Bruno (1981) identified nine traits in their sample of 908 right-wing European terrorists. For instance, they found that right-wing terrorists exhibited: poor and defective insight; emotional detachment from the consequences of their actions; and a belief in superstition, magic, and stereotyped thinking etc. Clearly, both studies presented dissimilar terrorist traits found in their samples, with the exception of low achievement (education) and “sexual role uncertainties.” Although viewed as potentially useful, these studies, and others at the time, were plagued with methodological deficiencies. That is, they lacked control groups and did not use reliable and valid behavioral measures (Victoroff, 2005). Furthermore, the traits described are not found exclusively in terrorists and do not help in distinguishing certain types of terrorists (whether they be right-wing, left-wing, secular, religious, state-sponsored, local, transnational etc.). Moreover, and in contrast to these findings, previous research by Morf (1970) on the Liberation Front of Quebec (FLQ) did not find any common personality traits within his sample. He goes on to emphasize that any finding that would link specific behavioral personality traits to terrorism would be void of any empirical support.

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Researchers have also examined terrorist personalities to explain violent behavior. For example, Johnson and Feldman (1992) concluded that terrorists are characterized by marginal personalities, and that this *biological* feature is what draws them into violent groups in an effort to compensate for their perceived self-deficiencies. Moreover, personalities with antisocial, sadomasochistic, and paranoid tendencies would seek out terrorist groups to express their inherent personality disorders. That is, they favor belonging to groups that allow, and reward, the behaviors generated by these traits. Indeed, the lure of terrorism may be just the right medium an action-oriented, aggressive, and excitement-seeking individual is looking for (Silke, 2003). A mundane lifestyle inhibited by daily routines and monotonous repetition would not fulfill the needs of these types of individuals. For example, an Italian terrorist describes the thrill of being involved with terrorism and missing "the troop a little bit, the chance to face danger together" (de Cataldo, Neuburger, & Valentini, 1996, p. 132); while another mentioned that he missed "the fact of being totally at risk" (p. 112).<sup>49</sup> Although this theory is logical it, once again, does not explain why all individuals who exhibit the above-mentioned traits do not become involved in terrorism.<sup>50</sup>

Other avenues of research utilize a psychodynamic framework when explaining terrorism. Pearce's (1977) psychoanalytic perspective claims that terrorists commit terrorist acts due to *superego lacunae* where gaps in self-monitoring exist – that is they are oblivious to how others view their behavior. He goes on to explain that the acts of terrorism also provide an external outlet for the things that have gone wrong in the terrorist's own life. Yet Pearce's conclusions are based on secondary sources of information, which call into question the validity

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<sup>49</sup> Borum (2003) explains that if excitement is what these individuals are seeking, then a deeper biological dysfunction could be the "cause". Here, low serotonin levels are associated with the need for stimulation through greater risk taking.

<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the issue of culpability may be invoked by legal teams tasked with defending their clients. For more on culpability see Raine (1993).

of his diagnosis – namely that it is a form of pathological narcissism. Post (2007), on the other hand, looks at the relationship between narcissism and terrorism. For example, he sees *identity fractures* as a factor leading to terrorist behavior. For this author, narcissistic wounds created during childhood, split the self into a grandiose and a hated *not me* (Sageman, 2004). The *not me* become the external target of anger to ease the inner tensions that have developed. Post uses this argument (he labels this observation the *twin dynamics of disloyalty to parents or the state*) to explain what he calls ethno-nationalist and anarchic ideologues. For Post, attacks against the state are seen as a generational attack against parental loyal to the state (these are anarchist/ideologues), while ethno-nationalist/separatists attacks against the state are understood to be a response driven by loyalty to the parents who have been previously harmed by the regime. It should be noted that for this analysis, Post uses one of the largest studies ever conducted by the West German Ministry of Interior of 227 left and right-wing terrorists to test his hypothesis.<sup>51</sup> Recognizing the limitations of his methodology, Post cautions that his conclusions due in fact lack any sort of empirical foundations. That is, they are purely qualitative in nature. Moreover, Horgan (2014) notes that several researchers involved in that same study reached different conclusions based on the type of interviews conducted. Furthermore, most of the terrorists in this sample refused to meet with researchers, raising questions of how representative the results truly were of the group. Lastly, many of those interviewed were actually *only* suspected of involvement in terrorism and had yet to be convicted. Specifically, their actual involvement is unclear with suspects aware that any evidence collected from these interviews could be used in the subsequent prosecutions.

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<sup>51</sup> See *Analysen Zum Terrorismus* 1–4. Darmstadt: Deutscher Verlag, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984; Jäger, H., G. Schmidtchen, and L. Süllwold, eds., *Analysen Zum Terrorismus 2: Lebenslaufanalysen*. Darmstadt: Deutscher Verlag, 1981; and von Baeyer-Kaette, W., D. Classens, H. Feger, and F. Neidhardt, Eds. *Analysen Zum Terrorismus 3: Gruppprozesse*. Darmstadt: Deutscher Verlag, 1982.

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Despite these findings, researcher's interest in examining pathological narcissism as an explanation of terrorist behavior continued – mostly by mental health professionals with limited practical experience in countering terrorism (e.g., Gilmartin, 1996; Pearlstien, 1991). For instance, Sageman (2004), responding to this perspective using his observations of the 172 AQ affiliated terrorists, explains that he failed to find any evidence of childhood trauma as described by self, friends or relatives.<sup>52</sup> He goes on to state that the vast majority of his sample were described positively (e.g., excellent student, pleasant, shy, loner etc.). Moreover, the author notes that terrorists within AQ cannot have narcissistic personalities due to the ideological obligation of submission to a higher authority, and the willingness of these terrorists to sacrifice for comrades and cause. He goes on to add that AQ's recent non-hierarchical organization structure order does not allow for these personality traits to exist.<sup>53</sup> Although, the psychodynamic approach to explain human behavior in the realm of psychology has “waned” in recent years (Taylor, 1988), it surprisingly continues to be used in terrorism research despite the evidence to the contrary.

Indeed, research on terrorist profiles, traits and personalities has left the field with more questions than answers. Horgan (2009) states that 30 years of social and behavioral research has “not delivered a meaningful terrorist profile” (p. 2). Research has shown that personality traits are poor indicators of deviance or crime (Dernevik et al., 2009) and are difficult to measure consistently. Additionally, the lack of empirical data from terrorist research conducted in the field has left the “field open to wild speculation” (Sageman, 2004, p. 80). For example, this line of research underscores the fact that psychological forces manifesting in personality traits are stable and enduring; appear early in life, and can lead to social maladjustment and dysfunction

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<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that the author found childhood data on only 69 of the 172 AQ members.

<sup>53</sup> Still, other terrorist groups such as, the PKK, the LTTE, and Sendero Luminoso had leaders who appear to exhibit pathological narcissistic personalities. See Post (2007).

(Sageman, 2004). Moreover, Horgan (2014) notes that traits cannot predict behavior based on a single terrorist act and that the presence of these traits in small samples of terrorists cannot be generalized to the broader population (Merari & Friedland, 1985). Borum (2003) underscores that “[t]here is no terrorist personality, nor is there any accurate profile – psychologically or otherwise – of the terrorist” (p. 38). Lastly, and worth noting, individuals who do not exhibit signs of pathological traits and personalities can indeed transform into immoral savages. For example, previous research on violent behavior has shown (through experimental research) that even “normal” individuals – who lack traits associated with violent behavior – can indeed commit horrible acts (Milgram, 1963; Zimbardo, 1972).<sup>54</sup>

**Mental illness.** In parallel to the above efforts to explain terrorist behavior, researchers also looked at the mental health of terrorists. For example, Parry (1976, 1977) claims that not all terrorists are insane or crazy, but that most are; and that terrorists have to be crazy in order to become involved in the types of activities that result in death and destruction. In this explanation, the reasons behind terrorism are not found in the historical or political context, but in the delusional individual *destined* to violence. Indeed, it is of great comfort to label someone who commits terrorism as being profoundly different from the rest of us. Yet in this example, *fundamental attribution error* is to blame (Qauttrone, 1988). Humans tend to view the behavior of others as symptomatic of some dispositional drive, while their own behavior is viewed as being caused by environmental or contextual ones. Accordingly, when humans see violent acts of terrorism, the natural reaction is that they must suffer from some form of mental abnormality (Horgan, 2014).

Yet the existing literature tells a different story. For example, German psychiatrist Wilfred Rasch’s (1979) study on the German the Red Army Faction in the 1970’s countered

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<sup>54</sup> Zimbardo labels this attitudinal transformation the *Lucifer effect*.

claims that the group's leaders were mentally ill. Basing his conclusions on close contact interviews, he concluded that nothing he observed could justify the claims that these individuals are psychotics. He further argues that, after additional examinations of 40 other members of the group, he found no evidence of psychological abnormalities. It should be noted that one explanation for the different outcomes reached by researchers on this matter is the methodology involved. In Rasch's case, close contact and personal interviews gave him a clearer view of who he was assessing. McCauley and Segal (1987) further challenge the presumed relationship between mental illness and terrorism. In their review of the literature on the social- psychology of terrorist groups, the researchers found that the terrorists do not show any "striking" psychopathology, and that they appear to be indistinguishable from the average criminal, or political activist. For these authors, the only differentiating factor between them is that of the contextual circumstances.

More recently, research by Sageman (2004, 2008) concluded that the "jihadis" in his sample were the "best and brightest"; and that although a few suffered from mental illness such as mild retardation and psychotic symptoms, the rate found is the same, or below, the average rate in the general population. Moreover, Horgan (2014) emphasizes that research from the previous three decades has been unable to detect any significant pattern of mental illness in terrorists.<sup>55</sup> Ruby (2002) also concludes that the prevalence of mental illness among samples of terrorists in custody is as low as, or lower than, what can be found in the general population. Taylor and Quayle (1994), after conducting unstructured and close contact interviews with terrorists from Ireland and Europe, conclude that they are far from being "madmen." The authors describe how these terrorists have considerable insights into their own actions and are quite

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<sup>55</sup> Horgan (2014) does note that although there have been cases of female schizophrenic patients recruited as suicide bombers by AQ in Iraq except that, in this instance, they are unwitting terrorists exploited by the group.

aware of the how others view them. Indeed, terrorist organizations carefully screen out potential members before recruitment so as to avoid a serious liability to their clandestine operations.<sup>56</sup>

For example, in the case of suicide bombers, the mentally ill would be vetted in order to prevent security risks (Horgan, 2014).<sup>57</sup> For instance, a study by Post et al. (2009) found that a Palestinian terrorist, tried in a US federal court in 1997 for skyjacking, was screened by the group psychiatrist after experiencing symptoms of PTSD. Apparently, continued participation for this operative could have jeopardized the entire organization.

Despite terrorists use of unthinkable means to achieve their political objectives, the vast majority of research to date shows that terrorists are psychologically normal (Horgan, 2014; Silke, 2003) and that terrorists are actually healthier and more stable than other violent criminals (Lyons & Harbinson, 1986). These observations are in-line with terrorism researchers' conclusions at the end of a major International Summit on Democracy Terrorism and Security in 2005. These experts note that explanations of terrorism at the *individual* level are insufficient; that terrorists are, by and large, not psychotic, depressed, or severely emotionally disturbed, nor are they crazy fanatics (Horgan, 2014).

**Psychopathy.** Still, one seemingly logical conclusion we make about the perpetrators of horrific terrorist acts such as beheadings, suicide operations, and mass executions on TV or on social media sites, is that they most certainly are mentally deranged psychopathic murderers.

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<sup>56</sup> Although Zacarias Moussaoui, a known AQ operative and believed to be the “20th” suicide bomber on 9/11, has been reportedly diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic by the defense psychologist. See Lewis, N. (2006). Psychologist Says Moussaoui Is Schizophrenic. *The New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/18/us/18cnd-moussaoui.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>57</sup> Research on lone wolf terrorism may paint a different story. A recent study by, Horgan, and Deckert (2014) on 119 lone-actor terrorists found that the nearly 32% had some form of mental illness before the individual engaged in terrorism related behavior.



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Psychopathy in this case is a label that is generally accepted and “understood”.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, psychopathy has been a major psychological construct in explaining terrorist behavior since the early 1980’s (Corrado, 1981). Extant research has shown that psychopaths exhibit both social and emotional deviance. They are impulsive, need excitement, lack responsibility, are antisocial, glib, egocentric, lack remorse or guilt, deceitful, manipulative, and lack any emotions (Hare, 1993). At first glance, these descriptions seem to fit nicely with how we envision terrorists – but are they accurate? And are these conclusions validated by empirical research?

Victoroff (2005) claims that “sociopaths may sometimes be among the terrorists, but terrorists are not, by virtue of their political violence, necessarily sociopaths” (p. 14).<sup>59</sup> This observation appears to be substantiated by some of the autobiographies and interviews that have surfaced in recent years. For example, Michael Stone (2003) provides a strong case against the psychopathic claim. In 1988, Stone was involved in a deadly terrorist attack on IRA mourners in Northern Ireland. Three people were killed and dozens injured. Stone recalls:

I knew I might die on active service and for a brief second I thought about pulling the plug on the operation. I was only human, not a robot or a monster. I didn't have ice running through my veins. I was anxious and a little scared. (p. 125)

The above example could be viewed as evidence that a terrorist, in the context of what was occurring in Ireland at that time, could not be considered a psychopath since anxiety and fear are not inherent in their behavioral calculus. In another example from Italy, a Red Brigade operative states that:

I never considered myself a murderer; we had declared war on the State, even though the State did not recognize us as combatants. In this context people were killed, were

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<sup>58</sup> Although the term psychopath is used pejoratively, it should be noted that researchers have begun to distinguish between criminal and non-criminal psychopaths (in addition to primary and secondary psychopathy). That is, not all psychopaths are inherently “bad”.

<sup>59</sup> The term sociopathy and psychopathy have been used interchangeably in the past. However, researchers have recently begun to make a distinction between the two. For example, sociopathy is believed to be acquired while psychopathy is seen as biologically caused.

kidnapped and died, and we were arrested and stripped of our dignity in prison. We killed people we did not know except for the fact that they were opponents.... It was unpleasant to kill, the thought of the relatives of the victims brought us suffering, but it was necessary for a higher cause. (di Giovanni, 1990, p. 108)

Again, this account illustrates a clear case of empathy – arguably, psychopaths feel no empathy.

Moreover, membership in a terrorist organization requires self-sacrifice, loyalty, and commitment. In contrast, psychopaths are driven purely by self-serving motives that would contradict the values that any terrorist group would require of its members.

Again, conclusions that terrorist are psychopathic would offer much comfort to societies who experienced terrorism, but it appears that this label is – for the time being – misplaced. The literature informs us that there is no room for psychopaths in terrorist organizations due to social and emotional factors that inhibit the psychopath from being accepted *into* and *remaining* attached to the group. Psychopaths are known for drifting in and out of relationships (Hare, 1993), and invest in personal relationships *only* enough to get what they want. Terrorist groups, on the other hand, are comprised of individual members committed to both group and overarching cause – these requirements may be too much for the psychopath to meet (Horgan, 2014). Also, in many cases, terrorist recruiters seek out highly motivated, disciplined and reliable members – qualities not found in the psychopath. Even if psychopaths do become members of terrorist organizations, they become a burden on the group by creating, among other things, internal conflicts, consequently making their presence too costly (Alderdice, 2007). Dernevik, Beck, Grann, Hogue and McGuire (2009) further refute the psychopathy argument on methodological grounds. The researchers assert that measuring psychopathic behavior using the available diagnostic tools such as the ubiquitous PLC-R<sup>60</sup> are of inadequate validity when

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<sup>60</sup> The psychopathy checklist (the PLC and subsequently the revised version the PLC-R) was developed by Robert Hare, a Canadian psychologist, in 1991 and 2003 as a psychopathy assessment instrument and

attempting to predict “politically motivated” crimes (e.g., terrorism). They note that the PLC-R does not include important contextual factors such as religion and ideology in its overall assessment. Thus, it would be difficult to identify, and predict terrorist behavior on a limited population that has yet to be fully examined/researched in a clinical setting (Dernevik et al., 2009). Sageman (2008) agrees with this observation. He notes that in order to accurately assess psychopathy (or more accurately antisocial personality disorders), researchers need historical evidence of a terrorists’ childhood to be able to make an informed diagnosis.

### **Towards a Better Understanding of Terrorism**

Clearly, the arguments of terrorists as psychopaths have been challenged. Even those who claim that terrorists are mentally ill will encounter resistance to this claim. Moreover, extant research has informed us that dissimilar groups conduct, sustain and end their terrorist activities for different reasons. This makes it nearly impossible to identify a single cause – let alone a theory that explains it all (Horgan, 2007). Additionally, the many causes are “interacting, bidirectional, (and) confounded by unknown or misunderstood other variable” (p. 113). The field’s limited knowledge is partly due to the complexity of causes of terrorism and because, as Laqueur (1986) explains, again, that many “terrorisms” exist.

Not surprisingly, and based on the conclusions of the previous research, alternative approaches to explaining terrorism, and those who commit it, have now been pursued – an explanation that includes both individual and contextual factors. By accepting that multi-determinants, both dispositional and contextual, and interacting at the group level, are at play, provides greater analytic power. Ultimately, this line of research can liberate researchers from the previous schools of thought surrounding this topic. This shift in thinking has occurred for

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has “come to dominate clinical and legal practice over recent years” (Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011, p. 95).

several reasons, many of which have been described before. Horgan (2009), for example, explains that previous research does not take into account that terrorist involvement can be, in most cases, a gradual process.<sup>61</sup> That is, involvement in terrorist groups is expressed in different forms at different times (e.g., different roles at different times within the group). These roles are not *static*, but fluid, and range from what could be construed as subversive activities that fall short of terrorism to full-on acts of murder. Moreover, in many cases, the actual “turn to violence” will occur over an extended period of time.

Exogenous influences are also presumed to play a significant role in involvement in terrorism. Bjorgo (2009), for example, in his research on right-wing extremist groups in Europe, describes how individuals are attracted to terrorism. The author explains the presence of *lures* to joining terrorist groups. These lures include the search for father-like figures and replacement families, friends and community; thrill-seeking and the appeal of being involved in a violent uniformed quasi-military group; and protection, etc. Post, Spriznak and Denny (2003) note that being involved in Palestinian terrorist groups carries with it a sense of status, prestige and honor for not only the terrorist, but also for their family.<sup>62</sup> Research in Pakistan on AQ and the Taliban show similar *pull factors* to terrorism (Beg & Bohkari, 2009). In this case, a life of honor and respect are expected for those who continue to fight the “invading” forces on their lands. Moreover, in several studies on “Islamic” terrorist groups, religious rewards in the afterlife attract potential suicide bombers searching for personal and familial gains. For instance, a suicide bomber can “ensure” not only his own entrance into *paradise*, but also that of many

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<sup>61</sup> Post (2007) offers a somewhat alternative view in his research on nationalist-separatist and “Islamist” groups. He explains that individuals living in areas that experience violent “resistance” movements are socialized into accepting terrorism more readily. For Post “hatred is bred to the bone.”

<sup>62</sup> These conclusions were reached based on data gathered using semi-structured interviews with Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah operatives; and secular groups such as Fatah and the Palestinian Front for the liberation Palestine.

family members (Post, 2007). Unmistakably, for some, the lures of terrorism exist and are stronger than once imagined.<sup>63</sup>

In analyzing factors at the individual level, Horgan (2007, 2009) notes several *risk* factors that are associated with involvement in terrorism.<sup>64</sup> *Temporary* emotional states such as anger, disenfranchisement, and alienation have been observed and may create vulnerabilities that can impinge on that individual to become involved in terrorism. More *permanent* and relevant individual factors have also been proposed such as thrill-seeking, and the ability to cope with high levels of stress. In this case, Horgan notes that different personalities could be attracted to the different roles within a terrorist group (e.g., fundraiser, sniper, bomb-maker etc.). Other factors such as dissatisfaction with current legitimate activities, ineffective political activism, and the urge to “do something” about it has been noted by the researcher as factors associated with terrorism. Also, identification with the victim, kinship and social ties to terrorist groups; believing that terrorism is not inherently wrong; and the expectation that involvement will result in different types of rewards are also viewed as risk factors. For Horgan, these factors *predispose* an individual to becoming more “*open*” to involvement in terrorism. Moreover, this line of thinking helps answer questions as to why so few people with the same structural influences become terrorists.

Consequently, researchers have begun moving away from questions of *why*, to questions that look at the *how*. That is, instead of looking at *why* individuals become terrorists based on individualistic traits, we see a closer look at *how* initial involvement occurred. Here, researchers

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<sup>63</sup> As shall be shown later, previous research neglects to address the phenomenon of abandoning terrorism. That is, those who leave violent groups through voluntary or involuntary disengagement. If terrorist personalities and “root causes” explain involvement in terrorism then how can they explain why some would decide to leave?

<sup>64</sup> Although, for the author, involvement itself is conceptually unclear. For example, Horgan notes that the possession of terrorist propaganda such as magazines and terrorist literature are punishable by law in the United Kingdom under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

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examine how situational and contextual factors *interact* over time, making involvement in terrorism more likely. In this view terrorism is better explained as *process*. Taylor and Horgan (2007) state that:

Some of the difficulties we face arise from the assumption that terrorism is something to be understood out of its social and political context, and which furthermore can be characterised as a psychological state of some kind disconnected from context and history; this necessarily leads to a focused attempt to identify unique and/or personal qualities. However, an under-explored alternative to an account in terms of individual qualities is to see involvement in terrorism... as a process rather than a state; this implies a focus not on the individual and their presumed psychological or moral qualities, but on process variables such as the changing context that the individual operates in, and also the relationships between events and the individual as they affect behavior. (p. 586)

Clearly, for Taylor and Horgan (2007), processes may lead to not only better conceptualizing of terrorism, but also more practical and effective counterterrorism approaches.

The shift from *profiles* to *pathways* and *roots* to *routes* has taken place (Horgan, 2008). A shift away from the static, end-state explanations of terrorism to ones based more on movement and non-linearity. Explanations that take into account the interactions that occur between the “vulnerable” individual and the environments they come from. Here, processes explain how one may gradually move from non-violence to violence (and in many cases back to non-violence). Clearly, the process of becoming a terrorist entails a beginning and an end. For example, McCauley and Segal (1989) observed that terrorists are becoming involved and are remaining committed, while others are becoming less committed and eventually leave the group. Adding to this conceptualization, Horgan (2014) breaks down terrorism into three different yet overlapping parts: involvement, engagement and disengagement. It is in the involvement in terrorism that research in the past several years has focused. More specifically, it is the *process* of involvement that has gained the most attention – a process described as radicalization.

**Radicalization.** Involvement in terrorism and radicalization has become synonymous in recent years. Since 2004, the concept of radicalization has been central to “terrorism studies and counter terrorism policy-making” (Kundnani, 2012, p. 3). It has “pervaded almost all aspects of the discourse on terrorism and risk since 9/11” (Githens-Mazer, 2012, p. 559). Radicalization has been defined as the *process* of developing extremist beliefs or ideologies (Borum, 2011). And it is these beliefs that presage involvement in terrorist groups. Indeed, many researchers believe that no act of terror can be understood in the absence of radical beliefs (Neumann, 2013). Whether one looks at AQ and its affiliated groups, the Irish Republican Army, or left and right-wing terrorist groups, the presence of an underlying radical ideology is claimed to be the prime motivator for terrorism. But questions remain as to when and how these radical beliefs are embraced.

Still, by adopting this view of terrorism, policy-makers hope to disrupt this process before and as it occurs. Accordingly, different government institutions, in the US and beyond, have developed models for how they understand the process of radicalization, and subsequent terrorist involvement. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2007)<sup>65</sup> has developed a model that looks specifically at Muslim converts in the United States and terrorism. Here, four sequential stages for radicalization take place: pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and action. Similar to this line of thinking, the New York Police Department (Silber & Bahjat, 2006) developed a linear model that seeks to explain the adoption of “salafi”/jihadi ideologies in Western countries. For these authors pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and “jihadization” occur. Lastly, the 2007 Danish Ministry of Justice Report on homegrown terrorism states that radicalization also develops in a linear four-stage process where pre-radicalization occurs first; followed by conversion/identification; then conviction and

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<sup>65</sup> Retrieved from <http://leb.fbi.gov/2007-pdfs/leb-december-2007>.

indoctrination next; with the process culminating into action (Precht, 2006).

Sageman (2008) provides a non-linear process of radicalization based on his sample of 172 AQ related operatives. The author proposes two pathways: the “bunch of guys” pathway, and that of involvement through joining groups comprised of childhood friends. In either case, groups (or *clusters*) develop spontaneously with group dynamics playing an important role. The process begins with radicalization, then mobilization, followed by motivation and, in some cases, separation. More specifically, individuals radicalize due to the sense of moral outrage for the perceived war against Islam that, and importantly, resonates with each individual’s personal experiences (e.g., discrimination and marginalization). Lastly, Sageman highlights the presence of terrorist networks that facilitate the shift into these terrorist groups. Interestingly, as the individual becomes more radicalized, their previous social relations become distant, leading to further isolation from prosocial influences and more dependence on the new radical group.

In yet another manifestation of the concept of radicalization, Moghaddam (2005) introduces what he terms the “staircase” to terrorism. In this model of radicalization, the author suggests that an individual progresses through six different “staircases” with each subsequent step providing a limited set of alternatives to choose from. For this individual, progressing through this imaginary staircase, terrorism becomes the only rational action to select. McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) describe a process of radicalization as a pyramid shape in which the most radicalized are found at the peak. Here, pyramid apex represents more radical behavior and a commitment to stronger cognitive feelings and emotions towards their group and cause. In this model, the authors attempt to explain why so few become active terrorists as compared to the base. They note that for individuals found in the middle of the pyramid, *groupthink* reinforce radical beliefs, especially when isolation occurs due to in-group out-group hatred. Also,



increasing animosity between in and out-groups causes only the most extreme to remain in what can be described as a perpetual process of self-selection where only the most radical will ultimately remain. Additionally, the authors provide 12 mechanisms for either the individual or the group that help explain *why* radicalization initially occurs. These mechanisms are: personal victimization; political grievance; the slippery slope; the power of love; extremity shift in like-minded groups; extreme cohesion under isolation and threat; competition for the same base of support; condensation; fissioning; Jujitsu politics; hate and martyrdom.

**The Internet and radicalization.** Researchers have also examined the role of the Internet and social media to understand the radicalization process and terrorist groups in general. Hoffman (2006), like others, notes that AQ no longer relies solely on guns and bombs to achieve its strategic objectives. Today, Minicams, laptops, e-mail accounts, web servers, smart phones and a host of other 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies have been used for nefarious purposes. Terrorist groups exploit the Internet as a method of propaganda dissemination, a means of communication, a platform for training, a conduit for receiving financial support and for recruitment and radicalization<sup>66</sup> (Theohary & Rollins, 2011). Unquestionably, the Internet offers AQ and its affiliates the same opportunities and capabilities that it affords for the rest of society: the “ability to communicate, collaborate and convince” (von Behr, Reding, Edwards, & Gribbon, 2013, p. 3). Indeed, for many people across the globe today, including terrorist groups, using the Internet is inexpensive, allows anonymity, and permits global reach.

More recently, social media has been noted as an important factor in the recruitment and radicalization of AQ affiliated terrorists (Klausen, 2015). One reason for this is the rapid increase

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<sup>66</sup> In 2005, AQ’s then deputy leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, in assessing the group’s vision for the future, stated that over half of the group’s battle is waged through the media with the objective of winning the hearts and minds of the Islamic *ummah*. For Zawahiri and AQ, the Internet was and remains a critical frontline. For more see [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm).

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in social media use in the West and beyond. For example, in the US, time spent using social media increased from 88 billion minutes in 2011, to nearly 121 billion minutes in 2012 (Weimann, 2014). Additionally, individuals spend nearly 24 hours a week sending emails, texts and other forms of social interactions. Yet, and not surprisingly, these interactions have not all been benign. In an analysis of ISIL social media use, Berger and Morgan (2015) found that nearly 46,000 Twitter accounts were used by the group in a four month period in 2014. Interestingly, roughly 20% of those accounts chose the English language as the primary language used. The authors also note that these accounts had approximately 1,000 followers daily and were very active.<sup>67</sup> Klausen (2015) examined 59 Twitter accounts of known Western “fighters” in Syria and found that 85% of these account holders tweeted in English (their native language), and that nearly 75% of these accounts had more followers than accounts being followed. These figures are higher than the average Twitter user. This is a troubling observation considering that the majority of tweets are on ‘jihadist’ dogma (e.g., fatwas or religious edicts, “jihadist” literature, and religious guidance, etc.) and battlefield reporting (e.g., pictures of “martyrs”, ongoing operations in Syria and elsewhere, and guidance on how to reach Syria safely).

Indeed, AQ and AQ affiliated groups prolific use of social media has prompted researchers to better examine the nexus between Internet use (including social media) and radicalization. For example, in their literature review of Internet radicalization, von Behr et al. (2013) discover five specific themes that terrorism researchers have previously focused on. The assumptions are that the Internet: increases the opportunities for self-radicalization; the Internet operates as an “echo chamber”;<sup>68</sup> the Internet is viewed as an accelerator of the process of

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<sup>67</sup> The authors note that these numbers are higher than “ordinary” accounts.

<sup>68</sup> An *echo chamber* is a situation where information and ideas are exchanged, reinforced, and amplified within a closed system in which competing voices are either prohibited or excluded. In this instance, radical views may become mainstream.

radicalization; the Internet works as facilitator of radicalization in the absence of physical contact; and lastly, the view that the Internet creates more opportunities for radicalization. In testing their hypotheses in respect to the validity of these assumptions, the authors reviewed 15 cases within the United Kingdom of Internet radicalization that included AQ affiliated suspects, “Islamist” extremists and right-wing groups. The authors found that the Internet does indeed create more opportunities for radicalization and that it does act as an “echo chamber” in most of the cases. However, they note that their study did not provide evidence that self-radicalization was occurring. In most cases, the individual had communications with others in online terrorist communities. Moreover, the study was not able to conclusively demonstrate that the Internet acted as an accelerator of radicalization, nor did they find that physical contact was unnecessary in the process of radicalization. The latter finding contrasts with what other researchers have found outside the UK. For instance, the case of American born “Jihad Jane.”<sup>69</sup> Known as Colleen LaRose, “Jihad Jane” was arrested in 2009 for her involvement in a plot to kill Lars Vilks, a “controversial” Swedish cartoonist. Her radicalization appeared to occur entirely through the Internet (Halverson & Way, 2012). Similarly, Arid Uka, an Albanian Muslim who was living in Germany, was arrested for killing two US servicemen and injuring two others near the Frankfurt airport (Weimann, 2014). Investigators claimed that Arid was driven to commit his act after watching a YouTube video of an alleged raping of a Muslim woman by US soldiers. Apparently, Arid was not involved in any terrorist group prior to his act nor did he travel aboard to train. His radicalization occurred through the Internet.

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<sup>69</sup> The Internet has changed how AQ and its member’s operate. For example, Sageman (2008) describes how the Internet has now allowed women to become more involved in the group’s operations (e.g., propaganda creation and distribution). For these vulnerable women, face-to-face interactions are no longer required to connect with suspect elements of the terrorist underworld. Interestingly, ‘Jihad Jane’s’ only means of contact with the group of perpetrators was through the Internet and social media – that is, no face-to-face meetings ever occurred.

Still, research on Internet radicalization provides another explanation. That is, for some vulnerable youth, the Internet and social media are the perfect medium to express anger and frustrations either individually or collectively. Web sites, chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter etc. are places where they can find like-minded individuals. In this case, self-selection might be more of an explanation for radicalization than the Internet and the sites within it. When and how the shift to violence happens is still up for debate.

When considering the *novelty* of the Internet, it is not surprising that the field's understanding of the role of the Internet and social media, vis-à-vis radicalization, is still unclear (Ferguson, 2016). Although the role of social media is undeniably present, the exact effects are not yet known. Today, ISIL and similar-minded groups, represent a "new phase" in the world's efforts to counter terrorism due, in part, to the group's ability to exploit social media. Now, "lone wolf" terror acts, as they relate to social media, are more real than ever before (Tumulty, 2015).

**Issues with radicalization.** Undeniably radicalization research has steadily increased in the past decade, especially since the 2005 terrorist attacks in London (Horgan, 2014). The adoption of the radicalization construct to explain terrorism involvement has moved the field away from deterministic explanations and terrorist profiles. However, even with radicalization, it appears that more questions are created than sound answers offered.

To begin, there is no consensus on what radicalization actually is. For example, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) focus on mechanisms and group dynamics, defining radicalization as:

Increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup. (p. 416)

Borum (2011) provides a variety of definitions used by Western intelligence and security institutions. For instance, the Dutch Security Service (AIVD) defines radicalization as a:

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Growing readiness to pursue and/or support – if necessary by undemocratic means – far – reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a threat to, the democratic order. (p. 12)

The Danish Intelligence Service (PET) sees violent radicalization as:

A process by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective. (p. 12)

The U.K.'s Home Office views radicalization as:

The process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups. (p. 12)

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines radicalization as:

The process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect social change. (Schmid, 2013, p. 12)

While the Swedish Security Service conceptualizes radicalization as both:

A process that leads to ideological or religious activism to introduce radical change to society and a process that leads to an individual or group using, promoting or advocating violence for political aims. (Schmid, 2013, p. 12)

Unquestionably, the rise of the radicalization construct has sparked intense debates within academia. As is evident, an agreed upon definition of the concept has not yet been reached (Horgan, 2014). Additionally, a review of radicalization research by Githens-Mazer (2012) found that only a limited number of studies on radicalization were empirically based. Moreover, the “overwhelming majority that used their own empirical data provided no definition of the concept of radicalization” (p. 3). The author notes that the concept is used differently based on different understandings of radicalization leading to more confusion than clarity. This ambiguity is partially due to the conflation of two distinct concepts: *causes* and *process* of radicalization. That is, radicalization as a cause of terrorism or as a process leading to terrorism. The researcher

cautions that the term radicalization has substituted the word terrorism and that the former should be abandoned altogether.

The radicalization debate also presents challenges to policy-makers tasked with countering terrorism. For example, no distinction is made between cognitive and behavioral radicalization (Neumann, 2013). In this case, different policies need to be developed to address either the cognitive or the behavioral outcomes of radicalization. Neumann emphasizes that radicalization as a process is not contentious, but questions arise when attempting to objectively determine where exactly the “end point” rests (e.g., extreme or radical beliefs). For Neumann, extremism or extremist behavior is a normative label that is subject to historical and contextual considerations. That is, the word radical has no meaning of its own (Sedgwick, 2010).

Indeed, what was once considered extreme thought or behavior in the past could very well be normal in the present or future (e.g., civil rights, gay marriage in the 1980’s, etc.). Neumann (2013) cites two definitions that support his unease in this regard. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) views radicalization as “the movement of ... individuals from moderate mainstream beliefs to extremist views.”<sup>70</sup> He also notes a definition used by US Congressional Research Service report in which AQ related radicalization is seen as “the process of acquiring ... radical, extremist or jihadist beliefs” (Bjelopera, 2011, p. 1).<sup>71</sup> The previous definitions propose that radical ideas precede radical behavior, and that in order to prevent radical acts, radical ideas must be stopped. The policy prescriptions for the US would appear limited unless constitutional rights would be transgressed. For the US, freedom of speech and religion prohibit law enforcement agencies from acting until the belief is manifested in a violent way. Moreover, research concludes that many are not radical before joining terrorist groups and that radical

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<sup>70</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/nsci-ecsn/rad/internet/p2-eng.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, the Dutch Security Service (AIVD) does not include the term violent in their definition of radicalization.

beliefs are developed after joining (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan, 2014). Again, if terrorists groups lure potential candidates, then radical beliefs might not be the only factor in this process.

Although the concept of radicalization has dominated the discussion on terrorism, conceptual uncertainties impede policy-makers from developing a unified approach to countering radicalization. For instance, in the US and the United Nations, counter radicalization is now replaced with countering violent extremism (CVE)<sup>72</sup> and more recently the prevention of violent extremism. And although the adoption of the countering violent extremism lexicon could be an indication that radicalization, as a concept, is beginning to wane, it has not completely disappeared. Radicalization research has entered the realm of prisons as shall be shown later (see section on prison radicalization and the emergence of deradicalization programs). Indeed, terrorism research has continued to move forward. Yet the inability of previous research to fully explain initial involvement in terrorism has generated a different type of interest and, accordingly, research agenda, one that seeks to explain why terrorists leave groups. For these authors, *disengagement* from violent and terrorist groups offers another avenue of exploration in the field of terrorism studies.

### **Alternative Approach: Understanding Disengagement**

Certainly, terrorism is a complex phenomenon where diverse groups, and even more diverse group members, strive for contrasting goals. To better understand this reality, researchers have begun looking at the *process* of terrorism involvement, and in many cases the disengagement from violence. For many authors, disengagement is a viable approach to understanding terrorist behavior and a practical way to prevent it.

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<sup>72</sup> For more, see the 2011 US Counter-Radicalization Strategy titled *Empowering Local partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism>.

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However, disengagement from terrorism is not immune to the conceptual ambiguity that has dogged other important concepts such as terrorism and radicalization (Horgan, 2014). This knowledge gap stems from a lack of research due to the fields disinterest in studying *what has occurred*, and consequently, viewed as unworthy of research (Horgan, 2009). For Horgan, the neglect of research on disengagement raises questions to how the terrorism research agenda, which is driven by the (urgent) needs of policy-makers within their respected government, is developed. Despite these observations, concepts and definitions have been afforded to de-conflict the misconceptions over what it means to be disengaged – much of which is based on research conducted on left and right-wing extremist groups, cults, and gangs.

Disengagement, in general, is defined as the process of changing one's behavior by refraining from terrorist groups and their activities (Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010). For Horgan (2014) however, more conceptual clarity is required. For instance, researchers must begin by making an important distinction between what it means to be physically disengaged and psychologically disengaged. For example, psychological disengagement occurs when the individual would cease to *believe* in the group they belong to. Psychological disengagement might arise from a sense of disillusionment, where the fantasy of being involved in terrorism does not correspond with the actual reality of it. Psychological disillusionment may also occur due to ideological and strategic differences with group leaders, or to tactical disagreements over who to target and how. Moreover, changing personal priorities such as marriage, or the desire to live a *normal* life, might contribute to the sense of disillusionment, and accordingly, psychological disengagement. Lastly, terrorist group members might just simply become *burned out*. The lifestyle of the terrorists is stressful, time consuming and dangerous. It should be noted, that although one might become psychologically disillusioned, physical disengagement might



not follow due to the presence of *exit barriers* such as fear of reprisal from security services and rival groups, the reality of losing friends, and the sense of betrayal that might arise upon leaving<sup>73</sup> (Bjorgo, 2009). Physical disengagement, on the other hand, defined as the cessation of terrorist activity, occurs, in large part, when a terrorist group member experiences *role migration* (Horgan, 2014). Role migration can either be voluntary or involuntary such as imprisonment or expulsion from the group (Disley, Weed, Reding, Clutterbuck, & Warnes, 2011). In Horgan's (2014) research, voluntary role migration can also be caused by law enforcement surveillance. In this case, active group members might be tasked with less conspicuous roles. Additionally, acquiring technical expertise or even political participation in local politics may result in role migration. In all these cases, the individual might be disengaged from violence, but continues to espouse the radical beliefs of the group.

