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Best Practices in the Assessment, Intervention and Management of Radicalized Offenders:

*Proceedings from the International Roundtable and
Mini-Symposium on Radicalized Offenders*

*December 2 - 4, 2014
Ottawa, Ontario*

Background

The Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) Research Branch is currently taking part in a three-year research initiative, *Mitigating the Threat Posed by Violent Extremist Offenders in Correctional Institutions and Communities*. This initiative is funded by Defence Research and Development Canada's (DRDC) Centre for Security Science (SSC).

As part of this multi-year initiative, the Research Branch initiated and hosted a three-day event on radicalized offenders. The event began with a two-day international roundtable that brought together eight international experts with significant knowledge and experience in the management of extremist offenders in a correctional setting. This document provides a summary of the proceedings from these first two days of discussion.

Purpose

The objective of the International Roundtable was to examine international best practices in managing radicalized offenders in such a way as to assist CSC in developing population management guidelines in areas such as accommodation, offender assessment, and staff training. In addition to information gleaned from other initiatives undertaken in the multi-year research project, this accumulated and analyzed knowledge will be used to inform CSC's policies and operations concerning radicalized offenders.

Overview

The event was attended by expert delegates from the participant countries of the United States, England, New Zealand, Israel, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Canada as well as by three academics with expertise in violent extremism. In addition, observers from several Public Safety partners (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Defence Research and Development Canada, Public Safety Canada, Ottawa Police Service) were invited to attend. Senior CSC executives and Research Branch project staff were also in attendance.

The event began with brief introductory presentations from each of the international delegates, generally outlining their nation's correctional system, their experience with the management of radicalized offenders, and the issues/challenges that they were facing to date. Following this, guided roundtable discussions were held, targeting six main areas of discussion: accommodation strategies; population management; assessment and risk estimation; recruitment and susceptibility; programs, treatments, and interventions; and community management.

Overarching Themes

The presentations provided by the international delegates illustrated the wide variation in populations, management strategies, and experiences internationally. These country-based outlines emphasized how differences in context led to differences in practice, a theme which set the tone for the remainder of the meeting and enabled open and frank discussion within a protected environment. Across the discussions and presentations in this event, a number of high-level, over-arching themes emerged:

- The effective management of radicalized offenders requires an international, national, and multi-systemic approach to the collaborative, open, and reciprocal sharing of intelligence information at all points of offender management.
- The provision of training to all staff is crucial for the effective management of radicalized offenders. Staff in all positions should be trained on what radicalization is, when it is problematic, how to identify it, and what their responsibilities are in terms of reporting and intervention.
- More evidence/research is required in a number of areas surrounding radicalized offenders, including effectiveness of assessments and interventions, community reintegration and reoffending, and understanding resilience in the face of a radicalizing influence.

More specific themes and best practices also emerged during the roundtable discussions.

Discussion Topic 1: Accommodation Strategies

Roundtable discussions around accommodation strategies focused on the use of the concentration and dispersion approaches, which presented both benefits and risks (i.e. concentration can create a “critical mass” but may prevent “contagion” whereas dispersion can result in the reverse). From the perspective of security intelligence, dispersion is the preference as it allows for better surveillance.

It was critical that accommodation strategies remain fluid and dynamic, considering the types of radicalized offenders present in the population as well as the presence of leaders and proselytizers. In discussing the methods of detecting and managing charismatic leaders, radical proselytizers, and recruiters, it was suggested that prison officials should be aware of those who present themselves as spokesmen for the group and those that prepare the words for others to speak. Prison staff should also determine which individuals others appear to defer or cater to. If an individual appears to be problematic in this capacity, it may be advisable to place them on units where their direct influence would be limited. It is essential to note however, that leadership in and of itself is not necessarily problematic; rather it is essential to determine the underlying intentions and messaging of leaders.

