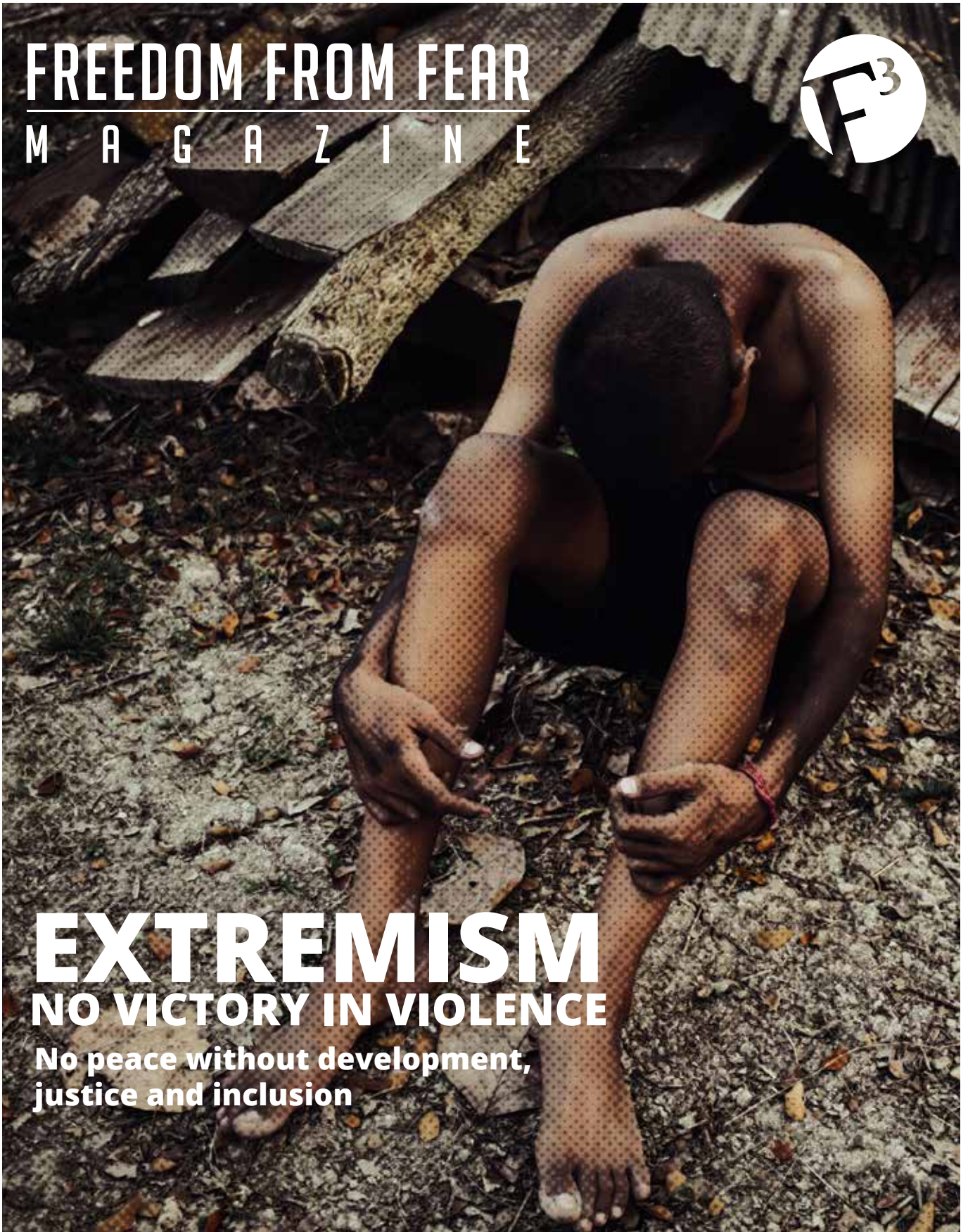


FREEDOM FROM FEAR

M A G A Z I N E



EXTREMISM

NO VICTORY IN VIOLENCE

No peace without development,
justice and inclusion

UNICRI

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EXTREMISM

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**No peace without development,
justice and inclusion**

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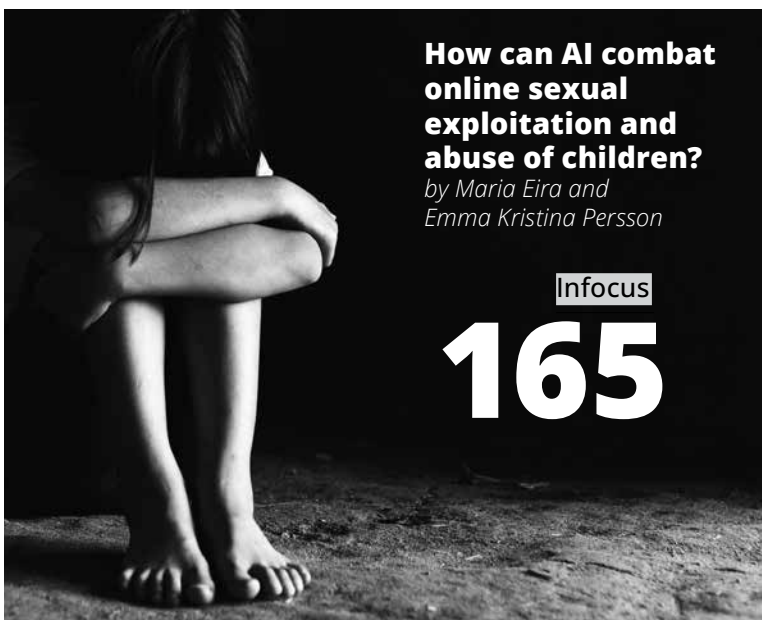
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Staying ahead of the curve in efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism

by Antonia Marie De Meo
Director of UNICRI

This year began with the harrowing news of a terrorist attack at a mosque in Peshawar, Pakistan. The world watched and listened in horror as the death toll rose from an initial 30 to over 100 within hours as more bodies were uncovered from the debris. More than 200 people, mostly police officers, were injured. This daring suicide bomb attack at a mosque in a police compound was a stark reminder of the imminent danger posed by terrorism and violent extremism, and an example of their effect. This attack was among a number that occurred in the first quarter of the year, with varying degrees of impact on lives and infrastructure.

Terrorism and violent extremism are the bane of our time. From individual lone-wolf mass shootings to suicide bombings, the methods vary but the impacts are devastating. Beyond loss of lives, injuries and the destruction of infrastructure, the twin scourges of terrorism and violent extremism threaten democracy, adversely affect stability of governments, and retard economic development. Such incidents are difficult to foretell and forestall due to their pervasive and unpredictable nature.

As the United Nations research and training institute for criminal justice and crime prevention, UNICRI has a vested interest in enhancing safety and security. The Institute closely monitors trends and developments, with a view to enhancing the capacity of Member States and partners to prevent, curtail or respond to such incidents. UNICRI implements an array of programmes that contribute to counter-terrorism efforts and works with UN entities, governments, and civil society actors in its whole-of-society approach.

As a member of the [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact](#), UNICRI contributes to coordinated efforts across the United Nations system to prevent and counter terrorism. Its pivotal role includes supporting Member States to translate the good practices identified in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy into national policies. UNICRI works in three priority areas, namely: a) enhancing efforts for rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and returning foreign terrorist fighters, both inside and outside prisons; b) supporting local communities and civil society organizations in preventing and countering radicalization and extremist activity; and c) working with vulnerable populations, particularly at-risk youth, to strengthen prevention of violent extremism through empowerment and resilience.

