

# *Preventing Homegrown Terrorism: Establishing a Deradicalization Program in New York State*

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## **Thesis**

The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) with the New York State Office of Counter Terrorism (OCT) should implement a formal de-radicalization program based on the “Exit” and “Hayat” programs to decrease homegrown terrorism and protect civilians.

## **Background & Analysis**

In response to the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the United States of America has supported the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Free Syrian Army in the Syrian Civil War with training and weapons. While these policies managed to stop and even diminish ISIS territory and strength, attacks from this group have not been contained to the region. With the internet, one of the most powerful radicalization tools,<sup>1</sup> ISIS and other extremist groups have radicalized frustrated individuals and convinced them to commit solo terrorist attacks around the world. In fact, these Lone-Wolf Terrorist (LWT) attacks are “poised to increasingly replace group-actor terrorist attacks for the foreseeable future.”<sup>2,3</sup>

More and more families and communities are being affected as the primary target of these strategies are young people. Parents and friends are often the first people to notice changes in the radicalized person’s behavior.<sup>4</sup> As a result, they have to either make the difficult decision of notifying the authorities and possibly ruining the rest of their child’s life or ignoring the situation which could result in tremendous harm to other individuals. In one instance, Mr. Sal Shafi handed his son over to the FBI and thought to himself, “my God, I just destroyed Adam.”<sup>5</sup> However, in most other cases, family members understand remains silent.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is imperative NYS implement an alternative to prevent homegrown terrorism.

## **Talking Points**

- ▶ Without a formal de-radicalization program, the United States and the State of New York is setting themselves up for failure as LWT attacks are expected to increasingly replace group-actor terrorist attacks in the future.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ Family and community members who know about a relative or friend’s radicalization have to make the impossible decision of either informing the authorities and possibly ruining their friend/relative’s life or ignoring the situation and potentially harming other civilians.

- ▶ Current methods of countering radicalization are ineffective and inherently discriminatory.
- ▶ Addressing radicalization not just as a national security concern but also as a treatable mental-health issue could lead to more humane treatment of terrorism suspects.

### **The Policy Idea**

The German-based Hayat and Exit programs focuses on information and family-oriented counseling in regard to personal and societal security relevancy and involves psychological assistance and legal mediation. This program has been exported to Britain and there are plans to implement it in Australia and Canada.<sup>8</sup> The OMH and the OCT should, with assistance from experts at Hayat Germany, recreate the program here and available to all NYS residents. This can be done by amending New York Codes, Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Subchapter E Article 2 to include de-radicalization programs into medical plans.

### **Policy Analysis**

Other attempts at countering LWT have remained largely ineffective because there isn't clear leadership in coordinating strategy.<sup>9</sup> As a result, various departments and agencies nationwide and locally have proposed and tried numerous policies. Comprehensive surveillance and intelligence-gathering, for example, is used by the New York Police Department (NYPD) based on individual profile analysis of LWT cases.<sup>10</sup> This policy is troubling for numerous reasons. Even though the NYPD report on radicalization concedes there is no effective way of profiling because LWTs come from a diversity of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds,<sup>11</sup> the report encourages profiling by unfairly suggesting certain "signatures" exist in the radicalization process such as "religious conduct" and "expressive activity" in young Muslim-Americans.<sup>12</sup> Expectedly, a Institute of Homeland Security finds that this method has only been able to stop 19% of terrorist plots in the United States, not to mention its potential implications on civil liberties.<sup>13</sup>

However, this same report finds that 40% of foiled terrorist plots come from targeted observations and then tips from community members.<sup>14</sup> However, in 63% of cases, people were verbally told about the terrorist plot meaning 23% more could have been reported.<sup>15</sup> This implies that other potential terrorist plots could be foiled by making it easier for community members to confess. This is exactly the problem Hayat and Exit target. They established emergency helplines for these situations. In terms of treatment, exit has a 2% recidivism rate over 500 cases.<sup>16</sup> They have been praised as one of the "most successful" programs.<sup>17</sup>

## Key Facts

- ▶ LWT attacks are 16 times more common now in the United States than in 1950.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ The comprehensive surveillance programs and intelligence-gathering that is currently implemented has only stopped 19% of foiled terrorist plots.<sup>19</sup>
- ▶ In 63% of cases, family and friends were verbally told by the person of his/her intention to participate in terrorism-related activities.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ The EXIT program has obtained a 2% recidivism rate over 500 cases.

## NEXT STEPS

The New York State legislature should amend New York Codes, Rules, Regulations Subchapter E Article 2 to include de-radicalization programs into medical plans. This will not only mandate the New York State Office of Mental Health to set up such program but also set up the program throughout New York. The Office of Mental Health should immediately contact the experts at the Hayat and Exit programs asking them to come to the United States to assist with the project as they did in Britain.<sup>21</sup> The New York State Office of Counterterrorism should assist in establishing the program by implementing the emergency helpline, combining it with existing tip lines and marketing the availability of such a service.

<sup>1</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015, 13

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>3</sup> Lars Erik Berntzen and Sveinung Sandberg, "The Collective Nature of Lone Wolf Terrorism: Anders Behring Breivik and the Anti-Islamic Social Movement," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014): 759-779, doi:10.1080/09546553.2013.767245

<sup>4</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015, 10

<sup>5</sup> Apuzzo, Matt. "Only Hard Choices for Parents Whose Children Flirt With Terror." *The New York Times*. April 09, 2016. Accessed December 02, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/us/parents-face-limited-options-to-keep-children-from-terrorism.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/us/parents-face-limited-options-to-keep-children-from-terrorism.html?_r=1).

<sup>6</sup> Gill, P., Horgan, J. and Deckert, P. (2014), Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,, *J Forensic Sci*, 59: 425–435. doi:10.1111/1556-4029.12312

<sup>7</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015, 10

<sup>8</sup> German Program Triggers International Deradicalization Network | Germany | DW.COM | 03.09.2014." DW.COM. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/german-program-triggers-international-deradicalization-network/a-17898077>

<sup>9</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015, 44

<sup>10</sup> Patel, Faiza. *Rethinking Radicalization*. Report. New York: NYU Brennan Center for Justice, 2011, 16

<sup>11</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015: 16

<sup>12</sup> Patel, Faiza. *Rethinking Radicalization*. Report. New York: NYU Brennan Center for Justice, 2011, 16

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gill, P., Horgan, J. and Deckert, P. (2014), Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,, *J Forensic Sci*, 59: 425–435. doi:10.1111/1556-4029.12312

<sup>16</sup> Koehler, Daniel. "Deradicalization and Disengagement." *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*: 123

<sup>17</sup> Ranstorp, Magnus; Hyllengren, Peder. (2013). Prevention of violent extremism in third countries. Measures to prevent individuals joining armed extremist groups in conflict zones. Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), Swedish National Defence College: 16

<sup>18</sup> Alfaro-Gonzales, Lydia. *Report: Lone-Wolf Terrorism*. Report. Washington D.C: Georgetown Security Studies, 2015: 10

<sup>19</sup> Patel, Faiza. *Rethinking Radicalization*. Report. New York: NYU Brennan Center for Justice, 2011, 11

<sup>20</sup> Gill, P., Horgan, J. and Deckert, P. (2014), Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists,, *J Forensic Sci*, 59: 425–435. doi:10.1111/1556-4029.12312

<sup>21</sup> German Program Triggers International Deradicalization Network | Germany | DW.COM | 03.09.2014." DW.COM. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/german-program-triggers-international-deradicalization-network/a-17898077>