

EX POST PAPER

The role of police officers in dealing with jihadist returnees

Introduction

There is serious and growing concern in Europe over the potential increase in number of returnees from the so-called caliphate. It is anticipated that men, women and children will wish to return to their old neighbourhoods: certain returnees may be imprisoned; some may be disillusioned, traumatised or remorseful, while others may be committed radicals or even terrorist sleepers.

European countries must be prepared to:

- 1) receive and monitor returnees (procedures and protocols);
- 2) assess returnees' risks, vulnerabilities and potential for successful resocialisation;
- 3) mitigate the risks and start to resocialise them (exit programmes);
- 4) implement measures and interventions to safeguard returnees' families and peers, and to protect the general public.

These actions fall under the remit of many authorities and organisations, and not of police alone. But in terms of police involvement, what responsibilities and contributions are required?

In this paper, the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) shares the findings of the Radicalisation Awareness Network Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL) Working Group, based on a meeting with experienced police officers in Düsseldorf, Germany on 30 and 31 March 2017.

Acronyms

AIVD	Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service
CVE	counter(ing) violent extremism
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
NCTV	Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
RAN CoE	Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence
RAN POL	Radicalisation Awareness Network Police and Law Enforcement (working group)
RAN YF&C	RAN Youth, Families and Communities (working group)
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
TPIM	Terrorism Prevention Investigation Measure
VERA	Violent Extremism Risk Assessment

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the RAN Centre of Excellence, the European Commission or any other institution or participant of the RAN POL working group.

Introduction to this paper

This document has been produced by the RAN POL Working Group (RAN POL's focal point is police and law enforcement ⁽¹⁾) and is based on police experience. Its intended readership is the police forces in Europe, those working with police, and those drafting policy for police or approaches including a police role.

If a returnee is back on home soil, and is not detained in prison...

... they must be living in society.

... locally, in a house, in a neighbourhood, perhaps with parents and younger brothers, walking the streets, meeting people, returning to school to finish their education so as to be able to get a job.

Do we trust the returnee walking freely on the streets? Are we sure of their intentions? Is there no risk that they might still be radicalised? Or reradicalise? That they might start to recruit others, make local extremist networks stronger or even turn to violence spontaneously or as instructed by any terrorist organisation such as Daesh or al-Qaeda? How can we organise successful resocialisation, disengagement or deradicalisation? Bring down risks? Is everyone aware of the situation, and informed of and prepared for their roles?

In Düsseldorf, RAN POL brought together police experts to share experiences and lessons learned.

Four topics

Following a brief introduction on returnees, this document will concentrate on the role and contribution of the police in carrying out the following four tasks:

1. Information gathering and preparations after someone's departure for Syria or Iraq, pre-returning and upon returning
2. Assessments
3. Exit work
4. Safeguarding and protecting.

There are many factors to be considered in these four areas, e.g. multi-agency collaboration. These are not entirely new challenges, and nor are the required responses. That is why previous lessons learned and shared within the RAN community of practitioners will also play an important part ⁽²⁾. RAN EXIT and RAN Youth, Families and Communities are two working groups with experience particularly pertinent to the subject.

⁽¹⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2017, May 12). Police and law enforcement Working Group (RAN POL). Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-pol_en

⁽²⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2017, May 12). Issue and Policy Papers. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers_en online.

Setting the scene

At the moment, the number of returnees from Syria and Iraq is limited. There are, however, indications that there are people willing to return, who haven't yet done so for a number of reasons. Some potential returnees are not permitted to leave, nor to enter their country of origin / original residence. They know that as soon as they arrive, they could be imprisoned. Some will move to other battle grounds, while others will die while engaged in conflict. There are also those who want to return home, and their parents are calling upon governments for support in this matter. Most countries are not overly keen to accommodate this, and some even try to impose a ban on re-entry into the country.

But it is inevitable that there will be an increase in the numbers of returning people who lived and fought with Daesh or the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly known as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the old Jabhat-al Nusra).

We are not sure what the future will bring. In the Düsseldorf RAN POL meeting, police looked back at the experiences and observations of existing returnees. Their circumstances are diverse and varied. We learned that recent returnees (i.e. over the past couple of years) from several countries were often disillusioned with the so-called caliphate project and were tired of the living in the ISIS warzone. However, most of them were not deradicalised, meaning that they seemed not to be distancing themselves from radical Islamist ideologies; they often became reacquainted with their old radical contacts and networks.

