

Developing a Reintegration Support Mechanism for US Person Foreign Terrorist Fighter Family Members Returning from Syria and Iraq

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than three years have passed since the territorial collapse of the Islamic State, and the United States' Government (USG) still lacks a deliberate approach to repatriate and reintegrate US Person (USPER)¹ family members of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF)² upon their return from detention centers in Syria and Iraq. As a result, the humanitarian needs of these at-risk individuals as well as the potential security threat they pose remains largely ignored.

Between 2011 and 2018, nearly 300 USPERs traveled to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq. While many of these individuals subsequently died in the corresponding violence, a small number – mainly consisting of non-criminally charged women and children – survived and currently reside within overcrowded detention facilities controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces or the Government of Iraq. Exposed to long-term trauma, violence, and anti-Western ideology, these USPER women and minors – possessing a legal 'right to return' – are eligible for direct reinsertion into local communities in the United States following repatriation.

At present, the US repatriation process places the responsibility for providing social and rehabilitation services for individuals not facing criminal prosecution primarily upon local and state institutions. However, many of these institutions lack the necessary funds and physical resources to assist existing marginalized local populations let alone traumatized and potentially radicalized individuals returning from a conflict zone. Without a dedicated national-level support mechanism to aid at-risk returnees, the USG places not only their physical and mental well-being and chances for successful societal reintegration in peril, but public safety as well.

The analysis of rehabilitation and reintegration programs enacted by foreign partner countries³ however provides a blueprint for the development of a voluntary reintegration mechanism. Specifically, the establishment of a federally funded, short-term residential 'transition center,' staffed by medical, social service, and religious experts, to provide a centralized intake point for these returning USPERs. In addition to delivering immediate medical and mental health care, the center's specialists would conduct periodic risk assessments, initiate personalized counseling plans, and assess the types of specialized services needed by each individual. Complementing the center would be a (1) voluntary cooperation agreement that acts as a mutual understanding between the returnees and USG regarding services offered as well as (2) a reintegration online portal and national telephone hotline for long-term post-transition

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term USPER refers to those individuals who are permitted to enter the United States without a visa. This includes native-born citizens, naturalized/derived citizens, and legal permanent residents.

² The term foreign fighter or foreign terrorist fighter refers to an individual "who travel[ed] to a state other than their own to join an illicit group and perpetrate or assist in terrorist attacks or armed conflict." [Byman, Daniel. *Road Warriors: Foreign Fighters in the Armies of the Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7.]

³ The foreign partner countries include: Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Germany, and Denmark.

support. Through the portal and hotline, an USPER returnee or their caregivers would possess 24-hour access to counselors or case workers at the center. The counselor and case worker staff would in turn administer aftercare assistance – to include locating medical care/counseling, vocational training opportunities, or social services near the returnee’s permanent place of residence.

In addition to the transition center, the establishment of an official position of Returnee Coordinator within the USG structure permits a centralized approach to the overall management and organization of the repatriation and reintegration efforts associated with USPER FTF family members – to include those returning from future conflicts. Such a position would also result in a streamlined and coordinated process across governmental agencies and non-governmental actors at all levels.

By implementing these recommendations, the USG would establish a means to address both the specific humanitarian needs of the returning USPERs while also reducing the potential threat these individuals could pose to national security.

KEY TERMS

The following key terms, used throughout this document, require further clarification or definition: radicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, deradicalization, reintegration, recidivism, and re-engagement:

‘Radicalization’ refers to the process through which an individual develops an increasingly extreme set of beliefs, emotions, and behaviors.^{4 5} This process may include a willingness to support, facilitate, or engage in violent activities in the furtherance of a terrorist cause.^{6 7}

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “E4J University Module Series: Counter-Terrorism.” *United Nations* (July 2018). <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html>

⁵ Trip, Simona, Carmen Hortensia Bora, Mihai Marian, Angelica Halmajan, and Marius Ioan Drugas. “Psychological Mechanisms Involved in Radicalization and Extremism. A Rational Emotive Behavioral Conceptualization.” *Frontiers in Psychology* (March 2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00437>

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “E4J University Module Series.”

⁷ Clutterbuck, Lindsay. “Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits.” *The Middle East Institute* (June 2015). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-and-counterterrorism-perspective-challenges-and-benefits>

The term ‘disengagement’ refers to the process of behavioral change most often resulting from a reduction or a cessation of violent participation within a group or movement.^{8 9} Disengagement does not necessarily indicate a change in an individual’s adherence to an ideology.

The term ‘rehabilitation’ pertains to the process of addressing an individual’s behaviors, mental health, social functioning, education level, and employable skills that might otherwise interfere with a return to society.^{10 11} Rehabilitation may also include a deradicalization component.

‘Deradicalization’ entails “*the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity.*”¹²

In studies concerning violent conflicts, terrorism, or criminal justice matters, the term ‘reintegration’ frequently encompasses (1) the individual’s initial reinsertion or resettlement into a community as well as (2) their long-term transition to civilian life.¹³ However, in order to differentiate between these two distinct stages more easily, this document refers the former as the *reinsertion phase* and the later as *reintegration phase*. Disengagement and rehabilitation closely intertwine with successful societal reintegration.¹⁴

‘Recidivism’ refers an individual’s return to terrorism-related activities following a period of detention or incarceration; whilst ‘re-engagement’ signifies an individual’s return to

⁸ Horgan, John, and Kurt Braddock. “Assessing the Effectiveness of Current De-Radicalization Initiatives and Identifying Implications for the Development of U.S.-Based Initiatives in Multiple Settings: Final Report to Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.” *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*, University of Maryland (September 2009). https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/De-radicalization%20Programs%20Final%20Report.pdf

⁹ Costa, Vitor, Pedro Liberado, Graca Esgalhado, Ana Isabel Cunha, and Pedro das Neves. “One Size Does Not Fit All: Exploring the Characteristics of Exit Programmes in Europe.” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 28 (Fall 2021). <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/487/297>

¹⁰ National Institute of Justice. “Practice Profile: Rehabilitation Programs for Adult Offenders.” *Office of Justice Programs, United States Department of Justice* (Accessed on February 20, 2022). <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedpractices/101#pdf>

¹¹ Benson, Etienne. “Rehabilitate or punish?” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, vol. 34, no. 7 (July/August 2003). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug03/rehab>

¹² Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness.”

¹³ Mazurana, Dyan, and Khristopher Carlson. “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone.” *Hunt Alternatives Fund* (January 2004).

https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/PartPPGIssueDisp_CombatToCommuntiy_WomenWageP_eace_2004.pdf

¹⁴ Costa, Liberado, Esgalhado, Cunha, and Neves, “One Size Does Not Fit All.”

terrorism-related activities following a period of disengagement for any reason.¹⁵ Successful reintegration significantly contributes to reducing the probability of recidivism amongst repatriated women and minors while also mitigating the risk of additional radicalization individuals within the community radicalizing.¹⁶

BACKGROUND

SYRIA, IRAQ, AND THE ISLAMIC STATE

The civil wars in Syria and Iraq, followed by the establishment of the Islamic State in 2014, acted as ideological catalyst for action¹⁷ for a generation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from across the globe. According to the Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, more than 40,000 individuals from 110 countries, including from the United States, traveled to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq¹⁸ between the years of 2011¹⁹ and 2018.²⁰ These ‘travelers’ not only included male fighters, but also women and children – some of whom voluntarily sought to join the conflict, while others were taken against their will.^{21 22 23 24 25}

¹⁵ Altier, Mary Beth, John Horgan, and Christian Thoroughgood. “Returning to the Fight: What the Literature on Criminal Recidivism Can Contribute to our Understanding of Terrorist Recidivism.” *Pennsylvania State University* (2008). https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/942_OPSR_TP_Returning-to-Fight_Literature-Review_508.pdf

¹⁶ Holmer, Georgia, and Adrian Shtumi. “Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative.” *United States Institute of Peace* (March 2017). <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/sr402-returning-foreign-fighters-and-the-reintegration-imperative.pdf>

¹⁷ Dawson, Lorne L. “A Comparative Analysis of the Data on Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Who Went and Why?” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* (February 2021). <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/02/Dawson-Comparative-Analysis-FINAL-1.pdf>

¹⁸ United Nations Security Council. “Greater Cooperation Needed to Tackle Danger Posed by Returning Foreign Fighters, Head of Counter-Terrorism Office Tells Security Council.” *United Nations, 8116th Meeting of the Security Council* (November 2017). <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13097.doc.htm>

¹⁹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander, Seamus Hughes, and Bennett Clifford. “The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq.” *Program of Extremism, The George Washington University* (February 2018). <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>

²⁰ Glenn, Cameron, Mattison Rowan, John Caves, and Garrett Nada. “Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State.” *Wilson Center* (October 2019). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

²¹ Wood, Graeme. “From the Islamic State to Suburban Texas.” *The Atlantic* (November 2017). <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/from-isis-to-suburban-texas/544910/>

²² Wood, Graeme. “The American Climbing the Ranks of ISIS.” *The Atlantic* (March 2017). <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/03/the-american-leader-in-the-islamic-state/510872/>

²³ Flores, Rosa. “A US father fears for his young children trapped in Syria.” *CNN* (November 2019). <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/06/us/miami-father-looks-for-children-in-syria/index.html>

²⁴ United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, “Criminal Complaint: United States of America v. Jihad Muhammad Ali.” *United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida* (December 2019). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1322536/download>

²⁵ United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, “Criminal Complaint: United States of America v. Emraan Ali.” *United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida* (December 2019). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1322531/download>

Following substantial territorial gains in Iraq and Syria between 2013 and early-2014, the self-proclaimed emir of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of a caliphate named the ‘*Islamic State*’ on June 29, 2014.²⁶ The Islamic State reached the height of its expansion in late-2014 and early-2015 when it controlled more than 38,000 square miles, a physical territory containing approximately ten to eleven million people.^{27 28}

In August 2014, US-led coalition forces launched a counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq that by late September 2014 expanded into Syria.²⁹ As multiple coalition partners³⁰ conducted airstrikes against Islamic State targets, Peshmerga (Iraqi-Kurds) fighters, Iraqi government forces, as well as Syrian elements that later joined to form the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)³¹ undertook ground offensives.^{32 33} By 2017, the Islamic State had lost approximately 95 percent of its physical territory³⁴ to US-supported coalition forces. In July 2017, Iraqi Special Forces and Iraqi Kurdistan regional forces recaptured Mosul, Iraq;³⁵ and in October 2017, SDF liberated Raqqah, Syria.³⁶ On March 23, 2019, SDF captured the Syrian city of Baghuz, the last of the Islamic State-controlled strongholds.³⁷

During the final months before the territorial defeat of the Islamic State in 2019, US-supported coalition forces in Iraq and Syria encircled ISIS elements and drove them into the

²⁶ Glenn, Rowan, Caves, and Nada, “Timeline.”

²⁷ BBC. “Islamic State and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps.” *BBC News* (March 2018). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>

²⁸ RAND Corporation. “Islamic State Control of People Down 83% in Iraq and 56% in Syria from Peak Levels.” *RAND Office of Media Relations, The RAND Corporation* (April 2017). <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2017/04/20.html>

²⁹ Glenn, Rowan, Caves, and Nada, “Timeline.”

³⁰ Coalition partners who conducted airstrikes in either Iraq or Syria included: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States. [United States Central Command. “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq.” *United States Department of Defense* (April 2016). <https://dod.defense.gov/OIR/Airstrikes/>]

³¹ Founded in 2015, the SDF is an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias seeking self-rule in northeastern Syria. In 2017, the United States began providing military training and supporting the SDF as a means to counter the Islamic State in Syria. [Al Jazeera. “Who are the Syrian Democratic Forces?” *Al Jazeera* (October 2019). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/15/who-are-the-syrian-democratic-forces>]

³² BBC. “Profile: Who are the Peshmerga?” *BBC News* (August 2014). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28738975>

³³ Glenn, Rowan, Caves, and Nada, “Timeline.”

³⁴ Glenn, Rowan, Caves, and Nada, “Timeline.”

³⁵ BBC. “How the battle for Mosul unfolded.” *BBC News* (July 2017). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37702442>

³⁶ Sherlock, Ruth, Lama Al-Arian, and Kamiran Sadoun. “This is Not Liberation: Life in the Rubble of Raqqah, Syria.” *National Public Radio* (October 2018). <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/26/658142688/u-s-plan-to-stabilize-raqqah-and-stop-return-of-isis-doesnt-appear-to-be-working>

³⁷ BBC. “Islamic State group defeated as final territory lost, US-backed forces say.” *BBC News* (March 2019). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47678157>

Middle Euphrates River Valley region along the Syrian border with Iraq.³⁸ Facing food shortages and fear of death from fighting, thousands of women and young children surrendered to SDF units and were ultimately relocated to SDF-administered internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Syria.³⁹ Adult males and teenage boys who surrendered were placed into SDF-controlled prisons in Syria.⁴⁰

THE DETENTION CENTERS – IDP CAMPS AND PRISONS

As of late 2020, approximately 14 SDF detention centers – comprising IDP camps and prison facilities⁴¹ – held between 8,000 and 9,000 ISIS male detainees, of which approximately 2,000 were identified as FTFs.⁴² The Wilson Center estimated the Iraqi prison system also housed several thousands⁴³ of ISIS fighters and a publicly undisclosed number of FTFs.⁴⁴ Despite requests from both the SDF and Iraqi government for nations to repatriate their FTFs, only a few hundred FTFs have been repatriated to date.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ Some countries cite a revocation of citizenship, lack of domestic support, inadequate prosecution options, or threats to national security as the reason for leaving these FTFs in SDF or Iraqi custody.⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰

³⁸ Glenn, Rowan, Caves, and Nada, “Timeline.”

³⁹ BBC, “Islamic State group defeated.”

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch. “Northeast Syria: Fate of hundreds of boys trapped in siege unknown.” *Human Rights Watch* (February 2022). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/04/northeast-syria-fate-hundreds-boys-trapped-siege-unknown#>

⁴¹ Hanna, Andrew. “Islamists Imprisoned Across the Middle East.” *Wilson Center* (June 2021). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/islamists-imprisoned-across-middle-east>

⁴² Jeffrey, James F. “Part 2: ISIS Prisoners and Families.” *Wilson Center* (December 2020). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/part-2-isis-prisoners-and-families>

⁴³ Hanna, “Islamists Imprisoned.”

⁴⁴ Jeffrey, “Part 2: ISIS Prisoners.”

⁴⁵ Jeffrey, “Part 2: ISIS Prisoners.”

⁴⁶ Widagdo, Setyo, Kadek Wiwik Indrayanti, and Anak Agung Ayu Nada Saraswati. “Repatriation as a Human Rights Approach to State Options in Dealing with Returning ISIS Foreign Terrorist Fighters.” *Sage Journals* (July 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211032679>

⁴⁷ Benton, Meghan, and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan. “Foreign Fighters: Will Revoking Citizenship Mitigate the Threat?” *Migration Policy Institute* (April 2019). <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/foreign-fighters-will-revoking-citizenship-mitigate-threat>

⁴⁸ Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati. “Repatriation.”

⁴⁹ United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. “Muthana v. Pompeo.” *United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit* (January 2021). [https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/97F4C9BA474983DE8525866200567816/\\$file/19-5362-1880558.pdf](https://www.cadc.uscourts.gov/internet/opinions.nsf/97F4C9BA474983DE8525866200567816/$file/19-5362-1880558.pdf)

⁵⁰ Cheng, Amy. “After long legal battle with ‘ISIS bride,’ U.K. pushes for power to cancel citizenship without notice.” *The Washington Post* (November 2021). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/19/revoking-citizenship-uk-new-bill/>

In addition to male ISIS detainees, approximately 60,000 to 70,000 ISIS-affiliated women and young children^{51 52 53 54} reside within the SDF-administered al-Hol, Roj, and Ayn Issa IDP camps⁵⁵ located in northeast Syria. While the populations mainly consist of Syrians and Iraqis,⁵⁶ more than 13,500 FTF family members⁵⁷ also inhabit these three camps. The Iraqi government holds at least another 300,000 individuals⁵⁸ – mostly women and children – in camps throughout Iraq.⁵⁹ An undisclosed number of FTF family members possibly reside within these Iraq-based camps.

Poor camp conditions, in addition to extreme overcrowding and understaffed security forces, have resulted in heightened safety concerns – especially within SDF facilities. A recent United Nations report noted increasing levels of violence, criminality, and social tensions at al-Hol camp.⁶⁰ Lieutenant General Paul T. Calvert, the former Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR)⁶¹ also publicly indicated a significant number of camp women continue to espouse ISIS’s ideology and attempt to indoctrinate the detained youths.⁶² Furthermore, a number of women at al-Hol established ‘*hesba*’ or religious

⁵¹ Gorevan, Daniel, and Kathryn Achilles. “When Am I Going to Start to Live?” *Save the Children* (September 2021). https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/when_am_i_going_to_start_to_live_final_0.pdf/

⁵² Hanna, “Islamists Imprisoned.”

⁵³ Chako, Madlin and Yasmine Saker. “Keeping children in Roj camp warm.” *UNICEF* (May 2021). <https://www.unicef.org/mena/stories/keeping-children-roj-camp-warm>

⁵⁴ Speckhard, Anne. “Waiting for Return of the Caliphate Among ISIS Enforcers in Syria’s al Hol, Ain Issa and Roj Camps.” *Government Technology & Services Coalition’s Homeland Security Today.us* (September 2019). <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/waiting-for-the-return-of-the-caliphate-among-isis-enforcers-in-syrias-al-hol-ain-issa-and-roj-camps/>

⁵⁵ Operational funding for the SDF-administered IDP camps is provided in part by financial assistance from foreign governments as well as non-governmental organizations. For the fiscal periods of 2012-2021, the total amount of USG humanitarian funding (USAID and DOS) provided in response to the overall Syria crisis exceeded \$13 billion. [United States Agency for International Development (USAID). “Syria – Complex Emergency.” *United States Agency for International Development, Fact Sheet #7, Fiscal Year 2021* (June 2021). https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/06.03.2021_-_USG_Syria_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_7.pdf] This figure did not include the financial or material support

provided by any foreign militaries to fund SDF guards, expand and improve prisons, or other detention-related expenses. [Hanna, “Islamists Imprisoned.”]

⁵⁶ Gorevan and Achilles, “When Am I Going.”

⁵⁷ Keller, Jean-Pierre. “ISIS after the US repositioning in the Northeast of Syria: camps, women and children, and leadership revival.” *The Geneva Centre for Security Policy* (April 2020). <https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/images/Syria-Transition-Challenges-Project-Discussion-Paper-6>

⁵⁸ Al-Hashimi, Husham. “ISIS in Iraq: The Challenge of Reintegrating ‘ISIS Families’.” *Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy* (July 2020). <https://newlinesinstitute.org/isis/isis-in-iraq-the-challenge-of-reintegrating-isis-families/>

⁵⁹ National Public Radio. “A life in limbo for wives and children of ISIS fighters.” *National Public Radio* [audio transcript] (March 2022). <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1086488950>

⁶⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Syria Humanitarian Access Severity Overview - August 2021.” *United Nations* (August 2021). <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/infographic/syria-humanitarian-access-severity-overview-august-2021>

⁶¹ CJTF-OIR is the U.S.-led international military effort to degrade and destroy ISIS.

