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Captivated by fear

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Chapter Nine

General Conclusions and Discussion

In 2014, substantial numbers of young Muslims in the West traveled to Syria to join the ranks of IS, a violent extremist movement seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate. In several countries, this development triggered public and political fears of what would happen when these youngsters returned home, ready and skilled to conduct terrorism attacks against countries on Western soil. One of the most prominent questions that needed answering was how returning jihadists, or others who had been arrested in relation to the conflict, should be incarcerated in order to prevent violent extremist ideologies from spreading through the inmate population.

The question of how to detain terrorism offenders was not new but has received political and policy attention since the aftermath of 9/11, when the Global War on Terror internationally caused an influx of prisoners incarcerated on terrorism charges. Today's terrorism detention policies are a continuation of measures that were implemented then. Countries have taken the potential threat of prisoner radicalization seriously and have generally approached the matter with (often expensive) measures to gain control over potentially radicalized prisoners and to minimize the risk that they radicalize or recruit fellow inmates. In the Netherlands, the government opted for a strategy that includes concentrating terrorism-related prisoners in specialized high security prisons, so called 'terrorism wings', with the aim to isolate them from other kinds of offenders and to contain the spread of violent extremist ideologies. The Dutch are not the only ones to pursue a concentration policy: other countries like the United States, Australia, France, and the Philippines opted for similar incarceration strategies.

Although it seems intuitively logical that isolating terrorists in high security prisons can be a way to control them and reduce their ability to negatively influence other prisoners, there are also obvious downsides to such an approach. Housing terrorists in the same unit may lead them to congregate and try to plot terrorism attacks or reinforce each other in their extremist views. Furthermore, it may be that subjecting these inmates to special treatments and harsh confinement conditions has a radicalizing effect on both the inmates and their support community, which may ultimately lead to an intensified threat. This begs the question as to what motivated policy makers to pursue a concentration strategy in the first place, and whether such models are based on sound rationale or not. Can concentration of terrorism prisoners be an adequate way to respond to the possible risk of prisoner radicalization, or are such policies more likely to be an irrational response to threat, fear, and pressures in the policy domain?

In this book I presented the findings of an evaluation of the processes whereby concentration policies emerge and the assumptions on which these policies are based. I selected the Dutch approach as an illustration of such policies, predominantly because it is exemplary for similar interventions implemented in other countries, and conducted a detailed examination of its development and implementation. Launching from the realist approach (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), which describes a theoretical and methodological approach to policy evaluation, I reconstructed the development and implementation of the Dutch terrorism wing and aimed to evaluate the policy process in the light of available academic and practical evidence.

In all, the results suggest that concentration policies may reflect a panicked response to a perceived threat rather than a sound and rational decision making process, and that there is little to no evidence that such policies are an adequate way to detain terrorism offenders and prevent prisoner radicalization. In fact, the evidence seems to suggest that such policies may produce undesired outcomes that could ultimately lead to a heightened rather than reduced violent extremist threat. In what follows, I will summarize the main findings that lead to this conclusion and discuss them within the broader context of international policy and academic debates on terrorism detention.

Concentration of Terrorism Offenders

In Part One I started out by reconstructing the decision making process behind the Dutch terrorism detention strategy, with the aim to understand how the policy came about and on what information and ideas it is based. In 2006, the Dutch government responded to the Islamist

threat by segregating terrorism offenders from the mainstream inmate population and incarcerating them in separate high security units. In 2010 the Ministry of Justice commissioned an evaluation of this policy, which was published in 2011 (Veldhuis et al., 2011). Parts of the research in this book are based and build forth on those findings. In Chapter Two I described the societal and political conditions under which the imprisonment of terrorism offenders emerged on the public and political agenda and aimed to capture the decision making dynamics that gave rise to the concentration strategy. In Chapter Three, I examined the policy's architecture in more detail and identified the central ideas and assumptions on which the intervention is built.

Together, these chapters suggest that the decision to segregate terrorism prisoners from the mainstream inmate population and concentrate them in specialized high security prisons reflects a bureaucratic reflex in response to threat-induced pressures in the policy domain, rather than a thought-through outcome of realistic assessments of risks and available policy alternatives. It appears that the terrorism wing was primarily introduced to satisfy public and political demands for decisive governmental action against terrorism suspects rather than as a sustainable effort to prevent violent radicalization in the shorter as well as longer run. Several findings hint to this possibility.

