

Quitting Violent Extremism

Motivations for Disengagement

An Honors Thesis for the Department of International Relations

Roland A. Gillah

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Abstract

Among the thousands of young men flocking to violent groups across the Middle East, there are a number of individuals who have willingly chosen to quit fighting. Using firsthand accounts from fighters who left groups such as the GIA, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Hamas, Al Qaeda, and the Gama‘a Islamiyya, this Senior Honors Thesis examines four distinct questions. Firstly, it lays out the common processes of disengagement from violent groups among the different accounts, highlighting that fighters leave groups first and foremost to protect themselves or those they care about. Secondly, it addresses the key motivations for disengagement, specifically that the primary reasons are existential, that the secondary reasons tend towards frustration with their groups, and that their tertiary reasons are rooted in guilt. Thirdly, the thesis examines common triggers among the different individuals, and finally the thesis looks at the question of ideology: whether a complete change of beliefs (de-radicalization) is necessary for a fighter to choose to end violent behavior (disengagement) and quit a group.

Acknowledgements

The genesis of this thesis began in Amman, Jordan in 2015, where I was studying Arabic in my junior year of university. Walking home one night, my best friend and I were attacked by a young man with a sword. My friend's hands were cut to the bone, and with the help of some kind Jordanians, we were able to get him to the hospital. Experiencing the violence that has become so commonplace in the Middle East left me with a burning question. Why do young people, many of them not unlike myself, become involved in violence, and is there a way it can be confronted? I decided the best way to investigate the question was by finding the narratives of perpetrators of violence; trying to understand why they acted in their specific context. Beyond conflict, I wanted something further—I wanted to find out how people, of their own volition, willingly gave up fighting.

Throughout my time working on this project, I benefitted hugely from the kindness and generosity of a number of people. My advisors at Tufts deserve enormous credit for their insight—Hugh Roberts for his unparalleled knowledge of the North African and Middle Eastern context and his dedication to excellence in every detail of my work, and Kelly Greenhill for encouraging me to work within the limitations of my sources and refining my analysis. I also particularly want to thank Richard Eichenberg and Kathleen Devigne for guiding my initial efforts, and Mike Niconchuk and Lizzy Robinson for their consistent promptings and support. Finally, to all those who helped me formulate my topic, especially John Horgan for suggesting the use of autobiographies, and Joe Felter, Lee-Or Karlinsky, Sam Sommers, George Smith, and Paul Joseph for their invaluable suggestions. Though I have benefitted greatly from others, the mistakes and views in this thesis are my own.

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Introduction: Understanding the Motivations to Get Out

Thousands of young men flock to violent groups across the Middle East and North Africa, yet there is a smaller but significant number of individuals in every conflict who at some point willingly choose to give up violence. Some are disillusioned fighters, weary of armed conflict and the battlefield lifestyle, while for others family and friends give them a way out. “Victims,” “perpetrators,” “terrorists,” “resistance leaders,” the world is awash with words that obscure the real motivations of these individuals. The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the factors that drive a person to break out of the cycle of violence. In the context of extremist groups in the Middle East, this means recognizing that what drives individuals to join violent groups is not necessarily the same as what drives them to exit.

Key Questions

The central question of disengagement, or why individuals cease fighting, pulls together a number of others: (1) what the process of disengagement entails, (2) what the key motivations are (for example, how fighters process disillusionment, the experience of armed conflict, and a shift in goals or beliefs about the necessity of violence) such that they respond by quitting violent groups, (3) what constitutes a trigger, i.e. a defining moment in choosing to leave, and (4) whether and to what extent is a change in beliefs, or de-radicalization, invariably a factor in disengagement, and to what extent? A deeper understanding of disengagement at the individual level could lead to policy approaches that encourage and incentivize exit, while also highlighting the voices of disengaged fighters as alternatives to continued participation in violent groups.

Research Methods and Design

I have examined these questions by reading autobiographies written by violent extremists, comparing patterns in disengagement across five memoirs from fighters operating in groups in the Middle East and North Africa during the 1970s to the present day: Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), Hizb ut-Tahrir, Hamas, Al Qaeda, and the Gama‘a Islamiyya. Applying content analysis to each memoir, I look specifically at the self-identified process of quitting, the primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations they identify as driving that choice, and commonalities in their reactions to triggers and belief changes. I also compare the memoirs to the scholarly literature on the role of radicalization and ideology in the process of disengagement.

A number of the accounts present multiple instances of disengagement, where the individual left the group by changing allegiance to a Western intelligence service, and after a substantial period of time chooses to completely leave the group and occupation as a spy. I treat each change of allegiance as a separate instance of disengagement, though certainly tied in with previous motivations. On their own, the memoirs have strengths and weaknesses, but taken together they provide a level of detail from which I generate new hypotheses. There is a methodological problem in several of the accounts in which the fighter switched sides to join a Western intelligence service, as these fighters do not represent the broader number of disengaged fighters who simply return home and do not publish accounts of their experiences. However, there are significant obstacles in obtaining a representative sample, and when handled with care these memoirs raise new questions about common factors that are present in many instances of disengagement, irrespective of whether the fighters switched sides. There are also drawbacks to using firsthand accounts, especially since the writers have a large incentive to portray their

actions in a positive light; however, accessing disengaged fighters on a large scale is nearly impossible, and the issue of credibility would remain even if the accounts were interviews.

The Argument

I find disengagement among the five accounts happened as follows. Fighters quit groups in two ways: either they disengaged and then after some time proceeded to de-radicalize, changing their beliefs completely, or they began by de-radicalizing and subsequently disengaged. Two forms of disengagement stand out: there are fighters who choose to leave their groups but continue to seek belonging in a larger movement or cause, and there are fighters who choose to completely sever their ties to violent extremism. The first category includes both fighters who defected to intelligence agencies and ones who joined non-violent movements. In the latter case, one fighter left the Gama‘a Islamiyya and turned to a sect called the Quranics,¹ maintaining his connection to Islam in a non-violent, apolitical manner. A number of the fighters joined intelligence services rather than simply cutting their ties, and their continued work as spies maintained their involvement in the high-risk lifestyle associated with covert groups. Although they had changed allegiance, they continued belonging to a cause larger than themselves. The second category involves fighters choosing completely to end their involvement with the lifestyle, fellow violent extremists, and often intelligence agencies. The fighters often go on to build new identities based around marriage or countering their former life. From these accounts it becomes clear that the definition of disengagement must be unpacked, as there is no single way to quit a group. While the length and motivations of disengagement vary, the emerging identity seems most often to counter their previous life, to the point where they do not again return to the fight.

¹ Quranics follow only the teachings of the Qur’an and reject the authority of the hadiths, the numerous

I argue that that three main motivations stand out across several instances of disengagement. Primary motivations explain why the fighter chose to leave the group at that specific moment, and the most prominent motivation was the desire to protect themselves or those they cared about. The other key motivation was a loss of belief in Islamism, but this must be qualified given that there is a systematic bias towards presenting accounts where the individual de-radicalized. Secondary motivations explain the limited change in beliefs necessary for one to quit a violent group. The most common secondary motivations are the futility of fighters' efforts to achieve their goals through the violent group, and frustration with the groups, caused by factors such as incompetent leadership and disillusionment with the reality of involvement. Tertiary motivations are drivers that culminate in a growing unease with participation in the groups. The most frequent tertiary motivation was guilt, particularly feeling responsible for the deaths the fighter had caused of innocents or their own comrades.

I find that each trigger is highly unique to the context of fighters' experiences; however, there are three similar patterns in the fighters' reactions. The first pattern is actions taken by fighters to re-define their relationship to the violent group. These actions included resisting the group by stealing money from it or trying to hide and avoid members of the group. The second pattern of fighters' reactions involves questioning their previous involvement in the group, especially trying to understand why people make sacrifices for causes other than Islamism, as well as finding contradictions in the Qur'an itself. The third pattern of reactions is a sudden attempt to leave, often in the form of a direct announcement ending their participation, or agreeing to work for an intelligence service in exchange for release from prison.

Finally, as what distinguishes violent extremism from other political extremism is its ideology, I find that ideology is an important, though not the sole factor in encouraging

disengagement. One of the key beliefs that changes is the legitimacy of killing noncombatants, even when they are not Muslims. One of the key beliefs that did not change was a broad view of a clash of civilizations between the “West” and “Islamism.” In fact, a number of the de-radicalized fighters, either through work in intelligence services or simply their own personal efforts, continued to believe that the existence of Islamism put Western, liberal freedoms at risk. In addition, the fighters who de-radicalized before disengaging were often exposed to alternative ways to put their beliefs into practice, both religiously and politically. The motivation to combat injustice remains just as strong in their choice to de-radicalize as it does in their initial decision to join.

Implications

One of the central implications of this research is that people join and leave violent groups for different reasons, and therefore simply combatting the drivers that lead people to join groups will not be sufficient to encourage them to leave. From the point of view of policy, there are short term and long term goals in promoting disengagement. As the most common driver was the desire for protection, in the short term putting continued pressure on violent groups such that involvement is life threatening will encourage disengagement. This pressure must be combined at the same time with pathways that lead out of groups towards a stable, fulfilling future, because fighters must be able to conceptualize that they can leave without invoking further repercussions in choosing to put down their arms. Exposure to alternative paths and positive social connections, including conversations with former fighters, are one resource, though lasting defection or demobilization is contingent on credible guarantees that returning home to their families will not also entail a prison sentence, or worse.

In the long term, a clearer approach is required to both encourage disengagement and ensure recidivism does not occur. Since disillusionment with the group's leadership and frustration with failed efforts is an important, if secondary driver of belief change, information campaigns that highlight instances of failure, lies, and incompetence within the group could promote a change of beliefs about the reality of involvement. Efforts to de-radicalize fighters and efforts to encourage disengagement must not be confused, and it would be unfeasible (and somewhat inappropriate) for governments to attempt de-radicalization on a large scale. As the process of changing beliefs is unique to each individual, one approach from the outside is to encourage reactions where fighters begin searching out further information and critiquing their involvement. In one account, imprisonment was an opportunity to become better educated about the Qur'an and to meet disengaged members of Islamist organizations. However, imprisonment often works as a place of further radicalization, so in and of itself prison is insufficient for lasting disengagement. Unfortunately, it is unclear how many of the individual factors and motivations can be encouraged from the outside, since the process of disengagement occurs primarily within groups and is quite personal to the fighter. Further study is merited in examining the relationship between entire groups disengaging and individuals choosing to leave, a process that remains quite distinct.

My findings generate questions for further research to test by other methods. Further research is necessary to clarify the role of self-interest and the existential nature of initial motivations for disengagement, as well as to what extent beliefs must change. From this research, I define de-radicalization as the rejection of the central beliefs often necessary for involvement in a violent group. Disengagement is therefore a behavior change, whereas a de-radicalized person can continue to participate in a group because only their beliefs have changed.

Further investigation can also explain the contributing role of factors considered essential to disengagement in the existing literature—such as marriage and relationships, guilt, and disillusionment. Due to its small sample size and the unique subject matter, this research cannot conclusively present a larger theory as to how disengagement occurs, but it seeks to raise questions and clarify the dynamics of quitting violent groups.

The Layout

The rest of the thesis presents evidence to support these arguments. Chapter I provides a literature review of existing theories of joining and leaving violent groups. Beginning with a brief discussion of the sociological, psychological, and ideological aspects of radicalization, it then moves into a discussion of competing theories of de-radicalization and disengagement. Chapter II lays out the methodology behind the use of memoirs and the analysis of motivations. Chapter III examines the process of leaving violent groups, looking at each of the five cases and highlighting common tendencies across the accounts. Chapter IV lays out the key motivations for disengagement and specifically highlights the most common primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations. Chapter V explains the triggers that precipitate disengagement and discusses commonalities among the reactions to them. Chapter VI discusses the difference between disengagement and de-radicalization. Finally, the thesis concludes and examines the implications and further questions raised by these findings.

Chapter I

Evaluating Theories of Joining and Leaving Groups

There is little consensus in the study of terrorism and a tendency for authors to bring their own baggage to the table, from politicized worldviews to superficial analyses that focus on current events, which results in cursory examinations of individuals, quick generalizations, and abstractions based on little research. While respecting the limitations of an undergraduate honors thesis, I try to be sensitive and rigorous with evidence, avoid sensationalizing the violence, and stop before putting forward unnecessarily provocative assertions. In attempting to understand the motivations behind radicalized violence, we must view the instigators of violence as rational actors—not as individuals given to abnormal psychopathic tendencies—who make the choice to join and to leave out of a (perceived) limited set of options. This literature review presents the combination of context, means, and ideology that explain the decision-making and behavior of fighters joining and quitting violent groups. It also provides context for why the fighters remain committed to their groups and some of the challenges they face in attempting to leave.

Language Used

Much of the language used to describe violent extremism is highly politicized and quite vague in meaning. Though many of these terms do not capture every aspect of those who perpetrate violence, in this thesis I use a few key words to address the motivations of violent actions. In this case, I define terrorism as the deployment of violence in order to intimidate the public. In general, violent extremism is the form of political violence legitimated by extreme ideological views and beliefs. As used in this thesis, “violent extremism” stands for one of its

specific aspects: Jihadi violence, which is not particular to one nation or ethnic group and uses fundamentalist interpretations of Islam in its ideology as justification for the use of violence.²

Jihadi violence is highly diverse depending on the context of the individuals involved.³ Radicalization is the adoption of beliefs that legitimate the adoption of extreme means in the achievement of certain goals. While the accepted view is that the wave of violence currently sweeping the Muslim world is a combination of ideological (specifically religiously-based) violence with political aims, I do not proceed on the assumption that fundamentalist Islam is a necessary precursor of violent behavior or its recruitment. Instead, it acts only as a risk factor. However, involvement does not only mean perpetrating acts of terrorism, but can also include buying weapons, raising money, and recruiting other members. Disengagement means ending violent behavior associated with violent extremism, or jihadi violence. It entails a distinct behavior change, choosing to stop committing acts of political and ideological violence. It differs significantly from de-radicalization, which is more than a change in behavior but a complete change in the beliefs and mindsets that motivate extremist violence.⁴

² Paul R. Pillar, "Jihadi Terrorism: A Global Assessment of the Threat," in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 7-17

³ Ibid.

⁴ Horgan, John. "Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism," in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 173-186

I. Joining Groups

Push and pull factors of Radicalization

In the study of violent extremism, the aspects that are the least understood (and therefore the most critical) are why people join and why they leave. Max Taylor and John Horgan coin the term ‘Arc of Terrorism’ to describe overall three phases of *involvement, engagement, and disengagement*.⁵ Radicalization is a product of push and pull factors, where a person’s decisions to join a violent group depend on his or her psychology and the enabling environment they live in. In addition to an individual’s personal factors and the socio-political context, setting events play a major ideological role. Setting events are the causes that give their grievances focus, and so enable engagement without actually being the root cause.⁶ One example of these grievances is identification with injustice from across the globe, and the treatment of Palestinians or the actions of the Assad regime at the outset of the Syrian Civil War act as just such foci for individual’s frustrations. This global identification often references the larger concept of a global nation of Islam.⁷ Setting events seem to mirror the focusing ability of ideology that Hamid identifies as a method of channeling frustration into action.

