

COUNTERING AND PREVENTING THE THREAT OF TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: FROM THE INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN TO THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

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Introduction

More than ever we see a nexus between internal and external security. Things happening abroad may have a direct impact on national security and public order and vice versa. Think for instance of the Turkish referendum and the protests of diaspora communities it spurred in the Netherlands and Germany. Since the terrorist threat clearly has a transboundary character and the efforts to spread extremist ideology, as well as to incite and to recruit, have a transboundary character it makes sense to also organise the counter approaches in a multilateral manner.

For one thing, it is important to use a broad scope when assessing the long-term trends in terrorist threats, in order to “predict” how these trends will develop in the near future. Using data generated from international attacks such as the number of casualties and the modus operandi throughout the years provides interesting insights into how the terrorist threat is developing worldwide.¹ This form of strategic foresight is of great importance for timely and effective policy planning of responsive mechanisms. Assessing these long-term trends, for instance, tells us that in Europe we are now dealing with a diversification of targets chosen and weapons used by terrorists, and that there is also an increase in lone actor attacks. This conclusion follows from the *Clingendael Strategic Monitor* 2017 study, in particular the chapter on terrorism. The conclusions that can be drawn based on long-term analysis of data are important for threat assessments. Based on the data mentioned above, we can conclude that intelligence and law enforcement agencies are facing an even harder task in intercepting preparations for terrorist attacks. With the “weaponisation of ordinary life”, in which a simple van or a kitchen knife can function as an effective weapon, authorities become unable to retrieve information on plotted attacks based on weapon supply trafficking. At the same time, authorities should – based on these outcomes – take a different approach to taking protective measures in the case of mass events, for instance, or for crowded streets with pedestrians. The assessments of long-term trends for the European region can therefore also translate directly to the security measures needed at a local level.

1. An important source for these data is the University of Maryland's START Global Terrorism Database, see <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

Table 1: Listing CT/CVE/PVE objectives

Objective	Source of the measure/action or actor/platform fulfilling the objective (includes examples; not meant to be exhaustive)
Harmonisation of criminal legislation	International conventions; United Nations Security Council resolutions; EU legislation
Mutual legal assistance and extradition	Bilateral and multilateral conventions; European Arrest Warrant
Stopping logistical, financial support; travel	UN Security Council resolutions; sanctions; EU regulations; Financial Action Task Force special regulations
Improving effectiveness of investigative, prosecutorial and adjudicative policies (training and capacity building)	Training manuals developed or capacity building (workshops)/technical assistance organised/offered by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – in particular the Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB), the OSCE, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), Europol, Interpol, Eurojust
Improving effectiveness of security and border management policies (training and capacity building)	Technical assistance offered by UNCTED, the EU, Frontex
Improving protection of critical infrastructure (training and capacity building)	Standard setting by the Organisation on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF), 1540 Committee, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), national governments
Early detection (sharing of information/intelligence, and analysis to make an inventory of indicators)	Data sharing platforms set up by Europol and Interpol; (bilateral) cooperation between intelligence agencies; data sharing mechanisms and platforms set up by national governments, local authorities
Improving (local) police activities, including community policing	Training and capacity building by the EU, Interpol, Europol, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), national governments, local authorities
Rehabilitation and reintegration (policy advice, training and capacity building)	Guiding principles, good practices guides and manuals prepared by/training workshops sponsored by the UN, GCTF, UNODC, EU, working with states; yet the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) also functions as a hub for exchange of experiences among first line practitioners; national governments; national probation centres; local authorities
Countering Violent Extremism	Listing guiding principles and setting up platforms to support, for instance, counter-narratives by the UN, EU, OSCE, national governments, municipalities, non-state actors; installing repressive preventive (administrative) measures by national/local authorities; addressing root causes of VE by international organisations, national/local authorities, and non-state actors
Prevention of radicalisation; building resilience in societies; community engagement	Among others, development programmes, skills training, youth/women leadership programmes, public-private partnership programmes to promote entrepreneurship, access to justice programmes, diversity promotion, anti-discrimination, promoting Security Sector Reform (SSR), good governance promotion, political/community participation/engagement initiated by the UN, EU, OSCE, Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund (GCERF) of the GCTF, national and local authorities, and non-state actors.

