



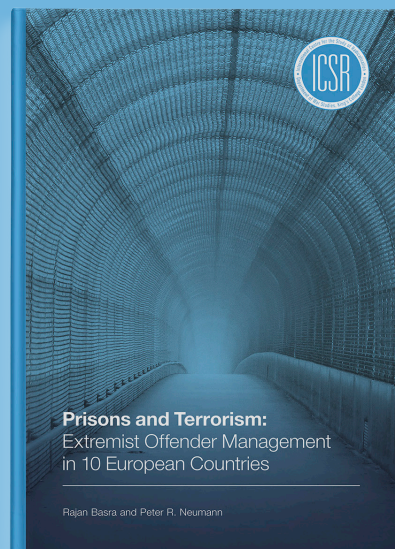
الائتلاف العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب
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International Reports

18

PRISONS AND TERRORISM EXTREMIST OFFENDER MANAGEMENT IN 10 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES





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Director General

Major General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Moghedi
Secretary-General of the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition

Editor-in-Chief

Ashour Ibrahim Aljuhani
Director of Research and Studies Center

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TAOQ RESEARCH



E-mail: info@taoqresearch.org

Phone: +966 114890124



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PRISONS AND TERRORISM EXTREMIST OFFENDER MANAGEMENT IN 10 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) of King's College London published a research study conducted by subject-matter experts in extremism and terrorism, examining dozens of European offenders convicted of terrorism related offences, or direct involvement in terrorist attacks in Europe. Flooded with influx of inmates of criminal backgrounds, prisons are thus portrayed as a breeding ground for extremists and terrorist groups. Against such a bitter reality, terrorist ideology now emanates through prisons. Decades before the leadership of ISIS emerged from Camp Bucca in Iraq, Egyptian Islamists, German Marxists, Irish Republicans and Basque Separatists have also depended on prisons to carry out their planning, recruitment and executive preparation.



CRIME AND TERRORISM

The ICSR Report reveals that “assessment methods for extremism-related threats are being used in most of the countries surveyed”; while, some programs and initiatives cannot be assessed now simply because they are still in the infancy stage. The countries examined acknowledged that they face difficulty being aware of what lurks about in their prisons, and that disengaging from extremism requires a long time, while success cannot always see light at the end of the tunnel. Together combined, the ICSR Report produces a set of recommendations for making prisons a top priority in combating extremism and terrorism.

Although the increase in spending on prisons is not commonly approved, the two authors call on governments and public opinion to become aware that maintaining law and order in prisons is a profitable investment in fighting crime and terrorism. The ICSR Report also highlights key questions and solutions, such as: Should offenders be imprisoned in one place? Should they be dispersed and placed in mixed public units? Should they be completely separated? Each valid option is supported by advocates, making such treatment methods more diversified, with a special attention attached to the most dangerous inmates.

The ICSR Report concludes that crime and terrorism are interrelated; the criminals who turned into terrorists in prisons made up 57% of those surveyed, while 27% spent a sentence in prison and turned into extremists. The two authors believe that offenders may view jihad as a way of “expiation” for their past commission and perpetration.

INTRODUCTION

Prisons are a focal hotbed of almost all terrorist groups in modern times; prisons serve as a hosting springboard for many prisoners to grow more radicalized, with no political affiliation or extremist propensity previously identified. They also serve

as dens to plot and plan many attacks. Prisons, however, helped many to turn away from extremism and stave off terrorism. The ICSR Report provides an overview of the current situation of ten European countries on the following:

1. Trends within extremist offenders.
2. Attacks and operational planning within prisons.
3. Prison regimes for extremist offenders.
4. Reintegration and release policies.

The two authors wonder why researchers and political decision-makers lack interest in polarization in prisons, and about the paucity and dearth of subject-matter studies, albeit critically seminal and significant over the recent decades. The ICSR Report draws on its 2010 research study, which successfully fostered awareness among researchers and established key terms, dynamics and trade offs. It was read by many policymakers and informed efforts to better reform prison regimes for politically motivated offenders in Australia, Britain, and the Netherlands.