⁶² Williams, Katie Bo. “Coalition Plans to Expand Giant ISIS Prison in Syria.” *Defense One* (February 2021). <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2021/02/coalition-plans-expand-giant-isis-prison-syria/172270/>

police units in an effort to punish women and children suspected of deviating from Islamic State doctrine.⁶³

In May 2021, when Western media journalists visited the heavily guarded foreign nationals annex of the al-Hol camp, which houses approximately 10,000 non-Arab foreign women and minors,⁶⁴ several young children began hurling stones.⁶⁵ One child reportedly yelled “we will kill you because you are an infidel...we are the Islamic State.”⁶⁶ Similarly, in late 2021, women housed at Roj camp hurled rocks at security units and set fire to tents.⁶⁷ Earlier in the year, a Dutch women detained at Roj told reporters that she had been stoned and struck with a hammer by other foreign women for failing to compile with the Islamic State dress code.⁶⁸

Reminiscent of Iraq-based Camp Bucca, a US military facility that housed many future leaders of ISIS during the period of 2003 to 2009,⁶⁹ the SDF-administered camps housing women and minors have become similar incubators of radicalization.⁷⁰ The reconstitution of ISIS membership and the indoctrination of the next generation of fighters in these camps creates what General McKenzie calls a “strategic problem 10 years down the road” once the detained minors have obtained adulthood and fully embraced extremist ideology.⁷¹

THE AMERICANS

Of immediate concern to the USG are the USPER FTF family members who traveled to the conflict zone and may now reside within either SDF- or Iraqi-controlled camps or detention centers.⁷² In 2018, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported approximately 300 USPERs attempted to depart or had departed the United States between the years of 2011 and

⁶³ Saleh, John. “The Women of ISIS and the Al-Hol Camp.” *Fikra Forum, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (August 2021). <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/women-isis-and-al-hol-camp>

⁶⁴ Arraf, Jane. “Violence Erupts at Syrian Camp for ISIS Families, Leaving a Child Dead.” *The New York Times* (February 2022). <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/09/world/middleeast/syria-camp-violence.html>

⁶⁵ Associated Press. “In Syria Camp, IS Ideology Molds Forgotten Children.” *Voice of America* (June 2021). https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east_syria-camp-ideology-molds-forgotten-children/6206549.html

⁶⁶ Associated Press, “In Syria Camp.”

⁶⁷ Omer, Zana. “Women Reportedly Linked to IS Set Syria Camp on Fire.” *Voice of America* (October 2021). <https://www.voanews.com/a/women-reportedly-linked-to-is-set-syria-camp-on-fire/6280350.html>

⁶⁸ Sancha, Natalia. “The transformation of ISIS women in Syria’s Al Roj camp.” *EL PAÍS* (March 2021).

<https://english.elpais.com/international/2021-03-26/the-transformation-of-isis-women-in-syrias-al-roj-camp.html>

⁶⁹ McCoy, Terrence. “How the Islamic State evolved in an American prison.” *The Washington Post* (November 2014). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/11/04/how-an-american-prison-helped-ignite-the-islamic-state/>

⁷⁰ Dent, Elizabeth. “The Unsustainability of ISIS Detentions in Syria.” *The Middle East Institute, Policy Paper 2018-5* (March 2019). https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-03/The%20Unsustainability%20of%20ISIS%20Detentions%20in%20Syria_reduced.pdf

⁷¹ Cronk, Terri Moon. “Centcom Commander: Middle East Refugee Camps Rife for Extremely Ideology.” *DOD News* (December 2020). <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2443505/centcom-commander-middle-east-refugee-camps-rife-for-extreme-ideology/>

⁷² While some of the Americans who traveled initially supported anti-Assad rebel factions or other terrorist groups - such as Jabhat al-Nusra; by early-2015, a vast majority of the Americans had joined the Islamic State either voluntarily or due to the threat of death upon capture by ISIS militants.

2018 with the intent of traveling to the conflict in Syria and Iraq.⁷³ A study conducted by the King’s College London, identified 272 known USPER fighters and family members who had successfully departed from the United States.^{74 75} Unfortunately, due to the difficulty in tracking individuals who indirectly traveled to the region or used a surreptitious means for departure, a precise number remains unavailable^{76 77 78 79}

Of the identified known USPER travelers, experts and academics estimate as many as 40 individuals remain at-large outside the United States.⁸⁰ While no official information from the USG is publicly available concerning the assessed current status of any of these individuals, many are likely either deceased or residing within the detention facilities.

Challenges to Identification

Complicating the USG’s ability to determine an accurate count and current location of these USPER travelers is the use of *noms de guerre* or kunyas by many FTFs and their family members.^{81 82 83} John Georgelas, an American with alleged ties to ISIS’s leadership, adopted the kunya “*Yahya Abu Hassan*,” though it is unclear if any of his wives or children also used pseudonyms.^{84 85} Ariel Bradley, a mother of two, went by several aliases before her reported

⁷³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, “The Travelers.”

⁷⁴ Cook, Joana, and Gina Vale. “From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’: Tracing the Women and Minors of the Islamic State.” *ICSR, King’s College London* (2018). <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-‘Diaspora’-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>

⁷⁵ Jenkins, Brian Michael. “Options for Dealing with Islamic State Foreign Fighters Currently Detained in Syria.” *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 12, Issue 5 (May/June 2019). <https://ctc.usma.edu/options-dealing-islamic-state-foreign-fighters-currently-detained-syria/>

⁷⁶ United States Department of Justice. “American Citizen, an Alleged ISIS Sniper and Weapons Instructor, Indicted for Providing Material Support to ISIS.” *Justice News* (September 2019). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/american-citizen-alleged-isis-sniper-and-weapons-instructor-indicted-providing-material>

⁷⁷ Nada, Garrett. “The U.S. and the Aftermath of ISIS.” *Wilson Center* (December 2020). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/us-and-aftermath-isis>

⁷⁸ United States District Court for the District of Minnesota. “Arrest Warrant: United States of America v. Abdelhamid Al-Madioum.” *United States District Court for the District of Minnesota* (December 2019). <https://www.justice.gov/usao-mn/press-release/file/1317351/download>

⁷⁹ United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. “Criminal Complaint: United States of America v. Allison Elizabeth Fluke-Ekren.” United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia (May 2019). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1466981/download>

⁸⁰ Jenkins, “Options for Dealing.”

⁸¹ Wright, Robin. “Despite Trump’s Guantanamo Threats, Americans Who Joined ISIS Are Quietly Returning Home.” *The New Yorker* (June 2019). <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/americas-isis-members-are-coming-home>

⁸² Mironova, Vera, and Karam Alhamad. “The Names of Jihad: A Guide to ISIS’ Noms de Guerre.” *Foreign Affairs* (July 2017). https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-07-14/names-jihad?check_logged_in=1&utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=lo_flows&utm_campaign=registered_user_welcome&utm_term=email_1&utm_content=20220123

⁸³ Nada, “The U.S. and Aftermath.”

⁸⁴ Wood, “The American Climbing Ranks.”

⁸⁵ Terrorists and Extremists Database. “John Georgelas: Overview.” *Program on Extremism, The George Washington University* (Accessed on January 24, 2022). <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/john-georgelas>

death in Syria.^{86 87 88} Allison Elizabeth Fluke-Ekren, a mother from Kansas and leader of an all-women ISIS military battalion, was known at various times as “*Umm Mohammed*,” and “*Umm Jabril*.”^{89 90} A father and son charged in Florida used the names “*Abu Jihad TNT*” and “*Abu Dujanah*” in an effort to hide their true identities.^{91 92 93}

The kunya ‘*al-Amriki*’ provides a particular challenge for coalition forces attempting to verify an individual’s identity. Meaning ‘*the American*,’ the term often applies to any individual who appears to be of Western descent or speaks the English language.⁹⁴ An individual known as “*Abu Muhammad al-Amriki*” appeared in a 2014 ISIS video discussing his decision to defect from Jabhat al-Nusra and join the Islamic State.⁹⁵ He was never publicly identified, but was later assessed to be of possible Azerbaijan origin.⁹⁶ In 2019, SDF determined “*Abu Mohammad al-Ameriki*,” a captured ISIS fighter, was Warren Christopher Clark from Houston, Texas.^{97 98} However, in the same year, the SDF erroneously identified “*Abu Souleiman al-Amriki*” as being a 16-year-old American fighter.⁹⁹ Officials later determined the minor was actually a citizen of Trinidad & Tobago, who entered the war zone at the age of 12 years old along with his mother.¹⁰⁰

Another complicating factor for identifying potential USPERs concerns children who were born to USPER parents while abroad. This includes those children who were born in a third country, were born in Islamic State-controlled territory, or born to a parent residing within SDF-

⁸⁶ Hall, Ellie. “How One Young Woman Went From Fundamentalist Christian To ISIS Bride.” *BuzzFeed News* (July 2015). <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ellievhall/woman-journey-from-chattanooga-to-isis>

⁸⁷ Alexander, Audrey. “Cruel Intentions: Female Jihadists in America.” *Program on Extremism, The George Washington University* (November 2016).

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Female%20Jihadists%20in%20America.pdf>

⁸⁸ Terrorists and Extremists Database. “Ariel Bradley Overview.” *Program on Extremism, The George Washington University* (accessed on January 24, 2022). <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/ariel-bradley>

⁸⁹ Weiner, Rachel. “Former Kansas teacher is accused of leading all-female ISIS brigade.” *The Washington Post* (January 2022). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/01/29/kansas-woman-islamic-state-charge/>

⁹⁰ United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, “Criminal Complaint: Fluke-Ekren.”

⁹¹ United States Department of Justice. “Two ISIS Members Charged with Material Support Violations.” *Justice News* (September 2020). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-isis-members-charged-material-support-violations>

⁹² United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, “Criminal Complaint: Emraan Ali.”

⁹³ United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, “Criminal Complaint: Jihad Ali.”

⁹⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, “The Travelers.”

⁹⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, “The Travelers.”

⁹⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, “The Travelers.”

⁹⁷ Sdf1. “5 Terrorists Have Been Captured Alive By Our Forces.” *SDF Press Center* (January 2019). <https://sdf-press.com/en/2019/01/5-terrorists-have-been-captured-alive-by-our-forces/>

⁹⁸ Sdf. “SDF Announced The Last Phase Of Al-Jazeera Storm Campaign.” *SDF Press Center* (January 2022). <https://sdf-press.com/en/2018/09/7932/>

⁹⁹ Hughes, Seamus, and Bennett Clifford. “Sixteen-Year-Old American Islamic State Fighter Captured in Syria.” *Lawfare* (January 2019). <https://www.lawfareblog.com/sixteen-year-old-american-islamic-state-fighter-reportedly-captured-syria>

¹⁰⁰ Callimachi, Rukmini, and Eric Schmitt. “Teenager Captured With ISIS Fighters Is From Trinidad, Not the U.S., Officials Say.” *The New York Times* (January 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/world/middleeast/teenager-isis-syria-trinidad.html>

or Iraqi-administered camp or detention facility. Media reports and government press releases indicate at least seven American children were born under the above conditions.^{101 102 103}

Biometric enrollments and DNA testing of individuals upon capture and during periodic re-enrollments at detention centers has led to the positive identification of some USPERs.^{104 105}
¹⁰⁶ Unclassified court documents indicate US Department of Defense (DOD) activities inside of SDF prisons included routine biometric enrollment of detainees, to include basic biographical information, fingerprints, and photographs for the purpose of ascertaining identities of detainees.¹⁰⁷ Once collected and uploaded into government databases, the information would be compared to previous biometric data collections of known or suspected terrorists.¹⁰⁸

In early 2020, SDF also conducted an enrollment operation inside the foreign annex of the al-Hol camp for the purpose of verifying the identities of the women and children housed there.^{109 110 111} Additionally, several non-government organizations (NGOs) and private American citizens have obtained access to some of the SDF-administered IDP camps in an effort to locate and identify orphaned USPER children.^{112 113} No information available provided insight into efforts to locate possible USPERs in Iraq camps. However, given the ease with which individuals seemingly created new personas under the Islamic State, determining an individual's true identity and country of origin – especially children who traveled at a young age, were born abroad, or orphaned – remains an ongoing challenge.

¹⁰¹ CBS News. “2 American women captured with ISIS sent back to U.S. with 6 kids.” *CBS Interactive Inc* (June 2019). <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-women-kids-sent-back-us-from-syria-kurdish-officials-say-today-2019-06-05/>

¹⁰² Yee, Vivian. “An American Family Detained in Syria Is Sent Back to the U.S.” *The New York Times* (June 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/05/world/middleeast/american-isis-syria-detain.html>

¹⁰³ CBS News. “We were prisoners: American teen forced into ISIS speaks.” *CBS Interactive Inc* (October 2017). <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/american-teen-forced-into-syria-by-father-escapes-isis-in-raqqqa/>

¹⁰⁴ Sdf1, “5 Terrorists Captured Alive.”

¹⁰⁵ Hall, Ellie. “A Young American Girl Whose Mother Joined ISIS And Died Has Been Rescued, A Former US Diplomat Says.” *BuzzFeed News* (August 2021). <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ellievhall/american-aminah-mohamad-ariel-bradley-isis-rescued>

¹⁰⁶ Gorevan and Achilles, “When Am I Going.”

¹⁰⁷ United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. “Unclassified Memorandum Opinion: United States of America v. El Shafee Elsheikh.” *United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia* (January 2022). <https://casetext.com/case/united-states-v-elsheikh>

¹⁰⁸ United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, “Unclassified Memorandum Opinion: Elsheikh.”

¹⁰⁹ Huszti-Orbán, Krisztina, and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. “Use of Biometric Data to Identify Terrorists: Best Practice or Risky Business?” *Human Rights Center, University of Minnesota* (2020). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/Use-Biometric-Data-Report.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Loveluck, Louisa. “In Syrian camp for women and children who left ISIS caliphate, a struggle even to register names.” *The Washington Post* (June 2020). https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/syria-al-hol-annex-isis-caliphate-women-children/2020/06/28/80ddabb4-b71b-11ea-9a1d-d3db1cbe07ce_story.html

¹¹¹ Alexander, Audrey. “The Security Threat COVID-19 Poses to the Northern Syria Detention Camps Holding Islamic State Members.” *CTC Sentinel* vol. 13, issue 6 (June 2020). <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-security-threat-covid-19-poses-to-the-northern-syria-detention-camps-holding-islamic-state-members/>

¹¹² Hall, “A Young American Girl.”

¹¹³ Flores, “US father fears.”

US REPATRIATION EFFORTS AND PROCESS

The official USG policy under both former President Trump and current President Biden has been one of pro-repatriation for its citizens.¹¹⁴ In October 2020, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) indicated 27 Americans from Syria and Iraq had been repatriated to the United States since 2016.¹¹⁵ The USG charged ten of the adults, nine males and one woman, with terrorism-related offenses immediately upon their return.¹¹⁶ The remaining seventeen USPERs, who were adult females and minors, were reinserted to their home communities, or resettled with family members. In January 2022, the USG repatriated another criminally-charged USPER woman, who had previously been apprehended in Syria, but only recently transferred to USG custody.¹¹⁷ In addition to these returnees, an undisclosed number of adult and minor USPERs still remain within Syria- or Iraq-based camps and detention centers awaiting potential future repatriation.

The current US repatriation process for detained USPERs seeking a return from Syria and Iraq entails two pathways: (1) repatriation to face criminal prosecution or (2) repatriation for resettlement [*See Figure 1*]. Once identified as a being a possible USPER, an element of the USG conducts DNA testing and comparison to verify the individual's identity and nationality.¹¹⁸ Following confirmation of identity and citizenship status, the USG conducts a review of database holdings to determine whether a pending US criminal complaint or indictment exists for the individual. If a complaint or indictment is discovered, the USG initiates a foreign transfer of custody between the detaining government or recognized regional authority as in the case of the

¹¹⁴ Hassan, Lila. "Repatriating ISIS Foreign Fighters is Key to Stemming Radicalization, Experts Say, but Many Countries Don't Want Their Citizens Back." *FRONTLINE* (April 2021).

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/repatriating-isis-foreign-fighters-key-to-stemming-radicalization-experts-say-but-many-countries-dont-want-citizens-back/>

¹¹⁵ United States Department of Justice. "The United States Has Repatriated 27 Americans from Syria and Iraq Including Ten Charged with Terrorism-Related Offenses for Their Support to ISIS." *Justice News* (October 2020).

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/united-states-has-repatriated-27-americans-syria-and-iraq-including-ten-charged-terrorism>

¹¹⁶ United States Department of Justice, "The United States Repatriated 27."

¹¹⁷ United States Department of Justice. "American Woman Who Led ISIS Battalion Charged with Providing Material Support to a Terrorist Organization." *Justice News* (January 2022).

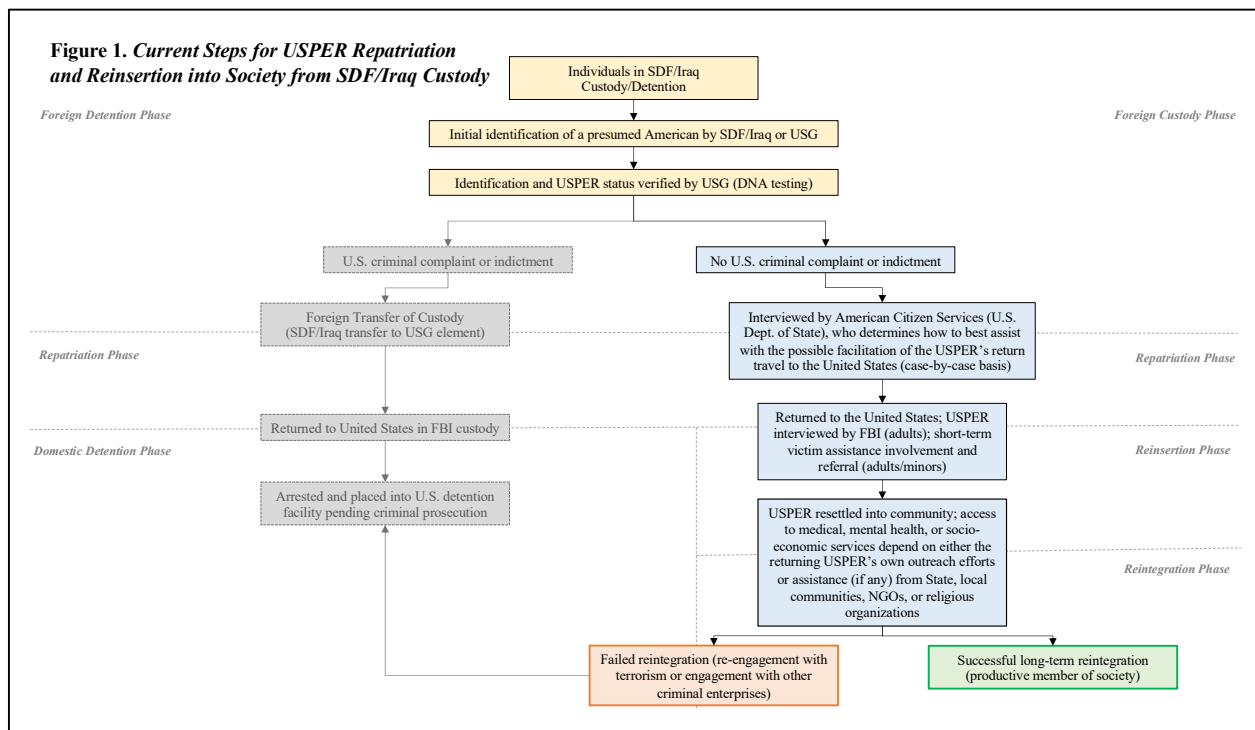
<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/american-woman-who-led-isis-battalion-charged-providing-material-support-terrorist>

¹¹⁸ United States Department of State. "Information on DNA Testing." *Bureau of Consular Affairs, United States Department of State* (Accessed on February 26, 2022). <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/travel-legal-considerations/us-citizenship/US-Citizenship-DNA-Testing.html#:~:text=DNA%20sample%20collection%20at%20a,applicable%20U.S.%20embassy%20or%20consulate>

¹¹⁹ United States Department of State (DOS). "Foreign Affairs Manual and Handbook: 8 FAM 304.2 – DNA Testing and Citizenship." *United States Department of State* (Accessed on February 27, 2022)

<https://fam.state.gov/FAM/08FAM/08FAM030402.html>

SDF, and United States.¹²⁰ The charged USPER is then placed into the custody of the FBI, who returns the individual to the United States to face prosecution.