Above all, the reconstruction of the agenda setting and policy preparation phases made clear that the decision making processes occurred under high levels of public and political pressures as a result of a heightened terrorist threat in the Netherlands after 9/11. The government's counter-terrorism strategy was closely scrutinized in the media and decision makers felt urged to take rapid action to prevent violent extremist ideologies from spreading through the prison system. They perceived that drastic measures were required (and demanded) to guarantee the public's safety.

As a result of these (real or perceived) pressures, no systematic research was conducted to inform the decision makers about the nature and degree of the risk of prisoner radicalization or about the possible effects of different policy strategies. The decision makers felt they lacked the time to investigate whether and, if so, how violent extremist ideologies may spread among prisoners and which policy alternatives might offer an adequate solution to this risk. As such they did not examine whether concentrating terrorists in separate prison units was indeed a necessary and useful response, or what outcomes such an intervention might produce. Rather they relied on folk psychology, which led them to assume that a concentration strategy would

maximize control over potential dangers and minimize the risk of violent extremist activity in prison.

Remarkably, the policy makers were primarily involved in crafting the general outline of the government's terrorism detention strategy (i.e., concentrate terrorists in segregated high-security prisons), but left important decisions about policy details and operationalization to be made by the practitioners. The Prison Service, in particular the penitentiary institute in Vught where one of the terrorism wings would be located, had an important say in defining the policy's architecture. In one way, this informal transfer of responsibility seems to point at the terrorism wing's symbolic function: the policy makers prioritized developing an intervention that sends out a signal of decisive governmental action but paid less attention to whether such an intervention would indeed be designed in a way that is tailored to the policy's formal goals and objectives. In another way, it also exposes uncertainty and lack of knowledge in the decision making domain: the policy makers relied largely on existing knowledge and experience at the operational level in crafting the policy's details. Either way, it seems that the practitioners' prominence in the policy making process paved the way for lower bureaucratic-level concerns and priorities to shape the policy design in a way that would minimize the risk of failure at the prison level.

The resulting policy betrays these pressures and decision making dynamics with an imbalanced, short-term oriented intervention that is geared solely toward instant threat management, whereas undesired or longer-term policy outcomes received little priority. The terrorism wing is characterized by intense security measures and restrictive prison regimes that facilitate control over the inmates' behavior, whereas less urgent ambitions like rehabilitation or de-radicalization were explicitly rejected as policy objectives. As such, the terrorism wing focuses only on achieving security in the short term but does not seek to avoid undesired policy outcomes (e.g., post-release radicalization) or to achieve sustainable prevention of violent extremism (e.g., by preventing recidivism).

The Nature and Dynamics of Prisoner Radicalization

In Part Two, I examined whether the underlying ideas that give rise to such short-term security oriented policy responses are supported by academic knowledge or not. Is the rationale behind concentrating terrorists valid, or is it more likely to be rooted in flawed assumptions about the probability and processes whereby violent radicalization may spread through the prison system and about how such processes may be countered? To answer this question I contrasted the

central assumptions in the international policy debate on prisoner radicalization against theoretical (Chapter Four) and empirical (Chapter Five) observation.

The findings indicate that there is little evidence that concentrating strategies may be helpful to prevent prisoner radicalization. The available evidence suggests that such policy responses may be based on exaggerated risk perceptions and unsubstantiated assumptions and that there may in fact be a risk that they produce undesired outcomes. If anything, it is clear that there is negligible empirical knowledge about the nature and dynamics of prison radicalization and that it is thus wholly unclear under which conditions (if at all) the concentration of terrorists may be an adequate way to prevent prisoner radicalization, or what outcomes such policies can be expected to produce.

In Chapter Four I aimed to examine whether or not the assumption that prisons are fertile breeding grounds for violent extremism is supported by academic knowledge. As little empirical data is available to help answer this question, I reviewed existing evidence from adjacent disciplines in criminology, sociology, and psychology and developed a theoretical model that discusses the conditions under which (and mechanisms whereby) prisoner radicalization is likely to occur. I unfolded the argument that prisoner radicalization may occur when inmates become highly dependent on membership of a group in order to obtain the means to satisfy fundamental needs. The more dependent inmates become, as a result of threats to or deficits in individual need satisfaction caused by depriving confinement conditions, the more intensely they might identify with the group's norms and values.