Research from the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) ⁽³⁾ and experiences from other countries show the same mixed pattern. However, sometimes certain common elements may be observed:

- Many are disillusioned with the so-called caliphate, but not with its ideology and anti-Western worldview;
- Returnees are not being welcomed as heroes by their old networks and contacts;
- Other communities are not particularly welcoming either;
- Returnees are sometimes subject to pressure and intimidation from the local extremist networks or Daesh;
- There is a growing overlap with criminal groups;
- Returnees are reluctant to offer insight into their actions in Syria or Iraq;
- Families and returnees engage with police and authorities for support in returning, but once returnees have arrived, this contact and the will to cooperate frequently with police and authorities diminishes.

⁽³⁾ Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Federal Office of Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) & Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism (HKE). (2016). *Analysis of the background and process of radicalisation among persons who left Germany to travel to Syria or Iraq based on Islamists motivations* (Version of 4 October 2016), 29-30. Retrieved from https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/Publikationsreihen/Forschungsergebnisse/2017AnalysisOfTheBackgroundAndProcessOfRadicalization.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

Recent returnees have a different profile and higher risk

Those returning in the future might have a different profile to the first wave of returnees. And there are reasons to consider these future returnees a much higher risk to national security as was stressed by the Dutch intelligence agency AIVD in their 2017 publication on returnees ⁽⁴⁾.

These returnees pose a greater threat than was previously the case; they stayed in the conflict zone for longer, received weapons training, gained combat experience and built up their jihadist network. They are battle-hardened and might have acquired both military and ideological training. This is even true for returning children from the age of nine, who have experienced war trauma and witnessed executions and punishments: some even were forced to execute people. The Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counter Terrorism (NCTV) and AIVD published a report on such children ⁽⁵⁾ to raise awareness of the challenges and risks for the so-called 'cubs of the caliphate'.

More urgency, higher risks, more work: rely on proven countering violent extremism (CVE) and exit approaches

Figure 1 (page 6) is taken from the factsheet 'Comprehensive approach returnees' ⁽⁶⁾ published by the Dutch CT coordinator. The approach to returnees is more or less the same as that being developed and improved for radicalising individuals who wanted to travel or who were stopped from leaving for the so-called caliphate. The Dutch portray the existing multi-agency individual case management approach as already operational.

In the RAN POL meeting, the importance of using existing structures and procedures was echoed by specialists: *We do not need drastic new approaches and institutions. With greater conviction, we need to adopt successful approaches and adapt them in order to cope with returnees.*

We see that often, returnees return to environments familiar to them and where they have acquaintances, friends and contacts. This means that cities that saw people leave can expect some of them to come back. These are the cities that should be the first to prepare for returnees.

About multi-agency, shared responsibilities, different roles for police and this document

Successful prevention and exit work require orchestrated actions and interventions of all involved government and non-governmental organisations. From the range of activities and interventions that

⁽⁴⁾ Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD). (2017). *Focus on returnees*. Retrieved from https://english.aivd.nl/binaries/aivd-en/documents/publications/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-returnees/Terugkeerders+in+beeld_ENG_WEB.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) & the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD). (2017). *The children of ISIS: The indoctrination of minors in ISIS-held territory*. Retrieved from https://english.aivd.nl/binaries/aivd-en/documents/publications/2017/04/26/the-children-of-isis-the-indoctrination-of-minors-in-isis-held-territory/WEB_Minderjarigen_bij_ISIS_ENG.pdf

⁽⁶⁾ Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV). (2017). *Comprehensive approach returnees*. Retrieved from https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/Factsheet%20NCTV%20Terugkeerders%20ENG_tcm32-244754.pdf

