

# The Spectre of the Informal Prison Imam

## Daniel Porter

### Introduction

#### *Prisons are a Microcosm of Society*

'Nowhere else do the workings of the system become more obvious [than in prison]: the two classes – those with the keys, and those without.'<sup>1</sup> This statement by founding member of the Baader-Meinhof Gang, Gudrun Ensslin, remains insightful. At the outset, I would urge the reader to consider a prison as a microcosm of society. This is because a prison's internal dynamics are developed through the psychology of imprisonment, whereby the roles inmates adopt and their subsequent relations in confrontation to guards are responses to systemic deprivations. It is within prisons that we encounter intense insecurity and population density, and the clear division of individuals across ethnic and religious lines.

Thus, the social divisions present outside of the prison system are further accentuated in such a compressed environment, and it is for this reason that, to a greater extent than society at large, prison actualises the survival of the fittest and Hobbes's state of nature, with 'the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.<sup>2</sup> It is as a result of these heightened tensions and privations, and inmates' subsequent responses to them, that prisons can offer a deeper understanding of racial divisions, religious sectarianism and, ultimately, totalitarianism. These privations, in conjunction with a desire to break from a criminal past, create what Quintan Wiktorowicz terms a *cognitive opening*.<sup>3</sup> This opening requires a resolution to satiate deprivations and remedy sins, and the simplicity, redemption, and community offered by Salafi-jihadists has contributed to a growing rate of conversion and radicalisation in

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<sup>1</sup> Gudrun Ensslin & Bernward Vesper, 'Notstandsgesetze von Deiner Hand': Briefe 1968/1969, (Suhrkamp, ed. 2009). p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford World's Classics, ed. 2009). p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). p. 20.

British prisons.<sup>4</sup>

### *Argument and Structure*

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the growing spectre of Salafi-jihadism within British prisons, the role of the informal prison imam herein, and potential countermeasures to further radicalisation. It is crucial to note that these individuals are current convicts themselves, often initially imprisoned for breaches of the Terrorism Offences Act 2000. These imams position themselves as faith leaders within the prison community, proselytise a Salafi-jihadist interpretation of the Islamic faith, and are instrumental in the radicalisation and/or increased propensity towards violence of prisoners. Moreover, through this proselytisation, they contravene Section 12 of the Terrorism Act by inviting support for a proscribed organisation,<sup>5</sup> intentionally aiding and abetting the Salafi-jihadist ideology and the acts of terrorism committed in its name. As a result, because this paper shall assess diplomatic countermeasures to mitigate the threat of these particular individuals, it falls within the larger literature which concerns negotiating with terrorists. This work distinguishes itself from the broader theme by framing the potential interlocutors not as Salafi-jihadist terrorist *organisations* such as Islamic State (ISIS), but *individual* radicalisers to this violence.

A brief review of the key literature on negotiating with terrorists will be followed by an analysis of the growth of radicalisation in UK prisons, a section investigating negotiations with prison imams, and ultimately a summary of the main findings. This article will entail an investigation into the nature of the threat, including the problem with state-provided prison imams, the disproportionate vulnerability of inmates to radicalisation, and changing British containment policies. Furthermore, I shall assess the

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<sup>4</sup> A recent report published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), has compiled a database containing the profiles of 79 recent European jihadists with criminal pasts, finding that 45 of these had been imprisoned prior to their radicalisation, and '18% of the total sample radicalised there, although the process often continued and intensified after their release'. See Rajan Basra, Peter R. Neumann & Claudia Brunner, *Criminal Past, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus* (ICSR, 2016), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom: The Terrorism Act 2000 [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland], Chapter 11, Part 2, p.12

possible diplomatic tracks that could be considered, focusing primarily on the role of ex-Islamists and prison surveillance in de-radicalisation programmes, and the comforts and commodities which can be compromised in exchange for the willing participation of prisoners. As a concluding note, the distinction between individual and collective moral considerations shall be reflected upon, before stressing that negotiations with informal prison imams are a morally viable course of action for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