**Disengagement research.** Disengagement research on AQ affiliated terrorist groups has been, and not surprisingly, limited due to the clandestine nature of the groups, restricted access to prisoners, and because terrorist members are on the run or in hiding. Furthermore, if research is permissible, those who are accessible might be *different* and unrepresentative of the group in general. Yet despite this shortage of accessible data, our understanding of disengagement has increased. Specifically, researchers have leveraged existing studies conducted on other secretive and violent groups in an attempt to better understand the disengagement process. For example, research on youth gangs sheds light on the power of group dynamics and cohesion that make exit/disengaging difficult. Cohen's (1955) early research showed how gangs provided for the needs of the youth who sought group membership. These needs include the provision of an identity, protection, a sense of community and excitement. Vigil (1988) observed that the process

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<sup>73</sup> For example, group members might inform the authorities of previous crimes committed by those who were once involved in the group.

of joining a gang is, at times, more difficult than leaving, noting that the group provides, again, the member with valuable social ties in the form of support and friendship that impede exit. Thus, the need to provide an alternative social milieu is seen as critical for youth gang exit. This is in line with Klien's (1995) conclusion that harsh law enforcement practices are counterproductive and actually serve to strengthen group solidarity making exit even more difficult. Decker and Van Winkle (1996) explained that even when a gang member chose to leave, rival gang members continued to target them. They also found that even after exit, it was difficult to accurately determine disengagement since former gang members continue to associate with their former friends. Also worth noting is that research on gang disengagement did find that members *aged-out* of the gang, with many leaving due to the high levels of violence experienced either directly or indirectly (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Accordingly, one policy recommendation was to intervene immediately after being victimized. Here, the gang member is most vulnerable and disconnected from the powers of group dynamics. Lastly, extant research has shown that a significant majority of youth gang members quit relatively quickly, as opposed to other forms of violent subcultures (Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 2004).

Desistance from crime has also been explored to understand disengagement from terrorism. Laub and Sampson (1993, 2003) developed a theory of *age-graded informal social control* to explain criminal desistance. The authors note that *turning points* that occur to the individual such as marriage, employment, and military service change the *routine activities* of the individual and limit antisocial associations thus reducing the opportunities to commit crime. For these authors, the *qualities* of the above mentioned structural attachments have a positive influence on the life-course for those who have previously been *set* on a criminal career

trajectory. For those criminals who have experienced *turning points*, increased social capital and interdependence prevent further crime commission. Warr (1998) adds to this explanation by elaborating on how *differential associations* are an important factor in desistance from crime. Here, antisocial associations are disrupted allowing for more prosocial ones to develop, consequently preventing the reinforcement of criminal attitudes and behaviors and encouraging law obedience.

Research on cults and New Religious Movements (NRM's) finds that the process of voluntary disengagement consists of several stages. Wright's (1988) research, based on interviews with both current and former members of cults, showed how the *disaffiliation* process begins with disillusionment and how this state of mind is associated with the breakdown in the individual's insulation from the outside world. In this instance, intimate and loving relationships that are not sanctioned by the group's leaders weaken the bond to the group. Another source of disillusionment that allows for *disaffiliation* is the failure of group to reach its objectives; and the inconsistencies observed between the behavior of the leaders and their stated values and goals. Additionally, the author notes that external pull factors such as the desire to return to school, heeding the calls of their families, and discovering a new belief system are all factors in leaving the movement. Lastly, Wright explains that exiting the group can take three forms: covert, overt and declarative (where exit is both public and hostile). Beckford's (1985) decade long research on former members (and parents of current members) of the Unification Church<sup>74</sup> in several countries found that some members exited the group because they felt homesick, while others felt a sense of guilt for deserting close relatives. Also associated with exit was the inability of the group's leaders to address and resolve lingering ideological questions.

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<sup>74</sup> The Unification Church (known derogatorily as the Moonies after the group's founder Sung Myung Moon) is a religious movement originating in South Korea in the 1950's. The movement reached the US several years later. The group has been perceived as controversial for their unorthodox theology.

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Ebaugh's (1988) describes a more dynamic, yet linear theory of voluntary role exit. Based on 185 in-depth interviews with former prostitutes, convicts, alcoholics and others, the researcher notes a process revolving around identity-searching and replacement. The process begins with initial doubts about the person's present role compelling them to make a cost/benefit analysis for remaining in that role. The initial doubt rises from a sense of general dissatisfaction, yet without understanding the actual reasons behind it. The next stage is that of "seeking out and weighing alternative" roles. If an alternative role is found, a turning point takes place in which the individual formally announces their decision to exit their previous role (an example of this would be handing in a job resignation). The last stage is the "post exit phase" where the individual must construct a new identity that incorporates both the new role and the former ex-role. Here, significant challenges arise for the new "ex" not least of which is managing the perceptions of these new relationships that continue to *see* the previous identity of that individual. Accordingly, adjustments made by the "ex" revolve around how the self is presented and how to deal with new and former relationships based on this new identity. And although promising, the linear process developed by the author has not been empirically verified (Altier et al., 2014).

In examining European right-wing movement, Bjorgo (2011) notes:

People engage in terrorism and similar forms of violent extremism for a variety of reasons, political or non-political. In general, they do so to fulfill a dream, a need or an urge to do or achieve something. The frequent failure to achieve what they expected or dreamed about is also usually the source of their disillusionment, and subsequently, a main reason to disengage from violent extremism – providing that they are able to do so. (p. 277)

Unmistakably, disillusion appears to be a major factor that drives both involvement and disengagement from violent groups. Bjorgo's (2009) research, based mostly on interviews with 50 former and current right-wing extremist, revealed that different "push" and "pull" factors are

at play and influence the member to disengage. “Push” factors include the loss of faith in the ideology due to self-doubt in the group’s goals (which usually occur after leaving the group); a feeling that the violent activities of the group have “gone too far”; disillusionment with the *inner workings of the group* in which excess partying and rowdiness, of group members, shatters the *fantasies* these nascent members once had, in addition to feelings of paranoia caused by fear of infiltration and internal group pressures due to the likelihood of losing status and confidence within the group; and exhaustion from being a member of a demanding right-wing racist group (i.e., burnout). Moreover, stigma and fear of prosecution place pressures on group members to reconsider the *stigmatized* lifestyle that they have chosen. Lastly, Bjorgo noted how negative sanctions by the new member’s previous social network could foster disengagement – but only in cases where stronger bonds to the group have yet to form.<sup>75</sup> “Pull” factors associated with disengaging include the desire to live a “normal life”; becoming too old and no longer yearning for excitement or even having the energy to participate in group activities; and the desire to avoid jeopardizing career prospects.<sup>76</sup> The strongest of all pull factors, as noted by Bjorgo, was the member’s longing for establishing a family. Here, new intimate relationships, for both males and females, were seen as a strong factor for group exit.

Yet despite these push and pull factors, exit does not always occur. Inhibiting factors that prevent disengagement do in fact appear. For example, negative sanctions from the group such as threats against personal safety (to the member and/or his/her family), and notifying the authorities for crimes previously committed, would inhibit the disillusioned within their ranks from leaving. Also, abandoning the group means the loss of the protection of the group. Former

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<sup>75</sup> The author notes that severe sanctions can have a negative impact. In this instance, labeling them as racists and Nazis might push them further into group’s arms – especially in the absence of available alternative identities to this nascent member.

<sup>76</sup> Existing European laws (in Germany mainly) exclude former right-wing activists from employment opportunities.

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*enemies* (that may have initially pushed the individual to become involved), and the newly created ones, would seek revenge for the violence committed while that individual was a member of the group. Negative sanctions from law enforcement may also inhibit a member from exit. The fear of prosecution for previous criminal acts, and the fear that the authorities would place pressures on them to inform on former friends keeps members in place. Also, those members who wish to exit have nowhere else to go considering previous social ties and friendships have been severed. Lastly many members view their future career prospects as limited due to their involvement with neo-Nazi or far-right groups.

Moving closer to terrorism, Wasmund (1986) looked at how German Red Army faction members *disassociated* from the group, noting that exit from a group also entails the loss of identity and community. Furthermore, the likelihood of arrest and incarceration are seen as not conducive to disengaging from the group. The author noted that the rewards of remaining in the group exceeded the punishment of exit. More recently, della Porta examined disengagement of left-wing groups in Italy (2009). In her case studies, the researcher observed the pivotal role that legislative initiatives, known as *pentiti* and as dissociation laws, had in reducing the threat by left-wing groups in that country. These laws, enacted in the early 1980's, reduced sentences for members who confessed to involvement in terrorism. Moreover, sentences were significantly reduced for members whose collaboration with the authorities led to group infiltration and disruption of illegal activities.<sup>77</sup> The author also noted that the implementation of "homogenous" areas within the prisons helped facilitate disengagement. Here, prisoners were housed with others who shared their desire to disengage from the group. This Italian government initiative reduced the pressures to remain committed to the organization by distancing defectors from those still

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<sup>77</sup> Sentence reduction was dependent on the amount of "damage" done to the group by the defector's confession/cooperation.

ideologically committed. Here, the author described how external forces had an influence on the disengagement process from left-wing terrorist groups. Still, although the *pentiti* and dissociation laws were associated with the decline of the Red Brigades in Italy, many of those who benefited from these initiatives did not actually change their radical attitude (Post, 2007).

Others provide a different explanation. For instance, disengagement from terrorist groups is, by some accounts, associated with positive relations with a mentor. Garfinkel (2007) conducted primary research using telephone interviews, as a method, with seven former members of religious terrorist groups. The author found that positive associations with mentors encouraged the individual to move from violent to peaceful change noting that these personal ties allow for an *ideological reorientations* to occur. The shift in attitude and behavior was initially due to vulnerabilities, often caused by crises, stressful or traumatic experiences. Jacobson (2007), on the other hand, in a review of the personal accounts of individuals who left terrorist groups, found that those terrorists who continued to have contact with their family and friends are more likely to disengage from the group. The author notes several cases where AQ operatives simply walked away<sup>78</sup> while others such as Ziad Jarrah, pilot of United Airlines flight 93, were barely persuaded to continue with the operation. Although there have been several cases of defection, it is not clear if exit from the group is followed by an ideological shift. More recently, Neumann (2015) compiled a data set of 58 ISIS defectors from across the world. In analyzing their narrative, the author identifies five major themes of why these “foreign fighters” chose to leave: group infighting, targeting other mostly Sunni groups (especially innocent civilians), a recognition that ISIS is corrupt and un-Islamic, and the disappointing and harsh standards of living they experienced in the areas under the group’s control. The author concludes that although far from

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<sup>78</sup> The author notes that two Saudi nationals, who had previously trained in Afghanistan, decided, for reasons unknown, not to take part in the attack.

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rigorous, the study offers insights on the rationale for “foreign fighters” to leave and the need to exploit these “voices” of disillusionment to prevent others from joining.

Horgan (2009) presented case studies of individuals once involved in a range of terrorist groups. One-on-one interviews conducted between 2006 and 2008 with former “Islamist” extremists, IRA, right-wing groups and others from across the globe, helped shed more light on the idiosyncratic process of disengagement. For each of those interviewed, the pathway away from terrorism was as different as the pathways into involvement. The author’s tentative conclusions state that disengagement is not necessarily associated with “de-radicalization”. That is, leaving the group does not mean that radical attitudes and values have actually changed. Additionally, just as involvement with terrorism is a gradual process, so too is disengagement. Moreover, the author also observed that disengagement does not entail a complete break from the group. Continued association with the group in more subversive activities was detected. Despite the study’s production of additional knowledge on disengagement, the author concedes that it is far from rigorous adding that it is indicative of the state of terrorism research, which is described as “pre-scientific, pre-paradigmatic, exploratory and (at best) descriptive” (p. xxiii).

Still, a better understanding of disengagement can serve to bring terror groups to an end. Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) outline the benefits of facilitating disengagement from terrorist groups through disengagement/“deradicalization” and amnesty programs. For example, disengagement can reduce the cost of purely repressive means to counter terrorism such as indefinite prison sentences. Also, the adoption of collective disengagement approach can end a terrorist group campaign as had occurred in Ireland and Egypt. The authors also note that early intervention by law enforcement can help in preventing further radicalization and subsequent commission of serious terrorist acts. In this vein, the introduction of disengagement or



“deradicalization” programs (e.g., in Saudi Arabia and Singapore respectfully) can augment conventional imprisonment practices where rehabilitation and counseling are not specifically applied. Disengagement may also decrease the available manpower of a terrorist group. For example, Rabasa et al. (2010) claim that a *tipping point* occurs when:

Enough ex-militants renounce radical Islamism, the ideology and the organizations that adhere to it are fatally discredited. Even short of this tipping point, as greater numbers of militants renounce extremism, radical Islamist organizations will experience greater hurdles in attracting adherents and sympathizers within the Muslim community. (p. xiv)

Not dissimilar to this line of thinking, Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) note that facilitating disengagement can create a pool of defectors that may act as *credible voices* to counter the ideological narrative disseminated via traditional and non-traditional media outlets. Moreover, these defectors can provide valuable intelligence to law enforcement and intelligence agencies that may aid in the disruption of terrorist organizations and their plans. Lastly, programs that facilitate disengagement are seen as essential *exit routes* for *reluctant* terrorists who are unsure of how to leave and are skeptical of what to expect upon exit. In this case, potential defectors would have to make a choice between the “freedom” of continued involvement and extended prison terms.

Despite the recent uptick in research on disengagement, little is still known about *how* the process of disengagement from terrorist groups actually occurs (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009). Key questions such as what it means to be disengaged, and how to determine if the individual is *truly* disengaged, have not been answered. The reasons for this go beyond the conceptual ambiguities mentioned earlier. Unquestionably, researching disengagement presents, again, a score of methodological challenges as was previously shown. For example, representative samples (and control groups) are hard to find due to the secret nature of terrorism. This makes analysis of key variables, over an extended period of time, and that could explain why and how terrorist

disengage, difficult (Altier et al., 2014). Moreover, samples of individuals who have disengaged, and that are accessible to researchers, may very likely be systematically different from those that remain engaged in terrorism. Lastly, it appears that most of what is known about disengagement is based on studies of right-wing extremists groups and individuals who leave traditional groups and organizations. Time will only tell how transferable this body of knowledge is to AQ affiliated groups across the globe.

Indeed, the significance of promoting disengagement from terrorism in countries that have faced the scourge of terrorism has not gone unnoticed by policy-makers – despite academics grappling with the conceptual uncertainties. Today, we see the development of innovative programs that aim to disengage, rehabilitate and ultimately “de-radicalize” terrorists within their prison systems. As will be shown, research to date has provided evidence that countering terrorism through “softer” less operational approaches has the potential to reduce terrorism.

### **Prison Radicalization and the Emergence of Deradicalization Programs**

Since the September 2001 attacks on the US, and the subsequent GWOT, thousands of suspected AQ affiliated operatives have been detained across the globe (Kruglanski et al., 2010; Pluchinsky, 2008). Of those detained, 20% are serving life sentences or are sentenced to death (Pluchinsky, 2008). Clearly, the overwhelming majority will eventually be released. This situation presents policy-makers with critical choices on how best to address this future threat. One such choice is the need to develop disengagement or “deradicalization” programs. Undoubtedly, the aim of preventing further radicalization within the prison systems, and rehabilitation of those in custody, is vital to the safety and security of nation-states facing the AQ (and now Daesh) terrorist threat.

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Nevertheless, managing terrorists within the prison system presents a series of challenges for counterterrorism officials and academics – one of which is prison radicalization. Prisoner radicalization is not new though. In the early twentieth century, prisons have unwittingly facilitated ideological growth and recruitment for extremists, the likes of Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler (Mulcahy, Merrington, & Bell, 2013). More recently, terrorists groups such as AQ, the IRA, ETA, and the diverse Palestinian groups have had their leaders and supporters serve time behind bars only to emerge, in many cases, more extreme. Yet despite these unquestionably significant historical cases, terrorists in prisons still pose a problematic policy choice for policy-makers. Specifically, for those concerned with countering terrorism, the risks come in mainly two forms: prisoners radicalizing others in their proximity and prisoners remaining radical upon release. In looking at the former, numerous cases have surfaced where terror suspects radicalize other inmates; in addition to continuing with terror related activities even from behind prison walls. For example, Kevin Lamar James, a former Crip who was serving a 10-year prison sentence for robbery, was indicted for plotting, while in prison, an attack on U.S. military targets, Israeli government facilities and Jewish synagogues in the Los Angeles area (Hamm, 2007). At the time of discovery, the plot was considered one of the most advanced since 2001. It was believed that James gradually became radicalized during his years in prison.<sup>79</sup> Joseph Padilla, also known as the “dirty bomber”, was radicalized in a Broward County Florida jail (Figchel, 2007). He would later be convicted in 2007 with attempting to detonate a “dirty” bomb in the US upon his return from an AQ training camp in Pakistan (Sinai, 2014). Richard Reid, the infamous “shoe bomber”, along with Mukhtar Said, the leader of the failed 21/7 bombing attempt in London, were both thought to be radicalized during their time served at Feltham Youth

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<sup>79</sup> Hamm describes how James drifted from one moderate Islamic group within the prison to the more extreme *Jam'iyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheed*.

Offenders Institution in the UK (Jones, 2014).

The other concern for policy-makers is terror suspects, who upon release, reengage in terror related activities. For example, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the former leader of Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), was imprisoned in the mid 1980's for sexual assault and drug possession (Kirdar, 2011). During Al-Zarqawi's prison stint, he would befriend a leading radical ideologue known as Mohammed Al-Maqdisi.<sup>80</sup> Al-Maqdisi would later take him under his wing. During their time in prison, the two collaborated to cause havoc and disruptions within the prison system allowing for easier recruitment of other petty criminal to their cause (Brandon, 2009). Al-Zarqawi would flee to Afghanistan one year after his release to join the Afghan jihad. Ayman Al-Zawahiri's radical beliefs increased during his three-year prison sentence in the early 1980's for his suspected involvement in the Egyptian president's assassination. Zawahiri was allegedly brutally tortured while in custody emerging more committed to the ideology, more dangerous and even more powerful (Silke, 2014). More recently, Daesh's self-proclaimed leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was arrested in 2005 by US forces in Iraq for anti-coalition activities and held at Camp Bucca for nearly four years (McCoy, 2014). During his detention, Al-Baghdadi was able to connect with other like-minded terrorists, form networks and eventually to "distinguish himself as leader" (Cronin, 2015, p. 89). In Indonesia, a well-known radical hardliner, Oman Rochman, was arrested in 2004 for bomb-making charges only to be subsequently released by the Indonesian authorities. He was later arrested in 2008 for involvement in the establishment of a militant camp in Aceh, Indonesia (Osman, 2014). Also in Indonesia, Abdulla Sonata was arrested in 2005 for his role in aiding and abetting Noordin Top, a top ranking Jemaah Islamiyah member. He was

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<sup>80</sup> Born Isam al-Barqawi in 1959 in the West Bank, Al-Maqdisi is considered one of the leading AQ figures and key ideologues. See Wagemakers' 2008 article titled *Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi: A counter-terrorism asset?* At <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Vol1Iss6-Art3.pdf>.

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sentenced to seven years, released early, and rearrested for joining a terrorist group also operating in Aceh. In Saudi Arabia, thousands were held for terrorism related charges beginning in 2003. Of these, at least 25 are known to have recidivated, including 11 former Guantanamo Bay detainees who later escaped to Yemen to join the newly established AQAP (Porgess, 2014). In the US, a 2016 report by the Director of National Intelligence revealed that, of the 676 detainees transferred from Guantanamo Bay, 30% either rejoined a terrorist group or were suspected of reengaging in violence.<sup>81</sup> Although the above cases are only a small sample of terrorist recidivism, they nonetheless pose a serious concern for policy-makers. For a released terrorist will continue to have the skills and motivations to commit terrorism. In this instance, a violent act committed by a former terrorist would be very hard to explain to a worried constituency.

Unquestionably, terrorists are a distinctive type of prisoner that present a unique challenge for prison authorities. And despite the threat they pose, the topic has been largely ignored (Silke, 2014) and consequently narrows the ability of policy-makers to make informed decisions. Indeed, for many tasked with developing prison policies and management, the choices are limited to segregating terrorists in custody, concentrating them in one place or complete isolation (International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence [ICSR], 2010). The rationale for each choice appears logical enough. For instance, the decision to disperse terror suspects within the prison population is avoided, and in theory, the threat of radicalization is contained. Still, in each policy choice, weaknesses do appear. For example, segregation limits the ability to infiltrate these groups (Murray, 2014). Moreover, the challenges these terrorist inmates pose go beyond the issue of radicalization. That is, terrorists can continue

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<sup>81</sup> See *Summary of the Reengagement of Detainees Formerly Held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba* [http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/Summary\\_of\\_the\\_Reengagement\\_of\\_Detainees\\_Formerly\\_Held\\_at\\_GTMO\\_Ma%204\\_2016.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/Summary_of_the_Reengagement_of_Detainees_Formerly_Held_at_GTMO_Ma%204_2016.pdf).

with their terror related activities. In many cases they continue to develop the group's ideology and strategies, and continue to mobilize supporters (ICSR, 2010). For example, evidence exists that HAMAS prisoners in Israeli prisons directed activities on the street through mobile phones and *ashgarims* (small transparent notes rolled into bindles); while in US prisons, *kites* were used by terrorist inmates as a means to communicate with outside members (Hamm, 2012). In Indonesia, a Jemaah Islamiyah member smuggled a laptop into prison facilitating the translation of radical literature and its dissemination within and beyond the prison confines (Osman, 2014).<sup>82</sup> Here, it appears that corruption within the prison systems allowed terrorist groups to resume planning and indoctrination (Osman, 2014). In other instances, bestselling "jihadi" literature, that justified killing civilians and encouraged their followers to continue to fight, were written while these operatives were in custody (Rabasa et al., 2010). Evidently, being behind bars does not necessarily serve the incapacitation function of prisons (Murray, 2014).

Undoubtedly, the threats terrorist prisoners constitute for counterterrorism and prison officials are many. For instance, the presence of terrorist prisoners behind bars can motivate their *comrades* to liberate them from their captors either through direct measures or through extortion (e.g., hostage taking). In Italy for example, Red Brigade operatives successfully freed Renato Curcio, the leader of the group (Post, 2007).<sup>83</sup> In 1976 in Germany, the Red Army Faction (in collaboration with the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine) hijacked a Lufthansa flight bound to Tel Aviv in an attempt to secure the release of the group's main leaders. The operation failed after German Special Forces stormed the plane ending the hostage crisis. In Yemen, an AQ affiliated terrorist group kidnapped a Saudi diplomat in 2012. The group demanded the release of AQ suspects held in Saudi Arabia – the Saudi government did not heed

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<sup>82</sup> See previous sections on Egyptian terrorist groups.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, Post reports that Curcio was reading a book on bomb-making before being freed.

their demands and the hostage was eventually freed three years later (Alomran, 2015).<sup>84</sup>

Again, the evidence suggests that the housing of “terrorists” presents governments with difficult decisions on how best to address the multiple threats they pose. In many cases, they refuse to cooperate with prison authorities (ICSR, 2010). In the UK for instance, the IRA staged “dirty protests” in reaction to the stripping away, in 1976, of their political prisoner status (Hannah et al., 2008). The inmates refused to wear prison garbs, clean their units and ceased shaving and cutting their hair. This protest would last for several years, culminating in a hunger strike in 1981 that ended in the death of Bobby Sands and nine other IRA prisoners. The unwillingness of the Thatcher<sup>85</sup> government to negotiate with these terrorists, and the subsequent fallout, poured life back into the IRA’s “resistance” by rallying global support for their cause (Post, 2007). One hundred thousand people attended Bobby Sand’s funeral, sending a powerful message to IRA followers, and the British government, that the group should not be underestimated.

Today, and not surprisingly, radicalization within the prison systems has become a major concern for numerous reasons. For one, the growing numbers of terror suspects behind bars increases the perceived threat that radicalization may occur. These concerns seem logical. For example, the presence of nearly 10 million prisoners worldwide (Walmsley, 2009), with nearly one third of those located in the US, is viewed as a potential recruitment pool for terrorist organizations.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, in the US, nearly 35,000 inmates convert to Islam annually – the

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<sup>84</sup> In 2012, ISIL launched what it called the “breaking the walls” campaign in which the group sought to “liberate” its supporters held in Iraqi prisons. By July of 2013, hundreds of AQI operatives and ISIL supporters were freed from several prisons in Iraq – including Abu Ghraib. For more see [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept\\_0.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept_0.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Margaret Thatcher was the leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990 and the Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1990.

<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that prison radicalization does not apply to all terrorist groups. For example, Horgan (2014) notes that the IRA does not recruit “criminals” into their cause.

highest conversion rate of any other religion (Pew Research Centre, 2012). These figures, however, obscure the facts that the research has provided. For instance, although prisoner radicalization can be regarded as a threat against this backdrop, Hamm (2007) finds that in the US, those that do convert do so in search of “meaning and identity” (p. 15); adding that these conversions can actually help in the rehabilitation of the inmate. He goes on to state that only a small percentage of prisoners truly convert their radical beliefs into terrorist actions. The author does caution that, although cases of prison radicalization appear isolated, gang intelligence officers in California and Florida prisons have uncovered potential terrorist plots within their respected jurisdictions. Hamm concludes his study by claiming that those involved in prison radicalization represent the “spectacular few.”

Still, experts have maintained that prisons remain incubators of terrorism and that those in custody do serve as captive audiences (Cilluffo et al., 2007; Hannah et al., 2008). Additionally, prisons are notoriously known for an abundance of alienated young men separated from their traditional support networks (Cilluffo, 2006). In this case, they are viewed as vulnerable subjects to the narratives of radical ideologies (Goldman, 2014). Other concerns relate to the fact that those imprisoned may interact with hardened criminals. In this instance, the threat intensifies in that ideologies mix with criminal expertise allowing for more innovative and deadly terrorist acts to occur (Neumann, 2010; Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007). These concerns are all the more relevant when the “spectacular few” capture the attention of a weary and worried public.

In response to these concerns, researchers have endeavored to understand how prisons, and being a prisoner, are associated with the development of radical beliefs. One explanation offered is the presence of a “cognitive opening” for the prisoner. Choudury (2007) describes a



moment of identity crisis were the use of previous explanations, based on former identities, fail to explain the prisoner's present experience. Hence, a reevaluation of the self takes place. For this prisoner, becoming radical can alleviate the internal crises through acceptance into radical groups that, in turn, substitute the previous social ties that had since abandoned him (Stone, 2011). Others see the emotional strains of fear, humiliation and loss of self-empowerment as factors that lead to radicalization (Kruglanski, Gelfand, Belanger, Gunaratna, & Hettiarachchi, 2011). Viewing ones' self as weak and insignificant places pressures on the prisoner to relieve these highly upsetting feelings allowing for fewer reservations to the adoption of radical beliefs. The authors note that one way to achieve this relief is by attaching the self to a more powerful organization that confronts what is viewed as the oppressing forces that had previously detained them. Indeed for this prisoner, attaching the self to a more *powerful* group promises to "bring one's enemy to its knees... [and] restores one's sense of significance" (p. 185). Becoming a radical in this case reestablishes a sense of importance within this newly chosen community. Silke (2014), on the other hand, provided a typology of the different types of prisoners who are radicalized and are found within the prison system. For Silke, recognizing the differences between these groups may help in assessing risk, which can assist prison authorities on how best to manage these inmates. In doing so, he describes four types of prison radicalization. First, there are the "true believers" who espouse radical views and who have engaged in terrorist activities before imprisonment. The second group is composed of those suspected of involvement in terrorism but are not essentially radicalized. Involvement in terrorism for this group could be attributed to kinship and friendship ties. The third group is called the "ordinary decent" prisoners who have been radicalized during their time behind prison walls. For policy-makers, these individual pose the greatest risk since there *was* no previous radical involvement prior to their

incarceration. That is, counterterrorism officials would have little reason to monitor them upon release. Lastly, the author identifies a group he calls the “vulnerables.” These individuals could become radicalized under the right circumstances. Silke’s research shows, once more, that incarcerated criminals and terrorists are a heterogeneous group where each requires a specific intervention in order to properly achieve rehabilitation and reform objectives. Lastly, Sinai (2014) presented a six-phase process of prison radicalization. In this model, the prisoner pre-radicalizes due to personal factors, followed by situational and contextual factors that enable the adoption of radical beliefs. Next, a phase of self-identification occurs with indoctrination taking place. Phase five is characterized as *militancy*, where the prisoner calls for violent acts against the perceived enemy. Phases six and seven are described as post-release terrorism ending in post-attack reincarnation.

Notwithstanding recent attempts to better understand prison radicalization – gaps in knowledge remain. Silke (2014) notes that despite the “overwhelming flood of books and publications in the wake of 9/11 – it is surprising to then see how little has focused on prison issues” (p. 5). He goes on to assert that what occurs within prison walls has been, for an extensive period time, overlooked. Moreover, the issues that limit our understanding of prison radicalization are similar in nature to those that affect the study of terrorism in general (and more recently that of radicalization). For, example, conceptual precision and methodological rigor are lacking. Prison authorities are finding it difficult to distinguish between converting and radicalizing.<sup>87</sup> Is this conversion occurring for protection, spiritual enlightenment or more nefarious reasons (Jones, 2014)? Additionally, research has shown that the overcrowding witnessed within these prison systems forces inmates to seek protection to ensure survival

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<sup>87</sup> See *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding* (2013). Facts and Fictions about Islam in Prison: Assessing Prisoner radicalization in Post-9/11 America. Retrieved from [http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU\\_Report\\_Prison\\_SpearIt\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU_Report_Prison_SpearIt_WEB.pdf).

(Goldman, 2014). In this case, group membership does not necessarily equate to radicalization. Furthermore, even if a prisoner does convert, remaining religiously affiliated to Islam is fleeting. Research has shown that inmates do actually join radical Islamic gangs within prisons but that, upon release, most reintegrate within their community, severing, in the process, the previous radical jailhouse ties. Also, conversion to Islam, in many cases, takes place for benign reasons such as access to *halal*<sup>88</sup> food, and more time out of the prison cell to perform religious prayers (Hamm, 2013). And although several cases of prisoner radicalization have been used as *irrefutable* cases of radicalization occurring within the prison systems, it is still not clear if these conversions truly equate to radicalization – especially considering the time lag between prison release and terrorist activities (Jones, 2014). Here, situational and contextual factors may be at play and that may influence the released prisoner’s decision to engage in terrorist activities. Lastly, it appears that there is little evidence to suggest that prisons in the US are terrorism “factories”; and that among prisoners who do hold radical political views, the vast majority never become involved in terrorism (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2013). Indeed, other factors such as prison gangs, violence within the prisons, and discontent over domestic issues (e.g., race, the criminal justice system and the perceived negative treatment of Muslims at home and abroad) are primary forces that lead to radicalization.

The issue of prison radicalization is not new, yet policy choices for decision-makers remain limited. The need to better understand the nature of prison radicalization can help save, not only time and money, but also lives.<sup>89</sup> And although the threats posed by terrorists behind bars are real – their magnitude is not yet clear. What is clear is that the numerous cases of released terrorists committing terrorist acts upon release places pressures on policy-makers and

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<sup>88</sup> *Halal* foods is a reference to any food or drink that is permissible to consume under Islamic law.

<sup>89</sup> In Australia, classifying all terrorist offenders as high risk has substantially increased the financial costs associated with their subsequent segregation. See Carlton (2008).

academics alike to better understand prison radicalization and, accordingly, address it. Indeed, with all these concerns surfacing, and in response to this reality, countries have begun developing initiatives to reduce the present and future threat these inmates present.

Disengagement and “deradicalization” programs have been developed across the globe to address these exact threats. Today, policy-makers have additional tools on how to diminish the risk these individuals pose to, not only other inmates and the communities they will be released to, but to the world as a whole.

### **Innovative Approaches to Countering Terrorism**

Countering terrorism, for the most part, has relied on the traditional operational approach to meeting the threats arising from terrorists and the groups they belong to. Undoubtedly, the emphasis has been to either kill or capture terrorists (Lankford & Gillespie, 2011). More than a decade’s worth of military and security operations have decreased the capabilities of the Core AQ threat but has, at the same time, created the potential for a new generation of terrorists to arise through radicalization processes; and through the exploitation of the increasing sympathy among the populations these groups come from (Gunaratna & Lawrence, 2014).<sup>90</sup> Indeed, many operatives have been taken of the battlefield yet the intentions and objectives of these groups remain intact and continue to resonate among the vulnerable few. Accordingly, the increasing *criticism* of how the GWOT has been managed, has been followed by calls for “softer” and smarter approaches to dealing with the terrorist threat (El-Said, 2015). And when considering the continued threat posed by AQ and its affiliated groups, it comes as no surprise that countries have begun looking into more innovative approaches that *complement* the existing counterterrorism tactics to counter these groups (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). These

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<sup>90</sup> This threat is all the more transnational when terrorist members see themselves as defending the geographically spread Islamic *ummah*.

*comprehensive* efforts may better address the challenges, as noted earlier, that the increasing number of terrorists behind bars pose, and also the threat of recidivism for those who are set to be released. Indeed, research has shown that those released can, and do, pose a significant risk through continued terrorist activities. Pluchinsky (2008), for example, notes that AQ recruits members from three primary sources: new recruits, converts, and *released “jihadi’s”*.

To address these issues, various countries have developed disengagement and “deradicalization” programs to deal with challenges that AQ and AQ affiliated prisoners present.<sup>91</sup> For instance, programs have been developed in the Middle East (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Pakistan); in Africa (e.g., Egypt, Algeria and Morocco); and in Southeast Asia (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand). The programs developed vary in size, targeted group, and comprehensiveness; yet share similar themes (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009). For example, many programs have an ideological component that attempts to delegitimize the justification for turning to violence. Other programs attach greater importance on the provision of social services and employment (Disley et al., 2011). Moreover, several programs target not only the individual, but also seek to collectively “deradicalize” the entire organization.<sup>92</sup> For instance, Ashour (2011) explains the collective “deradicalization” of Algerian terrorist groups such as the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF), and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the 1990’s; Harrigan and El- Said (2013) and Barrett (2010) discuss the collective “deradicalization” of the notorious Egyptian Jemaah Islamiyah. Other collective disengagement efforts have less of a religious component such as Colombia’s Disengagement and Reincorporation Program (Ribetti, 2009), and the UK governments “quite” and lengthy negotiations with the IRA that was capped

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<sup>91</sup> As mentioned earlier, researchers have noted that a more appropriate title for these approaches is “risk reduction” initiatives considering the conceptual ambiguousness associated with the previous labels. See Horgan and Braddock, (2010) and Rabasa et al. (2010).

<sup>92</sup> Researchers have explained that this was possible due to the existence of strict organizational hierarchies within the group.

with the “Good Friday Agreement” (Horgan & Braddock, 2010).

Clearly, during the past several years, individual disengagement and “deradicalization” programs have gained the interests of policy-makers and academics from across the globe. One reason for this attention is that programs in places such as Yemen, Singapore, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia have shown potential promise. Available public source data has provided evidence (though limited) to the level of success these programs enjoy. Again, questions still remain as to the exact nature of these programs; what constitutes success; and when and how to measure it. Lastly, restricted access by researchers to these programs only serves to limit the field’s knowledge on how these programs seek to end AQ and AQ affiliated terrorism.

**Yemen’s religious dialogue committee.** Yemen’s deradicalization initiative is considered one of the first such efforts at engaging terrorists as part of a broader counterterrorism strategy (Boucek, Beg, & Horgan, 2009). One reason for the adoption of this program, arguably, was to alleviate the growing criticism against the Yemeni regime for their inability (and arguably unwillingness) to prevent terrorist acts against US and Western interests. For instance, the USS Cole attack in 2000 and the Limburg tanker in 2002 originated from Yemeni soil (Horgan & Braddock, 2010).<sup>93</sup> The inability of the Yemeni regime to prevent terrorist activities, occurring against a backdrop of a substantial military buildup by the West in response to the 9/11 attacks, forced the Yemeni regime to find a way to address the AQ threat emanating from its lands. Thus in 2002, a “soft” approach to counterterrorism was advanced by the Yemeni leadership to prevent, not only acts of terror, but also a possible military response by an impatient West.

Thus, in 2002, senior religious scholars and political elites convened a meeting to

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<sup>93</sup> AQ has been active in Yemen since the early 1990’s. For example, in 1992, AQ claimed the attack against a hotel in Aden housing 100 US personal in transit to Somalia to participate in Operation Restore Hope. For more, see Katzman, K. (2005) Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment. *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress* at <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RS220492102005.pdf>.

develop a religious engagement plan with AQ detainees (Boucek et al., 2009) – despite reservations by senior religious scholars for the safety of those involved in the program; and also because these scholars would be seen as lacking the necessary legitimacy to influence the attitudes of these terrorists. Nevertheless, five religious scholars chosen by the Yemeni leadership and led by Sheikh Hamoud Al-Hitar began engaging AQ members detained for terrorist related acts.<sup>94</sup> This group would later be known as the Committee for Dialogue (CD) (El-Said, 2013). At the outset, a total of 420 AQ terrorists were targeted by this initiative, of these, 100 were involved in the USS Cole attack (El-Said, 2014). The ultimate purpose of this program was to engage these individuals in a religious debate in an attempt to undermine their justifications for violence. Scholars leveraged religious texts such as the Quran and the Hadith (the prophet Mohammed’s sayings PBUH) to openly debate the misguided interpretations they embraced. It became clear to those delivering the program that many AQ members had memorized sections of the Quran giving them a false sense of understanding and authority (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Interestingly, Hamoud Al-Hitar informed these detainees that if they were right, the committee would follow in their ways; but if they are proved wrong, then they (the detainees) must change (El-Said, 2014).

The dialogue between the CD and AQ members in custody focused on several issues such as the belief that the Yemeni state was not an Islamic state; that Yemen’s international obligations, created through treaties, were anti-Islamic (in that they did not further the Islamic *ummah*’s collective interests); questioning the legitimacy of the Saleh regime’s rule in Yemen;<sup>95</sup> the justifications for the killing of non-Muslims (Boucek et al., 2009); the overall concept of jihad (Horgan & Braddock, 2010); rights of non-Muslims in Muslim countries; and activities that

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<sup>94</sup> Many of those targeted were the older AQ cadre who had previously returned from the Afghani frontlines. For more see Al-Hitar (2011).

<sup>95</sup> President Saleh ruled a *unified* Yemen for nearly 22 years until his ousting in 2011.

may disrupt the security and stability of the Yemini state (Al-Hitar, 2014). In conducting these meetings, rules and ethics of dialogue such as mutual respect and freedom to express one's view would be followed. The sessions would occur in prison and would include no more than five AQ members at one time.

The CD program appeared to be a success. By one account, between 2002 and 2005, a total of 87% of the 420 arrested for AQ related terrorist acts went through the program and were subsequently released (El-Said, 2014). Those who had committed more serious crimes were required to serve out their entire sentence. Al-Hitar claims that of the 864 individuals who have participated in the program and have since been released, all have abstained from violence and have not jeopardized the security and stability of Yemen. These "successes" have been achieved, in part, to the different guarantees in place to make sure that those released do not return to violence. For example, the CD required all those to be released to sign a pledge that they will renounce their prior beliefs, refrain from terrorism, and swear to God to abide by the commitments they had made during the dialogue sessions (Al-Hitar, 2011). They are also required to assign a trusted person that is required to report to Yemeni officials whenever need be. Additionally, the families and tribal members of those soon to be released must also vouch for the individual and are, in effect, responsible for his actions (Boucek et al., 2009). Lastly, those released are subjected to security monitoring for an undisclosed period of time.