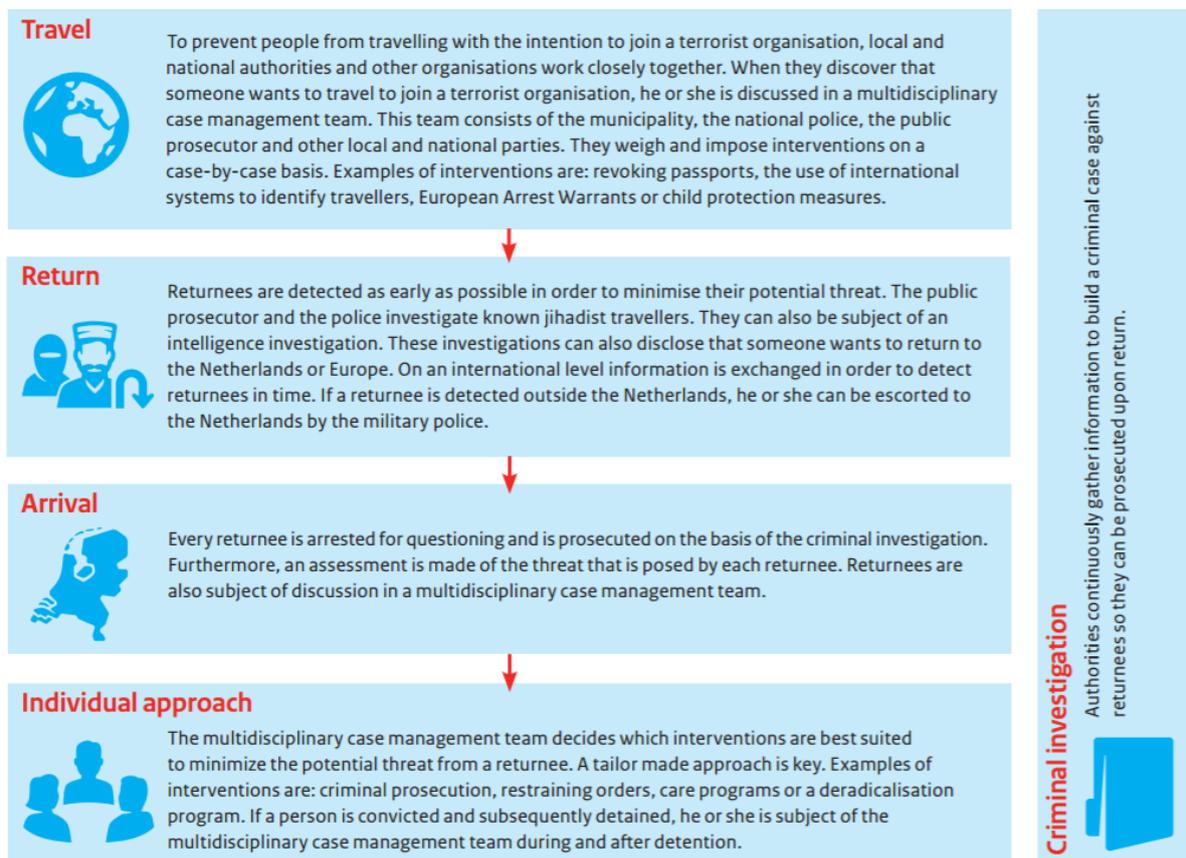
is needed, we see there are in Europe different views on whether or not these are core task of the police.

Multi-agency schemes need to include police and non-police actors. This should be organised from a perspective of shared responsibility. The police are, at a local level, often well positioned to initiate or facilitate the required multi-agency working. All actors and the organiser of the multi-agency should operate from the same frame work. This implies that you cannot always define what is the police role or and what is not. Even if something is not the remit of the police, it is necessary for the police to know and use the same shared definition of challenges and the multi-agency responses. That's why there is also contextual information in this document, which goes wider than the strict police role.

Police role

- Owing to their lack of manpower and resources, intelligence agencies will call upon police to monitor all potentially risky individuals.
- Since many returnees are reticent, there is a need for ongoing monitoring and information-gathering at local level. Police can facilitate and organise this, and serve as a link between intelligence agencies, local government and other local organisations and institutes.
- Police can be the initiator, supporter or organiser of the required multi-agency.

Figure 1: Dutch approach to returnees



1. Information gathering and preparations after someone's departure for Syria or Iraq, pre-returning and upon returning

The challenge

Despite failing to keep people from travelling and reaching Syria, Iraq or other jihadi battle grounds, there is still work to be done. There is a risk that siblings and peers may be targeted and recruited from abroad. Parents need support to deal with this traumatic event or could need guidance in contact with the family member in Syria or Iraq.