Moving from the individual level to the group level, Hamid argues that radicalization is less an individual process but a group process that occurs after a person joins a group. Radicalism is a drawn-out process, beginning with what Hamid calls “accumulated personal experience,” combined with a response to the social and political environment around them.⁸ Individuals also focus on key events or conflicts that represent injustice, and allow their ideology

⁵ Horgan, John and Taylor, Max. “Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research,” in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 179

⁶ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁷ Hamid, Shadi. “Radicalization After the Arab Spring: Lessons from Tunisia and Egypt,” in *Blindspot: America’s Response to Radicalism in the Middle East*. Aspen Strategy Group, 2015, 47.

⁸ Hamid, *op. cit.*, 57.

to drive them into action. As their experience within a violent group grows, so the ideology becomes more extreme and their commitment deepens.

Accumulated Personal Experience

Accumulated personal experience acts as the psychological driver of involvement in violent extremism. It combines the individual's exposure to violence, emotional displacement, and humiliation, his or her need for significance, and the resulting quest for glory. Past experience of trauma can result in factors of alienation, emotional displacement, and humiliation. Exposure to armed conflict makes a person more likely to accept a violent response as normalized. Mike Niconchuk posits that a loss of a traditional culture may also heighten the continual search of identity, especially for Muslims living in the West or even rural migrants who move to big cities without integrating. Isolation plays a powerful role because as individuals go through trauma, depression, or addiction they begin to lose their friends and social connections, lose the ability to tell the difference between fight or flight responses, lose meaning, and eventually lose a clear sense of "self."⁹ Horgan quotes Adriana Faranda, a former fighter in the Italian Red Brigades, who says, "When you remove yourself from society, even from the most ordinary things, ordinary ways of relaxing, you no longer share even the most basic emotions. You become abstracted, removed. In the long run you actually begin to feel different. Why? Because you are different."¹⁰ Emotional displacement is the loss of love or a key romantic relationship, which can frequently result in person no longer feeling significant.¹¹

⁹ Mike Niconchuk. "Notes on Radicalization." Jordanian Ministry of the Interior. 2015.

¹⁰ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*. 4.

¹¹ Niconchuk. *op. cit.*

Humiliation can also drive violence, as it often damages a person's self worth.¹²

Humiliation and shame have their own special connotations in Arab tribal communities, where shame is connected to a loss of credibility and can almost amount to personal injury; Atran and Kruglanski connect this personal shame to group shame, especially one that deals a blow to one's social standing.¹³ After trauma, a person makes decisions in a temporary emotional state that may support violent action, or as Niconchuk terms it, "heroic limbo." At that point, the person no longer feels significant, and can choose a negative path of violence, terrorism, or addiction to assure themselves of their own significance. However, the person can also choose the positive path of resilience, sacrifice, and humility, avoiding retribution and breaking the cycle.¹⁴

Individual violent actions are generally the result of this heroic limbo, but people join groups based on the goals they set themselves. Goal formation is highly influenced by the individuals around a person and the circumstances under which they find themselves. The more stressful the context, the more likely individuals are to try to alleviate their own or another's suffering. Dying a hero and a martyr in a violent group for a meaningful cause is often a manifestation of a youthful quest for glory. Rousseau best epitomizes it in his use of the terms *amour de soi-même* (self-love) and *amour propre* (appreciation of self that is dependent on others' appreciation). It is when fighters' find their significance is confirmed by others (*amour propre*) that young men and women seek glory as foreign fighters in the Islamic State or by joining movements within their own countries. Participation in a violent group also becomes a quest for control, particularly when individuals feel marginalized and powerless within their own communities. Fighters are willing to use violence to attain the vision they desire and exclude

¹² Niconchuk. *op. cit.*

¹³ Atran and Kruglanski, qtd in Niconchuk. *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Niconchuk *op. cit.*

those who do not agree with them, as evidenced by the Islamic State's goal of a caliphate and the purity of the few who join it.¹⁵

It should be noted that the factors that drive someone's involvement with a violent group and the factors behind the commission of an act of violence are distinct.¹⁶ Humiliation, trauma, and emotional displacement may all result in individual acts of violence, but psychological explanations do not entirely explain why a person would join a group, only as precursors for participation and the benefits they might receive from staying involved. It suggests that the main pathways into groups come from their networks of relationships and communities.

The Enabling Environment

At the Societal Level

The enabling environment is the societal, political, and social contexts that give individuals opportunities to join groups. The societal level is the extent to which the larger community, the system of employment, incentives, and attitude to youth, impact young people's decisions to join violent groups. There is a distinctly generational quality about the radicalization process in its current form, with fighters made up (primarily) of men between the ages of 20 and 40.¹⁷ A lack of jobs or opportunities is frequently put forward as the root of young men joining violent groups; however, the evidence suggests it is a misconception. That is not to say extreme poverty does not drive violence; it certainly can, but that does not account for the mass participation in violent groups in the Middle East that we see today. While not focused on the Middle East, a 2015 Mercy Corps survey of youth in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Somalia

¹⁵ Niconchuk. *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Max Taylor, 1988 qtd in Horgan, John and Taylor, Max. "Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research," in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 178

¹⁷ Justin Magouirk, *et al.* "Connecting Terrorist Networks." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. No. 31 (2008), 2

suggested that it was not poverty or the lack of a job that led young people to join groups such as the Taliban, Al-Shebab, and the FARC, but reactions to injustice in a number of different forms: discrimination, corruption, and normalized violence.¹⁸

It appears that youth with a history of civic action, rather than loners, are the most likely to fight in violent groups. Armed groups take advantage of young people's frustration over injustice rather than simply unemployment, and channel the frustration into violence.¹⁹ It also raises the question of whether many of the young men who join violent groups do so out of a sense of injustice (as suggested by the MercyCorps report) or whether out of self-interest, and therefore whether one is more likely to disengage than the other.

Political Drivers

The political context presents how government actions such as coups or anti-terror laws can spur young people to join violent groups. In the case of Egypt, Hamid explains how the coup against Muhammad Morsi led to the imprisonment of the older leadership and the failure to enact Islamic reform, a generational shift within the Brotherhood created a loss of faith in the Muslim Brotherhood's policy of gradual change through the democratic system. With the long-term reformist strategy in ruins, inexperienced junior leaders chose simply to resist and began adhering to more extreme voices with different aims. Violent attacks in Egypt increased sharply, as responses to Sisi's increasingly repressive policies, which encouraged many Egyptians to take up arms and resist with violence. Groups such as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, the violent group in Sinai who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, capitalized on Islamist sentiment shared with the Islamic State but primarily drew on the local Sinai population's resistance to the

¹⁸ Keith Proctor, "Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice, and Violence." MercyCorps. 2015.

¹⁹ Ibid.

government's repressive and exploitative policies. The cases of Egypt demonstrate how repression and injustice, rather than religious factors, can draw locals to confront the government with arms.²⁰

Among diaspora Muslim communities in the West, the perception that integration is impossible and that counter-terror laws and Western foreign policy are repressive leads young people to become foreign fighters. Omar Bakri Mohammed, a prominent British Islamist who became spiritual leader to Hizb ut-Tahrir, argues that the Western push for integration is fundamentally in conflict with the Qu'ran, which:

Speaks about living, co-existing, but not integrating. We are never going to believe in isolationism, but we are never also going to believe in integration. I believe in interaction. Co-existing. Live and let other people live. Discuss, debate, condemn, contest. Intellectually, rationally. Debate...But if you say to them *integrate*, you are going to find people going underground.²¹

Bakri characterizes the desire to fight as a reaction to government policy that impacts society—which although differing from the extreme use of force engaged in the Egyptian government's counter-terror response, serves to emphasize the perceptions of injustice that young people confront and act upon. Unlike psychological causes, perceptions of repression and injustice in society can eliminate alternative courses of action for individuals to achieve their goals, leading vast swathes of young people into violence.

A Social Network

Social relationships of family and students facilitate involvement in violent groups. Recruitment is a social process, where the entire structure of these groups are essentially collections of personal relations, formed in the location they are fighting and then connected

²⁰ Hamid, *op. cit.* 47.

²¹ Omar Bakri Mohammed, qtd in Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements.* 130.

across continents to the network of people around the neighborhood in which they first radicalized.²² There is a parallel to Ibn Khaldun's foundational political theories, especially in his concept of *asabiyah* or group feeling. A strong sense of group identity can be inspiring and somewhat addictive, and therefore recruitment can be explained by a social need to belong.

Familial ties to victims or to those involved in fighting can be one of the most effective factors that encourage participation among young people, both because the centrality of familial networks in many Middle Eastern cultures can keep groups loosely unified across different cells, and because family members often have similar tactical and ideological beliefs.²³ Among friends, recruitment begins with other friends in a particular neighborhood or mosque.²⁴ Beyond religious gatherings, group activities such as sports groups or even an online chatroom can coalesce like-minded people around similar aspirations.²⁵ Once they join groups, some even marry relatives of fighters, increasing the familial ties around any one organization.²⁶ However, according to survey data with 300 fighters in Syria in 2013 and 2014, while 44% mentioned joining because all their friends joined, only 4% noted that their entirely family wanted them to join.²⁷

Once engaged, fighters belong to a community that uses both peer pressure and the desire to fit in to re-forge their views after they have joined. This peer pressure is an example of a community enforcing sacred values, the moral obligations and shared religious beliefs that make

²² Oliver Roy, "Al-Qaeda: A True Global Movement" in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 19-25

²³ Shapiro, Jacob N. *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

²⁴ Roy. *op. cit.* 19-25

²⁵ Ginges, Jeremy *et al.* "Psychology Out of the Laboratory: The Challenge of Violent Extremism." *American Psychologist*. Online First Publication, August 8, 2011. 11

²⁶ Roy. *op. cit.* 19-25

²⁷ Vera Mironova, Loubna Mrie, and Sam Whitt. August 13, 2014. "Islamists at a Glance: Why Do Syria's Rebel Fighters Join Islamist Groups? (The Reasons May Have Less to Do With Religiosity Than You Might Think)." *Political Violence @ a Glance*

up a group or society's fundamental worldview.²⁸ Sacred values are an integral part of social identity, and these values may mutate and adapt as fighters are socialized into a life of violence. During this time they begin to replace past values with new beliefs and new visions for the future, and they are continually asked to prove their loyalty and commitment. A pattern of participation emerges, with simple daily activities in the group culminating in a final test of commitment with an extreme action—something deliberately selected as inconsistent with previous beliefs and visions, and often allow return to that old life very difficult. There is also a steady process of desensitization and loss of the ability to empathize with “the other.”²⁹ This process results in deep commitment, and it can make individual members blind to opportunities to quit and alternatives to suicidal violence.³⁰

Community plays a huge role in the recruitment, process of radicalization, and support of so-called terrorists, in the first place in keeping ties together across fragmented cells, secondly by using the relationship of militants to local leaders and the community to claim violent actions taken by a few are representative of the interests of many, and thirdly by spreading certain key values that get pushed to an extreme in small militant groups.

The Role of Ideology

When examining individuals engaging in armed struggles, the role of adherence to ideology in motivating participation in violent extremism is highly unclear. Of course, what sets apart these violent groups from criminal organizations or gangs is their political aims, but an ideology based on religious beliefs may not on its own drive someone to participate in a violent group. Horgan defines radicalization as simply the “acquisition of certain beliefs, values or attitudes

²⁸ Ginges. *op. cit.* 3

²⁹ Hundeide, K. “Becoming a Committed Insider.” *Culture and Psychology*, 9 (2) (2003), 107-127.

³⁰ Ginges. *op. cit.* 3

deemed, in hindsight, conducive to involvement in terrorism, but not necessarily the commission of an illegal act of violence.”³¹ This ideology lays out the morality permitting violent action, and is greatly varied, with some groups (such as Tanzim al-Jihad) adhering to an ideology that “innovates,” making jihad a collective obligation without the declaration of a Caliph, while others adhere to variants of Salafism that condone and occasionally advocate a violent response. While the ideologies of jihadi activists encourage the recourse to violence, it is still unclear whether every person who joins these groups is inspired by religious values.

The Misconception of Ideology

One school of research argues that religious ideology does not determine participation in a violent extremist group because there are many highly religious individuals who do not participate in violent groups and there are individuals who join for practical reasons. All the memoirs in this thesis describe groups that adhere to Salafist beliefs, though there are violent groups that follow Shi‘a Islam or other interpretations. Hugh Roberts explains how Salafism has been termed ‘radical’ because recent trends of Salafism are largely often derived from Wahhabism, the variant of Sunni Islam practiced by Saudi Arabia that is highly conservative in its attitude to family, women, and punishments. However, the view that it is an ‘evil ideology’ that accepts the use of violence is a fundamental misunderstanding. The majority of Salafis are non-violent scholars and preachers who condone only the most classical (i.e. not uniquely Salafi) interpretations of the use of violence as holy struggle. Only “Jihadist Salafism” allows for violence, and is more a type of activism than a pervasive ideology.³²

³¹ Horgan and Taylor. “Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research,” 174

³² Hugh Roberts, “Logics of Jihadi Violence in North Africa,” in *Jihadi terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 27-43

Not all violent non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa adhere to a Salafi set of ideals, and join groups with other motivations. In fact, according to a study of current fighters in Syria between 2013 and 2014, the goals of Islamists and the Free Syrian Army were remarkably similar. 79% of Islamist fighters stated they joined to take revenge on Assad, while 83% stated they joined to defend their community. In explaining why they chose their particular group, only one of the four reasons over 50% of Islamist fighters cited was that theirs was the only group that truly fought for Islam. The other reasons focused on inspirational leaders, better training opportunities with their group, and that the group would take care of their family if they fell in battle.³³ As the survey on Syrians shows, the importance of defending one's community from injustice comes across as an equally powerful decider as following a specific set of religious teachings, which tend to have a very individualized and variable effect.

There are also many fighters who join violent extremist groups with very little background or depth in religious beliefs. In the memoirs, this is evidenced by Maajid Nawaz, who joined Hizb ut-Tahrir in his late teens and early twenties with little prior knowledge of the *hadiths* or the Qur'an. In addition, many fighters seek monetary reward, while there are even some supporters of the Islamic State who identify as secularists or agnostics, fighting for the group because they have come to see extreme violence as necessary.^{34,35} This case gets at the heart of what kind of ideology plays a role—it is not necessarily a religiously inspired set of values but an ideology that explains the necessity for violent action.

Ziya Meral puts forward a unique response to the question of necessity by asking how exposure to violence alters a person's faith and the lessons they interpret from their religion. He rationalizes, "Exposure to violence and injustice, seeing no "why," and looking for a "how" to

³³ Mironova, Mrie, and Whitt. *op. cit.*

³⁴ Hamid. *op. cit.* 47.