If no US criminal complaint or indictment exists for the detained USPER, the US Department of State’s (DOS) American Citizen Services (ACS) conducts an interview to assess the individual’s status and treatment while in foreign custody.¹²¹ ACS also establishes whether the USPER desires an actual return to the United States; and if so, how the DOS might best assist in facilitating a potential return. In cases where the USPER is determined to be a victim rather than a potential perpetrator of a crime, as with many of the women and all minors, the USG often opts to quickly obtain the USPER’s release and facilitate a return to the United States.^{122 123}

‘Right to Return’ and Missing Documentation

Even with ACS support, many of the non-charged USPERs detained in the camps and detention centers face a significant challenge concerning their ability to legally demonstrate to

¹²⁰ United States Department of Justice. “The International Prisoner Transfer Program.” *Office of International Affairs, United States Department of Justice* (Accessed on November 17, 2021). <https://www.justice.gov/criminal-oia/iptu>

¹²¹ United States Department of State. “Arrest or Detention of a U.S. Citizen Abroad.” *Bureau of Consular Affairs, United States Department of State* (Accessed on November 17, 2021). <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/emergencies/arrest-detention.html>

¹²² Hall, “A Young American Girl.”

¹²³ Baker, Josh. “Transcript: Return From ISIS.” *FRONTLINE* (December 2020). <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/return-from-isis/transcript/>

the USG their ‘*right to return*.’¹²⁴ In the United States, an USPER’s right to return hinges upon their US citizenship or legal permanent resident (LPR) status. An individual born within the United States and who is subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, known as a native- or natural-born citizen, possesses birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment.¹²⁵ This type of citizenship cannot be revoked by the government, though an individual may voluntarily renounce it. Possessing birthright citizenship also guarantees an individual the absolute right to return to the United States. Conversely, an individual who obtains US citizenship via the naturalization process may, under certain limited circumstances, be subject to the revocation of citizenship.¹²⁶ The grounds for revocation are restricted to the following: (1) the person procured naturalization illegally, (2) the person deliberately concealed material fact or willfully misrepresented fact on his or her naturalization application, or (3) person receives other than honorable discharge from the military before five years of honorable service has been achieved after naturalization.¹²⁷ Regardless, federal courts recognize the right of return for both native-born and naturalized citizens as an inherent part of US citizenship.

For LPRs, the question of the right to return is more complex and dependent on whether an individual effectively abandoned his or her legal permanent residency status.¹²⁸ The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) maintains the responsibility for identifying individuals who may have abandoned their LPR status based on length of absence from the United States, purpose of travel outside of the United States, or intent to return.¹²⁹ Once identified, the USCIS may refer the matter to the immigration court system for a formal ruling.¹³⁰ An immigration judge, a member of the civil courts, then determines whether an individual conclusively abandoned his or her status and hence admissibility to the United States.¹³¹ However, federal court rulings indicate that LPR status is a protected right under the Fifth

¹²⁴ In 1964, the United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, ruled in *Worthy v. United States*, that “it is inherent in the concept of citizenship that the citizen, when absent from the country to which he owes allegiance, has a right to return, again to set foot on its soil.” [United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit. “Worthy v. United States.” *United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit* (February 1964). <https://casetext.com/case/worthy-v-united-states-4>]

¹²⁵ The Fourteenth Amendment states: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

¹²⁶ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Policy Manual: Part L – Revocation of Naturalization, Chapter 2 – Grounds for Revocation of Naturalization.” *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services* (January 2022). <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-l-chapter-2>

¹²⁷ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Policy Manual: Part.”

¹²⁸ Pines, Daniel. “Overseas Lawful Permanent Resident Terrorists: The Novel Approach for Revoking Their LPR Status.” *San Diego Law Review*, vol. 51, issue 1 (2014). <https://digital.sandiego.edu/sdlr/vol51/iss1/6>

¹²⁹ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Policy Manual: Part D – General Naturalization Requirements, Chapter 2 – Lawful Permanent Resident Admission for Naturalization.” *United States Citizenship and Immigration Services* (January 2022). <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-d-chapter-2>

¹³⁰ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Policy Manual: Part D.”

¹³¹ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Policy Manual: Part D.”

Amendment and cannot be revoked without due process.¹³² Predominant legal opinions further interpret this due process to include the right to return for the purpose contesting the USG's claims of status abandonment.^{133 134}

As a result of war, intentional destruction, or confiscation by the Islamic State, many of those in SDF and Iraq custody no longer possess any legal identification or civil documentation, such as marriage certificates, passports, or birth certificates which could attest to their USPER status or eligibility for citizenship.^{135 136 137 138} This is especially true for those children born under the Islamic State or inside IDP camps where birth registrations were not recorded or officially-recognized certificates issued.^{139 140} As such, many of these children reside as *de facto* stateless persons at present.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, many of the detained USPERs and their immediate family members lack ready access to US embassy or consulate personnel – particularly in Syria. As noted, by an unidentified DOS official, the USG is aware of reports of a “*small number of U.S. citizens present in camps in northeast Syria,*” however the absence of US consular services within the country makes assistance extremely difficult.¹⁴² This lack of access to consular services prevents some USPERs from being able to verify identities, obtain replacement travel documents, or register the births and adoptions of children. Instead, they must depend upon the SDF or a third-party intermediary to alert the DOS on their behalf before any issues might begin to be addressed.^{143 144}

¹³² Pines, “Overseas LPR Terrorists.”

¹³³ Pines, “Overseas LPR Terrorists.”

¹³⁴ While prevailing legal opinions support an LPR's right to return, the absence of legal precedent indicates this issue likely remains unsettled.

¹³⁵ CBS News, “2 American women captured.”

¹³⁶ Callimachi, Rukmini, and Catherine Porter. “2 American Wives of ISIS Militants Want to Return Home.” *The New York Times* (February 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/19/us/islamic-state-american-women.html>

¹³⁷ Wright, “Despite Trump's Guantanamo Threats.”

¹³⁸ Renard, Thomas, and Rik Coolsaet. “Returnees: Who Are They, Why Are They (Not) Coming Back and How Should We Deal with Them?” *Egmont Paper 101* (February 2018).

https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2018/02/egmont.papers.101_online_v1-3.pdf?type=pdf

¹³⁹ Bruneau, Charlotte. “Excluded, abandoned: Children born under Islamic State era still paying heavy price.” *Reuters* (December 2020). <https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-security-undocumented-children/excluded-abandoned-children-born-under-islamic-state-era-still-paying-heavy-price-idUSKBN28K287>

¹⁴⁰ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre. “Legal Limbo: The Future of ISIS's Children.” *Syria Justice and Accountability Centre* (March 2019). <https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2019/03/12/legal-limbo-the-future-of-isis-children/>

¹⁴¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Nationality and Statelessness: A Handbook for Parliamentarians.” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (2005).

<https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/Nationality%20and%20Statelessness.pdf>

¹⁴² CBS News, “2 American women captured.”

¹⁴³ United States Department of State, “Arrest or Detention Abroad.”

¹⁴⁴ United States Department of State. “Report my Passport Lost or Stolen.” *Bureau of Consular Affairs, United States Department of State* (Accessed on February 4, 2022). <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/have-passport/lost-stolen.html>

Repatriation, Reinsertion, and Reintegration

The current resettlement process for non-charged USPERs returning from the Syria/Iraq-based camps entails three phases: (1) repatriation, (2) reinsertion, and (3) reintegration [*See Figure 1*]. During the repatriation phase, USPER women and minors, whose citizenship or LPR status has been confirmed by the USG, are physically returned to the United States. Upon arrival, each adult woman participates in interviews with representatives from local FBI field offices – to include victim assistance specialists.¹⁴⁵ ¹⁴⁶ During the interviews, FBI special agents may question the woman in an effort to determine if she may possess any information pertaining a federal crime. Additionally, FBI victim specialists assess each woman’s immediate needs and provide referrals for local counseling, employment, housing, medical, and legal services.¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁸ With regards to minors, the FBI victim specialists assess each child and work with the child’s designated caregiver to identify local resources for medical and counseling services.¹⁴⁹ Since 2001, the FBI’s victim assistance program has assisted more than two million victims of crime, however due to a staff of only 255 employees¹⁵⁰ it lacks the resources to act as a dedicated, long-term support mechanism following repatriation.

Subsequent to the FBI interviews, the USPER next enters the reinsertion phase of their return. During this transition step, the USG resettles the individual into a local community or places them into the care of a legal guardian. In 2019, the USG repatriated and reinserted eight members of a Cambodian-American family from Seattle.¹⁵¹ The group consisted of four sisters, who were originally taken by their parents to Syria, and four young children who were born to the two elder – now adult – sisters while abroad.¹⁵² In 2018, four children were repatriated from Syria along with their mother, who faced criminal charges as a result of her affiliation with ISIS.¹⁵³ Following the mother’s arrest upon arrival in the United States, the children were placed into the care of the Indiana Child Protective Services.¹⁵⁴ In another instance, a pregnant 15-year-old girl, who was taken to Syria by her father and then married off to an ISIS fighter, was repatriated by the USG and released into the care of her grandmother.¹⁵⁵ With regards to

¹⁴⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Specialized Assistance for U.S. Crime Victims Overseas.” *Office of Victim Assistance, Federal Bureau of Investigation* (June 2008).

https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2008/june/vicassist_062308

¹⁴⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation. “FBI Victim Assistance Program.” *Office of Victim Assistance, Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Accessed February 26, 2022). <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-victim-assistance-program.pdf/view>

¹⁴⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “FBI Victim Assistance Program.”

¹⁴⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Victim Services.” *Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Accessed on February 27, 2022). <https://www.fbi.gov/resources/victim-services>

¹⁴⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “FBI Victim Assistance Program.”

¹⁵⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Victim Services.”

¹⁵¹ Yee, “An American Family Detained.”

¹⁵² Yee, “An American Family Detained.”

¹⁵³ Baker, “Transcript: Return From ISIS.”

¹⁵⁴ Baker, “Transcript: Return From ISIS.”

¹⁵⁵ Hughes and Clifford, “Sixteen-Year-Old American.”

orphaned American children returning to the United States, custodial arrangements fall to individual states to address¹⁵⁶ – with the child most often placed into the foster care system associated with their deceased parent’s last place of legal US residence.

Individuals in reinsertion phase potentially face challenges resulting from United States’ lack of a unified national policy, process, or mechanism for addressing the needs of these at-risk individuals and their caregivers. Current reinsertion efforts – such as immediate housing and temporary socio-economic assistance – fall under the responsibility of either the local and state authorities or upon the returnee. A pregnant USPER with three young children, who returned from Syria, reported she initially depended upon her husband’s estranged family for housing and financial support due to a lack of any other available resources at the time.^{157 158}

Reintegration constitutes the final phase of the process and is directly dependent upon the USPER’s successful rehabilitation and transformation into a productive member of society. Failure to reintegrate places an individual, who already likely faced significant exposure to extreme violence, anti-Western ideology, possible weapons training, at increased risk of marginalization.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, an individual who fails to reintegrate potentially poses a threat to their local community, in the terms of possible engagement in criminal activity,¹⁶⁰ or to national security,^{161 162} through re-engagement with terrorist elements or other material support activities.

Based on studies of armed conflicts, it is known that women and children who have experienced long-term exposure to violence require access to medical and psychological care.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Hall, “A Young American Girl.”

¹⁵⁷ Wood, “From the Islamic State.”

¹⁵⁸ Pesta, Abigail. “The Convert.” *Texas Monthly* (November 2017). <https://features.texasmonthly.com/editorial/the-convert/>

¹⁵⁹ Lyons-Padilla, Sarah, Michele J. Gelfand, Hedieh Mirahmadi, Mehreen Farooq, and Marieke van Egmond. “Belonging Nowhere: Marginalization & Radicalization Risk Among Muslim Immigrants.” *Behavioral Science & Policy*, vol. 1, issue 2 (2015): 1–12. https://behavioralpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/BSP_vol1is2_-Lyons-Padilla.pdf

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “E4J University Module Series.”

¹⁶¹ Schuurman, Bart, and Liesbeth van der Heide. “RAN Issue Paper: Foreign Fighter Returnees & the Reintegration Challenge.” *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (November 2016). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files_en?file=2020-09/issue_paper_foreign_fighter_returnees_reintegration_challenge_112016_en.pdf

¹⁶² Sischa, Kerstin, Christoph Bialluch, and Claudia Lozano. “Female Returnees and their Children: Psychotherapeutic perspectives on rehabilitation of women and children from the former territories of the so-called Islamic State.” *Violence Prevention Network, Publication Series* issue 4 (2020). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-10/spotlight_fts_october_2021_en.pdf#page=14

¹⁶³ Aoláin, Fionnuala Ní. “Position of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the human rights of adolescents/juveniles being detained in the North-East Syria.” *United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts & Working Groups* (May 2021). https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/SR/UNSRCT_Position_human-rights-of-boys-adolescents-2021_final.pdf

¹⁶⁴ ¹⁶⁵ ¹⁶⁶ ¹⁶⁷ One USPER minor, who received weapons training from ISIS as a young child, required counseling to assist in coping with past trauma.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the long-term effects of such trauma¹⁶⁹ to these individuals may take considerable time to manifest,¹⁷⁰ and directly impacts their ability to successfully reintegrate into society. Previous conflicts reveal many female and child victims of prolonged violence suffer from feelings of shame, fear, ostracism, and distrust; and many frequently retreat from social interactions, living in isolation from both family and local communities.¹⁷¹ In addition to this self-imposed isolation, these individuals are also at risk of becoming targets of societal rejection which further hinders their ability to function normally.¹⁷² ¹⁷³

Rehabilitation – to include counseling, deradicalization, and vocational training – plays a key role in assisting an individual with the transition and reabsorption into society. Currently, rehabilitation efforts are left to the individual, ad hoc community or religious organizations and non-governmental organizations to address. One female USPER suffering from feelings of isolation and ideological uncertainty upon re-entering society, indicated she had to self-identify the social service resources needed to assist with rehabilitation and eventual successful reintegration.¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁵ ¹⁷⁶

The lack of a national-level reintegration support mechanism places the United States at risk. While none of the USPER women or minors who have been repatriated appear to have engaged in criminal activities or re-engaged in terrorism-related activities to date, their long-term

¹⁶⁴ Aoláin, Fionnuala Ní. “Gendering the Boy Child in the Context of Counterterrorism: The Situation of Boys in Northeast Syria.” *Just Security* (June 2021). <https://www.justsecurity.org/76810/gendering-the-boy-child-in-the-context-of-counterterrorism-the-situation-of-boys-in-northeast-syria/>

¹⁶⁵ Bouta, Tsjeard. “Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.” *Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”* (March 2005). <https://www.oecd.org/derec/netherlands/35112187.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community.”

¹⁶⁷ National Institute of Justice. “Children Exposed to Violence Meeting.” *Office of Justice Programs, United States Department of Justice* (October 2015). <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249899.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ BBC. “It’s ‘sweet relief’ to be home, says US boy forced to threaten Trump in IS video.” *BBC News* (November 2020). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54995445>

¹⁶⁹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. “TIP 57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Service.” *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* (March 2014). <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/TIP-57-Trauma-Informed-Care-in-Behavioral-Health-Services/SMA14-4816>

¹⁷⁰ Mayo Clinic. “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).” *Mayo Clinic* (Accessed on February 28, 2022). <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

¹⁷¹ Wood, Elisabeth Jean. “The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks.” *The Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 11 (March 2008): 539-561. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104832>

¹⁷² Hussin, Sabariah. “Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation: Way Forward for Returnees.” *RSIS Commentary*, no. 065 (April 2019). <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CO19065.pdf>

¹⁷³ Jenkins, “Options for Dealing.”

¹⁷⁴ Pesta, “The Convert.”

¹⁷⁵ Wood, “From the Islamic State.”

¹⁷⁶ Clarion Project. “The FBI Saved Me – Tania Joya’s Story – I Was Radicalized prt 6.” *Facebook* (video), (Accessed on December 9, 2021). <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3194224994005777>

reintegration success remains uncertain. Additionally, the potential success of these past returnees does not automatically equate success for the future reintegration of those USPERs who experienced significantly longer exposure to violence and radicalization rhetoric.

METHODOLOGY

When considering the development of a reintegration support mechanism for non-charged USPER FTF family members, the initiatives enacted by eighteen foreign nations¹⁷⁷ provided a logical starting point for analysis. While many of these foreign programs originated from a desire to rehabilitate imprisoned male extremists, some have recently modified curriculums to accommodate women and children returning from Syria.^{178 179 180}

In order to identify transferable best practices, each of the eighteen nations were sorted and ranked based on: (1) a demonstrated willingness to repatriate family members of their nationals who traveled to join the Islamic State;¹⁸¹ (2) governmental support for rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives for these family members; and (3) publicly available information to verify the nation's program(s) contained elements designed to address radicalization, limit re-victimization, and enhance the likelihood of successful reintegration into society. The eight nations which met all of the above criteria were next sorted by their relevant individual programs and ranked based upon: (1) experience with countering Salafi-jihadist ideology, (2) the type and extent of interaction between the program staff and participants, (3) the program's focus on ensuring staff credibility with the participants, and (4) dedication to both short-term and long-term care and support. Finally, each individual program was analyzed to determine the extent in which they offered transferable elements applicable to the needs, culture, and legal constraints of the United States.

¹⁷⁷ During research, the author reviewed programs from the following nations: Australia, Columbia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Mauritania, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Singapore, Sudan, Sweden, The United Kingdom, and Yemen.

¹⁷⁸ Reed, Alastair, and Johanna Pohl. "Tackling the surge of returning foreign fighters." *NATO Review* (July 2017). <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2017/07/14/tackling-the-surge-of-returning-foreign-fighters/index.html>

¹⁷⁹ Hassan, Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin. "Denmark's De-Radicalisation Programme for Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* vol. 11, no. 3 (2019): 13–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26617829>

¹⁸⁰ Köehler, Daniel. "Family Counseling as Prevention and Intervention Tool Against 'Foreign Fighters': The German 'Hayat' Program." *Journal EXIT-Deutschland* (2013). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344395571_Family_Counselling_as_Prevention_and_Intervention_Tool_Against_Foreign_Fighters_The_German_Hayat_Program

¹⁸¹ Indonesia initially permitted the repatriation of Indonesian nationals who traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State. However, in 2020, the government reversed its stance and declared a halt to all repatriations – except for children under the age of ten – citing to national security concerns. [Madrim, Sasmito, and Rakr Hussein. "Indonesia Not to Repatriate Citizens Linked to IS, Gives Exceptions to Minors." *Voice of America* (February 2020). https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_indonesia-not-repatriate-citizens-linked-gives-exception-minors/6184106.html]

Of the programs considered, only Saudi Arabia's *Munasaha Program*, Indonesia's *KEMENSOS Plan*, Germany's *HAYAT-Deutschland* program, and Denmark's *Aarhus Model* met the study's overall conditions. While some nations, such as the United Kingdom and France, possess long-running rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, they were ultimately excluded due to recent waning political support for such efforts. Other nations were omitted from consideration due to either a lack of comprehensive information pertaining to specific program details or overlapping similarities with another nation's program – as in the case of several of the northern European countries.