In many countries, a hard lesson has been learned from not carrying out a proper assessment of the vulnerability and resilience of siblings and peers: successful chain recruitment has seen three sisters follow their brother, and friends follow their mates' route, using the same recruitment and smuggling networks and jihadist contacts.

There is also a need to gather information on those who have gone: What are they doing abroad? Can we make an estimation of their true intentions for returning? Could they build a social circle that would provide a chance for resocialisation, deradicalisation or disengagement, in appropriate cases? Can we empower the family to be a protective and supportive factor, for the safeguarding of their other children and for the returning son or daughter?

Solutions and approaches

Open a file, and prepare police and multi-agency setting

Files should be opened on all individuals who leave, to aid pursuit and investigation as well as prevention and resocialisation.

- Look for an existing multi-agency setting that provides a platform for gathering and assessing information from different actors, and which can function as an arena to discuss and design tailor-made intervention programmes.
- Use existing schemes as they might already have trustworthy working relations, work processes and protocols to help deliver the required result. Awareness and trust between the multi-agency actors and their efficiency can be boosted with a training session on returnees for the key actors in the multi-agency cooperation. Returnees with children will require multi-agency cooperation for child protection and prevention of abuse.
- Existing information-sharing protocols should be tested using real-life cases. If it turns out the protocols need to be improved or explained, take action to do so. This could also test whether the existing legislation is up to standard or needs adjustment.

Interesting practice:

Backbone for colleagues

A local police unit in The Hague created a 'Counter Terrorism Extremism Radicalisation Backbone' of police experts, who may be consulted by colleagues not thoroughly familiar with extremism and returnees. A backbone officer is available for consultation 24/7. There is also an internal handbook for all officers, with instructions to follow should an individual appear to be subject to radicalisation and willing to join a terrorist movement. One of the chapters is titled 'What to do when a returnee appears on the radar', and it sets out who to contact and what to register in the police systems. However, all this is pursuit and investigation oriented, and not prepared with prevention or deradicalisation in mind.

Engage with the traveller and family

In Aarhus (Denmark), Bavaria (Germany), the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, police will try to engage with families as soon as someone has left. They may also do so earlier in the process, in the previous phase when parents and others are concerned about the risk of potential radicalisation and recruitment. Most families have a need to understand the situation, how they can get their child back and what will happen after the returning child sets foot on home soil. The engagement should be carried out by police with relevant skills and expertise, like family contact officers or a trusted community police officer. Although they will identify themselves as police, their main task is to support the family in police matters.

Building a relationship with returnees and their families is key. This means that police need to be pragmatic: the personality and existing relations of the police officers are important, and if the current line-up is not working, then the police officer could be replaced, or another agency or institute could be asked to engage with the family. It does not have to be the police who build this relationship, but the police should be involved.

Interesting practice:

Use Cialdini's six key principles of influence

In the RAN POL meeting, participants were inspired by a presentation on the added value of using hostage negotiator techniques to build a working relationship with someone hostile towards police. How can you persuade such a person to share information and cooperate with police and other agencies? The presentation focused on the deliberate use of six principles of influence (**consistency, reciprocity, liking, social proof, authority and scarcity**), based on Robert B. Cialdini's book *Influence, the psychology of persuasion* (⁷). We must stress that the influence techniques were identified as potentially very helpful in successfully approaching and influencing returnees and their families. The techniques are or should be part of the police curriculum; in several countries, prevention officers may well benefit from a refresher course.

Reception of children

Children are seen as victims first and foremost. However, based on events in Syria and Iraq, children as young as nine could also pose a risk, either in the short or long term. If the returning father or mother are in custody or jail, child protection takes over. All children returnees need assessment and potentially special care for instance on potential trauma and re-schooling. For this reason, the child must be assessed from several perspectives, and it could be months or even years before risk behaviour presents. Lessons learned from dealing with child soldiers and children exposed to domestic violence or sexual abuse point to treatment through long-term engagement and intervention, delivered by specialists, not police. The role of the police is to determine how to engage with young children who might be witnesses, victims or perpetrators. We can learn from police experience in handling child abuse and domestic violence, where the police used experts with specialised, sensitive approaches. The 'do no harm principle' points us to avoiding actions that could cause more secondary trauma and the subsequent enlarged vulnerability.

