



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF TERRORISM

The Arc of Terrorist Involvement

INTRODUCTION

The “Arc” model identifies critical stages in the development of the terrorist. The distinctions made in this model draw from analogies with criminal careers and are useful in the identification of potential intervention points. This model focuses on the development of terrorist group members, and although there may be points of overlap, it is not intended to explain the development of lone-actor terrorists. The model is comprised of three stages: becoming involved, engagement, and disengagement. For some, a fourth stage, re-engagement, is present.

INVOLVEMENT

This stage focuses on the factors that shape how and why people become involved in terrorist groups.

- Individuals are usually gradually socialized into involvement, for instance, via exposure to ideological teachings, family, friends, or charismatic individuals within a terrorist group.
- Involvement is a process. There is no single factor that explains it. Risk factors for involvement may include:
 - Dissatisfaction with current identity or activity
 - Limited alternatives and opportunities
 - Need for validation and approval of others
 - Acceptance of extremist views
 - Placing a premium on action
 - Positive expectations about involvement with specific individuals/groups
- Individuals who seek out involvement do so with certain expectations about what involvement means.
- The group and community can play powerful roles in shaping and sustaining increased involvement. When there is a close relationship between the terrorist group and the broader community it claims to represent (even at a local level), this can serve as a powerful influencer, both in terms of attracting recruits as well as sustaining their commitment at subsequent stages.



ENGAGEMENT

This stage focuses on the activities and roles associated with being involved in terrorism.

- Engagement in “terrorism” may refer to a wide variety of actions, ranging from direct involvement in terrorist activity (e.g., shootings or bombings) to ancillary and indirect activity (e.g., raising funds, radicalizing or grooming potential sources of support).
- It may be difficult to clearly ascertain what constitutes “membership” in a terrorist group.
- Not all actions performed by members of terrorist groups may be clearly illegal, and the classification of what is illegal may vary significantly across jurisdictions. Often, engagement in illegal behavior may supplement engagement in a wide variety of innocuous behavior (e.g., holding down a job).
- Increased engagement with a group often results in reduced engagement in activities outside the group.

This research is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Science and Technology Directorate and coordinated through the U.K. Home Office. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the Department of Homeland Security or the Home Office.