In this way prisons with highly depriving confinement conditions, for instance due to overcrowding or violence, may produce cohesive and competitive inmate groups that seek to distinguish themselves from other groups and whose members may be willing to go to great lengths to defend the group or prevent being rejected by it. Within groups that are defined by (extremist) ideology, this may lead to radicalization among individual members. This is not necessarily a recipe for violent extremism, however. Inmates may join an extremist group for several reasons other than ideological commitment, such as protection or status. For radicalization to occur it is likely that – at least – a shared sense of vicarious humiliation, identification with a charismatic leader, and a basic level of physical need satisfaction must also be present. Given the lack of research into the extent to which these conditions and mechanisms are present in prisons around the world, it is as yet unclear how serious the risk of prisoner radicalization may or may not be in any particular case.

The findings of the study presented in Chapter Five support the view that, in the absence of highly depriving confinement conditions, the risk of radicalization among 'ordinary' prisoners may be smaller than is often believed. An additional factor is likely to affect this risk: the social standing of violent extremist offenders within the broader inmate community. In order to influence others one must be respected. Using survey data collected among prisoners in regular Dutch prisons I examined whether it indeed seems likely that terrorism offenders obtain an influential position among inmates, by assessing their status position within the broader inmate community and examining whether other inmates view them favorably and with respect or rather disrespect and reject them. The results indicate that, at least in the absence of highly depriving confinement conditions, prisoners – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – hold extremely negative attitudes about terrorism offenders and are more likely to distance themselves from these prisoners than they are to seek to associate and interact with them. This seems to suggest that mainstream prisoners may be unlikely to be open to (radicalizing) influence of terrorism offenders, and hence that concentrating terrorism prisoners may be an unnecessary reaction to a problem that may not even exist in the first place.

To make matters worse, the findings point to the possibility that concentration policies may not only be redundant but can also produce undesired side effects that could ultimately undermine longer term security objectives. The survey results revealed that detention in a separate terrorism prison triggered even stronger rejecting responses from other prisoners than detention in other regime types: general inmates were more likely to express disrespect, a desire for social distance and negative attitudes toward inmates who had been in a terrorism prison than in other prison regimes. Although examining how such responses may affect terrorism offenders' in-prison and post-prison behavior was beyond the scope of this study, previous research has shown that experiences of rejection and stigmatization can result in aversive responses like aggression (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001), loss of self-control (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Twenge, 2005), and self-defeating behavior (Twenge, Catanese & Baumeister, 2002). Likewise, such experiences have also been linked to a propensity toward violent radicalization and terrorism (e.g., Veldhuis & Staun, 2009), and may hence increase the risk of recidivism or post-release radicalization.

The Concentration Model in Practice

In Part Three, I examined how concentration policies operate in practice and whether they produce the expected mechanisms and outcomes. By doing so I aimed to assess whether

pressures on the decision making process can also reflect on the implementation phase and affect how the policy is delivered. Moreover I aimed to evaluate the validity of the underlying rationale behind concentration policies against yet another criteria (in addition to academic knowledge) and assess whether the policy makers' – possibly flawed – assumptions about how the policy is supposed to achieve its objectives are supported by practical experience.

To this end I returned to the Dutch case and reconstructed how the policy's different elements are delivered. The analysis sheds light on the quality of the decision making and implementation processes as well as on the validity of the policy's underlying rationale. In Chapter Six I discussed the policy's primary element: segregating terrorism prisoners in separate high-security units; in Chapter Seven I focused on the secondary elements: the security level and prison regime. The results reveal how threat-driven decisions during the agenda setting and policy formulation processes caused path-dependent feedback effects that negatively affected the policy's implementation and triggered several unwanted mechanisms.