Wikipedia. (2017, March 24). Robert Cialdini. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cialdini

In prison? A window of opportunity to build relations

In most countries, changes in legislation mean that travelling to Syria and Iraq falls under terrorism laws. In most countries, returnees will therefore be held in custody and given a prison sentence. This is a window of opportunity for approaching such individuals. In some states in Germany, police are permitted to already approach an imprisoned returnee to and an initiate dialogue on exit and resocialisation. It makes sense to try to maintain contact with returnees through all phases: pre-departure, while they are abroad, upon arrival, in prison and when they are released from prison. Returnees' prison sentences also afford police the time to discuss with the family the subject of what will happen when the returnee is released. Pertinent questions to ask include 'What do you want for your son or daughter?', 'How do you view your role?' and 'How can we support you in this?' Naturally, not all families or partners will be open to such dialogue, but we should attempt to approach them nevertheless. In some Northern-Western European countries the police are the actor holding these conversations. Of course a municipality worker or NGO could also do this. For police it is relevant to be establishing a link to the actor engaging with the returnee or family.

Police role

- Contribute to the sense of urgency regarding the returnee issue, and help to raise awareness and develop expertise on dealing with returnees.
- After arrival, the returnee will always be contacted by the police, and may even be arrested for interrogation purposes. Through this contact, police can assess the returnee's needs and potential for cooperation, and use the principles of influence to establish an association that will result in increasingly reliable information, and more opportunity for engagement and cooperation.
- From a police perspective, two processes are taking place:
 - I) pursuit and investigation;
 - II) prevention, and engagement with the returnee and their family:
 - establish contact with the returnee and their family as early as possible in the process, and ensure that siblings are safeguarded;
 - build a relationship with the family, or ask another agency to do this;
- Work with a family contact officer, a community or prevention police officer, or even a non-police contact;
- Ensure police officers know the protocols and have the required expertise to work in a multi-agency setting with returnees and home-grown radicalising individuals.

2. Assessments: risk, threat, vulnerability, potential for change

The challenge

Police must consider the following questions: 'Who is this person?', 'What have their movements been — is there anything that would be held against them in court?', 'What are their intentions and plans?' and 'is this person dangerous or someone with remorse wishing to resocialise into society?'

Broadly speaking, two different types of assessment were noted in the discussion:

- an initial assessment carried out by intelligence, with the help of police and others, focusing predominantly on risks and threats;
- later in the process, at local level, an assessment for a tailor-made programme to mitigate the risks and aim for resocialisation, disengagement and deradicalisation.

The solutions

The first challenge or task is the criminal investigation and threat analysis in terms of national security. This should also cover elements of relevant physical and/or psychological needs or problems. The initial risk assessment may be carried out by the intelligence service.

There are also several risk assessment models already in use by police and in multi-agency collaboration: VERA 21⁽⁸⁾, ERG 22+ and IR46, for instance. They all work with lists of indicators for various factors: (i) beliefs and attitudes, (ii) context and intent, (iii) history and capabilities, (iv) commitment and motivation, and (v) protective circumstances (taken from VERA).

The United Kingdom's 'Channel guidance' approach uses a framework that covers 22 factors ⁽⁹⁾ that may cause someone to do one or more of the following: (i) engage with a terrorist group, cause or ideology; (ii) develop the intent to cause harm; or (iii) develop the capability to cause harm.

- Most tools work with historical data, which can help police recognise a change in behaviour over time. The problem with most returnees is that there is a gap in the data during their stay in the so-called caliphate. This makes it even more vital to start reassessing the person on a regular basis after their return, supplementing the data with information based on their actions.
- Experts at the Düsseldorf meeting noted that they would ascertain whether their risk assessment tools can be used to assess women and minors.
- Regarding the questions of how and when to interview minors, we should make use of the experience gained from cases involving children, domestic violence and child abuse.

⁽⁸⁾ Government of Canada. (2009). VERA: Violent Extremist Risk Assessment and SPJ instrument. *Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism 2009-02*. Ottawa. Retrieved from <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2009-02-rdv/index-en.aspx#Appendix>

⁽⁹⁾ The Home Office. (2012). *Channel: Vulnerability assessment framework*. HM Government. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118187/vul-assessment.pdf online

Local assessment of risks, needs and potential for change

Assessment at local level should not focus exclusively on risks. It is intended to support risk assessment, but should help to create tailor-made plans for individuals. Therefore, certain parts of the assessment can be more oriented to care and resocialisation.