This issue of the *Freedom From Fear* magazine highlights trends related to terrorism and violent extremism. It illustrates efforts by UNICRI and partners to stay ahead of the curve through diverse initiatives. From analysing new tools used by terrorist actors to new hot spots for terrorist attacks, this issue shows evolving trends as terrorists and violent extremists adapt to a changing world. A crucial element is the nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime, a mutually profitable symbiosis that sustains both terrorist and criminal groups and activities. This issue also assesses the emerging link between climate change and violent extremism, and its resultant threat to peace and security, while also highlighting

gender-based norms of violent extremism. It amplifies the voices of terrorism survivors and their role in preventing radicalization, as well as lessons learned from disengaging from violent extremism. It also examines how sports can support strategies to address violent extremism and promote inclusion. Lastly, to promote justice and accountability, this issue looks at the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of radiological and nuclear terrorism.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) is an emerging area that presents both threats and opportunities for terrorists and violent extremists, as well as counter-terrorism actors. In this technological age, with the imminent possibility of new and emerging technologies being used for terrorist purposes, it is crucial to understand the potential misuses of technology and identify the gaps in legal frameworks or governance systems, to better facilitate investigations and prosecutions to hold criminals and terrorists accountable for malicious use of these technologies.

UNICRI has been identifying and analysing the impact of technological changes on trends and patterns in crime, including terrorism, and exploring the potential opportunities technology presents for law enforcement and counter-terrorism actors. Working with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), UNICRI looked extensively at trends and developments in cybercrime, extrapolating potential malicious uses of AI for terrorist purposes. The Institute's report [Algorithms and Terrorism](#)

observes that terrorist organizations have tended to use various forms of 'low-tech terrorism', such as firearms and vehicles. It concludes that the current capability of groups such as Da'esh to effectively deploy AI is unlikely, but as it becomes more widespread and the barriers to entry lower, the risks increase. In this context, the crime-as-a-service model, through which terrorist groups and individuals seek services offered by cyber criminals on the dark web, may enable terrorists to launch more technologically advanced cyber-attacks.

UNICRI has also been monitoring the impact of technology around Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) terrorism. In 2021, UNICRI and UNOCT published the report ["Advances in Science and Technology to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism"](#). This report elaborates possible risks associated with the malicious use of science and technology to develop and deploy WMD and identifies solutions to prevent and combat WMD terrorism.

The misuse of ICT to generate and spread conspiracy theories and disinformation is another priority area because acts of terrorism and violent extremism are often linked to hatred and racism, xenophobia, islamophobia, and anti-Semitism. Early during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICRI conducted a [study](#), ["Stop the Virus of Disinformation"](#), on the malicious use of social media. In January 2023, UNICRI released a new [Handbook to Combat CBRN Disinformation](#) for practitioners of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risk mitigation to debunk maliciously generated

false information by non-State actors, including terrorists.

In October 2022, UNICRI published the report [Perceptions of climate change and violent extremism: Listening to local communities in Chad](#). This explores community members' experiences and perceptions on the role of climate change and degradation of natural resources in exacerbating local conflicts, as well as the impact of climate change on violent extremist groups' recruitment narratives. This was followed in December 2022 by the launch of a project to build gender-sensitive resilience to violent extremism in the Sahel.

UNICRI recognises youth vulnerability to recruitment and radicalization to terrorism, as well as their important role to help prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism and promote peace and security. UNICRI is working with the UNOCT-led United Nations Global Sports Programme's [#MoreThanAGame](#) campaign that targets youth and highlights stories of professional athletes and young people whose lives have been changed through sport. The campaign, launched on 18 November alongside the 2022 FIFA World Cup, was attended by youth who are training to be practitioners to prevent violent extremism (PVE) and promote peace. Campaign

partners marked the first [International Day](#) for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism on 12 February 2023 with sport-based PVE activities.

UNICRI contributes to enhancing knowledge about the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism and assists Member States to incorporate effective measures in their crime prevention and counter-terrorism strategies. This includes initiatives aimed at improving policies to prevent the trafficking of persons, drugs, arms, and CBRN materials, both for profit and operational use. Its [Policy Toolkit](#) on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism, published in 2019, equips policy-makers and experts to address the Nexus in various regions.

While UNICRI prioritises human lives in the global fight against terrorism and violent extremism, it also focuses on threats to vulnerable targets, including critical infrastructure and public places. Terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure can significantly disrupt the functioning of government and the private sector, while attacks in public places can lead to multiple fatalities. Potential attacks against vulnerable targets have become increasingly at-

tractive to terrorist organizations because they can be carried out with minimal resources and little to no complex planning.

The Institute works closely with various actors to enhance safety and security for vulnerable targets. In September 2022 the [United Nations Global Programme on Countering Terrorist Threats Against Vulnerable Targets](#), led by UNOCT and jointly implemented with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), UNICRI and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), launched five [specialized modules](#) dedicated to the protection of vulnerable targets against terrorist attacks. The modules incorporate principles and policies developed by UNICRI over its 20-year history of developing counterterrorism and security policies for major events and tourist destinations.

This issue of the *Freedom From Fear* magazine focuses on diverse but critical topics related to violent extremism and terrorism, their far-reaching and cross-cutting consequences, and preventative efforts that are underway.

I hope you'll enjoy reading the magazine, learn from the authors who have shared their expertise, and be inspired to act against terrorism and violent extremism within your sphere of influence.



Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.

Mahatma Gandhi

Preventing/countering violent extremism and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: an impact nexus

by Noel Klima

“
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to harmonise the economic, social, and environmental aspects of living.”

Introduction

Today's society experiences immense challenges to sustainable development. However, with challenges come great opportunities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to harmonise the economic, social, and environmental aspects of living. The [2030 Agenda](#) was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 and came into effect on 1 January 2016. It provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The 2030 Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 associated targets which are integrated and indivisible. The SDGs constitute an urgent call for collective action by all countries in all continents. The Agenda calls for shared responsibilities, universality, engagement, and discussion. The SDGs explore the causes of our most pressing problems and provide answers to the contexts and needs at both local and global levels. The 2030 Agenda strikes a balance between human needs on the one hand, and the environment on the other hand, while trying to understand the complex dynamics of interaction between the two.

The concept of countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) emerged



more than 10 years ago in the post-9/11 context out of concerns to address the root causes of 'terrorism' (Frazer & Nünlist, 2015). Before, the approach to counter-terrorism was largely focused on security responses, despite the proven inadequacy of such approaches. CVE has become a popular term used by many, from governments, the academia, and NGOs. It often refers to non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism. CVE initiatives can vary a great deal, from projects that are aimed at changing behaviour to programmes that challenge ideas and beliefs, or initiatives that commit to building resilience and social cohesion. Those approaches can be based on engagement and outreach, capacity building and development aid, education and training, messaging and public relations campaigns, and many more (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018).

“

The Agenda calls for shared responsibilities, universality, engagement, and discussion

P/CVE is thus part of Member States' broader counter-terrorism agenda. P/CVE approaches address the contributing factors and 'root causes' of violent extremism, such as discrimination and marginalisation, poor governance, and lack of accountability of the State. For this reason, successful P/CVE approaches must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law in communities affected by violent extremism. Ideally, the P/CVE agenda should also actively work to strengthen human rights and the rule of law. Additionally, P/CVE approaches are multidisciplinary. The efforts, resources, and insights of different actors such as law enforcement and intelligence agencies are relevant, as well as those of a vast network of actors at the local, national, regional, and global levels; these can include municipal services (prevention, welfare, youth, integration, education, etc.); civil society organisations operating in different domains; religious and community leaders; healthcare workers; teachers;

sports club trainers, etc. (Hardyngs, Klima & Pauwels, 2022).