METHODOLOGY

The ICSR Report draws on the same methodology adopted for the 2010 Report, which was a project carried out between April 2019 and June 2020 and was funded by the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism and the Swedish Ministry of Justice. The two authors make it clear that the funders did not influence the process of research, choice of contributors, framing of questions, or conclusions arrived at. The ICSR Report includes hundreds of detainees of terrorism-related crimes, from ten countries selected after careful deliberations, as follows:

Country	Number of prisoners in custody for terrorism-related offences	Number of prisoners monitored for radicalization	Placement regime	Separate dedicated units for extremists	Primary risk assessment tool used	Deradicalization or disengagement approaches specific to extremist offenders
Belgium	~ 136	165–450	Dispersal (with select concentration)	Yes (2 units, with a total capacity for 40 inmates)	Violent Extremism Risk Assessment 2 Revised (VERA-2R)	Individual disengagement programmes (which vary according to the language, Dutch or French, spoken by the inmate)
Denmark	19	64	Dispersal	No	Unspecified	Mentoring

England & Wales	238 (183 jihadists; 44 far-right; 11 other)	~ 450	Dispersal (with select concentration)	Yes (1 unit, with a total capacity for 8 inmates)	Extremism Risk Guidelines 22+ (ERG 22+)	'Healthy Identity Intervention' (HII); 'Desistance and Disengagement Programme' (DDP)
France	549 (522 jihadists; 36 Basque separatists)	1,458	Dispersal (with select concentration)	Yes (with planned capacity for 1,500 inmates)	'Radicalisation assessment grid'; VERA-2R	Individual programmes; group workshops; RIVE (Research and Intervention on Violent Extremism)
Germany	Unspecified	≥ 292	Dispersal	No	VERA-2R; 'Rule-based analysis of potentially destructive offenders to assess the acute risk – Islamist terrorism'	Programmes vary from state to state, as funded by the 'Democracy Life!' initiative, with different ideological, pastoral and socio-educational emphases
Greece	≥ 20 (estimate) (3 jihadists; remainder far-left)	≥ 20 (estimate)	No specific regime	No	No extremism-specific risk assessment tool	No extremism-specific programmes
The Netherlands	36	≤ 51 (estimate)	Concentration	Yes (6 units, with a total capacity for 48 inmates)	VERA-2R	Terrorism, Extremism, and Radicalization (TER) disengagement interventions
Norway	25	34	Dispersal (with select de facto 'isolation')	No	No extremism-specific risk assessment tool	Mentoring
Spain	329 (126 jihadists; 203 Basque separatists)	493	De facto 'isolation'	Yes	Adaptation of VERA-2R (in Interior Ministry prisons); 'Prevention, Detection and Intervention of Extremist Radicalization Processes' (in Catalonia only)	'Framework Program for Intervention in Violent Radicalization with Islamist Inmates' (in Interior Ministry prisons); no extremism-specific programmes (in Catalonia)
Sweden	> 53	Unspecified	Dispersal	No	Risk, Need, Responsibility Assessment (RNR-A); other tools (such as VERA-2R) are also used	No extremism-specific programmes

STRUCTURE

The ICSR Report consists of seven main chapters, preceded by an introduction about its methodology and structure, and end with a set of key recommendations on extremist offender management in the 10 European countries surveyed. Structurally, the ICSR Report covers

the entire life cycle and trajectory of extremist offender experience, from sentencing through prison regimes, measures to prevent radicalization and promote disengagement and rehabilitation, and post release and probation arrangements. Chapter One provides a detailed introduction explaining the ICSR Report

methodology and structure; Chapter Two discusses types of extremists and their criminal backgrounds all over Europe; Chapter Three examines attacks inside prisons and conspiracy; Chapter Four explains prevention methods of extremism and recruitment; Chapter Five discusses prison regimes; Chapter Six describes release and rehabilitation; Chapter Seven sets forth recommendations and guidelines.