Interesting practice:

Assessment in the multi-agency Safety house

In The Hague (the Netherlands), risk assessment and network analysis is carried out in a multi-agency setting, under the responsibility of the local municipality, together with prosecutors, police and other partners like child protection, probation and other care and safety partners. It is designed to deal with serious multi-problem cases and it works with the formula 'One family, one plan, one director', and it was running before the returnee challenge arose.

Who performs assessments at local level?

Various options are available. The assessment may be organised by:

- The police
- The local authority
- Bodies with shared responsibility.

Information-sharing and assessment

Sharing information is always a challenge. And sometimes, it is easier to accomplish at practitioner level than at management level. Different countries use different means to achieve this. In the United Kingdom, closed court hearings allow more secretive information to be shared. The British police are also piloting close cooperation with mental health services in so-called Mental Health Hubs⁽¹⁰⁾. In the Netherlands, the IR46 model is used, scoring on 46 indicators. Occasionally, the score on a certain indicator is indicated without disclosing the source and the exact behaviour. Denmark uses multi-agency safety houses, and not only is information-sharing permitted, but it is a legislative responsibility.

There is also the option to work with the 'form of words', an agreed upon way of wording indicating something without being explicit, or to 'sanitise' information so it can be shared.

More information is available in the 2017 ex post RAN POL paper⁽¹¹⁾ on police involvement in multi-agency information-sharing and working.

Police role

- Keep explaining to other actors **why** you need certain information or why police cannot share certain information.
- Serve as the linking pin with intelligence.

⁽¹⁰⁾ National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). (n.d.). Mental health pilot hubs. Retrieved from <http://www.npcc.police.uk/NPCCBusinessAreas/TAM/MentalHealthPilotHubs.aspx>

⁽¹¹⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2017). RAN POL ex post paper: 'The role for police officers in multi-agency working and information sharing'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-pol/docs/ran_pol_role_for_police_officers_utrecht_212016_en.pdf

- Advise other actors on (personal) safety.
- While police might have highly relevant information and expertise for assessment, they are definitely not the only ones to do so.

3. Exit work: risk mitigation and offering an alternative

The challenge

Returnees must be helped to resocialise — even returnees that are to be imprisoned are likely to return to society at some point in time. At that point, the choice lies between doing nothing, monitoring and/or assisting with exit work and resocialisation. Resocialisation is vital, not only because it guides returnees to become 'good citizens', but more importantly, because it is one of the few positive strategies to minimise the risk of violent extremism. Resocialisation and rehabilitation make society safer.

The identity of radicalised individuals is often completely permeated by extremism. Ideals, social environment and daily occupation, all of this defining someones identity, are all exclusively devoted to the radical milieu. In order for individuals to successfully leave all this behind, a viable alternative must be offered. The process of exit work therefore involves both deconstruction of the extremist context and construction of a non-extremist one.

The solutions

This is not an entirely new challenge, and we do not need to find totally new solutions. Lessons learned from rehabilitation of other, 'non-radicalised' prisoners can be applied, to some extent. More importantly, many countries within the EU already have organisations and projects involved in the disengagement and deradicalisation of violent extremists⁽¹²⁾.

The RAN Exit working group has set out some of the essential lessons for successful exit work in two papers: *Minimum methodological requirements for exit interventions*⁽¹³⁾ and *Setting up an exit intervention*⁽¹⁴⁾. Each case in exit work has to be tailored to the specific circumstances at hand. In this sense, the preparations for an exit intervention for returnees are no different from other cases. However, since returnees might have experienced violence, be traumatised and have received military and/or ideological training, some additional measures might be required. These measures include the following:

⁽¹²⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2017, May 12). The RAN Collection: Exit strategies. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/ran-exit-strategies_en

⁽¹³⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2016). RAN EXIT ex post paper: 'Minimum methodological requirements for exit interventions'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit/docs/ran_exit-ex_post_paper_london_15-16032016_en.pdf

⁽¹⁴⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2017). RAN EXIT ex post paper: 'Setting up an exit intervention'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit/docs/ran_exit_setting_up_exit_intervention_berlin_13-14_022017_en.pdf

- Mental or physical aid. Injuries or trauma, both physical and mental, need to be treated prior to any exit intervention.
- Daesh returnees have received ideological training. And although non-religious exit workers are perfectly capable of discussing ideology, support from a theological expert or imam might be helpful.
- Additional safety measures might be required, for the safety of both the exit worker and the client. More details can be found on page 6 of the ex post paper *Setting up an exit intervention*.