³⁵ Shapiro. *op. cit.*

survive, requires theological responses in their rawest form: what is wrong with the universe? What is right? How do I understand what I see? How do I respond to the challenges and how do I live?”³⁶ In his view, a recruit to the Islamic State will first see the world through their own personal and moral lens, and conclude that it is corrupt, chaotic, and unjust. Once they travel and start to experience violence but before they are disillusioned by it, the deeper questions of the necessity of jihad are already answered.³⁷

Ideology is Key

On the other hand, another school of research argues that ideology is key for promoting recruitment and the use of violence because groups draw many of their justifications from Jihadist Salafi thought. The interpretation of the word Jihad to mean an obligation to engage in armed struggle on behalf of the global Muslim community is not a perversion of Muslim teachings, both in Sunni and Shi‘a thought, so long as it falls within certain conditions. Religious-based activism sets the preconditions for recourse to violence, and both Sunni and Shi‘a activists can take the form of either reform movements or violent groups. Roberts lays out three types of Sunni Islamic Activism: Political, Missionary, and Jihadi. These are not different steps along the same path, measuring different levels of commitment, but three separate paths that try to solve different problems for Muslims. Political Islamist movements see a problem of poor Muslim governance and lack of social justice, so they seek to achieve power non-violently through political parties and create change within constitutional and legal frameworks.

³⁶ Meral, Ziya. “The Question of Theodicy and Jihad.” *War On the Rocks*, February 26, 2015.

³⁷ Ibid.

Missionary Islamist Movements fear the issue of diminishing belief, and so they attempt to strengthen Muslim faith and morals, warning others against the dangers of unbelief.³⁸

The dangerous branch of Sunni Activism that encourages widespread political violence are Jihadi Islamist movements, who address the threat of non-Muslim political and military power in the Muslim world through armed struggle. There are three main rationales: defensive or irredentist movements who attempt to resist non-Muslim powers and try to reclaim land occupied by them (Lashkar-e-Taiba in Kashmir), internal movements fighting against nominally Muslim regimes deemed impious (the GIA in Algeria and Tanzim al-Jihad in Egypt), and global movements in combat with the Western world (Al Qaeda).³⁹ Strands of religious belief certainly do encourage violence along strict guidelines, but the misconception lies in attributing the actions of one violent branch to all of Salafism, although Hamid's analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the coup suggest that it may not be so difficult to shift between these schools of thought. Understanding both the attraction of the ideology and how it spreads is critical to a study of why people exit groups, because it gets to the core of when group beliefs take precedence over individual beliefs, and whether people's beliefs need to be changed to change their involvement with violent extremism.

Setting Events

Setting Events are the key events that individuals focus on as symbolizing the greater oppression and injustice against Muslims. Omar Bakri Mohammed describes how, to many radical Muslims, there is no difference between historic events and the crises that serve as flashpoints for radicalizing Muslim youth today, especially Syria, Iraq, Bosnia, Kashmir,

³⁸ Hugh Roberts, *op. cit.* 27-43

³⁹ *Ibid.* 27-43

Chechnya, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Radicalization, in his view, is therefore the return to fundamental Islam to find solutions to modern problems.⁴⁰ Kruglanski *et al.* separate the ideological narrative in three basic parts: the *grievance* or injustice being perpetrated towards one's group, the *culprit* seen as responsible, and the *moral obligation to act*. In the case of Syria, groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State identify the Assad regime and its supporters as the culprits of a Shi'ite-led repression of Sunnis, and therefore the obligations of Muslims around the world to resist an impious regime. This rhetoric explains first the necessity of violence as a moral response, emphasizing that the culprits are inherently bad, not influenced by their own context. They then make the case that violence will be effective.⁴¹

Setting events become 'sacred' in the sense that they are key grievances that become the emotional cornerstones of narrative and ideology. Once they are 'sacred,' individuals set specific goals to address these grievances and go out of their way at great risk to achieve extreme gains. With respect to setting events, violent extremism appears to stem more from political aspirations transformed into religion-based group ideology than it does with traditional and institutional religious learning.⁴²

In the end, ideology appears to be a motivating factor for violent extremism, as it focuses the obligation to violence around key world events and leads to more extreme violence. However, this ideology tends less to be a precursor for violence and more a result of involvement in a group or exposure to violence. The ideology need not be strictly religious—in fact, only jihadist interpretations of some strands of Salafi ideologies result in violence, though it is

⁴⁰ Omar Bakri Mohammad, qtd in Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*. 123.

⁴¹ Kruglanski *et al.* "Terrorism—A (Self) Love Story." *American Psychologist*. October 2013.

⁴² Ginges. *op. cit.* 6.

possible to shift from a peaceful ideology to a violent one evidenced by some members of the Muslim Brotherhood's shift towards violent attacks in Egypt after the coup.

II. Leaving Groups

De-radicalization

In examining why violent extremists leave, there are two distinct schools of thought based on different assumptions about the role of belief change in driving exit from violent extremism. In short, does a person have to completely move away from the ideological beliefs that are seen to be drivers of involvement in violent extremism, or can he or she be considered to have quit a violent group by simply putting down the weapons and ceasing to fight? Disengagement focuses simply on abandoning or deterring violent behavior, while de-radicalization posits a change in ideology as a prerequisite for a change in behavior. However, which beliefs must change remains a subject to be explored.

Sometimes participation in violent groups does not give members the significance they sought when entering the groups, so Kruglanski isolates de-radicalization into two factors, “Means Shift,” where the means of violence becomes immoral and therefore ceases to bestow significance on the fighter, and “Goals Shift,” where the fighter’s political and personal goals change. In Means Shift, fighters become unwilling to fight because they begin to empathize with the other side and become more tolerant of views not identical to their own. One example of Means Shift is an entire group declaring their own violent actions immoral and ceasing to operate. The Gama’a Islamiyya in Egypt wrote 25 volumes⁴³ urging all its followers to stop fighting, while one of the commanders of Tanzim al-Jihad, also an Egyptian named Dr. Fadl, wrote a book denouncing terrorism and even traveled to prisons convincing his former followers to give up violence.⁴⁴ Interestingly, when these two organizations disengaged as a group, it was the leaders who first declared the use of violence as immoral and appeared to wield considerable

⁴³ For more, see Kruglanski, *et al.* “Terrorism—A (Self) Love Story.”

⁴⁴ The Gama’a Islamiyya wrote repudiations entitled the *Tashih al-Mafahim (The Correction of Concepts)*, and Dr. Fadl, whose real name is Sayyed Imam Al-Sharif, wrote *Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World*.

influence over the fighters lower down on the chain of command. This case raises the question if individual fighters at lower levels de-radicalized, would the leaders follow?⁴⁵

In Goals Shift, priorities change due to the fading of a desire for significance, finally feeling significant, or the creation of new goals of self-preservation, comfort, and safety that supersede the previous desire to matter. The desire for significance can fade when the fighter no longer feels humiliated, or when fighters' political and personal goals have been met, such as when they feel they have contributed all they could to their cause. At a similar moment, new goals emerge with those of comfort and safety overtaking the need to fight.⁴⁶ Both Means Shift and Goals Shift represent ideological transformations, and are therefore both components of de-radicalization.

If changing ideology is critical to encourage fighters to quit their groups, then it is important that those with credibility in religious debates be a part of efforts to transform ideology. Niconchuk puts forward that non-violent Salafis might be useful in intervening with fighters currently engaged in fighting under the precepts of Salafi ideology, and therefore non-violent Salafis could address the religious arguments for leaving.⁴⁷ Likewise, Omar Bakri Mohammed offered himself as a potential positive influence on youth interested in jihad, preferring the term 'reformation' to de-radicalization. These preachers must be consistent in both what interpretations they condone, and their condemnation of killing. However, Horgan doubts that a preacher like Bakri could ever de-radicalize youth because his non-violent views still support Al Qaeda's grand beliefs.⁴⁸ Likewise, Hamid worries that Salafis are at worst too far removed from the political aspirations of jihadi activists and at best would tend to argue that violence is

⁴⁵ Kruglanski *et al.* "Terrorism—A (Self) Love Story."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Niconchuk. *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements.*

ineffective rather than immoral, occasionally legitimating the use of violence along the lines of Classical Jihad, in cases such as the occupation of Iraq by American forces. He recommends therefore allowing non-violent Salafis to promote strict interpretations of the Qu’ran that do not legitimate violence, but that Western governments should not encourage them explicitly.⁴⁹

Certainly some fighters completely change their beliefs and leave violent groups, but it is unclear whether changing attitudes is always a prerequisite. Horgan posits that not every person who ascribes to radical beliefs will necessarily become involved in violent behavior, while not every so-called “terrorist” holds radical views.⁵⁰ However, exiting a group requires some sort of decision to leave, and one of the main drivers is disillusionment, which entails a practical change of beliefs. Therefore, it seems that at times a certain transformation of beliefs is necessary for individuals to quit violent groups; though the extent of belief change that is necessary deserves further study.

Disengagement

Effective disengagement can be achieved without a major change in beliefs. John Horgan believes that the process of disengaging from a terrorist group is just as varied as the process of joining, and it has its roots in experiences while many individuals are still deeply committed to fighting. Therefore, it is a gradual process that may not involve a complete rupture from the movement.⁵¹ Horgan reduces the factors for disengagement as psychological or physical, and one can be a catalyst for the other. These can be either voluntary, where the individual chooses to leave, or involuntary, where the person is forced by an external issue. However, he qualifies that

⁴⁹ Shadi Hamid, Shadi and William, McCants. “Experts weigh in (part 4): Is quietist Salafism the antidote to ISIS?” Markaz. Brookings: March 31, 2015.

⁵⁰ Horgan and Taylor. “Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research,” 174

⁵¹ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements.*

a person may stay involved despite significant reasons to quit because they do not perceive avenues of disengagement as open to them.⁵² In addition to the motivations of disengagement, the concept brings up a number of other questions. There is a need to clarify the relationship between the attractions of joining a group and the decision to leave and to determine whether de-radicalization is necessary for disengagement. Horgan posits that one of the most important beliefs that must change is whether engaging in violence to achieve the fighter's goals is permissible, but it is unclear whether there are other beliefs that must change in order to facilitate disengagement. Finally, it is uncertain whether fighters remain disengaged if the decision to quit a violent group is voluntary or involuntary, and the dynamics of taking on a new identity after disengagement merit further study.⁵³

Factors

Disillusionment

There is sparse literature on why individuals choose to leave violent extremist groups, but a few key motivations have been identified. These are disillusionment, a search for new roles and identity, social relationships, goal change, and exposure to violence. For disillusionment, Horgan proposes that disengagement may occur because of dissonance between the initial hopes and needs that drive involvement and the later realization of what involvement truly entails. This disillusionment is closely tied (though not identical) to the amount of meaning an individual may derive from involvement in a violent group, and highlights a certain level of disappointment in the reality of engagement.⁵⁴

⁵² H.R.F. Ebaugh. *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

⁵³ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁵⁴ Horgan and Taylor. "Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research," 178

The group dynamics while engaged in violence play a huge part in driving individuals to exit, which can occur due to differing views on tactics, qualms about a current identity and therefore a search for a new identity, and growing tired of the lifestyle. There are numerous times tactical, political, or ideological decisions are not in line with an individual's core beliefs. This discontinuity often manifests as losing respect for those peers when their actions do not line up with those of the fighter.⁵⁵ Operatives will often differ with leaders on preferences for targets, number of attacks, and allocation of finances, which sometimes put at risk the achievement of political goals due to misaligned tactics.⁵⁶ To ensure complete control over their own fighters, groups often become quite territorial over participation of their own members in other groups.

The buildup of minor disagreements and irritations can also lead to burn out, which manifests as a disparaging of peers whose everyday demeanor may be culturally very different or unpleasant (especially for foreign fighters). Horgan cites a Red Brigade member who was disgusted by a superior cleaning his feet at the table, and the experience cemented other feelings of alienation and disgust with the group. However, many individuals may continue to participate in violent actions while also being completely disillusioned, which highlights the distinction between being deeply engaged in a role in the violent organization and being deeply committed to it.⁵⁷ In a broader study, Ebaugh looked at role change in former criminals, alcoholics, doctors, and nuns. She noticed four trends: disillusionment with the person's current role or identity, a search for a more pleasing role, specific triggers that forced the final decision to exit, and the establishment of a new identity as a former criminal, alcoholic, etc.⁵⁸ Group dynamics such as disagreement over tactics or beliefs and disgust with other fighters' actions often clash with the

⁵⁵ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁵⁶ Shapiro. *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁵⁸ Ebaugh, *op. cit.*

romanticized views of the violent organization that individuals held before joining. This disillusionment, if presented with pathways out of a group, leads fighters to disengage.

New Friendships

Another factor driving exit is social connections, especially the formation of new relationships such as friendships and marriage. As extremist groups are highly socially-oriented, the people with whom fighters choose to have friendships or romantic relationships can decide both their trajectory into a group and out of one. If family ties become more distant, extremists will be forced to build stronger relationships outside the group, which can decrease commitment. In previous conflicts in Syria, foreign fighters married locals and so lost their motivation to continue fighting.⁵⁹ In addition, age becomes a driver not only because of physical weakness, but also improved ability to make decisions based on experience and the perception that they ought to have seniority in a group.⁶⁰

Goal Change

Meanwhile, in addition to the fading desire for significance as evidenced by Goals Shift, priorities change after marriage or having a child (for both men and women), as well as when an individual takes an extended period of time away from the violent group. Ziad Jarrah, the 9/11 hijacker who piloted the United flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania, directly disobeyed the ringleader Mohammed Atta's orders to cut all ties with his family and continued contacting his wife while he was in the U.S. According to the 9/11 Commission report, Jarrah needed constant encouragement from his fellow hijackers and terrorists in the U.S. and Europe to continue

⁵⁹ Shapiro, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Horgan and Taylor. "Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research," 178

engaging, which suggests that sustaining connections outside the group has the potential to disrupt a person's continued involvement. Horgan suggests that different social communities can challenge the identities of those individuals deeply committed to involvement. In much a similar way to Casebeer's recommendations, they provide a counter-narrative with alternatives to violence.⁶¹

Reaction to Violence

Disengagement can be spurred on by guilt and reaction to violence. As Hundeide argues, any path out of a violent group requires facing conflicting actions and choices that most will not face outside a personal crisis or sudden immediate danger.⁶² This suggests a specific trigger spurred on by traumatic experiences. One of the primary motivations for gang members to get out was their experience with violence, especially disillusionment about the 'mythic violence' of gang warfare and the real consequences of violence.⁶³ In a highly relevant study, Garfinkel examined the psychological transformation in moving from violent activities to non-violent activities with militants from Nigeria, Israel, Kashmir, and Lebanon. Like Niconchuk, she found moments of vulnerability due to stress, trauma, and crisis drove a reorientation in beliefs, often vitally impacted by personal relationships.⁶⁴ While Ziya Meral explained how violence can alter a person's faith and make them turn towards interpretations that permit violence, it can also make individuals question the assumptions under which they act and modify their beliefs in the

⁶¹ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁶² Hundeide, *op. cit.* 112.