Successful P/CVE approaches must be underpinned by human rights and the rule of law in communities affected by violent extremism

A decade after the first pilot projects, CVE approaches have been adopted across several continents, and are still being developed further. This globalisation of the P/CVE policies is one of the most significant developments in the counter-terrorism (CT) policy. The impact of P/CVE is also not to be underestimated. It has had significant effects on the rule of law and on the perceived neutrality and fairness of states. Paying attention to the conditions that lead to the occurrence of violent extremism has generated greater awareness of the direct links between extremist violence and poor governance, accountability gaps in domestic law, and the repressive use of counter-terrorism as a means to extinguish legitimate democratic expression and participation (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). Additionally, P/CVE policies have significantly widened the range of methods used by governments for countering

terrorism and shifted their target from terrorist organisations to religious ideology and identity issues. The emergence of P/CVE also led to a new vocabulary and a new set of extrajudicial actors who are often to be consulted (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018).

In the framework of the P/CVE policies several points of interconnection (such as poverty, social political exclusion, poor governance, economic dimensions, operational integrity, security, etc.) can be identified. Significant progress has been made in meeting many development challenges and connecting them with P/CVE goals. Nonetheless, the interlinkage between the 2030 Agenda and the P/CVE agenda and the potential contributions that a more robust integration might bring are still understudied.

Nexus of factors

P/CVE, as a discipline, is situated at the intersection of development, peace and security, and human rights (Rothermel, 2020). Underlying factors of poverty, inequality, marginalisation, lack of access to justice, and human rights infractions endanger social cohesion and could boost radicalisation (Werther-Pietsch, 2018; Kuhn, 2020). Vice versa, violent extremism and terrorism jeopardise peace and security and produce devastating effects on hu-

man rights, the economy, and the environment (Rajah et al., 2019).

Member States continue to face tremendous challenges across the world in tackling violent extremist threats. The nature and seriousness of the violence varies but can have both short and long-term implications for societies and the environment. Terrorist acts can destabilise states and governments, undermine civil society, and threaten economic and social development. Furthermore, the freedom of citizens, including their freedom from physical threat, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression could be impeded (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Acts of terrorism could also threaten international relations and undermine cooperation between states, including cooperation for development. In addition, terrorism can be linked to transnational organised crime, with converging interests in many illicit activities such as arms trafficking and illegal transfers of biological and chemical materials which can have dramatic environmental effects (Rajah et al., 2019). Lastly, violent extremism intersects with and is increasingly part of the context in which development organisations operate. Violent extremist groups endanger and divert the delivery of development assistance and aid services. In certain cases, terror-

ism and violent extremism are the primary factors contributing to the need for continued assistance and the failure to meet the SDGs (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).



Violent extremist groups endanger and divert the delivery of development assistance and aid services

Those common denominators of violent radicalisation and the detrimental effects of violent extremism can thus be linked with the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, which strives to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs can directly and indirectly help our efforts to counter terrorism by addressing the conditions conducive to its spread. The SDG and P/CVE agendas have a lot of factors in common. These include, their emphasis on strengthening civil society resilience, particularly women and youth's resilience, and empowering local agents of change; building social cohesion, and increasing the role that inclusive cities can play in this regard; the need for government to be responsive to citizens' needs; and the importance of respecting human rights and addressing

grievances and inequality (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

However, an overemphasis on countering violent extremism without taking into account the interconnection with the SDGs leads to increased funding for security-oriented programmes and a decrease in funding for the local priorities – development and peace-building issues – many of which are critical to addressing the structural and other drivers of violent extremism (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). It is thus crucial to recognise the nexus of factors of sustainable development and violent extremism and integrate the two agendas in a more precise and effective manner.

Examples of interconnection/integration between P/CVE and SDGs

Several attempts to integrate or align the P/CVE agenda with the sustainable development agenda can be identified.

Firstly, there are close parallels between the recommendations of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) and many of the targets of the [SDG 16](#). These include developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (16.6); promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice (16.3);

and strengthening relevant national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime (16.a). For example, recommendation 50.a, which urges Member States to review all national legislation, policies, strategies, and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism to ascertain whether they are firmly grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law, and whether they put in place national mechanisms designed to ensure compliance and to take measures to strengthen the rule of law, repealing discriminatory legislation, and implementing policies and laws that combat discrimination and exclusion, is linked with target 16.10.1 which states the importance of public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements as its objective.

“ MIL empowers citizens, including children and youth, with competencies related to media, information, ICT and other aspects of literacy which are needed for the 21st century ”

Moreover, the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) concept, which tries to promote media and information literacy as a tool for reinforcing human rights, countering radicalisation, and extremism is according to UNESCO is “very much intune with Goal 16 of the SDGs’ to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” It mentions: “MIL empowers citizens, including children and youth, with competencies related to media, information, ICT and other aspects of literacy which are needed for the 21st century” (Sakamoto, 2016, p.65). A concrete example of a project within the MIL concept is the Connection project “Civic Education partnership Germany-Morocco”, where good experiences with trainings of youth and adult members of civil society in the development of local SDG development plans are created, keeping in mind the increasing regional tensions caused by radical groups (Röhlinger, 2016).

There is also a common thread between the objectives and priorities of the National Youth Policy (NYP) and the SDGs as the case of India shows (Singh, 2016). The youth leaders have been systematically sensitised and educated about the NYP ob-

jectives and priorities, as well as the SDGs (Singh, 2016). Additionally, the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (GCCC) represents the cross-cutting quality of P/CVE in its mandate to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts across the three pillars (peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian affairs) of work of the United Nations (UN-OCT, 2018; Rothermel, 2020). Furthermore, one of the latest UN frameworks for CT and PVE, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity’, was launched in May 2016 and revised in February 2017. This framework emphasised the incorporation of SDG 16 (Richards, 2020). The work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) also promotes the SDGs in several ways: while disarmament in itself contributes to global anti-terrorist efforts, the Organisation also facilitates cooperation and capacity building and strengthens existing counter-terrorism strategies (Rajah et al., 2019).

A number of countries have already underscored the synergy between P/CVE and development. Australia recognises that violent extremism is a development issue directly threatening poverty reduction, stability, and economic growth objectives and has in-



creased the role of its aid programmes in CVE approaches. Denmark released a plan titled ‘Principles Governing Danish Development Assistance for the Fight Against the New Terrorism’, in 2004, becoming one of the first countries to acknowledge the link between security and development. The Danish principles underline that security is necessary for development and that ensuring stability and security can be investments in poverty reduction and economic growth. Norway released an action plan in 2014 detailing its efforts to improve preventive measures to counter violent extremism. The action plan acknowledges that broader prevention encompasses reducing poverty, improving conditions for youth, and fighting marginalisation. In the United Kingdom, the Department for International Development (DFID) is scanning all current and new development projects for potential CVE relevance. Through this assessment, DFID aims to understand when projects may need dual (development and CVE) objectives that can be mutually supportive. In the United States, a 2011 USAID policy on violent extremism and insurgency was approved, this policy recognises the role development can play in addressing the social, economic, and governance grievances that drive violent extremism. Furthermore, the European Union launched a European

Security Strategy that states that security is a requirement of development. The ‘European Consensus on Development’ statement in 2006 also recognises the need for conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding and for addressing the root causes of violent conflict (e.g., poverty, weak governance, human rights abuses, gender inequality, etc.). In a 2011 development policy document, the European Commission (2011, p.11) argued that the European Union’s “development, foreign and security policy initiatives should be linked so as to create a more coherent approach to peace, state-building, poverty reduction and the underlying causes of conflict.” At the level of the United Nations, global citizenship education has been taken up as a central feature of both the new global development compact (SDG 4) and the Preventing Violent Extremism through Education Strategy (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Indirect connection

SDG 16 calls for the support of resilient and inclusive societies in their struggle for peace. Strategies include mediation, conflict transformation, dialogue, and support to local facilitators in peace processes, access to justice, meaningful participation, and fair institutions (Werther-Pietsch, 2018). All those strategies

SDGs have also an impact on P/CVE by reframing P/CVE approaches and providing vulnerable populations with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities.



aim to change the balances of power within society. They are also crucial to counter violent extremism in society. In addition, political stability and an absence of extremist violence/terrorism have a positive effect on public trust which can be a contributing factor to reaching the SDGs by 2030.