Policies on counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) are being implemented but also developed at various policy levels. When discussing the policies on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism, it is interesting to assess the implementation of policies from the top down, namely, first assessing the

international (legal) policies, such as international conventions and UN Security Council resolutions, the regional policies, such as those issued by the European Union, the national policies, and ultimately the policies at the various local levels. Following the manner in which policies adopted at the international level trickle down to, ultimately, implementation at the local level, and assessing whether the assumed effect of these policies materialises at that level will provide valuable information about the effectiveness of the various policy levels.

Just as interesting, but less well researched and documented, is whether the context specific policies developed and implemented at the local level yield results that would merit policy uptake to the national and possibly even the regional or international level. The work done so far, after all, is mostly limited to collecting good practices to be shared at the local level, although a thoroughly developed model for monitoring & evaluation also seems to be lacking.

Important in all of this is to distinguish the various objectives that are served by the policies adopted at various policy levels (see Table 1). One clear objective is, for instance, the harmonisation of criminal legislation through the obligation to implement legislation set in either international conventions or in UN Security Council resolutions. In particular, various organs of the UN, such as the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED) and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODCD), furthermore provide technical assistance and motivate states to improve their investigative, prosecutorial and adjudicative policies, as well as other security and border management policies.

In terms of analysing how the policy objectives and measures formulated at the international/European policy level are being implemented at the national and local levels, as well as on how policy uptake based on local experiences takes place at the national and international/European levels, I will, due to the limited scope of this paper, only focus on the objectives of CVE and in particular strategic communication and prevention of radicalisation, and subsequently highlight some of the initiatives developed at the various policy levels. These areas are most suitable for assessing the interaction of the chain of actors from the international to the local level.

Strategic communication

Recently the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on strategic communication. Security Council Resolution 2354 (May 2017) urges member states to follow new guidelines on countering terrorist narratives and amplify credible and positive alternative narratives to audiences vulnerable to the messages of extremist organisations. The resolution refers to a comprehensive international framework for counter terrorist narratives prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and which consists of three main elements: 1. the legal and law enforcement measures in accordance with obligations under international law, including human rights law, and relevant Security Council resolutions and in furtherance of General Assembly resolutions; 2. public-private partnerships; and 3. the development of counter-narratives.

Clearly, the Security Council (SC) on its own is not able to implement all three elements of its comprehensive framework. As such, it can only play a decisive role with regard to the first element by promoting harmonisation of legislation. With regard to this first element, various SC resolutions, in particular SC Resolution 1624 (2005), set a legal standard by encouraging member states to criminalise incitement to terrorism and take action against the glorification of terrorism. Over the years, the SC has encouraged member states and offered technical guidance for the development of criminal legislation to fulfil this objective. Its Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the organ mandated to monitor the implementation of the resolution, also keeps a record of the progress in implementation of legislation and has issued two global survey reports on the progress. For the second element, the council is dependent on cooperation with the private sector and can merely offer a platform for consultation between the governments that need to implement and enforce prohibitions of particular posts on social media because they qualify as incitement and the industry that needs to employ take-down policies. Yet, encouraged by the initiatives of the UN Security Council and UNCTED the major private sector providers announced the formation of a Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism on June 26th 2017. Finally, according to its own principles, the third element of the comprehensive framework can best be implemented by credible messengers, such as youth organisations or religious organisations. To assist in materialising that element, UNCTED can only appeal to governments to engage with civil society organisations and to support the grassroots initiatives that support these activities.