⁶³ Decker, S.H. & Van Winkle, B. *Life in a Gang: Family, Friends and Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁶⁴ Garfinkel, "Personal Transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace" qtd in Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

opposite direction.⁶⁵ Violence triggers emotional arousal, intensified by perceived responsibilities, which allows for great pressures to push an individual to exit.⁶⁶

Terrorist Disintegration

Many of the factors that drive individual disengagement are closely tied with the manner in which violent groups as a whole disintegrate. Martha Crenshaw cites three main reasons groups disintegrate: either they are defeated by their enemies, fall victim to a rival group, or fall apart from within.⁶⁷ Dipak Gupta adds complete victory for the group and the transformation of the group into a criminal movement.⁶⁸ It is even possible that the factors that allow for the formation of the group can also lead to its disintegration, as is the case when an entrepreneurial leader helps coalesce people towards action, but his or her sudden absence severely weakens the cohesion and direction of the group. Splintering happens unintentionally when leaders attempt to form alliances to strengthen groups and fighters disagree, or sometimes with their direct intention, when the leaders believe their goals will best be served by multiplying into different groups.⁶⁹

Groups also tend to drift apart when they lose focus of their goals and suffer from a lack of tight leadership, which is particularly apparent during peace negotiations. Finally, a withdrawal of support can be an equally powerful stoppage of attacks, as evidenced by the Gama'a Islamiyya after the 1997 attack at Luxor that killed 62 people and horrified the public

⁶⁵ Meral, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements.*

⁶⁷ Martha Crenshaw, Martha. "How Terrorism Ends." Paper Presented at the Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (September 1987).

⁶⁸ Gupta, Dipak. *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The Life Cycle of Birth, Growth, Transformation and Demise.* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008). 161.

⁶⁹ Horgan, John. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements.*

and numerous fighters within the group.⁷⁰ Similar to individual disengagement, a change of goals after a defeat or a victory leads to a loss of focus and disagreement within a group can tear it apart; however, key leaders have enormous influence over the dynamics within the group, and therefore its continued survival.

Conclusion

If disengagement means completely quitting a violent role, these explanations do not easily account for those who re-engage at a later time.⁷¹ The major goal of either de-radicalization or disengagement is stopping a return to violent behavior, otherwise known as recidivism.⁷² Different methods of encouraging disengagement or de-radicalization will have different outcomes, and for any given fighter it is challenging to be sure recidivism will not occur at some point. We arrive at a few clear hypotheses for radicalization, de-radicalization, and disengagement. Radicalization begins with accumulated personal experience: psychological drivers such as trauma, humiliation, and a desire for significance. None of these are sufficient to lead a person specifically down the path of violent extremism until contact with the societal, political, and social context provides pathways to various violent groups. Individuals focus on setting events that coalesce their grievances into an ideology, but it is not until they join groups that they solidify their ideological views and their commitment deepens.

In a way, disengagement and de-radicalization mirror this process of engagement. De-radicalization occurs due to a belief change that the use of violence is immoral or impermissible, marked notably by an increase in empathy with the other side, and a change in goals. At this

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Horgan. *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*.

⁷² Horgan and Taylor. "Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research," 173

point, they begin to achieve significance, or discover it cannot be satisfied by participation, and seek new goals. Disengagement happens due to disillusionment, building new friendships, a reaction to violence, and changing goals. However, the primary sources will show not only whether the distinction between disengagement and de-radicalization is a generalizable pattern, but what the direct triggers and reactions are that drive an individual out.

Chapter II

A Methodological Study To Understand Disengagement

To quote Scott Straus, “Methods matter. Theory matters. And what distinguishes scholarship from journalism—is the systematic collection and analysis of evidence.”⁷³ There is a gap in scholarship surrounding the dynamics of abandoning violence, particularly in theories that try to explain individual-level behavior. The methodology of this thesis is somewhat unusual in its use of memoirs of former fighters to search for key motivations for disengagement. Using content analysis, I attempt to address four questions, (1) what does the process of disengagement entail, (2) what are the key motivations (for example, how fighters process disillusionment, the experience of armed conflict, and a shift in goals or beliefs about the necessity of violence) such that they respond by quitting violent groups, (3) what constitutes a trigger, i.e. a defining moment in choosing to leave, and (4) is a change in beliefs, or de-radicalization, invariably a factor in disengagement, and to what extent?

In the first question, I examine the perpetrators’ process of disengaging, specifically looking at how they became involved in disengagement or defection, and how this involvement changed over time. I highlight both the motivations and the actions of the fighters as they attempt to quit their groups, looking specifically at how fighters reacted to certain emotional states. I then explain how these emotions (my *x* variables) translated into behaviors that break the cycle of violence. These emotional states are specifically disillusionment, the search for a new identity, new relationships such as friendships and marriage, changing priorities, and reactions to violence. I determine the measurement indicators of disillusionment are instances of disappointment with the group, when initial hopes do not match reality, a loss of meaning in

⁷³ Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), xi.

participation, and rejection of the group, which is manifested in disagreement with leaders or subordinates about tactics, burn out, and a rejection of the fighter's current identity. These indicators act as drivers for the decision to quit violent extremism (my y variable). Using this method of content analysis, I determine common patterns among perpetrators' actions as they try to leave their groups, and I highlight central tendencies towards specific motivations that led to disengagement.

I also address a few other key questions, specifically looking at whether group-level issues that forced groups to disintegrate or disengage trickled down to the individual level. This question involves examining how the fighters rated the leadership of the violent group, which taps into their attitudes before exit, and how they imagined their future before choosing to quit.

In the second section, I contrast the initial motivations for leaving and how they change as they disengage. I present a table that summarizes the frequency of the motivations mentioned in the memoirs, and then I group the evidence into primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations, explaining which variables most impact the decision to quit a group. Finally, this section compares the motivations as present in the memoirs with common theories about the variables I selected that drive individuals to leave (for example, whether disillusionment was a primary motivator of exit), clarifying any discrepancies.

In the third section, I identify the key event that acted as the most important reason for abandoning violence in each group, which determines the presence of a self-identified trigger driving individuals to quit. I group them based on the common reactions they elicit from the fighters, which acts as a detailed summary of the common processes across accounts, and addresses which triggers elicit the same reactions. Finally, the section assesses whether these triggers might produce the same reaction more than once.

Finally, to answer the fourth question about the role of a change in ideology in driving disengagement, I keep track of various references to religious beliefs, their stated opinions about enemies, political goals, and grievances. This analysis requires noticing if they share any common political or sectarian myths or conspiracy theories, and if they lend them much credence. Lastly, I explain specifically which beliefs changed for disengagement, which allows me to arrive at the central distinction between disengagement and de-radicalization. Throughout the analysis, I keep track of the internal consistency of results by watching whether the author gives the same reasons throughout the work and portrays events or his involvement consistently.

A note about the primary sources

The thesis will primarily examine autobiographies and memoirs of former extremist fighters as first-hand accounts of why they chose to give up violence. This methodology takes advantage of the accounts as most genuinely presenting the firsthand experiences and attitudes of fighters in a field where a large, representative sample is almost impossible to obtain, and therefore these accounts are the most effective source to explain motivations. Like any autobiography, there is always the risk that they will misrepresent their actions or be highly selective about what they present about their own experiences and actions.⁷⁴ Most writers have a high incentive to cast their actions in a favorable light. They will probably not highlight instances of strife and discord; however it is unclear whether these biases will impact their own description of the process of exiting. There may be a systematic bias towards the kinds of fighters who felt motivated to write autobiographies, as they all share a certain type of worldview and decision-making process.

⁷⁴ Altier, Mary Beth; Horgan, John; and Thoroughgood, Christian. "In Their Own Words? Methodological Considerations in the Analysis of Terrorist Autobiographies." *Journal of Strategic Security* 5, no. 4 (2012): 85-98

Although these five sources cannot be considered representative of the variety of disengaged fighters, they present a level of detail that would otherwise be highly challenging to obtain from a larger sample. All of the writers were young men born between 1961 and 1976, and they represent a range of experiences. Two were born in the Middle East and joined violent groups from there, while two were born into diaspora Muslim communities in Europe, with one person a European convert to Islam. They represent a range of groups and locales: the Algerian Groupe Armé Islamique (GIA), the British branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the West Bank arm of Hamas, the Yemen and European cells of Al Qaeda, and the Egyptian Gama‘a Islamiyya. Three of the accounts describe the fighters leaving violent extremist organizations to work for various intelligence services (the DGSE, the Shin Bet, the PET, the CIA, and MI5). Defection is one form of disengagement, but it is overly represented in this thesis, as it appears defectors were more willing to write about their experience leaving groups and accessing prominent English-language publishers.

The memoirs were all written in English and published by prominent American and British publishing houses, which suggests the information presented is biased for a Western audience. However, most of these memoirs were written as personal, exciting narratives, not academic works, so it is unclear whether the writers and editors took any creative license. Despite the age difference of a number of the fighters, all but one account handle the transition into the 21st Century and the post-9/11 attitude to terrorism, which makes their accounts still highly relevant to current experiences. Therefore, while technology and conflict zones may have changed, the motivations and decisions hold true across different several years.

Table 1: List of Memoirs

- Omar Nasiri. *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.
- Maajid Nawaz, with Tom Bromley. *Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism*. Guilford: Lyons Press, 2013.
- Mosab Hassan Yousef, with Ron Brackin. *Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices*. United States of America: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010.
- Morten Storm, with Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister. *Agent Storm: My Life Inside Al Qaeda and the CIA*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014.
- Dr. Tawfik Hamid. *Inside Jihad: Understanding and Confronting Radical Islam*. Self published book. 2007.

Chapter III

The Process of Getting Out

Common Patterns

Despite the range of groups, locations, and experiences there remains a common pattern of disengagement around a two step process: growing frustrations with the group and ideology come to a head with a specific event, triggering disengagement. The process of disengagement can be quite prolonged, and in these memoirs some fighters extended the process as spies within groups working for Western intelligence services. This chapter explains what the process of disengagement entails, with frustrations beginning even a year before the person exits a group. Largely, fighters in these accounts leave in two ways: they leave the group and later on change their beliefs and reject the legitimacy of involvement in the violent group, or they begin by rejecting the violent group and subsequently decide to leave when their beliefs are no longer in line with their actions. Their goals seem to fall into two categories: continuing to belong to a larger cause and effort, or completely ending involvement in violent extremism.

Table 2: Summary of Disengagements

Fighter/Group	Type of Exit/Trigger/Motivations
Omar Nasiri /GIA	Disengagement (1) – Trigger: Storage of weapons in his house Motivations: Protection, frustration with the GIA, and loss of belief in Islamism
Omar Nasiri /GIA	De-radicalization – Trigger: GIA hijacking of Air France flight 8969 Key belief changes: The killing of innocents is murder
Omar Nasiri /Al Qaeda/DGSE-MI5	Disengagement (2) – Trigger: Threat of exposure as a spy Motivations: Boredom, protection, and desire to get married
Maajid Nawaz /Hizb ut-Tahrir	De-radicalization – Trigger: Imprisonment with other fighters Key belief changes: Justice is separate from Islamism, imposition of Sharia law as secular is Western concept
Maajid Nawaz /Hizb ut-Tahrir	Disengagement – Trigger: Offer of leadership Motivations: Beliefs no longer in line with actions, Disillusionment with Hizb ut-Tahrir, and guilt
Mosab Hassan Yousef /Hamis	Disengagement (1) – Trigger: Imprisonment with Hamas prisoners Motivations: Desire for release, disillusionment with Hamas/Islam
Mosab Hassan Yousef /Hamis-Shin Bet	Disengagement (2) – Trigger: Watching a Coptic priest on TV Motivations: Desire for a romantic future, openly practice Christianity, beliefs no longer in line with actions
Morten Storm /Al Qaeda	De-radicalization – Trigger: Failure of journey to Somalia Key belief changes: Killing innocents is wrong, Islam had been misinterpreted, Islam was contradictory
Morten Storm /Al Qaeda-PET-CIA	Disengagement (2) – Trigger: CIA request to drive down to Yemeni tribal areas Motivations: Desire for protection, distrust of the intelligence services, guilt
Tawfik Hamid /Gama‘a Islamiyya	De-radicalization – Trigger: Members plotting to kill policemen/joining Quranics Key belief changes: Islam had lost its soul, tolerating other religious views was important

Table 2: This table separates out each instance of disengagement and de-radicalization in the memoirs, and explains the trigger that precipitated quitting and the primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations.

Omar Nasiri

Omar Nasiri was born in 1967 in Tangier, Morocco, but spent his childhood in Brussels, Belgium. He returned to Tangier at 15 years old and remained for 10 years, working, until his brother Hakim encouraged him to become a more pious Muslim, he moved back to Brussels to live with his mother and brothers in 1993. During that time, he began using the contacts he gained in Morocco for hash smuggling to begin smuggling weapons for the Groupe Armé Islamique (GIA), an Islamist insurgent group in Algeria. After a little less than a year of smuggling weapons for the group, he stole 25,000 francs hoping to signal to the leaders that they were no longer welcome in his home. His younger brother Nabil warned him that the GIA leaders were going to kill him for his theft, so he went to the Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure (DGSE), the French foreign intelligence service, to offer his services as a spy.

He continued spying for the DGSE for a while, but upon the arrest of his family he left for Afghanistan in 1995 to train in Al Qaeda's camps. While at the camps he studied both the finer points of Salafist jihadist theology and practical subversion and combat skills. Emerging in 1996 a more committed Muslim but still a spy for the DGSE and MI5, he watched extremist preachers in London (including Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza). Finally, in 1998 he moved to Germany to get married, resigning from his work as a spy.

The case of Nasiri presents the complex issue of defectors, whose involvement in the violent group increased even as they held views that ran counter to those that legitimated the violence of the group in which they participated. Nasiri's account can be narrowed into a distinct instance of initial disengagement, when he sought out the DGSE, de-radicalization some months later, further, if disingenuous, engagement while participating in the Afghan camps, and a final disengagement where he ceased to be both a fighter in Al Qaeda and a spy.

Before his initial disengagement, he continually disagreed with the leaders over wanting to receive a cut of the payments to the arms dealers. He also disagreed as to who was to blame for the suffering of Algerians, since the GIA believed the root cause was French support of the regime. He explains, “the true scandal in my mind was not the way Western governments exploited the Muslim world. It was that the Muslim world went along with it.”⁷⁵ However, despite his differences of opinion, it was feeling trapped by the increasing imposition of the group into his home, interrupting his sleep for prayer and endangering the safety of his mother and brothers, that finally drove his decision to steal the money. He described, “I didn’t blame them for who they were, or for what they were doing. But I needed to protect my family and myself, and I had run out of options.”⁷⁶ His anger at the GIA leaders for their imposition drove him to steal their money, but when it resulted in a death threat he went to the DGSE for protection, disengaging from the group.