The highly advertised Yemeni CD was one of the first programs developed to complement existing counterterrorism measures through alternative approaches. Despite its claimed success, it has not been spared criticism. Boucek et al. (2009) note that the prison setting that these dialogues occurred in hampered the entire process from the outset. That is, the unequal power relationship undermines the previous rationale for dialogue among equals. Moreover,



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grievances among these detainees surfaced due to the fact that many had not been convicted of any crime. Additionally, for many of those released, government promises of employment and financial assistance were never kept. This only added to the previous grievances experienced. Also, police harassment of those released hindered their ability to reintegrate back into their communities (ISCR, 2010). Other criticisms focused on the Yemeni government's release of terrorist suspects involved in the 2000 US USS Cole attack (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). This move by the Yemeni government further strained the tenuous relationship between the US and Yemen. Lastly, issues regarding the program's claims of success have come under fire. Although Al-Hitar claims AQ members were persuaded to abandon violence in 98% of the cases, and that the success rate of the program exceeded 90% (El-Said, 2014), the issue of "fighting" abroad appears to be excluded from this calculation. Several cases of Yemenis, who had previously participated in the program, have reportedly joined nascent terrorist groups in Iraq, with several executing suicide missions there. Based on these events, the US would subsequently end its support for this program (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Lastly, the absence of reliable data on the Yemeni program and the unwillingness of the Yemeni government to allow outside researchers to collect data prohibit a proper evaluation of success (Rabasa et al., 2010).

The security situation in Yemen during the time of the program's implementation was stable with no reported attacks against Westerners or Western targets in Yemen (Boucek et al., 2009). However, since the 2006 escape of 23 AQ members from a Yemeni prison, and the subsequent formation of AQAP (Council on Foreign Relations.org Staff, 2015), Yemen has become an increasing threat to not only the Yemenis themselves – but also to the region and the world. By some accounts, the emergence of AQAP and the ensuing wave terrorist attacks are a clear indication of the CD's failure (Rabasa et al., 2010). Still, others would argue that the

Yemeni government's lack of resources hindered it from addressing the socioeconomic demands that these members required; and prevented the Yemeni government from allocating the necessary manpower to monitor those released. Yet despite the challenges the CD faces and the questions surrounding the Yemeni regime's true intention for initiating this program, it had undoubtedly influenced other countries to adopt, at least, certain aspects of the program (Boucek et al., 2009).<sup>96</sup>

**Singapore.** In December 2001, the Singaporean Internal Security Department (ISD) arrested 13 AQ affiliated Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members for plotting suicide attacks against American, Australian, British, and Israeli interests in Singapore by way of four trucks carrying more than five tons of ammonium nitrate (Ramakrishna, 2014). If the plan had been successfully executed, an estimated 3,000 innocent civilians would have lost their lives (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). Later, in 2002, Singaporean counterterrorism operations led to the arrest of another 18 members of JI for conducting surveillance on key Singaporean targets. Subsequent interrogations of these operatives revealed that JI was attempting to establish an Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia through an AQ inspired "jihad".

In response to the threat, and through exercising the Singaporean Internal Security Act (ISA), Singapore held in custody 73 JI members between 2001 and 2008 (Abuza, 2009). As a law enforcement tool, created by the British colonial government to address the pan-Malayan communist insurgency, the ISA allows authorities to manage terrorist suspects through three measures: detention orders (DO), suspension of detention (SD) and orders of restriction (OR). For Singapore, the option to hold terrorism suspects indefinitely provided the government with a strong deterring force against initial involvement with terrorist groups. Yet Singapore understood

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<sup>96</sup> Concerns surrounding the dialogue program led to its temporary suspension for three years. It would be restarted again in May of 2008 (Boucek et al., 2009). One noticeable difference in the newer version is the absence of the Dialogue Committee (El-Said, 2014).

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early on that, although it had the operational capabilities to counter JI through purely operational means, it needed to address the underlying ideology that drove them (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). Moreover, for the Singaporean government, a minority Muslim population living under ethnic Chinese rule could very well create vulnerabilities that may lead to further radicalization of those respected communities. Accordingly, the government initiated a Religious Rehabilitation Program (RRP) in 2003 to provide religious counseling for the detainees, their families and society as a whole.

Ramakrishna (2014) describes the Singaporean effort as a “three ring” approach to dealing with the JI threat. These efforts target the detainees (the inner-ring), the families (the outer-ring), and the Muslim community and society (the outer-most ring). Gunaratna and Hassa (2011) go on to explain that the approach is comprehensive and far-reaching. Initially, the Singaporean Ministry of Home Affairs approached key religious figures to meet with JI detainees in order to better understand the ideology that motivates them. The scholars immediately noted how dangerous these beliefs are, and how the detainees had adopted a distorted understanding of Islam that justified and promoted violence as a means to an end. These religious scholars described how JI members saw themselves as an exclusive group filled with hatred and anger against the “out-group”. In light of what was learned, and realizing the importance of countering the beliefs held by these detainees, the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) was established in 2002 (Abuza, 2009).

Initially, the RRG was composed of 37 Singaporean religious scholars who worked voluntarily and without pay. Their aim was to help correct the beliefs that these detainees had espoused; and to also work with their families to provide needed counseling and assistance. These scholars came from different age groups, were both male and female, and had different

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religious backgrounds. Even the head of the Singapore's sharia court was involved (Hannah et al., 2008). Furthermore, all scholars were required to take psychologically based counseling courses to help better engage these detainees (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011).

For Singaporean officials, engaging detained JI operatives through a counter ideological approach was viewed as a proper rehabilitation measure. This approach was made possible after the RRG developed a "jihad manual" which allowed for addressing the ideological justifications that these detainees have embraced. In implementing the program, one RRG member, one ISD officer and a psychologist from the Ministry of Home Affairs is assigned to each detainee. Counseling sessions would last anywhere from two to four hours daily (Ramakrishna, 2014). Gunaratna and Hassa (2011) note that the RRG sought to extricate the negatively adopted ideology and to replace it with the correct understanding of Islam. They also reminded these detainees how the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) exemplified the previous way of life in a multi-racial, multi-religious society. These efforts also focused on explaining the variations between the different *types* of jihad and how their views of jihad are fundamentally misguided. In some cases, engaging with the detainees would be difficult due to the suspicion and animosity they held towards these religious scholars. In fact, hard-core detainees such as JI's spiritual leader, Ibrahim Maiden, was not receptive to the RRG's attempts at engagement (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). Despite the presence of hardcore elements that are resistant to ideological change, research has shown that many who participated in the program have changed their beliefs and subsequently their actions. One explanation for these results is that detainees who were released on restriction orders (RO) are required to continue meeting with the RRG in order to prevent re-adoption of the JI ideology.

In addressing the threat of community radicalization (the outer ring), the Singaporean

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Ministry of Home Affairs, along with the RRG and the Internal Security Department (ISD), developed a strategy that sought to prevent entire communities from being influenced by the JI narrative (Ramakrishna, 2014). The RRG began an outreach campaign to these vulnerable communities in 2005. The families of the detainees were also of concern since many had been exposed to the same ideology the detainee had been previously exposed to. In parallel to the RRG's efforts, a group of voluntary Muslim community leaders created the Inter Agency After Care Group (ACG) to provide assistance to the families of those in custody (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). It became clear to Singaporean officials early on that if the families lose their sole breadwinner, JI would move in to support them. In response to this vulnerability, the RRG would dispatch female members to these families to provide counseling and guidance. Additionally, and through the ACG, families were assisted in finding jobs, helped in developing reading skills to pay bills, other utilities, and to pay taxes. More importantly, the ACG worked at ensuring that the children of these detainees would continue with their education.

The outer-most ring was targeted through the Community Engagement Program (CEP). As part of their preventative efforts, the RRG would deliver public information programs at schools, mosques and youth clubs to inform those vulnerable of the dangers of the JI ideology (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). Workshops, seminars and conferences were also conducted to raise awareness about issues related to the JI ideology and how best to counter them. This initiative also proactively addresses "crisis" situations that might affect the solidarity and cohesion of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Singaporean state. For example, after the publication of controversial cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in an offensive manner, religious community leaders issued statements that discouraged violence and advocated proper ways to address these developments. Lastly, and realizing the scope of JI's operations in

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Southeast Asia, the Singaporean government began countering the group's narrative by developing a website that provides scholarly articles, media interviews and how best to respond to extremism.

Touted as one of the most comprehensive deradicalization programs in place (Hannah et al., 2008), the Singaporean approach to countering JI appears to have succeeded in preventing terrorism in Singapore. By the end of 2009, the RRG had conducted over 1200 counseling sessions on those detained and/or under restriction orders (Gunaratna & Hassa, 2011). The families and wives of those in custody also received 120 sessions respectively. Indeed, JI activity within Singapore has been negligible since the 2001 security crackdown, although five men were arrested for plotting to carry attacks in Singapore in 2007 and 2008 (Abuza, 2009). More importantly, three quarters of the 60 individual arrested since then have been released on restriction orders (15 JI members still remain in custody). Abuza (2009) notes that of the 73 previously detained JI members, 44 have been released on orders of restriction, while most of those arrested in 2001 remain detained – these are the hardcore elements that have not been receptive to the RRG's efforts.

Still, questions still remain whether those released have actually been “deradicalized.” The subjective nature of assessments by the RRG, the ISD, and government psychologists lacks any quantitative measure to ascertain a genuine change in belief (Ramakrishna, 2014). Additionally, few of those detained were operational members of JI. That is, they played supportive roles, such as fundraising and facilitation. This observation may be explained by the demographic data of these detainees. For example, the majority averaged 39 years of age, were married, and previously employed (Abuza, 2009). Arguably, those released have simply “aged of terrorism.” Also, the substantial resources at the Singaporean government's disposal, as

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expressed in a robust security service, permits better monitoring of those released. Fear of likely re-arrest may be more of a reason for not reengaging in terrorism than an actual change in attitude. Indeed, the Singaporean government's use of the ISA to pursue JI members is seen as a major factor in preventing both involvement in terrorism and recidivism. In both cases deterrence plays a key role. Other factors that could explain the success of the RRG is Singapore's small size and the limited number of ports of entry that make hiding and fleeing difficult. Other concerns with the Singaporean approach surround RRG personnel. Abuza (2009) notes that the RRG staff espouse a *Sufi* interpretation of Islam. That is, their Islamic school of thought is viewed as a "fringe sect by salafi jihadis" (p. 205). Furthermore, these RRG members are seen as being co-opted by ethnic Chinese government officials – the same officials they are attempting to depose. For these detainees, the credibility of the RRG as religious scholars is lacking. Lastly, the reluctance to use former JI members in the rehabilitation process (as is the case in Indonesia) indicates that the Singaporean government distrusts those released (Abuza, 2009). In other words, this inaction could be interpreted as a sign of little change among those freed.

**Indonesia.** Even Indonesia, the largest Muslim majority country in the world (Vaughn, 2011), has not been spared by the JI terror campaign. In 2002, over two hundred individuals, mostly from Indonesia and Australia, were killed when JI targeted a popular nightclub on the island of Bali (Osman, 2014). Subsequent attacks would continue in the years to follow, with JI attacking the J.W. Marriott hotel in 2003, the Australian embassy in 2004, again in Bali in 2005, and the twin bombings of two Jakarta luxury hotels in 2009. Ensuing Indonesian security operations during that time uncovered terrorists cells, scores of weapons and explosive materials (Abuza, 2009). Between 2002 and 2005, approximately 300 JI members had been detained.

Following the 2002 attacks, a special Indonesian counterterrorism unit, known as

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Detachment 88, developed what has been better described as a rehabilitation *approach* rather than a *program* (Rabasa et al., 2010). The Unit's efforts were in response to the inability of the Indonesian prison system's handling of terrorist suspects due to lackluster enforcement of prison regulations, corruption, poor training of prison staff and overcrowding (Osman, 2014). By holding terrorist suspects within police jails, Unit officers hoped to isolate these prisoners from other vulnerable inmates; and also to mitigate the threat they pose by being housed in a weakly controlled environment. Although the Indonesian approach may initially appear similar to other "deradicalization" programs, it is significantly different in that it does not attempt to change the radical mindsets of these terrorists. Instead, it aims to primarily develop intelligence on the JI network in order to disrupt their operations, and secondly, to reintegrate those detained back into their communities as best they can (Rabasa et al., 2010). Counterterrorism officials in Indonesia concede that Indonesia's successes in countering JI have been, in no small part, due to the adoption of this approach.

In its efforts to counter JI, Unit 88 sought the assistance of former JI operatives in their custody to engage the newly detained. A technique called "cultural interrogation" was used in which the interrogator would become immersed within the immediate environments of the JI operatives they held (Rabasa et al., 2010). This technique was important considering many of those arrested distrusted government officials and would consequently refuse to cooperate with them. Accordingly, a need to introduce credible interlocutors to engage these prisoners became clear early on. One such interlocutor was Nasir Abbas, a Malaysian citizen living in Indonesia and a former operational commander for JI in the Philippines. Abbas, who was arrested in 2003, would become disillusioned with the tactics used by the group (O'Brien, 2008). For Abbas, the killing of innocent civilians was not justified (e.g., the 2002 bombing in Bali in which scores of



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innocent civilians lost their lives) (Abuza, 2009). Initially, Abbas was reluctant to cooperate with the police, but after experiencing the positive treatment within the prison, by both Muslim and Christian officers, he had a change of heart. During his interrogation, Abbas provided Unit 88 with a wealth of tactical and strategic information on the group's operations and organizational structure. Abbas even accompanied the Unit during security operations conducted in the field (Braddock & Horgan, 2011). Additionally, and due to his credibility within JI circles, he was able to engage roughly 200 JI prisoners inside and outside of prison (Rabasa, et al., 2010). Through these efforts, Abbas attempted to correct the beliefs these JI members had regarding two main issues: the killing of innocent civilians and the establishment of an Islamic state (Schulze, 2008). It should be noted that not all were receptive to his approach – some were ambivalent while others viewed him as an outright apostate.

Another former JI leader who assisted the Indonesian police in their counterterrorism efforts was Ali Imron. Imron, a one-time JI member, had spent years in Afghanistan and Pakistan training other “jihadis” on military tactics (Milla, Faturachman, & Ancok, 2013). In 2002, Imron was arrested, along with two of his brothers, for involvement in the Bali attacks (Abuza, 2009). Unlike his brothers though, Imron was spared the death penalty for his willingness to cooperate with Indonesian authorities. He was subsequently sentenced to life in prison (Rabasa, et al., 2010). Since his arrest, Imron has publically recanted his beliefs and has asked for forgiveness from the families of those who lost their lives in the 2002 Bali Attack – or any other terrorist attack that he was directly or indirectly involved in. Like Abbas, he also cooperated with Indonesian authorities by providing information on the inner workings of JI, their choice of targets, how they hide and how they recruit. Additional efforts to right what wrongs he has committed took the form of publishing anti-JI literature to counter the arguments and

justifications the group uses for committing violence. For Imron, the desire to disrupt future plots by JI tracks with his pleas for forgiveness.

Indeed, the Indonesian approach to “deradicalization” “defies simple characterization” (Braddock & Horgan, 2011, p. 273) and can be best described as “ad hoc”. Yet these efforts have produced positive results as witnessed by the decrease in the level JI terrorist activity in Indonesia (Abuza, 2009). The ability of Unit 88 to co-opt high ranking members of JI to work in their favor is, by some standards, a measure of success – especially considering the lack of government funding for this approach (Rabasa et al., 2010).<sup>97</sup> Abuza (2009) notes that since 2002, 150 JI members have been released through either general amnesties or sentence remissions – many of whom were recipients of these engagement tactics. Still, questions arise as to the level of attitudinal change these detainees experience. Osman (2014) notes that many are not truly “deradicalized”. That is, they continue to hold radical beliefs. For instance, to those that have repented, the fighting that takes place against Christians in the Poso region of Indonesia is seen as legitimate (Schulze, 2008). Cases of recidivism are also an indication of a limited change in beliefs. Numerous incidents have been documented of former JI prisoners rejoining the ranks of the group. For example, Bagus Budi Pranoto previously served a four-year sentence for his role in the 2004 Australian embassy bombing in Jakarta. He would later be rearrested for involvement in the 2009 attacks on the J. W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta that left nine dead (Rabasa et al., 2010; Stewart & Burton, 2009). In another example, more than 17 former prisoners who had participated in the Indonesian “rehabilitation” effort were arrested in 2010 for involvement in a terrorist network operating in the Aceh region of Indonesia. Lastly,

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<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that one reason for the Indonesian government’s “reluctance” to support and institutionalize the Unit’s efforts is arguably due to political caution. That is, Indonesia, as the largest Muslim state, sees the value in legitimizing the radical – yet non-violent – political stance the group espouses. This could be explained by the legacy of colonial resistance decades earlier. Consequently, JI as a group was not criminalized.

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Abdullah Sonata, a trusted JI financier who had previously completed the program and was released in 2009 for good behavior, was subsequently rearrested in 2010 for being implicated in a plan to carry out a terrorist attack in Jakarta (Abuza, 2010; Saputra, 2010)

Other criticisms of the program relate to the observation that high ranking JI members, such as Abbas and Imron, were only effective in engaging former Afghan veterans and those who are essentially against the JI's violent and indiscriminate tactics (Schulze, 2008). That is, they lose credibility in the eyes of the newer cadre of JI members. Another weakness of the program is that no concerted and institutionalized government effort has been taken to rehabilitate these prisoners. Although the police have provided financial and moral assistance to detainees and their families in the past several years, the modest support is not enough to wean them from the JI community they come from. Those released will continue to lack the necessary skills to find jobs (if they are available); will have little money at their disposal; and will eventually return to the same JI community – a community created through kinship and intermarriage. The end result would likely be recidivism.

The unstructured and underfunded Indonesian approach has shown promise in its use of former radicals to change terrorist beliefs within the Indonesian prison setting. Unit 88's ability to win over disillusioned JI members has helped in disrupting JI networks in Indonesia – at least temporarily. Critics of the program have emphasized that disengagement (among other more operational goals) appears to be the primary motive, in contrast to both the Yemeni and Singaporean models discussed earlier. Lastly, the absence of an aftercare component is seen as a weakness that, considering the JI's dependence on families and friends for recruitment, could very well lead to a return to violence.

**Malaysia.** Similar to Singapore, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country with a population nearing 28 million – over 60% of which are Muslim (Harrigan, 2013). It also has a similar history of colonial resistance, insurgency and Communist threats beginning in the 1940's. In dealing with these issues, ISA's were also introduced to deal with these risks associated with the political landscape at that time. The ISA's, initially passed in 1960, required the Malaysian government to reeducate and rehabilitate “subversive” detainees; with a focus on correcting their religious and political errors (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009). More recently, these legislative measures were used to counter the JI terrorist network.<sup>98</sup> JI, as was the case in Singapore, sought to undermine the harmony and unity of Malaysia in an attempt to establish an Islamic state. For example, in 2001, 38 members of a little known group called the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) were arrested for their associations with AQ operatives involved in the September 11 attacks (Rabasa et al., 2010).

Interestingly, and unlike many other countries that have developed “deradicalization” programs post 9/11, Malaysia has not experienced a single terrorist attack, despite the fact that JI was originally established there (Abuza, 2009). For those members arrested, no trials have taken place. Instead, the Malaysian government leveraged the existing ISA laws to detain suspected members for an indefinite period of time. Abuza (2009) notes that between 2001 and 2007, there were approximately 115 individual detained for affiliation with AQ related groups (e.g., the JI and KMM). Two women were also among those who have been arrested. By Harrigan's (2013) calculations, there were roughly 154 extremists in Malaysian custody between 2001 and 2009.<sup>99</sup>

Although little is known about the Malaysian “deradicalization” program (Rabasa et. al

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<sup>98</sup> The Malaysian government repealed the ISA in 2012 replacing it with the Security Offences Special Measures Act (SOSMA). Later in 2014, the Malaysian parliament approved the more stringent Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) to counter the increasing terrorist threat there.

<sup>99</sup> Among them were 117 JI members and 14 from AQ.

2010), researchers have noted that it is rooted in the counter insurgency legal framework previously adopted (Harrigan, 2013). The ISA allows for preventative measure and indefinite incapacitation (preventative detention) to encourage those detained to disengage and eventually “deradicalize”. Those suspected of terrorism are monitored, and if the risk of an attack is imminent, the suspect(s) will be apprehended. Upon arrest, the security service has up to 60 days to interrogate the suspect. Thereafter, they are either held on detention orders (DO’s) or are placed on restriction orders (RO’s), where – upon release – their movements are controlled. Those on RO’s are also required to check-in regularly with police officials. Harrigan (2013), however, views the process undertaken by the Malaysian authorities as less punitive and more rehabilitative.<sup>100</sup> For instance, detainees are housed within the *Kamunting* detention center, but are isolated from other low-level criminals housed there. Phase one of the program lasts three months, is run by prison staff, and is concerned with assessing the inmate in order to develop the appropriate rehabilitation scheme. Additionally, spiritual, religious and moral education classes are administered. Recreational activities and counseling services are also provided as a component of the rehabilitation process. It is unclear if psychological counseling takes place (e.g., in Singapore and Saudi Arabia respectively). The purpose of this phase is to acclimate the new detainees to the prison environment and to instill in them a sense of discipline and respect for rules and regulations.

For those detainees who show a positive response in the initial phase, a move to the second occurs. Here, more focused religious counseling takes place with the assistance of the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (MDID) along with continued counseling and motivational programs. A major theme in these dialogue sessions is correcting the misguided aspirations that these AQ affiliated operatives have regarding the establishment of an Islamic

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<sup>100</sup> Harrigan’s work is one of the only comprehensive examinations of this program available publicly.

state in Malaysia (Abuza, 2009). For hardcore radicals that are not receptive to the program's approaches, a different method is adopted. In this instance, the police, not the prison authorities are tasked with "deradicalizing" the detainees through leveraging the credibility of "former" extremists. In these rehabilitation sessions, the ex-militants engage the hardcore detainees on religious issues concerning jihad and misconceptions surrounding the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia.<sup>101</sup>

Phase three consists of other "personality enhancement" programs such as anger and emotional management, vocational training (e.g., in agriculture and entrepreneurial skill development), and parenting and family education. Apparently, much of the practices adopted by the Malaysian government are based on rewarding positive behavior. For those detainees who are committed to following the instructions and regulations of the prison regime, privileges such as face-to-face family visits, freedom to buy goods within the prison, more time for TV viewing, and more time to spend in the library are afforded. Even visits outside the prison are allowed in special cases (e.g., funerals, sick loved ones). For those detainees who fail to respect orders, loss of these privileges occurs, as well as more cell time. Monitoring and assessment of the detainee's behavior is ongoing, and those who are near the termination of the two-year prison sentence are either recommended for release or remain in detention. The security forces are tasked with monitoring those who have been determined fit for released. Financial assistance has also been provided to the released detainees, and their families, in order to offset the families' dependence on JI networks (Abuza, 2009). In one case, a female detainee was provided with seed money to help start a small business upon her release.

The Malaysian program begins with detention and interrogation, followed by more

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<sup>101</sup> Polygraph tests are also administered prior to release in order to better ascertain the truthfulness of these detainees' recantations. Worth noting, some of these detainees have spent over six years in detention (Harrigan, 2013)

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intensive reeducation and rehabilitation for those who have shown a positive response to the initial engagement (Barrett & Bokhari, 2009). Family assistance, in the form of social welfare and healthcare is also provided (Harrigan, 2013). If, and when, a detainee is deemed fit for release, the restriction order placed upon him limits their freedom to move, while constant monitoring by the security service continues. Similar to the Singaporean approach, the rehabilitation continues even after the person is released from prison (in the form of regular meetings with security officials). The results so far have been promising. Most of the detainees, apart from six, who have undergone the rehabilitation the program, have not recidivated. These numbers should be interpreted with the caution though. Compared to other “deradicalization” efforts in the region (e.g., Singapore and Indonesia) the Malaysian program lacks transparency (Abuza, 2009). The lack of official data on those detained and released impedes researcher’s abilities’ to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Rabasa et al. (2010) note that “[b]ecause of the paucity of information about Malaysia’s deradicalization program, it is difficult to assess its effectiveness, or even its strengths and weaknesses” (p. 106). Additionally, reports of human rights abuses against these detainees raise questions as to how successful the program truly is. That is, the use of the ISA is likely to be more of a factor in the “rehabilitation” process than an actual change in beliefs. To this point, reports of intimidation by the Malaysian security forces against the detainees and their families have also been observed (Abuza, 2009). Indeed, the prospect of indefinite detention could motivate detainees to say what the Malaysian officials want to hear. Researchers have also touched on the drawbacks of using government affiliated religious scholars to engage the detainees (except in special cases mentioned above). Here, the credibility of these religious figures is called into question and, accordingly, their ability to influence the beliefs and attitudes of those detained. Lastly, and similar to Singapore, the

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Malaysian program does not appear to “deradicalize” these inmates. Much of the religious dialogue is focused *not* on the legitimacy of establishing an Islamic state, but in clarifying that Malaysia is on the path to becoming one (Abuza, 2009). That is, there is no need for violence to precipitate something that is essentially occurring.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Indonesia or Pakistan (and other countries respectively), Malaysia has a small number of AQ affiliated terrorists in their custody. Furthermore, no terrorist attack has taken place there. Despite these observations, Malaysia has proactively addressed the terrorist threat through the development of an institutionalized and well-coordinated program. However, the lack of transparency surrounding the program prevents researchers from reaching solid conclusions on the efficacy of this approach. Most have not recidivated, but this could be due to restriction orders and heavy monitoring and surveillance by the security services (Harrigan, 2013). Still, the program appears to be better suited than others to counter the risk posed by AQ and its affiliates.

### **Conclusion**

Since the horrific events in the US on September 11th 2001, policy-makers and academics across the globe have feverishly attempted to better understand the enemy they face in the hopes of preventing future terrorist acts and, in the process, saving innocent lives. Yet leveraging previous terrorism research to craft counterterrorism policies may be questionable – it may even lead to counterproductive outcomes. The reasons are simple: what was (and is) known about terrorism has been clouded by, not only conceptual ambiguity, but also methodological concerns. For example, Schmid (2013) notes that “[t]he lack of clarity and consensus with regard to many key concepts (terrorism, radicalization, extremism, etc.) – ill-defined and yet taken for granted – still present an obstacle that needs to be overcome” (p. IV). As for methodological



challenges, Horgan (2014) explains that terrorism is low-volume and perpetrated by a small number of actors who, when captured, are resistant to participation in studies conducted by those they deem as part of the hostile “other” (Dernevik et al., 2009). Not surprisingly then, research on terrorism lacks a valid data set (Gupta, 2012) creating dependence on secondary sources for analysis that lack credibility and “precision” (Silke, 2001). Still, researchers have continued conducting studies that provide the field, and policy-makers, with badly needed “facts” despite what Ranstorp (2007) has noted, and rightly so, that very few researchers have conducted a critique of these studies. He goes on to caution that the:

Paucity of critiques of terrorism studies literature is worryingly evident in the limited number of relevant articles focusing on methodology or other research methods. Less than a dozen serious scholarly articles are exclusively devoted to critiquing the terrorism studies field – not just in the last few years following 9/11 but cumulatively over the last thirty years. (p. 4)

Nevertheless, to claim that terrorism research has not advanced the field would be incorrect. The unprecedented surge in terrorism research has undeniably led to a better understanding of who the terrorists are (and are not), and what appears to motivate them (and not). Moreover, and based on the conclusions of the previous research, a different approach on *how* to study terrorism and terrorists has emerged. For example, considering that earlier research has shown that: no terrorists profile exists (for the time being);<sup>102</sup> that the psychological explanations of terrorist behavior, which have been dominated by the belief in *dispositional factors* found within the individual, are speculative; that no terrorist traits exist; that macro level explanations fail to account for why only a *few* individuals become involved in terrorism; and lastly, the recognition that terrorist group’s appear to *lure* individuals and sustain their continued involvement has moved the field away from *why* questions to *how*. Now, the process of

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<sup>102</sup> Even if a terrorist profile does exist, it does not explain why and how terrorism occurs (e.g., involvement).

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*becoming* a terrorist and, just as importantly, *leaving* terrorism has received great interest from both academics and policy-makers alike. And although understanding how an individual becomes initially engaged in terrorism through, for example, the concept of radicalization, is useful, the pathways away from terrorism offer just as much promise. Indeed, by gaining a deeper understanding of the latter, policy-makers may be able to prevent future terrorism by not only those who abandon terrorism, but also by containing and pushing back the spread of the terrorist ideology through the actions (and inactions) of these repentant terrorists. This avenue of research makes sense considering the increasing number of terrorists behind bars and the reality that many will eventually be released. The next chapter will describe the rationale behind the current study and how it aims to answer the numerous questions surrounding the Saudi Ministry of Interior's Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy in order add to the existing, yet limited knowledge, the field has regarding "deradicalization" and disengagement programs for AQ related prisoners.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“As the birthplace of Islam and the location of the two holy mosques, Saudi Arabia has always been of central strategic and symbolic importance to al-Qaeda” (Rabasa et al., 2010, p. 56). Indeed, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been the target of AQ related terrorist attacks for over two decades (El-Said & Barrett, 2013). For example, from 1995 to 2006, over twelve *major* AQ related terrorist attacks occurred, killing more than 110 and injuring nearly 800 (Porgess, 2014).

For Bin Laden and AQ, the Saudi Arabian regime represents one of its main enemies – if not *the* main one. One reason for this deep-seated animosity is the longstanding US/Saudi relationship and its manifestation in the military and diplomatic cooperation during the first Gulf War. For these early “Afghan veterans”, and those few who supported them within the kingdom, the presence and collaboration with a Western power against a (secular) Muslim country was an abomination, and arguably, a radicalizing force that would be felt for years. Other reasons for AQ’s relentless ranting and terrorist activity against Saudi Arabia have ranged from perceptions of betrayal and abandonment, by the kingdom, of the Palestinian cause, to alignment with British forces to defeat the last Islamic caliphate<sup>103</sup> (Reidel & Saab, 2008). It was in 2003, however, that the kingdom experienced the most intense AQ terrorist campaign to date. Lasting for several years, the campaign left scores of AQ operatives killed, in hiding or in custody.<sup>104</sup> The Saudi MOI arrested nearly 9,000 suspects by 2008, with that figure reaching 11,500 by 2011 (Boghardt, 2015). More recently, a Washington Post report places the number of AQ affiliated prisoners housed at a maximum-security prison outside of Riyadh at over 3,000 (Sullivan, 2015).

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<sup>103</sup> The Ottoman Empire was the last Islamic caliphate. It came to an end in 1924.

<sup>104</sup> Many also fled to neighboring and distant lawless areas to continue their terrorist activities. For example, AQ operatives have regrouped in Yemen and the FATA.

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In light of this firm approach to counterterrorism, it was recognized that the kingdom needed to address the growing numbers of suspects in custody to prevent those that would be subsequently released from reengaging in terrorism. The “softer” approach of Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) was thus developed as an initiative that sought to undermine the appeal of AQ as well as address the underlying factors that may lead to terrorism (Al-Hadlaq, 2011; Boucek, 2011; Porgess, 2014). Barrett and Bokhari (2009) write that “some of the most recent ... best-known and successful rehabilitation programs have been launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” (p. 179).

Yet few academics from outside the region have thoroughly examined the Saudi approach (e.g., Boucek, 2008, 2011; El-Said, 2014; Porgess, 2011; Stern, 2011), and much of this research has been exploratory – at best – and relying mostly on secondary non-Arabic sources. Additionally, researchers have described the effort in different ways, at different times, and based on different sources of data adding to confusion as to what is actually being achieved and why. Moreover, and understandably, access to PRAC, and to those who implement it, is difficult due to the sensitivity of terrorism related matters in general. Consequently, the available public data and observations regarding the Saudi approach have become outdated. Lastly, and worth noting, is that the field of terrorism studies has evolved, with concepts becoming better refined, while others are developed or leveraged from existing knowledge (e.g., criminological theories) to explain terrorist behavior. A closer look at how the Saudi’s are dealing with terrorism, especially as it relates to those terrorists in custody, is critical in light of the thousands of “foreign fighters” from over 50 countries now flocking to Iraq and Syria to join the so called “Islamic State” (Blanchard et al., 2014, 2015) – including the many Saudis who joined in the

“battle” there.<sup>105</sup> Undoubtedly some will return while many more will inspire those most vulnerable to their messaging. Indeed, the terrorist threat remains in which ISIL has now “supplanted al Qaeda as the jihadist threat of greatest concern” (Cronin, 2015, p. 87).

Clearly, there is a need to explore innovative ways to mitigate the terrorist threat in conjunction with ongoing security approaches. Here, a need to better examine one of the “best funded and longest running programs” (Boucek, 2008, p. 3) is a step in the right direction. Accordingly, this study will attempt to add to the existing knowledge regarding the kingdom’s approach and the effect it has had on terrorism within it. The choice of design for this study will be a mixed method *sequential explanatory design – follow-up explanations model*. Initially, by conducting statistical analyses on official data provided by the Saudi MOI, a preliminary conclusion can be made on the impact the (PRAC) strategy had. To achieve this, the study will look – empirically – for differences in terror related operations before and after program implementation; and it will also examine if differences exist in civilian and security forces casualties before and after program implementation. Additionally, a closer look at the PRAC strategy, through primary sources of data, will be conducted, on sight, through interviews with senior policy-makers, counterterrorism specialists, and those involved in implementing the strategy. A better understanding of why the program was implemented; how it is delivered; what constitutes success and how it is determined are some of the questions that this study hopes to answer. Moreover, the mixed methodology of this study will allow for qualitative analyses to take place. Here, more context is provided to the study, and more importantly, it allows for a better understanding of *why* the PRAC strategy is associated with levels of terrorism in KSA. Although causation cannot be determined with this quasi-experimental (arguably pre-

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<sup>105</sup> In May of 2014, the Saudi Interior Ministry estimated that roughly 1,200 Saudis had travelled to join different groups operating in Syria. Other estimates suggest that the figure may be closer to 2,500.

experimental) design, correlation may be established.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, with the GWOT at its end, and with its consequent increasing terrorist prison population, along with the proliferation of AQ affiliated/inspired groups appearing across the globe, and in response to the existing gaps in the terrorism literature (Cronin, 2006; Horgan, 2009), this study hopes to provide much needed insight on how to deal with future problems associated with AQ related terrorism specifically, and to other forms of terrorism in general.

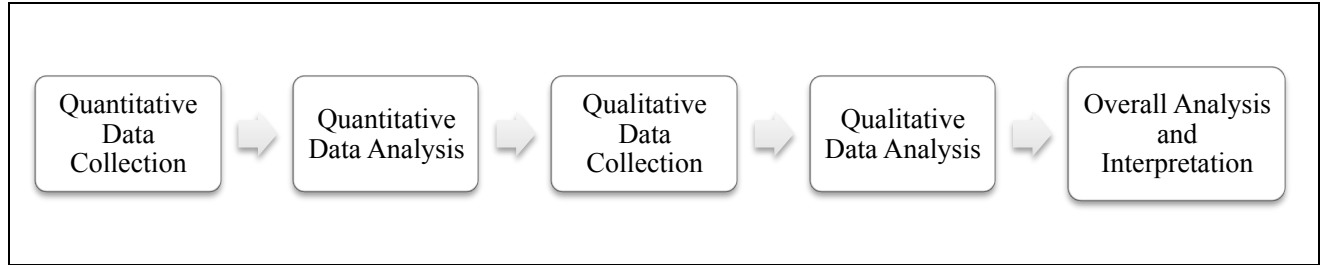
### **Research Design**

The current study will adopt a mixed method *sequential explanatory design – follow-up explanations model*. The mixed method has been defined as a procedure for the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in order to better understand the research question at hand (Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Moreover, Creswell (2009) notes that mixed methods, as a choice of design, goes beyond just merely the collection of quantitative and qualitative data in that “it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” (p. 4). Indeed, the rationale for using this type of design is based on the observation that “neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation” (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006, p. 2). Researchers have also stated that sequential explanatory designs are ideal for examining understudied social phenomena. Specifically, it allows the qualitative component to explain the quantitative data (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). For example, *why* is the PRAC strategy effective and *how* in reducing terrorism? (Figure 3.1).

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<sup>106</sup> See footnote number 13.

Figure 3.1. Sequential Explanatory Design.



The study's chosen design has two distinct stages (i.e., strands): an initial quantitative stage followed by a qualitative one (Creswell et al., 2003). More precisely, the collection and analysis of the quantitative data occurs first followed by the collection and analysis of the qualitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Again, we should recognize that the choice of the *follow up explanations model* gives the researcher the ability to better explain and understand the previously gathered and analyzed quantitative data. That is, the researcher arrives at the qualitative stage with specific questions in mind that aim to clarify and explain how/why an increase or decreases in a variable (i.e., terrorism) is associated with the given intervention (i.e., PRAC). In this instance, answers to the study's second research questions can be found. It should also be noted, that the level of interaction between the two stages will be independent – that is, interpretation of both sets of data will occur only at the end of the data collection phase (Creswell, 2007). To illustrate, Creswell, Plano and Clark (2011) suggest that the quantitative data be summarized and interpreted, followed by the summarization and interpretation of the qualitative data. Lastly, an interpretation of the *connected* results occurs as they relate to the research questions. Despite this research design's popularity, Creswell et al. (2003) note several challenges associated with this type of research such as demands on resources and time, how to

weigh the quantitative and qualitative data (i.e., priority),<sup>107</sup> and when the data for the two stages should be connected. However, in dealing with the issue of priority, this study will allocate more weight in the qualitative phase considering the dearth in knowledge surrounding the PRAC strategy.

### **Research Question: Stage One (Quantitative)**

Is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia successful at countering terrorism? More specifically, is the PRAC strategy effective at reducing terrorism and physical injuries to Saudi security personnel and civilians alike in the KSA?

### **Hypotheses**

H1: There is a relationship between the decrease in AQ related terrorist operations in the KSA and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

H2: There is a relationship between the decrease in the number of killed and physically injured Saudi security officers and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

H3: There is a relationship between the decrease in the number of killed and physically injured civilians and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

### **Stage One: Sequential Explanatory Design–Follow-up Explanations Model (Quantitative)**

The study will utilize an *interrupted time series design* in order to examine if a relationship exists between acts of terrorism, as operationalized later, and the introduction of the PRAC strategy. Campbell and Stanley (1963) explain that:

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<sup>107</sup> Creswell (2007) notes that when weighing the importance of either the quantitative or qualitative data for a study, researchers can assign equal priority, quantitative priority, or qualitative priority.



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The essence of the time-series design is the presence of a periodic measurement process on some group or individual and the introduction of an experimental change into this time series measurements, the results of which are indicated by a discontinuity in the measurements recorded in the time series. (p. 37)

Braden, Gonzalez and Miller (1990) note that “[q]uasi-experimental designs may be used to assess the impact of a treatment or program in situations in which true experiments may not be performed due to pragmatic or ethical considerations” (para. 2). The choice of design for the current study will, accordingly, allow for gauging the “impact” of the intervention by looking at changes within the time series (McDowall, McCleary, Meidinger, & Hay, 1980). The *interrupted time series* design will permit the study’s author to statistically analyze dependent variable data at successive time periods both before and after the introduction of PRAC (the independent variable). Specifically, the design will make possible the analysis of terrorist related operations occurring three years before the implementation of the PRAC strategy and three years afterwards.<sup>108</sup> The six-year time span chosen will allow for the collection of the needed data to conduct the necessary statistical analysis.