At the EU level, the objective of harmonisation in legislation by criminalising incitement is being met through the adoption of Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA, which obliges EU member states to criminalise those actions and prosecute those that post violent extremist propaganda and messages that intend to incite and recruit. In Framework Decision 2008/919/JHA direct and indirect provocation to commit a terrorist offence has also been criminalised. According to an ICCT research paper issued in April 2016, of the 26 EU member states included in the research, 23 had indeed adopted legislation against incitement or glorification of terrorism (Van Ginkel & Entenmann (eds.), 2016, pp 60-61). So far and as part of its Media Communication Strategy,² the EU has also taken steps to facilitate the operationalisation of counteractions against extremist content on the internet by informing service providers of social media channels such as Facebook and YouTube to take down certain content. It has therefore set up the EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU) of the European Counter-Terrorism Centre at Europol. The EU Internet Forum is another initiative to implement the EU Media Communication Strategy, and is in particular a good example of a close cooperation with the industry. The cooperation has spurred several companies to tighten their internal procedures to control the content that is being posted. Finally, the Strategic Communication Network (originally set up as the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT)) has been established, and contains two components: CVE and CT communication campaigns to be delivered to member states, and a network for member states to exchange good practices of CVE and CT communications. The network typically offers technical assistance and facilitates the work of credible messengers to deliver the counter messages. It is interesting to note that the EU Media Communication Strategy (2005 and revised in 2007)

2. European Council, *Revised Media Communication Strategy* (5469/3/07 REV 3), 28 March 2007.

in itself also has the ambition to deliver the EU's own message in a more effective manner, including the underlying message of the overall EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to be implemented in a just, fair and inclusive manner, respecting the guiding principles of integration, non-discrimination, equality, respect for cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and equality between men and women.

Finally, to cater to the needs of the practitioners at the national or local level, the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has established the Communications and Narratives working group, which offers a platform for experiences. Although very relevant for awareness raising and exchange of practices, it is not (yet) able to deliver a set of good practices, or a list of do's and don'ts in counter messaging that can be relevant for both practitioners and state organs that issue counter or alternative messages.

At the national level, there are a couple of examples of states developing counter-narrative campaigns. One example is the French campaign launched in 2015 under the heading #stopdihadisme. The effectiveness of these campaigns are in any case highly debatable, since the messenger lacks the credibility in the eyes of the target group, and the message is not tailored enough to a particular group since it uses broadcasting instead of narrowcasting techniques. Overall, these government campaigns lack the finesse to adapt to and effectively contradict the sophistication of the propaganda by ISIS. Apart from the local initiatives developed by non-state actors, it is hard to find information on state initiatives that are not communicating a message themselves but are rather fully supportive of the initiatives developed by non-state actors. The reasons for this are clear, since public knowledge of this kind of support might undermine the credibility of the local initiative.

Prevention against radicalisation

Although in 2006 the UN adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of which one of the four pillars was the pillar focussed on addressing "Conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism", the need to invest in prevention against violent extremism was more urgently acknowledged by the UN Secretary General, who in 2016 presented the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674-A/70/675) (PVE Plan) to the General Assembly. The concept of PVE was introduced to distinguish certain policies from the more repressive trend that had developed as a consequence of a certain interpretation of the countering violent extremism (CVE) policies that were earlier introduced to steer away from the singular repressive and military responses that ruled the policy field after 9/11. However, the lack of a clear definition of "violent extremism" allowed for wide interpretations of this policy field, resulting in repressive measures that also targeted civil society groups and journalists in certain regions. PVE is intended to focus exclusively on the prevention phase and address root causes that render communities vulnerable to the influences of extremist organisations, and is intended to increase resilience in these communities.

The PVE Plan lists 70 practical, inclusive and comprehensive recommendations to member states and the United Nations system. One of the key recommendations advises member states to develop a National Action

Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Plan of Action also points out the importance of national ownership and respect for international law, and among other things, emphasises the importance of a multidisciplinary approach. Although the UN and its various organs stimulate governments and offer technical assistance to develop these plans of action, it is ultimately up to the member states to facilitate the multi-stakeholder consultations to set up coordination platforms and initiate multidisciplinary programmes and comprehensive approaches to prevent radicalisation to violent extremism.