### *Definitions*

Amidst the numerous definitions of terrorism, it is clear that as a tactic it intends to create a sense of fear, usually by the use or threat of acts of physical violence to influence the behaviour of a target group.<sup>6</sup> While terrorism exists as a tactic, extremism can be seen as its ideological precursor, referring to 'political ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles'.<sup>7</sup> In Britain, such an ideology could advocate racial or religious supremacy, oppose emancipatory rights, and/or reject the principles of an elected democracy. This paper shall discuss Salafi-jihadism as a political revolutionary idea, fusing an extremist ideology with terrorism as a tactic. Ultimately, and in the tradition of Fred Iklé, I understand negotiations as a process in which explicit proposals are communicated 'for the purpose of reaching agreement on an exchange or on the realization of a common interest where conflicting interests are present'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Literature Review**

#### *The traditional view on negotiating with terrorists is ahistorical*

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<sup>6</sup> Peter R. Neumann & M. L. R. Smith, 'Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and its Fallacies', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2005), p. 574, and Peter R. Neumann, *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries* (ICSR, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Fred C. Iklé, *How Nations Negotiate* (1964), quoted by Alexandra García Irigorri, 'Negotiations in International Relations', in *Revista de Derecho, Universidad del Norte*, Vol. 19 (2003), p. 93.

Conflicting interests are clearly present when negotiating with terrorists. The traditional view in this discussion suggests that negotiations accord terrorists with legitimacy, undermining moderate groups by favouring the extremists. This stance is reinforced by politically popularised aphorisms such as Dick Cheney's asserting that 'we don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it', or the disastrous impact Owen Smith's remarks about bringing Islamic State 'around the table'<sup>9</sup> had on his campaign for the leadership of the British Labour Party in 2016. These commitments, however, are largely ahistorical, because states almost always end up negotiating with terrorist organisations in one way or another.<sup>10</sup> I would advocate the maintenance of a flexible response to dynamic situations, suggesting in line with Peter Neumann, that assuming 'negotiations are appropriate in all cases would be no more valid a theory than one that assumes they never are':<sup>11</sup> the merits of diplomacy ought to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

*The modern view on negotiating with terrorists is orientalist and short-sighted*

Disagreement still remains regarding which *type* of terrorists we should negotiate with. It is argued that individuals with maximalist and apocalyptic aims in concurrence with ISIS, such as the interlocutors this paper shall attempt to address, cannot be or become constructive interlocutors.<sup>12</sup> Some academics, such as Bruce Hoffman and William Zartman, have dichotomised between *nihilistic*, often religiously inspired, terrorists and *traditional*, more rational, terrorists who have the potential to be negotiated with.<sup>13</sup> However, the inevitability of negotiating with *rational* terrorist organisations, like the Irish Republican Army, is only possible with

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<sup>9</sup> Haroon Siddique, 'Owen Smith Suggests Islamic State Needs to "Get Round the Table" – As it Happened', in *The Guardian*, 17 August 2016, [online](#) (last accessed 21 December 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Examples include the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA), Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC)

<sup>11</sup> Peter R. Neumann, 'Negotiating with Terrorists', in Leonard Weinberg (ed.), *Democratic Responses to Terrorism* (Routledge, 2008), p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; H. A. Hellyer, 'Why ISIS Cannot Be Negotiated With', *The Atlantic*, 10 January 2016, [online](#) (last accessed 21 December 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Neumann, 'Negotiating with Terrorists'.

twenty years of post-peace reflection; a liberty not granted within the earlier years of their development. Furthermore, the nationalist and separatist political objectives of *traditional* terrorist organisations 'have a long history in Western political thought'.<sup>14</sup> In reality, Baader-Meinhof-Gruppe's ambitions of 'turning West Germany into a Marxist workers' republic',<sup>15</sup> may be no less absolutist or realistic than the political objectives of Salafi-jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State. Rather, it is their discursive alienation from twentieth century Western history that makes negotiations seem futile and abhorrent. Therefore, this distinction between *rational* and *irrational* terrorists is framed with the benefits of hindsight and an unsympathetically Western perspective. I would therefore suggest that persistence in the current climate cannot be assumed,<sup>16</sup> and states must always be prepared to bring the extremes into the discussion, leaving no one left to outflank them.<sup>17</sup>

