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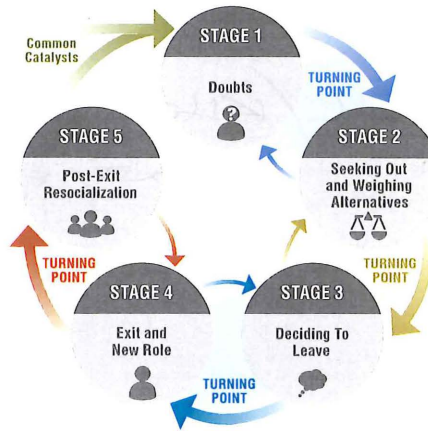
(U) Process of Violent Extremist Disengagement

(U) Key Findings

(U//FOUO) A study of individuals who disengaged from violent movements concludes that tailored approaches to countering violent extremism (CVE) at key turning points in the disengagement process can help facilitate disengagement.³ CVE efforts will be most effective after an individual experiences initial doubts about involvement in violent extremist activities. From that point in the process, an effective disengagement strategy needs to consider the individual's role within the group, vulnerabilities in that role, his or her support system, and level of commitment to violent extremism.

(U) Process of Violent Extremist Disengagement

(U//FOUO) Disengagement is a complex process in which an individual typically goes through five stages, from harboring initial doubts to seeking out and weighing alternatives to making a decision to leave a group. Once such a decision is made, an individual needs to exit the group, define new behaviors and roles, and become resocialized. This is a non-linear process driven by a number of factors—societal, organizational, social, and personal. An individual may take any length of time to progress through each stage, may remain at any one stage for a length of time, may move back and forth between each stage before proceeding to the next, or may skip some stages entirely. In this graphic, we highlight only those efforts that facilitate the disengagement process.



Common Catalysts



(U) Experiencing Common Catalysts for Disengaging from Violent Extremism

(U//FOUO) The individual experiences a disconnect between what he envisioned to be a violent extremist's role and what actually occurs. This feeling commonly is caused by the individual:

- (U//FOUO) Objecting to violence;
- (U//FOUO) Recognizing inconsistencies in ideology;
- (U//FOUO) Feeling burned out or exhausted; and/or
- (U//FOUO) Being threatened by disruption or prosecution of the violent extremist or his associates.

(U) CVE Efforts:

(U//FOUO) Law enforcement pressure on the individual or his extremist associates can spark initial doubts, but continued lawful pressure, monitoring, and support from nonviolent individuals will be needed. CVE efforts are likely to be effective after an individual experiences initial doubts by reinforcing those doubts, and helping the individual rethink his commitment to violence, develop nonviolent response patterns, and sustain that commitment for the long term.

TURNING POINT



(U) Reinforcing Initial Doubts to Find Alternatives

(U//FOUO) The individual has experiences that reinforce his doubts, particularly by receiving support from others who are aware of these feelings and who support the individual's disengagement.

(U) CVE Efforts:

(U//FOUO) Supportive family members and friends can reinforce the extremist's doubts and help the individual start to progress through the disengagement process.



TURNING POINT



(U) Deliberating Options to Finalize Decision to Leave

(U//FOUO) The more self-aware the individual is of his reasons for dissatisfaction and the more control he feels over leaving violent extremism, the shorter the deliberation stage. Individuals who perceive a lack of options outside violent extremism or who feel they need to remain engaged to survive spend more time engaged in violent extremism because they see few alternatives. Social and organizational factors are important at this stage.

- (U//FOUO) Group disengagement can accelerate an individual's disengagement because the social structure of the group falls apart and the individual is forced to weigh alternatives.
- (U//FOUO) Even time in prison, which often reinforces an individual's commitment to violence, can sometimes encourage transformation by providing an environment for contemplation and reflection, especially if psychological or social services support the individual's disengagement.

(U) CVE Efforts:

(U//FOUO) CVE efforts can be most effective when family members and close friends of violent extremists remain engaged throughout the process because of their ability to encourage, support, and offer nonviolent options to the individual.



TURNING POINT



(U) Acting on the Decision to Leave to Start a New Life

(U//FOUO) The individual's decision to disengage is dependent on perceived support for his role change, as well as the ability to envision a life after exit. The decision to leave provides the opportunity to eliminate his initial doubts, announce the exit to others, and mobilize resources to support the exit.

- (U//FOUO) Opportunities for change influence the speed of deliberation. Those who have few nonviolent outlets typically prove most receptive to intervention, probably because they have less to lose by disengaging. Those who have the most positive alternatives to violent extremism prior to their involvement spend the most time deliberating their exit because they have more to rethink.
- (U//FOUO) The individual's prominence and position influence whether he announces the intention to leave violent extremism; the higher the position or more public the role, the more likely an individual is to publicly announce his departure, probably because he feels a high degree of obligation to the violent extremist group.

(U) CVE Efforts:

(U//FOUO) The individual's new nonviolent role may require a new environment. Facilitating the individual's removal from the violent extremist environment while enabling the individual to maintain close contact with a support network would help strengthen CVE efforts.



TURNING POINT



(U) Taking on New Nonviolent Role to Resocialize into Society

(U//FOUO) Individuals who disengage often undergo a lengthy, stressful role change to resocialize as nonviolent individuals. A number of personal, social, and societal factors support the individual's sustained disengagement from violent extremism:

- (U//FOUO) Families who support their loved one in the disengagement process are central to reinforcing the individual's decision and can provide opportunities to resocialize into society.
- (U//FOUO) Education—for personal growth or professional development—facilitates resocialization.
- (U//FOUO) Professional support from social workers, psychologists, or probation officers provides an outlet for the difficult life transition and can help the individual develop healthy, nonviolent coping strategies to remain disengaged.
- (U//FOUO) After an individual has decided to disengage, if he has contact with his former enemies, he is more likely to perceive these interactions as positive, which could lead to deradicalization.
- (U//FOUO) For some former extremists, a complete environment change is necessary; they need to end relationships with violent extremists, form new ones with nonviolent individuals, and develop healthy daily habits in order to sustain disengagement.

(U) CVE Efforts:

(U//FOUO) Many former violent extremists are motivated to "right wrongs" and some may be persuaded to work on CT efforts, helping to reinforce their new nonviolent role. Former violent extremists can offer support to others going through the disengagement process by acting as credible voices against the violent extremist group and its ideology.



³ (U//FOUO) For the full text version of this analysis see NCTC NSAR 2014-1404 (U//FOUO), *Turning Points in Violent Extremist Disengagement: Insights for Countering Violent Extremism*, 9 July 2014.