It should become apparent that the *interrupted time series* approach for stage one does not seek to establish an unambiguous causal link between the independent and dependent variables.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, it does aim to add to the field’s limited knowledge surrounding counterterrorism initiatives that target, among other things, terror suspects in custody. This should come as no surprise. In researching terrorism, Sinai (2007) states that despite having a qualitative and quantitative component it “can never achieve the capability of a true ‘science’ because of the clandestine and warfare nature of terrorist activities” (p. 32). Horgan (2009) notes,

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<sup>108</sup> It should be noted that extant research does not provide a definitive date for when the PRAC strategy was officially launched. For example, Porgess (2014) and Boucek (2008) state that rehabilitating detained terrorists through religious counseling began in 2003. Al-Hadlaq (2014) on the other hand explains that an *advisory committee* was formed in 2004. Thus, and depending on the results of the qualitative interviews, it is expected that the time frame for analysis will be between 2003 and 2008.

that research in respect to disengagement/“deradicalization” programs is best described as “pre-scientific, pre-paradigmatic, exploratory and (at best) descriptive” (p. xxiii). Undoubtedly, ethical concerns prohibit policy-makers and researchers from adopting a true experimental design to determine the impact of a specific initiative. For assigning a convicted terrorist to control groups would be unacceptable by any standard. Additionally, other types of longitudinal designs, that are arguably more rigorous, such as prospective panel/cohort designs, are costly, time consuming, and suffer from several similar threats to internal validity (i.e., history, maturation, mortality, instrumentation etc.) (de Vaus, 2001). Clearly internal threats to validity will always exist in any research design that requires measurements at different time intervals, and where a control group is absent.

Although these limitations are real, they should not prevent research on terrorism to continue. For example, the absence of a control group in the *interrupted time series* design introduces threats to internal validity such as history, maturation, and possibly instrumentation; yet replication of this study can reduce the doubt surrounding the study’s results (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Also, examining AQ related terrorism, both regionally and globally, can help in better assessing the impact of the PRAC strategy (i.e., “controlling” for history). Moreover, and through the data gathered from the qualitative component of this study, other rival casual factors can be discovered and accounted for (e.g., better cooperation and coordination locally and globally, better policing/security practices, demographic shifts etc.). Lastly, Campbell and Stanley (1963), in recognizing the challenges researchers face when conducting social science studies, state that the researcher should “*design the very best experiment which the situation makes possible* [emphasis added]” (p. 34).

**Research Question: Stage Two (Qualitative)**

What is the KSA's PRAC strategy? How can it explain the results of the quantitative analysis? Why does it "work"?

**Stage Two: Sequential Explanatory Design – Follow-up Explanations Model (Qualitative)**

Stage two of the study will utilize a *single case study* design. Creswell, Hanson, Clark and Morales (2007) define case study research as:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 245)

Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that qualitative case studies provide researchers with "opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources" (p. 454). Meredith (1998) highlights two important strengths of case study research: the ability to study a phenomenon in its natural settings and the ability to answer questions of *why* and *how* in the complicated nature the phenomenon exists in. Hence, in answering questions such as *what*, *why*, and *how* a program works (Stake, 2005),<sup>110</sup> it follows then that the *single case study* is the appropriate choice of design for this study in that it allows for: the gathering of important contextual information and granular details (Yin, 2015) of the PRAC strategy,<sup>111</sup> and permits collaboration between researchers and participants where the latter are able to directly express their stories (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Indeed, *the single case study* design is the logical choice when considering that choosing a design is driven by the research question initially developed for inquiry (Creswell et al., 2007).

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<sup>110</sup> More specifically, Stake (2005) uses the term *single instrumental case study* where the researcher focuses on one area of concern, e.g., "deradicalization" programs, and examines one *bounded case* e.g., the PRAC strategy within the MOI between 2003 and 2008.

<sup>111</sup> The PRAC strategy will be the case under examination. Miles and Huberman (1994) define the case as a "unit of analysis" (p. 25).

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As a data collection method, the researcher will primarily use semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the MOI's PRAC strategy specifically and counterterrorism efforts generally. Hagan (2010) notes that interviews "provide the qualitative detail and complexity of response that may be required, particularly if the subject of the study is little known" (p. 149). The choice of conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather knowledge has several advantages. For instance, the presence of the researcher during the interview process. Hagan (2010) explains that the interviewers presence "afford[s] observation, clarification of misunderstandings and control over the respondent" (p. 175). Another advantage is the researcher's confidence in knowing that the person interviewed is actually the intended respondent.

However, as with any methodological choice, limitations arise when seeking to safeguard issues related to validity and reliability.<sup>112</sup> Hagan (2010) and Mitchell and Jolley (2012) cite several disadvantages that are associated with this method caused by the introduction of the human element into the data gathering process. For example, interviewer bias may influence the respondent's answers through verbal and non-verbal gestures that occur when a "correct" response is given.<sup>113</sup> Also, *reactivity* (Maxwell, 1996) is a concern when conducting qualitative research. In this case, the mere presence of the researcher may influence the responses provided (i.e., the Hawthorne effect). Moreover, and similar to *reactivity*, *social desirability* may occur when sensitive questions are asked. Here, the respondent might reply to questions in a manner that pleases the researcher (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Other issues relate to how a respondent interprets past events (especially in retrospective designs). Hagan (2010) notes that respondents

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<sup>112</sup> Creswell (2003) defines validity as "accuracy".

<sup>113</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note how qualitative research is inherently *reflexive*. Specifically, researchers cannot eliminate prior preconceptions, theories, or values that could influence how data is recorded. In this instance we are witnessing a possible *Halo effect*.

might mistakenly report previous activities, suffer from poor memory,<sup>114</sup> under/over report events, or “telescope” past events. The latter occur when a respondent mistakenly reports events taking place in a specific period of time, when in reality it occurred prior to that event. The presence of *gatekeepers* must also be recognized when conducting these interviews. Although Hagan (2010) describes gatekeepers as helpful when conducting participant observation research in that it allows for better access to clandestine groups, their presence in this study *may* bias the responses given. That is, the MOI *may* allow only those with positive views surrounding PRAC to be interviewed. Unfortunately, little can be done to mitigate this threat when conducting research of this type. However, understanding the possibility of a gatekeeper *effect*, and accounting for it, will allow for a more accurate understanding of the PRAC strategy.

Despite these challenges in conducting interviews, the author of the study does not anticipate that they will significantly influence the results. For example, *interviewer bias* and *social desirability* should have minimal effects on the final results of this study. MOI officials and program implementers will answer the questions they want in a way that they desire. This is likely due to the fact that most are older in age, have years of professional experience in security related matters (in the MOI’s case), and would not seek, nor need, the *approval* of the researcher. Also, considering the voluntary nature of their participation, respondents can refrain from participating at any point in time. Lastly, by utilizing several methods as proposed by Maxwell (1996, 2013), Saldaña (2013), and Yin (2015) an increase in the validity and reliability of these data is possible. For example *feedback* and *member checks* will be used to address construct validity concerns. Here, feedback is solicited (systematically for the latter) from those interviewed to check if conclusions reached track with respondent responses. For the former, by

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<sup>114</sup> de Vaus (2011) labels this limitation *respondent recall*. Here, respondents “reconstruct past events in the light of subsequent events” (p. 140).

remaining in contact with the dissertation committee on a regular basis, observations and tentative conclusions can be reviewed and corrected if biases are detected. Additionally, triangulation (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2015) will also be used through leveraging of the existing literature surrounding the PRAC strategy – and the interview responses – to validate (or invalidate) the conclusions reached. Yin (2015) also advises the use of a case study protocol and recording of interviews to address reliability concerns. Saldaña, on the other hand, recommends keeping copious amounts of field notes and analytical memos to moderate reliability concerns. It should also be noted that the author of this study’s preexisting ties with the MOI could *bias* the data collection and analysis process. By recognizing this possibility, the study’s author will consistently *self-reflect* during the different stages of this research.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data for this mixed method study will occur in two stages: stage one is quantitative data collection while stage two is concerned with the qualitative data component.

Stage one of the current study will focus on the acquisition of quantitative data collected from official MOI sources. This data will consist of all AQ related terrorist acts (and the subsequent physical injuries to both security personnel and civilian respectively) in Saudi Arabia for the study’s required timeline. Access to this data will be possible due to the presence of existing contacts the study’s author has developed with the Saudi MOI.<sup>115</sup>

Stage two consists of a series of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, with a sample of no less than 8 Ministry of Interior (MOI) officials and PRAC strategy implementers. Specifically, three different groups will be interviewed to gain a better understanding of the exact nature of PRAC; and to better understand – and explain – the results of the quantitative stage of

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<sup>115</sup> Hagan (2010) notes certain limitations when conducting research using official data such as police departments “fluffing” the numbers.

the study. It is expected that the three groups will provide greater knowledge in describing PRAC in addition to providing the necessary qualitative data to conduct the proper analysis to explain quantitative data outcomes. The sampling procedure for this stage is *purposive selection* (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990). These interviews will be conducted in the fall of 2015 in the KSA. Interviews and interview protocols will be conducted in the Arabic language. The interview protocols will follow the guidelines presented in Hagan (2010), Maxwell (1996, 2013), and Yin (2015) to ensure, among other things, clarity of question formation, interview protocol coherency,<sup>116</sup> and the avoidance of assumptions regarding the respondent's knowledge of the topic. All respondents will be provided with an *informed consent to participate form* before commencing with the interview (see appendix A). All responses will be recorded unless permission is not granted.<sup>117</sup> These interviews will be conducted in a confidential manner considering the sensitivity of the topic, and also considering that these officials and strategy implementers are still employed within, and by, the Saudi government. To protect the confidentiality of those interviewed, data will be stored in a locked cabinet after removing identifying information (de Vaus, 2001). Additionally, passwords, and if available, encryption tools, will be used when data is being entered electronically.<sup>118</sup> It should be made clear that no physical or emotional harm are anticipated when conducting these interviews.

**Group one.** For group one, at least three interviews will be conducted with senior policy-makers within the MOI to better understand the *reasons* behind the development of the PRAC strategy and *why* it works. Considering the MOI is a highly structured hierarchical government institution, these policy-makers will be in a strong position to provide authoritative insight into

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<sup>116</sup> For example, developing a data matrix.

<sup>117</sup> Maxwell (1996) notes that in the absence of a recording device, the researcher must make the "observational notes as detailed, concrete and chronological as possible" (p. 89).

<sup>118</sup> Even when entered electronically, identifier information will be kept in separate files.

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the strategy. Questions posed for this group include, but are not limited to: why the program was developed; how is success defined; what the challenges are, if any, for developing such an innovative approach; why terrorism increased or decreased; alternative explanations to increases or decreases in terrorism; and where the future of the program is headed (see appendix B).

**Group two.** For group two, interviews will be conducted with counterterrorism officials who were involved in the *operational* aspects of countering AQ before and after PRAC development and implementation. Questions for this group include, but are not limited to: a description of who the AQ terrorists were; why they constituted such a serious threat; what was the MOI response; what was the anticipated, and un-anticipated, “fall-out” from the security-centric approach; why terrorism increased or decreased; and alternative explanations to increases or decreases in terrorism (see appendix C).

**Group three.** For group three, interviews will be conducted with MOI and non-MOI officials tasked with strategy implementation. For this group, questions include, but are not limited to: who the prisoners participating in the strategy are and why they are there; what are the different components of the strategy and if they have changed; how is the strategy implemented, that is, where does it take place, for how long, who the staff are, and why they were chosen; why are certain programs implemented (e.g., art therapy); what happens if an individual involved in a program continues to pose a risk; how are the families involved in the process of rehabilitation; how does the MOI ensure compliance by those released; why terrorism increased or decreased; and alternative explanations to increases or decreases in terrorism (see appendix D).

It should be noted that interview protocols for all three groups will have several questions that are similar in concept. This approach will allow for coding of the qualitative data at the end of the study.



### Definitions

- The Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI): The MOI is the lead government agency tasked with promoting public security, and is the ministry responsible for overseeing the PRAC strategy (Boucek, 2008). The MOI is responsible for a range of security – and safety – related matters that include, but are not limited to, domestic security, counterterrorism, civil defense, passports control, border security, infrastructure protection, and prison administration.
- The Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care strategy (PRAC): PRAC was developed after the 2003 AQ terrorist campaign <sup>119</sup> and has expanded and changed over time (Porgess, 2014). The purpose of PRAC is to rehabilitate, reform and reintegrate persons in custody who have been implicated in AQ affiliated terrorist acts through engagement and subsequent correction of religious misunderstandings. Additionally, the strategy seeks to identify and address social, psychological, and economic problems these prisoners may face.
- Recidivism: Saudi Arabia introduced its comprehensive terror laws in 2014. The law considers terrorism:
  1. Any involvement with a violent group outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,
  2. Involvement within the kingdom or beyond in recognized groups and movements (whether they be recognized locally, regionally or internationally) that espouse radical ideological motivations; or the adoption of such group’s ideologies; or the expression of sympathy with such groups; or the support in any shape or form for such groups; or financial support in any shape or form (Assakina, 2014).

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<sup>119</sup> Extant literature is unclear as to the exact date of the program’s development and implementation. This is mainly due to the fact the program was run “quietly”.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

Accordingly, recidivism will be operationalized as any individual participating in any act shown above.

- Terrorist related operations (TRO's): will be operationalized as any AQ affiliated terrorist attack occurring within Saudi Arabia, in addition to MOI security operations such as raids, and/or any overt or covert security pursuit that results in the death, injury or capture of an AQ affiliated member.
- Saudi security officers: all officers employed at the different ministries involved in safety and security. These include MOI officers with civilian and military ranks, the Saudi National Guard (SANG), and the Saudi Ministry of Defense (MOD).<sup>120</sup>
- Killed and/or physically injured: loss of life or physical injury as a consequence of a terrorist attack. Only injuries that require immediate medical attention will be included.
- Civilians: any person, regardless of nationality, that is not employed by the MOI, SANG and MOD.

### **Population**

The case study methodology adopted in stage two is comprised of a population of n=1. Specifically, the PRAC strategy is the target population. However, considering the exploratory nature of this study, and the non-probability sampling technique adopted, accurate generalizations cannot, and will not, be made.

### **Variables**

Dependent variables:

- Terrorist related operations (TRO's),

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<sup>120</sup> For example, the SANG and the MOD are responsible for protecting many of their own facilities/commands.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

- Killed and/or physically injured Saudi security officers,
- Killed and/or physically injured civilians.

Independent variable:

- The Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

### Data Analysis

**Stage one analysis.** Analysis of the *interrupted time series* data will be conducted using a Statistical Process Control (SPC) known as a Control Chart. Developed by Shewhart and Deming (1939), Control Charts were initially used to detect sources of variability within any *ongoing process* found in the industrial sector. The authors explain that any of the above process will exhibit variations of some sort – the question is whether these variations are “controlled”<sup>121</sup> (i.e., caused by chance) or “uncontrolled” (i.e., caused by an identifiable factor) (Deming, 1986; Wheeler & Chambers, 1992). Not surprisingly, Control Charts were widely used in the business world as a quality control tool (Levi & Mainstone, 1987; Montgomery, 1991; Saunders & Saunders, 1994) and later adopted by others in places like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1986) to monitor the incidences of disease within their jurisdictions. Control Charts were also used to identify variability within the *human organism* in response to specific treatments. In this case, researchers have described the usefulness of these charts when attempting to identify treatment effects when the change is too subtle to detect using graphed data (Pfadt et al., 1992). More recently, Control Charts have been used within the criminal justice realm to assess the impact of law enforcement interventions. For example, Spelman (1995) examined the impact of *hotspot policing* practices using this method.<sup>122</sup> The author noted that “the control chart can be an invaluable assessment tool. The officers assigned to this

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<sup>121</sup> The term “assignable causes” and “chance causes” were initially used by Shewhart.

<sup>122</sup> For more, see Eck and Spelman (1987); Goldenberg and Linton (2005).

problem could show within two months that their efforts were having an effect” (p. 139). Indeed, the choice of conducting this type of longitudinal analysis was much easier, more practical, and allowed for early an response by officers in the field to adjust (or even abort) an intervention based on the ability to analyze the data in a timely fashion (Spelman, 1995).<sup>123</sup>

To create the necessary Control Chart for the current study, a QI Macros statistical tool will be utilized. Here, TRO’s and security and civilian data will be inputted in a Microsoft Excel sheet.<sup>124</sup> The QI Macros statistical tool will then allow for the creation of the control (CL),<sup>125</sup> upper (UCL), and lower control limit (LCL) using a *local* measure of dispersion.<sup>126</sup> More specifically, Sigmas at  $\pm 1, 2, 3$  will be computed allowing for the placement of three parallel lines below and above the CL (Sideridis & Greenwood, 1996).<sup>127</sup> Monthly mean data of TRO’s and security and civilian data would then be plotted against CL. By observing where these monthly means are situated on the chart, and in relation to the intervention (i.e., PRAC), an assessment can be made if the process (i.e., mean monthly counts) is in “statistical control” denoting no systemic change in the process (Spelman, 1995). If monthly data points fall steeply or consistently below the control limits then a determination could be made that there is a relationship between the PRAC strategy and a decrease in terrorist incidents.<sup>128</sup> Here, a test of the current study’s hypotheses is possible. Wheeler and Chambers (1992) explain that

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<sup>123</sup> The author explains that this type of analysis is most accurate when seasonal and trend effects are minimal.

<sup>124</sup> These types of charts are called Variable Control charts in which interval level data are plotted.

<sup>125</sup> The CL is also the mean or baseline.

<sup>126</sup> For more on Control Chart “myths” and within group dispersion see Wheeler’s (2012) manuscript titled *Myths About Data Analysis* at <http://www.spcpress.com/pdf/DJW238.pdf>.

<sup>127</sup> Berger and Hart (1986) note that 68% of all data points should fall within 1 SD of the mean, that 95% should fall within 2 SD’s of the mean and with 99.7% of data points falling within three SD’s of the mean. Based on this distribution, probabilities of an intervention can be determined, and accordingly, so can statistical significance.

<sup>128</sup> Researchers have noted that the *observable* difference can assist in determining the practical significance of any given intervention. That is, a statistically significant test of an intervention might produce “negligible” outcomes in reality. For more, see Parsonson and Baer (1978, 1986, 1992).

researchers can reject the null hypothesis (i.e., the system is “out of control”) if:<sup>129</sup>

- One data point falls either below or above the upper/lower control limits,
- Two of three *successive* data points are found beyond two Sigma’s of the mean,
- Four out of five *successive* data points are found beyond one Sigma of the mean,
- Eight *successive* data points fall on the same side of the mean.

**Stage two analysis.** The data from the qualitative component will be categorized into two parts: *descriptive* and *qualitative*. Descriptive data responses given by all three groups will provide a richer picture of what the PRAC strategy is and give greater context to the study. Specifically, these responses will provide the needed answers of what the strategy is; how it was developed and when; how it operates and by whom and for whom; and the different challenges arising etc. The questions formulated for the interview protocol are informed by the gap in knowledge of, and conflicting reports, surrounding the PRAC strategy found during the literature review.

In order to explain and understand the results of the quantitative analysis, qualitative responses will be coded for theme development<sup>130</sup> or what Maxwell (2013) calls a *categorizing strategy*. Saldaña (2013) defines coding as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Specifically, all interviews will be immediately transcribed after concluding each interview followed by a translation from Arabic to English. Next, a two-step coding process will be used to analyze the responses received for each question. First,

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<sup>129</sup> Although, the Control Chart can enable researchers to test hypotheses (Montgomery, 1991), a notable disadvantage is that no standardized set of rules exists to determine what constitutes an “out of control” process (Caulcutt, 1991; Hantula, 1995).

<sup>130</sup> Saldaña (2013, p. 15) defines a theme as “an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded.”

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*descriptive* coding (first order process) will be used to identify specific words or phrases that emerge and are related (or unrelated) to explaining the results of the quantitative data (Saldaña, 2013). Next, *subcoding*<sup>131</sup> (or second order process) will be conducted to further refine and examine, in greater detail, the initial themes or topics that emerge from the first order process. It should be noted that the study's author will be the sole collector of data, yet it is anticipated that an uninvolved person with the study will assist in addressing intercoder *reliability* and *agreement* to ensure that the themes developed are reliable and valid (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Lastly, although, prior assumptions might bias towards the selection of certain themes, the study's author will, nonetheless, look for responses surrounding recidivism, the role of the family, regional/global trends etc. that may validate (or invalidate) the *role* the PRAC strategy has on terrorism in the KSA.

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<sup>131</sup> Defined as “a second order tag assigned after a primary code to detail and enrich the entry” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 77)

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The current study utilized a mixed method sequential explanatory design – follow-up explanations model to answer the following research questions:

Is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia successful at countering terrorism? More specifically, was the PRAC strategy effective at reducing terrorism and physical injuries to security personnel and civilians alike in the KSA?

#### **Stage One of the Mixed Method Research Design**

To answer these questions quantitatively, an *interrupted time series design* was utilized where data associated with terrorism related operations (TRO's), and security and civilian deaths and/or physical injuries were collected for the study's time frame and inputted in an Excel spreadsheet. A Statistical Process Control (SPC) analysis was then conducted to answer this study's three hypotheses:

H1: There is a relationship between the decrease in AQ related terrorist operations the KSA and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

H2: There is a relationship between the decrease in the number of killed and physically injured Saudi security officers and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

H3: There is a relationship between the decrease in the number of killed and physically injured civilians and the introduction of the Saudi MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

On October of 2015, the researcher visited the Kingdom of Saudi of Arabia (KSA) to begin data collection for this study. Using previously known contacts there, presentations were given to several Ministry of Interior officials to receive the required approval for this study along with the needed official terrorism related data. After receiving the necessary approval, data was provided from the relevant MOI department. Validation of the provided data was also sought using alternative sources of open source materials. Below are the statistical results of the three different data sets associated with this study.

### Terrorism Related Operations (TRO's)

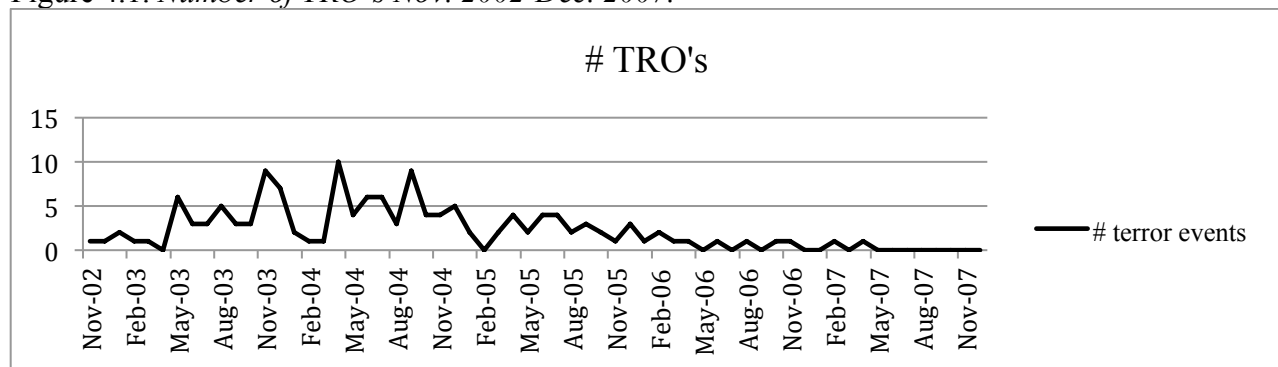
**Descriptive statistics.** Between late 2002 and 2007, 140 terrorist related operations (TRO's) took place across the KSA. The results of the descriptive analysis of the official data are shown below (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. *Descriptive Statistics of TRO's Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*

	N (in months)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Results	62	2.26	2.43

Further analysis of the data shows that April of 2003 witnessed the most TRO's with 10 attacks followed by 9 in both November of 2003 and September 2004 respectively. Additionally, no TRO's were recorded between May of 2007 and February 2007 (Figure 4.1). In fact, the next TRO occurred in August of 2009 when AQ operatives beheaded a Saudi general working counter terrorism operations for the MOI.

Figure 4.1. *Number of TRO's Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*





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An examination of the data annually reflects a severe increase in TRO's in 2003 with 43; 2004 recorded the highest count at 55. The data show that TRO's gradually decreased the following years leading to zero counts in 2008 (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. *TRO's by Year.*

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
TRO's	2	43	55	29	9	2	0

Based on the official data, it appears that the most common TRO was an MOI security operation <sup>132</sup> (n=72); followed by shootouts (n=19); attacks on MOI security personnel <sup>133</sup> (n=11) and finally attacks on foreign nationals <sup>134</sup> (n=11). A total of 7 TRO's involving large explosive devices (e.g., booby trapped cars) were also recorded. The most serious of these were the 3 simultaneous attacks of three different residential compounds in May of 2003 (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. *Types of TRO's.*

Type TRO's	Security Operations	Shootouts	Attacks on MOI Patrols/Officers	Attacks Against Foreigners	Suicide Attacks	Major AQ Operation <sup>135</sup>	Other
Frequency	72	19	16	11	7	4	11

Looking at where these TRO's occurred, the data shows that the capital of KSA, Riyadh, witnessed, by far, the most (n=84) with Mecca <sup>136</sup> placing a distant second (n=26) (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. *TRO's by Province.*

Province	Riyadh	Mecca	Qasim	Eastern Province	Medinah	Aseer	Hail	Jizan	Tabuk	Al-Jouf
# TRO's	84	26	13	8	4	1	1	1	1	1

**Determining statistical significance – statistical process control.** In addressing the first hypothesis, a control chart was created using the official data provided. This data was entered in a Microsoft Excel worksheet where monthly TRO's were created. The statistical analysis was

<sup>132</sup> For example, planned and “reactive” raids on an AQ hideout.

<sup>133</sup> These could be either assassinations or attempted assassinations in addition to attacks on static and moving security patrols.

<sup>134</sup> These include kidnappings and direct gunfire while the victim was travelling by car.

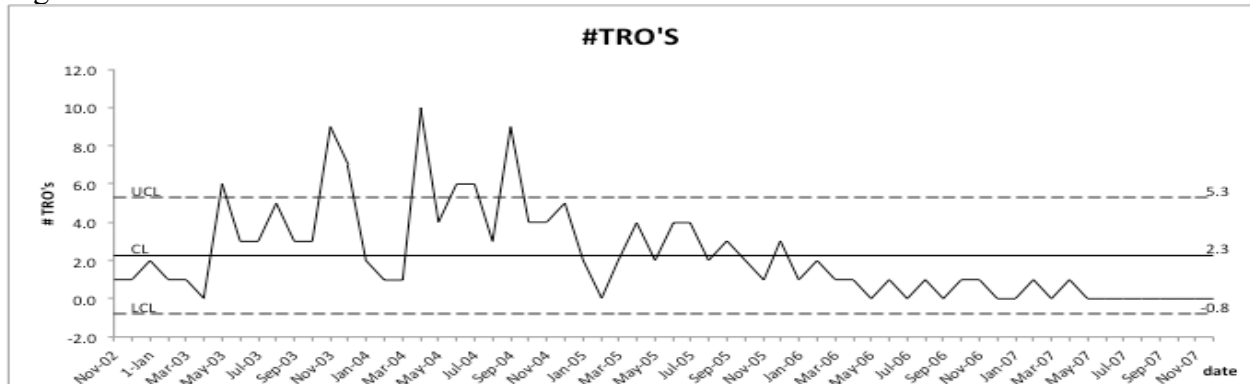
<sup>135</sup> These include attacks against the US consulate in Jeddah; the attack on Abgaig oil refinery; and the attacks against a residential compound in Al-Khobar.

<sup>136</sup> Most of these attacks occurred in the port city of Jeddah.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

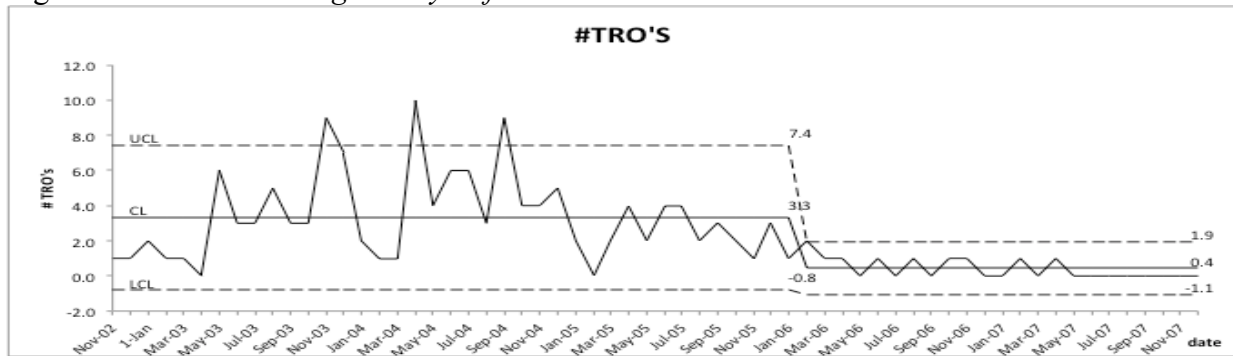
conducted using the QI Macros analytical tool. For this data set, the Upper Control Limit (UCL) was calculated at 5.3, while the Lower Control Limits (LCL's) were calculated at -0.8. The results are as follows (Figure 4.2). Looking at the Control Chart, it becomes clear that there is a statistically significant decrease in TRO's beginning in January 2006.

Figure 4.2. Control Chart: TRO's Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.



A second analysis was conducted using the QI macros tool where the *process change* function was calculated (Figure 4.3). Here, means and Sigma were recalculated to determine before and after change as they relate to the implementation of the PRAC strategy. The Control Charts developed for this data set clearly show that the system was “out of control” between May of 2003 until January of 2006. Moreover, since implementing the PRAC strategy in early 2006, the data shows that the system began to “regain control”. Additionally, the tests indicate a statistically significant difference before its establishment and afterwards. For example, over 24 consecutive points (monthly counts of TRO's) fell below the CL (the mean) after 2006. Furthermore, we observe that over 20 consecutive monthly TRO counts fell below one Sigma of the mean. The provided data unmistakably shows that there is a relationship between the implementation of the PRAC strategy and the levels of terrorism in the KSA.

Figure 4.3. *Process Change Analysis for TRO's Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*



**Killed and/or Physically Injured Saudi Security Officers**

The MOI provided official data on the numbers of Saudi security officers killed and/or physically injured in their efforts to counter AQ.

**Descriptive statistics.** Between late 2002 and 2007, 414 Saudi security officers were killed and/or physically injured. The results of the analysis of the descriptive data are shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. *Descriptive Statistics Killed/Physically Injured Saudi Security Officers Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*

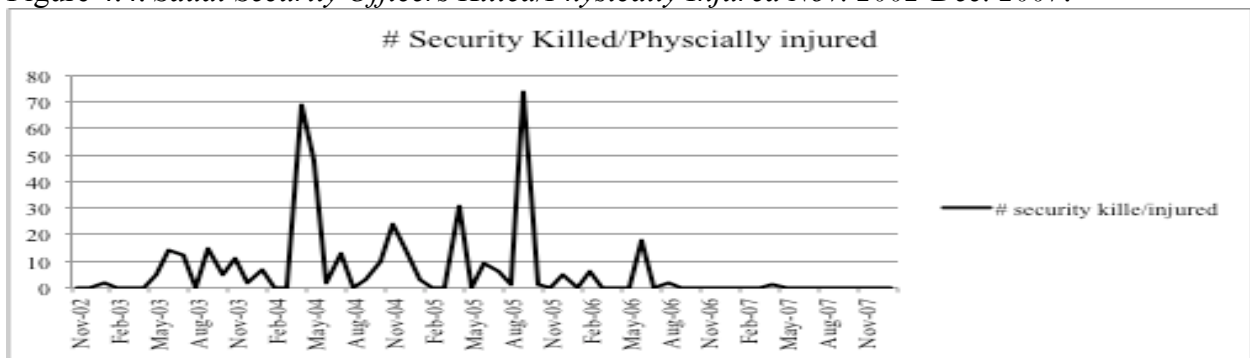
	N (in months)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Results	62	6.68	14.58

Looking closely at the data, it is clear that September of 2005 witnessed the most killed and/or physically injured Saudi security officer (n=74) with April and May of 2004 both recording over 48 counts (Figure 4.4). More specifically, the data provided shows that 53 security officers of different ranks and command’s had lost their lives, while 361 suffered a range of physical injuries that required treatment.<sup>137</sup> Some injuries required serious medical attention. It is not clear how many “slightly” injured officers did not require treatment. Furthermore, and as was reflected above, the circumstances of these deaths and injuries are different. For example, AQ conducted several assassination attempts against MOI security

<sup>137</sup> As shall be shown later, the KSA developed a system of compensations based on the extent of the injury suffered. For example, those with 70% debilitation are treated equally as those who lost their lives fighting terrorism.

personnel. In May of 2003, AQ operatives ambushed two senior MOI security officers in Riyadh. Both officers survived despite being hit multiple times – two other officers were not as fortunate. The first was shot dead in the holy city of Mecca in 2006, while the other was brutally decapitated in his hometown of Buraideh.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, some officers were deliberately targeted for their roles in fighting AQ, whereas others were killed or physically injured while conducting raids or when performing security duties such as manning checkpoints or running patrols.

Figure 4.4. *Saudi Security Officers Killed/Physically Injured Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*



A further examination of the data on annual basis reveals that 2004 witnessed the most killed and/or physically injured officers with 191 cases; 2005 recorded the second highest count with 130 (Table 4.6). No Saudi security officer was killed or physically injured countering terrorism in 2008.

Table 4.6. *Saudi Security Officers Killed/Injured by Year.*

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
# of Killed/physically injured security forces	0	66	191	130	26	1	0

**Determining statistical significance – statistical process control.** In order to answer the second hypothesis, a Control Chart was created using the official data provided. This data was entered in a Microsoft Excel worksheet where monthly counts of killed and/or physically injured

<sup>138</sup> In late 2003, AQ had successfully planted two improvised explosive devices in the vehicles of two mid-level, at the time, MOI security officers responsible for terror related investigations. Although the explosive had detonated, fortunately, no one was injured.

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Saudi security officers were created. The statistical analysis was conducted using the QI Macros Analytical tool. For this data set, the UCL was calculated at 21.3 while the LCL was calculated at -8.2 (Figure 4.5). An examination of the Control Chart reveals that there was a statistically significant decrease of killed and/or physically injured Saudi security officers that began in October 2005.

Figure 4.5. Control Chart: Saudi Security Officers Killed/Physically Injured Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.

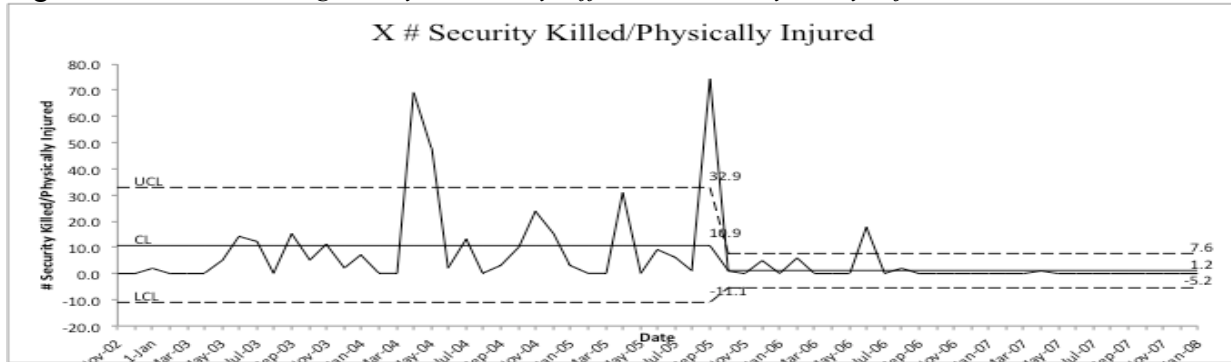


A second analysis was conducted using the QI macros tool where the *process change* function was calculated (Figure 4.6). Here, means and Sigma were recalculated to determine before and after change as they relate to the implementation of the PRAC strategy. The Control Charts developed for this data set show that the system was “out of control” between May of 2003 until October of 2005. Furthermore, the data shows that since implementing the PRAC strategy in early 2006, the system began to “regain control”. Additionally, the tests indicate a statistically significant difference before PRAC’s establishment and afterwards. And although the system appears to have “regained control” in October of 2005 for eight months, a significant spike in killed and/or physically injured security officers occurred in June of 2006. However, the system was back “in control” for the rest of the study’s time frame (and beyond). Specifically, since October of 2006, 16 points (monthly counts) were recorded at zero indicating a statistically significant difference before and after the PRAC strategy was implemented in early 2006.

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Unquestionably, the data indicate that there is a relationship between the decrease in killed and injured Saudi security forces and the implementation of the PRAC strategy.

Figure 4.6. *Process Change Analysis Security Officers Killed/Physically Injured 2002-Dec. 2007.*



### Killed and/or Physically Injured Civilians

The MOI provided official data on the numbers of civilians killed and/or physically injured in their efforts to counter AQ.

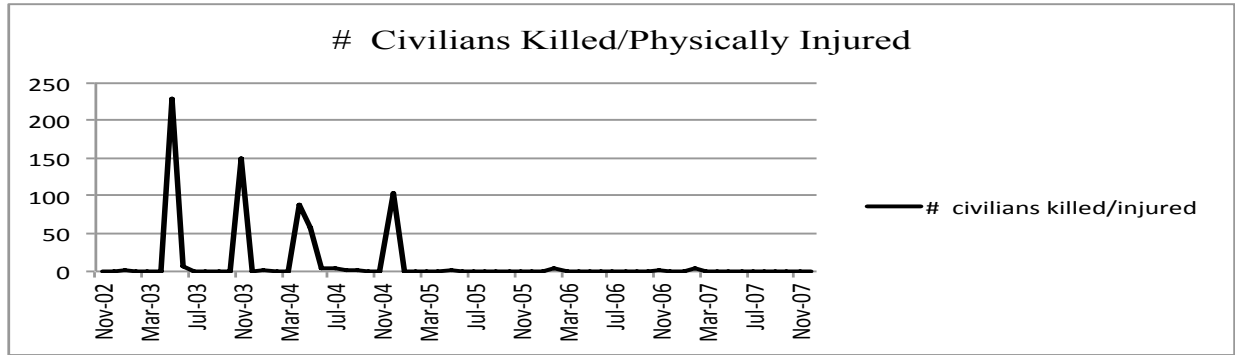
**Descriptive statistics.** Between late 2002 and 2007, 661 civilians were killed and/or physically injured. These casualties include both Saudi and foreign nationals. The results of the analysis of the descriptive data are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7. *Descriptive Statistics Killed/Physically Injured Civilians Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.*

	N (in months)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Results	62	10.66	38.46

Looking closely at the data, we observe that May of 2003 witnessed the highest number of killed and/or physically injured civilians with 230. These casualties were the result of three simultaneous suicide attacks by AQ operatives on three residential compounds in the capital Riyadh. The second highest count occurred in November of 2003 when AQ operatives conducted suicide attacks on the Al-Muhayya compound killing and physically injuring 149 (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7. Killed/Physically Injured Civilians Nov. 2002-Dec. 2007.



Breaking down the data annually reveals that the years 2003 and 2004 were by far the bloodiest in the KSA’s campaign against AQ (Table 4.8). Over 98% of all civilian deaths and physical injuries occurred during that time frame despite the fact that 9 TRO’s were recorded in 2006 causing the death and physical injury of 26 Saudi security officers.

Table 4.8. Killed/Physically Injured Civilians by Year.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
# of Killed/physically injured civilians	0	386	264	1	6	4	0

Moreover the data reveals that 87 foreign nationals lost their lives and 430 were physically injured. 7 Saudi’s were also killed with 136 sustaining physically injuries. (The latter figures exclude the cases of Saudi security forces who were casualties of the AQ campaign). Lastly, the data provided showed several cases of foreign nationals being specifically targeted for assassination type operations. American, British, French and Irish nationals were all victims of AQ terrorism.

**Determining statistical significance – statistical process control.** In addressing the third hypothesis, a control chart was created using the QI Macros statistical tool on Excel. Yet due to the limited number of cases, and the extremely skewed shape of data, the results were ambiguous and thus discarded. Consequently, the hypothesis was removed from the overall study

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despite the clear decrease in civilian deaths and physical injuries that resulted from AQ's terrorism campaign in the KSA.