Police role

The role of the police in exit work and resocialisation will depend on the country and on relations with the returnee. The success of exit work is highly contingent on trust and willingness of the client. In most Member States, a government-run exit programme will have issues with credibility in the eyes of the target group. This is especially true for returnees, who have often been imprisoned and remain under close surveillance by that same government. However, since monitoring and safeguarding are parallel tasks during the process of resocialisation of returnees, the police cannot be excluded.

We distinguish three different roles the police can take during the exit and resocialisation process.

- Police being one of the partners in multi-agency exit
 In most countries, the exit programme will be run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO). NGOs operate independently from the government; this allows them to build trust and credibility with the client. Since collaboration with the police might violate this trust, there must be clear agreements and processes regarding information-sharing. Transparency between the agencies involved and towards the client is key. Coordination of the resocialisation programme will be the responsibility of the municipality or exit organisation. The police may be involved if there are concerns over safety, either from their side or from one of the other agencies that are involved.
- Police coordinating and directing multi-agency exit
 In some countries (e.g. the state Bavaria in Germany), coordination of the exit programme and resocialisation is the responsibility of the police. In this case, the police decide which NGO will be involved in implementing the exit intervention. The upside of this organisation structure is that the police have greater control in monitoring the resocialisation process and safety aspects. The downside of this close relationship with the police is that it might limit the willingness of the client to cooperate. This disadvantage is a serious concern: as the RAN Exit working group clearly states, clients cannot be forced to disengage or deradicalise.
- Execution of the exit programme directly by police
 There are situations in which the police have such a close relationship with the client that they can execute the exit intervention directly (e.g. Aarhus in Denmark). Police doing the exit talks. In these cases, it is crucial that the professional expertise required to implement exit interventions is present among police. Police staff needs to be trained and other preconditions for successful exit work must be in place (see ex post paper mentioned earlier in this paragraph). The advantage here is access to police information and reduced risk of the communication errors often entailed in multi-agency collaboration. However, such a trustworthy relationship between the police and client are very rare.

Concluding: because of a proper assessment of national security, and the personal safety of the involved professionals, police should have close connections to the exit work. The key question is 'What works?'. Police involvement can hamper or benefit the exit work. To allow exit work to deliver its needed results, the local context will answer what the optimal role for police can be, eyeing the trust issue and the voluntary nature of exit.

4. Safeguarding the environment

The challenges

Allowing someone with an extremist history to return to society poses two challenges in terms of safeguarding. One challenge is in relation to the returnee's direct environment: siblings, peers and others close to the returnee. Are they resilient and able to contend with the potential risks and negative influences that accompany returnees?

The other challenge relates to the existing extremist networks. How is it possible to avoid such networks benefiting from the expertise, status and skills that a returnee has developed whilst abroad? And how to protect the returnee from intimidation or influence by these networks?

The solutions

Family support

For the direct environment, it is wise to assess vulnerability and resilience. Families can be the most important partner in the resocialisation process, but they may also act as a negative influence. An assessment helps to define the support a family needs, work on risk and protective factors, and make individual family members and the family system resilient. Family resilience can be generally defined as a dynamic process of families (that have been exposed to a significant stressor or adversity), that requires protective and recovery factors, identified by the family and its members as helpful, to promote healthy coping. Parents should show they understand the risks and their role as parents towards the returnee and the other children.

Most of the work related to family support is not police work. It is key that the police are aware of the dos and don'ts of this work, and do not unnecessarily disturb the process of family support⁽¹⁵⁾. Police may contribute to the analysis of the family and peer groups with their own information and the information they receive from partners. In Aarhus (DK) the police facilitated the possibility for families to meet, without the police being at the meeting.