EXTREMIST OFFENDERS

Throughout Europe, the extremist offender population has changed deeply over the past decade. There are more extremist inmates, who are convicted of terrorism related offences and those convicted of regular criminal offences who have become radicalized in prison. Glaringly, such inmates are also of more varied backgrounds and are serving a wider range of sentences. Combined, these established facts simply mean that managing extremist offenders is increasingly becoming even more urgent and more challenging.

A RISE IN NUMBER

As reported, almost half of the inmates across the ten countries surveyed are in France; most of the remainder are in Spain, Germany, Britain and Belgium. Even Scandinavia, which has low population density, is dealing with more extremist offenders than in previous years. Although Greece often experiences left wing or anarchist terrorism, the Greek authorities do not have statistics on terrorist offenders, and it is estimated that there are over 20 extremists in custody. Germany also does not have national statistics, which means that each federal state should be consulted individually. It also reveals that inmates are of different backgrounds and sentences, with a marked increase in the number of women and the number of far-right inmates.

Equally important, 54% of the inmates considered potentially extremist entered prison as 'regular' criminals, and not because of terrorism related offences. Well, it remains unknown when these numbers will skyrocket. Given the loss of the ISIS territory in Syria and Iraq, the rise of the far-right in Europe, the medium term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a global recession, the pace of terrorism in Europe may be thus impacted, which, in turn, will impact the number of extremists in custody. Despite the emergence of extremist women, their numbers in prisons are still small compared to the total number of prisoners. For example, out of 177 extremist prisoners in Belgium, there are only nine women (5%); out of 126 in Spain, there are 10 women (9.5%); out of 522 in France, there are 50 women (9.6%). Women account for no more than 10% of the total number of extremist inmates, which reflects the

proportion of women who travelled from Europe to Syria and Iraq.

VARIED SENTENCES

Sentences are broad in range; some inmates serve short sentences while others serve life imprisonment. In Spain, extremists convicted between 2012 and 2019 received average sentences of between six months and 13 years. In the United Kingdom, sentences were imposed between nine months and 45 years. In Belgium, 50% of terrorism related convicts were sentenced to less than ten years, while 20% received five years or less. In Denmark, sentences are between six months and ten years. In France, sentences were longer, while in Greece the average sentences were 16 years, the highest in the European Union.

PLANNING AND PLOTTING

It stands to reason that what happens inside prison undoubtedly reflects what happens outside. The investigation into the recent attacks in prisons reveals different types of plots. For instance, when examining the attacks following the release of some inmates, the plots planned in prisons, the attempts to force the authorities to release prisoners, and highlight the recent recruitment activity in prisons, it seems, taken together, that the prison and the «outside world» are closely linked.

ATTACKS WITHIN PRISONS

One recent development across Europe is terrorist attacks within prisons. The first incident was sparked off by Bilal Taghi, who stabbed two prison officers in France in 2016. Inspired, five more attackers carried out later similar incidents. Rather than attacking their fellow inmates as was the case previously, each attacker carefully chose to target the most immediate symbol of authority among the prison officers. Despite the restrictions imposed, such attackers were dangerously cunning while plotting, skilled at fashioning improvised knives, luring guards to their cells or using the element of surprise and sleight of hand. Analytically, these attacks mark an escalation from threats and assaults that are a regular occurrence in prison life, and fortunately none of these attacks brought about fatalities.

One common feature of the attackers was their violent past; five of the seven perpetrators of the prison attacks have convictions for committing or plotting acts of violence, while a sixth attacker, Mohammed El-Hannouni, is likely to have experienced or participated in violence with terrorist groups in Syria. It seems that their adherence to acts of violence was controlled and channeled by their propensity to intolerance and extremism, revealing how past violence can be a risk indicator for future violence.