CASE STUDIES

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia possesses one of the most recognized and longest operating rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives in the world.¹⁸² ¹⁸³ Known as the *Munasaha Program*, or the more simply as the '*Counseling Program*,' this well-funded initiative was formally launched in 2006 by the Saudi Ministry of the Interior.¹⁸⁴ Initially based in Riyadh at the Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center, the program has in recent years expanded into a network of seven rehabilitation centers located throughout the Kingdom.¹⁸⁵

Administrative Structure and Oversight

The Advisory Committee, located within the Ministry of the Interior, oversees the administrative functions of the entire program.¹⁸⁶ The Advisory Committee has four subcommittees – (1) Religious, (2) Psychological and Social, (3) Security, and (4) Media – each of which possess a different programmatic role.¹⁸⁷

The Religious Subcommittee, composed of state-approved clerics, religious scholars, and university professors, is the most influential component of the Advisory Committee. Members of Religious Subcommittee directly interact with participants during counseling phase of the program.¹⁸⁸ The Psychological and Social Subcommittee, the second most influential member, is

¹⁸² Boucek, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare." *Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, no. 97 (September 2008). https://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp97_boucek_saudi_final.pdf

¹⁸³ Berkell, Kelly A. "Off-Ramp Opportunities in Material Support Cases." *Harvard Law School National Security Journal*, vol. 8, Issue 1 (2017). <https://harvardnsj.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2017/02/1.-Berkell.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ Berman, Ilan. "Saudi Deradicalization Faces the Future." *Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy* (March 2020). <https://newlinesinstitute.org/violent-extremism/saudi-deradicalization-faces-the-future/>

¹⁸⁵ Berman, "Saudi Deradicalization Faces Future."

¹⁸⁶ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

¹⁸⁷ Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

¹⁸⁸ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

composed of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social science researchers.¹⁸⁹ Members of the Psychological and Social Subcommittee evaluate participants for possible psychological issues and conduct assessments on the individual's progress during the program.¹⁹⁰ This committee also determines the specific type of aftercare an individual or their family requires following reintegration into Saudi society.¹⁹¹ The Security Subcommittee monitors participants both during the rehabilitation phase and post-release.¹⁹² The Security Subcommittee, in coordination with their Religious and Psychological and Social counterparts, also determines which program participants have successfully progressed enough in rehabilitation to warrant release from custody.¹⁹³ ¹⁹⁴ The Media Subcommittee is the fourth member of the Advisory Board. This subcommittee focuses on community outreach and develops materials for use by participants within the program.¹⁹⁵

Program Entry and Steps of Progression

The *Munasaha Program* starts at either the preventive detention¹⁹⁶ or punitive detention¹⁹⁷ stage for participants before transitioning to a rehabilitation center with the aim of eventual reinsertion into society.¹⁹⁸ Understanding that participation serves as a possible condition for release from detention, individuals – to include youths – volunteer¹⁹⁹ to attend the program's highly-controlled and structured activities aimed at re-education, rehabilitation, and reintegration.²⁰⁰ ²⁰¹ ²⁰² ²⁰³ Upon volunteering, the Advisory Committee advises each individual that counselors and experts are neither officials from the Ministry of the Interior nor part of the Kingdom's security apparatus.²⁰⁴ Additionally, each individual is informed that they will be

¹⁸⁹ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

¹⁹⁰ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

¹⁹¹ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

¹⁹² Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

¹⁹³ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

¹⁹⁴ Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

¹⁹⁵ Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

¹⁹⁶ Preventive detention refers to the confinement or house arrest of an individual without trial or conviction by a court.

¹⁹⁷ Punitive detention refers to incarceration of an individual following a trial and conviction by a court.

¹⁹⁸ Cigar, Norman. "Blurring the Line between Countering Terrorism and Countering Dissent: The Case of Saudi Arabia." *NCHR Occasional Paper Series #11 2019, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo* (2019). <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/publications/occasional-papers/docs/oc-11-19.pdf>

¹⁹⁹ A study published by the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University of Oslo, questioned the voluntary nature of participation given that prisoners understand the possibility of release depends upon completion of the program [Cigar, "Blurring the Line. "]

²⁰⁰ Cigar, "Blurring the Line."

²⁰¹ Boucek, Christopher. "The Saudi Process of Repatriating and Reintegrating Guantanamo Returnees." *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 1, issue 1 (December 2007). <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-saudi-process-of-repatriating-and-reintegrating-guantanamo-returnees/>

²⁰² Horgan, John, and Mary Beth Altier. "The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2012): 83-90. <https://www.jstor.org/43134238>

²⁰³ Al-Khatti, Kamel. "Why Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization Program is Successful." *European Eye on Radicalization* (June 2019). <https://eeradicalization.com/why-saudi-arabias-deradicalization-program-is-successful/>

²⁰⁴ Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

treated as a victim of radicalization going forward and will receive specialized treatment based on their assessed needs.²⁰⁵

Following enrollment, the detained individual engages in dialogue with clerics and scholars from the Religious Subcommittee. Initial discussions are based not on lectures from the clerics or scholars, but on the individual's explanation for their own radicalization and involvement with a terrorist movement.²⁰⁶ As discussions continue, the clerics in coordination with psychologists begins to address the individual's misperceptions concerning the Kingdom's Wahhabist interpretation of the Koran as well as any emotional or behavioral issues.^{207 208} The length of time required in this initial religious and counseling phase varies based on each individual – however participation appears to last between several two-hour sessions and six weeks.^{209 210} Following sufficient progression, the prisoner undergoes evaluation and may become eligible for transfer from the correctional facility to one of the residential rehabilitation centers.²¹¹

At the rehabilitation center, an individual participates in specialized training courses and mental health consultations²¹² lasting an additional eight to twelve weeks.²¹³ Each individual also partakes in continued religious discussions, undergoes psychological therapy, engages in group social activities, and receives educational training aimed at preparing the individual for eventual release and reinstatement into society.^{214 215 216} While still confined, the individual nonetheless obtains increased freedoms with demonstrated progression – to include visits from family members and short periods of temporary release into the care of family members.^{217 218}

²⁰⁵ Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

²⁰⁶ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²⁰⁷ Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center. "Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center." *Ministry of Interior, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Accessed February 11, 2022).

https://www.moi.gov.sa/wps/portal/!ut/p/z1/04_iUIDg4tKPAFJABjKBwtGPykssy0xPLMnMz0vM0Y_Qj4wyizfwNDHxMDQx8vb39jc3cDR18vNyswwwNPA31Q9HVWBgGuRs4GhmFupuYhZkYOJjqB9FIH4cwNGASP24FUT_hN96LsAVRqEoMTIxdgUrMnUICA7wMDYxN0RWgmeGOoQBLIBFyZnBqnn5BbmhoRGWwZ5aJoyIAWHI2Q!!/dz/d5/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS80TmxFL1o2XzBJNDRIMTQyS09LTzcvQTVCTkpGOVAxME81/

²⁰⁸ Altier, Horgan, and Thoroughgood. "Returning to the Fight."

²⁰⁹ Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating."

²¹⁰ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²¹¹ Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating."

²¹² Al-Khatti, "Why Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization."

²¹³ Casptack, Andreas. "Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study." *The Middle East Institute* (June 2015). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study>

²¹⁴ Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating."

²¹⁵ Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center, "Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling."

²¹⁶ Al-Khatti, "Why Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization."

²¹⁷ Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating."

²¹⁸ Al-Barei, Sultan. "Saudi Munasaha programme sees solid results, low recidivism." *Al-Mashareq* (May 2017). https://almashareq.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_am/features/2017/05/23/feature-01

The final step of treatment focuses on aftercare activities for both the individual and family post-release.²¹⁹ ²²⁰According to the program administrators, this portion of the program helps ensure the released individual and their immediate family have access to specialists, psychologists, and sociologists.²²¹ It also shifts the responsibility of the individual's continued reform and long-term reintegration onto the family rather than the state. Should the individual re-engage with terrorist activities or violence, the family may be punished.²²²

Based on a review of public data, to date, all of the individuals who participated in the *Munasaha Program* based at the rehabilitation centers have been male. However, media reporting indicates similar rehabilitation efforts also exist for women associated with extremist groups.²²³ ²²⁴Rather than a prison- or rehabilitation center-based program, the women receive counseling as part of home-confinement and in the presence of family and male guardians.²²⁵ One formerly detained woman who graduated from an in-home program reportedly now provides deradicalization counseling to other radicalized women.²²⁶

Program Success Rate

Due to limited metrics to accurately gauge changes of behavioral and ideological beliefs within an individual, determining a program's degree of success in terms of rehabilitation and reintegration can be extremely challenging. A frequent measure used by some governments and researchers concerns the overall recidivism rate for program participants. The Saudi government historically claimed the *Munasaha Program* experiences an overall completion success rate of 80 to 90%²²⁷ and a recidivism rate of 1 to 2%²²⁸ for more than 3000 participants.²²⁹ The 1 to 2% recidivism figure factored in former Guantánamo Bay detainees who resumed terrorist activities following completion of the program as well as graduates who engaged in criminal activities not affiliated with terrorism.²³⁰ However, available information remains unclear as to whether the

²¹⁹ Horgan and Altier, "The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization."

²²⁰ Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center, "Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling."

²²¹ Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center, "Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling."

²²² Seifert, Katherine. "Can Jihadis Be Rehabilitated? Radical Islam." *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2010): 21-30. <https://www.meforum.org/2660/can-jihadis-be-rehabilitated>

²²³ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²²⁴ International Peace Institute. "A New Approach? Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism." *International Peace Institute* (June 2010). https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/a_new_approach_epub.pdf

²²⁵ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²²⁶ International Peace Institute. "A New Approach."

²²⁷ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²²⁸ Mastroe, Caitlin, and Susan Szmania. "Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and DeRadicalization Programs: Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security." *START, University of Maryland* (March 2016). https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_SurveyingCVMetrics_March2016.pdf

²²⁹ Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism."

²³⁰ Al-Khatti, "Why Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization."

women who participated in the in-home counseling programs re-engaged in terrorist-activities or were included within the recidivism rate.

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

The *Munasaha Program* provides several key takeaways – in addition to transferable elements applicable to the challenges faced by the United States regarding returning USPER FTF family members.

The program appears ideally designed to address the specific rehabilitation and reintegration needs of an authoritarian state governing a religiously homogenous population. Approximately 93% of Saudi Arabia’s total population is Muslim,²³¹ with approximately 85% identifying as Sunni Muslim.²³² As such, the *Munasaha Program* can focus almost exclusively on countering Salafi-jihadist ideology. This singular focus makes it an ideal instrument for jailed Saudi nationals returning from the Syria-Iraq conflict zone.²³³

While the Saudi framework provides a formalized mechanism for the rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalized male individuals, it largely appears to ignore women – with some noted acceptations – and very young minors.²³⁴ Little to no literature indicates how or even whether the Kingdom addresses trauma or potential re-victimization amongst these two specific groups. Likely, due the country’s male guardianship system, both women and the children under the age of ten years old rely upon immediate family to obtain the necessary services on their behalf.²³⁵

Another significant drawback of the *Munasaha Program* concerns its lack of transparency and independent evaluations which are necessary to demonstrate overall program effectiveness as well as to attest to the reliability of metrics reported. Saudi Arabia regularly censors the publication of any information considered potentially embarrassing or damaging to

²³¹ Fahmy, Dalia. “5 facts about religion in Saudi Arabia.” *Pew Research Center* (April 2018).

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/12/5-facts-about-religion-in-saudi-arabia/>

²³² Office of International Religious Freedom. “2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Saudi Arabia.”

Office of International Religious Freedom, United States Department of State (May 2021).

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/240282-SAUDI-ARABIA-2020-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

²³³ A 2014 Saudi royal decree criminalized the joining, endorsing, providing moral or material aid to an extremist organization as well as fighting in a foreign conflict – Saudi citizens found in violation face prison sentences between three to 30 years. [Reuters Staff. “Saudi Arabia to jail citizens who fight abroad.” *Reuters* (February 2014). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-law/saudi-arabia-to-jail-citizens-who-fight-abroad-idUSBREA1213O20140203>]

²³⁴ In 2014, Saudi authorities arrested a 13-year old boy on terrorism-related charges stemming from activities he allegedly committed at the age of 10. [Noonan, Daniel. “Life in the Kingdom of Death: Saudi Teenager Arrested at 13 Faces Death Penalty.” *Inside Arabia* (June 2019). <https://insidearabia.com/life-in-the-kingdom-of-death-saudi-teenager-arrested-at-13-faces-death-penalty/>]

²³⁵ Associated Press. “Forcibly repatriated Saudi woman: 'My family will kill me'.” *Deutsche Welle* (April 2017). <https://p.dw.com/p/2bJTx>

the government.²³⁶ While the foreign government officials and experts frequently receive invites to view activities at the Mohammed Bin Nayef Counseling and Care Center, the Saudi government to date has not permitted any official evaluations by non-Saudi government entities. As such, the reliability of any government sanctioned data or metrics noting success must be questioned.

Despite the authoritarian nature of Saudi regime and its lack of attention to women and very young minors, the *Munasaha Program* does contain several transferable elements applicable to the development of a reintegration support mechanism in the United States. While exact figures are unavailable, the program is acknowledged to be well-funded by the Saudi government.²³⁷ Additionally, the program places emphasis on viewing participants as victims of radicalization – this is especially significant given those USPER FTF family members residing in the IDP camps and those who have already resettled face no criminal charges to date. Furthermore, the program incorporates psychological counseling as well as non-judgmental religious dialogues individually-designed for each participant on a case-by-case basis. The utilization of rehabilitation centers as a ‘*transition facility*’ or ‘*half-way house*’ for counseling, vocational training, and preparation for eventually reinsertion into society is also a key feature that easily transfers to the United States.

INDONESIA

Much like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia also possesses significant experience with rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. Early Indonesian efforts originated with Detachment-88, an elite counterterrorist police unit, in aftermath of the 2002 Bali bombings^{238 239 240} By 2012, the Indonesia’s national counterterrorism agency, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT), assumed oversight of the nation’s numerous prison-based rehabilitation and reintegration programs.^{241 242 243 244} However, facing the forced repatriation of approximately 75 Indonesian FTFs and family members deported from Turkey in early 2017, the Indonesian

²³⁶ Hassan, “Repatriating ISIS Foreign Fighters.”

²³⁷ Boucek, “Saudi Arabia’s ‘Soft’ Counterterrorism.”

²³⁸ Schulze, Kirsten E. “Indonesia’s Approach to Jihadist Deradicalization.” *CTC Sentinel* vol. 1, issue 8 (July 2008). <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Vol1Iss8-Art3.pdf>

²³⁹ Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness.”

²⁴⁰ Ulyana, Yaza Azzahara, and Ahmad Riyansyah. “De-radicalization Program: The Case Study of Indonesia.” *International Journal of Business, Economics and Social Development* vol. 2, no. 2 (2021). <http://journal.rescollacom.com/index.php/ijbesd/article/view/130/125>

²⁴¹ Levenia, Ulta, and Alban Sciascia. “Does Indonesia’s Deradicalization Program Work?” *The Diplomat* (June 2020). <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/does-indonesias-deradicalization-program-work/>

²⁴² Sugiarto, Sugiarto. “Communication Strategy of National Counter Terrorism Agency in Deradicalization Program in Indonesia.” *Jurnal Pertahanan & Bela Negara*, vol. 10, issue 2, p. 195-214 (August 2020). <http://jurnal.idu.ac.id/index.php/JPBH/article/view/898>

²⁴³ Schulze, “Indonesia’s Approach.”

²⁴⁴ Sirait, Osbenardus, Muhamad Syauqillah, and Margaretha Hanita. “Deradicalization Program in Indonesia.” *Journal of Terrorism Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (November 2021). <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1053&context=jts>

government found itself unprepared.²⁴⁵ Acknowledging the nation at that time lacked criminal codes to prosecute citizens who participated in foreign conflicts – to include terrorist-related activities abroad, the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs launched a program known as the ‘*KEMENSOS Plan*’.²⁴⁶

Specifically designed to address non-charged²⁴⁷ individuals returning from either the Syrian civil war or the Islamic State, the *KEMENSOS Plan* consisted of three phases: (1) arrival, (2) rehabilitation, and (3) reinsertion.^{248 249} By mid-2018, after more than 200 repatriated Indonesians²⁵⁰ transited through the plan’s one-month rehabilitation phase and re-entered society, the Indonesian government halted repatriations and disbanded the effort,²⁵¹ citing national security concerns.²⁵² With an estimated 689 Indonesian nationals, including many women and young minors, still residing within foreign detention centers and IDP camps due to ties to the Islamic State,²⁵³ it remains unclear if the government will re-initiate the program in the future.

Administrative Structure and Oversight

While the Ministry of Social Affairs theoretically provided program oversight for the *KEMENSOS Plan*,²⁵⁴ in reality multiple partner agencies and NGOs actively competed for control and leadership. The Civil Society Against Violent Extremism (C-SAVE), an Indonesian NGO focused network building to combat radicalism, contacted the BNPT’s foreign terrorist task force (FTTF) instead of the ministry to offer handle capacity-building services within the program.²⁵⁵ Likewise, Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), an NGO experienced with prison-based invention and training programs, contacted the FTTF to offer assistance with the program’s rehabilitation phase.²⁵⁶ The FTTF, along with members from Detachment-88, agreed to accept both NGOs’ involvement. At the same time, the deradicalization division, a separate element within BNPT, launched its own independent rehabilitation efforts under the *KEMENSOS*

²⁴⁵ Sumpter, Cameron. “Returning Indonesian Extremists: Unclear Intentions and Unprepared Responses.” *ICCT Policy Brief, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* (July 2018).

<https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2018/07/ICCT-Sumpter-Returning-Indonesian-Extremists-July2018.pdf>

²⁴⁶ Sumpter, “Returning Indonesian Extremists.”

²⁴⁷ The Indonesian constitution prevents the retrospective application of new legislation; meaning any Indonesian FTF or family member who traveled prior to May 25, 2018 cannot be criminally charged for partaking in an overseas conflict or terrorism-related activity (Sumpter, 2018).

²⁴⁸ Anindya, Chaula Rinita. “The Deradicalisation Programme for Indonesian Deportees: A Vacuum in Coordination.” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 18 (Spring 2019).

<https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/195/149>

²⁴⁹ Santos, Ana P. “In Indonesia, ‘Women Are Now a Permanent Part of the Jihadi Structure’.” *Pulitzer Center* (November 2019). <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/indonesia-women-are-now-permanent-part-jihadi-structure>

²⁵⁰ Sumpter, “Returning Indonesian Extremists.”

²⁵¹ Santos, “In Indonesia.”

²⁵² Sumpter, “Returning Indonesian Extremists.”

²⁵³ Madrim and Hussein, “Indonesia Not to Repatriate.”

²⁵⁴ Santos, “In Indonesia.”

²⁵⁵ Sumpter, “Returning Indonesian Extremists.”

²⁵⁶ Sumpter, “Returning Indonesian Extremists.”