Points of Contact

Dr. John Horgan - jgh11@psu.edu
Principal Investigator

Dr. Mary Beth Altier - mea16@psu.edu
Project Manager

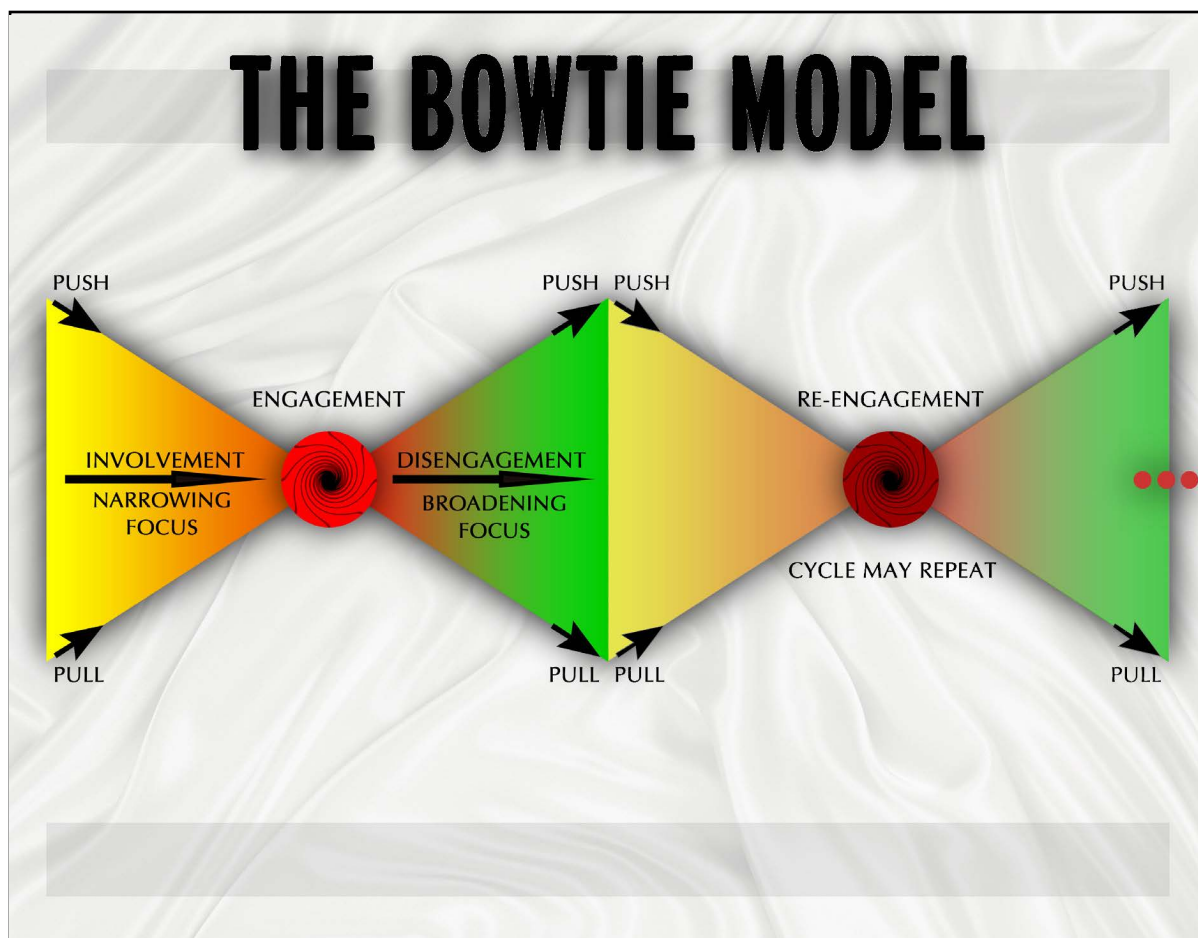
For More Information

Project and Executive Summaries found at
icst.psu.edu/research.shtml

ENGAGEMENT *continued*

- Group members may perform one specific task, or their engagement may be much more diffuse and involve performing a variety of tasks.
- Even in the smallest terrorist groups, there are a variety of roles members can fill.
- Individuals often begin their engagement in one role before taking on another.
- Role migration may be incremental or sudden and is not necessarily a linear process.
- Some, with special skills, may be preselected for a specific role from the outset. Others may graduate over time from a less prestigious role to a more prestigious role, or from a peripheral to a more central kind of involvement.
- An increased sense of empowerment and control often accompanies a new role.
- There may be divergence between group members' expectations and their actual experiences within roles; they don't always get to do what they expected to do.
- Group members may face positive and negative consequences of engagement, and some roles may carry a greater social and psychological cost than others.
- Some group members acquiesce to the demands of a particular role better than others and rapidly develop specialized skills associated with the role.

Individual Movement through Terrorism: The 'Bow Tie' Model



DISENGAGEMENT

This stage focuses on how and why active group members cease engagement in terrorist activity.

- Disengagement can be a collective or individual process.
- Collective disengagement (e.g., when an entire terrorist organization lays down its arms) may lead to individual disengagement.
- Individual disengagement (e.g., when a key leader disengages) may lead to collective disengagement.
- Disengagement can be a voluntary or involuntary process. Involuntary disengagement happens when an individual or organization has no choice but to refrain from terrorism (e.g., when an individual is imprisoned or when an organization is defeated).
- Disengagement does not always involve a change in ideology or beliefs (i.e., de-radicalization).
- It may be clear-cut (e.g., involve a dramatic exit from the group) or a slow, phased process.
- Certain factors may “push” individuals toward disengagement, including:
 - Disillusionment with key personnel
 - Disillusionment with the strategy or actions of the terrorist group
 - Unmet expectations
 - Loss of faith in the ideology
 - Difficulty adapting to the clandestine lifestyle
 - Physiological and/or psychological effects of engaging in terrorist activity
- Certain lures outside of the terrorist organization may “pull” individuals toward disengagement, including:
 - Competing loyalties
 - Positive interactions with moderate individuals
 - Longing for the freedoms of a conventional life
 - Employment/educational demands or opportunities
 - Desire to marry and establish a family or the demands of having a family

- Promises of amnesty
- Financial incentives

- Disengagement may be preceded by a change in views, a reduction in one’s involvement in terrorist activity, and/or role migration.

RE-ENGAGEMENT

This stage focuses on how and why certain individuals return to terrorist behavior after a period of disengagement.

- An individual may disengage completely from a group, but may later re-engage.
- A period of disengagement can be short or long.
- There is no single reason why individuals re-engage in terrorism.
- Re-engagement can be a collective or individual process.
- Re-engagement can be voluntary or involuntary.
- Re-engagement does not necessarily follow from (or result in) a change in one’s ideology or beliefs; one does not have to be “committed” to a group to re-engage.
- Re-engaged individuals may come back to any role in a group (not necessarily the same roles they held before).
- The circumstances surrounding individuals’ disengagement from terrorism may affect the nature and extent of their re-engagement.
- Disengaged individuals who have cut all ties to a terrorist group may be less likely to re-engage; links to terrorists and terrorist organizations may increase opportunities for re-engagement and may instill or reinforce individuals’ beliefs in a violent ideology and acceptance of terrorist behavior.

ADDITIONAL READING

- J. Horgan and Taylor, M. (2011). “Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research.” In R. Coolsaet (Ed.) *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge* (London: Ashgate).
- J. Horgan. (2005). *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge).
- M. Taylor and J. Horgan. (2006). “A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Development of the Terrorist,” *Terrorism & Political Violence*.
- J. Horgan. (2008). “From Profiles to Pathways: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*.