To begin with, the findings of Part Three reinforced the idea that concentration policies may be driven by exaggerated (or at least untested) estimations of the risk of prisoner radicalization. In the Netherlands, the selection criteria for the terrorism wing were broadly defined on the basis of categorical criteria: suspicion or conviction of a terrorism-related offense. However, whether the selected inmates also conveyed a risk of radicalizing or recruiting fellow inmates, and thus whether segregating them from the mainstream inmate population contributes to preventing the spread of violent extremist ideologies, was not investigated. As was demonstrated in Part Two, whether or not violent extremist offenders can have a radicalizing effect on other prisoners or whether these other inmates are in turn susceptible to such influence depends on situational and individual conditions, including the social standing of violent extremists in the inmate community. Most of the inmates had spent months in regular jails prior to their transfer to the terrorism wing without displaying signs of radicalization or extremist proselytization. In fact, in some cases inmates seemed to be de-radicalizing during their stay in the terrorism wing, which raises doubts about the necessity to segregate them from other prisoners. As such, there seems to be no objective justification that placing these inmates in the terrorism wing contributed to solving the problem of prisoner radicalization, if such a problem existed in the first place.

Moreover, the concentration policy triggered a series of undesired mechanisms during the implementation phases, which could not be avoided without deviating from the original policy plan. In part, these mechanisms are inherent in the concentration strategy: during the

implementation it became clear that incarcerating terrorism offenders together conveys a risk that already radicalized offenders reinforce each other's ideological beliefs and plan terrorism plots together. Likewise, it may be undesired to detain leaders and followers together, or individuals who are charged in the same court case. To avoid this, on several occasions the prison authorities deviated from the concentration policy by refraining from placement in the terrorism wing or by transferring inmates from the terrorism wing to regular prison units, even though they met the selection criteria for the terrorism wing.

In part, undesired mechanisms emerged as a result of the (arguably due to threat-based pressures on the decision making process) risk averse and categorical way in which the policy is designed. For example, by categorically allocating all terrorism-related prisoners to the terrorism wing, regardless of whether they have been found guilty or not and without consideration of the nature of the offense, the policy may unnecessarily subject low-risk offenders to high security levels and harsh confinement conditions. While segregating potentially influential violent extremists from potentially susceptible prisoners may be useful or necessary in some cases, it certainly is not in all. In such cases placement in specialized terrorism prisons may not only be pointless and unjustified, it may even feed in to frustration and anger that could ultimately result in an increased risk of (post-release) radicalization. Because the policy makers did not account for periodic evaluations of the inmates' stay in the terrorism wing or facilitate transfer to other prison regimes when desired, such unwanted mechanisms are not easily avoided.

Another notable characteristic of the concentration model, which again illustrates how threat-based policy making can lead to imbalanced and suboptimal policy responses, is that it is solely designed to achieve short-term security objectives and pays little heed to undesired outcomes or longer term objectives that may seem less urgent during the decision making process. This is not only true for the Dutch case: Neumann (2010) found that around the world, terrorism detention strategies tend to be risk averse and focus predominantly on restrictive security regimes that leave little room for rehabilitation and de-radicalization efforts. Although no research has been done that empirically assessed that impact of concentration models on violent extremist recidivism, criminological research increasingly converges on the conclusion that harsh confinement conditions have a criminogenic effect and increase rather than reduce the risk of reoffending (Cullen, Lero & Nagin, 2011; Gendreau, Coggin & Cullen, 1999). If similar outcomes can be expected in terms of violent extremism it may be that concentration policies prove counter-productive in the longer run. As long as there is no empirical data available on such

possibilities, it remains to be seen whether concentration policies can contribute to preventing the risk of violent extremism or, in contrast, whether they may reinforce it.

Interestingly, many of the undesired policy mechanisms could have been foreseen in advance but were discarded by the policy makers. Several of the problems that emerged during the implementation phase had been anticipated and discussed during the decision making process and the policy makers were aware that other countries, like Germany and Ireland, had had negative experiences with concentrating violent extremist prisoners and that such policies have caused a range of security problems in the past. Nevertheless, no measures were taken to prevent such undesired outcomes and information about previous experiences with concentration policies were discarded as irrelevant: the decision makers seemed predisposed toward implementing a strategy that would produce immediate results (e.g., obtain political and public consent and facilitate instant risk management) and paid little – arguably insufficient – attention to the possible downsides of such an approach.

Fear-Based Terrorism Detention Policy

Together, the results of Parts One to Three suggest that policies to segregate terrorism prisoners from the mainstream inmate population and detain them in separate high-security prisons may reflect a bureaucratic knee-jerk in the face of a (real or perceived) threat, rather than the outcome of rational decision making. Not only is it wholly unclear to what extent the threat of prisoner radicalization actually exists or how it evolves, and thus whether concentration policies may be an adequate policy response, there is also a credible risk that such policies create undesired or even counterproductive outcomes. This begs the question as to what motivates policy makers to implement (variations of) a concentration strategy, even though such strategies are likely to be suboptimal.