Plan.²⁵⁷ This lack of a single, centralized leading authority ultimately resulted in heightened disorganization and competition amongst the plan's various stakeholders as well as confusion regarding end goals for the program participants.²⁵⁸

Program Entry and Steps of Progression

The entry into the program commenced for an individual with his or her forcible repatriation to Indonesia from either a foreign detention center or IDP camp.²⁵⁹ Prior to arrival in Indonesia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided notification to the Indonesian National Police and Detachment-88 regarding an individual's scheduled return date and travel itinerary.²⁶⁰ Upon landing at an Indonesian airport, Detachment-88 immediately placed the individual into police detention for interrogation.²⁶¹ If determined to be a subject of any pending criminal charges, the individual regardless of gender or age was turned over for prosecution.²⁶² ²⁶³ If an individual was determined to be without current or prior criminal charges, he or she was transferred into the custody of the Social Affairs Ministry for rehabilitation.²⁶⁴

During the rehabilitation phase, the Social Affairs Ministry housed the individual in one of two government-run shelters in East Jakarta for thirty days.²⁶⁵ Minors and their parents resided at the Social Rehabilitation for Children Against Law (PSMP) shelter, while single or childless adults dwelt at the Protection House and Trauma Center (RPTC).²⁶⁶ ²⁶⁷ Upon arrival at the assigned shelter, the individual completed a questionnaire to self-assess his or her level of commitment²⁶⁸ to Salafi-jihadist ideology²⁶⁹ before undergoing an in-take screening process administered by social workers and psychologists.²⁷⁰ ²⁷¹

Following in-take, the individual began attending counseling sessions aimed at behavioral changes through the re-instilling the values of '*Pancasila*,'²⁷² the national ideology of

²⁵⁷ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁵⁸ Ilyas, Mohammed, and Rayvinder Athwal. "De-Radicalisation and Humanitarianism in Indonesia." *Social Sciences* vol. 10, no. 3: 87 (March 2021) <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10030087>

²⁵⁹ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁶⁰ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁶¹ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁶² Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁶³ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁶⁴ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁶⁵ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁶⁶ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁶⁷ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁶⁸ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁶⁹ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷⁰ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁷¹ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷² Pancasila is a founding concept of Indonesia, comprising of five principles: "*monotheism, civilized humanity, national unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice.*" [Greenwalt, Patrick. "Factsheet: Indonesia's Pancasila." United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (March 2021). <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021%20Factsheet%20-%20Indonesias%20Pancasila.pdf>]

Indonesia^{273 274} and Islam Nusantara, an interpretation of Islam endorsed by the Indonesian government.^{275 276} The specific methods employed by the *KEMENSOS Plan* to achieve these twin rehabilitation goals differed between adults and minors. Social workers targeted minors mainly through play and interactive games,²⁷⁷ whereas adults were targeted through rapport building and life skills training.²⁷⁸ Adults additionally attended mandatory daily lectures from the BNPT and the Indonesian National Armed Forces pertaining to the importance of adhering to Pancasila.²⁷⁹ During the third week of rehabilitation, scholars from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and former jihadis engaged adults in religious dialogues concerning Islam Nusantara.²⁸⁰

Upon the conclusion of the 30-day rehabilitation phase, an individual was required to sign a document pledging loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia and to abide by *Pancasila* before being reinserted into his or her home community.^{282 283 284} Local civil society organizations (CSOs) then assumed responsibility for the after-care portion of the *KEMENSOS Plan* following the individual's resettlement.²⁸⁵ After-care included additional life skills trainings and assistance in locating employment opportunities.²⁸⁶

Program Success Rate

As with the *Munasaha Program*, a lack of publicly available data complicates any assessment focused on determining the *KEMENSOS Plan*'s overall effectiveness with participant rehabilitation and reintegration. While the Indonesian government claimed an overall success rate of approximately 100% for its deradicalization programs as of 2018 – which included the *KEMENSOS Plan*,²⁸⁷ a repatriated Indonesian couple who attended the program is known to have subsequently carried out a suicide bombing in the Philippines in 2019.^{288 289}

²⁷³ Greenwalt, "Factsheet: Indonesia's Pancasila."

²⁷⁴ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷⁵ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷⁶ Ilyas and Athwal, "De-Radicalisation and Humanitarianism."

²⁷⁷ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷⁸ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁷⁹ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁸⁰ Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁸¹ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁸² Sumpter, "Returning Indonesian Extremists."

²⁸³ Ilyas and Athwal, "De-Radicalisation and Humanitarianism."

²⁸⁴ Santos, "In Indonesia."

²⁸⁵ Ilyas and Athwal, "De-Radicalisation and Humanitarianism."

²⁸⁶ Ilyas and Athwal, "De-Radicalisation and Humanitarianism."

²⁸⁷ Sugiarto, "Communication Strategy."

²⁸⁸ Levenia and Sciascia, "Does Indonesia's Deradicalization Program?"

²⁸⁹ Santos, "In Indonesia."

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

Despite its relative short existence, the *KEMENSOS Plan* provides two potentially transferable best practices and highlights three critical pitfalls to avoid in the development of a US-based reintegration support mechanism.

First, the plan's establishment of the in-take shelters allowed the government to evaluate the repatriated individuals within a secure and controlled facility while also providing a safe and stable environment. These shelters acted as temporary 'transition zones' where social workers could screen, evaluate, and monitor individuals for potential threats and determine their future social service needs. Additionally, the 24-hour availability and companionship provided by social workers' permitted trust building between participants and some of the program staff.²⁹⁰ At the same time, individuals received medical care and life skills training in preparation for their pending reinsertion into society. As noted in the earlier section regarding the Saudi rehabilitation center, the concept of an in-take shelter or '*transition center*' could easily transfer to the United States – assuming the individual's residency at such a facility was through a voluntary and not compulsory basis.

Second, recognizing adults and minors require different needs and methods of interaction, the plan implemented a specialized approach for administering counseling and therapy to the minors. As aforementioned, social workers used what appeared to be a form of 'play therapy,'²⁹¹ though specific details were unclear, as the primary medium for engaging with and treating young minors. Since some children may be unable to process their emotions or articulate problems in the same manner as an adult, a trained therapist or social worker can use playtime to assist the child in dealing with inner conflict and trauma.²⁹² ²⁹³ Specialized therapy approaches based on age and gender are already widely-practiced throughout the United States. As such, any reintegration support mechanism must include trained experts on staff to oversee the various types of counseling and therapy needed by the USPER FTF family members.

The *KEMENSOS Plan* fell critically short in three key areas though: attendance duration for participants, leadership, and funding. Described by one Indonesian terrorism expert as an insufficient, rudimentary "*hit-and-miss rehabilitation*" initiative,²⁹⁴ each participant spent no

²⁹⁰ Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme."

²⁹¹ Play therapy refers to "*the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained Play Therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development*" (APT, 2022).

²⁹² Pietrangelo, Ann, and Karen Gill. "How Play Therapy Treats and Benefits Children and Some Adults." *Healthline* (October 2019). <https://www.healthline.com/health/play-therapy>

²⁹³ Lilly, JP, Kevin O'Connor, Teri Krull, Charles Schaefer, Garry Landreth, Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, Karla Carmichael, Mary Aguilera, and Edward Franc Hudspeth. "Play Therapy Makes A Difference." *Association for Play Therapy* (Accessed on March 9, 2022). <https://www.a4pt.org/page/PTMakesADifference/Play-Therapy-Makes-a-Difference.htm>

²⁹⁴ Santos, "In Indonesia."

more than thirty days within the program. Such a short duration failed to allow for adequate counseling and therapy and did not permit any meaningful time to implement safeguards to prevent the individual from immediately re-engaging with terrorist entities²⁹⁵ following reinsertion into society. Furthermore, the plan lacked any form of centralized leadership to direct program objectives or oversee daily operations. Participants routinely interacted with various competing program stakeholders who provided repetitive discussions or conflicting offers of assistance which eroded participant’s overall trust.²⁹⁶ Finally, severe underfunding resulted from the absence of any budgetary authority for the program.²⁹⁷ While the Indonesian government annually allocates substantial sums to CVE efforts nationwide,²⁹⁸ the lack of internal coordination between the program stakeholders as well as in inter-agency competition frequently results in funding shortfalls for initiatives. To supplement the cost of the plan’s RTPC shelter for example, the Ministry of Social Affairs diverted funding from other directorates and social service programs.²⁹⁹ These three failures constitute important lessons for the United States to learn from and avoid repeating well developing a reintegration support mechanism.

GERMANY

While Saudi Arabia and Indonesia use centralized, top-down approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, Germany employs a decentralized, bottom-up method.³⁰⁰ Implemented and administered at the local or state level by NGOs, a majority of the German rehabilitation and reintegration programs receive operational funds from federal agencies.³⁰¹ In 2019, the German government allocated approximately \$118 million toward countering Islamist extremism and supporting projects focused on returning German FTFs and their family members.³⁰² One of the FTF-specific programs to receive at least partial funding³⁰³ from federal sources is ‘*HAYAT-Deutschland*’ (*HAYAT*).³⁰⁴

Meaning “*Life*” in Turkish and Arabic, *HAYAT* was established in 2011 by a Germany-based NGO, ZDK Society Democratic Culture, as the nation’s first counseling program to

²⁹⁵ Santos, “In Indonesia.”

²⁹⁶ Anindya, “The Deradicalisation Programme.”

²⁹⁷ Anindya, “The Deradicalisation Programme.”

²⁹⁸ Anindya, “The Deradicalisation Programme.”

²⁹⁹ Anindya, “The Deradicalisation Programme.”

³⁰⁰ Reed and Pohl, “Tackling the surge.”

³⁰¹ United States Department of State. “Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Germany.” *Bureau of Counterterrorism, United States Department of State* (Accessed on March 14, 2022). <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/germany/>

³⁰² United States Department of State, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2019.”

³⁰³ Beginning in 2021, *HAYAT*’s counseling services no longer depended upon state support. [HAYAT-Deutschland. “HAYAT-Germany: Exit from Islamism.” ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur gGmbH (Accessed on February 14, 2022). <https://hayat-deutschland.de/start/>]

³⁰⁴ HAYAT-Deutschland, “HAYAT-Germany.”

specifically address militant jihadism and FTFs.^{305 306} Since 2012, *HAYAT* has been part of a nation-wide counseling network, which includes a 24-hour support hotline, established by the German Federal Office for Immigration and Refugee Affairs (BAMF) to counter extremist ideology.^{307 308}

Administrative Structure and Oversight

Despite its close partnership with the Federal Government of Germany, oversight of *HAYAT* resides with the ZDK Society Democratic Culture organization.³⁰⁹ The NGO uses a team of terrorism and Islamism³¹⁰ experts, social workers, psychologists, and retired high-ranking police officers³¹¹ to provide individualized counseling support to the family, friends, and associates of FTFs and suspected radicalized individuals.³¹² These experts leverage existing social relationships or bonds as a means to re-build trust between the family and the individual³¹³ with the goal of creating an environment of eventual ideological moderation.³¹⁵

Program Entry and Steps of Progression

Unlike the *Munasaha Program* and the *KEMENSOS Plan*, the entry point to *HAYAT* depends upon when family members or advice-seekers contact the program concerning an individual deemed at risk to radicalization. Designed to address different types of FTF or traveler scenarios – (1) individual about to leave for a conflict zone, (2) individual already departed, and (3) individual is returning or has returned,³¹⁶ *HAYAT*'s focus on the third scenario is the most relevant to individuals repatriating from Syria and Iraq.

Following repatriation to Germany, the individual undergoes questioning by either the police or the intelligence services.³¹⁷ If contacted by the police, intelligence service, or the individual's family, a team of experts from *HAYAT* initiate a risk assessment to determine the

³⁰⁵ Jansen, Klaus. "German program triggers international deradicalization network." *Deutsche Welle* (March 2014). <https://www.dw.com/en/german-program-triggers-international-deradicalization-network/a-17898077>

³⁰⁶ HAYAT-Deutschland, "HAYAT-Germany."

³⁰⁷ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³⁰⁸ European Commission. "Family counselling Hayat-Deutschland." *European Commission* (Accessed on February 13, 2022). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/collection-inspiring-practices/ran-practices/family-counselling-hayat-deutschland_en

³⁰⁹ European Commission, "Family counselling Hayat-Deutschland."

³¹⁰ Islamism is the belief that Islamic law and values should play the central role in public life. [Hamid, Shadi and Rashid Dar. "Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer." *Markaz (blog)*, The Brookings Institution (July 2015). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>]

³¹¹ Hayter, Christopher. "Deradicalization or Disengagement?: A Framework for Encouraging Jihad Abandonment." *Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University* (April 2016). <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1010551.pdf>

³¹² Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³¹³ Reed and Pohl, "Tackling the surge."

³¹⁴ Hayter, "Deradicalization or Disengagement."

³¹⁵ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³¹⁶ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³¹⁷ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

individual's level of potential radicalization and threat, if any, to the community.³¹⁸ The *HAYAT* team bases its assessment on a combination of radicalization indicators and years of professional experience obtained from their fields of specialized disciplines.³¹⁹ Specifically, they attempt to determine whether the returnee is identifiable as an 'endangerer,' 'traumatized,' or 'disillusioned' person.³²⁰ If the team assesses the individual poses a physical security threat aka an 'endangerer,' *HAYAT* advises the German authorities while also providing assistance to the family in identifying legal resources or providing them with access to therapists if requested³²¹
³²² Should the individual be deemed a 'traumatized' or 'disillusioned' person aka non-violent, *HAYAT* develops a step-by-step counseling plan for the family to assist them in developing an environment conducive to the individual's rehabilitation and reintegration^{323 324}

HAYAT employs a unique approach compared to other rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives in that it focuses almost exclusively on the empowerment of family and friends, while initially avoiding direct engagement with the radicalized individual.³²⁵ *HAYAT* attempts to use emotional-social bonds to "sow seeds of doubt in the radical ideology"³²⁶ by providing family and friends with methods and guidance on how to indirectly confront the individual's belief system.³²⁷ By establishing a positive affective or emotional environment, one in which the individual may freely engage in non-judgmental discussions on values and ideology, *HAYAT* assesses the individual's likelihood of perceiving counseling services and family involvement as a means of manipulation decreases^{328 329} This approach of establishing a stable and emotional supportive home environment also increases the chances of the individual undertaking a successful break from the radical ideology.³³⁰

Family support group meetings also play a role in the *HAYAT* counseling process.³³¹ During these meetings, *HAYAT* may bring together three or four families to discuss emotional, religious, and social concerns each is experiencing. As demonstrated in other thematic areas –

³¹⁸ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³¹⁹ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²⁰ Berczyk, Julia. "Returning from the Islamic State." *per Concordiam: Journal of European Security Defense Issues* vol. 6, issue 4 (October 2015): 12-17. https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-09/pC_V6N4_en_Berczyk.pdf

³²¹ Berczyk, "Returning from Islamic State."

³²² Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²³ Berczyk, "Returning from Islamic State."

³²⁴ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²⁵ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²⁶ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²⁷ Hayter, "Deradicalization or Disengagement."

³²⁸ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

³²⁹ Köehler, Daniel. "De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs as Counter-Terrorism and Prevention Tools. Insights from Field Experiences regarding German Right- Wing Extremism and Jihadism." *In Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*, edited by Marco Lombardi, Eman Ragab, Vivienne Chin, Yvon Dandurand, Valerio de Divitiis, and Alessandro Burato, p.142. Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015.

³³⁰ Hayter, "Deradicalization or Disengagement."

³³¹ Köehler, "Family Counseling."

such as drugs or behavioral aggression – group sessions if properly moderated tend to provide emotional stabilization and alleviate attendees’ concerns that they alone face a particular issue.³³² These meetings also serve a potential interaction point between family members and local services – to include welfare offices, social services, and local authorities³³³ – which reinforces the concept of a ‘whole-of-community’ approach in dealing with rehabilitation and reintegration challenges. Through these community groups, the family also obtain access to practical resources that a rehabilitating individual may need like vocational training or employment opportunities.³³⁴

While counseling and support efforts may extend over several months to multiple years, exiting from the *HAYAT* program ultimately depends upon the family or original advice-seeker as well as the rehabilitating individual. Given involvement is strictly voluntary, participation may be terminated at any time by those who seeking assistance. However, should a situation change the program remains available for future re-engagement.

Program Success Rate

Due to German privacy laws, the program’s NGO status, and the varied interaction points for participation – via hotline, counseling, mediation, and referrals – information pertaining the *HAYAT*’s success rate remains unclear. As of 2014, a German newspaper reported the program had helped “dozens of people over recent years.”³³⁵ A 2015 article by a *HAYAT* team member indicated as of June 2015, the program had assisted in 156 cases.³³⁶ However, no specific data or metrics appear available via public information at this time.

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

Despite the obscurity of the program’s success rate, *HAYAT* provides several key takeaways as well as three transferable best practices for consideration. The transferable elements include: (1) a 24-hour national support hotline, (2) the use of a diverse team of specialists, and (3) family inclusion in the rehabilitation process.

Association with Germany’s 24-hour support hotline, known as ‘*Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung*’ or the Radicalization Counseling Center, signifies an important feature of the *HAYAT* program. While not established nor directly administered by the program, it nonetheless represents a centralized contact point for any persons with questions or concerns pertaining to the radicalization of an associate or family member.³³⁷ The hotline provides concerned advice-seekers with an initial consultation, advice on potential next steps or available local services, and

³³² Köehler, “Family Counseling.”

³³³ Köehler, “Family Counseling.”

³³⁴ Köehler, Daniel. “De-Radicalization and Disengagement.” p.141.

³³⁵ Jansen, “German program.”

³³⁶ Berczyk, “Returning from Islamic State.”

³³⁷ Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung. “Procedure of the consultation.” *Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung* (accessed March 10, 2022). https://www.beratungsstelle-radikalisierung.de/DE/Wer-Wir-Sind/Ablauf-Beratung/ablaufberatung_node.html;jsessionid=98B698391AEA3E98B6C202CAA767915.intranet262

a means to establish contact with a network of specialized programs³³⁸ – which includes *HAYAT*. Association with the hotline benefits both the advice-seekers who can be quickly referred toward the most appropriate program for their unique situation and *HAYAT* in that it allows the program to have an amplified service reach across the entire country.³³⁹

The composition of the *HAYAT* team as well as its networking capabilities represents another key element of the program. The diverse skill sets of the staff places the program in an optimal position to provide services tailored toward individualistic needs and scenarios. This breadth of expertise is especially important when working with the family of an individual returning from a Syria or Iraq-based detention center or camp. As noted earlier, repatriated women and minors face not only physical, mental health, and potential radicalization issues, but also heightened risk for community ostracization and re-victimization. In some countries, the burden of addressing these issues falls to the family, who may or may not receive support from outside entities like NGOs, state authorities, or socio-religious organizations. The *HAYAT* team largely negates this challenge for program participants through its counseling services and direct access to a nationwide network of partners. Leveraging the network allows the program to augment its capabilities while also assisting in communicating with various stakeholders concerning the specific needs of a radical individual and his or her support network.³⁴⁰

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the *HAYAT* program concerns the emphasis on the role of “*family therapy*” in the rehabilitation process.³⁴¹ By strengthening and leveraging existing family bonds, the program positions the persons closest to the radicalized individual – most frequently family members – as a counter-pull to the social bonds provided by an extremist organization like ISIS.³⁴² Often this form of therapy is not unidirectional as the *HAYAT* team may need to address intra-family conflicts as well as counsel the family on the fact that the radicalized individual’s life trajectory may not be in accordance with the family’s desired wishes.³⁴³ Despite the challenges though, positive family involvement under the direction of a

³³⁸ Federal Office for Immigration and Refugee Affairs. “Radicalization Counseling Center.” *Federal Office for Immigration and Refugee Affairs* (Accessed on March 10, 2022). <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Service/ServiceCenter/ThemenHotlines/BeratungsstelleRadikalisierung/beratungsstelleradikalisierung.html?nn=282656>

³³⁹ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. “HAYAT Germany / Counseling Center HAYAT.” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (Accessed on March 10, 2022). <https://www.bpb.de/themen/infodienst/208850/hayat-deutschland-beratungsstelle-hayat/>

³⁴⁰ Berczyk, “Returning from Islamic State.”

³⁴¹ Köehler, “Family Counseling.”

³⁴² Hayter, “Deradicalization or Disengagement.”

³⁴³ Köehler, “Family Counseling.”

professional counselor, has demonstrated success in assisting some individuals in disengaging from terrorist movements and acquiring help with de-radicalization.^{344 345 346}

Each of above three key takeaways, to varying degrees, represent transferable elements for use in the creation of an USPER FTF family member reintegration support mechanism. The establishment of a dedicate national hotline to address rehabilitation and reintegration questions or to assist in locating regional or local support services would fulfill an already existing need for repatriated USPERs as well as their caregivers. The creation of a reintegration support mechanism comprising a diverse team of experts and specialists who could build upon pre-existing professional networks is also feasible through the use of NGOs or private sector institutions. Finally, while the *HAYAT* ‘family therapy’ model may not directly transfer given differing cultural norms, the involvement of family, when possible, would provide a valuable facet to any program developed for the returning USPER women and minors.