The literature discussing negotiations with terrorists has traditionally been framed in an unapologetically ahistorical view, paying little attention to its deployment of hindsight. More recently, these perspectives have been challenged: talking to terrorists has gradually become a less extreme position. What remains in the literature, however, is a uniformity with regards to potential interlocutors, focusing on the group at a broader level, or disillusioned figures within the group, who may have the political potential to move forward. The following examination, therefore, aims to fill a unique space in the literature by analysing the potential for diplomatic tracks with a narrower subset of the terrorist population, focusing specifically on the growing threat of prison radicalisation and the informal prison imams therein.

## ***The Growing Spectre of Radicalisation in British Prisons***

### *The problem with state-provided prison imams*

A chaplain, or a prison imam in particular, is responsible for the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Samir Puri, 'Thinking the Unthinkable Over ISIL', in *Defence in Depth*, 2016, [online](#) (last accessed 21 December 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (The Bodley Head, 2008), p. 4.

provision of spiritual care within the prison environment. One problem with imams provided by the state is that those appointing them often expect the imams to be 'spiritual advisers, welfare officers and terrorism experts all at the same time',<sup>18</sup> an unreasonable and unrealistic prospect which they cannot fulfil. Another issue is that they fail to gain credibility or respect within the prison environment, precisely because they are believed to be symbiotically working as spiritual advisers and surveyors of radicalisation. The state's assumption that these imams will function as a panacea, combined with inmates' assumption that they are puppets of the state, has created a vacuum within prison pastoral care. This vacuum, in many cases, has been filled by inmates with a far more simplistic understanding of religious texts and, critically, an absence of ties to the state towards which these prisoners have acted, and been imprisoned for insubordination.

*The disproportionate vulnerability of inmates to violent radicalisation*

The absence of legitimate pastoral care within the prison environment is worrying due to the disproportionate vulnerability of inmates to the radicalisation process. This disproportionality occurs because inmates desire to break from their history of criminal and harmful behaviour, and endeavour to make up for their 'sins', creating the cognitive opening discussed by Wiktorowicz. The Salafi-jihadist ideology offered by informal prison imams subsequently provides spiritual redemption from crime, yet also satiates 'the personal needs and desires that [initially] led them to become involved in it'<sup>19</sup> by rejecting the state through violent means. One may act like, but need not feel like, a criminal. This strong redemptive narrative, targeted at young men from Muslim backgrounds, 'unfamiliar with their own religion yet impulsive, confident, willing to take risks, and in previous conflict with the state and established authorities',<sup>20</sup> has made prisons the perfect breeding ground for radicalisation. The suitability of prisons for these purposes was noted by Abu Qatada, Osama bin Laden's

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<sup>18</sup> Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism', p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Silke, 'Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization', in *European Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2008), p. 107.

'Ambassador to Europe', who talked about seeing the signs of Allah within British prisons: 'Young men enter into Islam and then... learn Arabic and the Sharia in a short number of months.'<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the systemic deprivations of inmates can be manipulated by charismatic recruiters who can channel these experienced or perceived humiliations into a grander ideological narrative. Once again, prison is the perfect breeding ground.

It must still be noted that a cognitive opening and conversion to Islam in no way necessitates radicalisation or an increased penchant for violence. Unfortunately, however, this itself has proven problematic for prison staff who have found it difficult to distinguish between religious conversion and legitimate expressions of faith, against potentially problematic radicalisation and politically inspired extremism.<sup>22</sup> The most obvious example here lies within the term 'jihad', which holds vastly different meanings depending upon the context in which it is used. A disconnect with respect to language and theology can lead to the misunderstanding of subtleties, the unfair treatment of some prisoners, and critically, cases of radicalisation where they otherwise may not have occurred.