His process of de-radicalization was slower than disengagement; although he had never entirely shared the political ideology of his brother and the GIA leaders, he never wholly rejected it. However, he ascribed his main motivations for double dealing between arms smuggling and spying as a desire for money and excitement. While watching footage of the GIA hijacking of Air France Flight 8969 in December 1994, he began empathizing with the victims and recognized his own complicity in their murders. From this event he concluded that killing innocents was wrong, and throughout the rest of his involvement in the GIA and Al Qaeda he never ceased to believe that the killing of innocents could not be justified by Islam. While in the camps, he realized, “According to the laws of jihad, however, the definition of “enemy” can be expanded to include the entire supply chain: anyone who supports the enemy...But how far, I

⁷⁵ Omar Nasiri. *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 44.

wondered, does the supply chain extend? To anyone who votes for an enemy regime? What about those who don't take sides at all? How far does it go?..I came to understand how, in the mind of an extremist, almost anyone could become the enemy.”⁷⁷ The realization that killing innocents was wrong, and that the ideology he followed meant killing anyone could be justified had a profound effect on changing his commitment to the GIA's cause.

Nasiri falls into a broader category of fighters who disengaged before de-radicalizing; the thought processes involved were highly distinct. Concern for his own survival and anger at the leaders drove Nasiri's initial disengagement, without a grand ideological rupture with the GIA or its tactics. Likewise, his final disengagement from both Al Qaeda and the DGSE and MI5 was motivated by a simultaneous desire for a married future and a fear of being killed by his former GIA combatants. These desires and responses represent normal reactions to outside control and fundamental human needs for survival and protection. Nasiri's process suggests that existential needs, rather than ideological ones, may drive disengagement.

In addition, the fact that his first disengagement involved turning to work for an intelligence service indicates that his desire to enlist in a larger group did not fade away. With his subsequent de-radicalization, he committed to fighting for a cause larger than himself, growing surer of switching sides. These instances differed with his final disengagement, where his desire for married life drove him to completely end his involvement, a personal desire confirming his own significance.

Maajid Nawaz

Maajid Nawaz was born in Essex, the United Kingdom in 1978, of Pakistani descent. Growing up in Southend he faced racism and discrimination, but while watching his older

⁷⁷ Nasiri. *op. cit.* 148.

brother align himself with Islamism he realized the protection offered by skinheads' fear of Islamist terrorism. He started attending Hizb ut-Tahrir meetings in secondary school and joined as a full member while starting at SOAS in 1995. While Hizb ut-Tahrir had overall goals of a global caliphate and imposing Sharia law, it was not a violent group in the U.K., though its recruitment efforts in Muslim countries were aimed at overthrowing what they deemed were impious regimes.

After recruitment assignments to Pakistan and Egypt, Egyptian secret police arrested and tortured him in 2002, holding him at Mazrah Torah prison for five years. During his time there with other dissidents, he disavowed his previous obsession with Islamism and de-radicalized. Freed in 2007 with the help of Amnesty International, the Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders offered him a position of leadership in the U.K. Within a few months he turned down the position upon realizing his beliefs were no longer in line with those of the organization he would be leading.

Nawaz's account represents a similar experience to Nasiri's of growing up a member of the Muslim diaspora in Europe. His is one of two accounts where the individual did not join an intelligence service, though he became a public figure as founder of Quilliam,⁷⁸ criticizing Islamism in Britain. Nawaz's process of leaving involved a long, distinct period of de-radicalization, followed by disengagement; however, it is not apparent whether the factors that led to de-radicalization and disengagement were separate. His ideological commitment to his role in Hizb ut-Tahrir appeared to be greater than that of Nasiri's, since he never questioned the ideology as much as Nasiri. Therefore, his turn first towards de-radicalization raises the question of whether previous commitment can decide the type of exit a person takes out of a violent group.

⁷⁸ Quilliam is a think tank based in London that focuses on counter-extremism, particularly against Islamism. It was founded by Maajid Nawaz and Ed Husain, both former members of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Before his de-radicalization, he became increasingly disillusioned with the leadership of Hizb ut-Tahrir due to the self-serving behavior of leaders such as Omar Bakri Muhammad, who tried to cover up the violent act of a particular Hizb ut-Tahrir member, who killed a secondary school student, by disavowing their involvement with the organization.⁷⁹ Another leader was Irfan, a local Hizb ut-Tahrir leader in Pakistan who pettily made Nawaz look disloyal by dismissing his legitimate criticisms of incompetence. Nawaz described his reaction:

From now on, whenever I looked at Irfan, whereas previously I had seen a brother, now all I saw was someone who apparently liked to maneuver for position. For an idealist like myself that was a painful thing to recognize. Looking back, it was the end of my political innocence.⁸⁰

Nawaz highlighted this moment as critical to his journey out of the group, because

The thought process involved in leaving groups such as HT begins first at questioning an individual in authority, then the tactics, then the strategy, then the methodology, and then finally by questioning the ideology itself. This was probably the first, unrecognized seed that would lead to my eventual departure from the whole cause.⁸¹

In his self-identified process, questioning leadership and tactics was essential in the road towards de-radicalization.

His change of beliefs occurred due to consistent exposure to different points of view on justice and Islamism, along with conversations with imprisoned secular and violent group leaders. Nawaz described the experience as “a process of years for me to work my way out of it. First emotionally, and then intellectually, then politically, and finally socially, until piece by piece I had to reconstruct my entire personality from the inside out. This is not an easy thing to do.”⁸² On an emotional and moral level, he began by decoupling the concept of justice from

⁷⁹ Nawaz described witnessing Sa’eed Nur kill Ayatonde Obanubi in a confrontation between students of Muslim, South Asian descent and students of African descent at Newham College, East London in 1995.

⁸⁰ Maajid Nawaz, with Tom Bromley. *Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism*. Guilford: Lyons Press, 2013. 102

⁸¹ Ibid. 102

⁸² Ibid. 181

Islamism, specifically realizing that the two could come in conflict in ways he had never envisioned. He also began grappling with moral ambiguity by reading Western literature, such as The Lord of the Flies, Animal Farm, and The Lord of the Rings (particularly the character of Smeagol/Gollum), and comparing the lessons in them to the behavior of other members within Hizb ut-Tahrir.

On an intellectual level, he studied Arabic and the Qur'an, as well as Sunni-Shi'a dialogues and the Repudiations of Gama'a Islamiyya, the Egyptian violent organization that de-radicalized as a group. Furthermore, he had several conversations with non-Islamist prisoners of conscience, realizing that a person could believe strongly in a cause that was not Islamism. One of the prisoners was a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, but told him that one day he had grown out of it. As terrorist attacks hit London in the 7/7 bombings, he began empathizing with the victims and convincing other detainees that murdering innocents (whether or not they were Muslims) was not justified. Finally, he came to the conclusion that Hizb ut-Tahrir's goal of merging Sharia with secular law to build the caliphate was a Western concept based on unitary legal systems before the Reformation. In addition, he concluded that no blanket imposition of Sharia law had existed under the last Muslim empire, the Ottomans (who he now believed left interpretation of Sharia law up to the local legal authorities). The central Islamist aspirations of Hizb ut-Tahrir were therefore, he realized, "the bastard children of colonialism."⁸³ This overall loss of belief in Islamism due to education on Islam, literature, and exposure to former fighters resulted in his deep discomfort with participation upon release.

Nawaz finally disengaged when he was offered a position of leadership in Hizb ut-Tahrir. He described returning and realizing, "As my doubts grew, I increasingly began to consider my

⁸³ Nawaz, with Bromley. *op. cit.* 191

Hizb ut-Tahrir brothers as ignorant of Islam, politics, and history.”⁸⁴ He remained in the group trying to reform it but faced disillusionment when no one was receptive. After trying to persuade a fellow university student who pointed out he no longer believed what he was proselytizing, he said, “The ball dropped. I could go no further. It was one thing to be arguing for my views within the organization; it was another to be leading a group whose ideology I was beginning to question.”⁸⁵ He announced his resignation by email and left the group in 2007, founding Quilliam, a counter-extremist organization in the U.K., a year later.

Nawaz’s exit coincided with growing estrangement from his wife, as he attempted to rid himself of the remnants of his former life. Nawaz exemplifies a category of individuals who de-radicalized before disengaging. A long period in prison with constant exposure to education, new ideas, and former violent fighters contributed to his change in his beliefs. His exit from Hizb ut-Tahrir followed naturally from that change. His account falls into a broader number of cases where a certain change of beliefs was necessary to spur on exit, specifically beliefs about the legitimacy of imposing Islamist justice. His change of beliefs was quite extensive, but as he was more committed ideologically to Hizb ut-Tahrir than Nasiri had been to the GIA, it is possible he needed a deeper de-radicalization in order to consider quitting. Unlike Nasiri’s existential concerns, Nawaz highlights the incongruity of his own beliefs with the beliefs of the organization as critical to his leaving. The final recognition that he had lost those beliefs was the trigger for his exit. Similar to Nasiri’s second disengagement, his goals upon leaving concern the re-building of his own personal identity, outside of the context of belonging to an Islamist group.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 203

⁸⁵ Nawaz, with Bromley. 205

Mosab Hassan Yousef

Mosab Hassan Yousef was born in Ramallah, the West Bank in 1978, the son of one of the founders of Hamas, Sheikh Hassan Yousef. He faced numerous incidents of Israeli repression growing up, including watching his father's arrests by the Shin Bet, the Israeli domestic security service. In 1996 he attempted to buy weapons in order to kill Israelis, but he was captured by the Shin Bet. After being tortured by the Shin Bet, they offered him a deal to spy from within Hamas and regain his freedom. He agreed and attained a high position within Hamas by 1999 as the person responsible for his father's safety and administrative needs. He continued to spy for the Shin Bet throughout the Second Intifada. He began to de-radicalize and at the same time converted to Christianity in 2005. Finally, in 2007 he chose to leave the Palestinian Territories entirely, including his life as an informant, so that he could have romance in his life and a future outside of the conflict.

Unlike Nasiri and Nawaz, Yousef's engagement represents that of the vast number of fighters who grew up in the Middle East and joined local violent groups. Similar to Nasiri, his role in Hamas grew hugely after he disengaged and became a spy. He also disengaged before he de-radicalized, the processes seemed highly connected, as in Nawaz's case. During his arrest, Yousef maintained his strong hatred of Israelis. He first agreed to work for the Shin Bet with the belief that they might give him his freedom, which he would then use to kill them. He did, however, begin to berate himself for his carelessness and question his hatred,

I still hated everything around me. The occupation. The PA. I had become a radical just because I wanted to destroy something. But it was that impulse that had gotten me into this whole mess. Here I was sitting in an Israeli prison, and now this man was asking me to work for them.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Mosab Hassan Yousef, with Ron Brackin. *Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices*. United States of America: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010. 83

Initially, his expressed willingness to disengage was a lie to gain his own release, but as he spent more time with Hamas inmates his idealization of Hamas ended and he grew more committed to disengagement. Shin Bet had powerful leverage, however, as they could present highly detailed information about everyone he lived around. It is therefore less surprising he agreed so readily.

Due to watching the other Hamas inmates grow increasingly suspicious of each other with the belief there was an informant and torture each other, Yousef became deeply disillusioned both with Hamas and Islam in general. He questioned, “Was this Hamas? Was this Islam?”⁸⁷ realizing that not all Muslims were up to the standard he had for his father. Growing increasingly disillusioned, the encounter with Shin Bet offered him a way out. He did not act on his criticisms of Islam until offered the chance to study the Bible in Jerusalem. Further contact and training by the Shin Bet led him to conclude that he no longer wanted to kill them. He explained with every meeting,

The world I knew was relentlessly eroding, revealing another world that I was just beginning to understand. Every time I met with the Shin Bet, I learned something new, something about my life, about others. It wasn't brainwashing through mind-numbing repetition, starvation, and sleep deprivation. What the Israelis were teaching me was more logical and more real than anything I had ever heard from my own people.⁸⁸

Not only did a role as an informant give him a way to address his growing disillusionment with Hamas, further contact encouraged him to question his previous assumptions about the possibility of Israelis and Palestinians working together.

The de-radicalization process, started by his interactions with the Shin Bet, sped up as he studied the Old and New Testaments. He began measuring Hamas's actions and his own by the standards of the Christian values he found in the New Testament, rather than those of the Qur'an.

⁸⁷ Yousef, with Brackin. *op. cit.* 102

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 119

While his “conscience was being rewired,”⁸⁹ he began to demonize Islam as requiring murder. Upon being realizing he would have to assist Mossad in their assassination of a Hamas fighter, he contrasted, “Though not yet a Christian, I was really trying to follow the ethical teachings of Jesus. Allah had no problem with murder; in fact, he insisted on it. But Jesus held me to a much higher standard. Now I found I couldn’t kill a terrorist.”⁹⁰ For Yousef, Islam was inextricably linked to his participation in Hamas, and as he withdrew from Hamas as an informant he also turned away from Islam and towards Christianity.

The process of losing the religious values associated with participation is not unique to Yousef at all: both Nasiri and Nawaz describe becoming less adherent to fundamentalist Islam as they de-radicalized and taking up smoking, drinking, and spending time with women. Neither of them completely disavowed their Muslim identity; in fact, Nawaz to this day identifies himself as a prominent Muslim critic of Islamism and Nasiri described that even after his de-radicalization, his time in the camps provided a deeper education into Islam and he returned a more committed Muslim. However, it is unclear whether Yousef’s movement away from strict Islamic practice was a by-product of de-radicalization or an act of resistance to participating in the group. It would be inappropriate to make any grand assertions about the role of religion in de-radicalization, though it certainly merits further investigation. The mere fact that two of the four accounts presented here de-radicalized without giving up their religion does not suggest it as critical in leaving a violent group.

Yousef finally disengaged from Hamas and his work as a Shin Bet informant when he came to the conclusion he would have no future in the Palestinian territories. He lamented,

I was twenty-seven years old, and I couldn’t even date. A Christian girl would be afraid of my reputation as the son of a top Hamas leader. A Muslim girl would have no use for an

⁸⁹ Ibid. 178

⁹⁰ Yousef, with Brackin. *op. cit.* 178

Arab Christian. And what Jewish girl would want to date the son of Hassan Yousef? Even if someone would go out with me, what would we talk about? What was I free to share about my life? And what kind of life was it anyway? What had I sacrificed everything for? For Palestine? For Israel? For peace?⁹¹

He sold his IT company in the West Bank, and finally negotiated with the Shin Bet to let him move to America.

Again, disengagement appears to be centered on existential concerns—in this case, his first disengagement showed his desire for freedom from prison, and his second displayed his fear of a future without a family and a romantic future. However, for Yousef disengagement was only a step towards de-radicalization. He falls in a similar category as Nasiri, disengaging before de-radicalizing, but at least in his own analysis the questions he asked in the former led directly to the latter. His account reiterates the fact that a certain change in belief is necessary for disengagement, but it appears they can be entirely separate processes or part of a general movement towards de-radicalization.