DENMARK

Established by the Danish city of Aarhus in 2007, in response to heightened societal tensions between ethnic Danes and local Muslim communities,³⁴⁷ the *Aarhus Model* aims to prevent early radicalization and provide an exit mechanism for radicalized individuals.^{348 349} Unlike many programs, the *Aarhus Model* focuses not on a specific ideological belief system, but rather on the prevention of criminal activities and reversing the individual’s perception of exclusion from mainstream Danish society.^{350 351} While initially designed to assist radicalized youth, the initiative expanded in 2013 to address the reintegration challenges faced by returning FTFs and family members.³⁵²

The model is also unique amongst counter-radicalization programs that it is based upon the institutionalized cooperation between all elements of government and civil society.³⁵³

³⁴⁴ Cragin, Kim, and Melissa A. Bradley, Eric Robinson, Paul S. Steinberg. “What Factors Cause Youth to Reject Violent Extremism?: Results of an Exploratory Analysis in the West Bank.” *RAND Corporation* (2015).

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1118.html

³⁴⁵ Hayter, “Deradicalization or Disengagement.”

³⁴⁶ Köehler, “Family Counseling.”

³⁴⁷ Powell, Ana. “The Aarhus Model: How Denmark Prevents Jihad Fighters.” *The Borgen Project* (July 2015).

<https://borgenproject.org/aarhus-model-denmark-prevents-jihad-fighters/>

³⁴⁸ Bertelsen, Preben. “Danish Preventive Measures and De-radicalization Strategies: The Aarhus Model.”

Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs, vol. 2015, issue 1 (2015).

https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8240cd02-135a-1a71-a306-62438e4236be&groupId=252038

³⁴⁹ Hemmingsen, Ann-Sophie. “An Introduction to the Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalization.” *Danish Institute for International Studies* (2015).

<https://www.ft.dk/samling/20151/almdel/reu/bilag/248/1617692.pdf>

³⁵⁰ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁵¹ Powell, “The Aarhus Model.”

³⁵² Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. “Countering Violent Extremism II: A Guide to Good Practice.” *Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats* (January 2019).

<https://crestresearch.ac.uk/site/assets/files/2393/18-039-01.pdf>

³⁵³ Reed and Pohl, “Tackling the surge.”

Constructed on the Danish SSP (schools, social authoritarians, and police) platform, an interdisciplinary partnership developed approximately 40 years ago to support crime prevention, the model engages a top-down as well as a bottom-up approach. This extensive multi-agency, multi-directional interaction includes support and resource assistance from “*social service providers, the educational system, the health-care system, the police, and the intelligence and security services.*”³⁵⁴ In addition to coordination between the SSP elements, the *Aarhus Model* incorporates continuous dialogue exchanges with mosques, cultural organizations, NGOs, and key members of at-risk communities.^{355 356 357}

The theoretical grounding for the *Aarhus Model* lies in the ‘*Life Psychology*’ scientific discipline.³⁵⁸ Developed at the Aarhus University, the theory centers on how an individual employs generic life skills to handling everyday life tasks and achieving life goals.³⁵⁹ Per the theory, ideological radicalization may occur when an individual experiencing societal exclusion feels, whether by real or perceived threats, that his or her fundamental life goals are blocked; and the only avenue for attainment of a meaningful life is via extreme forms of legal (political protests or religious engagement) or illegal activism (crime or terrorism).³⁶⁰ The Aarhus team attempts to reverse this process by assisting the individual in identifying and ultimately removing perceived obstacles while also providing the individual with the social tools and resources to regain a sense of inclusion.³⁶¹

Finally, the *Aarhus Model* aims to protect to an individual’s constitutional rights, to include freedom of expression, while ensuring the individual poses no threat to either the community, themselves, or Danish democratic norms and institutions.³⁶² However, as with *HAYAT*, the Aarhus approach does not replace punitive measures if warranted.³⁶³ Participation in the counseling and exit programs is voluntary; and engagement does not equate to prison avoidance or sentence reduction in the incidents where a criminal offense occurred.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁴ Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

³⁵⁵ Jackson, Brian A., Ashley L. Rhoades, Jordan R. Reimer, Natasha Lander, Katherine Costello, and Sina Beaghley. “Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes.” *Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center operated by the RAND Corporation* (2019).

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2600/RR2647/RAND_RR2647z1.appendixes.pdf

³⁵⁶ Bertelsen, Preben. “Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation. LGT: A Systematic Assessment, Intervention and Supervision Tool in Mentoring.”, Overland, Gwynyth, Andersen, Arnfinn J. Førde, Kristin Engh Grødum, Kjetil Salomonsen, Joseph (editors). *Violent Extremism in the 21st Century: International Perspectives*, Chapter Part IV, 1, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2018).

https://psy.au.dk/fileadmin/Psykologi/Forskning/Preben_Bertelsen/Artikler/Mentoring_in_anti_radicalization.pdf

³⁵⁷ Aarhus Kommune. “Anti-radicalization.” *Aarhus Kommune* (accessed on March 7, 2022).

<https://www.aarhus.dk/english/collaborate-with-the-city/inclusive-citizenship/anti-radicalisation/#2>

³⁵⁸ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁵⁹ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶⁰ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶¹ Bertelsen, “Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation.”

³⁶² Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶³ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶⁴ Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

Administrative Structure and Oversight

A collaborative group of local Aarhus municipality representatives from schools, social service agencies, and the police, known as SSP Aarhus provides administrative oversight.³⁶⁵ This collective partners closely with the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences at Aarhus University – in addition to political, psychological, sociological, and religious experts.³⁶⁶ An interdisciplinary working group consisting of SSP Aarhus, the East Jutland Police, the Aarhus Municipality Department of Social Affairs and Employment, Aarhus Municipality Department for Children and Young People carry out the program’s daily operations.³⁶⁷ At the federal level, SSP Aarhus interacts with the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) as well as with numerous other governmental ministries.³⁶⁸

SSP Aarhus obtains funding for operations from the Danish government via the Department of Social Services and the Department of Employment,³⁶⁹ however precise figures concerning the annual amount received remains unclear. While the federal government publicly committed to spending approximately €130 million (or \$148 million) during the period of 2015 to 2019^{370 371} to fund counterterrorism measures throughout the country, a majority of the funds went to programs headed by the Danish intelligence services.³⁷²

Despite extensive research, publicly available information fails to indicate the exact staffing level of SSP Aarhus or its supporting team of experts. As of 2015, ten “*well-educated mentors employed by the Municipality of Aarhus*” and “*four mentoring coordinators*” assisted the Aarhus team.³⁷³ The Infohouse, a regional-level collaborative project between the East Jutland Police and SSP Aarhus to prevent radicalization in the Aarhus Municipality, is comprised of two part-time police assistants as well as several members from the Aarhus team.³⁷⁴

Program Entry and Steps of Progression

The *Aarhus Model’s* rehabilitation and reintegration program, referred to as the ‘*exit-process*,’ provides repatriating FTFs and family members desiring to disengage from a jihadi

³⁶⁵ Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. “Countering Violent Extremism II.”

³⁶⁶ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶⁷ Agerschou, Toke. “Preventing Radicalization and Discrimination in Aarhus.” *Journal for Deradicalization* (Winter 2014/2015): 5-22. <http://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/2/2>

³⁶⁸ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁶⁹ Rosen, Nancy. “Denmark and France: A Counterterrorism Case Study, Counterterrorism Strategies and the Infringement of Returning Foreign Fighters’ Human Rights.” *Goucher College* (May 2019): p.72. <http://hdl.handle.net/11603/13885>

³⁷⁰ Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

³⁷¹ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, “Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes.”

³⁷² Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

³⁷³ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁷⁴ Aarhus Kommune, “Anti-radicalization.”

group or abandon radical ideology a pathway to reintegrate into society.³⁷⁵ Phase one initiates prior to repatriation, with the Danish intelligence and security services conducting an intelligence-led assessment on each returning individual.³⁷⁶ If the assessment determines the individual possesses neither threat to national security nor participated in any criminal offenses punishable under Danish law, then the matter is transferred to the regional Infohouse in Aarhus.³⁷⁷ At the Infohouse, a ‘task force’ conducts an assessment to determine an individual’s specific level of radicalization as well as the type of resources the returning individual and his or her social community³⁷⁸ might require.³⁷⁹ ³⁸⁰ ³⁸¹ The task force is composed of members of the East Jutland Police District, the Department of Children and Young People, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Social Affairs and Employment, and a psychologist.³⁸²

Phase two begins with the individual’s return to the Municipality of Aarhus. Following arrival, the individual undergoes a physical and mental health assessment – with the treatment of any mental health issues taking precedence over continuation in the exit program.³⁸³ Following the health assessment, the Aarhus team presents the individual with an “*exit-process cooperation agreement*”³⁸⁴ which outlines the services offered as well as specific goals. Since participation is voluntary,³⁸⁵ the individual is under no obligation to endorse the agreement. However, the Aarhus team advises the individual that program assistance and support services is contingent upon the agreement being authorized.³⁸⁶ According to 2019 RAND study and media reports, a large percentage of FTFs and family members ultimately decline to participate.³⁸⁷ ³⁸⁸

For those that do participate, the final phase of the process entails access to mentorship, psychological counseling and therapy, medical care, education and job opportunities, and

³⁷⁵ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁷⁶ Carlsson, Lotta. “The Role of psychotherapy in rehabilitation and exit work.” *Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission* (November 2021). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/whats-new/publications/role-psychotherapy-rehabilitation-and-exit-work_en

³⁷⁷ Carlsson, “The Role of psychotherapy.”

³⁷⁸ Under the Aarhus Model, the term social community or social network refers to all persons maintaining personal, social, or professional interactions with a radicalized individual. This includes family, friends, school peers, and professional colleagues (Bertelsen, 2015).

³⁷⁹ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁸⁰ Perešin, Anita, and Daniela Pisiou. “Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families: European experiences & lessons for P/CVE.” *Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission* (2021). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-10/ran_ad-hoc_repatriated_ftfs_june_2021_en.pdf

³⁸¹ Aarhus Kommune, “Anti-radicalization.”

³⁸² Agerschou, “Preventing Radicalization.”

³⁸³ Perešin and Pisiou, “Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters.”

³⁸⁴ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁸⁵ Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

³⁸⁶ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁸⁷ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, “Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes.”

³⁸⁸ Higgins, Andrew. “For Jihadists, Denmark Tries Rehabilitation.” *The New York Times* (December 2014). <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/world/for-jihadists-denmark-tries-rehabilitation.html>

housing.³⁸⁹ Mentoring, in particular, plays an essential part of the overall exit process.³⁹⁰ Mentors, recruited with regard to age, gender, background, and experience, work closely with the participants.³⁹¹ The mentor discusses with his or her mentee the “*personal and societal dangers*”³⁹² of radicalization. Additionally, the mentor acts a “*well-informed, interested, and emphatic sparring partner*”³⁹³ for the mentee to discuss daily life challenges as well as political or religious issues in a non-judgmental environment.³⁹⁴ ³⁹⁵ Finally, the mentor actively assists the mentee in finding pathways of inclusion within the Danish society.³⁹⁶ Former FTFs and family members who graduate from mentorship and successfully reintegrate fully in society may be offered positions as mentors other radicalized individuals.³⁹⁷

Due to differing experiences and needs of the individual participants, no set timeline exists for completion of the program. However, the process typically requires about a year – with the InfoHouse remaining in contact with the participant throughout the program and post-completion.³⁹⁸ ³⁹⁹ Additionally, “*the exit process may be terminated at any time by either the citizen or the authorities if the citizen does not adhere to the [cooperation] agreement.*”⁴⁰⁰

Program Success Rate

Much like with the *HAYAT* program, little public data exists beyond anecdotal evidence to measure the model’s success rate – especially with regards to the rehabilitation and reintegration of Danish FTFs and family members.⁴⁰¹ As of late 2014, ten of 16 Danish FTFs who had returned from Syria reportedly rejected offers for counseling assistance, but at least one of the ten subsequently sought assistance with reintegration into society.⁴⁰² No information was discovered regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration status of three Danish women and 14 minors repatriated from SDF-controlled camps in early October 2021.⁴⁰³

³⁸⁹ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, “Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes.”

³⁹⁰ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹¹ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹² Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹³ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹⁴ Reed and Pohl, “Tackling the surge.”

³⁹⁵ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹⁶ Bertelsen, “Danish Preventive Measures.”

³⁹⁷ Powell, “The Aarhus Model.”

³⁹⁸ Rosen, Nancy. “Denmark and France.” p.74.

³⁹⁹ Agerschou, “Preventing Radicalization.”

⁴⁰⁰ Agerschou, “Preventing Radicalization.”

⁴⁰¹ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, “Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes.”

⁴⁰² Higgins, “For Jihadists.”

⁴⁰³ Wight, Emily, and Ahmed Bayram. “Save The Children Welcomes The Repatriation of 37 Danish And German Children From Syrian Camps But Urges None Should Be Left Behind.” *Save The Children* (October 2021).

<https://www.savethechildren.net/news/save-children-welcomes-repatriation-37-danish-and-german-children-syrian-camps-urges-none>

Key Takeaways and Transferable Elements

The *Aarhus Model's* exit-process appears initially to exemplify a near ideal rehabilitation and reintegration program which protects the civil rights of a returnee while also limiting risks to the local community. However, its unique design and strengths are the outgrowth of a long-standing, national approach to overall crime prevention within a small, culturally-homogeneous welfare-state society. As such, the model does not necessarily transfer either wholly or easily to a larger, more culturally-diverse nation like the United States.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, the model requires an ongoing political dedication to federally-fund medical/mental health treatment, educational/employment opportunities, housing, and mentorship services⁴⁰⁵ for individuals who some in the United States may be reluctant to repatriate let alone financially support. Regardless, several individual components of the model's exit-process would directly enhance an US reintegration mechanism.

First, the program's implementation of multiple forms of assessments – security-focused, physical and mental health, and ongoing risk – represents a transferable best practice. While the USG currently conducts intelligence and initial security-focused risk assessments as well as physical health evaluations on repatriating USPERs, mental health assessments (when conducted) fall primarily upon local, state, or NGOs to coordinate with certified and trained medical professionals.⁴⁰⁶ Likewise, any post-repatriation, follow-up risk assessment of a non-criminally charged USPER, if conducted at all, becomes the responsibility of either state or community-based social services agencies who often lack the necessary resources to undertake such measures. However, with the development of a national reintegration mechanism, the United States could help ensure these assessments are conducted, or at least made available, for a returnee within a given period post-repatriation. In turn, these assessments would better position the USG to identify and counter any potential threats posed by the repatriated individual while also assisting medical and social services in developing treatment plans based on individualistic needs of each returnee.

The second transferable practice concerns the exit-process's use of a voluntary cooperation agreement to protect an individual's civil rights whilst providing incentives for program participation. A similar form of contractual agreement placed within the US reintegration framework would likewise assist in both formalizing and incentivizing the rehabilitation process. The contract could clearly outline the services and support offered as well as the goals and expectations for the participant. Should either side (the program administrators or the participant) decide the terms of the agreement are no longer satisfactory then the contact could be dissolved and services halted, thereby limiting the potential for wasted resources.

⁴⁰⁴ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, "Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes."

⁴⁰⁵ Jackson, Rhoades, Reimer, Lander, Costello, and Beaghley, "Practical Terrorism Prevention: Appendixes."

⁴⁰⁶ Healthwise Staff. "Mental Health Assessment." *University of Michigan Health System* (accessed on March 11, 2022). <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/aa79756>

The model's dedication to long-term mentorship signifies a third transferable element. While the *Munasaha* and *HAYAT* programs also rely upon mentor-mentee relationships during the rehabilitation phase, only the Aarhus initiative places an emphasize on the importance of extended capacity building and individual guidance through focused mentorship.^{407 408} Establishing similar mentorship component within a US reintegration mechanism would provide returnees with a fixed point of contact while progressing through the phases of rehabilitation and societal reinsertion. The mentor would be available to discuss any daily life challenges (family, housing, employment, education, social relationships) and engage in non-judgmental dialogues regarding personal or religious beliefs with the participant. The mentor would also be able to monitor the participant's adherence to the overall program objectives.

The fourth and final element pertains to the model's overall focus on societal inclusion rather than exclusion or stigmatization.⁴⁰⁹ Each of the four foreign programs reviewed by this study regard repatriated FTF family members, albeit in measured terms, as victimized citizens requiring eventual reintegration into society. The *Aarhus Model* in particular is based on the principle that continued exclusion, marginalization, or stigmatization in society reinforces a commitment to extremist tendencies. Conversely, by ensuring inclusion, a radicalized individual's personal, religious, or political motivations may be transformed into "*legal modes of participation*"⁴¹⁰ – thereby making the individual a positive and productive member of a democratic society. Since many of the USPER FTF family members are assessed to be criminally inculpable, incorporating the principle of inclusion into a reintegration mechanism should produce a higher potential payoff in the long-term than the current ad hoc approach.

SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

While no single mechanism for rehabilitation and reintegration applies across all cultures nor addresses all challenges, the summarization of the transferable elements from the four foreign initiatives nonetheless highlights eleven core best practices. These practices fall into two distinct groupings: physical elements and programmatic components. The six physical elements include a transition center, voluntary cooperation agreement, team of diverse specialists, assessments and evaluations, support hotline, and dedicated funding. The five programmatic components entail the principle of inclusion, medical treatment and psychotherapy sessions, empathic exchanges concerning religion, long-term mentorship, and inclusion of family during the rehabilitation and aftercare. By incorporating both the physical and programmatic features, a reintegration support mechanism can be designed to address the diverse needs faced by USPER FTF family members who have yet to be repatriated as well as those who have already returned. Furthermore, the adoption of these features would significantly lessen any potential near-term security threats as the individuals would be observed for a period of time prior to community

⁴⁰⁷ Hemmingsen, "Introduction to Danish Approach."

⁴⁰⁸ Bertelsen, "Danish Preventive Measures."

⁴⁰⁹ Hassan, "Denmark's De-Radicalisation Programme."

⁴¹⁰ Bertelsen, "Danish Preventive Measures."

reinsertion. Similarly, the services offered by participating in the program would better position the individuals to achieve successful long-term reintegration into society.

Just as each of the four foreign initiatives revealed transferable best practices, they also underscored several pitfalls to avoid. First, underfunding hampers any focused efforts on rehabilitation and reintegration. As in the case of the *KEMENSOS Plan*, funding levels impacted the daily operations of one to the two government-run shelters. It becomes difficult to provide critical services, medical and mental health care, and retain specialized staff in a rehabilitation program without a dedicated funding stream or annual budgetary allocations from either public or private sources. Second, decentralized leadership and stakeholder competition in rehabilitation and reintegration programs directly impacts strategic objectives and daily operations as well as delegitimizes the process in the eyes of the participants. Again, as in the case of the *KEMENSOS Plan*, multiple agencies and NGOs desired to engage in or direct portions of the program – however no single entity assumed centralized leadership of the initiative. Instead, competing interests resulted in participants receiving duplicative or conflicting offers of assistance which eroded trust. Finally, the duration of individuals’ involvement within the program should not be fixed to a specific timeframe. Rather the program’s duration must remain flexible to address the individualistic requirements of a given participant. This does not mean that an individual would or should remain indefinitely within the program, but that the program should account for the fact that disengagement from extremism and rehabilitation are non-linear processes requiring significant time.

ANALYSIS

The current posture of the USPER women and minors in SDF- or Iraqi-administered detention centers along with the success of other countries in assisting their own returning citizens not only demonstrates a national-level rehabilitation and reintegration mechanism is necessary, but also achievable and highly desirable. Justification for such an apparatus may be found by examining the following factors: (1) the unsustainability of the status quo, (2) the failure of the existing US return process to either provide care for the returning USPERs or address security concerns they may pose, and (3) the benefits provided by the implementation of a national-level system focused on rehabilitation and reintegration support.