#### *Empirical data reaffirms disproportionality*

The disproportionate vulnerability of inmates to violent radicalisation is not merely theoretical. As stated earlier, a study conducted by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), found that of 79 European jihadists with criminal pasts, 57% had been incarcerated prior to their radicalisation, and at least 31% of those who had spent time in prison had been radicalised there.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the redemptive potential of Salafi-jihadism for those with criminal backgrounds is underscored across Europe, with German Federal Police stating that of the 669 German foreign fighters for whom they had sufficient information, two-thirds had police records before travelling to Syria, and one-third had criminal convictions.<sup>24</sup> These figures are similar

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<sup>21</sup> Abu Qatada, quoted in Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism', p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Neumann, Basra & Bruner, 'Criminal Past, Terrorist Futures', p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) & Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (HKE), 'Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus

elsewhere: in Belgium, one-half of the country's jihadists possessed criminal records prior to their departure for Syria<sup>25</sup> while in Norway and the Netherlands, approximately 60% of jihadists had previously been involved in crime.<sup>26</sup>

It is not merely conjecture to suggest that those with criminal backgrounds, and more importantly, those with a history of incarceration, are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation and violent behaviour. Without intervention, this threat will not dissipate, and the gradual imprisonment of returning foreign fighters is only likely to exacerbate the threat further. Prisons should prevent violent extremists from committing new offences and radicalisation from occurring within detention--this will be inextricably more difficult should those providing pastoral care within prisons promote the path (back) towards extremism.

#### *Previous British prison policy*

This threat has not been overlooked by policymakers, with the central debate focusing on whether to separate terrorist prisoners from the general prison population, or to separate terrorist prisoners from each other. Each approach has its own benefits and risks, and until recently, British prisons followed the latter policy option. This policy of dispersal meant that terrorists were spread across high-security prisons upon detention, a strategy which serves to prevent hierarchical command-and-control structures from being re-created within the prison environment, and stops prisoners from coordinating future attacks in the outside world.

However, it is this policy of separating terrorist prisoners from each other that has enabled the radicalisation of other prisoners, and furthermore, allowed for the alignment of terrorists and 'ordinary' criminals convicted of non-terrorist offences. This alignment created opportunities for networking and skills-transfer, because it brought

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islamistischer. Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind', 2015, p. 17, quoted in Neumann, Basra & Bruner, 'Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures', p. 7

<sup>25</sup> Christophe Lamfalussy, 'Un djihadiste belge sur deux a un passé de délinquant', in *La Libre*, 14 August 2015, quoted in Neumann, Basra & Bruner, 'Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures', p. 7

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with Dutch and Norwegian police officers; 1–2 September 2016, quoted in Neumann, Basra & Bruner, 'Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures', p. 7

together terrorist individuals with 'ordinary' criminals who have: (1) an easier access to weapons; (2) an ability to stay under the radar; and (3) a familiarity with violence.<sup>27</sup> As a result, this policy of separating terrorist prisoners from each other has been counter-intuitive in the prevention of extremist radicalisation, recruitment, and operational planning.

### *Changing British prison policy*

For these reasons, Ian Acheson's 2016 review on extremism within British prisons recommended that the present system of dispersing terrorist prisoners across the country should be re-evaluated, and 'consideration given to containment of known extremists within dedicated specialist units'.<sup>28</sup> The first of these units, a separation centre at HMP Frankland in County Durham, has now been coined a 'Jihadi Jail', and the notorious Islamist preacher Anjem Choudary was moved there in July 2017. The risks of such a policy include the aforementioned re-creation of hierarchical command structures, as well as the creation of a focal point for protests and media attention.

