



Peace and Security Summit

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WORKING GROUP: De-radicalisation Programmes: Leaving Terrorism Behind?

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Session I: Summary

Many nations have developed programmes to counter radicalisation. What factors make successful de-radicalisation programmes? Is the timing of these programmes important? Should these programmes aim at disengagement, or should they focus on removing radical ideology? The working group started first by discussing the factors which led many individuals to leave violent extremism behind – and even turn against their former colleagues – and then moved on to discuss factors that encouraged organisations, as opposed to individuals, to disengage from violent extremism and give up their weapons in return for conciliation with their states and society. Within these processes, special attention has been paid to the particular factors that led to de-radicalisation of both individuals and organisations, and to prevent them from returning to a life of violent extremism. One theme that emerged from this discussion is the possibility that some graduates of such programmes, despite becoming disengaged from political violence, may still spread views that drive others to engage in violence, or simply adjust their roles from fighters to propagandists. This raises questions regarding protections for free speech.

While discussing the strategies that have contributed to successful de-radicalisation programmes, the working group referred to such strategies as delegitimising leadership in centralised groups, using selective state repression, providing a third party non-violent interaction to influence world views, and providing inducements to help people escape the financial pressures that may contribute to radicalisation. This group also investigated the level of focus for successful de-radicalisation programmes and whether they should be tailored on an individual, village or national basis.

Session 2: Summary

This session focused on the elements and components of successful de-radicalisation programmes. The working group debated the importance of spiritual and religious rehabilitation programmes within broader de-radicalisation operations. It was argued that certain countries face different radicalisation problems and that, while these rehabilitation efforts were helpful in general, they require different focus, depending on the causes of radicalisation. In more secular societies and groups, de-radicalisation should focus more on spiritual rather than religious dialogue, which is more suitable for more religious societies and groups. Using a religious approach to carry out a dialogue with a secular group might simply mean nothing to them. On the contrary, it adds to the problem. In this session, it was also argued that an individualistic approach to this problem is more useful in addressing these issues. It was pointed out that hard-core detainees who are committed to the religious ideology are generally more susceptible to this form of rehabilitation because they are more opinionated, psychologically stronger, and are usually more disciplined than the weaker ones who often seek leaders to follow and make decisions on their behalf. Therefore those who are ideologically less involved and have a more political motive for radicalisation are more difficult to de-radicalise. Other rehabilitation techniques included psychological rehabilitation, educational rehabilitation, family rehabilitation, recreational rehabilitation, historical rehabilitation, and creative arts.

This working group also debated the effect of timing for rehabilitation programmes and whether nations must wait for organisations to be soundly defeated and for the hopelessness of the cause to set in. There was disagreement on this issue since it requires a degree of centralisation to groups for it to be targeted. This working group also discussed the difficulty of re-introducing detainees into society. For example, this might lead to hostility against an individual who had caused damage to his/her own society or simply place him/her in harm's way because of an existing conflict. Following on from this, there was a general consensus that a successful de-radicalisation programme must be able to build trust between detainees and prison authorities and officers. But there was disagreement on the relationship between successful de-radicalisation and the role of the external or global environment.

Session 3- Summary:

The third session focused on methodologies, research designs, and measures whereby de-radicalisation programmes could be assessed and evaluated. The focus of the group soon shifted to the challenges faced in the implementation of these methods. The issue of using recidivism as a measure was challenged as not directly applicable; a programme can eliminate radicalisation, but once a detainee leaves they could become re-radicalised again for reasons that are more connected to their new environment after release. Also debated was the issue of radicalism vs. fundamentalism. The working group attempted to determine which one of these definitions best described the problems these de-radicalisation programmes address. The debate centred on fundamentalism and non-violent versions of radicalism that may be beneficial to the growth of democratic societies, versus

radicalism and fundamentalism which locks people into a distorted world view and encourages violent action. The issue of generalising from one programme to another was also raised. It was agreed that the factors which make for success in a given programme are context-specific, even though the general principles that underlie successful de-radicalisation may be common. The challenge therefore is to separate the general from the specific, perhaps through comparative analysis of different programmes.

The group then examined U.S. policies against domestic terrorism and discussed their effect on the narrative of extremist groups. It was advanced that the U.S. Government views the issues through the separate prisms of domestic and international politics, even though it is very difficult to separate these two concerns in practice. Members of the working group regarded this bureaucratic reality as detrimental to U.S. interests since cases of domestic terrorism were often based on a narrative of justification which was international in scope. The group then discussed how the U.S. can deal with distortions in the perception of U.S. policies as portrayed in some foreign media. The case of Indonesia was examined since the Bali bombings, though first portrayed as a U.S. or Western plot in some quarters, were exposed as domestic terrorist acts after the development of Indonesian democracy and Indonesian free press.

Overall Recommendations:

De-radicalisation can work but – for it to be successful in achieving its goals – certain conditions are required, including: a politically strong state, a developmentally strong state, dynamic civil society, strong family support and an after-release programme; building trust and facilitating interaction inside and outside the prison environment with similar minded groups and individuals, who denounce violent and radical ideologies and promote more peaceful approaches to political problems.