France seems to be the most impacted as it sustained four attacks out of six. The French prisons are more overcrowded with extremist perpetrators than those across Europe, which makes it difficult for the authorities to monitor and control the inmate population. The 2010 Report points out that the sufficient space and availability of sufficient prison wardens reduce the possibility of disputes and conflicts among inmates because of their cultures and identities.

PRISON-BASED PLOTTING

The ICSR Report reveals that 12 of the 22 attacks and plots in Europe since 2015 have been carried out by extremist fighters who have finally been released; three of the perpetrators committed crimes one month into their release. Although these cases are exceptionally rare, they augur ill how an inmate can leave prison with intent to carry out a terrorist attack. Vicarious and first-hand experience tells that the imprisonment of such inmates does not force them to cool off and repent to become better disillusioned or well realize their errors; rather, the small minority of offenders seems to have emerged from prison with a greater commitment to their deeply ingrained ideologies. The remaining attackers have carried out attacks across time periods of between four months and two years, which means they took time to become radicalized before making their decisions.

Five of 22 attacks have been staged in prisons, where the perpetrators have met, conspired and plotted to work in tandem. This has happened between convicted terrorist perpetrators and regular offenders. In such cases, the prison has provided favorable conditions to facilitate their mission; their imprisonment has allowed them to meet other like-minded extremists, exchange ideas and develop expertise. Although the authorities seek to isolate extremist perpetrators from each other, it is difficult to completely curb such communication.

PRISON-RELATED RECRUITMENT

Most of the cases of militant extremism in prisons in recent years are triggered by the socialization between regular criminals and extremist offenders of terrorism-related convictions. The cases in which an inmate becomes radicalized alone, without any interaction or encouragement from others, are rare. Contrary to popular perceptions, extremism per se does not always carry a purely ideological nature. Simply put, extremism is simply a pragmatic choice made in an unsafe and hostile setting. Inmates, especially those new to a prison, should make alliances to protect themselves. Recruitment and planning for the post-prison stage begin immediately

after the recruitment of the new element to an existing extremist group. Extremist groups have established support and awareness programs that include messaging campaigns and prison visits to support extremist prisoners and recruit new members.

Surprisingly enough, most of these groups operate within a legal framework, making it difficult for the authorities concerned to arrest and investigate their members. For instance, messaging campaigns often seem natural and harmless, aiming to raise morale, and are often explicit, featuring no extremist content, or with few unclear references. The authorities lack the legal tools available to ban such groups. However, it is possible to identify extremist groups and their individuals known in the extremist milieu who tend to declare their activities, thus facilitating their identification from legitimate support groups.

PREVENTION OF EXTREMISM AND RECRUITMENT

Chapter Four discusses the developments in the efforts made by the authorities to address prison-related extremism and recruitment, including the establishment of central units for training and recruitment of experts, and assessment of conditions and risks. As false compliance or alternatively fake repentance has gained prominence, an increasingly growing interest in understanding the challenges associated with offenders comes into play.

MONITORING

One key aim of monitoring is to draw a line between real religiosity and marked radicalization, albeit very often so difficult. Research studies reveal that religion has a positive effect on the vast majority of inmates who rediscover their faith in prison, and many other inmates claim religiosity out of greed for more safety and protection among their fellow inmates, or out of desire to take advantage of the good benefits available to the religious inmates.

These cases represent a major challenge for prison officers, and highlight the urgent need for highly experienced, skilled and seasoned staff, fully aware of how to better deal with terrorist offenders. Some countries have increased staff training. For example: The Ministry of Justice in the United Kingdom has trained twenty-two thousand employees in understanding extremists. However, it is not reasonable or practical to expect all prison staff to have full, up-to-date, advanced subject-matter knowledge of extremist groups, symbols, narratives and ideologies. To better assist these teams, governments have increased surveillance capacity, monitoring e-mails, phone calls and visitors.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

The information culled by monitoring is only productive if it guides and informs how offenders are better managed. As such, risk assessment is vital for inmate management. Several decades, risk assessment tools were created, tested, refined and developed to measure the likelihood of regular criminals reoffending more crimes, as well as their violence and aggression against others. Otherwise, the risk assessments of extremism are relatively new; therefore, these tools have been developed to dance to the tune of the new reality.