In answer to this question, the findings presented in this book suggest that threat perceptions and fear in the policy domain may play an important role. In Part Four (Chapter Eight), I examined this proposition by reviewing the contemporary state of the international policy and academic debate on prisoner radicalization, with a specific focus on the different levels and ways in which fears of terrorism may shape policy making in this area.

I suggested that fear has become institutionalized in the policy and scholarly field of terrorism detention in ways that affect actors throughout the policy cycle and negatively influence how

they think, feel, and act. Ultimately, this causes erosion of the quality of the policy process. Societal concerns may give rise to a public discourse of threat and fear that is adopted by stakeholders at different stages and bureaucratic layers of the policy process, including politicians, policy makers, scholars and practitioners, and shape how they cognitively frame and respond to risks. By adopting fear-driven discourses, in their communication to the public as well as internally, actors involved may also implicitly commit themselves to responses (e.g., policy strategies, research focus, policy delivery) that correspond to such narratives. Consequentially the entire policy domain may become dominated by a mindset of fear – even when individual actors do not personally experience fear – such that perceptions of threat and corresponding psychological responses may become guiding principles in the formation and implementation of policy.

Within the international policy debate on prisoner radicalization and terrorism detention, hints to the possible influence of fear are reflected in an asymmetric sensitivity to information that signals threat, with little regard for information that points to low risk. These hints are also reflected in policy responses that stereotypically target Muslims over other subgroups, and in an apparent tendency among decision makers to avoid risks and blame. The policy debate is awash with references to a perceived threat of prisoner radicalization despite a lack of supporting evidence, in spite of information that suggests the threat may not be as serious as assumed, and in spite of evidence that policies may be counterproductive. This threat-filled tone in the debate translates into actual policy: around the world, terrorism detention policies reflect a security-first approach that is primarily geared toward instant threat reduction and betrays little consideration of longer term security objectives (Neumann, 2010).

The institutionalization of fear in the decision making context also seems to negatively affect the use and production of relevant academic knowledge to inform the policy debate. Foremost, the academic debate itself appears to be in the grip of a mindset of fear, with scholars often raising alarmist voices about the threat of prison radicalization, generally on the basis of weak evidence (see for discussions Hamm, 2013; Ilardi, 2010; Rappaport, Veldhuis & Guiora, 2012). Given the amount of political and scholarly attention the issue of prisoner radicalization has received over the past decade, surprisingly little knowledge has been produced that can truly inform the policy debate. Much of the work that has been done in the field is of descriptive or exploratory nature; little theoretical work and empirical data are available that provide insight into the nature and dynamics of prisoner radicalization. In part, the lack of knowledge may be attributed to conceptual and methodological difficulties in conducting research in this area. In part, however,

it seems that researchers face fear-based institutionalized barriers, such as limited access to prisons and little funding for empirical research endeavors (vis-à-vis policy-oriented projects), which prevent the formation of a knowledge base that is rooted in evidence and realistic appraisals.

In addition, fear in the policy context is likely to cause policy makers to ignore or inadequately rely on the little bit of academic knowledge that *is* available. Over the past decades, the field of criminology has produced a vast amount of literature on issues related to crime and the penal system, including on the dynamics of inmate behavior (e.g., Gogin & Law, 1997), rehabilitation and reintegration (e.g., Geandreau, Little & Goggin, 1996), and the consequences of imprisonment (e.g., Bonta & Gendreau, 1990; Haney, 2003). For example, a growing body of research is emerging on the possible outcomes of supermax prisons, which closely resemble specialized terrorism prisons in that they segregate and concentrate reportedly dangerous prisoners from the mainstream inmate population (e.g., Mears, 2008; Riveland, 1999), yet such accounts seem rarely to be used to inform the policy debate.

As a consequence, policy makers are challenged to develop policy responses to a perceived threat of prison radicalization while (seemingly) lacking evidence-based information on the causes and nature of the problem as well as on the possible outcomes of different policy alternatives. This lack of knowledge, combined with external pressures on the decision making process as a result of public and political fears of terrorism, may serve to explain why decision makers regularly opted for terrorism detention strategies that depart drastically from traditional policy lines and promise instant threat reduction, even though such policies have not been tested and may produce uncertain or even counterproductive longer term outcomes.