The impact of the SDGs on P/CVE approaches

The sustainable development goals already had a tremendous impact on P/CVE approaches. Recently, more holistic counter-terrorism strategies have focused on prevention and sustainable development, engaging with civil society, and proactively preventing violent extremism (Rajah et al., 2019). This could, however, be expanded. It is

important to concretise the impact that has to be derived from the SDG perspective on peace architecture. Since the interface between security and development progressively forms part of a broader constitutionalisation process in international law, it is possible that there might be a creation of a consistent body of international law leading up to a status where states internally perform along globally agreed constitutional principles, i.e., ‘whole-of-actors’ Roadmaps to Peace with binding effects on all partners involved, which would shape international relations beyond the UN Charter (Werther-Pietsch, 2018).

SDGs also have an impact on P/CVE by reframing approaches and providing vulnerable populations with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities to

create meaningful alternatives to violence and by encouraging partnerships across sectors to develop such programmes sustainably. When analysing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in their entirety, as a holistic agenda to eradicate poverty and hunger, foster human development, human rights, and peace, and ensure environment and ecosystems’ health, it becomes clear that the financing of P/CVE is important (Schiano et al., 2017). Additionally, SDGs can serve as an entry-point for tackling factors that contribute to the spread of violent extremism, but through a more neutral and empowering agenda with positive effects (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). Lastly, the sustainable development goals have also led to efforts to increase the connection between several existing UN gender agendas, such as the Women, Peace, and Securi-

ty (WPS) agenda and the P/CVE context (Rothermel, 2020). Considering and including gender is often presented as contributing to the smooth integration of security and development into the ‘holistic’ aspirations of the P/CVE agenda.

Relevant actors

➤ A core feature for both the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas is the call for whole-of-society engagement involving multi-stakeholder partnerships between actors from national and local governments, the private sector, civil society, the media, and academia. Local governments such as cities, municipalities, and their actors, such as mayors, are, similarly, focused on addressing the practical concerns of their citizens that cut across the different global agendas, including those related to P/CVE and SDG 16 (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). The difficult questions about social integration, polarisation, hate, and violent extremism that mayors encounter in their daily work cannot be viewed separately from the provision of local needs including housing, psychosocial, healthcare, education, jobs, and more. The actions of states are also critical given that research suggests that the role of

the State and the law enforcement and governance institutions is crucial in promoting narratives of injustice and generating grievances that can contribute to violent radicalisation.

Both the SDGs and the different P/CVE approaches put primary responsibility for implementation on Member States. While the importance of civil society and other actors is recognised, the scope of their role is defined by the priorities and internal political agendas of national governments. The political dimension of countering violent extremist interventions is thus considerable. In recent years, the engagement of civil society organisations for peace, human rights, and democracy experienced a continued downward trend, known as the phenomenon of shrinking space. In certain circumstances, e.g., in ungoverned and weak states, legislation all too often tends to cut down and restrain political life (Werther-Pietsch, 2018). However, civil society should be the primary driver of the transition of CVE approaches since they are able to facilitate increased participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups and to broker increased collaboration for social indicators monitoring in the context of the SDGs.

Therefore, vulnerable populations should be provided with innovative economic, social, and political participation opportunities to create meaningful alternatives to violence. Citizen engagement is crucial in reframing P/CVE approaches in light of the SDG agenda. Accordingly, sustainable partnerships across sectors to realise those opportunities are critical (Schiano et al., 2017).

Citizen engagement is crucial in reframing P/CVE approaches in light of the SDG agenda.

Lastly, both the SDG and P/CVE agenda aim to maximise the contributions of young people and women in both countering violent ideologies and working as peacebuilders. More attention, however, should be paid to the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives that include and engage youth and women, as well as holistic development priorities and the participation in decision-making of both groups. (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019; Pulubuhu et al., 2017).

Links with specific Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

CVE approaches cannot only be linked to SDG 16. SDG 1 aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. It also takes the form of hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making, which are all conditions conducive to violent extremism.

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

SDG 3 implies that the role of health should be reconsidered, including its relationship with the concept of 'well-being'. Good living conditions are fundamental to well-being. **A change to a mental health and public health approach might be therefore necessary in the P/CVE field.** There is a larger prevalence of the range of mental health problems such as psychosis, personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, in persons who commit or want to commit violent extremist

acts in comparison with other groups in society (Logan, 2022). Integrating a public health approach in developing CVE-related programmes might destigmatise the issue of wanting or needing to seek help, as well as having the resources and ability to access advice and services since this is an issue that the medical system has dealt with over the past decade. This is, among other factors, due to policy decisions that created adverse health outcomes and mistrust within minority communities. Furthermore, public health could contribute to policy making and programme development, thereby helping to shift CVE away from its dependence on law enforcement and closer to mental health education, youth development, and other human services sectors. For example, an investment in a child's spectacles can potentially be a violence prevention strategy, it may prevent a child from going down a potentially destructive path by simply offering tools to refocus on school. Many health activities may not be CVE-specific, but are often CVE-relevant. Thus, **mental health and public health services can greatly contribute to targeted violence reduction.** The 10 Essential Functions of Public Health can provide guidance about how the public health approach can contribute to preventing extremist violence (National Academies of Sciences, 2017).

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Both the Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism and the 2030 agenda mention the importance of quality education. Education plays a key role in promoting shared world values and fostering cultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and social integration (van der Vet, 2020). **As part of the struggle against poverty and social marginalisation, every child must receive a quality education** which should include "teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy, and developing the behavioural and socioemotional skills that can contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance" (United Nations, 2016, p.1). Goal 4.7 of the Agenda includes very similar aims. This strengthens students' resilience and can prevent them from seeking answers from less reliable sources of information, which may be manipulated by violent extremist recruiters (UNESCO, 2017). Education is also emphasised in the SDGs as having the potential to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender equality and women's empowerment is not only a specific SDG (SDG 5) but is also considered a cross-cutting theme that affects the achievement of all other SDGs. It is thus important to mainstream a gender perspective in CVE approaches. Misconceptions about women's motivation and recruitment into terrorist organisations or violent extremist groups lead to counter-extremism policies that build on those misconceptions (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2016). A gendered interpretation of extremist violence recognises the often-invisible role of women in their varied roles as preventers, supporters, perpetrators, and survivors of violent extremism. It is crucial to understand agency in terrorism and in the context of the criminal justice system and to make sure that the communication material promoting the P/CVE project/programme does not reinforce gender stereotypes or increase existing inequalities feed the root causes of violent extremism and exacerbate vulnerability to it (Speckhard, 2021; Pearson et al., 2020).





SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The prevalence of water-related terrorism is increasing. This mostly includes attacking water infrastructure such as pipes, dams, weirs, levees, and treatment plants associated with water storage, treatment, and delivery. Terrorists target infrastructure to undermine government authorities and influence populations (Newsecuritybeat, 2018). This hampers the achievement of SDG 6, i.e., ensuring availability and sustainable management of water for everyone. Problems with water availability and distribution can also create instability and lead to conflict, which is a conducive factor of violent extremism. It is thus recommended to better integrate this sustainable development goal in P/CVE approaches (King, 2017).



SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

A lack of energy sources or an uneven distribution increasingly leads to energy terrorism. **Energy is the most important non-human terrorist target.** A terrorist attack on energy infrastructure undercuts the energy security of countries, which in turn may hurt the target country's national security



and economy and again hinder the achievement of SDG 7. Additionally, terrorists are increasingly targeting energy facilities or companies because of the negative phenomena following energy production, such as the unfair distribution of income, environmental degradation, and unemployment (Lee, 2022). Giving people better access to clean and sustainable energy is thus a possible P/CVE strategy as well as a sustainable development strategy.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

There is a nexus between terrorism and economic growth. Terrorism is detrimental to economic growth. This relationship is, however, dependent on country-specific factors such as political openness, cultural affiliation, and levels of political instability (Meierrieks & Gries, 2013). There is also some empirical evidence linking extremist violence to economic deprivation. Unemployed youth are typically more inclined to engage in such activities (Adelaja & George, 2020). Policy makers should, in order to prevent or combat terrorism, focus on improving the economy by creating job opportunities through the provision of a conducive environment that supports businesses and

reduces inequality gaps (Isola et al., 2019). Poverty on a societal level can often create 'enabling environments' in which the receptivity to terrorist narratives and the popular support for radical organisations can considerably increase. **Poverty creates conditions in which terrorist organisations can acquire credibility** and legitimacy, establish enduring foundations, and develop a network of 'support structures' that allow them to flourish (Cantin, 2019).

SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Part of SDG 9 is building resilient infrastructure. Infrastructure resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt to changing conditions, and recover positively from shocks and stresses. A terrorist attack can be seen as such a shock. Terrorist threats to critical infrastructure and vulnerable targets are among the most serious security challenges facing the international community today (OSCE, n.d.). The extent of actual damage to infrastructure and, more widely, to an economy depends on the vulnerability and resilience of the country in question and its location. **Developing countries and emerging economies face a significant lack of capacity to capture information on**

the damage estimates that would need to be collected by a combination of disaster risk management agencies and local governments and sector agencies. P/CVE can thus play an important role in making certain critical infrastructure more resilient. **Responses should also include risk management, through investing in adaptation measures, as well as resilience financing strategies,** which must prioritise mobilising the necessary support and stimulating the required innovation and investments from within and outside governments to address it.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Inequality is multidimensional in nature; it includes a social, an economic, and a social, economic, and ecological dimension. With social inequalities, relative deprivation is a key factor driving violent extremism (Kunst & Obaidi, 2020). Furthermore, growing inequality has a significant impact on societies and the potential to undermine democracy (Kuhn, 2020). **There is a link between socio-economic inequalities and extremist ideologies,** pathways into violent extremism, discrimination, and real and perceived inequalities and their relevance in extremism. Thus, approaches that aim to reduce inequality in order



to decrease the likelihood of extremist violence and terrorism contribute to SDG 10.

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities across Europe are facing complex environmental, social, and economic challenges as well as an increasing frequency and intensity of hazards and disasters. Therefore, the concept of resilience is vital or is important.

To tackle violent extremism and achieve resilience, strategic communication between different cities is necessary.

Additionally, SDG 11 aims to achieve resilient communities. In relation to violent extremism, the challenge or threat can be understood as the potential for violent extremists to recruit individuals to their cause and potentially even engage in violence; successful adaptation to this threat would be a community that comes together in such a way that its members are no longer vulnerable to the threat. In short, the process of becoming a resilient community would need to inherently reduce potential vulnerabilities or risk factors and promote protective experiences or conditions (Grimes et al., 2017; Ellis & Abdi, 2017). Chandra et al. (2013) identified five central components of community resilience in relation to national health security: underlying physi-

cal and psychological health of the population, economic well-being, effective communication, comprehensive engagement of diverse stakeholders in planning, and social connectedness. Research on resilience in the P/CVE field and in adjacent fields can thus contribute to some targets of SDG 11.

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

SDG 12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Violent extremism and terrorism could however hinder this. **It has been shown that violence reduces investment in capital-intensive sectors, lowering productivity.** Businesses tend to shift investment to conflict-related goods instead of investing in the production of consumption and exportable goods. There is also an adverse effect of violent extremism on agricultural production since it leads to security instability and effects access and availability of resources. Additionally, terrorist conflicts might lead to an increased number of people forcibly displaced. The total economic impact of refugees and internally displaced people should not be underestimated and accounts for lost production, consumption and investment in the country of the conflict. Furthermore, fear of falling victim to violence changes consump-

tion and work-related decisions. It leads to increased transportation costs, reduced productivity and dampened consumption (UNDP, 2019).

SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and

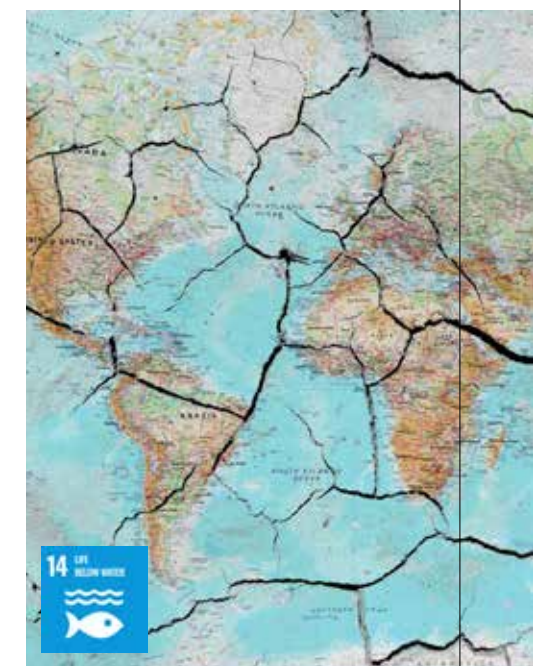
SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG 13, 14, and 15 are all climate change related. There is an overlap between P/CVE and climate change prevention. On the one hand, people and countries that are impacted by climate change are often more vulnerable to terrorist recruitment (Security Council, 2021). On the other hand, terrorism and violent extremism also adversely affect the environment. Successfully fighting climate change and countering terrorism both depend on promoting good governance and strengthening partnerships with national, regional and international actors. Where vulnerabilities overlap, solutions often overlap as well. **Climate change can be described**

as a threat multiplier, indirectly escalating the risk of conflict through mechanisms such as food and water insecurity, economic shocks, and human mobility (Security Council, 2021).

Ensuring the climate and conflict-sensitivity of interventions will be key to making sure that interventions are less prone to failure and are able to realise synergies and co-benefits. At present, interventions and strategies to counter violent extremism do not often take climate change into account (Nett & Rüttinger, 2016). It is thus best to use existing knowledge on the nexus to inform context-specific adaptation and/or mitigation intervention(s) at multiple scales across the globe (Asaka, 2021).

However, it might be possible that investment in climate solutions could increasingly be connected to efforts to reduce the 'threat of terrorism', rather than as a standalone imperative in itself when connecting it with P/CVE. To avoid this, it is crucial that there is a more rigorous analysis to understand where an investment in climate solutions can help reduce the impact and likelihood of support for violent terror groups and wider conflict issues. Building engagement strategies from this analysis and learning from people living and working in environments where climate change,



conflict, and violent groups using terror tactics overlap, can help the climate justice and environmental peacebuilding movements (Asaka, 2021; Street, 2021).

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Several national and international governments and practitioners have underscored the synergy between P/CVE and development. Both concepts diverge and converge in numerous ways, e.g., poverty, poor governance, and socio-political exclusion. Currently, there still remains a gap between security and development (Kessels & Nembr, 2016).