### **Summary**

The researcher was able to receive official data from the Saudi MOI to examine if the implementation of the PRAC strategy had an impact on the levels of AQ related TRO's; the number of Saudi security officers killed and/or physically injured and on the number of civilians killed and/or physically injured between November 2002 and December 2007. The Control Charts developed using the QI macros statistical tool reflected a statistically significant change in TRO's occurring after January 2006 – the time when the PRAC strategy became officially operational. For instance, Control Charts showed an “out of control” system between May of 2003 and February of 2006. Understandably, this time period witnessed the heaviest amount of AQ terrorist activity and consequently the appropriate security response. Security operations such as planned and “reactive” raids dominated the total number of TRO cases with 72. Moreover, most of the TRO's recorded occurred in the capital Riyadh (n=84). Interestingly, the data provided by the MOI appears conservative (n=140). In discussions with MOI officials during the researchers' data gathering phase, one officer clarified that several high profile terrorist cases were excluded considering the weak ties the perpetrators of these events had with AQ (for example the killing of several high profile government figures in the Al-Jouf province in 2002). Other terrorism cases were also excluded due to their different ideological motivations.

Analysis of the data provided concerning Saudi security officers killed and/or physically injured using the QI macros statistical tool showed a statistically significant difference after July of 2006 – the period after the implementation of the PRAC strategy (even though statistical significance was observed as early as October 2005, only to spike several months later). Looking



closely at the Control Chart, we see that the system was “out of control” beginning in May of 2003 until October of 2005. During that time, the majority of the 53 MOI officers had lost their lives battling AQ (n=49), while 338 security officers suffered a range of physical injuries.

Finally, over 661 civilians were victims of the AQ terrorist campaign during the study’s time frame. Specifically, 94 Saudi and foreign nationals – respectively – had lost their lives. Foreign nationals represented the highest count at 87. Interestingly, over 550 Saudi’s (both security officers and civilians) suffered physical injuries – 67 lost their lives. In attempting to address the third hypothesis, a lack of data precluded the use of the QI Macros statistical tool. Although a clear decrease in civilian deaths and physically injuries is apparent, its statistical significance before/after PRAC’s introduction could not be determined.

### **Stage Two of the Mixed Method Research Design**

*A single case study* design was used to answer this study’s second research question:

What is the KSA’s PRAC strategy? How can it explain the results of the quantitative analysis? Why does it “work”?

This choice of design will allow the researcher to explain the results of the quantitative analyses through gaining deeper insight into the PRAC strategy.

For the second of stage of this study, the researcher travelled to Riyadh in the fall of 2015 to meet with Saudi officials within MOI headquarters and also at the MBNCCC to better understand the PRAC strategy. Interviews were conducted with 5 senior MOI officials (2 of whom were leading the MBNCCC efforts),<sup>139</sup> 2 mid-level MOI officers involved in countering

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<sup>139</sup> All MBNCCC staff the researcher had engaged earned their Ph.D.’s from the KSA, the US, and the UK respectively (including the two senior MOI official tasked with running the Center).

terrorism, and several MBNCCC officials.<sup>140</sup> These meetings took place at the MOI headquarters, the MBNCC Center in Riyadh, and in the offices of these MOI senior officials located across the Saudi capital. The research topic was explained to all the participants followed by informed consent forms which were signed by all. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, and all but three permitted the recording of these interviews. Interview lengths ranged from 75 minutes to well over three hours.<sup>141</sup> In addition to semi-structured interviews, official documents, and media materials were also provided. The information received uncovered a much more dynamic and strategic approach to countering terrorism using, among other things, what some have described as *softer approaches* involving counter radicalization programs. Moreover, the data collected shed much needed light on *how* the strategy works and *why*. For this phase of the study, a descriptive and qualitative analysis will be presented on the Saudi PRAC strategy to answer the research questions at hand.

### **What is PRAC?**

The numerous interviews and discussions in Riyadh allowed for a more in-depth understanding of how the KSA in general, and the MOI specifically, are countering terrorism through, as one senior MOI official elaborated, the use of *softer approaches*. Here, successfully countering terrorism required correcting the beliefs of those who have adopted the AQ ideology and, in parallel and more broadly, countering that same ideology in an effort to contain and consequently eliminate its presence in the KSA.

Yet despite this interest in adopting *softer approaches*, MOI officials noted the presence of challenges in developing a successful a strategy. For instance, the fact that the exact nature of

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<sup>140</sup> The researcher also had the opportunity to sit with several MOI officials during these visits where sidebar discussions surrounding the PRAC strategy also provided insight. These discussions were off the record and consequently not recorded or documented.

<sup>141</sup> For example, one session included several PRAC officials at the MBNCCC in Riyadh.

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the AQ threat was relatively unknown early on. But that would change. Several officials highlighted that, the *hard approach* adopted by the MOI initially was a critical tactic that not only stymied the “early momentum”, but also allowed for the development of the MOI’s unique approach. Specifically, the outcomes of these security operations led to the creation of a pool of AQ operatives in custody, killed, or in hiding that permitted extensive research to be conducted. Demographic markers were developed, historical analyses were conducted, and community assessments were undertaken to better understand who the enemy was and how they operated. Moreover it paved the way to move beyond the traditional, and immediate security approach, to one that sought to counter AQ over the long term.

Saudi MOI officials explained that the knowledge generated<sup>142</sup> from these early studies inspired the MOI leadership to examine alternative ways to address the multitude of threats AQ poses to not only the KSA, but also the world. This was especially true considering that many suspected AQ supporters and sympathizers were in custody and would eventually be released (and quite worryingly, to the same environment that may very well have allowed for initial radicalization to take place).

**PRAC’s beginnings.** Saudi MOI officials indicated that suspected AQ operatives in custody were undoubtedly an important starting point for the MOI’s PRAC strategy. Officials revealed that the MOI was initially overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of the AQ campaign (that began in 2003), and “unprepared”<sup>143</sup> to deal with the increasing number of AQ operatives that would end up in MOI custody. Prison officials needed to properly classify prisoners they held based on not only offence type but also on levels of radicalization. This required MOI, and

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<sup>142</sup> For example, many of those who had adopted the AQ ideology come from larger families, had limited knowledge in Islam, received their religious knowledge from questionable figures, and were motivated by regional conflicts etc.

<sup>143</sup> Officials explained that although the KSA had experienced numerous acts of terrorism prior to 2003, the well-organized nature of this terrorist threat was unprecedented in scope and intensity.

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consequently prison officials, again, to clearly understand the AQ *takfiri* ideology,<sup>144</sup> the justifications they use to commit acts of terror, to understand how they are able to recruit young Saudi men and their ways of radicalizing them.<sup>145</sup> And although the security services were capable of conducting successful interrogations of those in their custody (leading to further arrests and disruptions), understanding and correcting the beliefs they had espoused was vital – particularly to address the possibility of (further) radicalization in the Saudi prison system.<sup>146</sup> One way to accomplish this, as explained by the MOI, was to introduce religious clerics to engage and counsel AQ operatives behind bars.

Thus it appears the efforts to counter AQ using *softer approaches* began in earnest in 2004 with the establishment of the *counseling committees*.<sup>147</sup> These committees were primarily religious in nature and targeted AQ operatives in custody when “they are most vulnerable”.<sup>148</sup> Here, religious scholars worked with prisoners to expose, early on, the “misguided” beliefs they held using solid well-established Islamic precedent to counter their justifications to excommunicate the Saudi state and consequently to take up arms (e.g., to do something about it). Additionally, teams of social scientists/workers and psychologists were formed to assess the needs of the both detainees and their families. Not only are prisoner’s *deviant* beliefs being targeted, but also the (possible) psychological and social factors. These committees’ work continued to grow extending beyond prison where the families of those in custody were also

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<sup>144</sup> MOI officials explained that terrorist ideologies are not stagnant. For example, today we see existence Daesh (ISIL) whose ideology might appear similar to AQ at face value, but is, in reality, different (ideologically, strategically and tactically). Here, the MOI stresses the need to understand the nuances of the group’s belief system in order to address them effectively.

<sup>145</sup> One Saudi official explained that AQ, in many instances, uses “trap and scare” tactics to recruit unwitting youth. Here, radicalization occurs after recruitment.

<sup>146</sup> It should be noted that separate prisons are in place for AQ operatives and other high value prisoners. These prisons are independent of the general prison systems.

<sup>147</sup> These were known as *munasaha* committees in the Arabic language. Previous researchers have used the term advisory committees to describe these efforts. In this context, both are interchangeable.

<sup>148</sup> Comment made by one MOI senior official explaining the PRAC strategy.

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engaged. Specifically, the MOI recognized that radicalization did not occur in a vacuum thus requiring careful interventions to address environmental factors that may drive the initial involvement with AQ. Indeed, PRAC sought to contain the ideology from spreading and showed that the Saudi government will do all it can to protect those most vulnerable from becoming entangled in AQ's despicable activities. Furthermore, PRAC, as strategy was evolving and growing to include, among other things, a counter radicalization component.

Still, AQ suspects in MOI custody remained a serious concern for MOI officials early on. Despite the high numbers AQ operatives that will not be released for years to come (and in some cases executed), many would after completion of their sentence (or for the absence of evidence to prosecute them). For those soon to be released, larger efforts and a more institutionalized setting was needed to accommodate the hundreds that would be released back into society safely. As one MOI official remarked "we cannot lock them up forever." Accordingly, in early 2006, the MOI established the Mohammed bin Naif Center for Care and Counseling (MBNCCC) in Riyadh. The idea behind the Center spawned after recognizing the importance of reintegrating these prisoners back into society slowly, gradually and better prepared to deal with, among other things, AQ's incessant recruitment efforts<sup>149</sup> in order protect, not only society, but also those previously liberated from the clutches of AQ.

Indeed, a range of strategies and tactics were developed by the MOI to address the AQ threat. Interviews revealed that what began as, arguably, an ad hoc *counseling* effort evolved beyond the prisoner and their families to target the whole of Saudi society. Specifically, for the latter, several different departments within the MOI such as the security services, the media departments, and "ideological security" department performed a parallel objective to fully

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<sup>149</sup> Specifically, "push" and "pull" factors that may influence the individual's decision to reengage with AQ.

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counter the AQ threat – that of prevention. Together, they strove, at the strategic level, to *prevent* the AQ ideology from taking root within the kingdom and beyond.<sup>150</sup> As one MOI official explained, AQ “targets the whole of society”, and these efforts in turn sought to achieve the same. And although the MOI is the driving force behind this strategy, other Saudi ministries and public sector agents were also coopted, each in their respective roles, to assist in defeating AQ. These included, but were not limited to, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Media.

PRAC, and more specifically the rehabilitation and after-care component, took shape, grew and evolved despite, as one official put it, the absence of any specific blue print or best practice to leverage. This absence did not discourage the MOI leadership though. Interviews revealed that, HRH prince Mohammed bin Naif, who at the time, was tasked with the counter terrorism and security portfolios within the MOI (and consequently the entire Saudi state) saw these efforts as critical in the fight against AQ over the long run. For HRH, the MOI, and the kingdom as a whole, thinking “outside the box”<sup>151</sup> had chipped away at AQ’s credibility (among some circles) destroying in the process their operational presence in the KSA. Just as important, these efforts to counter AQ were seen by some as significant in not only protecting the kingdom, but also in preserving the religion of Islam as a whole.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> MOI officials stressed, on more than one occasion, how AQ and other terrorist organizations have consistently targeted the KSA in order to undermine both the ruling and religious establishment. For these groups, control of the two holy sites and an abundant source of natural resources are the ultimate prize.

<sup>151</sup> Critics of these efforts in the KSA and abroad questioned the efficacy of this approach and called for “more of the same” viewing these efforts as too soft and untested.

<sup>152</sup> These efforts protected the Islamic *ummah* from being hijacked by the *deviant* ideology adopted by AQ and other likeminded groups. Unquestionably, the presence of these groups, and their beliefs, created a debate within the some radical circles of how Islam is being interpreted and consequently where it is heading. See William McCants work titled *Militant Ideology Atlas* at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/militant-ideology-atlas>.

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To the naked eye, the PRAC strategy seems simple enough, yet it is broad and comprehensive with many moving parts working in unison. PRAC aims to correct the beliefs of those in custody (and those who are free) through counseling sessions at the personal and collective levels (in prison and beyond). It seeks to contain the spread of the violent AQ ideology within the families and communities they are part of to prevent radicalization through different forms of support and guidance. Lastly, it seeks to raise awareness and inoculate the whole of society from the deceptive messages AQ relentlessly attempts to spread. What has been presented so far has been a brief introduction to PRAC. Below is closer examination of the different components that make up this unique strategy.

**Prevention.** Interviews with MOI officials uncovered different prevention efforts undertaken by several departments within the MOI in close collaboration with numerous Saudi government ministries. Specifically, the MOI conducts what can be termed “general” and “specific” prevention efforts to counter AQ’s messaging and consequently its ability to operate in the KSA. “General” prevention can be further broken down into two tracks: efforts that aim to raise public awareness and efforts that focus on developing programs and projects to be implemented at the different ministries and across Saudi society. These programs seek to promote national solidarity, resilience, tolerance and moderation; while other projects were developed to counter the AQ narrative through, for example, exposing who AQ truly are. Many of these initiatives were achieved in collaboration with different government ministries with the ultimate goal of preventing the *deviant* ideology from taking root, or expanding, through raising the awareness of the general public. For instance, raising awareness through programs that target society at large through the use of billboards and posters specifically placed in areas of high traffic (e.g., crowded intersections), in schools, shopping malls and at transportation hubs (e.g.,

airports). The latter was developed to explain the legal requirement of disclosing money and goods before travel. Billboards, on the other hand, may show images of the destruction perpetrated by AQ, or may express images of citizens holding hands with security officers to emphasize the importance of cooperation and the role of the community in countering AQ. One early and poignant message was one that emphasized that *the citizen is the first security officer*.

Moreover, MOI officials explained the need to be transparent and quick in disclosing AQ related activities to prevent false information from spreading. Hundreds of official statements by “an official MOI source” informed society expeditiously of terrorist acts that have occurred in order to, among other things, prevent rumors or false information from spreading – in essence taking control of the discourse by being proactive and prompt. AQ operatives arrested or killed are revealed so as to remind society of the threat level, the need for vigilance and also to stress that the rule of law is, and always will be, upheld. These statements are aired and published in numerous outlets to reach the broadest possible audience.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, these statements help counter one thread of the AQ narrative: that the MOI is conducting extrajudicial operations against the “Muslim youth”. Another aspect of these efforts is the use of wanted lists which not only inform the public of who the terrorist are, but likewise places direct responsibility on those who continue to associate with these wanted AQ operative. In this case, no excuse can be made for unwittingly “assisting” an AQ operative on the run. Furthermore, these awareness efforts go beyond just informing the public of what is transpiring. Media reporting of AQ related terrorism was also refined so as not to confuse the general public of who these terrorists are, and in the process expose the misguided ideology they adopt. For example, AQ operatives were described

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<sup>153</sup> They are also aired and/or published in the English language.



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as *deviant*<sup>154</sup> as opposed to “jihadis” while MBNCCC transfers were called “beneficiaries” and not ex-terrorists. Additionally, news reporting was sensitive to not paint areas where AQ terrorist operatives come from (or are killed in) as hot beds. The objective here was not to isolate large areas or even families from the rest of society – a situation that may very well create a viable recruitment pool for AQ. One official mentioned that the backlash against AQ was so strong that it could have been possible to marginalize entire families from the rest of society due to the powerful and emotional media reporting of these events and societies rejection of their actions. However, and worth noting, the inclusion of tribal names in the media’s reporting of AQ activities arguably compels tribal leaders to come forward and publicly denounce, and times disown, those who come from their tribes.

Television was exploited in different ways to prevent the AQ ideology from reaching vulnerable audiences. The MOI, in collaboration with other ministries, developed numerous TV programs that aired in 2004 and continued to run for several years afterwards (in Arabic and subtitled English). Episodes called *From Inside the Cell*, *The Truth*, and *A Fatherly Stand* presented the viewer with important messages that, again, expose AQ’s brutality and devious ways. For example, these programs presented repentant AQ operatives who described how they had been “misguided”, or how un-Islamic these AQ operatives were in their daily lives (e.g., killing, not praying, stealing, deception etc.) in addition to revealing many of the inconsistencies in their interpretations of Islam as was disseminated by AQ. Also, one MOI official described the airing of an important recantation early in 2003. In this instance, a special program, hosted by a

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<sup>154</sup> *Al fi’ah al dhalah*, or *deviant* group, is the Arabic label/description for AQ that was reached by the highest religious authorities within the kingdom. This description was used after careful examinations of their motives and actions. The label has strong Islamic connotations that paint AQ, and their operatives, as straying away from true Islam.

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well-known and revered religious cleric,<sup>155</sup> aired the retraction of three religious clerics who had previously issued fatwas that had justified the killing of foreigners and security officials. Their recantations served to show how, even *they*, have deviated in their interpretations of Islam. The three clerics remain in prison to this day. Other programs show, in detail, security operations that targeted AQ hideouts and the wanton violence these terrorists employed. Emphasis on the killing of innocent bystanders by AQ was also included in these programs. These efforts did not solely involve former AQ operatives. Additional TV programs were created that allowed for discussions to take place where religious figures, social scientists, terrorism and security analysts etc. analyze the AQ threat and in the process reveal the true nature of their activities. These programs aired on national and international TV stations in the hopes to reach the broadest possible audience.

Other MOI (general) prevention efforts focused on developing programs to be implemented by, and in, other government ministries and institutions. One senior MOI official described his department's efforts in countering AQ's ideology by developing strategies to counter AQ in the long term. The mandate of this MOI department is to preserve the ideological underpinning of the KSA from AQ, and like-minded groups, attacks. These broad and strategic efforts are directed by the MOI and involve several ministries associated with inoculating and developing the future generation of Saudi society. Here, the MOI works closely, and in collaboration, with several critical public sector "socializing agents" such the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Islamic affairs, the Ministry of Culture and Media and also government institutions such as the Commission for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of

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<sup>155</sup> Dr. Awadh Algharni has become a respected religious figure within Islamic circles (his Twitter account has over 11 million followers). He had been previously imprisoned in the 1990's for involvement in seditious activities. Just recently, Dr. Algharni narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in the Philippines.

Virtue. The official explained that the role of the MOI is to provide guidance and coordination for the different government agencies involved in these prevention efforts. An array of programs were developed, and continue to be developed, to counter the AQ narrative.<sup>156</sup> For example, exercises in public schools to increase solidarity and reject terrorism and violence through class lectures or creative writing and drawing exercises were introduced. The official noted that AQ was determined to create a gap between the Saudi government and society by attempting to undermine their legitimacy.<sup>157</sup> Efforts were also undertaken to utilize many of the public spaces in the KSA to refute AQ. Mosques and religious sermons, as an ideal platform to address the malevolence of AQ, were also targeted. Mosques provide a consistent platform to reach the public – a platform that meets five times a day.<sup>158</sup> Here qualified religious clerics with valid credentials can address the issues that preoccupy the Saudi street – namely terrorism. Yet one official reminded that many of those who espouse the *deviant* ideology do not, in fact pray, in public mosques which they view as un-Islamic. He explains that these efforts seek to prevent those most vulnerable from being drawn to AQ's deceitful claims of jihad. Training programs were also developed for public service agencies to increase awareness towards the nuances of AQ's *deviant* ideology and their flawed arguments. Worth noting is that the youth are not the direct demographic of concern, yet these public servants will unquestionably interact with them in a personal setting. These programs may occur in the shape of workshops, lectures or short training courses.

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<sup>156</sup> Some of these efforts remain classified due to their sensitive nature.

<sup>157</sup> In addition to targeting leading Saudi government officials, AQ also targeted the legitimacy of the Saudi religious establishment which weighs in on important religious issues that face the kingdom. By attempting to shake societies' confidence in the *ulumas'* religious interpretations, the group hopes to introduce what they propose is their version of true Islam.

<sup>158</sup> Friday prayers are also an important occasion to inform the public of events in the KSA and the Islamic world.

**The MBNCCC.** Although the work of the MOI, in collaboration with other Saudi ministries, are directed towards the whole of society (e.g., targeting young and old of both sexes, the employed and unemployed, Saudi's and non-Saudi's etc.); there are other more focused prevention efforts in place. For example, the MBNCCC (in cooperation with other departments within the security service housed in the MOI) was involved in what can be described as both a “general” and specific prevention and containment strategy.<sup>159</sup> These efforts were aimed at not only broader society but also towards a targeted population. Along with those imprisoned for AQ related terrorist activities, these efforts also focused on several different demographics vulnerable to radicalization – or further radicalization – such as the families of those detained, the families of those terrorists killed, and the families of those terrorist who are in hiding abroad. These efforts were also aimed at foreigners within the kingdom whether in custody or free. Lastly, “areas” of concern were also the focus of preventative measures. For instance, regions or “activities” where disproportionate involvement in AQ was observed. This work was developed and implemented by MOI security officers, academics, religious scholars and other subject matter experts; and took on many forms such as counseling and service provision. These efforts were administered in prisons, halfway houses, and communities across the KSA and have cost the MOI millions of US dollars.

More specifically, MBNCCC officials explained that these *counseling* efforts that occur outside of the prison walls were composed of three primary elements: general counseling, targeted counseling, and electronic counseling (i.e., an Internet based website). Programs developed for this component of the PRAC strategy were based on sound religious doctrine – a resource in great abundance in the KSA and were guided by the outcomes of research on AQ

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<sup>159</sup> As shall be shown later, the MBNCCC plays several roles in the PRAC strategy. These include working with individuals, families, and specific prevention efforts.

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operatives in custody. They included, among other things, programs to counter “misguided” beliefs,<sup>160</sup> encourage tolerance and understanding. The ultimate goal here is correcting the *shubuhah* (specious arguments and fallacies) of AQ’s ideology and replacing them with the proper understanding of Islam based on the Quran and *Sunna*. They further explained that the religious focus to these prevention efforts were critical and served to undermine the very essence of AQ.<sup>161</sup>

Data provided revealed that between 2005 and 2014, nearly 2,074 programs had been implemented in 989 locations across the kingdom. Some areas within the Saudi provinces (13 in total) received more sessions than others, while some received none at all. It was explained that programs were developed for specific regions based on the information gleaned from analysis of previous AQ investigations. For example, a higher number of youth traveling to conflict zones was observed in location X and subsequently addressed. In this case, an in depth analysis of the area and possible factors associated with the increase are scrutinized. Then, and in coordination with local leadership of these provinces, the Center implements the specifically tailored program(s). For example, the Center conducted different types of activities to achieve these general prevention goals. These ranged from speeches and discussions (n=1,226), lectures (n=429), and religious sermons (n=232). Other activities included seminars, “cultural competitions”, public and private meetings and training sessions. It was explained that these programs can last anywhere from several days to several months. The provided data also showed that the majority of these programs were conducted in mosques (n=400), followed by boy’s

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<sup>160</sup> The term “misguided” is deliberately used by the KSA and MOI as part of the PRAC strategy. Specifically, a misguided person is easier to engage considering that, in many cases, overzealous youth recruited had, arguably, “good” intentions (e.g., safeguarding the human rights of Muslims in Iraq, the Balkans etc.).

<sup>161</sup> It should be noted that other programs are developed that aim to expose AQ’s tactics of luring, through deception and fear mongering, vulnerable youth.

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schools (n=292) and girl's schools (n=168) respectively. Other locations included men and women's universities, sports clubs, and *istirahat* (leisure clubs).<sup>162</sup> Lastly, MBNCCC officials stated that they had distributed over 250,000 books, nearly 58,000 audio recordings and roughly 79,000 pamphlets that aim to expose AQ's inconsistent religious rationale and also to counter them with well-established religious jurisprudence and fatwas.

*Counseling* sessions also targeted those AQ operatives who are behind bars. MOI officials described how these prisoners are held in five major maximum-security prisons across the KSA. The aim here appears to, initially, be more akin to a *containment strategy* considering the prisoner had already adopted the AQ ideology. As noted earlier, these efforts originally began in earnest in 2004. Specifically, after prisoners are questioned, religious clerics were introduced to engage the detainees in a religious dialogue.<sup>163</sup> The focus of these sessions was not to elicit information on terrorist plots or networks, but to understand why, and to a certain extent, how he had initially adopted the *takfiri* ideology. This rapport facilitated subsequent discussions where they would then explain why and how the prisoner had deviated from proper Islam. MOI officials noted that it became evident early on that different prisoners were radicalized in different ways and that some were more extreme in their beliefs than others. In this instance, the motivations for committing a terrorist related act were different and consequently required an individualized approach (e.g., traveling to Iraq, collecting donations for suspicious groups, online activities ranging from propaganda to incitement etc.). MBNCCC officials also explained that some – very few – were resistant to these approaches while others accepted them immediately. Apparently, for the MOI, the need to know the prisoner was crucial to countering the ideology.

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<sup>162</sup> An *istiraha* is best described as a villa with a pool and lawn located on the outskirts of town. They can vary in size and furnishing. The purpose of these *istirahat* is to remove oneself from the “hustle and bustle” of city life and unwind with family and friends in a relaxed environment.

<sup>163</sup> These clerics were, and are, not associated with the MOI.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

Moreover, they explained the importance of early classification of these prisoners so as to manage them in a way that ensures optimum treatment results later and to prevent further radicalization of himself or others within his vicinity. Again, it was emphasized that this initial engagement, wherever it may occur, was critical. For example, positive exchanges upon arrest can set the tone for the remainder of the prisoner's sentence.<sup>164</sup> Officials remarked that there was no set time for completion of these sessions and that they were based, primarily, on the assessment of the prisoner and his willingness to engage. And although these sessions were voluntary, prisoners were encouraged to participate (their participation may serve as a mitigating circumstance when they are sentenced).

These *counseling* sessions also included psychological evaluations. Here, the prisoner is assessed for mental and psychological abnormalities. Additionally, cognitive function is assessed to better understand the vulnerabilities in the prisoner's mental capacities that may inhibit proper rehabilitation and may consequently become a factor for future "relapse" back into terrorism. One psychologist explained that, in one case, a prisoner refused to engage with the religious cleric viewing him as a pawn of the government and an apostate, but interestingly, this prisoner was more receptive to the psychoanalyst's outreach. He went on to stress, that the psychoanalyst's efforts are not associated with the legal circumstances that landed the prisoner there in the first place. The psychoanalyst's only interest is the psychological well-being of the prisoner (which is directly associated with how well he will adjust to prison life and the treatment programs he will be offered).

*Counseling* sessions also occur in a group setting within the prison. Although initial engagement is conducted on a one-on-one basis (where group dynamics are absent allowing for

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<sup>164</sup> Note here that upon arrest is meant to describe the initial engagement between the suspect and the security forces. Specifically, this engagement occurs when the handcuffs are first placed or when forces request that these suspects surrender (i.e., risking their lives to take him alive).

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

more candid discussions), later sessions occurred in groups. In these group sessions, classes on Islamic knowledge were emphasized. Here, several main themes or *shubuhah* are discussed. These relate to how Muslims should interpret their role within society and the world (i.e., *dar alharb*),<sup>165</sup> to expose the fallacies that AQ propagate regarding Jihad, *alwalla wa labara* (loyalty and disavowal), the *daf al'sail* argument (resistance of any transgressions on honor or property) etc.<sup>166</sup> These classes can last up to several weeks with each group of prisoners examined on the extent of what they have learned. MOI officials explained that the overwhelming majority of those in custody had a superficial understanding of Islam. This reality can actually make rehabilitating these prisoners easier. The challenge, though, was to reach them early and before the AQ narrative became entrenched (before and after arrest). MBNCCC officials explained that AQ, in response to these efforts, specifically targeted the Saudi religious establishment in order to undermine their ability to counter the religious justifications that they use to conduct acts of terrorism.

The data provided by the MOI revealed that since 2005, over 15,000 one-on-one sessions were conducted; less than 3% either refused or did not benefit from these sessions. As for the group sessions, 1,826 prisoners (from over 50 nationalities) had participated with a 96% passing rate. One MOI official explained that these counseling sessions were tailored for each individual.<sup>167</sup> Specifically, some prisoners may require several sessions while others may not require any at all. He explained that it was important to understand each case carefully in order to provide the needed guidance efficiently.

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<sup>165</sup> A phrase meaning *land of wars*. Here, the self-proclaimed “jihadi” finds (or is given) a reason for going abroad to join the “battle”.

<sup>166</sup> The Saudi MOI generously provided the author of this study with detailed descriptions of these *shubuhah* and how best to counter them. For more on this contact the author.

<sup>167</sup> One MBNCCC official explained that, depending on the prisoner, the counseling may last up to 12 months.



## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

Families of AQ suspects were also targeted. MOI officials noted that the *counseling* sessions for the prisoner and his family occurred immediately after arrest or upon discovery of involvement in terrorism related activities.<sup>168</sup> For example, when an AQ operative is arrested, a team comprised of social workers, psychologists and security liaisons visit the homes of those in MOI custody. The goal was to determine the extent of radicalization within the family – if any – and to better understand the social and environmental factors that may have “allowed” for violent radicalization to take place. Moreover, the financial, medical and psychological needs of the family are evaluated. These actions were driven by previous studies, and investigations, into AQ that revealed that the terrorist organization was very keen on winning over the families of their operatives who have fled to areas of conflict, been killed and/or detained by the security services. For instance, investigations revealed, that AQ created specific cells within the organization (in KSA) to look after the emotional and financial needs of these families. The MBNCCC visits also served to counter the *deviant* ideology. In some cases, a religious scholar – based on the initial assessment – may be tasked with providing guidance and counseling to family members.<sup>169</sup> In others, a female social workers and psychologists may also be dispatched to families with females as heads of the household who may be vulnerable to becoming radicalized. If radicalization is detected, counseling sessions will be administered. Here, the MOI recognizes the strategic importance of preserving the unity of the family. MBNCCC officials noted that these teams become involved only after an investigation into the threat environment is conducted.

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<sup>168</sup> As mentioned earlier, these efforts target the families of killed AQ operatives, those in hiding, or plotting from aboard.

<sup>169</sup> Part of AQ’s narrative focused on the MOI’s neglect and harsh treatment of AQ operatives and their families.

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The interviews conducted revealed that these efforts served to not only “deradicalize” AQ operatives, but also to contain the *deviant* ideology from spreading within their immediate environment and society at large. Furthermore, by targeting the families of AQ, the MOI is attempting to achieve two goals: to contain the spread of the ideology within this family, and to prevent said families from becoming victims of future recruitment by AQ (and Daesh today). Lastly, the MOI is regularly assessing if certain areas within the KSA are exhibiting higher rates of terrorism involvement. If and when disproportionate involvement is observed, specifically designed programs are developed and implemented by the MOI and their partners within the Saudi government.

**Rehabilitation.** The second component of the Saudi PRAC strategy is rehabilitation. This phase begins when the prisoner is transferred to the MBNCCC upon completion of his prison sentence (located in the capital Riyadh).<sup>170</sup> During his stay at the Center, the new arrival sheds his old role as a prisoner and is welcomed as “beneficiary”. The purpose here is to address the stigma attached to a label such as ex-terrorist or prisoner (and also serves to provide him with a positive self-identity). The Center, as one official put it, served, among other things, as a halfway house for soon to be released prisoners. The MOI provides security at the Center although the protocols are far more relaxed than the “beneficiary’s” previous experience.<sup>171</sup> The Center is managed by the MOI, who in turn, employ academics, subject matter experts and religious scholars (who participate on voluntary basis) from across the Saudi society to achieve its rehabilitative and reintegrative goals. All in all, there are over 260 full-time and part-time

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<sup>170</sup> A new MBNCC Center was constructed in 2013 in Jeddah. Three others are scheduled to be opened in Central, Southern, and Eastern Saudi Arabia.

<sup>171</sup> Arguably, the risk of escape is low considering that “beneficiaries” have served their prison sentence. The threat may actually come from AQ operatives targeting the Center and the future *credible voices* that can threaten their existence.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

MBNCCC staff (both male and female).<sup>172</sup> One MOI official remarked that they recruit the best academics and subject matter experts from public and private sector entities, universities and technical institutions on a rotating basis. This ensures that the Center will always have, at its disposal, the latest in best practices.

Rehabilitation efforts are paramount at the MBNCCC (although, and as was previously explained, they do also perform a preventative function). Officials stressed the importance of doing everything they can to prevent the “beneficiary”, and their families, from becoming involved in or reengaging in terrorism. Center officials and staff reiterated the need, at this stage, to equip the “beneficiary” with the needed counseling, guidance and skills before release. Thus, to achieve the ultimate goal of positive reintegration, the Center provides numerous programs that range from “knowledge introduction”, general training programs, “cultural” and sports programs, and service provision. These programs are administered in an environment that differs from the “beneficiary’s” previous prison experience. MOI officials explained that this was intentional and served to acclimate the “beneficiary” to greater freedoms. Moreover, it created a learning atmosphere that served the Centers ultimate goal – that of positive reintegration. Officials also explained that these efforts provided reassurances to both the families of the “beneficiary” and to *society as a whole* that the MOI is performing its responsibilities towards these “beneficiaries” in a commendable fashion.<sup>173</sup>

On average, “beneficiaries” spend three months at the Center (at the very minimum) with stays extending up to six months – depending on program staff assessments of the prisoner’s progress. To ascertain risk, religious, psychological and security assessments are constantly

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<sup>172</sup> It should be noted that the MBNCCC has a fixed staff of academics specializing in sociology, psychology, and religious affairs etc.

<sup>173</sup> Much of the MOI’s effort remained secret. It was only when the program was well underway that media outlets began reporting on these activities. Yet MOI officials stated several times that knowledge of these efforts is actually important in gaining the trust and cooperation of the families.

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conducted (both overtly and covertly) to measure changes in beliefs, in personalities (using personality measures such as the MMPI), progress in in-class activities and also through programs that seek to uncover inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviors (i.e., through sporting events, art therapy or furloughs etc.). MBNCCC staff explained that continuous monitoring of behavior is essential to detect deception and also to address any concern that may surface (e.g., family issues, financial matters, regional developments etc.).<sup>174</sup> For example, one “beneficiary” refused to pray behind one of the MOI staffers. For the MBNCCC, this was clearly a red flag that required immediate attention. (Here extra counseling and religious sessions may be administered). Still, MBNCCC staff were candid in their discussions explaining measures of “violent radicalism” that may precede terrorism. They go on to state that these measures (i.e., the MMPI), *alone*, cannot accurately capture the exact level of “violent radicalism” buried in the “beneficiary’s” mind, but that they do offer proxy measures that can create a better picture of overall risk.<sup>175</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the “beneficiary” is provided with numerous programs – each based on the prisoner’s needs.<sup>176</sup> Officials explained that each “beneficiary” is different from the other. For instance, some are educated, married, financially stable etc., so it follows that programs need to be developed to suit each case properly. Furthermore, programs are adjusted and/or introduced to meet the evolving justifications/propaganda AQ uses to recruit (for example, the history of Islam and the KSA, or critical thinking skills etc.). Officials also

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<sup>174</sup> The MBNCCC is provided with the case file of each “beneficiary”. In it, behavioral/psychological measurements while in prison are used as a baseline to measure changes in behavior and cognitive functioning.

<sup>175</sup> One MBNCCC official explained that even if the MMPI showed positive personality traits prior to release, those released might experience unanticipated events several years down the line that very well could lead to “relapse”.

<sup>176</sup> MBNCCC staff explained that a team of social workers develop a detailed case file for each “beneficiary” in order to better understand who they are rehabilitating. For example, they discover what his hobbies are, where he likes to spend his free time, and what he considers leisure activities.

explained that program development and placement have been deliberate and methodical.

Specifically, the “beneficiary” progresses to the next phase only after successfully completing the previous programs.

Yet one important effort that is constantly emphasized is the religious training program. Program staff (i.e., credible religious scholars from outside the MOI who volunteer for this task)<sup>177</sup> administer lectures and training courses on the fundamentals of Islam and political Islam to clarify the inconsistencies in the AQ ideology that they had previously accepted. For example, issues such as jihad and its conditions are emphasized. On this issue, one MOI official wondered how a terrorist leader could convince someone that heaven awaits those who commit a suicide attack when the prophet (PBUH) could not do so. MBNCCC staff explained that, in many cases, limited knowledge of Islam is what creates vulnerabilities that are then exploited by AQ recruiters (on the ground and now online).<sup>178</sup> It follows then that filling this void with sound religious knowledge is essential in preventing these “beneficiaries” from reengaging in terrorism upon release. After completion of classwork, exams are given to ascertain the level of comprehension by these “beneficiaries.” But the religious counseling does not end with the completion of these exams. One-on-one and group sessions are also provided to answer lingering questions that they may have during their stay.<sup>179</sup> MBNCCC staff described how discussions (formal and informal) take place regarding the current events they observe in the media to address any flawed interpretations that they might reach (and that have been used by terrorist organization to recruit these young men). For example, clarifying how military operations

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<sup>177</sup> These religious scholars account for nearly half of the overall MBNCCC staff.

<sup>178</sup> Officials, on multiple occasions, described AQ operatives who have been arrested as lacking knowledge in even the basic fundamentals of Islam (e.g., proper ablution). Many of these AQ terrorists selectively focus on certain religious passages taken out of context giving them a false sense of religiosity. Therefore, engaging these operatives is critical in order to correct their *deviant* beliefs.

<sup>179</sup> Their continuous presence at the Center also allows for these candid and personal discussions outside the classroom to take place.

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occurring in conflict zones are not actions against Muslims per se, or explaining how the government is the sole decision-maker in foreign policy and national interest matters. In this instance, dialogue is facilitated and encouraged to clarify any misunderstandings the “beneficiary” might still have surrounding regional and global issues.

In addition to the religious component of the MBNCCC, Center staff explained that they administer 14 other programs. Each of these programs strives to provide the necessary skills and tools for the “beneficiary” to better reintegrate back into society.<sup>180</sup> For example, one topic in the social program seeks to provide the “beneficiary” with the ability to manage their social environment upon release. In this instance, the *five M’s theory* is presented where each *M* represents a different individual he may face upon release. The “beneficiary” may encounter the *muhibb* (the lover), the *mu’atib* (the blamer), the *mushakkik* (the suspicious), the *mumajjid* (the glorifier), and the *muraqib* (the watcher). The “beneficiary” is informed that he should expect others to behave in one of these roles thus helping him deal with these perceptions once they are experienced.

Several other programs are more akin to training workshops that range in duration from 3 to 4 days, and vary in content. For instance, workshops are developed to assist “beneficiaries” in establishing small businesses. This program strives to create independence and gives the “beneficiary” something to look forward to upon release. It also serves to introduce them into the global economic markets. This is important considering that AQ and other terrorist organizations view the global economic system as corrupt, founded on the un-Islamic principles of usury and fails to serve the interests of the Islamic *ummah*. Other workshops focus on developing positive

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<sup>180</sup> MBNCCC officials explained that the presence of 14 programs reflects the different personalities and backgrounds of these “beneficiaries”.

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thinking skills, the art of dialogue and debate, working with others,<sup>181</sup> English language fundamentals, and computers etc. Staff explained that these programs empower the “beneficiary” and helps create a more positive self-identity that, in the end, can drive him to become a productive member of society.<sup>182</sup> Art therapy has also been introduced. Here, the “beneficiary” is encouraged to express emotions through canvas paintings and murals. Center staff commented that many “beneficiaries” created works that reflected the previous terrorist lives they had abroad. In this instance, self-expression is viewed as therapeutic and allows for deeper engagement between MBNCCC staff and “beneficiary”. Worth noting, AQ and like-minded terror groups view the arts as an “innovation” and un-Islamic. Clearly, the mere participation in this program is considered a positive indicator of treatment.