Risk assessments are only accurate when based on complete information; lack of information leads to flawed and inaccurate assessments. Given the fact that it is not possible to gain complete information, prison services stress the importance of dynamic safety; that is, information gained from the daily interactions between staff and inmates to highlight changes in attitude and behavior.

Other sources also provide information, such as interviews, case files that come from outside prisons, original investigation files and court reports from inmate's conviction, etc. Experts may then be able to professionally and objectively assess an inmate's extremism.

FALSE COMPLIANCE

False compliance – alternatively fake contrition or compunction – has risen to prominence as extremist militants deceived authorities by pretending there were penitent and contrite before carrying out attacks. For instance, Usman Khan, the 2019 London Bridge attacker, participated in rehabilitation and disengagement programmes; he was considered to have made a success story of an extremist turning their life around 180 degrees. Only later was his ideal behavior discovered to nothing but a camouflage to decoy the authorities to gain freedom!

Much of this seems to be a pragmatic translation of TAQIYYA, a Shiite concept used to deceive and conceal one's true intentions. Some inmates boast of deceiving the authorities, even if they do acts forbidden in Islam, such as eating pork to have their prison sentences commuted to shorter ones.

It is notoriously thorny to identify false compliance. There are no guaranteed and foolproof mechanisms to discover deceptive repentance. Technically, one method to do so is through constant surveillance that helps to better identify discrepancies between what an inmate tells prison staff and what they tell their fellow inmates. Different counsellors and psychologists can also help to make independent assessments of inmates. Many inmates see prison as an opportunity to prepare themselves for greater challenges, as it is

a test for their faith and commitment to their cause, or it is a place for convalescence and re-planning. In the ten countries surveyed, many inmates learn new skills, study faith, Sharia and history of Islam.

PRISON REGIMES

Entire and permanent isolation is illegal in Europe. Prison systems have tried a number of techniques, most isolate dangerous offenders, while inmates are allowed to mix with each other. Among the questions that have created extremism-related challenges to experts in the past five years include: What is the most efficient prison regime for extremist offender management? Relevant answers are three-fold:

1. Concentration: it means placing all the extremist offenders in one ward.
2. Dispersal: it means dispersing extremist offenders and regular criminals.
3. Isolation: it means isolating extremist offenders from each other and from regular criminals.

Dispersal is currently the most common approach among the ten countries surveyed. There are merits to this approach because offenders will be possibly exposed to positive opinions that they would not have been aware of if they were isolated. The goal is to reduce networking with like-minded extremists to avoid creating new pyramidal cells while in prison.

However, dispersal does not work for all offenders simply because of their different perceptions, intentions and degrees of extremism. The main danger here lies in the possibility of increasing extremism and recruitment, or networking with other criminals, which is exactly what happened with Mehdi Nemmouche, who killed four people in a Jewish museum in Belgium in 2014, when he had met the trafficker who supplied him with weapons in prison.

CONCENTRATION AND ISOLATION

The Netherlands is the only European country that has adopted "full concentration" as a special model to house terrorism-related inmates since 2004. Spain imposes a de facto isolation regime on most convicted terrorists, which was a policy first introduced to tackle Basque separatist prisoners to further limit their interaction with each other; their movement is thus heavily restricted, inmates are denied any recreational or educational activities. One of the disadvantages of this model is that it allows the offender to play the role of the persecuted victim, fueling hostility and hatred towards authorities.

REINTEGRATION AND RELEASE

This topic is of great importance as many extremist offenders will be released across Europe; therefore, there should be a clear-cut prison offender management plan. For example, 80% of the extremists in France and

60% of the extremists in Belgium will be released by 2022, and in Spain everyone will be released by 2023.