SDG 16 provides an opportunity to bridge this development and security divide. **The 2030 Agenda emphasises the interdependency of development and security** by expressing that “sustainable development cannot be realised without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.” (United Nations, 2015, p.9). The linkage between the SDGs and P/CVE objectives offers an entry point for development and se-

curity actors to come together to promote inclusive and multidimensional approaches to achieve a peaceful society (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). As stated before, there are close parallels between the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) recommendations and many of SDG 16's targets (Zhou et al., 2017). Both agendas emphasise the importance of strengthening civil society, building social cohesion and resilience, the need for government to be responsive to citizens' needs, and the importance of respecting human rights and addressing grievances and inequality (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). Achieving SDG 16 will thus require development actors (e.g., bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, responsible national ministries and departments, international non-governmental organisations) to engage with security actors (e.g., ministries of interior, justice, foreign affairs, and defence; law enforcement actors; and regional and multilateral organisations), especially in fragile and post-conflict contexts, which are often vulnerable to violent extremism (Ensor, 2017).

However, integrating P/CVE objectives in development programmes or implementing P/CVE initiatives in fragile and conflict-affected areas

comes with its own challenges due to the lack of access, resources, and capacities and the involvement of governmental departments with different coordination mechanisms (Fink & Bhulai, 2016; Anderlini & Rosand, 2019). For instance, trust deficits, unintended stigmatisation, and a discrepancy in tolerance for long-term CVE initiatives versus long-term development goals could hinder the successful integration of the two agendas (Kessels & Nembr, 2016). Additionally, the apolitical mandates of development institutions and the political dimension of P/CVE interventions bring along some risks. This, however, also highlights an opportunity and need for external actors to be engaged (Zhou et al., 2017). On the development side, strengthening local institutions and political empowerment will be key to the successful implementation of SDG 16, which will implicitly promote means of addressing local grievances through a non-violent, bottom-up process (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). As such, addressing governance-related P/CVE issues through the broader SDG 16 lens that is less securitised and has wider ownership from Member States offers great potential (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

Recommendations

In light of the SDG agenda, approaches to P/CVE can be reframed by addressing predominant underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and violent extremism that regularly meet with fragility. It is, however, a two-way street. The relationship is best framed as one of mutual benefit between programming that supports complementary goals. P/CVE can prove a valuable vehicle for bringing together state officials, law enforcement agencies, civil society, and communities to formulate collaborative strategies. P/CVE actors have already laid some valuable groundwork through efforts to enhance community resilience, strengthen community policing, and foster greater understanding of the drivers (Fink & Bhulai, 2016). It is important to emphasise the integration of SDGs in P/CVE so as to keep in mind that state responses to countering violent extremism can mask larger democratisation demands in society. Without that integration, widespread economic violence sustained by the State in the name of countering extremism might be justified (Huff et al., 2016). It is thus essential that policy responses do not externalise the debate on conflict management, which is key to state and national cohesion.

Some other recommendations for policy makers to improve P/CVE approaches by integrating the SDG agenda include the consideration of the roots of extremism when addressing peacebuilding efforts. It is also important to balance short-term, medium-term, and long-term objectives and the related investments to address extremism comprehensively. Moreover, public spending should be aligned with the SDGs. Member States should therefore allow for an inclusive, transparent, and accountable open budget and legislative mechanisms that ensure social participation and ownership at the local level (Schiano et al., 2017).



In light of the SDG agenda, approaches to P/CVE can be reframed by addressing predominant underlying factors of poverty, inequality, and violent extremism



Vice versa, in order to optimise the efficiency and impact of development programmes with integrated P/CVE objectives, it is recommended to establish a baseline of knowledge on the interaction between security and development in relation to P/CVE and to refine and support monitoring and evaluation tools in insecure environments. Additionally, a robust learning capacity should be developed to apply the principle of do no harm. Looking at P/CVE approaches, it is key to clearly define the objectives and target audiences and identify realistic targets and timelines for the sustainable development programmes. Furthermore, the importance of the local level and developing context-specific initiatives in countering extremist violence can and should be applied to development initiatives (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Recommendations can also be given to enhance both the P/CVE and SDG agendas and integrate them coherently and effectively. Existing initiatives should be leveraged and a global platform to allow for regular multi-stakeholder discussions around the P/CVE and SDG agendas should be developed. It is also suggested to better advocate for an independent, vibrant civil society sector,

which is critical to the realisation of the whole-of-society approach that underpins the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas. Thirdly, the development of country-based platforms in fragile and conflict-affected states that cut across the P/CVE and SDG 16 agendas is needed. There should also be more national-level interconnectivity among multiple, interrelated strategies. The funding strategy of programmes should be driven by local analysis and priorities and data collection and analysis on the interlinkages between the SDG and P/CVE agendas and how they can be further strengthened should be leveraged. Governance is often less emphasised in the P/CVE discourse, but it is front and centre when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs. As such, more attention should be given to addressing governance-related P/CVE issues through the broader SDGs lens that is less securitised and less repressive and has wider ownership from Member States (Anderlini & Rosand, 2019).

After the above analysis of the interconnection of P/CVE and SDGs, it is clear that P/CVE should be recognised while trying to achieve other SDGs. This does not mean that all development assistance needs have to include specific objectives aimed at

P/CVE, but instead emphasis should be placed on the importance of recognising P/CVE relevance as part of an ongoing development work and the potential benefits of integrating some targeted P/CVE interventions into development programming where appropriate (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Evaluation

In 2017, the UN adopted a global SDG indicator framework which includes 244 indicators across its 17 goals and 169 targets. However, many of the SDG indicators assess outcomes rather than the comprehensive and integrated 'upstream' policies and interventions required to deliver the outcomes. Creating indicators is time consuming and may be burdensome, particularly in developing countries where access to appropriate high-quality data may be lacking. Evaluating the implementation of SDG 16 so far has taken four main forms: data gathering and analysis by the secretariats of the UN system using indicators agreed upon with Member States; monitoring by NGOs

and programmes such as the Small Arms Survey; voluntary national evaluations and reports; and high-level political reviews within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations (Savoia, 2021).

In comparison with the 2030 Agenda, the P/CVE field is even more characterised by unclear scope and underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Rigorous evaluations of P/CVE programmes are required to inform decisions about whether to sustain, discontinue, or scale up these efforts. Despite the extensiveness of P/CVE programmes around the world, data on the impact of these programmes are lacking. Reasons for this include several practical, political, conceptual, and logistical challenges that policymakers and practitioners face when evaluating P/CVE initiatives. It is important to understand whether the evaluation is useful, context-specific, ethical, accurate, feasible, independent, culturally sensitive, systemic oriented, and transferable, and to include a counterfactu-

al situation (what-if scenario). Those requirements are often difficult to achieve (Savoia, 2021).

It might be possible to adapt a P/CVE programme evaluation framework from the field of public health (Savoia, 2021). Also, a developmental evaluation where stakeholders of diverse backgrounds are contributing to the development of initiatives could be well-suited to the work of evaluating emerging P/CVE programmes designed to tackle a complex social phenomenon with no clear single causal factors (Savoia et al., 2020). Moreover, this approach enables the evaluator and the project developer to work together in an iterative process to develop and assess a programme. It could facilitate collaboration and cooperation between those with different types of expertise. It is also recommended to establish a baseline of knowledge on the interaction between security and development in relation to P/CVE and to refine and support monitoring and evaluation tools in insecure environments.