The private sector is also enlisted in these rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Over 40 private industries are involved in training programs that aim to create better employment opportunities for those “beneficiaries” soon to be released. These programs are administered at the MBNCCC and also outside the Center where training can continue for those released. Program staff reminded that the Center does not endeavor to find employment for the “beneficiaries”, but does offer assistance if it is requested. MOI officials also emphasized that these “beneficiaries” do not receive preferential treatment when applying for jobs and that they must compete with other Saudi’s for the same job openings.<sup>183</sup> However, the Center will attempt to return the beneficiary to his former employer if the job does not pose a security risk.

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<sup>181</sup> One MBNCCC official explained that there are numerous cases of “beneficiaries” adopting a suspicious stand towards others and distrust of their intentions. This program helps to change this mindset allowing for more meaningful relationships to emerge.

<sup>182</sup> One MBNCCC staffer explained that many of those that have joined terrorist groups are failures in life. These feelings of inadequacy compel them to seek out groups and ideologies that rationalize their shortcomings (e.g., “it’s not our fault”) and also provides them with social networks/groups that give them a sense of value and importance.

<sup>183</sup> MBNCCC officials note that working in the “public sector” is a positive indicator of rehabilitation.

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Program staff also discussed the importance of leisure activities. Sporting competitions and free time are carefully programmed into the curriculum to not only provide a release mechanism of pent up energy, but also to assess the progress of the “beneficiary”. In sporting competitions, for instance, “beneficiaries” are interacting with MOI staff at the Center and are working together to achieve a “victory”. Here, the barriers between the “us” and “them”, created by AQ, are further torn down. Free time for TV viewing of programs and news stations are deliberately allowed to slowly acclimate the “beneficiaries” back into a society that is inundated with different sources of information. As mentioned earlier, one purpose here, it appears, is to uncover (or illicit) hidden attitudes the “beneficiary” may have towards what is being viewed. It should be noted, that for many AQ operatives, TV viewing is considered sacrilegious and allows for foreign cultures to “invade” Muslim lands.

Although rehabilitation is a major focus at the Center, positive reintegration is the ultimate goal. Center staff explained that it is at this stage that the families are heavily engaged in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. One official explained that the Center invites three primary family members (e.g., fathers, or paternal and maternal uncles) to the Center to describe, in more detail, the “beneficiaries” case and emphasize the importance of their cooperation and the need to establish a strong relationship to ensure a smooth transition back into society. This engagement usually occurs immediately upon transfer to the Center. In addition to the work conducted with the families at the Center, MBNCCC staff comprised of social workers, psychologists and religious clerics conduct routine visits to further assess the social environment the “beneficiary” will soon be released to. These visits are more focused on preparing the “ground” as best they can for release and are an extension of the previous *counseling* committee efforts.



## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

MBNCCC officials explained that the reintegration process begins early, is slow and gradual. Monthly vacation time, which can last up to a week outside the Center, serves this objective. In this instance, the family and MBNCCC stay in close contact – a situation that is essential to the overall reintegration process. Moreover, regular family visits to the Center serve to (re)acclimate both parties to one another in the “beneficiaries” environment (in many instances the MOI pays for the transportation and housing of these families).<sup>184</sup> During the latter, the “beneficiary” prepares traditional coffee and treats to serve them. Here, the families reconnect with the “beneficiary” in a relaxed fashion (an environment that contrasts with previous prison visits). Families also observe the care their loved one is receiving. This experience, as noted earlier, gives the families greater confidence in these efforts and reinforces the notion that the MOI is truly working hard to return their son back in a healthy state. MBNCCC staff noted that the purpose here is to prepare not only the “beneficiary”, but also his family to his inevitable return.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, these practices are important considering how the “beneficiary” has spent, in some cases, years incarcerated or on the run. That said, MOI officials emphasized that “beneficiaries” are not guaranteed release. If the “beneficiary” fails a program or receives a negative assessment, he may be required to retake the program. If the assessments conclude that the “beneficiary” may pose a risk upon release, his file is then returned to the courts where he may be returned to prison.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> MBNCCC staff noted that these vacations are gradual in nature. For instance, initially, a three day furlough is given, and depending on the case, can reach as long as one week (as the beneficiary gets closer to his release). Staff also noted that these vacations are deliberate and part of the Center’s *visitation program*.

<sup>185</sup> One MBNCCC staffer described some of these efforts as akin to marriage counseling.

<sup>186</sup> If a “beneficiary” has successfully completed all Center programs, the case file is reviewed by the *advisory committee* at the Center which may then recommend his conditional release.

**After-care.** Before release, MBNCCC senior staff, mostly involving MOI officials, review the “beneficiary’s” case file. If a determination of minimum risk is established, based on a review of progress and MBNCCC assessments, the “beneficiary” will be released into the custody of his family. Center staff stressed that this release is conditional though. As described earlier, the “beneficiary” is discharged to three family members who must sign a pledge of responsibility for his actions once released. Additionally, family members must ensure that the “beneficiary” be present when called for – if needed – in the future. Center staff also explained that certain restrictions are in place, and in many cases, based on the courts sentencing. For example, a ban on travel for X amount of years is in place. This restriction can be enforced through confiscation of passports or rejection of passport issuance or renewal. Other security measures include prohibition of travel outside the area of residents without permission of the security apparatus, a ban on associating with known or former terrorist (either in person or electronically),<sup>187</sup> prohibition of employment in sensitive areas (e.g., schools or the military and security sectors), and the regular checking-in with the local security station. More recently, the Center has adopted the use of electronic monitoring devices for those released if and when deemed necessary. MBNCCC ensures compliance of these conditions through the security liaison section of the Center and also through the security apparatus that works *independently* to monitor the behavior of those released.

MBNCCC staff emphasized the role of the after-care component to ensure positive reintegration. Previous research on those who have been rearrested or who have recidivated (or have been killed) revealed the need to address the environment that the “beneficiary” will be released to. They explained that after-care is composed of three main programs that are essential

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<sup>187</sup> This may be challenging in some instances. For example, if a relative is a former terrorist (Williams & Lindsey, 2013). That said, family cooperation with the authorities is essential to prevent the possibility of relapsing back into *deviant* ways of thinking.

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for positive reintegration of the “beneficiary” back into their families, communities and ultimately society. Specifically, the Center conducts programs that focus directly on the “beneficiary”, addressing the well-being of the families, and a program called *adjustment and integration* that seek to safeguard the “beneficiary” from the lures of AQ. Again, these efforts serve to eliminate the personal and environmental factors that may lead to recidivism. For example, programs include the provision of health care services, social and educational services, and also employment assistance if required. Financial assistance is also afforded to some families and “beneficiaries” based on previous assessments by program staff. Center staff noted that in addition to addressing the challenges that the “beneficiary” may encounter, case officers conduct evaluations of the families’ needs prior to release with, in many cases, recommendations to offer similar assistance. Interestingly, these after-care efforts go beyond the families of these “beneficiaries”. For instance, MBNCCC staff are involved with the families of terrorists who have been killed, are on the run or in hiding.

MBNCCC officials also highlighted the importance of dealing with the psychological and emotional challenges of being released. Here, the shift in roles and the challenges of managing perceptions are addressed to achieve proper reintegration. Specifically, 11 psychoanalysts (8 males and 3 females) work with both the “beneficiaries” and their families to counsel and guide both through this life transition. The psychoanalytic sessions that began during the counseling phase in prison continues even after release from the Center. Yet post release psychological counseling is not the sole reason for contact and neither is the provision of financial and material assistance. For instance, Center staff conduct home visits, attend wedding receptions, gatherings and social functions. Moreover, they represent a direct line of communication to respond to any question regarding personal dispositions or any other matter that could inhibit successful

reintegration is reminded. Center staff underscored the importance of creating and maintaining this open line of communication to those released and their families’.

Data provided by MBNCCC officials reveals the extent of these extraordinary efforts. For example, the Center had provided some sort of financial assistance to targeted families over 6700 times. This assistance actually begins upon arrest and is provided based on the *counseling committee’s* assessments of the families’ financial situation.<sup>188</sup> The “beneficiary”, and based on case officer assessments, may also receive financial assistance. Here, staff reminded that those in prison come from different backgrounds where some are employed and financially stable while others are not. Age, in this instance, is also described as a factor – some youth are still in school. Still, nearly 2,300 “beneficiaries” had been provided with monthly stipends with approximately 2,800 cases receiving one-time financial assistance. For example, X amount is given upon release to help the “beneficiary” offer something of value to his family (e.g., a gift). This action has a significant positive effect on the “beneficiary” in that he is able to “provide” – a duty that is highly regarded in any society. The Center also assists, where it can, in the marriage of those released. Marriage traditions in the KSA require, in many cases, funds for dowries, gifts and receptions. The MBNCCC has supported 629 marriages. Additionally, health care provision is not neglected for the “beneficiaries” and their families. Over 2,000 cases had been assisted with health care issues. Also worth noting, 680 “beneficiaries” had sought help in finding employment while 314 were assisted in returning to their previous work. As for education, 1,032 were supported in their academic endeavors with many receiving graduate and undergraduate degrees. Lastly, the MBNCCC funded the Hajj and Umrah for over 1,600 “beneficiaries” and

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<sup>188</sup> MBNCCC staff explained that this type of assistance is important if the family’s only breadwinner is absent.

their families.<sup>189</sup> MOI officials noted the importance of facilitating the performance of these religious duties, especially if these had not been previously completed. Here, a cleansing of the soul takes place where a new beginning can occur. For the MOI, this can go a long way in achieving positive reintegration.

### **PRAC Strategy a Success?**

Interviews with MOI officials and MBNCCC staff revealed that the PRAC strategy consists of multiple objectives that aim to reduce and ultimately eradicate terrorism in the KSA. For example, MOI official's and the MBNCCC leadership (comprised mainly of MOI senior officials) explained that the objectives of their prevention programs are strategic in nature and thus seek to prevent Saudi society, in general, from sympathizing and consequently accepting AQ's actions (and other terrorist groups). By achieving this, the MOI is essentially drying up a potential recruitment pool.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, these same officials strongly believe that their efforts have been a factor in reducing terrorism in the KSA during the study's time frame (and afterwards) despite the challenges associated with accurately measuring prevention policies (considering that one cannot measure what has not occurred with certainty). Still, MOI and MBNCCC officials provided several examples to elucidate how these efforts may be gauged. For instance:

- 1- MOI officials explained that there has been a significant increase in the general public's reporting of suspicious behavior since the establishment of the (990) hotline in 2003.<sup>191</sup>

They go on to explain that this increase is related, in part, to better awareness among

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<sup>189</sup> Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam, is the annual pilgrimage occurring in the last month of the *hijri* calendar to Mecca. It is obligatory to all *able* (i.e., physically and financially) Muslims to perform at least once in their lifetime. *Umrah* is similar to the Hajj, although requires less religious rituals, is not obligatory and can be performed anytime of the year (except during the Hajj season).

<sup>190</sup> Yet MOI officials highlighted the increasing instability in the region and the need to account for it when understanding terrorist group's recruitment tactics and the subsequent radicalization of vulnerable youth.

<sup>191</sup> 990 is a toll free number created for the general public, by the MOI, to encourage and facilitate the anonymous reporting of suspicious behaviors.

society to their surroundings as they relate to AQ related activities. Another official explained that reporting has increased because, again, among other reasons, they do not want their loved ones killed or maimed by an AQ attack. Others reported in the hopes of receiving some sort of financial reward promised by the authorities.

- 2- One senior MOI official noted that early reporting in the printed news (in the KSA) singled out whole areas, families and activities (e.g., summer camps) when these terrorism events were covered. They go on to explain that they had detected a strong public backlash against these areas, activities etc. which was, for the MOI, a serious concern. Specifically, they did not want to alienate, for example, families that could, in the end, become an even more vulnerable recruitment pool. The official remarked that society's reactions to these events were a positive indicator of the efficacy of their prevention and public awareness campaigns.
- 3- MOI officials explained that AQ operatives who had been released after completing their sentences, and who had recidivated, fled to neighboring countries. This *escape* occurred despite MOI efforts to reinforce both the southern (Yemen) and northern (Iraq) borders. Officials explained that these operatives could not find the logistical support networks within the kingdom to hide or rebuild their organizations.<sup>192</sup> However, MOI officials did emphasize that the security operations are also an important factor here – most AQ sympathizers and supporters were either, dead, in jail, or on the run.
- 4- These prevention efforts, as noted by one senior MOI official, were strategic in nature and thus the results should not be measured in the short term. He goes on to explain that

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<sup>192</sup> MOI officials explained that AQ was able to regroup and establish AQAP in neighboring Yemen due to the inhospitable environment in the KSA. Despite this relocation, the MOI continued to target the group and was able to gain a good understanding of the network (e.g., through CT operations aimed at returning those that had fled).

Daesh (ISIL), although dangerous, has not been able to establish a fully functioning *organization* in KSA (as AQ had earlier) because of society's rejection of their ideology and their bloody ways. Furthermore, many of the recent Daesh arrests and operations in the KSA have been conducted by lone wolf terrorists, a phenomenon that is relatively new to the kingdom.<sup>193</sup> Another MOI official explained that although Daesh does strive to achieve a strong presence in the KSA,<sup>194</sup> the most recent arrests of a Syrian and a Filipino national, reflects the inability for the group to recruit, as AQ had before, middle to senior level operators.<sup>195</sup> For the MOI, this is yet another indicator of Saudi society refusing Daesh and the positive results of the prevention efforts that had taken place several years before.<sup>196</sup> As one MOI officials noted, the KSA would be in a much weaker position if it were not for these earlier efforts.

- 5- MOI officials explained that, per capita, Saudi's are less represented in the ranks of "foreign fighters" in Iraq and Syria than other countries near and far.<sup>197</sup> A recent Washington Post report<sup>198</sup> shows that although there are approximately 2,500 Saudi "fighters" in Iraq and Syria (it is not clear what groups these Saudi's have joined), neighboring Jordan has nearly 2,100. Tunisia is represented by anywhere from 3,000 to

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<sup>193</sup> This official explained that intense investigations by the security services may uncover one or two operatives involved in the plot. Moreover, if more than one individual is involved, the relationship between the two is very superficial (for operational security reasons). In one recent arrest, the terrorists involved did not even know each other's real names. Yet this official did caution that the MOI did in fact reveal that they have disrupted several cells operating in different parts of the KSA recently.

<sup>194</sup> Daesh recently announced the creation the *wilayat alhijaz* branch in the KSA.

<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, we have not witnessed a "Saudi face" for the group unlike AQ before them (in the KSA and Yemen, for example). This absence makes recruiting Saudi's that more difficult for the group.

<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, and worth noting, several recent Daesh attacks in the KSA consisted of relatives targeting, in some cases, other relatives (e.g., those employed in the security or military sector). Here, the "cells" created are comprised of trusted relatives found within their tribal social networks. Again, it appears that Daesh's recruiting success does not match up to AQ's earlier effort.

<sup>197</sup> MOI officials explained that those who have traveled to these areas joined several different groups (e.g., The Free Syrian Army).

<sup>198</sup> See chart courtesy of the Washington Post at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/foreign-fighters-flow-to-syria/2014/10/11/3d2549fa-5195-11e4-8c24-487e92bc997b\\_graphic.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/foreign-fighters-flow-to-syria/2014/10/11/3d2549fa-5195-11e4-8c24-487e92bc997b_graphic.html).

6,000 “foreign fighters” while 1,500 Moroccans are reportedly active there. Western nations are also producing terrorists at a higher per capita rate than the KSA.<sup>199</sup> For example, France leads European nations with over 1,700 “foreign fighters” in Iraq and Syria,<sup>200</sup> while Belgium has the highest number per capita. In the UK, observers noted that more “Muslims” have traveled to Iraq and Syria than have actually joined the British armed forces.<sup>201</sup> MOI officials explained that earlier prevention efforts are associated with these figures. Considering that Saudi is more conservative and in closer proximity to these regions, it would have been reasonable to expect that these numbers would be much higher – but they are not.

6- MOI and MBNCCC officials explained that the criticism against those who recidivate are a positive indicator of these prevention efforts. Despite the absence of empirical data available to the researcher, these officials explained that if a “beneficiary” chooses to return to terrorism after release he does not find sympathy among the broader Saudi society (or even his family). In fact, the government, in some cases, is viewed negatively for “pampering” them. Officials explained that these reactions show that the AQ narrative is being undermined where, for instance, sympathy cannot be gained through, among other things, allegations of harsh government tactics and neglect.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Interviews with one Saudi official revealed that hundreds have returned which could possibly indicate that these “fighters” did not embrace Daesh’s world vision and a positive outcome of the MOI’s PRAC strategy.

<sup>200</sup> See the 2015 report by the Soufan group titled *Foreign fighters: An updated assessment of the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq* at [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf).

<sup>201</sup> See the 2015 Radio Free Europe report at <http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>.

<sup>202</sup> MBNCCC officials also explained that after a terrorist attack, 20-30 tribal leaders would travel to the Royal Court to publicly denounce and condemn the terrorist act of their *tribesmen*. These public displays may also occur at the provincial level where these *tribal* members pay a visit to the provincial emir reiterating their stand with the Saudi government against terrorism.



## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

Other components of the Saudi PRAC strategy have also shown positive outcomes, particularly, the efforts of the MBNCCC. MBNCCC leadership explained that the counseling, rehabilitation and after-care components of the strategy aim to reduce terrorism by addressing recidivism through programs that serve to correct beliefs; to arm the “beneficiary” with the necessary tools to participate positively in society; and to work with the families to ensure that radicalization is absent. Not surprisingly, officials warned that those who recidivate can present an even bigger threat than before their imprisonment. For instance, not only do they rejoin the group as more experienced fighters (especially with regards to the nuances of the *investigative process*), but they can also act as “credible” operatives within the organization enabling them to recruit among the different social networks they are part of.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, those released will have firsthand knowledge of *how* to connect with terrorist elements abroad. On the other hand, those “beneficiaries” who have successfully completed the program may act, in fact, as *credible voices* to counter the AQ narrative through personal efforts (e.g., casually engaging those around them, or presenting a real life example of someone who has transitioned away from AQ) or projects managed by the MOI (e.g., TV programs, conferences etc.). MOI and MBNCCC officials also explained that working the families contributes to the overall level of security in the kingdom. By containing the spread of the AQ ideology within *some* of the families of those AQ operatives imprisoned, killed or on the run, the MOI was also able to reduce a possible recruitment pool for AQ. The logic here is that the same factors that may have led one family member to become involved with AQ may also influence others within that same family. This focus is essential when remembering that earlier MOI studies of AQ operatives in custody revealed that many came from larger families (7 to 15 siblings). MBNCCC officials stated that

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<sup>203</sup> MOI officials noted that those released without proper rehabilitation may present an even bigger risk than before. Specifically, they will have much more to lose when captured thus making their acts even more extreme.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

there are several available metrics to gauge the “success” of the different aspects that comprise this overall effort. Specifically, efforts that target the individual and their families, for example:

- 1- MBNCCC senior leadership explained that the 15% recidivism rate is a strong indicator of the efficacy of their efforts.<sup>204</sup> They go on to clarify that recidivism is defined differently in KSA.<sup>205</sup> For the MOI, and the KSA, recidivism is the violation of any condition of release. These include any activity that may lead to a return to terrorism such as associating with known or suspected terrorists, expressing support or sympathy (in any shape or form) for terrorist groups, or keeping in their possession materials that may be regarded as terrorism related. Moreover, violations that are not related to terrorism are also considered recidivism (i.e., technical violations). These officials stressed that the threshold adopted by the MOI is much lower than other countries that may view recidivism as the actual act of committing terrorism.<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, officials explained that the majority of those who had recidivated have either been rearrested, or killed with a minority escaping to areas of conflict. Lastly, MBNCCC staff cautioned that measuring success solely through recidivism rates is tricky.<sup>207</sup> For example, a “beneficiary” might recidivate several years after release. They explain that “new” factors outside of their control can influence the behavior of the “beneficiary” after release – these factors are novel (in that they were not addressed at the Center) and may present challenges in how the “beneficiary” should respond. Here, we see the relevance of the after-care component

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<sup>204</sup> Interestingly, MOI officials at the Center and beyond explained that although one return to violence is viewed as a setback, one positive case of reintegration is also considered a success.

<sup>205</sup> One MBNCCC staffer explained that they deliberately distinguish between recidivism, relapse and recurrence. For the Center, recidivism is the actual return terrorism. These classifications allow for a better understanding of how they can improve and/or adjust the delivery of the programs at the Center.

<sup>206</sup> In some countries, expressing sympathy with a terrorist group is protected by free speech and not punishable by law.

<sup>207</sup> Numerous criminal justice studies have explored the challenges in using recidivism rates to measure policy efficacy.

of the PRAC strategy where communication and engagement occurs well after release.

Lastly, the MOI and MBNCCC see the other side of the coin – that they were able to reintegrate 85% of those who have successfully passed through the Center.<sup>208</sup>

- 2- MBNCCC officials noted that another measure of “success” is the family’s *cooperation* in the reintegration process of their sons (this cooperation may occur during their sons prison stretch or after release from the Center). They explained that families contacted MBNCCC staff if they observed behaviors that were cause for concern.<sup>209</sup> Here, we see the fruits of the strong relationship previously established between the Center and the families where both are working towards a successful reintegration of their loved ones. Moreover, these families are vigilant and aware of the efforts of lingering AQ operatives that may attempt to contact them to provide different forms of support. MBNCCC staff remarked that these families view the MOI with respect and gratitude for not only “saving the lives of their sons” but also in their efforts to positively reintegrate him back into society. Many of these families understand that the alternative to the Center is much grimmer.
- 3- Another indicator of “success” for the MBNCCC is the pool of former AQ operatives who willingly speak out against their former group both publicly and privately.<sup>210</sup> The MBNCCC recognized early on that one of the most powerful voices to use against AQ was their own former recruit. Here, *credible voices* have been created that can authoritatively counter the false claims of AQ. Additionally, MBNCCC staff explained

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<sup>208</sup> It should be noted that the 15% recidivism rate represents recidivism as of 2015 – not for the study’s time frame. Additionally, and as previous research on recidivism has shown, unequivocally reporting that an individual did not recidivate remains a challenge for academics and policy-makers alike.

<sup>209</sup> MBNCCC officials noted that they educated the families during the “beneficiary’s” stay at the Center on behaviors that may indicate a possible return to violent radicalism.

<sup>210</sup> It should be noted that the creation of these *credible voices* and their use as a preventative “tool” is a strong indicator of how much faith the MBNCCC and the MOI have in their rehabilitation efforts.

how these former terrorists are now part of the rehabilitation program at the Center. The new project is called *My Experience*.<sup>211</sup>

- 4- MOI and MBNCCC officials explained that the MOI leadership, the Center and the Center staff have been targeted by AQ directly on their websites and social media.<sup>212</sup> Officials explained that, for them, this is a positive indicator that they are doing something right and that these efforts have a direct negative impact on AQ's (and other related groups) ability to recruit inside the KSA.<sup>213</sup> Lastly, one senior MOI official explained how AQ uses Center "graduates" to perform terrorist operations inside the KSA. For the MOI, this is seen as an intentional effort to undermine the program – a program that is carving away at the limited appeal of AQ.
- 5- Lastly, MOI officials explained that since the establishment of the MBNCCC, more AQ operatives abroad have surrendered to Saudi authorities. MOI officials emphasized that those who surrender will be prosecuted and will serve their prison time and that they should not expect anything less. Still, the presence of the program does appear to encourage the families to plead to their sons to return. For those abroad and disillusioned with their experience, a future that is *imaginable* is awaiting. This effort directly counters the AQ narrative that the security services will commit atrocities to them if they are captured or if they surrender.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, these *exit routes* allow for the gaining of

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<sup>211</sup> MBNCCC officials emphasized that those who volunteer to tell their stories do so willingly and without pay.

<sup>212</sup> In 2009, HRH Mohammed bin Naif narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by an AQ operative pretending to surrender. AQ hoped that the MOI would change its policy towards those surrendering and the Center – this did not occur.

<sup>213</sup> An MOI officer involved in counter terrorism operations noted that prisoners attending sessions with the *counseling committees* have, in the past experienced "pressure" from some inmates not to attend. They explained that these few resisters were fearful of becoming completely isolated within the prison.

<sup>214</sup> It appears more clearly now that any person who attempts to leave Daesh will be branded a spy, traitor, or apostate. For Daesh, the only response to this perceived threat is death.

important information on the organization such as tactics, strategies, and networks.<sup>215</sup>

Officials noted that over 30 AQ operatives have surrendered with most doing so after the establishment of the Center.

### **How does PRAC Reduce Terrorism?**

The MOI's PRAC strategy is complex, far reaching and overlapping. The multiple components of the strategy have several objectives, some tactical while others more strategic in nature, with the overall goal countering terrorism through countering the terrorist ideology. Indeed, official data and interviews with MOI and MBNCCC officials revealed that terrorism has been significantly reduced. Specifically, by developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy that targets individuals involved with AQ, at-risk families, and society in general. Furthermore, by creating *credible voices* and providing *exit routes* for those involved in terrorism, the MOI was able to further reduce terrorism by chipping away at the group's membership. And although the previous section touched on why the MOI is conducting the different parts of PRAC, a closer look at how it has succeeded in reducing terrorism in the KSA follows.

**Targeting society.** Interviews and official documents from the MOI indicated that the *prevention* component of the PRAC strategy focused on eliminating any sympathy and support for AQ and like-minded groups by exposing their ideology and their evil ways. Specifically, the MOI endeavored, to explain to “the whole of society”, with a particular focus on the youth, that AQ was a *deviant* group with an ideology far removed from Islam. They achieved this through highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions in their supposedly religious messaging; by effectively countering their religious justifications for committing bloody acts; and offsetting

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<sup>215</sup> Mohammed Aloufi, a former Guantanamo Bay inmate and a senior AQAP leader, surrendered to Saudi authorities in 2009. He later appeared on Saudi TV describing his involvement in the terror group and why he chose to abandon the group.

their narrative wherever and whenever it may appear. By exposing “the true nature of those behind the terrorist act”, the MOI is removing any doubt some may have towards these self-proclaimed “jihadis”.

Additionally, *public awareness campaigns* were also employed by the MOI to serve this general prevention paradigm. And while these efforts are preventative in nature, they appear to be more tactical in purpose and timely in execution.<sup>216</sup> For example, the MOI releases official statements after any terror related event to inform the public of not only the threat they face, but also to undercut any future propaganda that AQ might attempt to produce in an effort to glorify their acts and embolden their supporters.<sup>217</sup> MOI officials go on to describe the important role AQ places on its media campaign and how their propaganda serves multiple purposes such as self-propaganda,<sup>218</sup> psychological warfare, and misinformation. For the MOI, exposing the failures of these groups surely weakens their morale and also may prevent individuals “primed” for terrorism involvement from joining a losing team. Furthermore, and in addition to the official MOI statements, TV programs in which topics related to security matters, are discussed by security officials, religious clerics, government representatives, and repentant terrorist etc. that all serve to raise awareness and undercut the presumed and bankrupt religious justifications for conducting terrorist acts. Moreover these public discussions explain how AQ are exploiting/recruiting the youth and why.<sup>219</sup> These efforts are far reaching and utilize different mediums to “protect” Saudi society. For instance, and as discussed before, billboards and posters, accurate and timely media reporting (e.g., denunciation of terrorists and their acts by entire tribes, families, organizations, and luminaries), further expose the brutal nature of the

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<sup>216</sup> Some have labeled this approach *rapid response media* (Ferguson, 2016).

<sup>217</sup> As one MOI official noted: “this is a policy of being proactive from the outset to end rumors and provide the facts.”

<sup>218</sup> Here, terrorism serves to increase group solidarity and within group commitment.

<sup>219</sup> One topic broached was the absence of AQ leadership’s sons/relatives in suicide operations.

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

terrorist group and mobilize society to confront them. Again, by exposing AQ's inconsistencies and un-Islamic ways, the MOI is reducing any support or sympathy they may have consequently eliminating any potential pool of (future) recruits. Interestingly, in addition to general prevention, these efforts also seek to deter those from engaging in terrorism by constantly reminding of the MOI's ability to identify, track and neutralize those who engage in these acts.

**Targeting at-risk families.** Early research by the MOI revealed that many AQ operatives in custody had other family members who may have been radicalized. Based on this understanding, the MOI, and through the PRAC strategy, targeted the families of AQ operatives in custody, on the run, or killed. Recognizing that families may be vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization, the MOI addressed, again, a possible pool of (new) recruits. The logic here is that if one individual became radicalized, than it is not unlikely that another may also follow suit.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, by addressing the needs, whatever they may be, of the family, the MOI is recognizing the importance of a "healthy" environment for those released thus allowing for a positive reintegration process to ensue. If these "criminogenic" factors are not considered, recidivism is much more likely – especially if some family members continue to embrace a radical mindset. Lastly, MBNCCC and "beneficiary" family relations serve to preempt any possible "relapse" back into terrorism. Open lines of communication with the Center allow for family concerns to be expressed and addressed promptly thus eliminating the likelihood of deeper involvement with terrorism related groups.

**Targeting the individual.** The MOI's PRAC strategy, and specifically through the MBNCCC, aims to reduce terrorism by addressing the possible recidivism of those soon to be released. This is achieved by developing and implementing programs and treatments in different

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<sup>220</sup> There may be other factors that are at play and are not associated with the family. For example, radicalized peers or the presence of an AQ recruiter in their vicinity.

settings, at different stages, and at different times. Specifically, counseling sessions in prison address the *deviant* ideology adopted by prisoners in order to correct beliefs, early on so, as to allow for better subsequent engagement with counselors; and also to contain the spread of radical beliefs within the prison environment. For the MOI, this early intervention paves the way for a better rehabilitation experience at the MBNCCC and, in turn, plays an important role in reducing recidivism and consequently terrorism.<sup>221</sup>

Undoubtedly, religious dialogue and debate appears to be a core component when countering AQ. For instance, in addition to the sessions provided in the prisons, efforts at the MBNCCC continue to focus on religious counseling and guidance in order to arm these soon to be released “beneficiaries” with the knowledge to counter AQ’s out of context and unfounded religious appeals.<sup>222</sup> For example, recognizing, at the very least, the *shubuhah* AQ promotes for purposes of recruitment. Additionally, the numerous programs implemented at the Center deliberately serve multiple “other” goals ranging from increasing the “beneficiary’s” self-esteem and critical thinking skills, to the provision of technical skills that allow for financial independence and the chance to gain even more confidence in themselves once released. For the former, cognitive skills and emotional strength assist the “beneficiary” in, again, recognizing situations where terrorist recruiters, whether online or in their proximity, seek to lure them back with reasons other than “religious” (e.g., illegitimate Saudi rule, support for Western efforts to counter terrorism, failing to assist other “oppressed” minorities, modernization etc.). MOI

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<sup>221</sup> As noted earlier, those who recidivate can present different types of threat. For example, they are more dangerous because they have first hand knowledge of the security service’s “tactics”, have less to lose if discovered, and are credible voices with intimate knowledge on how to become involved in terrorism (where to go, who to contact and how etc.).

<sup>222</sup> Many of the fatwas that AQ depends on were issued by individuals with questionable religious authority or have since recanted their statements.



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officials noted that for those released, it would be very difficult to use neglect (by the MOI) as a justification for reengaging in terrorism – the motivation to seek revenge/justice is just not there.

Furthermore, and as noted above, by working with the families of these “beneficiaries”, the MBNCCC strives to eliminate any cause that could hinder a safe re-entry back into society.<sup>223</sup> All of these efforts aim, in the end, to positively reintegrate the “beneficiary” back into society, slowly and gradually, to ensure a seamless adjustment by both the “beneficiary” and their family’s. This makes perfect sense when considering that many have been disconnected from their previous social networks spending years abroad or behind bars.

Lastly, the MOI, through the MBNCCC, has created a post release environment where positive social associations can take place. Efforts to assist in employment in the public or private sectors, and supporting their desire for marriage (if single) all serve to create meaningful social bonds (and social capital) that can alter the life course (and peer associations) of those released – a life course distant from AQ.<sup>224</sup> Indeed, it would appear that, by completing all of these programs, the need to rejoin AQ would seem less appealing and more costly than before. Worth noting here is that the MOI and the MBNCCC understood early on that even if the “beneficiary” had exhibited positive results during his time at the Center, once released, new variables may come into play that could influence his reintegration process. For example, new conflicts appear, “provocative” remarks and actions by individuals or institutions begin to resonate, or the calls to support a certain cause may all push the former “beneficiary” into the hands of a waiting radical group. However, by remaining in close contact with those released

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<sup>223</sup> As noted earlier, social, psychological, and religious counseling are provided to prepare the “ground” for release.

<sup>224</sup> Moreover, the acceptance of these new roles within society are evidence that, at the very least, those released have rejected some of the broader claims made by AQ (i.e., active membership in an un-Islamic Saudi state).

(and their families), questions and concerns can be answered quickly and quietly thus interrupting a possible return to violence.

**Creation of credible voices.** MOI officials explained that one of the best and most effective ways to counter AQ messaging is by using former AQ operatives.<sup>225</sup> The ability of these “repentant” operatives to capture the attention of AQ group members, those becoming radicalized and *fence sitters* has been recognized and put to full use. Interestingly, to reach the broadest audience possible, former Guantanamo Bay prisoners, AQ operatives who have surrendered, those who have traveled to Iraq and others who once fought with Bin Laden have all spoken out against AQ. These voices may be heard at the MBNCCC itself (e.g., speaking to other “beneficiaries”), on local and international television programs (e.g., *60 Minutes*), magazines, the Internet (e.g., YouTube) and anyplace they may be. By sharing their experiences past and present, these credible voices can influence others to surrender, raise awareness in vulnerable youth, or inspire others that there is life after AQ. In all these cases, *credible voices* appear to play role in taking terrorists off the battlefield, and keeping them off it creating what Rabasa et al., (2010) refer to as a *tipping point*. Specifically:

When enough ex-militants denounce radical Islamism, that ideology and the organizations that adhere to it are fatally discredited. Even short of this tipping point, as greater numbers of militants renounce extremism, radical Islamist organizations will experience greater hurdles in attracting adherents and sympathizers within the Muslim community. (p. 31)

Indeed, absent the Center, these *credible voices* may have never been created and subsequently heard. For it is their positive experience in the Center (and in prison) that allowed for a shift in mindset to occur and consequently a realization of how they have been manipulated. Here we witness a growing sense of responsibility (arguably religious in nature) to prevent others from

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<sup>225</sup> There are many other influential voices speaking against terrorism, but it appears that for those who have adopted the ideology, the most dangerous voice is that coming from one of their own.

following suit.

**Presence of exit routes.** Although MOI and MBNCCC officials emphasized that their efforts should not be construed as rewarding *deviant* behavior, undoubtedly, the presence of the Center has facilitated the return of AQ operatives.<sup>226</sup> Data provided by the MOI shows that there have been scores of AQ operatives who have surrendered to Saudi authorities. In all cases, these operatives were prosecuted, sentenced and imprisoned. For those who completed their sentences, a transfer to the MBNCCC would occur. And although the establishment of the MBNCCC remained secret at the beginning, officials explained that a decision was made to disclose, with more transparency, the efforts taking place. The result was higher levels of interest, especially, for the families of AQ operatives who were “fighting” abroad. For example, numerous cases were mentioned where operatives abroad would contact their family. The families would plead with their sons to return explaining that the MOI has a Center where they can receive counseling and rehabilitation. For these families, a known future is far better than unknown one. Or even worse, one that in most cases, will end in death.

Additionally, the surrender by those who have joined terrorists groups allows the MOI to gain insights into the group’s inner workings. Operatives abroad or at home can have intimate knowledge of the group’s structural organization, group membership, recruitment tactics and targets etc. Moreover, their choice to surrender will, arguably, allow for the collection of information that may be more accurate and complete considering that their cooperation is occurring by choice. Here, a better understanding of the adversary will undoubtedly assist in the MOI’s counter terrorism operations.

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<sup>226</sup> It should be noted that the KSA has, at different times during their campaign against AQ, publicly expressed that surrendering will be factored in to their court cases.

Lastly, MOI officials explained that AQ had a prevailing narrative/propaganda theme that focused, incorrectly, on the “horrible” things Saudi security services would do to them if captured. The objective here, for AQ, was to ensure compliance and loyalty by these new recruits. The presence of the MBNCCC and the media reporting of these efforts (including segments with “beneficiaries” at the Center and those released) refuted AQ’s claims of harsh treatment and called into question not only this argument, but others surrounding the actions of the Saudi government and the role the MOI plays within it.<sup>227</sup>

### **Why does PRAC Work?**

In order to answer this question, a qualitative analysis was conducted on all interviews. Interviews were first transcribed manually in Arabic, then translated by the researcher, and transcribed again manually.<sup>228</sup> Coding techniques were guided by previously established methods and the research question of this study. Specifically, a two-step coding process was utilized where a *descriptive coding* technique was initially used to capture the most salient concepts within the text (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive codes can take the form of short phrases or words. *Subcoding* followed to further refine the coded phrases so as to discover emerging themes as they relate to the research question (i.e., why did PRAC work).<sup>229</sup> For example, “families cooperate” and “partnership’s” were coded as “trust”, and “we needed to understand” was coded as “research”.

Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) note, however, the challenges in achieving reliability and validity when using semi-structured interviews. For example, they

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<sup>227</sup> The concept of a creating a *tipping point* may also be leveraged here.

<sup>228</sup> Although this researcher has extensive experience in translation, a random sample of 5 pages (minus identifying markers and sensitive information) was provided to an MOI colleague to translate from Arabic to English. After comparing the results, it appeared that the substantive content of these interviews was captured with an overall general agreement on the accuracy of what has been translated.

<sup>229</sup> Saldaña (2013) defines *subcoding* as “a second order tag assigned after a primary code to detail and enrich the entry” (p. 77)

explain that many responses tend to elicit “open ended, rambling responses” (p. 297) that make inter-coder reliability more difficult. Yet Campbell et al. (2013) propose a three-stage solution to address this issue. First, they recommend the development of a coding scheme on a sample of data with the “highest” possible levels of *intercoder reliability*.<sup>230</sup> Next, discussions (or what they term adjudication) should take place between coders in which disagreed upon codes are addressed until reaching, again, high levels of *intercoder agreement*. Lastly, the researcher may then apply these final codes on the rest of the qualitative data.

Considering that this researcher was the only coder for this study, and following the guidance of Campbell et al., both *intercoder reliability* and *agreement* were achieved at high levels between the researcher and a bilingual MOI officer with experience and familiarity in CT related research. Specifically, a random sample of the qualitative data (10% of all translated and transcribed interviews) was provided along with *meaningful units of analysis* (after removing identifying markers and any information that may have been passed in confidence) to the other coder. Guided by the study’s research question and after several discussions, over 89% of all codes were finally agreed upon (Miles & Huberman, 1994).<sup>231</sup>

**Emergent themes.** The qualitative analysis, based on the interviews conducted, revealed several themes that appear to explain why the PRAC strategy is associated with a decrease in TRO’s and Saudi security officer casualties in the KSA:

1. Trust
2. Research
3. Comprehensiveness

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<sup>230</sup> These authors, and others, note that there is no consensus on what is deemed acceptable levels of intercoder reliability. For example, 70% is considered acceptable in exploratory research.

<sup>231</sup> Worth noting is that the similar backgrounds of both researchers may have contributed to the high degree of agreement. That is, an understanding of terrorism related issues and the policies used to address them.

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4. Early intervention
5. Individualized
6. Adaptation

**Trust.** One theme that consistently appeared was the notion of *trust*. MOI and MBNCCC officials explained that the cooperation of the families of AQ operatives in custody or on the run was an important element to their success in reducing terrorism in the KSA. Specifically, officials noted that the *responsible* actions undertaken by the MOI allowed for bonds to be created and partnerships to be developed that in the end assisted in the rehabilitation of their soon to be released son. Indeed one official explained that they “won the trust of the families.” Emphasis on winning over the families should come as no surprise since the MBNCCC views the family “as the corner stone of this program” and as the critical informal social control mechanism embedded within society.