Also at the EU level, one of the pillars of the overall EU Counterterrorism Strategy adopted in 2005 contains a “prevent” pillar. In the same year, a special EU Strategy for Combatting Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism was adopted. No binding regulations or decisions have followed the adoption of the prevent strategy, or its revisions since. It does stress, however, the need for a “balanced approach between security-related measures and efforts to tackle those factors that may create an environment conducive to radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism”.³ It furthermore stresses the importance of the role of communities, civil society, non-governmental organisations and the private sector, among others, in building resilience and supporting disengagement initiatives. Notwithstanding the admirable ambitions and recommendations formulated at EU level, without even an obligation to report on any progress in designing national prevent strategies on state level, the EU, like the UN, depends on the willingness of states to take action. So far, not even all EU member states have adopted comprehensive strategies that include both repressive and preventive measures (Van Ginkel & Entenmann (eds), 2016, p. 65). The RAN keeps a rolling list of prevention and deradicalisation initiatives and good practices in various member states, and in its various working groups also assists practitioners on issues such as education, youth, prison and probation, police and local authorities. These exchanges have provided input for very generic output documents, which do not really provide enough synthesis to inform the policy level on how to better instruct various actors on the effectiveness of the prevention initiatives.

The real innovations are, therefore, instead coming from programmes developed at local levels such as the model used in Aarhus (Denmark) to deradicalise extremist offenders or the “Veiligheidshuis” multistakeholder/multidisciplinary local consultation mechanisms used in the Netherlands. Although both programmes are in particular used in relation to individuals that are already radicalised, they both work from the principles that it is not only the hard security sector that is responsible for the response and intervention policies, but rather work in close cooperation with the soft sector, such as social services, mental health services, youth care, etc. The main cities in the Netherlands moreover work with a system of “key figures”, who are ordinary citizens who might even have another day job, and who – after an instruction workshop – are at the same time able to signal early signs of radicalisation among their neighbours and brothers and sisters within their own direct community. As they are one of the community, they also have the trust of the people they want to approach to discuss the changes in behaviour or mind-set, and, if necessary, reach out to the right authorities or religious mentors who have the credentials to engage with those vulnerable to radicalisation. It is difficult to make statements on the effectiveness of these approaches, as the first evaluations have yet to be conducted.

3. Council of the European Union, *Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*, 9956/14, 19 May 2014, Annex, par. 9.

Final observations

As mentioned in the introductory remarks, long-term trend analysis of terrorist threats is very important to inform international organisations and states how to plan their strategies and policies. Although these strategies and policies can set the general framework and ensure a balanced approach including repressive and preventive measures, the effectiveness of preventive policies depends a great deal on tailor-made approaches designed at the local level. The question is therefore whether the international and national policy levels are able to facilitate the tailor-made design and implementation of preventive policies at the local level. So far, the policies designed and implemented at local levels lack regular mechanisms for evaluation of their effectiveness, which would not only be beneficial for the improvement of these policies, but also would contribute to better informed framework policies at the national and international levels, and facilitate a better policy uptake. At the same time, the national and international policy level could put more effort into supporting the design and implementation of prevention policies at the local level by:

- (Financially) supporting evidence-based research into the underlying factors for radicalisation (at the local level);
- Facilitating processes of exchange between various actors;
- Disseminating knowledge;
- Providing (technical) resources.

Finally, insofar as local initiatives are dependent on financial donor support, local NGOs have to be aware of the current debate in international circles, making a distinction between C/PVE-specific and C/PVE-relevant programmes. Although the C/PVE-relevant programmes, which might for instance focus on improving good governance and access to justice or youth and women's empowerment programmes, but which lack a specific focus on countering or preventing violent extremism, play an important role in rendering communities more resilient to the risk of radicalisation, these programmes will most likely not qualify for C/PVE support funds. The downside of this is the tendency of many NGOs to no longer focus on the support of programmes that intend to improve the fabric of societies in a sustainable manner, but rather choose a more limited focus for their programming in order to secure their budgets. The question is, therefore, whether this discussion in the international fora is not counterproductive to the overall objectives it is supposed to support.

References

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