In order to minimize the perception of a 'special status' among radicalized offenders, delegates suggested some strategies and approaches such as maintaining a sufficient level of direct contact between offender and staff, closely monitoring their involvement with groups within the prison, treating them as ordinary criminals and encouraging communal prayer so that interactions could be observed.

In all decisions regarding accommodation, it is essential that the system continues to respond to offender needs as much as possible.

Lessons Learned/Good Practices:

- Accommodation strategies must be dynamic in nature and responsive to changing groups and structures. While isolation and integration are commonly used, the identification and control of key charismatic leaders is essential to controlling radical activity in institutional settings.
- Accommodation strategies must remain flexible and respond to the types offenders being dealt with, the numbers being dealt with, and how the radicalized offender profile changes over time. A static approach, unaware of individual institutional context and population differences, would generally be unsound.

Discussion Topic 2: Population Management

The focus of the discussion on population management was on intelligence gathering and information sharing. There was a general consensus that information flow goes from correctional systems to other criminal justice partners but that little is shared in return. Furthermore, there was agreement that a dedicated security intelligence function within the correctional agency is an absolute necessity. Cross-appointed security liaison officers to facilitate transmission of intelligence information from one agency to another may be an effectual practice. In order to assist in information sharing, there is a need for official agreements or MOU's between agencies to facilitate information transfer among criminal justice agencies. Another useful practice adopted by several countries is to provide frequent security intelligence briefs and awareness bulletins to staff and criminal justice partners. All delegates emphasized that staff training at all levels is critical to allow for relevant intelligence gathering.

Lessons Learned/Good Practices:

- The effective management of radicalized offenders requires an international, national, and multi-systemic approach to the collaborative, open, and reciprocal sharing of intelligence information at all points of offender management (pre-sentence, incarceration, and through release).

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- Information sharing between agencies has to be approached as a specific goal with agreements and paperwork to reinforce these agreements towards practice. Staff training, for all levels, is essential to increase and maintain the flow of useful information to corrections management and hence on to other criminal justice partners.

Discussion Topic 3: Assessment and Risk Estimation

The discussion in this regard was centralized on the use of a specialized assessment instruments vs. the application of standard (or traditional) offender assessments for the radicalized offender population. Most nations did not use a specialized risk assessment but focused instead on criminal behaviour, however at least one nation had developed a specific risk assessment for their radicalized offender population as part of an overarching population management strategy targeted for this group.

Challenges in this area included the ability or inability to quantify a belief or ideology, the implications for intervention options if specialized assessments were developed, and the inability to reliably validate such assessments due to a low base rate of occurrence. Those who used standard offender assessments for their radicalized offender population questioned whether they were suited to measure the unique needs of a radicalized population, but due to data limitations, had no evidence to the contrary that they were in fact not effective.

Lessons Learned/Good Practices:

- Understanding the unique needs of radicalized offenders is key in their effective management in an institutional setting. Approaches to determining needs vary (specialized assessments for radicalized offenders, standard assessments for all offenders, one-on-one interaction), however it is clear that more work is required to determine the applicability, reliability, and validity of these approaches for radicalized offenders.
- Enriching our collective understanding of the needs and motivations of violent extremist offenders will assist in our ability to determine if specialized risk assessment tools are required or if traditional assessment tools for general offender populations are sufficient.

Discussion Topic 4: Recruitment and Susceptibility

It was noted that while some do take up radical causes while in the institution, actual “radicalization” was a low base rate event. Delegates discussed what made certain offenders more susceptible to taking up a radical ideology. Important in this discussion was the idea of “identity” - both socially in general, and within the prison environment specifically – and the fact that the search for an identity may bring individuals to a radical mindset.

Other factors that might make an offender susceptible included the need to belong, the desire to follow a “trend”, the need to have influence over their surroundings, and having rage or dispositional disorders. Often placing these types of offenders with other persons who are positive influences and involving pro-social family members were seen as opportunities to do a “pre-emptive strike” against radicalization.