Implications for Rehabilitation and Reintegration

One of the questions that remains open is what the longer term consequences might be of fear-based terrorism detention policies. We have seen that fear-based prison policies often neglect to prioritize longer-term objectives like rehabilitation (see also Neumann, 2010). How does being detained in a specialized terrorism prison affect inmates' post-release reintegration and recidivism prospects? Alarmingly, the results presented in this book seem to suggest that there is a credible risk that concentration policies can increase the probability of violent radicalization, both during and after release. If anything, it is clear that our current understanding of the policy effects of fear-based concentration models is problematically poor and that we are still a long

way from being able to predict how such policies influence the risk of violent extremism in the longer run. This point is illustrated by a recent example from the Netherlands, where two brothers who had both been detained in the terrorism wing have gone down opposite paths after their release. Whereas one brother publicly renounced violent extremism and aspired to live a moderate, law-abiding life (e.g., Groen, 2010a; 2010b), the other brother reportedly travelled to Syria to join the violent jihad in 2014 (Groen, 2014).

In the past few years, the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders has received widespread political, professional, and scholarly attention. Although this shift in focus from incarceration to rehabilitation reflects a commendable ambition for more balanced prison policies and denoted an opportunity to move away from fear-based policy making, it is plausible that fear is also a driving force behind these policies, which may thus not be optimally suited to realize their intended objectives. There are cues that the policy debate on rehabilitation and reintegration is in itself rooted in fears of prisoner radicalization, now added with fears of violent extremist recidivism. For example, in Chapter Eight I aimed to demonstrate that the prioritization of rehabilitation and reintegration seems largely rooted in fears of ex-prisoners (often detained in specialized terrorism prisons like Guantanamo Bay) returning to terrorism and that the corresponding policy and scholarly discourse on rehabilitation is vested with references to threats, risks, and uncertainties. Such threat-based discourses may be adopted throughout the entire policy chain, reaching from politicians to policy makers and scholars all the way to the practitioners, and may activate a mindset of fear that comes to shape the development and implementation of corresponding rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

Moreover, it stands to reason that fear-based terrorism detention policies create path-dependent effects that impose constraints on the flexibility and efficacy of rehabilitation programs, by setting the institutional boundaries within which such policies operate. For instance, in a country like the Netherlands, where terrorism offenders are detained in separate high-security prisons (often up to the moment of their release into society), rehabilitation programs would have to be adjusted to the constraints imposed on the offenders by the restrictive prison regime. This is likely to cause a problem of conflicting objectives. Whereas rehabilitation policies require loosening control and granting inmates a certain degree of autonomy to participate in courses and prepare for life as a free citizen, fear-based incarceration strategies are likely to do the opposite and intensify control by restricting the inmates' social and behavioral freedom (Veldhuis & Lindenberg, 2012b).

As a result, a paradoxical situation may emerge in which rehabilitation programs are introduced on top of the fear-based detention policy. In this way, rehabilitation programs would first have to 'undo' the harm done by the confinement conditions, such as intensified radicalization and the development of close-knit extremist networks, before they can begin to promote peaceful reintegration into society. Likewise, such programs may not be tailored to address stigmatization of ex-prisoners as a result of being labeled and treated as 'terrorists', which may lead to rejecting responses by society and hence frustrate reintegration. The relevance of such concerns is illustrated by recent as of yet unpublished survey data, which revealed that public audiences hold more negative views toward prisoners housed in a terrorism prison than in a regular prison regime or a high-security prison (Veldhuis, Lindenberg, Gordijn & Veenstra, 2014). Until such possible outcomes are subjected to empirical scrutiny the conclusion remains that correctional counter violent extremism policies, both incarceration and rehabilitation policies, are rooted in weak rationale and poor evidence and that we know too little about the shorter term and longer term outcomes such interventions are likely to produce. Yet, as this book shows, we have more knowledge about these things than policy makers actually use in their decisions.

Reflections and Directions for Future Work

As with all scholarly work, the research presented in this book raises as least as many questions as it answers. Along the way, some important questions emerged that I have not been able to answer in this book, in part due to some limitations of the research. In this final section, I will make some suggestions for future work in the field of terrorism detention studies.