UNSUSTAINABILITY OF THE STATUS QUO

Quite simply, the status quo of the current detainment situation as it pertains to the USPER FTF family members is unsustainable. At present, the IDP camps and prisons housing USPER women and children lack basic humanitarian resources as well as adequate internal security measures which places both their physical and mental well-being at risk. Al-Hol, the largest of the SDF-administered facilities, is known as the ‘Camp of Death’ due to extreme

overcrowding and deteriorating conditions.⁴¹¹ However, this moniker could be applicable to any number of the IDP camps and prisons in northwest Syria and Iraq. One female detainee described daily life in the camps as:

*“Mentally exhausting. ... never gets better here. Always worse. ... majority of the children in the camp are sick. Almost everyday something bad happens. Children trapped in burning tents and dies. ... We have water tank that contains worms.”*⁴¹²

According to data collected by the United Nations and several humanitarian aid organizations, between 2019 and early 2021 more than 700 women and children died while detained in the al-Hol and Roj camps.⁴¹³ Reports specifically indicated some individuals perished as a result of either unsanitary conditions or the absence of medical care, while others were executed by fellow detainees for perceived rejection of extremist teachings.⁴¹⁴ Officials from the SDF as well as the United Nations also continuously warn of elements within the camps and prisons using ISIS ideology to indoctrinate and radicalize the youth.⁴¹⁵ A woman released from al-Hol camp in early 2021, reported observing children chanting “*the Islamic State endures*” while holding makeshift ISIS flags.⁴¹⁶ During a 2021 visit by the Associated Press, a young boy residing within the foreign nationals’ annex of al-Hol camp made a beheading gesture toward reporters and uttered “*with the knife, God willing.*”⁴¹⁷ Another boy shouted “*You are the enemy of God. We are the Islamic State. You are a devil, and I will kill you with a knife. I will blow you up with a grenade.*”⁴¹⁸

By permitting the USPER women and minors to remain detained indefinitely under such harsh conditions, the USG merely prolongs the exposure of these at-risk individuals to trauma, violence, and radicalization.⁴¹⁹ The children in particular are exceedingly vulnerable as they lack both the cognitive and emotional development needed to cope with the external pressures caused by the severe environment and extreme ideology.⁴²⁰ As noted by the Save the Children, a leading

⁴¹¹ Zelin, Aaron Y. “Wilayat al-Hawl: ‘Remaining’ and Incubating the Next Islamic State Generation.” *Policy Notes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (October 2019). <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/907>

⁴¹² Human Rights Watch. “Thousands of Foreigners Unlawfully Held in NE Syria.” *Human Rights Watch* (March 2021). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/23/thousands-foreigners-unlawfully-held-ne-syria>

⁴¹³ Human Rights Watch, “Thousands of Foreigners.”

⁴¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Thousands of Foreigners.”

⁴¹⁵ Saleh, “The Women of ISIS.”

⁴¹⁶ Al Abdo, Hogir and Bassem Mroue. “In Syria camp, forgotten children are molded by IS ideology.” *AP News* (June 2021). <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-united-nations-syria-middle-east-ef4113e4ec925db452ea82d368e6e4f4>

⁴¹⁷ Al Abdo and Mroue, “In Syria camp.”

⁴¹⁸ Al Abdo and Mroue, “In Syria camp.”

⁴¹⁹ Zelin, “Wilayat al-Hawl.”

⁴²⁰ Kuznar, Lawrence, Ali Jafri, and Eric Kuznar. “Dealing with Radicalization in IDP Camps.” *NSI Reachback Report, Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office, Joint Staff – Deputy Director for Global Operations* (February 2020). https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NSI-Reachback_B5_Dealing-with-Radicalization-in-IDP-Camps_Feb2020_Final.pdf

NGO focused on children’s health and education, “*these children are ISIS’s first victims... [the camps do] not allow them to learn, socialize or be children... [nor] allow them to heal from all that they have lived through.*”⁴²¹

Beyond the conditions within camp and prison conditions, it is also imperative to remember these detained USPERs face no pending criminal charges in either the United States or within Syria or Iraq.⁴²² By failing to repatriate these women and minors in a timely fashion, the USG appears to violate the Due Process Clause of Fifth Amendment that guarantees “*no person shall...be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.*”^{423 424} As a result of restricted consular services within Syria as well as the ambiguity regarding which nations or regional administrative entities are responsible for ensuring basic rights – to include access to legal representation⁴²⁵ – within the camps and prisons, the USPER women and minors possess no actual means to contest their condition or treatment. As such, this lack of due process effectively denies these non-criminally charged individuals both their liberty and potentially lives.⁴²⁶

Lastly, these USPER women and minors maintain a legal right to return to the United States.⁴²⁷ The US Supreme Court has previously recognized native-born and naturalized citizens as possessing an inherent right to enter the United States.⁴²⁸ Furthermore, the court determined involuntary expatriation “*is not a weapon that the Government may use to express its displeasure at a citizen’s conduct, however reprehensible that conduct may be.*”⁴²⁹ In addition, several lower federal court rulings indicate that LPR status may also be considered a right protected under the Fifth Amendment.^{430 431} Therefore, the denial of an LPR’s re-entry to the United States or an attempt to unilaterally revoke his or her status – and thereby presumed right to return – while abroad constitutes a possible violation of procedural due process.⁴³² Consequently, these

⁴²¹ Al Abdo and Mroue, “In Syria camp.”

⁴²² United States Department of Justice, “United States Repatriated 27.”

⁴²³ Pines, “Overseas LPR Terrorists.”

⁴²⁴ FindLaw Attorney Writers. “Fifth Amendment Due Process.” *FindLaw, Thomson Reuters* (October 2021).

<https://constitution.findlaw.com/amendment5/annotation05.html>

⁴²⁵ International Crisis Group. “Women and Children First: Repatriating the Westerners Affiliated with ISIS.”

International Crisis Group, Middle East Report N°208 (November 2019).

<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/208-women-and-children-first.pdf>

⁴²⁶ Capone, Francesca. “The children (and wives) of foreign ISIS fighters: Which obligations upon the States of nationality?” *Questions of International Law, Zoom In 60* (2019). <http://www.qil-qdi.org/the-children-and-wives-of-foreign-isis-fighters-which-obligations-upon-the-states-of-nationality/>

⁴²⁷ Lee, Margaret Mikyung. “Home Is Where They Have To Take You In: Right To Entry For U.S. Citizens.”

Federation of American Scientists, Legal Sidebar (October 2014). <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/home.pdf>

⁴²⁸ Lee, “Home Is Where.”

⁴²⁹ Kahn, Jeffrey. “Doe v. Mattis and the Rights of Citizens to Return to the United States.” *Lawfare* (August 2018).

<https://www.lawfareblog.com/doe-v-mattis-and-right-citizens-return-united-states>

⁴³⁰ Pines, “Overseas LPR Terrorists.”

⁴³¹ Ahn, Caroline. “Kwong Hai Chew v. Colding.” *Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School* (accessed on June 5, 2022). https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/kwong_hai_chew_v_colding

⁴³² Pines, “Overseas LPR Terrorists.”

detained USPERs, citizen and LPR alike, cannot be denied entry to the United States indefinitely. By continuing to prolong their eventual return, the USG only increases the risk that these women and minors will develop deep-seated grievances which threaten to transform them into a new generation of anti-Western extremists.⁴³³

FAILURE OF THE EXISTING US RETURN PROCESS

Beyond the unsustainability of the status quo, the current US return process also fails to ensure adequate access to the social support services needed for successful rehabilitation and reintegration or to address any potential security concerns. At present, the process views the USPER returnees primarily through a binary lens – one in which an individual represents either a criminal ‘perpetrator’ or a ‘victim’.^{434 435} Those identified as perpetrators face arrest and prosecution upon repatriation, whereas those labeled as victims simply resettle into local communities to commence potential reintegration. As such, the process largely ignores those higher-risk individuals who happen to embody both the ‘victim and perpetrator’ – as observed in some of the detained FTF family members.

As discussed earlier, most of the detained minors either traveled with parents or were born within Islamic State-controlled territory. Despite undergoing extensive ideological indoctrination, receiving weapons training,^{436 437} and engaging in violence on behalf of ISIS,⁴³⁸^{439 440} these children nonetheless remain legally inculpable for their actions due to age.^{441 442}

⁴³³ Zelin, “Wilayat al-Hawl.”

⁴³⁴ Miller, Elizabeth Lauren. “An Analysis of Women and Terrorism: Perpetrators, Victims, Both?”. *CUNY Academic Works* (June 2020). https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3823

⁴³⁵ Binetti, Ashley. “A New Frontier: Human Trafficking and ISIS’s Recruitment of Women from the West.” *INFORMATION2ACTION, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security* (2015). <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Human-Trafficking-and-ISISs-Recruitment-of-Women-from-the-West.pdf>

⁴³⁶ BBC, “It’s sweet relief.”

⁴³⁷ United States Department of Justice. “American Woman Who Led ISIS Battalion Pleads Guilty.” *Justice News* (June 2022). <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/american-woman-who-led-isis-battalion-pleads-guilty>

⁴³⁸ Mekhennet, Souad and Joby Warrick. “For the ‘children of ISIS,’ target practice starts at age 6. By their teens, they’re ready to be suicide bombers.” *The Washington Post* (October 2016). https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/for-the-children-of-isis-target-practice-starts-at-age-6-by-their-teens-theyre-ready-to-be-suicide-bombers/2016/10/06/3b59f0fc-8664-11e6-92c2-14b64f3d453f_story.html

⁴³⁹ Almohammad, Asaad. “ISIS Child Soldiers in Syria: The Structural and Predatory Recruitment, Enlistment, Pre-Training Indoctrination, Training, and Deployment.” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* (February 2018). <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2018/02/ICCT-Almohammad-ISIS-Child-Soldiers-In-Syria-Feb2018.pdf>

⁴⁴⁰ Harnisch, Chris. “Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges.” *Remarks by Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism Chris Harnisch, U.S. Mission to the OSCE* (February 2020). <https://osce.usmission.gov/foreign-terrorist-fighters-addressing-current-challenges/>

⁴⁴¹ Ash, Peter. “But He Knew It Was Wrong: Evaluating Adolescent Culpability.” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, vol. 40, no. 1 (January 2012). <https://jaapl.org/content/40/1/21>

⁴⁴² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). “Handbook on Gender Dimensions of criminal justice responses to terrorism.” *United Nations* (2019). https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/GENDER/17-08887_HB_Gender_Criminal_Justice_E_ebook.pdf

Likewise, some of the detained women, while having committed no criminally chargeable offences, however continue to harbor extremist beliefs⁴⁴³ and grievances which were only further amplified as a result of their experiences under the Islamic States and later within the camps. This dangerous combination of radicalization and deep-seated grievances is of particular concern with regards to non-charged USPERs returning to the United States. Research conducted at the University of California – San Diego indicates unaddressed grievances, often resulting from significant personal losses that negatively impact daily life, may lead to violence when coupled with humiliation and anger.⁴⁴⁴ Under the current return process – which gives limited consideration to rehabilitation or long-term public safety, a potentially aggrieved and radicalized USPER ‘victim-perpetrator’ remains eligible for direct reinsertion into local communities as long as he or she lacks criminal charges.

A second security- and humanitarian-related shortcoming of the current return process concerns the severe mental health crisis presently impacting many of the detained women and children within the camps and prisons.⁴⁴⁵ As such, those USPERs repatriated in the future likely will need extensive psychological counseling⁴⁴⁶ and specialized mental health care which the current process is wholly unprepared to address. In fact, many communities already lack sufficient resources needed to assist at-risk individuals or marginalized populaces.^{447 448} Rapidly increasing rates of mental illness throughout the United States, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic⁴⁴⁹ and further exasperated by an endemic of mass shootings involving troubled adolescents,^{450 451} has overburdened the present mosaic of local and state institutions responsible for mental health care, rehabilitation, public safety, and social services.

⁴⁴³ Harnisch, “Foreign Terrorist Fighters.”

⁴⁴⁴ Bergen, Peter. “Opinion: Forensic psychologist largely dismisses common talking point that mass shootings are caused by individuals with mental disorders.” *CNN* (June 2022). <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/18/opinions/mass-murders-pathway-to-violence-bergen-meloy/index.html>

⁴⁴⁵ Percy, Jennifer. “How Does the Human Soul Survive Atrocity?” *The New York Times Magazine* (November 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/31/magazine/iraq-mental-health.html>

⁴⁴⁶ Kuznar, Jafri, and Kuznar, “Dealing with Radicalization.”

⁴⁴⁷ Pollack, Daniel and Marisa Markowitz. “Is there a shortage of rural social workers?” *National Rural Health Association* (November 2021). <https://www.ruralhealth.us/blogs/ruralhealthvoices/november-2021/is-there-a-shortage-of-rural-social-workers>

⁴⁴⁸ National Institute of Mental Health. “Mental Health and Rural America: Challenges and Opportunities (transcript).” *National Institute of Mental Health* (May 2018). <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/media/2018/mental-health-and-rural-america-challenges-and-opportunities>

⁴⁴⁹ Panchal, Nirmita and Rabah Kamal, Cynthia Cox, Rachel Garfield. “The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use.” *Kaiser Family Foundation* (February 2021). <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

⁴⁵⁰ Tucker, Emma. “The Buffalo shooting suspect showed signs of violent behavior and was left untreated. Violence prevention experts say troubled youth like him need long-term support.” *CNN* (June 2022). <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/06/us/buffalo-case-shows-why-troubled-youth-need-long-term-treatment/index.html>

⁴⁵¹ Thrush, Glenn and Matt Richtel. “A Disturbing New Pattern in Mass Shootings: Young Assailants.” *The New York Times* (June 2022). <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/02/us/politics/mass-shootings-young-men-guns.html>

According to 2017 study conducted by the Steinberg Institute, a leading non-profit focused on brain health, two-thirds of primary care physicians in the United States reported complications in locating mental health services for patients.^{452 453} Furthermore, approximately 55% of the more than 3,000 counties throughout the United States indicated an absence of practicing psychiatrists,^{454 455 456} while 77% of those counties reported an overall shortage of behavioral health specialists.⁴⁵⁷ As a result, the dependence on local law enforcement to address mental health situations has grown significantly^{458 459} – often times with disastrous consequences.⁴⁶⁰ In a 2011 nationwide survey of more than 2,400 senior law enforcement officials, 84% of the participants indicated a substantial rise in mental health–related calls over the preceding two decades.⁴⁶¹ According to a 2015 study published by the Treatment Advocacy Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the treatment of severe mental illness,⁴⁶² the likelihood of individuals with an untreated mental illness being killed during a law enforcement encounter is 16 times higher than for any other group.⁴⁶³ As studies have repeatedly shown, adverse environments and prolonged exposure to violence directly and negatively impacts the long-term mental health of individuals.⁴⁶⁴ Without access to dedicated and specialized support, the odds of successfully reintegration for those USPERs repatriating in the future significantly diminishes while increasing the risk of their involvement in a potentially violent confrontation.

⁴⁵² Smith, Andy. “Shortage of Psychiatrists and Mental Health Providers Projected to Rise.” *inSync Healthcare Solutions* (accessed June 11, 2022). <https://www.insynchcs.com/blog/rising-shortage-mental-health-providers>

⁴⁵³ Steinberg Institute. “Fact Sheet: How Primary Care Providers Can Help Solve Our Psychiatrist Shortage.” *Steinberg Institute* (August 2017). <https://steinberginstitute.org/press-release/fact-sheet-primary-care-providers-can-help-solve-psychiatrist-shortage/>

⁴⁵⁴ Smith, “Shortage of Psychiatrists.”

⁴⁵⁵ Kuntz, Leah. “Psychiatric Care in the US: Are We Facing a Crisis?” *Psychiatric Times*, vol. 39, issue 4 (April 2022). <https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/psychiatric-care-in-the-us-are-we-facing-a-crisis>

⁴⁵⁶ Steinberg Institute, “Fact Sheet.”

⁴⁵⁷ National Council Medical Director Institute. “The Psychiatric Shortage: Causes and Solutions.” *National Council Medical Director Institute* (March 2017). <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Revised-Final-Access-Paper.pdf>

⁴⁵⁸ Westervelt, Eric. “Mental Health And Police: How Crisis Intervention Teams Are Failing.” *National Public Radio* (September 2020). <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/913229469/mental-health-and-police-violence-how-crisis-intervention-teams-are-failing>

⁴⁵⁹ Butler, Stuart and Nehath Sheriff. “Innovative solutions to address the mental health crisis: Shifting away from police as first responders.” *Brookings* (November 2020). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/innovative-solutions-to-address-the-mental-health-crisis-shifting-away-from-police-as-first-responders/>

⁴⁶⁰ Butler and Sheriff, “Innovative solutions.”

⁴⁶¹ Mental Illness Policy Org. “Survey: Police needlessly overburdened by mentally ill abandoned by mental health system.” *Mental Illness Policy Org* (accessed on June 1, 2022). <https://mentalillnesspolicy.org/crimjust/homelandsecuritymentalillness.html>

⁴⁶² Treatment Advocacy Center. “Who We Are and What We Do (Mission Statement).” *Treatment Advocacy Center* (Accessed on June 23, 2022). <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/about-us>

⁴⁶³ Fuller, Doris, H. Richard Lamb, Michael Biasotti, and John Snook. “Overlooked in the Undercounted: The Role of Mental Illness in Fatal Law Enforcement Encounters.” *Office of Research and Public Affairs, Treatment Advocacy Center* (December 2015). <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/overlooked-in-the-undercounted.pdf>

⁴⁶⁴ National Association of Social Workers. “2021 Blueprint of Federal Social Policy Priorities: Recommendations to the Biden-Harris Administration and Congress.” *National Association of Social Workers* (January 2021). <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=KPdZqqY60t4%3d&portalid=0>

Lastly, the current return process fails to acknowledge that repatriating women and minors often require extensive social assistance in obtaining immediate housing, temporary socio-economic support, educational enrollment, and vocational training – key elements for potential successful reintegration. As with psychological and behavioral support, the current return process ignores basic human needs at the national-level and places the burden for such services on often underfunded local, state, and community-based institutions. A 2021 report released by the National Association of Social Workers revealed several million Americans depended upon roughly 700,000 social workers daily to assist with location and obtainment of basic human services.⁴⁶⁵ A pre-COVID-19 pandemic study of estimated workforce levels predicated a shortage of more than 195,000 social workers by 2030.⁴⁶⁶ By failing to provide a dedicated social support mechanism for these vulnerable individuals returning from the camps and prisons, the USG only heightens the risks of them remaining marginalized within their resettlement communities.

BENEFITS OF A NATIONAL-LEVEL SYSTEM

The establishment of a national-level rehabilitation and reintegration mechanism will succeed where the current return process fails – by providing both humanitarian assistance and addressing security concerns. The implementation of a centralized, stand-alone apparatus ensures non-charged USPER FTF family members, returning from an SDF or Iraqi facility, will have ready access to critically needed physical and mental health care as well as social support services. Moreover, the establishment of a national-level transition center or ‘half-way house’ will provide returnees with a secure environment to begin the transition to civilian life as well as a controlled environment for mental health specialists to conduct ongoing evaluations, risk assessments, and threat monitoring over an extended period. By alleviating much of the risk associated with the direct reinsertion of traumatized – and potentially radicalized – persons into local communities, the USG will be able to balance public safety with the specialized care required for these individuals to reintegrate successfully into society.

OPPOSITION TO REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

Three main arguments frequently surface in opposition to any proposed rehabilitation and reintegration initiative or mechanism: (1) the effort is unjustifiable or unwarranted, (2) the funding required to support the effort would be better allocated elsewhere, and (3) no universally agreed upon empirical-based metric exists to measure program effectiveness.

The claim that returning USPER FTF family members should be handled either by using the criminal justice system exclusively or else by maintaining the current return process is

⁴⁶⁵ National Association of Social Workers, “2021 Blueprint.”