However, what should be noted is that Islamist-inspired terrorism does differ from terrorism committed in the name of the IRA or ETA, whose structures led to the policy pursuance of dispersing terrorist prisoners. This is because these organisations were much more vertical, relying on chains of command, tighter structures, and more explicit planning. Islamist-inspired terrorism, by contrast, is far more horizontal, meaning that there is a lesser focus on hierarchy, and a greater focus on individual actors committing low-sophistication and low-cost attacks in the name of a larger movement and ideology. Underpinning this tactical difference is former ISIS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's September 2014 declaration for supporters of the 'Caliphate' to kill disbelievers and citizens in coalition lands, 'in any manner or way, however it may be (...) with a rock (...) with a knife (...) with your car'. Due to these differences, I would suggest that the threat posed historically by concentrating IRA or ETA prisoners in specialist cell blocks within prisons is comparably larger than the threat posed by the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Justice & National Offender Management Service, *Summary of the Main Findings of the Review of Islamist Extremism in Prisons, Probation and Youth Justice* (2016)

concentration of Islamist terrorists today. As a result, specialist cells and the separation of highest security terrorist prisoners from the general population may be the more effective action in combating the threat posed by radicalisation in prisons. However, this is not to suggest that the threat will wholly be eradicated.

Prisons serve the aims of *punishment, incapacitation, and reform*.<sup>29</sup> Pastoral and spiritual care is instrumental in this process, and the persistence of informal prison imams will hinder the potential of prisons to wholly serve their function, and safeguard society upon a prisoner's release. Therefore, 'where conflicting interests are [clearly] present',<sup>30</sup> what proposals can be exchanged between NOMS, accountable for the running of prisons in England and Wales, and the informal prison imam? As discussed below, I argue that a balance can be found between counter-narrative programmes and broadened surveillance accepted by the informal prison imam, with the provision of prison comforts and commodities, in particular opportunities for education and professional training, leveraged by NOMS.

### ***Negotiating with the Informal Prison Imam***

#### *What should be prioritised in negotiations?*

The changing British prisons policy is likely to help prevent the radicalisation of non-extremist prisoners, but the concentration of these highest security terrorist offenders will certainly lessen the opportunities to perform successful de-radicalisation on prisoners in specialist cells. This is due to the potential for group think in an environment where members are similar in background and are insulated from outside opinions.<sup>31</sup> Because de-radicalisation is pivotal for reform, and because reform is a central focus of detention, NOMS should consider de-radicalisation as the foremost priority of their proposals.

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<sup>29</sup> Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism', p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Iklé, *How Nations Negotiate*, in García Iragorri, 'Negotiations in International Relations', p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (1972), quoted in Updesh Kumar & Manas K. Mandal, *Countering Terrorism: Psychosocial Strategies* (SAGE Publications, 2012), p. 418.

### *How can de-radicalisation be achieved?*

One way of approaching this should be the involvement of former extremists who are not state employees to provide counter-narratives within prisons. These individuals will have a more specific understanding of grievances and marginalisation which may have led to extremism, and will be able to communicate from a position of shared experiences. Furthermore, if these individuals are sourced from the local community, as opposed to being employed by the state, they will not face the same levels of distrust from the prison population. What must be ensured, however, is that they are in-fact *former* extremists. We can be less confident about the backgrounds of non-state practitioners, and therefore, heavy vetting will still be required. In addition, these individuals are likely to have less experience working in correctional environments, and therefore, be more open to manipulation and conditioning.<sup>32</sup> Thus, such an approach would have to be continually monitored.

A proposal of this kind could include compulsory individual or group de-radicalisation sessions. The size of these sessions would depend on whether the individuals are ideologues and radicalising agents, or followers who may be more receptive to de-radicalisation methods. In the case of the former, one-on-one sessions are likely to be more constructive, whereas group sessions are likely to work equally well with the latter as they are less likely to be zealous about their extremist convictions. The focus of these sessions would be on the retraction of experienced humiliation and social grievances from an ideological narrative which has been instrumental in creating a Salafi-jihadist group identity.<sup>33</sup>

### *The role of surveillance in de-radicalisation*

Another proposal, which may ensure the success of the previous one, must be the supervision of prayer rooms and de-radicalisation

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<sup>32</sup> European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) and Council for Penological Co-Operation (PC-CP), 'Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism', *Council of Europe* (2016), p. 42

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalisation to Violence in Prisons', (Criminal Justice Handbook Series, 2016), p. 111.

sessions in these specialist units. Prayer rooms are a popular location to meet and convey messages as they often lack guard supervision. This, coupled with language barriers, means that inmates often go 'off the radar' in a prison's religious sphere.<sup>34</sup> Monitoring procedures must be put into place in specialist units such as HMP Frankland to ensure religious services and interventions are being conducted appropriately, and the guards on duty in these environments must be able to understand the language spoken by inmates in order to verify the proper conduct.