REHABILITATION SCHEMES

All European countries prefer reintegration and disengagement as an approach by changing attitudes and opinions, although some countries prefer compulsory detention, and most countries rely on non-governmental organizations to rehabilitate offenders. The efficient program and necessary tools are selected after using an offender assessment. There are compulsory programs imposed on those released, but most of the programs are optional and require the consent of the offender. Many programs emphasize the necessity of choosing a seasoned, highly skilled, intelligent and well-experienced mentor to closely accompany and shadow the offender after release. Admittedly, such mentors are not easy to identify and hire.

CONDITIONS FOR RELEASE

Laws applicable to extremist offenders vary from across the ten countries surveyed, and such offenders are often released after they serve their sentences in most countries. Sweden, for example, has a special law to extend the detention period for dangerous offenders by six months. In Greece, offenders can request a re-examination of their files after serving 60% of the sentence. In Belgium and Britain, terrorist offenders can request a re-examination of their files only after obtaining a license from the High Prisons Authority.

POST-RELEASE

Terrorists are closely monitored after their release. In certain cases, probation arrangements require an offender to visit and check in with their dedicated probation officer for reintegration purposes. In Norway, the same conditions are equally imposed on extremists and regular offenders, which include setting their residence, work and training, regular visit check ins, and restrictions are similarly imposed on those associated with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation (1) Avoid overcrowding and understaffing

Overcrowded and understaffed prisons lead to chaos and a loss of discipline and control. Chaos is favorable for gangs and extremists. To better maintain security and counter crime and terrorism, more investment in prison regimes is required.

Recommendation (2) Develop expertise and train staff

Governments should well realize that the number of extremists in prisons is on the increase. This increasingly growing trajectory calls for systematic and constant responses by prison staff to be better enabled to understand the issues of ideological and behavioral

extremism, which in turn provides productive prison offender management, while ensuring the rights of inmates to freely practice their religion.

Recommendation (3) Share information

Failure to share information between prison institutions and external partners (probation agencies, social services and other government departments) may lead to significant problems, such as the release of extremist offenders who may carry out terrorist attacks after their release. A single online platform should be created that includes prison administrations, courts, probation agencies and the police to provide better update and access for information and data more quickly.

Recommendation (4) Examine risk assessment tools

Most governments use specific methods to assess the risks of violent extremists; such methods should be assessed and renewed regularly, and staff should be trained on how to use them. Feasible initiatives that have proven successful with extremists should be chosen and applied.

Recommendation (5) Assess and update prison regimes

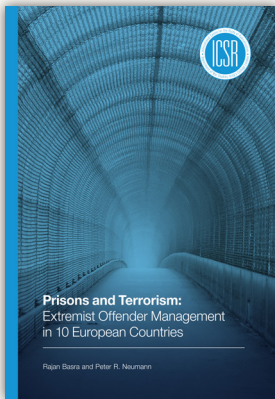
Although most of the ten countries surveyed adopt different initiatives, it seems a partial "concentration" approach comes into play to dealing with inmates. Therefore, the programs followed regularly should be assessed and adapted to the specificities of the group of extremist offenders and their behavior. While ideal solutions are not realizable, we should look for more practical solutions that better achieve the minimum interest.

Recommendation (6) Link up prison and probation

The success of rehabilitation plans is well demonstrated by their deep impact and long-term sustainability. The secret of the success of the rehabilitation and reintegration of extremists is the seamless linkage between prison sentence and probation. Field workers should link prison programs with post-prison programs because they all work to reintegrate the inmate.

Recommendation (7) Pay attention to emerging challenges

Governments should play a proactive role in adapting their policies and procedures to the changing reality. Recently, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of extremist inmates of all backgrounds and orientations, and a clear increase in the number of women of the far-right. This is undoubtedly a major challenge that should be taken into account in managing extremist criminals, including prison regimes, rehabilitation programs, risk assessment tools, training, and recruitment of staff and mentors.



Prisonniers et Terrorisme

Gestion des affaires des détenus dans les affaires de terrorisme dans dix pays européens

By ICSR Team

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