⁽¹⁵⁾ RAN Youth, Families and Communities Working Group (RAN YF&C). (2016). Ex post paper: 'Family support: what works?'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_ex-post_paper_family_support_29-30_september_manchester_en.pdf

Dealing with existing extremist networks

The relationship between a former member of an extremist group and existing networks is another dimension of protection and safeguarding. We cannot afford to allow existing networks to benefit from the expertise, status or contacts of the returnee.

Countries tackle this issue using different measures. Sometimes, they form part of a tailor-made programme, containing both positive and negative incentives.

Potential measures to safeguard the environment include:

- Limiting social media access;
- Restrictions in movements and personal contacts;
- Restricting access to the media and press;
- Obligatory engagement with a mentor;
- Electronic surveillance.

The way these measures are imposed differs. In Aarhus, they assess what effect certain actions/restrictions/measures of the individual will have on the success (or failure) of resocialisation. This is done together with the client, rendering it their responsibility to do something or decide not to. In other countries, these measures form part of a mutual agreement between the returnee and the director of a personalised, tailor-made offer, based on multi-agency case management. In the United Kingdom, they might form part of a Terrorism Prevention Investigation Measure (TPIM). This is a civil order that seeks to restrict a person's movements/associations so that the risk they pose is mitigated: individuals can be moved to other parts of the country, their contact can be restricted, etc. TPIM is intended for people who cannot be jailed, but who are considered dangerous. The civilian can challenge the TPIM (or separate measures of the TPIM) in a closed court procedure. At the same time, exit interventions are implemented. The TPIM measure is extremely resource intensive, and has only been applied to a few cases, as it is put in place when the secret service deems a situation highly dangerous, without having enough evidence to pursue the individual. This situation rarely occurs.

Communication

It is also necessary to consider the potential social unrest resulting from or public resistance to the 'return of a terrorist' to 'our streets or school'. This requires a smart communication strategy and crisis communication scenarios, should something go awry. Because public outcry will relate to security issues a coordinated communication approach of local authorities and police is necessary.

Police role

At local level, police can help initiate and optimise multi-agency work that can safeguard the close environment as well as protect societies. This could also be carried out under the direction of a local government, but in both scenarios, police can contribute with police information and expertise, and can be the linking pin with intelligence and the strong arm upholding the law.

5. Are the police prepared and ready for returnees?

The short answer is 'no'. The slightly longer answer is 'no, but we know what to do'.

No...

The first answer, no, is because of the pressing urgency of the returnees' challenge. Both in numbers and risk profile, there is a need to step up the preparation for all actors, including the police. In the RAN POL meeting, participants predicted that intelligence departments and secret services will not have enough resources and personnel to monitor potentially dangerous returnees. And this does not take into account the work to be done to address 'non-travelling' jihadist extremists. There are many home-grown jihadi extremists who pose a potential threat, without having been trained in the so-called caliphate. And in some countries, there are also high-risk right-wing and violent left-wing extremists.

So, the police are being called upon, and this may occur increasingly, if developments require it. There is unique added value for proximity police, for police working in neighbourhoods and with communities, and for police with strong ties to national intelligence, and with (sometimes) even stronger ties and working relations with local actors. These police can play a role in assessing, risk mitigation and safeguarding of families and communities.

It is worth noting that in several RAN POL meetings, the concern was expressed that these unique police actions are under pressure of budget cuts and reorganisation. There is a risk of overburdening local police, preventing them from contributing with their unique preventative and engaging roles and qualities.

...but we know what to do

The challenge is new and urgent in some ways, but not so much in others: we know what to do. All over Europe, and especially in north-western Europe, city police have started working on prevention of radicalisation and extremism, using practices and approaches that will be also used for this challenge. We do not need entirely new safeguards and procedures. We must ensure that the capacity, output and impact of existing multi-agency cooperation in terms of information-sharing, exit work and safeguarding is up to standard. The vital task and responsibility for national and local authorities and management of all involved police and non-police agencies is to build on existing and improved programmes for awareness-raising. Now is the time to optimise legislation and protocols for effective multi-agency working and information-sharing. We know what to do.

And let's keep learning. Challenges evolve; as our learning from successes and failures grows, so should those performing risk assessments and exit work at bilateral, regional, local and national level keep learning from each other. RAN POL and the other working groups and the RAN Centre of Excellence will facilitate this as far as our limited resources allow.