This supervision, however, must not be abused. Rather, it should form elements of *dynamic security*, where the 'staff prioritise the creation and maintenance of everyday communication and interaction with prisoners based on professional ethics'.<sup>35</sup> This interaction requires insight, the collection of relevant information, and transparency between staff and prisoners. It is correct to suggest that a prison imam is not a panacea, in that he cannot operate as a spiritual advisor and a radicalisation expert at the same time. What is needed, therefore, are certain individuals who can act as spiritual advisors, and additional individuals who can act as radicalisation experts.

#### *What can be leveraged?*

While these policies could be enforced without the need to negotiate, they are likely to be more successful if NOMS leverages its ability to provide comforts in the prison environment, solely on the provision that inmates abide by this new legislation. In this manner, explicit proposals will need to be communicated by NOMS in order to realise a common interest: greater surveillance and control over proselytisation in return for commodities and comforts. These commodities and comforts could include selective literature, improvements to prison food, more expansive opportunities for education and training, new facilities, or permission to spend a larger

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<sup>34</sup> 'Handbook on Violent Radicalisation: Recognition of and Responses to the Phenomenon by Professional Groups Concerned' (2008), Austria-France-Germany. in: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalisation to Violence in Prisons', p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> CDPC and PC-CP, 'Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism', p. 31.

amount of time outside of inmates' cells. Faced with the understanding that these de-radicalisation and surveillance guidelines will be implemented by NOMS irrespective of their agreement, this diplomatic track may be a more sustainable way to enable the success of newly introduced policies.

### *Moral considerations*

Inevitably, moral considerations must still be considered due to the possible legitimisation or rewarding of extremist narratives. This moral evaluation is not only exacerbated when one considers individuals considered to be more *moderate* in their ambitions, who are not afforded these luxuries, but when these negotiations are carried out in the name of victims and their families. However, is it always correct to hold states to the same moral standards as individuals? Governments have a responsibility not only to enact the political will of their citizens, but also to secure their safety; at home and abroad. What are the moral dilemmas that arise if governments do not negotiate with terrorists? A single prisoner radicalised to violence can be a significant threat to public safety, and if negotiation tactics can assist in the mitigation of this threat, I would argue that it would be immoral of a government not to attempt it. In a Machiavellian sense, individual and collective interest are not always the same. The morally right action for a government to take may be to put individual ethical estimations to one side, and evaluate what is smart, because 'sometimes it *is* clever to negotiate with terrorists'.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The threats posed by the informal prison imam have been expanding. The violent redemptive narrative of Salafi-jihadism has exploited cognitive openings within prisons, leading to radicalisation and a growing threat when these individuals are released from detention. The recent shift from dispersing the most extreme offenders to concentrating them may mitigate the threat of 'ordinary' criminals being radicalised; however, such a policy is more likely to

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<sup>36</sup> Josef Olmert, 'Negotiating with Terrorists: Pros and Cons', in *Fair Observer*, 30 July 2014, [online](#) (last accessed 21 December 2017).

create an environment of group think, and the hardening of extremist convictions. Negotiations can be pursued to moderate this danger, and as diplomacy entails an alignment of ends and means, prison comforts ought to be leveraged by NOMS to ensure the implementation of an effective de-radicalisation programme. Assertions of immorality and futility against those who appreciate the necessity of sometimes negotiating with terrorists can be replied to as historically and politically naïve. To suggest that we should never negotiate with terrorists would be to irrevocably tie one of the state's arms behind its back, preventing the full deployment of resources in the pursuit of peace. After closer examination, such absolutism cannot be considered admirable, but rather it is dangerous. Notwithstanding its prevalence outside of the prison system, Salafi-jihadism is a threat behind prison bars; but it need not always be.

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