⁴⁶⁶ Lin, Vernon W., and Joyce Lin, Xiaoming Zhang. “U.S. Social Worker Workforce Report Card: Forecasting Nationwide Shortage.” *Social Work*, vol. 61, issue 1 (January 2016): 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv047>

incorrect. Some political leaders continue to insist that rather than instituting an unwarranted and incentive-laden approach to reintegration, an expansion of punitive measures would be more effective in dealing with returning individuals possessing any terrorist-affiliations – to include the wives and children of FTFs.⁴⁶⁷ Yet, these leaders ignore the reality that punishment or, at the minimum, the continued marginalization of non-charged women and minors only heightens the risk of their future re-engagement with extremism. Similarly, some leaders also assert the absence of any US-based attacks to date by formerly repatriated USPER FTF family members clearly demonstrates the success of the current ad hoc reintegration approach. However, they too fail to appreciate that a system only appears to work until it suddenly does not. Given the exposure to violence and radicalization many of these USPER women and minors faced the continued embracement of the ‘do little-to-nothing’ status quo is nothing more than a game-of-chance.

The claim that a national-level rehabilitation and reintegration mechanism is not a good investment is also incorrect. Budget allocation and program funding certainly poses an ongoing challenge for every country – the United States included. However, while numerous initiatives compete for a finite number of resources, the benefits associated rehabilitation and reintegration programs nonetheless out-weigh the costs. Each at-risk individual who is rehabilitated and successfully reintegrated into society as a productive member signifies one less potential security threat.

Finally, contrary to program skeptics who claim no empirical-based metric exists to measure program effectiveness, it is possible to develop a means to measure success over time. As with many aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, the most appropriate or useful metric to determine a program’s level of success tends to be heavily debated. While long established programs often utilize recidivism rates to demonstrate efficacy, newer programs require time to compile reliable data for such calculations.⁴⁶⁸ However, participant survey responses and rates of program completion do serve as useful short-term metrics to assess a program’s effectiveness in the meantime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the existing inadequacies of the repatriation and societal reinsertion process for USPER FTF family members, the United States must develop and implement a stand-alone reintegration mechanism. To undertake this effort, the USG should commit to the following four actions: (1) establishment of a federally-funded transition center and rehabilitation program, (2) incorporation of a voluntary cooperation agreement, (3) establishment of an online portal and

⁴⁶⁷ Hemmingsen, “Introduction to Danish Approach.”

⁴⁶⁸ Mastroe and Susan Szmania, “Surveying CVE Metrics.”

national hotline focused on reintegration support, and (4) establishment of the position of ‘*Returnee Coordinator*’ within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The first three actions represent near- to medium-term solutions to the current challenges faced by the non-charged women and minors repatriating from either an SDF or Iraqi facility. The fourth action provides a long-term solution to address future coordination and repatriation efforts associated with conflicts beyond the confines of Syria and Iraq.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: ESTABLISH A FEDERALLY FUNDED TRANSITION CENTER AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The establishment of a transition in-take center and rehabilitation program provides returning family members with immediate access to critically needed physical care and mental health support, while also allowing for the evaluation and threat monitoring of these individuals within a controlled environment. Furthermore, as short-term residential facility, the center alleviates much of the risk associated with the direct reinsertion of traumatized and possibly radicalized individuals returning from a conflict zone into local communities that may lack medical and social services. Additionally, the center would provide the women and minors a secure environment to adjust to civilian life and re-build personal support networks.

The Center’s Service Functions

Establishing an In-take Process

Limited information pertaining to the personal circumstances of each individual prior to arrival at the center necessitates an in-take interview to establish a baseline assessment regardless of the individual’s age. This in-take evaluation would not only assist with the identification of the types of medical treatment, counseling, and social support services required, but would also aid in highlighting any potential risks posed by an individual.

During the actual in-take interview, qualified staff would initiate rapport building in order to develop trust with the individual, determine the specific needs of that individual, and discuss the types of services available during the rehabilitation and reinsertion phases. Furthermore, during the in-take evaluation process, each individual – with the possible exception of very young children – should be provided with opportunities to provide input and feedback concerning their personally unique plans for rehabilitation, reinsertion, and eventually reintegration. Doing so, would permit the individual to gain a sense of inclusion, control, and collaboration during the entire process rather than being a merely reactive element within it.

Conducting Periodic Risk Assessments

Given the long-term exposure to trauma, violence, and radical ideology, the women and children participating in the center’s rehabilitation program should undergo not only evaluations focused on medical treatment and mental health counseling progression, but also periodic risk assessments. Several types of violent extremism risk assessment tools already exist – such as Violent Extremism Risk Assessment Version 2 Revised (VERA-2R), the Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG 22+), and Significant Quest Assessment Tool (SQAT)⁴⁶⁹ – for adults. Assessments for minors present a more difficult challenge, however at least one foreign rehabilitation program utilizes VERA-2R to evaluate its radicalized youth.⁴⁷⁰ Conducting periodic risk assessments would help determine whether any of the program participants pose a potential threat prior to reinsertion into society. Should an assessment identify an individual as a potential violent security concern, it would necessitate the center to alert and work closely with law enforcement regarding the matter.

Providing Psychological Support

The psychological support provided by the center during the rehabilitation program should be sensitive to both gender and age. Many current rehabilitation and reintegration efforts focusing on returning FTF family members trace their roots to modifications made to prison-release programs constructed upon the concept of “*adult male norms*.”⁴⁷¹ However, such an approach may not be appropriate for many of the women and the majority of the minors. As such, any psychological support and treatment must focus on the unique gender and age-related needs of women and minors suffering from the negative effects of long-term exposure to violence, trauma, and radical ideology.

Multiple compulsory and competing systems or methods of psychotherapy currently exist to address the variety of trauma, mental health, and behavioral issues faced by adults and minors. Determining the appropriate system or method for each of the program’s participants must be handled by qualified healthcare professionals at the center. Regardless of the specific treatment plan, success will ultimately be measured upon whether the individual successfully reintegrates into society in the long-term.

⁴⁶⁹ Van Der Heide, Liesbeth, and Marieke van der Zwan, Maarten van Leyenhorst. “The Practitioner’s Guide to the Galaxy - A Comparison of Risk Assessment Tools for Violent Extremism.” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* (September 2019).

https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/09/29Aug19_Formatted_ThePractitionersGuidetotheGalaxy-2.pdf

⁴⁷⁰ Barracosa, Steven, and James March. “Dealing With Radicalised Youth Offenders: The Development and Implementation of a Youth-Specific Framework.” *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol 12: 773545 (January 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.773545>

⁴⁷¹ Brown, Katherine E., and F.N. Mohammed. “Gender-Sensitive Approaches to FTF Child Returnee Management.” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (December 2021). https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-12/ran_ad-hoc_gender_sensitive_response_ftfs_122021_en.pdf

Developing Social Support Networks

Strengthening an individual's social support network significantly contributes to a sense of inclusion, shared purpose, and self-confidence which are all critical elements in countering the feelings of marginalization. As such, developing or re-building an individual's social support network should be a core priority during the rehabilitation post-reinsertion phases. Counselors, religious scholars, support groups, and social workers as well as family members are best positioned to assist in this effort. Social support services provided by the center should include practical assistance (locating housing, transportation, and employment opportunities), information sharing (identifying and securing community resources for participants prior to reinsertion), and emotional assistance (engaging in empathic listening and non-judgmental dialogue exchanges).

Providing Mentorship and Engaging in Ideological Dialogues

Mentorship plays an essential part in most rehabilitation programs – especially with regards to dialogue exchanges concerning radicalization or victimization. To be deemed competent, empathetic, and credible, the center's mentors should be recruited based on not only background and experience, but also age and gender. As the program participants will be women and minors, special importance should be placed on employing both males and females with experiences similar to those of the participants. Ideally, a few of the mentors should be former extremists or individuals who resided in refugee or IDP camps.

Depending on the mentee, a mentor may need to assume the role of an emphatic and non-judgmental sparring partner in discussions pertaining to daily life, politics, or religion. Regardless of gender or age, the mentor should create an environment in which the mentee feels safe to freely discuss his or her perspectives on life.⁴⁷² That said, the mentor, especially when working with an individual espousing a violent or radicalized ideology, must be skilled in steering the mentee away from extremist trajectories and toward legal and non-violent means to express his or her dissatisfaction.⁴⁷³ This effort must also be done without violating the individual's rights or condemning his or her belief system.

Finally, the mentor should prepare the mentee for reinsertion into his or her home community by assisting with the identification of pathways for societal inclusion. The mentor can achieve this by ensuring the mentee possesses the general life skills needed to comprehend and manage the daily tasks or challenges they will face following reinsertion.⁴⁷⁴ Program participants empowered through mentorship with the skills to positively participate within the framework their given community face a greater chance of successful reintegration in the long-term.

⁴⁷² Bertelsen, "Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation."

⁴⁷³ Bertelsen, "Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation."

⁴⁷⁴ Bertelsen, "Mentoring in Anti-radicalisation."

Promoting Educational and Vocational Training Opportunities

Providing an individual with access to education and vocational training is critical during both the rehabilitation and reinsertion phases. While many of the returning adult women would likely benefit from opportunities to advance their knowledge and employable skills base, education will be central to the development of each of the minors. Minors under the Islamic State were “*consider the generation that would continue and expand the Caliphate in the future.*”⁴⁷⁵ As such, they experienced an educational system constructed on the tenets of a radical Salafist ideology that rejected any subjects such as social sciences, history, and art which failed to align with strict religious teachings.⁴⁷⁶ Placing minors who attend the program within an educational setting as soon as safely possible not allows them a return to normal life, but also permits the minors to gain potential exposure to cultural and religious diversity outside of that provided by their immediate family.⁴⁷⁷ This increased exposure is critical to their cognitive, intellectual, and social development.

Promoting Family Support

The level of familial support frequently and directly impacts the likelihood of long-term reintegration success. Family members not only provide emotional and financial assistance, but also act as a counterbalance to the re-engagement pull of extremist groups. Thus, family involvement should play an important part during a participant’s rehabilitation and reinsertion phases. The center can assist the family in preparing for this role by providing counseling services, training sessions, and access to short-term subsidized lodging. The lodging, reserved for those families required to travel more than 50 miles from their home residences to participate, would be located either directly onsite or else in near proximity and modeled upon the Ronald McDonald House program which provides temporary housing for families of seriously ill children receiving medical treatment not available in their hometowns. By empowering family members to create an empathetic support network and positive home environment, the overall chances dramatically increase for the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of the returning USPER FTF family member.

Promoting Community Outreach

As with family support, “*community engagement can serve to reinforce or compliment official rehabilitation,*”⁴⁷⁸ reinsertion, and reintegration efforts. The center should conduct extensive outreach to relevant local community actors such as civil society organizations and the religious intuitions⁴⁷⁹ in order to provide education and familiarization on the challenges faced by returning USPER FTF women and minors. Since successful reintegration requires not only

⁴⁷⁵ Sischka, Bialluch, and Lozano, “Female Returnees and their Children.”

⁴⁷⁶ Sischka, Bialluch, and Lozano, “Female Returnees and their Children.”

⁴⁷⁷ Sischka, Bialluch, and Lozano, “Female Returnees and their Children.”

⁴⁷⁸ Hussin, “Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation.”

⁴⁷⁹ Hussin, “Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation.”

the individual's desire to re-engage with his or her community but also the community's acceptance of the individual, community-based engagement can foster a sense of inclusion to mitigate the risk of re-victimization and possible recidivism.⁴⁸⁰

Providing Post-Transition Center Support

Given the considerable time required to achieve successful reintegration, the center's support function should not end upon an individual's completion of the rehabilitation program and reinsertion into his or her home community. Rather, the center should be prepared to provide aftercare assistance. This assistance should include: (1) access to the center's counselors, mentors, and social workers, (2) support in locating housing or social services, (3) local referrals for medical treatment and mental health counseling, and (4) general advice and guidance for the individuals, their families, or caregivers. Properly administered, the center should continue act as an extended 'safety net' while individuals slowly transfer to the care of more localized services.

The Center's Administrative Functions

Funding Source for Establishment of the Transition Center

The funding for the center and its services should be derived from a dedicated federal source – either a grant or contract awarded to an NGO or private sector institution in order to add legitimacy and a sense of independence to the overall program. The logical choice to finance the center's establishment would be either the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Each agency possesses distinct advantages and disadvantages over the other. HHS has extensive experience in funding healthcare-related initiatives; however, it lacks familiarization with any of the security challenges associated with individuals returning from a conflict zone. DHS conversely is knowledgeable on counter radicalization efforts, but unfamiliar with the medical needs of traumatized individuals. Given the returning USPER FTF women and minors require immediate medical attention and mental health counseling while also likely possessing a distrust of the intentions of any security services, HHS therefore would be the preferable choice to fund this initiative.

Determining the precise funding period for the center and consequently the rehabilitation program presents a particular challenge due to the uncertainty of whether and when the remaining non-charged USPER FTF women and minors might be repatriated. Since successful rehabilitation and reintegration efforts require several months to years depending on the individual, the USG should be prepared to fund the center for a period of at least two-to-three years initially. Following that time, depending on overall success or future needs, the program may be defunded, extended, expanded, or repurposed to address individuals associated with domestic radicalization, victims of human trafficking, or possibly refugees from future conflict

⁴⁸⁰ Hussin, "Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation."

zones. After the initial two-to-three-year period, the program may even become self-funding through donations or private sector investments and thus rendering it longer dependent on federal financial support as has been seen with some of the European programs.

Selecting Location and Determining Accommodation Requirements for the Transition Center

The center's location and accommodation size both play important roles in fostering the necessary environment for an effective rehabilitation program. As such, the Transition Center should be located near a medium to medium-large size city. While small cities or remote locations may enhance a sense of security through the physical isolation of the participating USPER family members, it would nevertheless be counter-conducive to the prosocial and inclusive approach required to assist with rehabilitation and eventual reintegration. Conversely, larger cities – despite their greater access to potential amenities and resources – possess the disadvantages of increased operating expenses, increased likelihood of unintended exposure to criminal or other marginalized groups, and the perception of placing a larger community at risk. Medium to medium-large size cities thus provide a more balanced option between limiting possible security threats and ensuring access to the resources and infrastructure needed.

With regards to accommodation requirements, the Transition Center should be large enough to house multiple families or individuals while also containing adequate space for treatment, socialization, recreation, and education activities. Given the estimated total number of USPER FTF family members still awaiting possible future repatriation is likely less than 50 individuals⁴⁸¹ and past repatriations were conducted on a case-by-case basis for relatively small familial groupings, it can be theorized that no more than a few individuals would be in attendance at any given time. Furthermore, the exact length of an individual's stay at the center would be determined by his or her specific treatment and counseling plan but would likely last between 60 and 90 days in order to allow for the development of successful coping strategies for trauma and prepare for reinsertion into society.⁴⁸²

Role of Operational Management at the Transition Center

The center's operational management team, while receiving federal funding, should function independently in order to develop and maintain trust of the residents participating in rehabilitation activities. Additionally, the management team must build out and maintain an extensive network of entities at the federal, state, and local levels. Management would be expected to act as both a resource point for the residents during and post-rehabilitation and as an intermediary between residents, families, and governmental authorities. To be seen as effective,

⁴⁸¹ The author estimates this number based on reporting indicating approximately known 40 USPERs remain at large. Considering some of these 40 individuals are likely deceased and some likely parented children abroad who could be eligible for USPER status, the number 50 represents an approximation.

⁴⁸² Rogers Behavioral Health. "Trauma Recovery Adult Residential Care." *Rogers Behavioral Health* (Accessed on March 19, 2022). <https://rogersbh.org/what-we-treat/ptsd/trauma-recovery-residential-care>

the management must be perceived as a neutral party between those receiving services and those concerned about potential threats to security.

Staffing of the Transition Center and Rehabilitation Program

Specifics concerning staffing levels and personnel hired should be addressed by the entity receiving the grant or awarded the contract without USG interference. Notwithstanding, the center's rehabilitation program should be comprised of experts from the disciplines of public policy, general health, psychology, sociology, and religion. Retired senior law enforcement officials might also prove useful – especially during engagements with local police departments or community leaders who may possess re-victimization or security concerns about an individual following their reinsertion into a local community.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: ESTABLISH A VOLUNTARY COOPERATION AGREEMENT

The incorporation of a written cooperation agreement between the USG and a non-charged USPER adult residing within an SDF or Iraqi facility provides a means to formalize the rehabilitation and reintegration support services offered as well as outline the expectations of individual receiving those services. This contract, voluntary in nature, would act as a mutual understanding between both parties by indicating that in exchange for direct governmental assistance in obtaining release and physical transportation back to the United States, the USPER adult agrees to enroll in a residential rehabilitation program at a government-funded transition center immediately upon arrival. The contract would however exclude any specific details pertaining to individualized counseling sessions or treatment plans since such services required evaluations conducted by qualified professionals.

Ideally, the contact would be offered when the American Citizen Services conducts its interviews to determine how to best assist the individual desiring repatriation. Just as the USG is under no legal obligation to assist an USPER in procuring return travel, the individual is under no requirement to accept this voluntary offer of assistance. An USPER adult who declines the agreement would not be subjected to any penalization. The individual would continue to receive the same level of assistance in obtaining travel documents and non-legal advice from the American Citizen Services as currently practiced. However, the individuals would not benefit from the government-covered costs of transportation, nor the unique social and medical services offered at the transition center.

Recognizing minors lack contractual capacity, approaching an USPER minor with a voluntary cooperation agreement to encourage participation in a rehabilitation program at the transition center would be inappropriate. That said, minors may nonetheless attend the program

by meeting one of three conditions. First, acknowledging the trauma associated with the separation of children and parental figures, any minor accompanying an USPER parent who has accepted the terms of the agreement would be automatically incorporated into the center’s program. Second, any repatriating minor whose legal US-based guardian authorized participation would be enrolled into the program – however, the legal guardian would be required to accompany the minor during the duration of the program. Third, any orphaned USPER minor being placed into the protective custody of the state would be eligible to attend the program if the state deemed it in the best interest of the child.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: ESTABLISH A REINTEGRATION SUPPORT PORTAL AND HOTLINE

The establishment of an online portal and 24-hour national reintegration support hotline fulfills the significant shortcoming of nation’s the current ad hoc approach to addressing the repatriation, potential rehabilitation, and hopeful reintegration of the non-charged USPER FTF women and minors. Through either the portal or the hotline, former participants of the rehabilitation program or their caregivers would be granted immediate access to a counselor or dedicated case worker from the center post-transition. This counselor or case worker would be available to administer aftercare assistance – to include locating medical care/counseling, vocational training opportunities, or social services near the individual’s place of residence. Furthermore, the portal and hotline would also act as centralized contact points for family members or repatriated USPER FTF individuals, whose return pre-dated the establishment of the Transition Center or who initially declined participation in the rehabilitation program. Services for these non-program participants would be limited to general guidance or referrals to local support services. Regardless, the portal and hotline would provide a means to centralize information pertaining to the resources needed to assist with the rehabilitation and reintegration USPER FTF family members nationwide.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: ESTABLISH A POSITION OF RETURNEE COORDINATOR

The establishment of an official Returnee Coordinator within the USG, perhaps at DHS, should be considered. Not only would the position assist with the overall management and organization of the ongoing repatriation and reintegration efforts associated with USPER FTF family members returning from Syria and Iraq, but also those efforts associated with potential future conflicts. Germany currently utilizes such a position to oversee its “*multi-agency, whole-state and whole-society*” initiatives focused on deradicalization and reintegration.⁴⁸³ Creating a

⁴⁸³ Perešin and PISOIU, “Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters.”

similar position within the USG would result in a more centralized, streamlined, and coordinated process since a single official entity would be able to interact with governmental agencies and non-governmental actors across all levels.

CONCLUSIONS

By implementing the four aforementioned recommendations, the USG would establish a reintegration mechanism that embraces both specific the needs of the returnees while also lessen any potential threat these individuals might pose to national security. Additionally, this mechanism easily conforms to and enhances the current process of repatriation and reintegration.

However, failure to implement such a reintegration support mechanism places not only local communities at risk, but also the repatriating USPER FTF women and minors who experienced long-term exposure to violence and radical ideology will in the IDP camps and detention centers.

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