Lessons Learned/Good Practices:

- Identity and/or self-perception may well be weak, non-existent, or at least confused when they enter prison. Given that all persons need an identity; there is a real opportunity to head off prison radicalization if attractive alternative identities are presented. This could lead to the adoption of a positive identity, thereby preventing a susceptible person from becoming radicalized.
- Efforts at preventing radicalization within correctional institutions should capitalize on recent, international research in order to identify and counter radicalization among offender populations.

Discussion Topic 5: Programs, Treatments, and Interventions

The consensus in the group was that the focus of interventions should be on disengagement rather than de-radicalization. De-radicalization, has to do with a movement away from ideology while disengagement is a movement away from behaviour. Delegates discussed and emphasized the importance of developing trusting personal relationships with all offenders (including radicalized offenders), which required a respect for their personal ideologies but a desire to disengage them from violent actions.

Specialized programs, treatments and interventions for radicalized offenders were not common among jurisdictions. For those that have them, the focus tends to be on disengagement and identity. Offender needs (such as identity needs) were seen as an opening to address behaviour change – effective interventions would find the drivers for their need to belong and provide non-criminal substitutes.

Lesson Learned/Good Practice:

- The focus for interventions for radicalized offenders should be on disengagement (from the violent behaviour) rather than de-radicalization (changing of the ideological thought patterns). Effective disengagement requires an understanding of the factors that motivate radicals to violent action.

Discussion Topic 6: Community Management

There was not a significant amount of experience in this area across nations represented, as radicalized (i.e. terrorist convicted) offenders have to date, been issued lengthy sentences. However, those that had experience in managing radicalized offenders in the community spoke to additional conditions or restrictions placed upon radicalized offenders (e.g., no fly restrictions, residency requirements, limited/no access to internet/mobile phones, financial disclosures, etc.), and the application of a higher level of monitoring for these offenders (e.g., increased frequency of in person contact including home visits, direct contact with immediate collateral contacts, etc.). Notification of release to partner agencies (and sometimes the public) upon planned release of these offenders was noted, and several countries mentioned repatriating offenders to their country of origin once released to the community.

It was indicated by several delegates that when these individuals are released, if they have retained their radical ideologies, they will often change their behaviours from violent acts to those that are not necessarily illegal but are on the cusp (e.g., fund-raising, political activities).

Lesson Learned/Good Practice:

- The effective management of offenders in the community requires a multi-agency, collaborative approach wherein notification and information sharing are key elements.

Event Wrap-Up

This report provides a high-level overview of a number of good practices that were identified in the effective management of radicalized offenders in a correctional setting. They do not however, accurately capture the breadth and depth of the dialogue nor the genuine passion exhibited by each and every participant. An important underlying message became quite evident early on in the proceedings, and was reiterated throughout: despite differences in severity and magnitude, all nations are challenged by this issue.

The nations present at the event had varied experiences which allowed for fruitful and candid discussion on ways forward. In many respects, those nations with the greatest exposure to security issues related to prison radicalization and terrorist offender management were the best positioned to shed light on those approaches they have found most effective, and consequently those they had not.

The Roundtable reinforced that voicing collective concerns was both unifying and empowering. Participants unanimously agreed that effecting change in the area of radicalized offender management can only be achieved through enhanced information exchange and international collaboration. It is important to note, however, that the

identified good practices are not necessarily applicable to all nations; in other words, a one size fits all approach or strategy is not realistic or recommended. Resolution in the areas of assessment, prevention and intervention need be tailored to the unique needs of each nation and in some cases, each offender.

CSC's Roundtable and Mini-Symposium on Best Practices in the Assessment, Intervention and Management of Radicalized Offenders demonstrated the importance of international sharing of information and dialogue on this important topic. The primary objective - to generate a number of sound approaches and operational practices in the area of radicalized offender management - was achieved. More importantly, a strong international consortium for future collaboration and support was established.