The families come and visit the Center and sit with Center staff and see what they are doing and how we engage them and see that it is more like a learning institute – if this is the right term.

For these families, the MBNCCC’s efforts reassures them of the MOI’s sincere goals and willingness to do everything possible to return their sons as productive members back to society. In response, these families work with the Center to address any concern that might arise during their son’s time in prison, at the MBNCCC, or after release. Here we notice how trust in these efforts has created an open line of communication:

The Center has become a place they [the families] can contact... to say we have an issue with our son .. [they] contact the Center either directly or indirectly through the program staff .. [to explain that] they have a son who is this or that and we heard about the Center etc. .. this is an indicator – among other indicators – of the success of this effort in that it has won the trust of the families.

Moreover, these families whose trust has been gained acted as ambassadors for these efforts spreading the word that MOI is truly trying to “save”<sup>232</sup> their children:

There are some families that are neighbors. One of their sons was arrested and later transferred to the Center. The other family’s son or some other relative was still abroad. They start saying that the Center is good and that he was there and what not. The mothers starts talking. The fathers starts talking. The sister talks etc. So there is communication between the families and they will be influenced by what they hear. So if the son calls the family or communicates with them some how the family will say look at the son of so and so. So they would try and encourage him to return. These are cases we have witnessed where the family plays a big role here.

One MOI official explained that the MOI’s balanced approach<sup>233</sup> to countering terrorism has created a level of trust that allows people to make critical decisions to “save” their loved one from certain death.

You would not believe that we have fathers, mothers, sisters and sons report individuals that they feel are becoming influenced by these terrorist groups.

The PRAC strategy also gained the trust of society writ large. One MOI official explained that the public awareness campaign was underpinned by the need to be transparent and immediate when releasing information regarding TRO’s to the public. Here, in addition to countering the AQ propaganda,<sup>234</sup> the MOI was winning over possible *fence sitters*.

Transparency is very important. It is what removed ambiguity that can place public opinion in a curious place .. transparency allowed us and public opinion to become one system in facing terrorism.

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<sup>232</sup> Interestingly, one MOI official explained that on several occasions when a suspected operative is arrested, a senior MOI official contacts the family congratulating them that their son has been saved (from certain death and “hell fire”).

<sup>233</sup> MOI officials noted on several occasions that the MOI security response was always proportional despite the threats its officers faced. This policy showed the public that MOI would address the threat responsibly and would not fall prey to AQ’s tactics of eliciting excessive force.

<sup>234</sup> AQ would issue statements immediately after a terrorist attack justifying their actions as fighting the Saudi apostates etc. These statements were methodically circulated in online forums (and in online AQ magazines), downloaded, and propagated by individuals.

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Initially people were in doubt. Are these guys are Muslim they are mujahedeen etc.?<sup>235</sup> But transparency showed that you are working within the limits of the law and that you are trying to arrest them and not just trying to kill them and that they are actually the ones who began shooting and that you responded to this attack and that your goal is noble and your goal is not about just chasing them and what not. This is what made public opinion much more aware about what was going on because with transparency every time you increase it we find a more positive response.

One MOI official involved in counter terrorism operations explained that:

Transparency in disclosing operations helps gain the trust of the people. This leads to better support and cooperation. Now they know who we are fighting. They [AQ] are not who they say they are.

**Research.** Another major theme that emerged was the importance the MOI placed on conducting research to better understand the threat posed by AQ. Specifically, the policies developed were based on evidence gleaned from field research and/or in depth analysis of AQ related investigations. The majority of MOI officials and MBNCCC program implementers interviewed by this researcher held Ph.D.'s and other graduate degrees. So it comes as no surprise that this mindset would be applied to this task.<sup>236</sup> For example one MOI official explained:

The MOI, and in response to these unprecedented events, strove to conduct studies to understand the true nature of the threat because based on scientific studies you can develop the proper response, solutions and alternatives.

The whole of society is being targeted. So prevention is critical... but protecting the youth is paramount. And based on understanding the threat, we have developed numerous programs that target this demographic.

Nearly 100 academics and officials, past and present, from across a myriad of fields, and from the different universities in KSA, formed a committee to develop and implement a national comprehensive strategy to counter terrorist ideologies. The committee worked for nearly two years. The strategy was developed after conducting meetings, workshops and studies.

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<sup>235</sup> As noted earlier, the term Mujahedeen was used to describe the *freedom fighters*, supported by the KSA and the West, who helped in defeating the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980's.

<sup>236</sup> As noted previously, research was possible considering the abundance of cases that allow this type research to be conducted.



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Indeed, the need to understand the threat early on was captured by this MOI senior official:

We want to know what their goals were. Not the obvious goal of terrorism. This is a given, but I want to reach the truth. You did what you did, but why did you do X for example. Why did you kill this officer? What was your end goal exactly? We need to get these answers in order to use them to protect others from becoming ensnared from the group's grips

Additionally, officials noted that it was these earlier studies that compelled the MOI leadership to develop the MBNCCC.

But after the studies that were conducted on those detained, conclusions were reached that helped develop policies we see today such as the need for a rehabilitation center, and the need to develop an ideological security component ... then after that, the work became more methodological.

In line with this thinking, an MBNCCC official explained the need for programs to be developed based on a proper understanding of each case.

I believe this is what makes this Center stand out. They do not look at things superficially. Everything requires an explanation and a desire to understand the reasons behind why things are done to benefit them ["beneficiaries"] in the end.

Furthermore, research by the MOI and the MBNCCC lead to targeted prevention measures. As noted earlier, studies were conducted on areas of concern to develop programs that sought to address the radicalization that was occurring at higher rates than the rest of the KSA.

Specific prevention is targeted towards a specific demographic. It is aimed at the youth for example. It is aimed at a particular strata that has increasing numbers of a certain phenomena... We develop programs based on the information we have gathered on the ground. For example in X (redacted) we have two programs there because the first time we calculated the number of those killed in Iraq and found there were over X [redacted], X individuals from there who travelled to Iraq and had been killed there.

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MBNCCC official also explained that knowledge may be leveraged from extant research and fitted within the framework of the Center. Here, we see how the *My Experience* program was adopted using previous efforts to counter *deviant* attitudes or behavior.<sup>237</sup>

Look at *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the *Drugs Anonymous*, what do they do? They bring the addict himself and have him talk about his experience etc. and they help one another cure themselves. So now you have the *My Experience* program at the Center. You bring those who were involved in the conflict and have been released and who have created their own positive path in society and living a wonderful life. This is a positive example that can be followed.

**Comprehensiveness.** The PRAC strategy is grand and involves not only numerous departments within the MOI, but also different ministries and private institutions across the KSA. Yet what makes this comprehensive effort a success is the *centralization* of decision-making and also the ability to *coordinate* the different components tasked with prevention, counseling, rehabilitation and after-care. Indeed, comprehensiveness, as a *theme*, was consistently invoked during these interviews.

Based on numerous examination and field visits of [other] programs, it appears that many are not rigorously evaluated and apparently those involved in developing these programs discuss outcomes that may eschew the facts on the ground. Unquestionably the Saudi program is the most comprehensive.

Another senior official described how expansive the prevention efforts are:

We have programs to counter extremism in every socializing institutions in the kingdom... for example, last week we had a meeting with the Ministry of Education and before that with Ministry of Religious Affairs and the media. Also with the technical institutes and the Youth Presidency. We meet with them to discuss programs that aim to prevent radicalization.

We are working with these social institutions... places where people are socialized and where they are involved in [developing] their life course. It starts with the family. It is part of this institution and it is the smallest socializing agent. Then you have schools. Then you have the mosque in the neighborhood. Then peer groups or friends. Then there is the media which enters your home, and now [video] games that brainwash. All these

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<sup>237</sup> MBNCCC officials are wary of comparing terrorism and radicalization to addiction. The point here was to describe how other efforts could be used to help rehabilitate those that have deviated from the accepted norms within society.

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are very important institutions and each should play a stronger role [in prevention]. We have provided for them a vision and a strategy.

The counseling, rehabilitation and after-care aspects of PRAC are comprehensive in nature as well. MOI and MBNCCC officials and program implementers regularly explained the many approaches undertaken to achieve positive reintegration. For example:

During the first stage there are religious counseling sessions, training courses that are part of the counseling phase .. it is an initial engagement, a beginning. The second phase is the intervention phase, we call it guidance. It is an intervention phase where you rehabilitate and develop the person and prepare him for after release. This stage is very detailed and very specific. [Here] we diagnose the case using psychological assessment tools such as the MMPI, and also conduct a social assessment and examination of this individual to know the social dimensions of his situation... The rehabilitation programs are diverse. They have a religious component to correct beliefs .. a social component that prepares and rehabilitates and also a psychological program to care for and correct cognitive decision making skills and [also] develop critical thinking skills. There are also other programs that prepare him such as training programs.

I am going to administer programs that are related to his married life. This individual has been absent from his family and his wife. So programs on family life, on family relations, husband and wife relations, positive child rearing practices are developed.

Specifically, in addition to working with a prisoner/"beneficiary", the MBNCCC works with their families in order to contain, when present, radicalization in addition to providing support if needed.

We engage the families at different stages and in many ways. There is a program specifically designed for containing the threat that may be present within the family.

One MBNCCC explained that intervention teams step in when they notice that more than one family member may be involved in terrorism.

So the family intervention [team] steps in to discover this dynamic. It gives us the opportunity to observe this, to understand if this is occurring and this has occurred on more than one occasion at the Center.

Undoubtedly, families are an integral part of the rehabilitation process. Although trust was a previous theme of why they partner with the MBNCCC, the comprehensive nature of the

program is reflected in how the MBNCCC works with these families. For example, one MBNCCC official described how they begin this relationship.

Three close relatives of the “beneficiary” sit with the experts .. a team of experts here at the Center. These teams begin to build a partnership with these family members. They are informed that they are the interlocutors and that they communicate with them. The goal is to help them pass this phase .. to overcome this challenge. We want their cooperation .. and they are told that this is not a security based partnership or to punish him but the goal is to help him .. to grab him by the hand .. to put our hands together to cooperate to take him from the problem he has faced to a better place.

**Early intervention.** Interviews with MOI and MBNCCC officials revealed that early intervention was also key to countering the radicalization of AQ prisoners and their families (and the families of AQ operatives killed or in hiding/operating abroad). For example, one official remarked that:

The goal is to rehabilitate from the very first moment he enters the prison.

Some who have visited the Center believe that the Center is the only work. This is not correct. It is a part of the overall approach. Even in the prison there are programs called counseling, also training programs in prison. This shows that there is early intervention .. in that they deal with them from the beginning.

Containment begins from the first day the individual is arrested. The family is immediately contacted. The family receives a monthly stipend.<sup>238</sup> A review of their situation will take place to see if there are any issues that need to be addressed.

Another described numerous cases of public reporting of suspicious activities as important in preventing (the process of) radicalization from evolving into violent acts.<sup>239</sup>

These calls are based on a suspicion of radicalization. He may have seen his neighbor where suspicious individuals visit him and they meet late in the evening. He’s not sure if they are up to good or no good so he calls the security services and we will not sleep because they might commit some terrorist act. We wont wait for a terrorist act to occur. Therefore we will investigate the report and if we observe that they have some questionable activities we will approach them and question them and understand where

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<sup>238</sup> For example, financial assistance is provided if the assessment reveals that the son was the sole breadwinner for his family.

<sup>239</sup> Saudi law prohibits the possession of materials associated with terrorism, any form of support, or even expressing sympathy with AQ and AQ related groups. For the KSA, containing and pushing back radicalization is a critical component of countering the *deviant* ideology.

they stand. Realize though that we are protecting him. We are protecting him from committing a crime that he cannot get out of, something he will later regret. The idea here is like he has not committed a crime as of yet but since it is terrorism related and since we need to protect society from terrorism I cannot wait until he commits the act or wait until he presents the evidence needed to prosecute him severely.

Indeed, for the MOI, discovering AQ networks and plots is paramount, but a policy of early intervention can also serve to protect these individuals and their families from possible future terrorism involvement (and what that entails).<sup>240</sup>

They detain him early .. these arrests .. many of them are based on a preventative policy. These procedures are based on a growing understanding of how radicalization occurs and how AQ manipulates recruits. MOI and MBNCCC officials explained that most terrorists begin the same way, by slowly adopting the *takfiri* ideology. Thus, early intervention is important to stop this process.

If you get the background information of one of those in prison you will notice that his beginnings are the same as many other more hardcore elements in prison. He was tricked by the ideology then he will have gradually increased his activities until he may become one of their leaders.

***Individualized.*** MBNCCC officials described how each case of radicalization and subsequent terrorism is different. Based on this understanding, the MBNCCC recognized the need to develop programs that are *individualized*, case specific, in order to maximize the benefit for each prisoner and “beneficiary”.

I mean .. now we have a sample that needs a program, a specific training program. One individual, for example, has a college degree the other does not. He does not even have a middle school education or high school. So we need to administer programs that are in line with his abilities and qualifications. Also, I have those that are married and those that are not.

You must distinguish between the leader and follower. The latter is not as involved in the ideological debate but is more concerned with receiving orders and guidance ... If I get 20 individuals, I will know that what drives this person does not drive the other. This

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<sup>240</sup> This could also be interpreted as the MOI acting *responsibly* towards Saudi society. Specifically, not waiting until a “serious” act of terrorism was about to occur.

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person might have family problems and escapes from these problems .. to .. to maybe find himself.

Many studies have been conducted where terrorists have been broken down into two types: leaders and followers where individuals in each group have very different characteristics. Thus each one requires a specific intervention that may be different from the other. Even the risk the factors and the recidivism rates of each are different. The traits present in each group or psychological dispositions are also different. This has been found in previous studies.<sup>241</sup>

Again, we see that the MBNCCC tailors programs and treatments based on the assessments made by the experts at the Center. Here, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the “beneficiary” assist in creating the most efficient rehabilitation experience.

Specific diagnoses take place [at the Center] that begin with the social and psychological assessment using assessment tools, interviews and observations.

You try to understand each case as much and as specifically as possible. What are the needs of the individual .. how severe is the distorted ideology he holds. Also, to know his personality and traits. Is he aggressive or introverted? Does he have any personality disorders or other problems? After we know all this.. he then participates in the rehabilitative programs.

I mean, if his psychological disposition is good and he does not require much time on this and requires more skills training [then we focus on this]. Or maybe abilities to make decisions, his critical thinking, his emotional capabilities or positive thinking or how to work others ... So this requires training programs to work with others. Also, if he is very abrupt in his response, a sharp response, a hasty reaction... so he requires the necessary training programs [to overcome these problems].

Counseling sessions within the prison are also tailored for each prisoner. Here, the MBNCCC and prison officials are careful not to expend too many resources on individuals who require less counseling sessions – regardless of the type of counseling.<sup>242</sup>

The counseling sessions were based on the prisoner assessment – that is to see if he requires more or less counseling ... The counseling sessions are based on the needs of the prisoners and these needs are known only after conducting the assessments

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<sup>241</sup> This is also an example of how the MOI and the MBNCCC leverage existing studies to support their efforts.

<sup>242</sup> MBNCCC officials explained that the services of the different counselors (religious, psychological, and social etc.) in prison and at the Center are available at anytime to those in custody and their families.

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Lastly, one MOI official noted that the PRAC strategy, in general, was developed from within. Specifically, the strategy is organic and takes full advantage of the strengths inherent in Saudi society.

There is a point we also need to discuss regarding the overall efforts. That is .. it is nationalistic. I mean that it is tailored for our culture .. it has adapted to the values of this society. I did not bring something from abroad.

*Adaptive.* The last major theme to emerge from the qualitative data was that of *adaptation*. The development of the PRAC strategy is, in and of itself, the strongest evidence for this theme. For example, before 2003, PRAC did not exist. The decision to develop the prevention, counseling, rehabilitation and after-care component was based on the novel threat that faced not just the KSA, but also the whole world over. Moreover, the MOI recognized that as the threats evolved, so too should the response. MOI officials explained that successful programs were retained and less successful efforts were reviewed, adjusted, or discarded. Others were introduced based on knowledge gained from researching AQ related cases. Unmistakably, the PRAC strategy was created to face the immediate threat facing the kingdom but was also *flexible* enough to evolve to meet the challenges of the evolving nature of the AQ threat. For example:

Challenges are many. There is no such thing as no challenges. The nature of our work is full of them. It is a challenge when dealing with this phenomenon – the challenge is that this phenomenon is always renewing itself.

MBNCCC officials also noted how these efforts had grown in response to the growing threat the KSA faced from AQ. Specifically, new programs were created to ensure a more complete rehabilitation experience.

Initially, the Center had three programs .. a religious program that focuses on correcting the ideology. Then you have the psychological and social programs. But after that, when we began researching more deeply we discovered that they had many inconsistencies and

misunderstandings that are related to financial/economic issues, and also political and historical ones. Thus we added programs.

The other program is the political program. They do not have a strong background here. They are weak. What is the rule of governance in the KSA? They do not see it as legitimate and the same with other states. Also, they do not see the legitimacy of the UN .. and they do not see the legitimacy of international relations. They see the world as *dar harb* and *dar Islam*. They have problems with these interpretations so we included a program to address these.

Take, for example, curing a disease .. I may develop an antibiotic and the virus may change .. it may be modified so we to have to modify the cure just as the disease is evolving itself.

MOI officials explained that AQ in the KSA was very active online early in the campaign.

Websites created, “jihadi” newsletters disseminated, and propaganda circulated. This required countering these messages in the same realm that these activities occur in. Here, overt actions were carried out by volunteers working in collaboration with the MOI.<sup>243</sup>

We noticed how they began using the Internet to recruit... They had several websites they used to circulate their propaganda. We needed to be there to counter the messages they were disseminating.

***Punishment.*** Although not a major theme, the concept of punishment as a factor related to the decrease in terrorism etc. was invoked on numerous occasions. Clearly for the MOI, the presence of the PRAC strategy should not be viewed as a substitute for retribution for committing an illegal violation. For example, one MBNCCC official explained that:

We see an inaccurate understanding towards the program. Is this program a substitute for punishment? So because of this .. [many] have a preconceived notion .. about .. that the program is an alternative to punishment and that the kingdom takes those that do not have a big case and presents them with the program as alternative to punishment and then releases them. But this is not the case. The punishment is one track for the small and big .. for those involved in a simple way and for those involved in a complex and serious way. The program is a parallel track to the punishment. The goal is to rehabilitate from the very first moment he enters the prison.

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<sup>243</sup> Online activities can take many forms. For instance, some activities are overt while others are less so and serve objectives that may be more tactical.



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Even for those who have surrendered, punishment awaits them for travelling aboard to areas of conflicts without the permission of the Saudi authorities. As one MOI official remarked:

Those who came from aboard went to prison and received their punishment.

The family calls us and asks for help to bring their son back and to transfer him to the Center without having him face prison time but we refuse this thinking. He has to receive his sentence and punishment then he may be transferred here.

Clearly, for the MOI and MBNCCC officials and staff, punishment is an important and necessary function that is independent of the rehabilitation phase.

We have to make a distinction between action and rehabilitation. Action is the actual punishment. After the punishment you have the rehabilitation process. If you or any prisoner .. you have the punishment component first then rehabilitation. That same concept is adopted here. But to be clear rehabilitation [through the counseling committees] and punishment occur concurrently.<sup>244</sup>

This is a comprehensive approach that begins in the prisons. Once he completes his sentence, and before he is released, he is transferred to the Center. There he is enrolled in the rehabilitation programs. This is the middle ground stage.. a phase after prison and before release into the community. Then you have the after-care component. There is no conflict between the punishment and the court component and the program.”

Lastly, the restrictive measure placed upon release may also be considered part of the punishment. For instance, one MOI official highlighted that:

Their passports are confiscated... he works .. but he is not going to be allowed to work in a sensitive area. Again, he is not permitted to travel abroad for a specific period of time and this is actually part of the sentencing [punishment] .. it is not done afterwards it is part of judgment.

### **Summary**

Interviews with MOI officials and MBNCCC staff, informal discussions, documents and media products, have provided important details of what the PRAC strategy is, how it is associated with a reduction in terrorism in the KSA, and why. Indeed, the MOI, as the entity

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<sup>244</sup> Specifically, and as explained previously, the PRAC strategy includes a counseling component that may be considered part of the rehabilitation process and that occurs before transfer to the MBNCCC.

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responsible for security in the KSA, has reduced terrorism by developing a strategy that targeted every vulnerable element found within the whole of Saudi society. This makes sense considering that AQ is doing the same. As one MOI official emphasized, AQ is fully committed to their goal – they have no other objective in life but to train, recruit, plot, disseminate propaganda, and kill. Yet the MOI, by engaging the individual in prison and at the MBNCCC, their families (and the families of AQ operatives in general), and society in general, has deftly contained the spread the spread of AQ's *takfiri* ideology, pushed it back, and is in the process, of ultimately destroying it. By gaining the trust of society, researching the threat methodically, being comprehensive in their approach, providing the right treatment at the right time, and being adaptive to the changing face(s) of terrorism, the MOI was able to create an environment inhospitable to AQ and their ilk. Indeed, as many of the region's countries were becoming inflamed, terrorist groups and terrorism resurfaced – except in the KSA.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study's mixed method design sought to answer several research questions associated with terrorism in the KSA. The initial quantitative stage focused on answering the following:

Is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia successful at countering terrorism? More specifically, was the PRAC strategy effective in reducing terrorism, and death and physical injuries to security personnel and civilians in the KSA?

The second stage, utilizing a qualitative approach, sought to explain and understand the quantitative results, and in the process, answer the research questions below:

What is the KSA's PRAC strategy? How can it explain the results of the quantitative analysis? Why does it "work"?

For this final chapter, the researcher will discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings of this project. Next, limitations will be addressed, followed by a section on policy recommendations for countering terrorism using alternative approaches. Lastly, directions for future research will be discussed.

#### **Overall Findings**

The quantitative analysis conducted revealed that there is a relationship between the PRAC strategy and a decrease in TRO's in the kingdom between November 2002 and December 2007. Looking at the numbers, the KSA experienced 9 TRO's in 2006 dropping to *only* 2 in 2007 – 2008 had no recorded TRO's. Clearly, these results contrast to the previous years when AQ was most active. For example, 43 TRO's were recorded in 2003, increasing to 55 in 2004. Specifically, during those two years, the KSA experienced a little over 4 TRO's per month. Looked at differently, 1 TRO occurred every week for a two-year period. These numbers are a

conservative estimate though. MOI officials who had provided the data explained that these are examples of clear-cut cases of AQ related TRO's. That is, they do not include other TRO's not related to AQ.<sup>245</sup> Regardless, these data reveal the severity of the AQ threat facing the KSA; and the MOI's effectiveness in countering it using, among other things, the *soft approach*. These results are impressive considering that the intensity of the AQ campaign was, by far, more serious than what other countries had faced and who have adopted a similar approach (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia respectively). Moreover, and worth noting, the MOI's successful efforts to regain control of the situation is significant when considering that AQ related terrorism was on the rise in the region and beyond. For example, AQ related terrorism across the globe only began to witness a slight, and *temporary*, decrease in 2008 (Figure 5.1).<sup>246</sup> These results should be interpreted with caution though due to methodological inconsistencies relating to the collection and reporting of terrorism in general (Pape, Ruby, & Bauer, 2014).<sup>247</sup> Lastly, this decrease in terrorism is, arguably, unexpected when factoring in the demographic makeup of Saudi society. For instance, over 60% of Saudis were under the age of 24 in 2003.<sup>248</sup> That is, and based on extant criminological research, the majority of Saudis were (and remain)

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<sup>245</sup> Moreover, one TRO might actually represent several operations. For example, the assassination of one MOI security officer led to several MOI CT operations. In this case, the TRO was only counted as one.

<sup>246</sup> Search criteria for this figure were as follows: 25 groups were chosen with the word AQ as a description or are known to be AQ affiliated. Terrorist attacks in all regions were included. These include ambiguous and unsuccessful attacks.

<sup>247</sup> There has been a growing debate between researchers at the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and their counterparts at the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) on how best to capture terrorism trends globally. For example, CPOST contends that their Suicide Attack Database (SAD) is a better and more accurate proxy for measuring terrorism across the globe. For more on this debate see the GTD's (2014) response to these claims at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/06/the-challenges-of-collecting-terrorism-data/>.

<sup>248</sup> See Graham Fullers 2003 report titled *The youth factor: The new demographics of the Middle East and the implications for U.S. policy* at <http://www.brookings.edu/~l/media/research/files/papers/2003/6/middleeast-fuller/fuller20030601.pdf>.

vulnerable to involvement in antisocial behaviors – especially considering terrorist groups persistent efforts to recruit Saudi men.<sup>249</sup>

Figure 5.1. AQ Terrorist Operations Across the Globe 2001-2010.

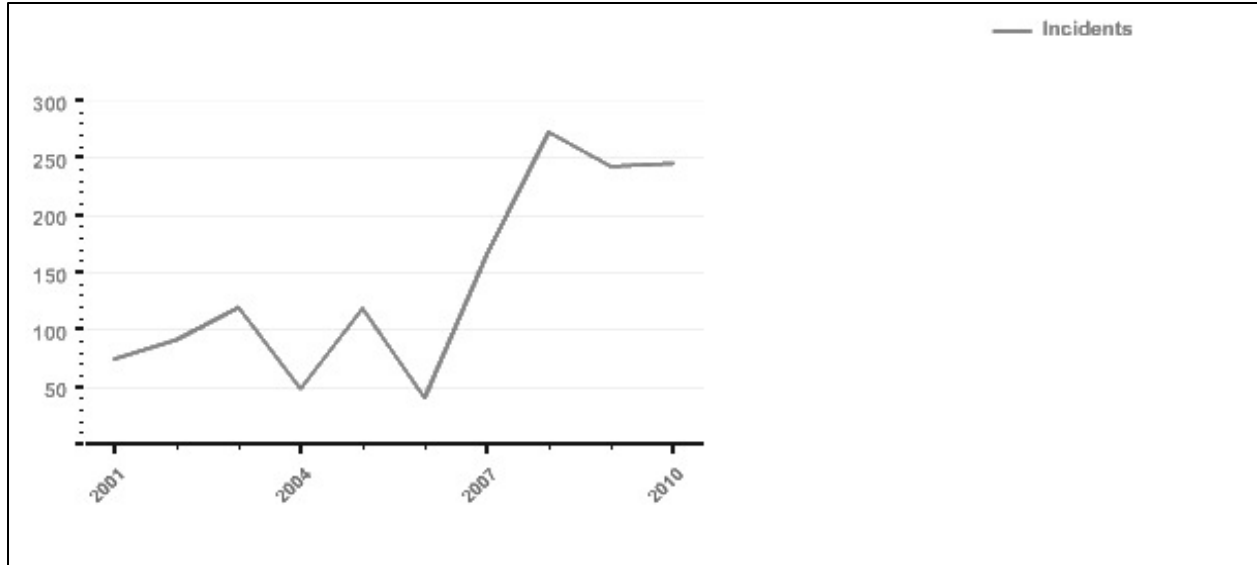


Figure courtesy of the Global Terrorism Database at START.

A decrease in security officers killed and/or physically injured was also associated with the introduction of the PRAC strategy. This should come as no surprise considering that a decrease in TRO's is directly related with the drop in killed or physically injured security officers. Specifically, the decrease is a function of a decrease in TRO's. Yet, and as will be discussed later, this decrease could also be attributed to other factors present during that time such as better training, equipment, and more experienced officers. As for the data surrounding the third hypothesis regarding killed and/or physically injured civilians, the evidence was inconclusive statistically. This is primarily due to the lack of monthly counts despite the high numbers of civilians, unfortunately, killed and/or injured. Still, the data does show that between 2003 and 2004, 650 civilians were the victims of AQ terror – an average of 28 per month.

<sup>249</sup> For more on the age/crime relationship see Ulmer and Steffensmeier (2014).

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However, the different efforts of the MOI led to the extraordinary reduction of civilian victimization to 1 in 2005, 6 in 2006, and 4 in 2007, with no recorded victims in 2008. Interestingly, in 2005 alone, 130 MOI security officers were physically injured countering AQ. Again, this decrease in civilian casualties is a direct function of the decrease in TRO's coupled with the other factors that will be discussed in the next section.

Worth noting, AQ appeared to indiscriminately target their victims. TRO's data reveals AQ targeted both Saudi's and foreigners alike. For example, 11 operations were conducted against foreigners while 16 were recorded against MOI officials and personnel manning their posts. Also, over 360 Saudi security officers sustained physically injuries, with 53 sacrificing their lives. Here, we see the manifestation of AQ's *deviant* ideology in the indiscriminate killing of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These observations are in line with previous research exposing AQ's victim profile.<sup>250</sup> Yet these results, and many others, do not track with media reporting, based on questionable sources, alleging that Saudi's, and their "Wahhabist" school of thought are the global driver of AQ's ideology.<sup>251</sup> The data shows that thousands of MOI security officers risked, and continue, to risk their lives fighting a group that does not value life. These same officers, in addition to the overwhelming majority of Saudi's, are the product of

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<sup>250</sup> For example see Helfstein, Nassir and al-Obaidi's 2009 article titled *Deadly vanguards: A study of alQa'ida's violence against Muslims* found in the CTC Sentinel

<sup>251</sup> Media reporting also claims that Saudi "Wahhabis" are funding radical madrassas attended by the poorest youth – especially in Pakistan (Blair, Fair, Malhotra & Shapiro, 2013). However, research shows that most terrorist in these regions come from middle-class households, and that only two madrassas, located in Indonesia, were arguably associated with terrorist activities (Sageman, 2008). Lastly, these claims are clearly questionable when we observe AQ's attempts to undermine the legitimacy of Saudi "Wahhabi scholars" who condemn AQ's barbaric acts and also mete out severe sentences for their guilty operatives. These are but a few inconsistencies that are found in these arguments.

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Saudi society's socializing institutions.<sup>252</sup> It appears that the logic of this argument is flawed and should be reconsidered.

Indeed, the data clearly show that there has been a statistically significant decrease in TRO's in the KSA between November 2002 and December 2007. The question remains *how* is the PRAC strategy associated with this drop and *why*. Interviews revealed that MOI's PRAC strategy decreased terrorism by addressing several possible threats that contribute directly, and indirectly, to terrorism. For example, addressing the threats arising from the *individual*. Here, correcting the prisoner's and the "beneficiaries'" beliefs (e.g., through highlighting the inconsistencies of the *takfiri* ideology and also the inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviors of the group's members and leaders), and equipping him with the necessary tools to become a productive member of society decrease the risk of recidivism. A recidivism rate of 15% means that 85% did not reengage with AQ, despite their presence in neighboring countries, and their relentless plans and plots to target the Saudi state. Moreover, the removal of these former operatives from the ranks of AQ obviously disrupts AQ's ability to operate. This is important considering that there have been several cases of suspected terrorist operatives who had been previously imprisoned, served their sentence, and subsequently released only to join the AQ campaign that began in 2003 (e.g., Abdulaziz Almgren).<sup>253</sup> The presence of former prisoners in the group not only added to group membership but also afforded *credible* operative whose messages resonated more loudly to vulnerable youth still unsure of who AQ truly represents. On the other hand, the 85% who did not reengage can act as counter weights – as *credible voices* with the ability to prevent others from joining, and also can encourage those

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<sup>252</sup> As one senior MOI official noted, if "Wahhabism" is associated with terrorism, then why do relatively so few Saudi's become involved in it.

<sup>253</sup> MOI officials explained that, at times, it may be difficult to prosecute individuals who have travelled abroad to lengthy sentences due to a lack of information regarding their activities. For example, "fighting" takes place in areas where government control is limited or absent.

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involved to “defect”. Here, a possible *tipping point* may occur where AQ operatives are influenced to leave (creating a cycle of former group degradation). Lastly, the MOI, and through the MBNCCC, provides services and support that serve to eliminate the criminogenic factors that may *push* those released back into the arms of the ever-waiting terrorist group. For instance; financial support for marriage; assistance with employment, health care and education; and marriage and social counseling etc. all, in the end, help create an environment where positive social interactions occur. The consequent end result is reducing the risk of reengaging with the group.

The PRAC strategy also targeted the *families* of AQ in operatives in custody, killed, or on the run. These efforts undoubtedly reduce terrorism for several reasons. First, by addressing the needs of the family, the MOI was able to preempt AQ efforts to recruit the families of these operatives. It is well known within counter terrorism circles that terrorist groups labor to win over the families of their operatives using different tactics such as financial and moral support, or through ploys to convince these families (through deception) that their sons are being abused and neglected by the security forces. Second, the MOI engages these families in an attempt to understand if signs of radicalization are found in other members of the family (e.g., fathers, mothers, and brothers etc.). If this is the case, specialists comprised of religious scholars, social workers, and psychologists are dispatched to assess and counsel at-risk family members to contain and correct the possible festering of radical beliefs (that may evolve into the adoption of more violent behaviors). In some cases, more severe measures may be taken. For instance, formally charging individuals believed to be *passively* involved with AQ (e.g., voicing sympathy). Third, the MBNCCC, by creating partnerships with these families, can address, early on, behavior that may be of concern after release. For example, direct communication with the



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MBNCCC may take place when questionable behaviors are observed. This cooperation is important especially considering that those in close proximity of the released “beneficiary” will be better situated to know if gradual reengagement with the group is occurring (Gill, Horgan, & Deckert, 2014). Here, terrorist actions may be disrupted before they have time to materialize. Indeed, to all involved, these efforts seek to *save* the individual from the clutches of AQ. It should come as no surprise that these efforts ultimately create families that willingly speak out for the MOI, and against AQ and like-minded groups. Specifically, families reach out to other families who have someone they love involved with AQ.

The general and specific *prevention* component of the PRAC strategy reduces terrorism by shrinking the possible pool of new recruits to AQ and pushing those who may sympathize with them even further into the fringes of Saudi society. Here, exposing what/who these terrorist groups really are, and emphasizing the religious establishment’s position towards them created a situation in which Saudi society had to respond – by taking a clear stand that rejected their actions and the ideology that drives them. Moreover, these prevention efforts equip vulnerable Saudi’s with the needed knowledge to recognize and address AQ’s recruitment tactics. Additionally, by providing timely information of AQ’s terrorist operations and details of their conspirators, the MOI is both increasing awareness of the group’s nihilistic and bloody ways and reducing the possibility of rumors and misinformation to circulate among a captivated audience (that may serve AQ’s propaganda purposes). Indeed, disclosing this information helped isolate the group from mainstream society making their movement across the kingdom that more difficult. Specifically, knowing who the terrorists are, how they operate and why, who they target and how, undoubtedly shrinks AQ’s ability to function. In all these cases, society’s recognition of the multitude of threats posed by AQ to themselves, their loved ones, the KSA, the world, and

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Islamic *ummah* as a whole pushes the overwhelming majority away from choosing the wrong path.

The PRAC strategy works. The qualitative analysis of the interviews revealed several themes that explain *why* the strategy was succeeding. First, the MOI's approach to countering terrorism created a level of *trust* within Saudi society that helped them achieve multiple goals related to the security situation there (i.e., through developing better cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships). These efforts won the trust of not only the families of AQ operatives but also, and more broadly, Saudi society. For these Saudi's, witnessing (and experiencing) the amount of fairness, care, restraint and professionalism by the MOI towards those who deviated elevated the latter to a higher moral ground and in the process created stronger solidarity between them all. It could have been very easy, and tempting, for the MOI to bury AQ in a pile of rubble – but the MOI chose the wiser approach. This is especially important since governments are fighting a hidden enemy. An enemy that, in many cases, is embedded within marginalized communities suspicious of government outreach efforts. Here, cooperation is limited for many reasons, but mainly for a lack of trust.<sup>254</sup> Second, the PRAC strategy is driven by the *research*. Early research on AQ operatives and the environments they came from led to, in part, the adoption of an alternative *softer approach*. Understanding the group's *deviant* ideology, who they recruited and how (e.g., through deception), allowed the MOI to develop policies and procedures that not only address the immediate threat (e.g., the prisoner) but also strategies that aim to prevent future terrorists from emerging (especially in areas where radicalization may be higher than the national average). Indeed, by recognizing that the *hard approach* was only a partial approach, the MOI

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<sup>254</sup> For more on this topic see Schanzer, Kurzman, Tolliver and Miller's 2016 report titled *The Challenge and Promise of Using Community Policing Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism: A call for Community Partnerships with Law enforcement to Enhance Public Safety*.

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developed a long-term strategy that addresses a long-term threat. Worth noting, the KSA had, unfortunately, an abundant sample of AQ cases that permitted the development of this knowledge. This may not be the case in other countries that faced a real but, arguably, less severe threat. Third, PRAC is *comprehensive*. It targets several vulnerable demographics using not only MOI resources but also those of the entire KSA government. Here, a *centralized* body within the MOI *coordinates* the different moving parts (i.e., Saudi ministries and the MOI departments tasked with countering terrorism) to achieve the multiple goals of prevention, counseling, rehabilitation and after-care. Similar efforts adopted by other countries arguably lack the comprehensiveness of PRAC for different reasons. Some may lack the financial resources, the expertise (e.g., religious scholars that can authoritatively counter AQ's faulty arguments), or the political will. The senior leadership in the MOI, however, recognized that for PRAC to succeed, *all* those who may have been affected by AQ must be included when formulating a policy to counter terrorism. Fourth, the PRAC strategy placed a heavy importance on *early intervention* to contain and counter radicalization. The MOI proactively arrested any individual who sympathized or expressed support for AQ quickly in order to prevent these individuals from becoming even more radical. And this initial sympathy with terrorist groups does not occur in a vacuum – others in their proximity may also be drawn in. This was especially true after the Multi-National Forces entered Iraq where, and in response, the region witnessed the emergence of numerous “resistance” and terrorist groups. In this case, individuals lacked a nuanced understanding of the group's motives and little insight into their strategies. They were attracted to general themes (e.g., protecting honor, expelling forces, countering Shia militia aggressions etc.) peddled by, for example, AQ.<sup>255</sup> If left unchecked, this individual may very well become

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<sup>255</sup> For instance, the AQ leadership claims to be fighting country X in the region, but unbeknownst to AQ recruits is that country X is actually facilitating the movements of their leadership in addition to providing

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more radical in the absence of any alternative viewpoint. Moreover, this same individual may be the target of AQ recruiters on the prowl (on land and online) who would identify, embrace, manipulate and, after vetting, finally introduced to the network. At this stage, social forces take over (in a secretive military style command structure), propaganda is viewed repetitively, *scare tactics* are adopted by group leaders, and the individuals becomes ensnared by the group. MOI officials revealed many cases where sympathizers progressed through the AQ ranks to become more violent, and some instances, a cell leader. This makes sense considering cell leaders do not spontaneously appear. Interestingly, this early intervention may be understood in different ways. For example, it also occurs upon arrest where professionalism and respect are witnessed by the suspect which may come as a surprise considering his previous indoctrination by AQ. Early intervention also occurs in prison where the AQ ideology is deconstructed and countered methodically early on. Families are also engaged promptly. Early assessments by the MOI, coupled with the possible provision of services and support, undercuts AQ's efforts to recruit these families. Fifth, the PRAC strategy's programs and practices are *individualized* to meet each case's unique demands. A one-size fits all approach does not address each individual's distinct pathway to terrorism involvement. Some AQ operatives are educated, married, employed and older, while others may not be. For any program to be truly effective, the treatment must fit the individual's needs. Additionally, and on a more macro scale, the PRAC strategy was created for the KSA. Religious, social, and financial considerations may preclude other countries from adopting a similar approach. Sixth, PRAC is *adaptive*. What started out as an ad hoc counseling effort evolved into a massive counter terrorism strategy, using among other things, a *softer approach*. Indeed, as the threat grew, so did PRAC. As AQ evolved, again, so too did PRAC. For

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a safe haven for them. This situation becomes more apparent if these AQ recruits observe that there have been no recorded AQ attacks against this country. Clearly, the strategic objectives of AQ are far removed from the mental calculations of these terrorists.

example, programs at the MBNCCC were developed to address some of the newer messaging AQ began using (at that time) to recruit such as Islamic history and the Saudi state; addressing the “emotional” response felt globally towards the military operations in Iraq; or addressing the backlash from the publication of “provocative” cartoons in Europe. In these cases, PRAC had to adjust and adapt its practices to prevent,<sup>256</sup> counsel, rehabilitate, and provide after-care for former AQ operatives and their families. Lastly, *punishment*, although not a major theme, was a subject invoked by several MOI officials and MBNCCC staff.<sup>257</sup> Unquestionably, retribution for committing a legal violation was an integral part of the MOI’s PRAC strategy where punishment, in theory, was not only an “initial deterrent” but also as an even stronger deterrent for repeat offenders.<sup>258</sup> Interestingly, and worth noting, by including offender’s accountability for their actions, we observe several principles of the Restorative Justice model present in the MOI’s PRAC strategy.