“ In comparison with the 2030 Agenda, the P/CVE field is even more characterised by unclear scope and underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation frameworks ”

Risks and obstacles of connecting SDGs with P/CVE

Notwithstanding the benefits of recognising the interlinkage between the SDGs and the P/CVE agendas, there are some legitimate concerns that a conceptual blurring between security and development has not necessarily led to better policies but in fact to confusion and exposure to abuse (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Although development and security aims can be overlapping and mutually reinforcing, there are challenges in integrating P/CVE objectives in stabilisation and development programmes. A lack of

trust between governments and civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors delivering development assistance contributes to reluctance on both sides to engage in collaborative partnerships without further clarity on concepts, parameters, and implications. Furthermore, the long-term nature of development initiatives runs contrary to the focus on immediate gains seen as necessary to address dynamic and rapidly changing security environments.

If traditional development programmes are effective and correctly done, particularly in areas vulnerable to violent extremism, the added value of P/

CVE measures might be contested. The evolving security challenges and the blurring of traditional lines between criminal, political, and terrorist violence does, however, call for a change in those traditional development programmes.

A lack of trust between governments and civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors delivering development assistance contributes to reluctance on both sides to engage in collaborative partnerships



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COVID-19, terrorism, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism

by Anasuya Ray

In March 2020, when the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization, it was impossible to imagine its potential scale or intensity. Almost three years into this

generation-defining crisis, it is clear that the pandemic has been a landmark event in current times and decisively influenced the geopolitical situation. Impacts of the pandemic have presented complex, multifaceted, and constantly

evolving challenges for United Nations Member States, affecting almost every area of policy and practice, including counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE). While many States managed to deal with the effects of the



pandemic, the long-term impacts remain fluid and evolving. Therefore, envisioning a post-pandemic landscape necessitates understanding existing trends, many of which have varied in scale, severity, scope, and intensity and differed across geographic regions, with growing disparities between resource-rich and resource-scarce States.

Since its onset, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) has explored the pandemic's impact on global terrorism and published a four paper analytical series on the topic. During this process, CTED has collaborated with all its partners – including Member States, United Nations agencies, member entities of its Global Research Network (GRN), civil society organizations, and the private sector – to evaluate, monitor, and assess the impacts of the pandemic on the terrorist threat as well as on counter-terrorism and CVE responses.

Key trends

Terrorism and violent extremism

Terrorist groups have sought to exploit pandemic-related socioeconomic grievances and political tensions – often

exacerbated by related restrictions – to expand their influence, drive their recruitment efforts, and undermine State authority. This is especially relevant for Member States facing fragile sociopolitical conditions and terrorism threats. However, while it is clear that COVID-19 has exacerbated many pre-existing issues and challenges that shape the threat landscape, more research is required to understand whether there is any correlation between pandemic-related impacts and changes in the nature or intensity of terrorist violence.



In many regions, the pandemic is likely to have increased the underlying drivers and structural factors that are often conducive to terrorism

Terrorists and violent extremists have sought to exploit sociocultural restrictions (including – but not limited to – closures of schools, community-based activities and religious services as well as the lack of employment and

entertainment opportunities) and continued to disseminate propaganda, disinformation and misinformation, and radicalize potential recruits to violence.¹ Early evidence suggests that there may have been an increase in the number of youth and children accessing extremist content online (including through gaming platforms) due to pandemic-related social isolation, thereby creating concerns about potential radicalization to terrorism.² While there is significant information regarding this pandemic-related terrorist and violent extremist activity (particularly online), there is as yet limited data on the long-term impacts of those recruitment and radicalization efforts.

Experts suggest that while pandemic-related restrictions have artificially and temporarily suppressed the threat of terrorism, their easing may result in an increase in terrorist violence.³ In conflict zones facing terrorism/terrorist threats, the pandemic appears to have had limited impact on terrorist activity, allowing pre-existing trends of violence conducted by terrorist groups and their affiliates to continue. In non-conflict zones, travel restrictions and quarantine measures have

1 Michael King and Sam Mullins (Just Security), “COVID-19 and terrorism in the West: has radicalization really gone viral?” 4 March 2021.

2 Caleb Spencer (BBC), “Coronavirus: children may have been radicalized in lockdown”, 30 June 2020.

3 Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities (S/2021/655).

instead created challenges for terrorist groups in terms of planning and operational activities, thereby undermining their ability to carry out attacks.

There are also concerns about increased terrorism-financing vulnerabilities. Experts, including the Financial Action Task Force,⁴ suggest that pandemic-related changes in financial behaviours (especially the growth of contactless transactions and increased digital onboarding) have exacerbated these vulnerabilities. Additionally, proceeds from pandemic-related relief efforts can be misused for terrorism-financing purposes. This has created new opportunities for terrorist groups to abuse fundraising platforms and the non-profit sector for terrorism financing under the guise of charitable giving.

Counter-terrorism and CVE responses

During the pandemic, social restrictions to contain transmission of the virus have limited (by necessity) freedom of movement and other human rights (including freedom of assembly, speech, and expression). These measures, and the resulting closure of civic spaces, made it hard for

civil society and other non-state CVE actors to conduct programmatic interventions (including gender-related interventions) in communities vulnerable to radicalization. The resulting vacuum can be exploited by those groups who are looking to fuel existing social grievances and tensions by targeting disaffected individuals.

The increased securitization of pandemic responses, the deployment of counter-terrorism tools and measures to implement pandemic-related restrictions, and the use of terrorism charges to prosecute COVID-19-related offences remain a significant source of concern. The proliferation of emergency measures and the curtailing of civil liberties have raised questions about State overreach which, if left unchecked, has the potential to exacerbate existing grievances and may be exploited by terrorists and violent extremists.

Faced with the secondary impacts of the pandemic – including growing economic inequities and deepening social divisions, precipitated by an erosion of trust in governments – many States have suffered severe setbacks, risking the reversal of socioeconom-

ic progress. These economic impacts have also increased humanitarian needs at a time when pandemic-related travel restrictions contributed to curtailing humanitarian access and outreach.

In some States, these economic impacts have also necessitated the diversion of existing resources from counter-terrorism training and other capacity-building measures. Decreased funding for training and capacity-building projects, reduction in security assistance, and the halting of peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development initiatives to counter violent extremism may cause retrenchment in counter-terrorism measures and security assistance.⁵ This can create further challenges for States most at risk of terrorism, which typically require such assistance.

Key global trends and Member States' responses:

➤ In response to the renewed surge in COVID-19 infections, some States have reinstated social restrictions and emergency powers introduced in the initial months of the pandemic (thereby raising concerns that COVID-19 is being used as a pretext to

curtail civil liberties).⁶ The reinstatement of these containment measures has led to growing discontent and disillusionment with pandemic-related measures, causing social unrest in some areas.

➤ In many States, this suspension of certain rights (e.g., mobility or assembly), the gendered implications of social isolation measures,⁷ the economic downturns⁸ and the stigmatization of, and discrimination against, some populations⁹ (i.e., refugees, migrants, and displaced populations) raised significant human rights concerns and have the potential to increase underlying grievances that can contribute to radicalization to violence.

➤ The pandemic has also undermined women's economic security by disproportionately causing loss of employment. Entrenched traditional gender stereotypes have increased their workload as caregivers and thereby negatively impacted their



In response to the renewed surge in COVID-19 infections, some States have reinstated social restrictions and emergency powers

inclusion in the political process (owing to the difficulties of balancing domestic and professional duties).¹⁰

➤ Border closures and new technologies and procedures at points of entry (facial recognition, biometrics systems, and contact tracing) had curtailed

the movement of people, potentially also restricting the mobility of terrorist groups during the early days of the pandemic. Various criminal networks might seek to abuse biometric and other related data by exploiting existing vulnerabilities in the system. Normalizing these exceptional measures in

4 "Update: COVID-19-related money laundering and terrorist financing", December 2020.