Morten Storm

Morten Storm was born in Korsør, Denmark in 1976. He converted to Islam in 1997 and studied in Yemen and in London, befriending a number of high-profile violent fighters, including Anwar al-Awlaki, Zacarias Moussaoui, and Richard Reid. While attempting to go to Somalia to fight in 2006, he was told it would not be possible because he would be arrested by Ethiopian troops. The resulting dejection and anger forced him to confront his failings as a violent fighter and question his commitment to Islam and to a violent cause. The resulting de-radicalization led him back to agents of the *Politiets Efterretningstjeneste* (PET), the Danish Secret Service. He began spying on Al-Qaeda groups within Denmark and the U.K. for MI6 and the CIA, which

⁹¹ Yousef with Brackin. *op. cit.* 236

culminated in trips to Yemen in 2011 to locate and target Anwar al-Awlaki. He finally chose to end his career as a spy in 2012 when he received no credit from the CIA for his assistance. The ensuing loss of trust in the intelligence services spilled over to a fear they could no longer protect him.

Before he de-radicalized, Storm was a deeply committed jihadist Salafist and had put a significant amount of effort into travelling to Somalia to fight. He had already been contacted by the PET but refused to cooperate; however, this opportunity had a strong effect on him because he used the same contact after his de-radicalization to offer his services as a spy. He had also begun questioning some aspects of the ideology, particularly the killing of noncombatants and the concept of predestination. His de-radicalization occurred after hearing that travelling to Somalia would only result in his arrest. He immediately began questioning why he was being prevented from serving Allah. However, these questions bore deeper into the legitimacy of his own beliefs, describing how:

Dejection soon became anger, and anger began to ask some difficult questions. At every turn I had been stopped; every plan had disintegrated. I had spent a decade – what should have been the best years of my life – devoted to a cause, sacrificing my relationships and any potential I might have had as a boxer. And that cause now seemed so distant.⁹²

His anger made him realize that his main motivation in joining was to combat injustice, “fight for the underdog,”⁹³ and protect Muslims in the streets of Denmark. However, he finally lost faith in his own interpretation of Islam and the way it was spread by Al Qaeda.

Storm’s immediate reaction was to look up contradictions in the Qur’an, and he found them credible. He finally rejected Islam by demanding, “Why should my family go to hellfire just

⁹² Morten Storm, with Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister. *Agent Storm: My Life Inside Al Qaeda and the CIA*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014. 116

⁹³ Ibid. 117

because they are not Muslims?”⁹⁴ but decided he had a responsibility to protect the world from the violence he had previously helped promote. Again his desire to combat injustice drove his participation in covert activities, this time from the other side. Similar to Nasiri, Yousef, and Hamid he still wanted to belong to a larger cause.

His initial disengagement contrasts sharply with his final disengagement, where he craved safety and an end to all involvement with spying or violent extremism. Having helped the CIA track down Anwar al-Awlaki, he found him haunting his dreams and feeling growing remorse for his part in the killing. He began strongly desiring to leave the group at that point, but also wanted to end his work as a spy on a high, with full credit awarded. He pushed himself to continue working as a spy, but after being tipped off by another informant in Al Qaeda that the CIA wanted to kill him, he grew increasingly suspicious of their motivations. Finally, they asked him to drive down to Yemen’s tribal areas and he refused, asking to leave. He described,

This lifestyle had brought me to the verge of a breakdown. For years I had been fuelled by the need to stop the next attack, by the rush of the spy game and the camaraderie with my handlers. But their insistence that I travel alone down to Yemen’s tribal areas unnerved me...I had been lucky, but luck has a habit of running out.⁹⁵

Finally, his desire to protect his own life drove him to end his involvement entirely with violent extremism and the PET. He had grown increasingly disillusioned with his work for the PET as well as the CIA, and the lifestyle grew too much. His second disengagement took place quite similarly to Nasiri’s, since they both wanted in the end to protect themselves and live a normal life, without further involvement in high-risk activities.

Storm’s account largely falls under the category of someone who de-radicalized before disengaging. Like Nawaz, he renounced his ideological views before working for PET, and

⁹⁴ Ibid. 118

⁹⁵ Storm, with Cruickshank and Lister. *op. cit.* 320

similar to Yousef he also gave up his religion. However, unlike Yousef he did not take an active role in another religion, but returned (privately) to his lifestyle before he converted, drinking and using drugs. Storm depicted his initial change of beliefs as causing his first disengagement, although his second disengagement again referenced a desire for safety. In this second disengagement from work as a spy as well as engagement with violent groups, he predominantly focuses on a desire for glory and appreciation, largely withheld by his handlers.

Tawfik Hamid

Tawfik Hamid was born in 1961 in Cairo, Egypt to a liberal family. He grew up with a number of Christians and Muslims, and began attending the University of Cairo's Medical School in 1978. He joined the Gama'a Islamiyya after six months in his first year and remained closely involved in their activities from the Medical School. In 1982, he began questioning the reasoning behind killing policemen and attacking impious parties at night. Meanwhile he joined a small sect called the Quranics, who followed only the teachings of the Qur'an and not the hadiths. Finally he decided to leave the Gama'a Islamiyya when he realized he did not follow their Salafi teachings anymore.

Hamid's account represents a similar experience as Yousef, growing up in a majority-Muslim country and joining a violent group. In addition, they both eventually turned to other sects to facilitate leaving the groups (although Yousef turned to an entirely different religion while Hamid continued as a Muslim). His is another account where the individual never joined an intelligence service, though like Nawaz he continued efforts after his disengagement to combat violent extremism. Like Nawaz, he also rejected the values of the group before disengaging, suggesting that there may be a connection between de-radicalization and not

working for an intelligence service. Unlike the other memoirs, however, Hamid's account was sparse in his description of disengagement, so his actions will only be included elsewhere in this thesis when applicable.

Hamid became increasingly disillusioned with the Salafist beliefs he blindly followed as a member of the Gama'a. He referenced a specific instance when Gama'a Islamiyya members planned to kill policemen protecting a party being held with music. He began questioning his own fundamentalism;

It occurred to me then that the Quran doesn't actually forbid music. *Jamaa* and other Islamists base this prohibition not on Quranic verses, but on non-Quranic sources such as the Hadiths...But in thinking in this way, I was doing the opposite of what *Jamaa* had taught me: I had started to analyze. The critical thinking with which my father had raised me helped me at the last moment it ignited a spark that was to become a fire.⁹⁶

Hamid highlighted his own critical thinking as crucial to changing his views on participation in the group. Furthermore, he pointed to his early exposure to Christianity in helping him ask, "What if Islam was to subjugate the world, but lose its soul?"⁹⁷ Like Yousef and Nawaz, he began applying a different morality to the actions of the group, and so rejected the group itself.

Hamid's turn to new beliefs was heightened by his participation in a different sect than the Salafist-oriented Gama'a Islamiyya. He joined the Quranics, a sect that only followed the teachings of the Qur'an and rejected the hadiths and other interpretations of Islam. He explained,

Consequently, members of this sect stood against killing apostates, stoning women for adultery, and killing gays... I was able to have different theologically-based interpretations from those of other sect members without mutual animosity. Tolerating different views was an important creed of the Quranics. If this alternative sect had not been available, it would have been much more difficult for me to resist jihadism.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Dr. Tawfik Hamid. *Inside Jihad: Understanding and Confronting Radical Islam*. Self published book. 2007. 48

⁹⁷ Ibid. 48

⁹⁸ Ibid. 49

Hamid demonstrated the importance of exposure to other groups and their beliefs in encouraging him to leave. His movement from the Gama‘a Islamiyya to the Quranics represents a continuing desire to belong to a larger cause, just as Nasiri, Yousef, and Storm did with their work with intelligence services.

Hamid explained briefly that in 1982 he chose to leave the Gama‘a Islamiyya after “cultivating a mentality that defied – and still defies – the violent injunctions promoted by prevailing Islamic instruction.”⁹⁹ He referenced the threats of violence they gave him, but he did not note whether the desire for protection from them was a motivation of his exit. His account falls into a broader set of narratives where de-radicalization led directly to disengagement, and like Nawaz his conversations with individuals of other sects and faiths highlights the power of handling competing ideological views. Unlike Nawaz, however, his decision to leave was still driven by personal goals of continued struggle for a larger cause, in this case the Quranic sect, rather than simply leaving and concentrating on his own personal goals.

Group Level Issues

There are a number of issues that affect the group as a whole, such as lack of financing, self-serving leaders, group discipline, constant assassination, and prison, that also result in pushing individuals out of groups. Nawaz was especially disillusioned by Hizb ut-Tahrir representatives in Pakistan, who ignored his honest critiques in order to make themselves look better. However, it was his period in prison where he disavowed his previous belief system and finally disengaged upon realizing he could not lead an organization whose beliefs he no longer believed in. Yousef also became disillusioned with the Islamist element of Hamas while being imprisoned with a number of other members, while Nasiri also did not trust the GIA leaders, but

⁹⁹ Hamid. *op. cit.* 49

for him he worried specifically about their carelessness in implicating his family in their activities. His account is the only one where disillusionment with the leaders led directly to exit, although his exit was based less on questioning the leaders as it was him wanting to resist them in any way possible. The covert nature of the way the GIA acted also contributed to this disillusionment, as they imposed themselves on unsuspecting supporters' homes to print information and store weapons to avoid detection.

Likewise, the threat of infiltration by intelligence services led Hizb ut-Tahrir members and Hamas members to adopt paranoid attitudes to their own members, treating them with suspicion and sidelining junior or dissident members at the first signs of disagreement. Groups also had to contend with enormous uncertainty, making elaborate and secretive plans to join foreign conflicts, only to have to give up at the last minute when members are arrested or travel becomes impossible. Just such an experience was the trigger that forced Storm to re-evaluate his time as a violent extremist. He spent several months building up to joining the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, but at the last minute he finds out that he will only be captured on arrival by Ethiopian troops. His dejection and anger at the sudden loss of control send him spiraling towards de-radicalization. Issues that affect the group as a whole such as imprisonment and stoking paranoia can have a marked effect in turning members on each other, which can add to the disillusionment certain members already feel. However, only in one case (Storm's attempt to fight in Somalia) did outside influence directly lead to an individual's decision to exit, which acted as a trigger from which he recognized the failures of his involvement.

Conclusion

Among the five accounts, disengagement seemed strongly precipitated by existential desires, while de-radicalization focused on key beliefs about the ethics of their actions within the group (often around the use of violence). While there may have been two types of quitting groups: those who disengaged and then de-radicalized and those who simply de-radicalized, it is worth noting that the first category may be unique to fighters who become turncoats, as both Nasiri and Yousef were spies. Two larger trends in goals become apparent: fighters who left the group but continued belonging to a larger cause with political goals and fighters who left to focus on their own personal goals. Both these trends represent what goals the fighters set themselves as they disengaged, and how they confirmed their own significance. In the first trend, the individuals who continued wanting to belong to something remained in the violent group and confirmed their own significance by fighting the group: the accounts of Nasiri, Yousef, and Storm during their work with intelligence services are indicative of this trend. However, Hamid's participation in a another religious sect also represents this need to belong, which suggests the goals need not be strictly political. In the second trend, individuals set personal goals of marriage, the ability to live a normal life, and the ability to live openly as a non-Muslim. These fighters affirmed their own significance by setting individualistic goals. Overall, these two trends demonstrate that the results of disengagement are as varied as the motivations for quitting, and therefore the definition of disengagement needs more precision.

Chapter IV

Motivations for Disengagement

For any individual there is no single motivation for disengagement. Decisions are complex processes, with primary reasons for leaving the group at that specific moment but also secondary and tertiary reasons for wanting to leave. The following chart measures the frequency of each motivation, organized by what appears to correlate most strongly with exit. While some individuals also de-radicalized, the chart focuses specifically on the moment of exit (i.e. the moment of disengagement). When individuals disengaged more than once, each instance of leaving is treated as a separate event with distinct motivations.

Primary motivations are those that explain why the individual prioritized and committed to that course of action at that specific moment. In other words, they explain the person's immediate decision to exit, and are precipitated by triggers, which are events that drive a person to take a specific action. Secondary motivations are those that accumulate over time to explain the limited change of beliefs necessary to give up a violent group. Tertiary motivations are the drivers that culminate in a growing sense of discomfort with participation, but do not immediately lead to exit.

Table 3: The Frequency of Motivations

Motivation	Frequency
<i>Primary Motivations</i>	
Protection	37.5%
Loss of belief in Islamism	50%
Boredom/feelings of uselessness	25%
Beliefs no longer in line with actions	25%
Anger at feeling trapped	12.5%
Release from prison	12.5%
Revenge on “enemy”	12.5%
Desire for a normal life	12.5%
Responsibility to protect others	12.5%
Atonement	12.5%
<i>Secondary Motivations</i>	
Futility of efforts	37.5%
Desire to stop group’s control	25%
Retaliation against the group	25%
Disagreements with intelligence handlers	25%
Disillusionment with leadership	25%
Loneliness	25%
Empathy with victims	25%
Disillusionment with Islam	25%
Disillusionment with group	25%
Marriage	12.5%
Disillusionment with comrades	12.5%
Desire for a romantic life	12.5%
Openly practice his new beliefs	12.5%
Desire for acknowledgement	12.5%
<i>Tertiary Motivations</i>	
Guilt for actions	37.5%
Money	12.5%
Empathy with “enemy”	12.5%
Dejection	12.5%
Anger at his own failure	12.5%

Table 3:¹⁰⁰ This table explains the frequency of the motivations across the five accounts. As some of the fighters, particularly the spies, disengaged more than once, I separate the accounts into 8 distinct instances of disengagement. Each motivation therefore represents at least 1/8, or 12.5%. They are grouped, from top to bottom, by primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix A for the motivations broken up by account

Primary Motivations

The chart above highlights that, among the five sources, the most common primary motivations for disengagement were the desire for protection, a loss of belief in Islamism, boredom and feelings of uselessness, and beliefs that were no longer in line with actions. The primary motivations were very closely tied with their triggers, which tended to be highly individualized for each fighter. Often, the motivations that began the process of leaving differed from those that led to the final moment of exit (from joining intelligence services to completely cutting ties with other fighters), and therefore the primary motivation is the one precipitates the eventual decision to get out. As the desire to have protection is maintained across multiple sources as a primary motivator, it suggests that the reasons individuals leave groups are often foremost when see their lives and those they care about at risk. The analysis highlights the existential nature of initial motivations for disengagement, and it suggests that threats to individuals both from within groups and outside them can force individuals to consider alternative paths. Likewise, boredom and feelings of uselessness suggest that participation is often driven by a desire for achievement, and disappointment or boredom will lead individuals to reconsider other courses of action.