Indeed it is not surprising that there is a relationship between the PRAC strategy and a reduction in terrorism in the KSA. For instance, PRAC, and specifically the MBNCCC, is comprised of what Rabasa et al (2010) term *pragmatic*, *affective* and *ideological* components. For these authors, addressing these components in unison can reduce recidivism and consequently future terrorism. Additionally, and as Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) have noted, the presence of these *softer approaches* to countering terrorism allows for the creation of *credible voices* that serve to counter the AQ narrative and, in the process, influence others to abandon the group; or, at least, act as a warning bell to those most vulnerable to their messaging. For the

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<sup>256</sup> For example, the issuance and circulation of fatwas condemning terrorist acts or the prohibition of travelling abroad to “conflict areas”, or government sponsored fund raising campaigns to provide humanitarian assistance to communities and regions in need.

<sup>257</sup> It should be noted that the Saudi Ministry of Justice is responsible for adjudicating all legal cases.

<sup>258</sup> Yet this may present a challenge for the MOI. As noted before, those who do recidivate may become more dangerous considering that the *cost* of re-arrest is higher than before. Moreover, there is an assumption here that terrorists are “rational actors” which some may argue is not the case.

former, leaving AQ and similar groups, is facilitated by the presence of *exit routes* away from terrorism. Clearly the benefits this situation presents are numerous. For instance, in addition to taking operatives of the field, these “defectors” are in a position to provide important information on the group, their tactics, and their strategies. In all of these scenarios, AQ’s ability to recruit, maintain group membership, and operate is severely disrupted.<sup>259</sup> And the aforementioned tracks with what Post (2007) had proposed to *decrease* terrorism. Here, the author recommends providing *exit routes*<sup>260</sup> and implementing efforts to delegitimize terror group leaders. For the latter, *credible voices* (e.g., “repentant” operatives, and/or religious clerics) serve to reduce support and sympathy for the group among broader society and consequently potential recruits. Lastly, this decrease in terrorism should be expected. The MOI has been implementing, most if not all, of the 25 recommendations recently proposed by the experts at the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GFT) and as expressed in the *Rome Memorandum*.<sup>261</sup> The recommendations seek to guide countries seeking to develop alternative approaches to countering terrorism. In theory, the MOI’s early adoption of these recommendations should have produced positive results – and they have.

### **Limitations/Rival Causal Factors**

As highlighted in chapter three, this study’s exploratory nature, manifested in the choice of design and methodology, presented several limitations. That said, these limitations should not impede conducting terrorism related research. For instance, this study does not attempt to

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<sup>259</sup> This is also inline with Neumann’s (2015) recommendations in a recent report on ISIS defectors. For example, the author notes that these *voices* can highlight the groups’ contradictions and exposes their lies; encourage others to leave; and lastly, can deter others from initially joining with the group.

<sup>260</sup> For Post, witness protection and *Pentiti* programs serve to undermine group cohesion and disrupt operational capabilities.

<sup>261</sup> The GCF is a global consortium where platforms are created to find ways to counter terrorism through, among other things, alternative and strategic approaches. For more see <https://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/159878/Rome+Memorandum-English.pdf>.

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unambiguously determine *the* direct causes of decreased terrorism in the KSA. Indeed, determining what caused a decrease in terrorism would be as challenging as determining what causes it. This study does, however, endeavor to determine, empirically, if a relationship exists between the PRAC strategy and a decrease in terrorism. In doing so, we are able to meet one important condition of causality – the presence of a correlation.<sup>262</sup> Yet it became apparent from the interviews and documents made available that other factors may be at play and are, at least, partly responsible for the results for the quantitative analysis. By recognizing these other influences, the study is following Yin’s (2015) recommendations in which the identification of, and accounting for, rival causal factors increases the internal validity of any case study.

Not surprisingly, there were several other factors that arose during discussions of the PRAC strategy. For example, MOI officials explained that PRAC was one of the three pillars that composed the broader MOI strategy to counter terrorism. They go on to describe adopting the *three M’s approach* to countering terrorism where the *men*, *money* and the *mindset* were all targeted and in parallel. Specifically, the MOI targeted the men through the traditional security approach. Intelligence gained from different sources, led to surveillance operations to be conducted, raids to follow, and disruptions of plots and networks to occur. As mentioned before, the *hard approach* was essential to stabilize the security situation in the KSA where the tangible and immediate threat posed by AQ was neutralized through the removal of their operatives from the field and the pushing of their remaining followers further and further into hiding (leading to what one MOI described as their “fragmentation”).<sup>263</sup> In pursuing their fight against AQ, MOI officials explained how these security services became better equipped, better trained and more

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<sup>262</sup> Moreover, the study was able to establish the time order between the independent variable (PRAC) and the dependent variables. Specifically, PRAC occurred before the decrease in TRO’s and other DV’s.

<sup>263</sup> The intense pressure on the group by the security services, coupled with a more vigilant community, did not allow the group to maneuver freely. They were constantly “looking over their shoulders.”

experienced when conducting CT operations.<sup>264</sup> They go on to highlight how the leadership of the KSA provided enormous amounts of support (e.g., financial) to the MOI to successfully defeat AQ. For instance, increased presence of MOI forces in the streets, roadblocks and checkpoints at key locations, more and better-equipped security forces at softer targets (e.g., housing compounds, hotels), which in turn, unquestionably, limited AQ's ability to successfully conduct operations. One CT officer explained that AQ began changing its targets in response to these measures. Harder targets were shifted to softer ones in an attempt to ensure successful execution.<sup>265</sup> Here we can leverage *routine activities theory* to explain the decrease in terrorism where the presence of *capable guardian* deterred possible terrorist attacks (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Indeed, better equipment, training, and more experience appear to be noteworthy factors that can, in addition to the PRAC strategy, explain the significant decrease in TRO's and security/civilian casualties.

Another factor that may have contributed to the decrease of TRO's in the KSA is the reinforcement of security measures on the northern and southern borders of the kingdom.<sup>266</sup> MOI officials explained that long borders between Iraq and Yemen (over 560 miles and 900 miles respectively), both of whom experienced a period of lawlessness during that time, were a serious concern. By increasing the security posture on these borders, the MOI was able to limit the amount of smuggling of individuals (e.g., AQ sympathizers seeking to join the group and AQ operatives fleeing to safer havens) and contraband (e.g., weapons and explosives) into and out of the kingdom from these areas. These same officials noted that the presence of military operations

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<sup>264</sup> At one point, AQ was, arguably, better equipped than some of the forces that engaged them at "short notice". For example, AQ had in their possession RPG's, AK 47's, and military grade explosives. However, one MOI official explained that despite the MOI's ability to use extreme measures, the security forces would favor the surrender of these AQ's operatives—killing them only as the last resort.

<sup>265</sup> For example, and more recently, Daesh turned to targeting mosques in different parts of the KSA resulting in the death of dozens. (One mosque was used by Special Emergency Forces cadets).

<sup>266</sup> These include increasing patrols and technologies that allow for better monitoring of these areas.



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in Iraq and the absence of complete government control in both Iraq and Yemen (especially near the border regions) forced the MOI to perform the duties of both sides. These measures were essential considering that AQ remained very active in these areas: plotting, training, and disseminating propaganda through the Internet. In any case, the inability of AQ to operate between these countries may have had a direct impact on the level of terrorism in KSA.

Moreover, structural adjustments within the MOI itself led to better communication and coordination between the different entities conducting security operations across the kingdom. MOI officials described how these adjustments led to quicker decision making when AQ operatives were identified. This was key considering that several different departments, in different regions, may be involved in one security operation. A unified command, and a clear command structure, permitted faster response to disrupt AQ plots and prevent security and civilian casualties.

MOI officials stressed, again, that The KSA leadership did not hesitate to modernize its forces to effectively counter AQ and their affiliates. In addition to structural and bureaucratic streamlining, a 35,000 man strong Facility Security Force (FSF) was stood up in 2007 to protect the countries critical infrastructure which was, and remains, a major target for AQ. In this instance, and as discussed above, the presence of *capable guardians* may have acted as a deterrent.<sup>267</sup>

The kingdom was also intent on drying the financial resources of AQ. In addition to the “traditional investigations” performed by the security services that focused on who and how the group collected and funded their activities, a Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) was also

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<sup>267</sup> Although AQ has been known to adapt its tactics. For example, we see today the use of multiple attackers moving in waves to neutralize the layered security fortifications in place.

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established in 2005.<sup>268</sup> The FIU, among other things, was a focal point for financial investigations within the kingdom and worked closely with other entities locally, regionally and globally. The FIU's chain of command, positioned directly under the Minister of Interior, reflects the importance the KSA, and MOI, placed on countering the financing of terrorism. By limiting the ability of AQ to collect money,<sup>269</sup> the MOI was able to reduce the group's operational capabilities and, consequently, their ability to conduct operations in the KSA and abroad.<sup>270</sup> Worth noting, MOI officials also discussed the importance of the prevention efforts to counter terrorism financing. For instance, public awareness campaigns and religious edicts served to inform the general public of AQ's deceptive fund raising schemes and the legal consequences for those who take part in their activities (e.g., collecting or donating funds).

Still, the MOI's efforts to counter AQ goes beyond the aforementioned. The leadership of the KSA recognized very early on the need to support the officers leading the fight. As early as 2003,<sup>271</sup> a Royal Decree was issued by the late King Fahed instructing all of the military forces leadership (i.e., Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense and the National Guard respectively) to ensure the wellbeing, financially and morally, of their own *martyred*<sup>272</sup> or injured personnel.

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<sup>268</sup> The KSA had previously established both an anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terror financing (CTF) regime in 2003. In that same year, the MOI's General Security department established the Saudi Arabia Financial Investigation Unit (SAFIU).

<sup>269</sup> One MOI official explained that AQ operatives were very deceptive in their collection efforts. In many cases, unwitting individuals, with inherent charitable tendencies, would donate money to what appeared to be a good cause. Moreover, AQ was deliberately exploiting Muslim's religious duty to give to those less fortunate (see the third pillar of Islam: *Zakat*). The official goes on to explain that numerous efforts were made to prohibit the unauthorized collection of donations and raising awareness to AQ's tactics.

<sup>270</sup> Again, research has shown that terrorist groups can increase their possible pool of recruits when they execute successful, or even unsuccessful, terrorist operations.

<sup>271</sup> This Royal Decree included those who were martyred or physically injured before its issuance in 2003.

<sup>272</sup> Saudi religious leaders versed in Islamic thought issued a *fatwa* that clarified that those who lost their lives countering terrorism are considered *martyrs*.

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These actions focused not only on those countering terrorism, but also, and just as importantly, their families. For example:<sup>273</sup>

- All martyred officers are promoted to the next rank with their full salaries going to the next of kin. Those with serious injuries (e.g., 70% disability) also receive the same treatment,
- Employing one of the officer's sons in the same rank as his father,
- Immediate financial support to the family of the martyr (and those seriously injured) that includes a one time lump sum of significant value; assistance in finding a home in any area they desire (another substantial sum is paid here); in addition to a significant amount to pay off any debt he may have accrued,
- All receive Medals of Honor for their bravery and service,
- In many cases, martyr's names are posted in public spaces to remind people of their sacrifice,
- Mosques and streets are named after some of the martyred,
- For those physically injured, the best medical services are provided in the KSA or abroad,
- For the MOI, the establishment of the Department for Martyr's Services (DMS) within the MOI. The DMS is directly under the command of the Minister of Interior and is tasked with maintaining constant contact with these families and is responsible for

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<sup>273</sup> The researcher has chosen not provide specific monetary details of what is being provided.

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providing numerous services to them such as health care, financial support, paying for children's school fees,<sup>274</sup> and employment assistance if needed etc.<sup>275</sup>

These are a few of the efforts performed by the MOI to reward and reassure their personnel that they, and their loved, will be looked after if something would go wrong when countering terrorism.<sup>276</sup> The researcher will not speculate how these actions may have influenced the results of the quantitative analysis, but recognizing them is important due to their significance.

MOI officials also emphasized the important role of international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. International cooperation can take on many forms. For instance, it may be that deeper and broader information exchanges on terrorism suspects and investigations, joint training programs, better equipment and analytic tools etc. have all influenced the results of the quantitative data. Specifically, better information exchanges may have helped disrupt a plot decreasing the numbers of TRO's and casualties. Or, better training and equipment may have also reduced the number of MOI officers killed.

Although the MOI was a major driver for Saudi prevention efforts, other programs may have also contributed to the decline in terrorism as it relates to PRAC. To illustrate, in 2003, the late King Fahed issued a Royal Decree calling on the establishment of the King Abdul-Aziz Center for National Dialogue. The Center's goals included efforts to reinforce the importance of dialogue, tolerance, and solidarity with the ultimate objective of preventing radical beliefs from taking hold of young Saudi minds. Through this platform for dialogue, those most vulnerable to

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<sup>274</sup> One MOI officer noted that it was important to address the education of the martyrs' sons and daughters, in the absence of their fathers, to prevent, among other things, associating with antisocial peers.

<sup>275</sup> For example, facilitating the transfer of a relative to be near the martyr's family to provide support etc. or to assist in finding employment for the wife of the martyr to supplement their income.

<sup>276</sup> Also worth noting are the visits made by senior government officials to the families of those martyred in order to pay respects and console the grieving relatives (both young and old). Hospital visits are also made to those have been injured by a terrorist attacks (security officers and civilians alike).

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adopting radical beliefs (i.e., 60 % of the Saudi youth) can move away from violent forms of dissent and disagreement to expression of views in an open and productive way. The Center achieved this through periodical conferences, workshops, and through discussions organized in different regions and among the different strata of Saudi society. Moreover, the Center funded the publication of numerous studies on the history of dialogue in Islamic history, dialogue protocols and their relevance to Islamic societies, and even children's books that instill the importance of tolerance and acceptance in Saudi society. Strategic in nature, the Center seeks to play a role in preventing members of Saudi society from being *lured* by the messaging promulgated by extremist groups.

Lastly, the decrease in TRO's could be partly attributed to historical factors. Despite the increase in AQ related terrorism across the globe (Figure 5.1), violence in Iraq actually declined. Specifically, pundits have argued that a decrease in terrorism in the KSA is perhaps associated with the stabilization of the security environment in neighboring Iraq. As the US increased troop levels in Iraq (the surge) and assisted with the emergence of the *Sunni awakening* movement (Petraeus, 2013), a significant and consistent decrease in "security incidents" occurred in February of 2007 (roughly one year after the significant decrease of TRO's in the KSA).<sup>277</sup> The logic here is that "foreign fighters" ceased travelling to Iraq due to the increased risk of capture and also due to the increasing levels of sectarian fighting taking place there. This logic appears to be well founded, yet it fails to consider that the AQ campaign in the KSA was occurring at roughly the same time as Operation Iraqi Freedom. That is, the two terrorist campaigns, although intersecting at different points, are independent. Unquestionably, there were some Saudi's who travelled to Iraq to join groups engaging the US and Multi-National Forces there, however many

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<sup>277</sup> See General Mark Kimmitt's 2009 analysis titled *Measuring Iraq* found at <http://blogs.harvard.edu/mesh/2009/04/measuring-iraq/>.

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AQ operatives stayed in the KSA choosing to continue the terrorist campaign they hoped would result in the overthrow of the Saudi government. Moreover, it would be reasonable to assume that terrorism in the KSA should increase if and when the heavily indoctrinated, and well-trained, “foreign fighters” returned. Additionally, even with the successful stabilization of the security landscape in Iraq, AQ was still active in places like Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon, and in northern Africa. Clearly, the threat in the region remained – especially for the KSA. Lastly, and worth noting, the decrease in “security incidents” in Iraq could also be partly attributed to the success of the PRAC strategy. For instance, in 2008, the Los Angeles Times reported that the then commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, General David Petraeus, stated that the Saudi efforts may be one reason for this decline (Kurlantzick, 2008). This makes sense. Saudi efforts included the issuance of religious fatwas that prohibited any involvement in the war in Iraq; development and implementation of numerous prevention programs (both general and specific) and awareness campaigns; tighter border security; and the traditional security response etc. It is not unreasonable to assume that all of these efforts prevented those most vulnerable to AQ’s messaging from joining their bloody campaign and consequently reducing the level of violence there.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Countering terrorism requires a comprehensive approach: one that includes both a *hard* and *soft approach*. The study revealed that for governments to counter terrorism effectively, they must adopt an approach that not only addresses the men and the money, but also the mindset. For the latter, countering the ideology, as a strategic goal, will prevent vulnerable populations from being initially attracted to terrorist groups. Indeed, the Saudi experience is unique in that it has been shown to work at countering a *real* and *persistent* AQ threat. And although other

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governments have adopted similar approaches for different reasons (e.g., appeasing a worried West), the success of PRAC was crucial – not just for the KSA but, perhaps, the world.

However, the efforts undertaken are specific to the Saudi context – a conservative Muslim nation that rules based on the Quran and the teachings of Prophet (PBUH). Additionally, the abundance of credible and legitimate religious voices, familial and societal cohesion, and a wealth of resources may be absent in other places. Specifically, other countries may lack the needed resources to implement a comprehensive strategy (e.g., Yemen), face a *relatively* less severe AQ threat (e.g., Malaysia and Singapore respectively), or face a different type of threat altogether. For instance, a terrorist threat that emerges from, in many cases, Muslim communities and enclaves, arguably, withdrawn from their Western liberal democratic societies'. Here, the challenge for “secular” governments is engaging these quasi-religious communities without sending the wrong messages (i.e., the only reason for engagement is due to the threat emerging from within these communities). Moreover, in many of these places, different laws are grounded in historical precedents and constitutional safeguards that may preclude the complete adoption of such an effort. Yet, despite these differences, the continuing threat arising from AQ (and now Daesh) and their ideology is, and must, be confronted by *all*. Below are several policy recommendations that may serve to counter this long-term risk.

1. One issue that challenges Western nations is adoption of an early intervention policy.

Governments choose to intervene only after a strong legal case has been developed against a suspected terrorist operative.<sup>278</sup> This makes perfect sense in that a stronger case will ensure a longer prison sentence and possibly help discover other suspects involved

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<sup>278</sup> Again, here we see the challenges of how different legal frameworks may inhibit law enforcement officials from acting. For example, when does radical thought become a threat to national security?

in the investigation.<sup>279</sup> Yet a policy of early intervention, followed by some form of an alternative to incarceration, may actually serve to increase the trust between law enforcement and the communities they are sworn to protect allowing for better future cooperation. For example, it is logical to assume that radicalization is most likely to be discovered by those closest to the radicalized individual. If there is trust, these individuals will be more willing to contact the authorities to help “save their son”.<sup>280</sup> These individuals could be concerned family members who are caught between reporting their loved ones (knowing full-well what will transpire in court) or choosing to ignore what they observe.

2. Also, and related to early intervention, governments should consider engaging terrorism suspects in prison in a religious discussion – especially when a suspected terrorist is pending trial. This recommendation may be controversial in some Western democratic/secular states, but the introduction of respected, qualified, and vetted religious clerics can correct violent radical thought and also can contain the issue of prison radicalization.<sup>281</sup> Of course, there are some instances where prisoners will be isolated from the rest of general populations for different reasons (e.g., high risk, long prison sentences etc.), but in other instances, these same terror suspects will be dispersed

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<sup>279</sup> However, policy-makers should also recall that detention does not always ensure *incapacitation* or *deter* potential recruits.

<sup>280</sup> A counter argument here is that reporting these individuals actually helps protect Islam from being hijacked by these radicalized individuals, who through their terrorist acts, are actually hurting rather helping Islam.

<sup>281</sup> Yet in the US for example, several challenges associated with implementing this recommendation have been recognized. For more see the U.S. Department of Justice’s 2004 report titled *A Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ Selection of Muslim Religious Services Providers* at <https://oig.justice.gov/special/0404/final.pdf>.



among them. Here, radical ideas may be reinforced and propagated in an environment that provides a “captive audience”.

3. By developing an alternative to “absolute” and lengthy incarcerations, governments can create an *exit route* for individuals who have travelled to join terrorist groups. Terrorism research has shown that many who have joined these groups are young, immature, and oblivious to the realities of terror group involvement. Numerous cases have surfaced of “foreign fighters” who have become disillusioned by their experiences in far off places. But for those who wish to defect, the choices range from bad to worse. Choosing to return may result in lengthy prison sentences. On the other hand, staying unwillingly, will lead to even more indoctrination in the group’s ideology making terrorist acts such as killing the innocent and suicide operations, upon their return, more acceptable (especially when “promised” by terrorists group leaders so much in the afterlife).
4. The introduction of halfway houses, as a transition point between prison and release, can facilitate better reintegration back into society – gradually and better equipped to deal with the challenges of reentry. This is a logical approach considering that, for example, recent research in the US revealed that most Daesh “foreign fighters” in US custody are relatively young (61% are under 21 years old).<sup>282</sup> Yet despite a federal statute that carries a maximum sentence of 20 years for the “provision of material support” to a terrorist group, a report by the Center for National Security at Fordham Law revealed that between 2014 and 2016, 79 individuals who have been charged with ISIS related

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<sup>282</sup> See report by the Center for National Security at Fordham Law titled *By the numbers: ISIS cases in the United States: March 1, 2014 - June 22, 2015* at <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55dc76f7e4b013c872183fea/t/56b3aae8f8baf3bfd460ecb5/1454615277175/ISIS+Cases+in+the+U.S.+June+2015.pdf>.

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terrorism will *only* serve an average sentence of 9.36 years.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, it appears that most will be released before their 35th birthday.

5. Governments facing a *serious* threat from terrorism should endeavor to establish a centralized body that can efficiently *coordinate* the different efforts needed to counter terrorism – especially in the realm of counter radicalization. As is the case with PRAC, success hinged on the comprehensive nature of this strategy where different ministries developed and implemented different programs to raise awareness, counter violent radical ideologies, and ensure that those released do not return to terrorism. Also, these efforts require a security component to help discover cases of violent radicalization and also assist in monitoring the “progress” of those released. Successful implementation of all these activities requires the establishment of a centralized body to provide guidance, resources, and support.
6. Margaret Thatcher, the former English Prime Minister, famously stated decades ago that the world must find a way to starve terrorists from the “oxygen of publicity on which they depend.”<sup>284</sup> And although freedom of the press precludes governments from interfering with the media’s inherent responsibilities; media outlets should nonetheless recognize that their reporting of terrorist events, especially those of AQ and like-minded groups, might actually be counter productive in the global campaign to defeat them. Media reporting should seek to isolate terrorist groups by accurately highlighting inconsistencies in their beliefs and the barbarism in their actions. It should not use descriptions that are misleading. For example, the use of terms such as “jihadi” or

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<sup>283</sup> See report by the Center for National Security at Fordham Law titled *ISIS Cases in the United States: March 1, 2014-February 12, 2016* at <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/55dc76f7e4b013c872183fea/t/56be4881b654f9af652ea926/1455310977496/ISIS+Statistical+Overview+%26+Names+02-12-16.pdf>.

<sup>284</sup> For more see <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106096>.

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Islamic terrorists<sup>285</sup> may send the wrong message to not only the terrorist operatives themselves (who would relish the term), but also vulnerable populations across the globe who may not know how to react to these labels and actions (e.g., are they Jihadi? Didn't "jihadis" help defeat the former Soviet Union?). As for the second label, research has shown, time and again, that most of those who join these groups have a superficial understanding of Islam (e.g., recent converts, young operatives etc.). How could individuals with a limited understanding of Islam be called an Islamic terrorist (especially when reminded that there are over 1.6 billion Muslims in the world)?<sup>286</sup> Media reporting should portray these operatives as what they truly are: criminal, barbaric, and *deviant*.

### Future Research

Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data has shed much needed light on *how* and *why* the KSA is countering terrorism through the implementation of the PRAC strategy. Yet, as with any research project, knowing more, at times, means that we may actually understand less. For example, as a whole, the PRAC strategy works. However, the PRAC strategy is very broad and composed of different components, with different programs, overlapping at times, and implemented by different entities. Some of these components have different short-term goals (i.e., rehabilitation, counseling, increasing awareness etc.) while others strive to critically undermine the group's ideology over the long run. That said, the overall objective remains one: to counter terrorism through countering the AQ ideology. And although this study was an

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<sup>285</sup> MOI officials explained that AQ operatives actually relish the terrorist label. The term terrorist empowers and gives the individual more self-worth in their *deviant* circles. For example "we terrorized them."

<sup>286</sup> The term *radical Islamist terrorism* has been used more recently. But even here, the label may not accurately capture the truth about what AQ, and AQ affiliated groups. For instance, are all radicals terrorists?

attempt to better understand PRAC, it cannot unequivocally identify which component/program had the most impact in reducing terrorism in the KSA and which had the least. Moreover, ethical and security concerns preclude the creation of a randomized control trial (RCT) to measure what is and is not effective. Still, researchers should revisit the PRAC strategy in order to better understand the following:

- Is there a *real* difference between those who recidivate and those who do not?<sup>287</sup> MOI officials, if they have not already done so, may design experiments and leverage statistical tools to determine if there are significant differences between those who have recidivated and those who have not. Based on the outcomes of this research, MOI officials could then conduct subsequent research to understand if variables such as demographic markers; time in prison, at the MBNCCC, or in the terrorist group, etc.; familial associations with AQ (if present); criminal background; and school performance etc. can “predict” either recidivism or positive reintegration. Could it be that those that who recidivate are incorrigible? This is a logical assumption. For instance, criminological research has shown that chronic offenders such as *life course persistent* offenders (Moffitt, 1993) or psychopaths are resistant to treatment (Hare & Neumann, 2009) and “destined” to commit *deviant* behavior.<sup>288</sup> If this is the case, MOI officials should consider isolating suspected terrorists who display “psychopathic” traits in order not to:
  - 1- Create a toxic rehabilitation environment for others,
  - 2- Allow psychopaths to gain insights on how to beat the “system” (Hare, 1993).

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<sup>287</sup> The author of this study recognizes that measuring recidivism has always presented challenges for researchers. It may be difficult to unambiguously claim that the individual did not recidivate.

<sup>288</sup> The author recognizes that extent research has proposed that psychopaths are ill prepared mentally to be involved in terrorist groups.

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- Not unlike the above, researchers could also focus specifically on PRAC program outcomes. For example, does poor performance in these programs predict future terrorism (i.e., recidivism)? Is there a correlation between the performance of these prisoners in *counseling sessions* (i.e., results of their exams) and later recidivism? Are those who pass certain classes with higher marks at the MBNCCC more or less likely to recidivate? Are the different services provided during the after-care component related to the levels of reengagement with the terrorist groups (i.e., the level of financial support, employment and academic assistance etc.)? These are but a few questions that may help us better understand what, if any, are the strongest predictors of later recidivism as they relate to the myriad of PRAC programs.
- The general prevention component of PRAC is essential to countering the *deviant* ideology, yet it is broad and complex. This project only scratched the surface of a multifaceted effort that involved the whole of the Saudi government. A more focused approach to understanding prevention is needed. This would include addressing the challenge of accurately measuring the success of these efforts. Moreover, how would one define success? Is it a measure of message penetration? Researchers could conduct survey's to assess Saudi attitudes towards AQ and likeminded groups before and after program implementation in order to determine if the long-term (and short-term) goals of these programs have been met.
- Related to terrorism but not specifically to PRAC, interviews with MOI and MBNCCC officials revealed that there have been recent cases of lone wolf attacks by individuals with questionable criminal and psychological backgrounds. Early research has concluded that terrorists do not, in general, suffer from abnormal personality and psychological

traits. One explanation is that terrorist groups vet these potential liabilities before accepting them within their ranks. However, the traditional structure of today's terrorist organizations has changed due to security crackdowns and the existence of social media sites. Could it be that lone wolf terrorists may in fact be more likely to be mentally ill than their predecessors? Researchers may want to reassess the notion that terrorist are not psychologically unstable especially considering that there have been reports of "foreign fighters" who have been described as mentally ill.<sup>289</sup>

- This project has explained the MOI's prevention strategy as it relates to the AQ ideology from taking root in the KSA. As one MOI official remarked, it was important to isolate and marginalize terrorist elements from society. Yet one challenge that may present itself is finding the *right* balance between too much "prevention" and the need for broader society to accept those who have "repented." That is, can too much prevention actually impede these "beneficiaries" from positively reintegrating back into their communities? Researchers should examine this dynamic, especially considering that in the Saudi example, the general prevention component of PRAC appeared to be a very powerful force.
- This study was exploratory in nature and atheoretical in interpretation. However, researchers should explore if PRAC would best fit under the Restorative Justice paradigm. For instance, researchers may seek to incorporate the reintegrative shaming model to explain the reduction in terrorism in the KSA.

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<sup>289</sup> See for example Weenink's (2015) article titled *Behavioral problems and disorders among radicals in police files*.

### **Conclusion**

Indeed, and as one MOI official noted, terrorism is a reality that we must accept today. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that it will not end any time soon. Terrorism, as a tool to achieve political goals, has been occurring for centuries and has touched nearly every corner of the earth. In response, policy-makers and scholars have attempted to better understand *why* and *how* the “average” person becomes a terrorist in order to create policies that ultimately seek to defeat it. Yet decades of research have produced incomplete explanations that have become more abstract and as complicated as terrorism truly is.

The need to counter terrorism is, arguably, more pressing today than it was in the past. For instance, AQ and like-minded groups have deliberately (and successfully) provoked world powers to preemptively intervene militarily in several countries to prevent future terror attacks. However, after more than a decade of relentless global operations, AQ related terrorism has not abated. True, thousands of operatives have been killed or captured yet, and more importantly, the AQ ideology remains. Moreover, for those in custody, indefinite detention may not be legally or morally acceptable. Consequently, many terrorists, if not most, will eventually be released. In recognizing the challenges associated with succeeding in the “GWOT” terrorism, researchers and policy-makers alike began looking at alternatives that may augment the strictly military/security posture used to counter the threat. Here, we observe how countries plagued by AQ related terrorism have begun developing alternative approaches to countering terrorism – namely through de-radicalization/disengagement and counter radicalization programs. In this case, terrorism is, in theory, defeated through countering the ideology that these groups *depend on*. As this project has shown, the MOI, in addition to the hard approach, has been able to neutralize the immediate threat posed by terrorist operatives, and at the same time, undermine the belief system

## COUNTERING TERRORISM IN THE KSA: PRAC STRATEGY

they use to recruit and justify their reprehensible deeds. Unquestionably, the KSA, and more specifically the MOI, have significantly reduced AQ related terrorism in the KSA through implementation of the PRAC strategy.

To the researchers knowledge, this is the first rigorous examination conducted of the MOI PRAC strategy and how it relates to terrorism in the KSA. Indeed, this project has shed much needed light on what the MOI is doing, how it works and why. More than before, we now know that PRAC includes a *counseling* component that addresses prison radicalization and at-risk family containment. Should PCRAC better describe the MOI strategy? This study also revealed that the PRAC strategy targets the families of AQ operatives killed or in hiding. This is significant when considering that there have been many cases of relatives of killed AQ operatives joining the group for, perhaps, avenging the death of their loved one. Additionally, we now appreciate that PRAC has both a *specific* and a *general* prevention component.

Moreover, questions surrounding the efficacy of these efforts have been answered. For example, there have been several arguments that the program has only succeeded with reintegrating “less dangerous” AQ operatives. This argument is myopic. Terrorist leaders do not become dangerous overnight. Left to their own devices, this “sympathizer” may, as history has shown, become a terror group leader. For instance, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, AQ’s head; Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the former head of AQ in Iraq; ISIL’s leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi; and Abu Mohammed Al-Jawlani, the leader of the AQ affiliated Jabhat Al-Nusra – the list goes on. These individuals were released from prison by their respected governments because they are not “dangerous” terrorists. Thus, *early intervention* is important to stop the further radicalization of these individuals. Lastly, an argument has been made that the PRAC strategy is too costly. This may appear true, yet a recent article following the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris explains



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that “full scale surveillance” of just *one* terrorism suspect released from prison would cost nearly 4.5 million US dollars (Stewart & Mueller, 2015).<sup>290</sup>

Despite the challenges inherent in terrorism research and policy formulation surrounding terrorism, this project, in addition, to providing deeper knowledge of the PRAC strategy, has presented several policy recommendations that may help other governments counter AQ related threats. Some of these may be possible in Western liberal democracies while others not so. For example, is facilitating more religious knowledge a sound policy recommendation when considering that the research has shown that AQ operatives lack a basic understanding of Islam? Probably not. Still, there are important takeaways. First, the hard approach *alone* will not work over the long run – *deviant* ideas must be countered with non-deviant ones. Also, programs and projects administered in prisons and halfway houses, and those implemented across society, must be comprehensive and based on a clear understanding of the threat/case in order to administer the proper treatments. These efforts must be *flexible* and *adaptive* to meet the changing nature of the threat they face. By developing and implementing these *alternative approaches*, governments are countering, among other things, AQ propaganda aimed at their sympathizers that alleges neglect and heavy handedness by government forces. Furthermore, these approaches may assist in creating better *trust* between governments and the communities AQ recruits from. Lastly, our definitions of success should be adjusted. For example, the MOI, by adopting this approach, has deftly created a situation where recidivism is, arguably, a win-win outcome. For those who recidivate, society may very well reject them viewing them as undeserving deviants who should

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<sup>290</sup> Housing terrorism suspects is also costly. Representative Adam Smith of Washington, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights that it costs US taxpayers 2.7 million US dollars annually to house a terrorist suspect at Guantanamo Bay. For more see <http://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/7-24-13SmithTestimony.pdf>.

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not have been given a second chance. As for those that have positively reintegrated, a story of success has been created.

**Appendix A**

**Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study  
For a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of New Haven**

**Title of Study:**

Countering Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:  
An Examination of the Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) Strategy

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by PhD. candidate Bandar Alsubaie. The purpose of this research is to explore the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) experience in countering the Al-Qaida (AQ) threat. Specifically, the current study seeks to better understand the MOI's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-Care (PRAC) strategy. To achieve this, a mixed-method approach will be adopted in which unstructured interviews are requested with MOI officials and PRAC strategy implementers in order to better understand how the MOI, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, are able to reduce terrorism within it.

There are no known risks associated with this research. In fact, the study is expected to provide beneficial results, not only for the MOI, but also for other countries facing an AQ or an AQ related threat. By understanding how the MOI manages terrorist suspects in their custody, valuable recommendations can be made to policy-makers and academics alike who are grappling with alternative ways to tackle old and new terrorist threats.

As a participant in this study, I will do everything I can to ensure your privacy. The protection of your identity will be of the utmost importance. Furthermore, I should make clear that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time during the interview. Moreover, you will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or withdraw from this study.

If you have any questions or concerns in respect to this study or if any problems should arise, please contact Bandar Alsubaie at the University of New Haven University at 203-988-3116. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of New Haven at 1-800-342-5864.

**Consent:**

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.**

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

**Appendix B (MOI officials/policy-makers)**

Reference number:

Countering Terrorism in the KSA:

An Examination of the Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy

Name:

Title:

Date:

Location:

Q1: What were the threats facing the KSA before the development of PRAC?

Q2: Why was there a need to develop this strategy? What other alternatives did the MOI have at its disposal?

Q3: How does the MOI define success for this strategy? Regarding the MBNCCC, is the reduction of recidivism the only goal? If, so how does the MOI measure recidivism? Also, what safeguards are in place to prevent MBNCCC program participants from recidivating?

Q4: How important is the role of the family in countering terrorism? Why?

Q5: What is the organizational structure of PRAC? How are decisions made in respect to the strategic vision of the approach?

Q6: Based on the KSA's experience in countering AQ and its affiliated groups, what has MOI learned about involvement in terrorism? Or the process of radicalization?

Q7: What have been the challenges – if any – in developing this strategy? In implementing it?

Q8: How does the MOI see the future of the PRAC strategy?

Q9: Is the PRAC strategy generalizable to other nations who face a similar threat?

Q10: What lessons learned – in general – can the MOI share with other countries that face a similar threat?

Q11: What other counterterrorism measures has the MOI, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, adopted to address the AQ terrorist threat?

**Appendix C (MOI officials/CT)**

Reference number:

Countering Terrorism in the KSA:  
An Examination of the Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy

Name: Title:

Date: Location:

Q1: What were the threats facing the KSA after the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks?

Q2: What were some of major challenges facing the MOI in dealing with AQ since then?

Q3: Can you describe who these AQ operatives were? Were they “Afghan veterans”, “home-grown” terrorists, the “new wave” of Afghan “fighters” etc.?

Q4: What has the KSA, and more specifically the MOI, learned from its experience in countering AQ?

Q5: What impact has the PRAC strategy had in respect to the MOI’s broader counterterrorism campaign?

Q6: What are the future threats facing the kingdoms with respect to terrorism?

**Appendix D (PRAC strategy implementers)**

Reference number:

Countering Terrorism in KSA:

An Examination of the Prevention, Rehabilitation and After-Care (PRAC) strategy

Name:

Title:

Date:

locations:

Q1: When, approximately, did the MOI begin implementation of the strategy? Why?

Q2: Who are the program participants? What were their charges? How long do they stay in the program?

Q3: When does the PRAC strategy begin? Where does the program take place?

Q4: Who are the program staff? What qualifications does the program seek from its staff?

Q5: What are the different components of the strategy? Have they changed? If so, why?

Q6: What program components are considered critical in the rehabilitation strategy of the participant?

Q7: How do program staff know if the program participant is ready for release?

Q8: When the program participant is released, what measures are taken to ensure that recidivism is mitigated?

Q9: How does the program staff view see success? How is it measured?

**Appendix E (IRB approval)**



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FOR THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Date: June 25, 2015

To: Dr. Christopher Sedelmaier and Mr. B. Alsubaie *AEG*  
From: Alexandria Guzmán, IRB Chair

Proposal Title: Countering Terrorism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Examination of the Prevention, Rehabilitation, and After-care (PRAC) Program

Review by:                      Committee \_\_\_\_\_                      Expedited Procedure   AEG X  

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The IRB has approved the proposed use of human participants in this project.

  X   The proposal is approved as submitted.

Project is **EXEMPT under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(3):**

*Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if:*  
*(i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.*

\_\_\_\_\_ The proposal is approved with the following stipulations/elaborations.  
Two copies of this report are enclosed. If you agree to the condition(s) of approval, please sign one copy and return it to me. If the condition(s) of approval are not clear or are unacceptable to you, please contact me.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Your study is exempt from further IRB review. Of course, if the research procedures are altered from the description in the proposal reviewed, you should submit a revised proposal. Also, if any problems arise concerning the welfare of subjects in the projects, please contact me immediately.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

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