

Deradicalization as a Sentencing Option for Certain Terrorism Defendants

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THESIS

For defendants charged with violations of the material support statutes, where deradicalization programming is considered as an alternative to or co-requisite of incarceration, such programs should include provisions for building family support and resilience.

Research Questions

- Which deradicalization programs are successful? What nuances are implicated in a successful deradicalization program?
- Who makes a “good” candidate for deradicalization
 - Does age play a role?
 - What is the role of the family?
- What are the policy implications of deradicalization in the context of sentencing?
- How do you determine when someone stops being a threat to national security?

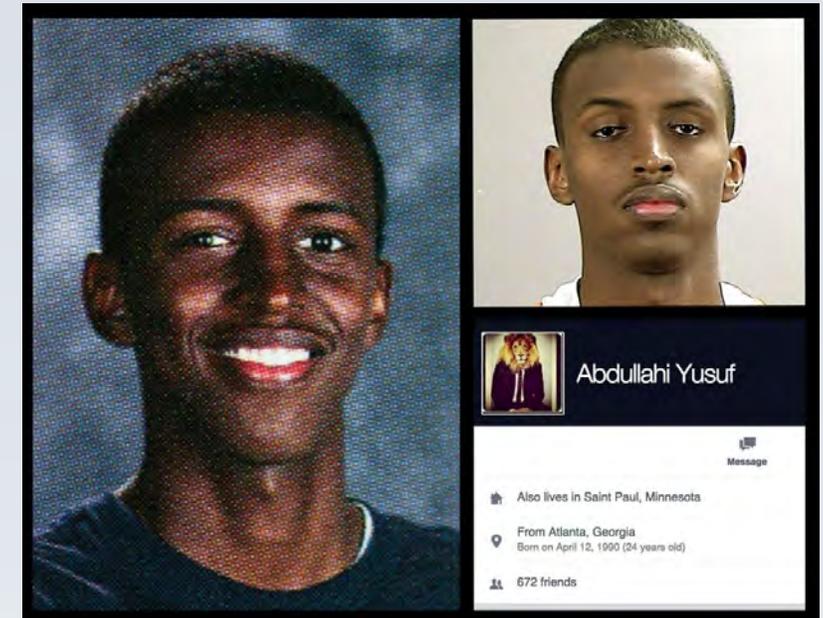
Deradicalization

“ ‘[D]e-radicalization’ as a concept denotes a process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state [and] has to be strongly differentiated from ‘disengagement’, which denotes the mere behavioural role change (from offending to non-offending) while leaving the ideological or psychological aspect aside. ”

— Daniel Koehler

Case Study: Abdullahi Yusuf

- Abdullahi Yusuf applied for a passport shortly after his 18th birthday, and then attempted to leave the country to join the Islamic State in Syria. He participated in a conspiracy with at least 10 other young men from Minnesota.
- He was prevented from boarding his flight to Istanbul, and then was arrested and charged a few months later. Yusuf agreed to work with the U.S. Attorneys Office in Minnesota and testify against his co-conspirators.
- Prior to his trial, he was given the opportunity by Judge Michael Davis, instead of pre-trial detention, to participate in deradicalization programming while in a half-way house. Although he was eventually ordered to pre-trial detention, he continued the counselling throughout the trial. Upon sentencing (he plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support), he was sentenced to time served and 20 years supervised release, and released to a halfway house. He is continuing deradicalization programming



Graphic courtesy of MPR News

Case Study: Abdullahi Yusuf

- Heartland democracy is a civic engagement organization operating in the Minneapolis area which targets “disengaged and disaffected youth”. Until their work with Yusuf, the organization had no experience with deradicalization
- Yusuf’s program is based off Heartland’s “Empowering U” program, which is a “deep empowerment and civic engagement program” designed to help participants to operate and thrive in their communities.
- Yusuf’s program specifically has focused on the following areas:
 - Process, Trust & Relationships
 - Family
 - Team
 - Law enforcement
 - Story (his story)
 - Identity and Place
 - Religion, Faith, Tolerance & Pluralism
 - Current events and context
 - Resilience and Mental strength
 - Educational experience and pursuits
 - Family and community connections
 - Peer relationships and pressure
- Counsellors are Ahmed Amin, a local high vice principal who is also Somalian (assumption is that he can relate to Yusuf on a cultural level) and Mary McKinley, Executive Director of Heartland.

The logo for Heartland Democracy, with "HEARTLAND" in green and "DEMOCRACY" in blue. The letter "O" in "DEMOCRACY" is replaced by a stylized orange and yellow sun or circle.