The critical note in this assertion is that disengagement involves a certain re-evaluation of choices and beliefs. 50% of the instances of disengagement involved a loss of belief in Islamism, while 25% were motivated by the realization that their evolving beliefs were no longer in line with their actions. These instances suppose that de-radicalization is an essential aspect of disengagement; however, when examined more closely there were varying levels of de-radicalization before disengagement. Some individuals such as Nasiri began to question Islamist ideology and occasionally openly argued with their leaders about the justification for their

actions; however, they did not completely reject the centrality of Islamism in their lives before they disengaged for more pressing reasons. Others such as Nawaz and Storm both questioned the ideology and dismissed Islamism completely before choosing to leave. The mere fact that Nasiri and Yousef disengaged without a complete change of beliefs indicates that complete de-radicalization is not a necessity for disengagement (but a certain level of questioning is). In addition, in their accounts a loss of belief in Islamism was only a growing concern that made them uncomfortable with their continued involvement, while it was central to Storm and Hamid's disengagements. However, there is also a systematic bias in the selection of the source material as the individuals most likely to write accounts of their experiences are those who have de-radicalized, since those who completely disavowed their involvement can more readily see the advantage of presenting their experiences to a Western audience. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that 50% of the instances of disengagement indicate the centrality of a change of beliefs; it does not make this examination representative enough to be conclusive. Instead, it highlights that a certain amount of belief change is necessary and raises the question of which belief changes are the most decisive in causing exit.

Secondary Motivations

Among the secondary motivations, the futility of the fighter's efforts (both to fight for the group or combat it) is most frequent across a number of instances of disengagement. Similarly important appears to be general frustrations with the reality of belonging to the group, from a desire to limit the group's control, disillusionment with the leaders, and disillusionment with fellow fighters. These findings fit closely into theories of disillusionment with the reality of involvement; it is often the case that an organization has poor leadership or poor execution of its

objectives, and its lack of success can result in a general rejection of the group. However, as these are secondary motivations these are limited in their ability to drive disengagement: they do not appear on their own to motivate exit, but without their presence quitting becomes far less likely. If taken to explain the change of beliefs necessary for disengagement, it suggests that a person's lack of success within a group is a major factor in leading to a change of views about participation. Likewise, loneliness and empathy with victims isolate members from the rest of the group, suggesting that the process begins when the individual sees his or her own aspirations as separate from what the group can offer. However, as with the importance of boredom and feelings of uselessness as a primary motivator, the fighter's inability to achieve his or her goals is both the most common motivator and clearest catalyst towards a re-evaluation of his or her participation.

Tertiary Motivations

Guilt for a person's actions acts as the most frequent element among tertiary motivations. For Nasiri and Storm, guilt was important in their decision to completely cease their work in the groups and as spies, while for Nawaz it made continued participation increasingly uncomfortable. Specifically, this guilt was tied quite closely with increasing empathy for victims, as fighters recognized the consequences of their actions. Storm, and Yousef to a lesser extent, faced guilt after they helped the intelligence services they spied for bring about the deaths of their comrades. While guilt appears highly common across the board in disengaged fighters, its place as a tertiary factor throughout many of the instances of disengagement suggests it is fairly limited as a driver out of groups. It can be enough to make a person look at other instances

of their involvement that make him or her uncomfortable (and so perhaps begin questioning), but it is not a critical driver.

Although not identified as a common driver across all the instances of disengagement, offers of money and disagreements over payment played a large role in each account. Nasiri argued with the GIA leaders in his home about receiving a cut of the payments to arms dealers, and in fact his act of resistance in disengaging was stealing 25,000 francs from them. In addition, his work as a spy was continually paid for in large sums by the DGSE, just as Yousef and Storm were also paid by the Shin Bet and the CIA, respectively. Each person made it very clear that money was not a significant enough driver to keep him engaged: Nasiri explained, “Of course I liked the money, and I spent it when I had it. I enjoyed the fancy restaurants, the five-star hotels. But I didn’t need them. These were not the things that motivated me.”¹⁰¹ Likewise, Yousef elaborated,

Some people will accuse me of doing what I have done for the sake of money. The irony is that I had no problem getting money in my previous life...Having tasted power, I know how addictive it can be—much more addictive than money. I liked the power I had in my former life, but when you’re addicted, even to power, you are controlled more than you control.¹⁰²

As they both evidenced, money was not their only motivator for continued engagement; however, the case of Nasiri and Storm illustrate how money is equated to acknowledgement and reward for their services. When it was denied, they both become more disillusioned with the groups they worked for. However, Yousef points out that in the end it was not a lack of money that drove him out but the lack of a future, especially a romantic relationship, which he came to realize would not be attainable given his continued double life for Hamas and the Shin Bet. It is important to note that there may be a systematic bias in the discussion of money, as the writers of

¹⁰¹ Omar Nasiri. *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 309.

¹⁰² Yousef, Mosab Hassan, with Brackin, Ron. *Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices*. United States of America: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010. 248

these autobiographies have a specific interest in making themselves look good. Therefore, they are likely to deliberately downplay instances of their involvement that may not appear noble, such as motivations of greed. Although not directly identified by each individual and certainly not a primary driver of disengagement, money does appear to be an important element in an individual's participation.

Theories

In general, the results remain somewhat in line with previous theories of disengagement, except that few entirely capture one of the top drivers of quitting a violent group: the desire for protection. Though some research notes the desire for protection as important for would-be suicide bombers, these results make clear that the desire for protection is a general desire in different roles within groups. The search for a new identity and the desire for a future are backed up by the prevailing literature about the role of new friendships and relationships encouraging people out. A couple of accounts focus on the role that new friends played in encouraging their exit, especially that of Nawaz, where exposure to non-Islamists gave him the space to conceptualize alternative ways to combat injustice and new friends played a critical role in making him recognize the dissonance between his own values and participation in a group, and that of Nasiri, where a desire for marriage and changing priorities drove him to finally leave the DGSE and Al Qaeda. However, other than those two instances the desire for marriage and new relationships was not as primary a driver of exit as expected. They played more of a contributing role to factors that pushed the fighter to think about his personal future. Likewise, guilt and reaction to violence played a much smaller role than expected. Importantly, none of the fighters in this study asserted that they had killed anyone directly. Again, the writers had a high

incentive to portray themselves in a positive light (and avoid potential legal issues if they admitted to killing someone); however, participation in a violent group does not entail only direct violent action, and guilt can arise for having abetted killings as much as pulling the trigger. Guilt was a factor that made individuals uncomfortable with their involvement in violent groups, but on its own was never enough to drive individuals out. It raises the question of whether an individual who directly causes harm to another human would react differently, specifically whether guilt would play a larger role in their disengagement.

According to the prevailing theories, one of the most significant drivers of disengagement is disillusionment, specifically encapsulated in the dissonance between the fighter's hopes and the reality of involvement, the loss of meaning in participation, a rejection of the group, and a search for identity outside the group. These results back up the importance of disillusionment with the group and the cause they are fighting for, with disillusionment with the group's leadership and a loss of belief in the success of their cause being two of the most common drivers; however, disillusionment seems to better explain the change of beliefs an individual undergoes rather than immediately drive disengagement. This analysis leaves open the question of the difference between disillusionment and goal change, as both appear very closely tied.

Conclusion

There are three main takeaways from this study of motivations of disengagement. Firstly, protection is a common motivation and falls closely in line with existential concerns for disengagement. These were not highlighted by the theoretical literature as much as the contributing factors of disillusionment with the group and a loss of belief. Secondly, a change of beliefs is clearly a high motivation for disengagement, though the extent to which it is main

driver of exit appears tied to the extent to which the individual grew disillusioned with the violent group. Disillusionment facilitates belief change, although it leaves open the question of which beliefs must change in order to drive a person out. Thirdly, guilt is a highly common motivator across many instances of disengagement, but it remains limited in its ability to push a person out. Coming face to face with the consequences of a fighter's actions was not, in these cases, sufficient to drive him out, but merely made participation more uncomfortable and contributed to a broader sense of disillusionment.

Chapter V

Triggers for Disengagement

For every instance of disengagement, a specific event acted as a trigger for each fighter, leading him or her to change course from participating to quitting. A trigger is the outside stimulus that precipitates leaving a violent group. There were few commonalities across triggers, as each was very specific to the circumstances the fighter found himself in, but the triggers elicited common reactions in several cases. These common reactions can be grouped in three: reactions that redefined their relationship to the violent group, reactions that involved searching out critical information about their time participating, and finally reactions that led to immediate requests to leave. In the first group, Nasiri's first disengagement was triggered by finding out weapons were being stored in his house, deliberately endangering him and his family. His immediate reaction was to steal a sizeable amount of money from the violent group as an act of resistance. Likewise, his second disengagement was triggered by the threat of being hunted by former GIA leaders and exposed as a spy, so he reacted by turning off his phone and retreating from other violent extremists and Western intelligence alike. These reactions were both instances that redefined the person's relationship to the group, and it suggests that when the immediate trigger was caused by encroaching threat of the group, perhaps the fighter's first reaction will be to find away to resist its influence. It raises the question of whether there are commonalities among the triggers that drive different reactions.

In the second group, fighters reacted to triggers such that they began searching for criticisms about their participation in violent groups. Triggers such as imprisonment with non-Islamist fighters and the failure of plans to join the Islamic Courts in Somalia elicited a re-evaluation of the value of their participation. While imprisoned in Egypt, Nawaz came face to

face with political prisoners held for resistance against the Mubarak regime without being members of Islamist groups. The horrors of imprisonment drove him to investigate why people would sacrifice themselves for reasons other than religion, and the subsequent conversations resulted in him challenging his previous assumptions that the quest for justice could not exist without Islamism. In the case of Storm, his string of failed attempts to move from a role raising money to a role in active combat in Somalia led him to question whether he was interpreting his faith correctly. He began to research contradictions within the Qur'an online, and the more information he found the more he questioned. These two experiences highlight the importance of critical thinking and education in encouraging disengagement, specifically because they change beliefs. They also represent a case of failure to achieve specific goals, with the response of turning inward and questioning why they want to achieve those goals in the first place.

In the third group, the various triggers led to an immediate attempt to leave. The triggers were largely similar in that they all brought the fighter face to face with their ability to have a future. For Yousef's first disengagement, his imprisonment in an Israeli prison led him to agree to work for Shin Bet after minimal resistance (though at first planning to betray his handlers at the first opportunity). Likewise, his second disengagement involved the trigger of watching a Coptic priest named Father Zakaria on television, which clarified his desire to openly convert and call himself a Christian, a lifestyle he could not have as a member of Hamas. These two triggers have common motivations around the desire to maintain or find a new lifestyle, only achievable by ending participation. For Storm, his final disengagement was triggered by a request from the CIA to drive down to the Yemeni tribal areas in 2012, a trip that would not only severely endanger his life because of local militants, but also risked an American drone strike removing him. His subsequent reaction to end his involvement in all violent activity or spying

was a clear choice to protect this own life. These reactions represent an immediate shift in goals, towards the goal of living safely in a new life (and are therefore quite closely tied in with the existential desires). It clarifies the multifaceted nature of disengagement, which can involve immediate exit, an extended series of actions to resist the group, or deeper attempts at questioning their own actions. These numerous reactions also highlight that disengagement is not a single moment but far often a more drawn out process, involving complex motivations, triggers, immediate reactions, and far-reaching consequences.

Table 4: Triggers

Redefining relationship to the group	Critiquing involvement	Immediate exit
Nasiri (Disengagement 1) – Trigger: Storage of weapons in his house Reaction: Stealing money as resistance	Nawaz – Trigger: Imprisonment/offer of leadership Reaction: Talking with other prisoners to understand what motivates self-sacrifice besides Islamism.	Yousef (Disengagement 1) – Trigger: Imprisonment with Hamas prisoners Reaction: Agreeing to work with the Shin Bet so that he can betray them later
Nasiri (Disengagement 2) – Trigger: Threat of exposure as a spy Reaction: Turning off phone and retreating	Storm (Disengagement 1) – Trigger: Failure of journey to Somalia Reaction: Look up contradictions in the Qur’an on the web	Yousef (Disengagement 2) – Trigger: Watching a Coptic priest on TV Reaction: Asking to leave
		Storm (Disengagement 2) – Trigger: CIA request to drive down to Yemeni tribal areas Reaction: He tells them he’s finished and asks for severance pay

Table 4: This table lays out the three trends in reactions after the initial from left to right: redefining the fighter’s relationship to the group, critiquing involvement, and the immediate decision to exit. For each instance, the trigger is presented, as well as the immediate reaction. Hamid’s account is not presented because he did describe the specifics of his disengagement.

Chapter VI

De-radicalization vs. Disengagement

One of the largest problems in studying so-called violent extremism is assessing the extent to which ideological commitments play a role in motivating, legitimating, and facilitating the choice to join or exit. Conceptually, this debate is evidenced by the distinction between disengagement, the physical act of quitting a group, and de-radicalization, the change of beliefs viewed as necessary for exit. As established previously, a certain level of belief change is necessary for a person to voluntarily choose to leave; however, since certain individuals choose to leave groups without first entirely changing their beliefs, it suggests that disengagement can occur without de-radicalization. Nasiri and Yousef are two such examples, since they both went through distinct change of beliefs during their time as spies; it should therefore be noted that this may simply be unique to individuals who become turncoats. None of the cases presented in this thesis returned to fight in their violent groups as committed members after de-radicalization, but further research is needed on whether de-radicalization lends itself to a lower likelihood of recidivism.

Each of the five accounts addressed in this thesis involved a form of de-radicalization. Broadly, there are two categories of accounts presented: those where disengagement happened as a separate process from de-radicalization, and those where de-radicalization preceded and caused disengagement. In the first category, Nasiri de-radicalized some weeks after he initially approached the DGSE to disengage from the GIA. Triggered both by watching the GIA's attack on Air France Flight 8969 in 1994 and the jubilant reaction by the GIA leaders in his home to the civilian deaths, he noted, "Everything was different now. The people on the plane were real to me: Arab immigrants living in Europe who loved their families and their land, and wanted to go

home for holiday...when I heard the tape I knew I was connected to it. I hadn't pulled the trigger, but maybe I had supplied the guns and the bullets. I was a killer, just like them."¹⁰³ He emphasized that watching the excesses of the GIA's violence turned him away from the Islamist cause, and he empathized strongly with the victims. His assertion that the passengers were blameless, simply visiting their families rather than supporting the regime, led him to strongly disavow the killing of innocents, and he believed himself guilty of aiding and abetting their deaths.

His account matches many of the theories of de-radicalization, including Kruglanski's Means Shift, where the use of violence becomes immoral and empathy increases for the people being killed. Nasiri's account stands out because during his extended involvement as a spy within the GIA and later Al Qaeda in their training camps in Afghanistan, he underwent a re-affirmation of his own faith. He described how while at the camps,

I had learned something essential about myself. I had learned that at my core I was a Muslim. Of course, I had known this all along...In the camps I had met men from so many different nations and classes and ethnic groups who all held one thing in common: they were all driven by the same hot fire of love for Islam and for her lands. This fire drove me, too.¹⁰⁴

Yet, while he retained his faith throughout his time in the camps, he remained resistant to the religious and ideological arguments that legitimated violence. Specifically, he pointed out how the "supply chain" of those considered legitimate to be killed by Al Qaeda could be extended to everyone, and that beyond the grand political and religious goals espoused by many of the fighters, no one ever seemed concerned for the victims.