Throughout this book, I have forwarded the theory that threat-based fears in the policy domain may exert strong, negative influence on the quality of terrorism detention policies. Probably the most obvious limitation of this work is that I can only provide limited empirical substantiation for this argument: the study was not designed to measure a mindset of fear and its psychological and behavioral consequences among stakeholders at different stages in the policy process. Rather than to falsify this theory, this study could only gather facts and evidence that strongly suggests that fear might play a role in the policy debate, but cannot refute (nor prove, for that matter) such claims. Falsification problems are the rule rather than the exception in policy analysis. This point is also recognized by Pawson (2002) when he argues that falsification as intended by Popper (1959) does not necessarily require falsification at the level of individual studies: "rather it is about how cumulation of understanding occurs across the body of research and so it occurs *collectively* as the second researcher tries to correct the errors of the first, the

third improves on the ideas of the second and so on" (Pawson, 2002, p. 346). Hence, it is of utmost importance that more evaluation studies are conducted that do not only focus on policy outcomes but also scrutinize the decision making processes by which such policies come into existence, with a particular emphasis on the different ways in which threat-based external pressures can affect the design, implementation, and outcomes of terrorism detention policies.

Also, an important suggestion that was raised in this book is that terrorism detention strategies may be rooted in exaggerated estimations of the risk of prisoner radicalization. The findings of this study suggests that violent extremist ideologies are only likely to take root among prison communities under highly specific institutional, situational and individual conditions. At least in the Netherlands, there is little evidence that such conditions are present and thus that prisoner radicalization is a serious problem to begin with. However, this study was not designed to empirically disentangle the social and psychological mechanisms by which inmates may come to adopt violent extremist ideologies and further behavioral data is needed to substantiate such claims. In fact what is needed first is that rudimentary facts are recorded to gain knowledge of the present situation, such as the proportion of terrorism offenders relative to the overall inmate population, sentence length of terrorism offenders, the numbers of prison conversions to (extremist interpretations of) Islam, and recidivism rates among violent extremist prisoners. Future research should thus aim to develop theoretical models on the dynamics of violent extremism in relation to the correctional system (e.g., both during and after imprisonment), and to test these models empirically. Such studies would not only contribute to enhancing our knowledge of the conditions under which radicalization among inmates may translate into a security threat, but are also essential to inform evidence-based rather than fear-based policy making in this area.

Moreover, I have pointed out that there is a credible risk that fear-based terrorism detention policies produce undesired or even counterproductive outcomes, like an increased risk of (post-release) radicalization, but I have not aimed or been able to empirically assess whether such negative outcomes actually occur in reality. Attempts to evaluate policy effects are often hindered by methodological difficulties in identifying causality: how to establish that observations are the result of the intervention rather than other factors? In order to understand the possible effects of different correctional strategies, it is important to subject (elements) of policies to closer scrutiny and assess whether and under which conditions that expected mechanisms by which policies are supposed to reach their objectives can be triggered. Conducting and comparing evaluation

studies in different countries and contexts should provide insights into the extent to which concentration policies for terrorists trigger both intended as well as unintended outcomes.

To Conclude

The research for this study was conducted in 2010, when the Dutch terrorism wing had been operational for four years. Although the findings presented in this book reflect on a policy period a few years ago and do not account for recent developments or policy changes, I believe that the argument that fear can be a driving force in terrorism detention policy is still relevant today. In response to the evaluation of the Dutch terrorism detention strategy, which was published early 2011 and criticized the policy's design and implementation (Veldhuis et al., 2011), the government decided to shut down the terrorism wing (*NOS,* 2011). In principle, this policy change denoted an opportunity to introduce a more balanced detention strategy and produce policy that reflects a realistic assessment rather than a bureaucratic reflex to political and public demands.

However, recent developments with IS and the possible security concerns associated with jihadis returning to their homes in Europe have catapulted the issue of prisoner radicalization back onto the international policy agenda and seem to have flared up fears of violent extremist ideologies spreading through the prison system. In the Netherlands, these concerns have led to the re-opening of the terrorism wing in September 2014 (Salome & Van der Wal, 2014). Similarly, France recently responded to the increased threat of violent extremism by segregating terrorism offenders in specialized high-security prisons (*de Volkskrant,* 2014), in spite of the lack of evidence that such policies are likely to help. Again, it seems that fear has gained a prominent role as a policy advisor.