Even after his de-radicalization, Nasiri retained the belief that the Muslim world remains humiliated by the West, and therefore conflict was inevitable. This clash of civilizations

¹⁰³ Omar Nasiri. *opus cit.* 58.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 251.

argument was highly prevalent in the memoirs as an ideological justification for participation: that Islam and the West are fundamentally incompatible. He exclaimed,

This is the problem of modern Islam in a nutshell. We are totally dependent on the West—for our dishwashers, our clothes, our cars, our education, everything. It is humiliating, and every Muslim feels it. I felt it every time I thought about the Uzis. I was disappointed with Amin and Yasin for their hypocrisy, but even more disappointed in the Muslim world. Once we had accomplished so much—in science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy. For centuries we ran far ahead of the West. We were the most sophisticated civilization in the world. Now we are backward. We can't even fight our wars without our enemies' weapons.¹⁰⁵

This quotation reflects some of the prevailing theories on the role of humiliation in motivating violent extremism, particularly the role of collective humiliation. Nasiri attributes blame to the entire Muslim world, and he continues to blame the West for its interference in supporting authoritarian regimes and its military policies that result in collateral damage (calling it not different from terrorism). He lamented that “we’re fighting our wars using our enemies’ tactics. If we, as Muslims, let ourselves become like *them*—which is to say, like *you*—then there will be nothing left to fight for.”¹⁰⁶ Nasiri’s account broadly shows that de-radicalization entailed belief changes around the excess of killing of innocent lives, while his core beliefs about Islam remain and in fact strengthen during his involvement, including his blame of the West for many of its actions in the Muslim world.

Yousef lays out a similarly distinct separation between his disengagement and de-radicalization. During his initial interactions with the Shin Bet, Yousef realized that the training to be a spy was designed to build him up, not break him down, in order to make him comfortable betraying his family. He came to the conclusion he no longer wanted to kill them, as was his initial plan, and he compared his experience training with his time watching Hamas members

¹⁰⁵ Omar Nasiri. *opus cit.* 38.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 319.

torturing each other. As time went on he began searching out competing information to the Muslim beliefs he held and he turns towards Christianity. He began rejecting Islam as much as he rejected Hamas, which makes his de-radicalization particularly unique. He held the Muslims in Hamas up to the moral standard he held his father, but found them lacking, and therefore he became disillusioned with both Islam and Hamas. Finally, as he fully converted to Christianity he came to the realization that neither the Israeli or the Hamas side were his enemies,

I saw that enemies were not defined by nationality, religion, or color. I understood that we all share the same common enemies: greed, pride, and all the bad ideas and the darkness of the devil that live inside us. That meant I could love anyone. The only real enemy was the enemy inside me.¹⁰⁷

Yousef stands out as an individual who disengaged before de-radicalizing, but to him changing his faith was intertwined with leaving the group.

The other category of accounts are those where de-radicalization caused disengagement. Nawaz describes beginning to both recognize the faults in Hizb ut-Tahrir while also noticing contradictions in his ideology during his imprisonment in Egypt. His experience was unique because of the amount of exposure he had to alternative ways to achieve his goals. Like Storm, he realized one of his primary motivations for involvement was fighting injustice, which to him was entwined with Islamism. Three key moments stood out: one of his former protégés from Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ash, visited him in prison and informed him that he had left the group to become a Sufi. He never made an explicit connection between listening to Ash and his subsequent re-examination of his views, but it raised the question of whether coming face to face with other possibilities helped him see his aims could be achieved outside of the group. The second moment was speaking to Ayman Nour, a political prisoner who was not only a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir but was also held in prison as a prisoner of conscience for a liberal cause (he

¹⁰⁷ Yousef, with Brackin. *opus cit.* 122

stood for election against Mubarak).¹⁰⁸ The power of mentorship came into full display in this case, where instead of arguing and debating with Nawaz, he tried to convince him to change his views. Nawaz remembers Nour saying, “*I grew up*. The phrase made me pause. I had been expecting a long pseudo-theological justification for why he had left, but Nour never tried that...he just left that phrase hanging there, and me to think about it. Which I did.”¹⁰⁹ Nour presented himself as an example of someone fighting and suffering for justice, without being a member of an Islamist group. The attraction of that example to Nawaz suggests that the continuing fight for justice remains of paramount importance. After his disengagement Nawaz explained, “My political grievances were still there, but I saw now that we no longer required Islamism in order to campaign against them. *Islamism itself had in fact become one of the grievances that needed challenging.*”¹¹⁰ This instance highlights how he no longer held the view that Islam could solve the problems of injustice in the world. However, the grievances he held were still there. He also maintained the same clash of civilizations argument that Nasiri held, believing in his case that Islamism and liberal values were fundamentally in conflict and that he had a responsibility to fight the ideology.

Finally, the third unique instance was that Nawaz began playing a large role in convincing other prisoners it was wrong to kill innocents. He sat with a Dagestani bomb-maker, Omar Hajiyevev, and convinced him that it was no more permissible to kill a non-Muslim life than a Muslim one, arguing,

So whom you kill is less about principle and more about expediency? Human life for you is about political point-scoring? Then how is what you’re fighting for any better than what you are fighting against? How can you feign disgust at Bush’s war games when this

¹⁰⁸ Nawaz, with Bromley. *opus cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 188

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 211

is just a game to you, too? Don't you see, if the Turkish people aren't a legitimate target for attack, then neither are the British people.¹¹¹

Nawaz dove deeper into questioning Islamism while also convincing others of his own change of beliefs. His process of de-radicalization suggests that belief change is a dual process, a combination of re-examination and actualizing new beliefs that culminates in disengagement.

The accounts of Storm and Hamid are quite similar. Hamid was also struck by the importance of alternative ways to practice his beliefs, as he noted that along with a fundamental critical examination of whether the hadiths ought to be followed as closely as the Qur'an, he had begun reading alternative interpretations of religion from the Quranics. Just as in example set by Nour and Ash for Nawaz, Hamid chose to leave after recognizing his goals could be best achieved elsewhere. Storm also questioned the legitimacy of killing other humans in the name of Islamism, though like Nasiri and Nawaz he justified his involvement in the deaths of violent extremists by drone strikes by arguing that some people were bad and he had to stop them. He also pointed out one of his main motivations was the desire to fight injustice, and as he tore apart his faith as justification for his previous involvement, he clung to his own responsibility to protect others from injustice, especially those he had previously helped to perpetrate.

Broadly, ideology plays a key role in encouraging disengagement but it is not the only factor. One of the most significant changes in belief was the legitimacy of killing noncombatants, even when they are not Muslims. In addition, beliefs about fighting injustice continued to be powerful motivators to fight against the violent groups they once supported. Often the fighters supported this view with the belief, unchanged since their days of violent extremism, in a clash of civilizations between the "West" and "Islamism." In fact, a number of the de-radicalized fighters, either through work in intelligence services or simply their own personal efforts,

¹¹¹ Ibid. 186

continued to believe that liberal values were fundamentally at risk. Fighters who de-radicalized before disengaging were often exposed to alternative ways to put their beliefs into practice, both religiously and politically. These examples of pathways out of groups became powerful goals as the previously mentioned motivations of desire for protection and disillusionment with the group drove fighters to leave.

Concluding Remarks

Disengagement is a complex process, relying heavily on the combination of the context of the violent group and psychological reactions to influence a change in behavior. This thesis presents common patterns in processes, motivations, reactions to triggers, and ideology across five accounts. Within the process of disengagement, the accounts were divided into fighters who left groups in order to protect themselves and later changed their beliefs, and fighters who changed their beliefs and later left groups when their views were no longer in line with their actions. However, three of the fighters did not simply quit their groups but instead turned to intelligence services to continue fighting. These fighters, specifically Nasiri, Yousef, and Storm during their periods working for the DGSE, the Shin Bet, and the PET respectively, continued working for a larger cause. With Hamid, who joined a small sect called the Quranics, their goals remained similarly politically and religiously-focused, but rejected the use of violence in the group. In the instances where Nasiri, Yousef, and Storm chose to end their work as spies, while Nawaz left Hizb ut-Tahrir, their goals became individually-focused, rejecting the group entirely and ending all involvement with anything associated with violent extremism. From this chapter, it is clear that there is not a single process of disengagement. Furthermore, disengagement can result in distinct outcomes, and raises questions about when the fighters' goals changed and what events and motivations most determined each outcome.

A fighter's motivations for disengagement are a combination of primary motivations, which explain why the individual left the group at that moment, secondary motivations that explain how the fighter came to realize the necessity of leaving the violent group, and tertiary motivations are those that make participation uncomfortable. The most frequent primary motivation was a loss of belief in Islamism, when the fighters started critiquing the ideology of

their group on issues such as the justice of killing innocents and realized their beliefs were no longer in line with their actions in the group. However, loss of belief in Islamism was only a primary motivation in two cases; in another two it acted as a factor making the fighters uncomfortable with participation but did not have the same powerful effect. The other most common primary driver was the desire for protection, where the fighter left the group to save himself or those he cared about. This result was somewhat surprising, since the prevailing literature did not emphasize the importance of existential concerns as drivers for disengagement.

The most frequent secondary motivation was a belief that the fighter's efforts to achieve his goals were futile. This disappointment lines up closely with existing theories of disillusionment, and it indicates the growing frustration with different aspects of group involvement, including disillusionment with poor leadership, retaliation against the group, and a desire to stop the group's hold over the fighter's life. The most common tertiary motivation was guilt, when the fighter felt responsible for the deaths of innocents or his comrades. This result raises questions about the level to which guilt influences disengagement, as the prevailing literature suggested guilt would play a more influential role. This study of motivations highlights that not all motivations have the same impact, and fears of life and death appear to be the most powerful. Each account downplayed the importance of money as a motivation, but many of the fighters were quite desperate for funds when they disengaged and lived a fairly lavish lifestyle when not spying. There is a systematic bias in the use of autobiographies, since those who were most driven by ideological beliefs and subsequently changed them are more likely to go to the trouble of writing books about their experiences. Therefore, the question of the money motivation demands further investigation.

Triggers acted as sudden events that forced fighters to face their primary motivations for leaving, examples of which included imprisonment, storage of weapons in the fighter's house, the threat of exposure as a turncoat, and the failed attempt to join the conflict in Somalia. Even though the triggers varied massively based on the specific context of the fighter, there were common reactions among the fighters. The first group of common reactions centered on redefining the fighter's relationship with the group; in one instance the fighter stole money in order to resist the group, while in another he hid and disconnected all phone contact from the group. In both instances, his efforts were focused on changing the group's hold over him. The second group of common reactions turned the fighters towards criticisms of the ideology they had previously adhered to. To examine their own ideology, fighters began seeking out information critical of their beliefs, both in the form of lists online of the contradictions within the Qur'an and face-to-face conversations with former fighters and non-Islamist prisoners. Finally, the third group of reactions resulted in immediate attempts to leave. These cases included agreeing to work for an intelligence service, so they do not entirely match with the conclusions presented in the process of disengagement chapter, particularly the individuals who chose personal goals over larger group goals. From this examination of triggers, larger policy questions become apparent about the ability of outside forces to influence reactions and encourage disengagement, and further research can determine whether these hold true over larger samples.

The final section addresses the question of ideological change in disengagement. Ideological change is important to disengagement; in fact, the distinction between disengagement and de-radicalization is somewhat artificial since the willingness to disengage is itself a change of beliefs. The clear distinction lies in the change in behavior, since disengagement always

entails a change of behavior but de-radicalization can include instances where the fighter is completely disillusioned but does not cease participating in a violent group. Furthermore, the beliefs that tend to change for disengagement focus on the secondary motivations mentioned in the second chapter: disillusionment with the reality of involvement with the group and frustration with a lack of success. Meanwhile deeper ideological beliefs about the justice of the group, especially the justice of killing noncombatants, fall more clearly under de-radicalization because questioning these beliefs undermine the legitimacy of all action in violent extremist organizations, not simply the one to which the fighter belongs. Despite de-radicalization, certain beliefs remain strong, particularly the view that the West and “Islam” or Islamist groups will always be in conflict. Two of the fighters simply changed allegiance to the West in this conflict, but did not change their overall assumptions about the role they played in contributing to the conflict. One of the other beliefs that remained strong was the responsibility to fight injustice. A number of the fighters had initially joined violent groups with the goal of combatting injustice, and even after leaving they continued with that goal in mind by founding counter-extremist organizations or spying for intelligence services. In the end, de-radicalization cannot be so easily separated from disengagement, and although the primary purpose of this thesis was to examine the fundamental factors that drove fighters to quit violent groups, a clearer study of ideology is required to determine precisely what set of changing beliefs determines a complete rejection of the group as compared with what set of changing beliefs results in a decision to leave.

Final Thoughts

Although the results presented in this thesis are not generalizable across all accounts of disengaged fighters, one challenge for further research will be to see if these results hold up

across a larger sample of disengaged fighters and whether there are other factors at play. Research can also focus on addressing key questions brought up by this thesis, especially more precisely clarifying the difference between disengagement and de-radicalization, specifically what outcomes result from which goals set by fighters. Investigation is merited in the role of money in facilitating exit, whether targeted outside triggers can spur on disengagement, and comparisons between individual instances of quitting and group demobilization. Without a clearer understanding of the dynamics behind fighters' decisions to leave violent groups, efforts to combat participation in violent groups will be ineffective in spurring on large-scale demobilization and may even perpetuate the same conditions that breed radicalization in the first place.

Appendix A: Motivations for Disengagement, by account

Fighter/Group Disengagement 1 or 2	Primary Motivations	Secondary Motivations	Tertiary Motivations
Omar Nasiri/GIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection for himself and his family • Anger at feeling trapped between dying or turning in the GIA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to stop the GIA from imposing on him in his own home • Retaliation against the GIA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Loss of belief in Islamism
Omar Nasiri/Al Qaeda-DGSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boredom and feeling useless as a spy • Protection for himself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage • Futility of efforts • Disagreements with handlers in intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of belief in Islamism • Empathy with victims • Guilt for his actions • Retaliation against the GIA
Maajid Nawaz/Hizb ut-Tahrir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs no longer in line with actions • Loss of belief in Islamism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disillusionment with Hizb ut-Tahrir brothers • Disillusionment with Hizb ut-Tahrir leadership • Loneliness • Desire to stop group's control • Empathy with victims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt for his actions
Mosab Hassan Yousef/Hamas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release from prison • Revenge on the IDF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust/isolation • Disillusionment with Islam • Disillusionment with Hamas 	
Mosab Hassan Yousef/Hamas-Shin Bet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for a normal life • Boredom and feeling useless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration with leadership • Futility of efforts • Desire for a romantic life • Openly practice his new beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs no longer in line with actions • Empathy with "enemy"
Morten Storm/Al Qaeda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility to protect others • Atonement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disillusionment with Islam • Futility of efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dejection • Anger at his failure
Morten Storm/Al	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disillusionment with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt for role in

Qaeda-PET-CIA	himself	PET/CIA • Desire for acknowledgement	killing al-Awlaki
Tawfik Hamid/Gama'a Islamiyya	• Loss of belief in Islamism	• Disillusionment with Gama'a Islamiyya	

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