5 Amy Dodd, Dean Breed and Daniel Coppard (Development Initiatives) "How is aid changing in the COVID-19 pandemic?", 9 November 2020.

6 International Centre for Not-for-profit Law and European Centre for Not-for-profit Law, [COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker](https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/). Available at <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/> (accessed on 10 October 2020).

7 United Nations, "Policy brief: [the impact of COVID-19 on women](#)", 9 April 2020.

8 Titan M. Alon and others, "[The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality](#)", National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 26947 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2020).

9 Zolbert Institute on Migration and Mobility, The New School, "[Human Mobility and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Principles of Protection for Migrants, Refugees, and Other Displaced Persons](#)".

10 Saskia Brechenmacher and Caroline Hubbard (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), "How the coronavirus risks exacerbating women's political exclusion", 17 November 2020.



Financial disruptions caused by the pandemic may render terrorist groups more prone to criminal activities “

a post-pandemic world would create a wide range of challenges, including significant human rights concerns around data protection and privacy. As such, any technology or surveillance measures must be in accordance with the law, necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory, restricted in time and have stringent safeguards in place to uphold and protect human rights.

➤ Financial disruptions caused by the pandemic may render terrorist groups more prone to criminal activities, including drug smuggling, trafficking in minerals and precious stones, fraud through electronic means, the sale of counterfeit medicines,

and cybercrime. International travel restrictions could also give rise to new trafficking and cash smuggling routes.¹¹ As States strengthen their legislation and measures for countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), the pandemic is also fuelling a debate on the extent to which targeted financial sanctions might impact emergency humanitarian responses.

➤ The pandemic further reduced the degree of attention given to the security and humanitarian challenges posed by the detention conditions of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) in prison

settings and of their family members in makeshift camps. The urgency of the situation has been highlighted by reports of COVID-19 cases in the crowded camps that house ISIL-associated women and children in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.¹²

Key regional trends

➤ Member States have continued to use monitoring tools and surveillance to track the movement of individuals, including by accessing their geolocation and communication data. In Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas,¹³ reports suggest that some States have used pandemic-related restrictions to curb dissent by targeting groups that raise legitimate con-

11 Eurasian Group on combatting money laundering and financing of terrorism, "Information Note: concerning the COVID-19 impact on the EAG countries' AML/CFT efforts and measures taken to mitigate the ML/TF risks stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic".

12 United Nations, Security Council, "Amid rising COVID-19 infection rates, medical supply shortages in Syria, more testing key to gauging extent of outbreak, humanitarian chief tells Security Council", press release, 16 September 2020.

13 International Press Institute, "Rush to pass 'fake news' laws during COVID-19 intensifying global media freedom challenges", 3 October 2020.

cerns, banning opposition political parties, shutting down independent media outlets, and curtailing press freedom.

➤ Violent extremist actors have adapted their online and offline narratives in response to the pandemic. Groups affiliated with ideologies stemming from xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief (XRIRB) – notably those located in Western Europe – have exploited the pandemic for recruitment and propaganda purposes.¹⁴ There has also been a global increase in misogynistic online content, which risks intensifying violence against women and girls. Initial evidence from South and South-East Asia suggests that digital forums have been used to spread false rhetoric and hate speech about women, potentially provoking online and offline violence.¹⁵

➤ In West Africa and the Sahel, ongoing violence and the pandemic have created specific challenges for children. Out of school, many are at risk of being forcefully recruited by



Violent extremist actors have adapted their online and offline narratives in response to the pandemic ”

14 United Nations, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, "Trends alert: [Member States concerned by the growing and increasingly transnational threat of extreme right-wing terrorism](#)", July 2020.

15 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Social media monitoring on COVID-19 and misogyny in Asia and the Pacific".

armed groups, pushed into menial labour, and at risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Elsewhere around the globe, the widespread closure of schools, religious services, and social activities has prevented front-line workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, and social workers from identifying potential signs of radicalization to violence.

- The pandemic has severely affected the implementation of protection, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration measures, CVE programming, criminal-justice processes, and judicial procedures. While some States have resumed repatriations of select nationals (mostly minors), at the height of the pandemic, barring few exceptions,^{16,17} most States halted ongoing or planned repatriation efforts of individuals associated with FTFs, with pandemic-related restrictions often cited as impediments.
- Experts from the Eurasian region have observed instances where terrorist and violent extremist groups have sought to exploit economic griev-

ances relating to the loss of employment by offering financial support to affected individuals (including offers to pay off debts or cover rent and utility expenses), perceiving this as an opportunity to indoctrinate or recruit them.

- The pandemic also forced many migrant workers to return to their countries of origin, thereby causing a dramatic decrease in remittances and potentially exacerbating existing grievances. Additionally, Governments in Central Asia are concerned that radicalization to terrorism of migrant workers working abroad could create counter-terrorism challenges on their return home.
- In some countries in Latin America, weakened democratic institutions, increasingly politicized judicial systems, and rising levels of crime and violence may be exacerbated by the pandemic. These political factors, together with pandemic-related economic issues, such as declining growth, rising inequality, and inadequate public services and social safety measures, could also con-

tribute to an increase in violent extremism.

- COVID-19 has also exacerbated humanitarian crises globally, often curtailing the ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance to the most needy and vulnerable. Some regions – notably West Africa and the Sahel¹⁸ – have experienced an increase in the targeting of aid workers by terrorist groups. Although some of the political and economic instabilities in the region predate the pandemic, COVID-19 fuelled these instabilities, which can potentially impact humanitarian relief work and further exacerbate drivers of terrorism and violent extremism in many regions.
- Even in regions where COVID-19 cases appear to be relatively low, disproportionate long-term effects of the economic slowdown and diminished international assistance could further weaken the delivery of essential services and limit economic opportunities. It is probable that in parts of Africa, violent extremism and radicalization to terrorism will increase, owing not

only to the imposition of restrictions but also to declining socioeconomic conditions, the weakening of infrastructure and governance, the deepening of inequities that fuel existing grievances, and extreme poverty and hunger (all of which are underlying drivers that fuel terrorism and violent extremism).

Future challenges

There have been tremendous strides in combating the pandemic – rising rates of inoculation (including boosters)

and decreasing numbers of infections suggest that many States may have turned a corner in combatting the pandemic. However, in many parts of the world, lack of access to vaccines (caused by unequal distribution) has left millions still vulnerable to the virus, allowing deadly variants to emerge and spread globally. The continued disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations also need to be addressed. As recovery efforts continue against a backdrop of long-

term impacts of the pandemic, the transnational nature of the challenge is clear.

- Member States must continue to uphold human rights while developing and implementing policies to contain the pandemic and avoid creating or exacerbating grievances by suppressing the fundamental freedoms of individuals. In this regard, States need to ensure that pandemic-related social restrictions (including through the use of emer-



16 Reuters, "Uzbekistan repatriates 98 people from Syrian Camps", 8 December 2020.

17 See <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/9733353>.

18 BBC, "Niger attack: French aid workers among eight killed by gunmen", 9 August 2020.

gency powers) are strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, implemented fairly in a non-discriminatory manner, and, most importantly, temporally limited.

- A whole generation of youth has directly experienced the impacts of the pandemic with closures of educational institutions, reduced employment and entertainment opportunities, and curtailed community programmes. As a result, resilience to violent extremism in fragile communities may be reduced, thereby making individuals more vulnerable to radicalization to violence in such settings.
- Despite the lack of clarity regarding potential long-term impacts, it is clear that there will be no straightforward return to pre-pandemic norms and that many working methods and approaches have likely shifted significantly and permanently. Adapting to, and thriving within, this new reality will be critical to international counter-terrorism and CVE efforts moving forward.
- In States with sizeable counter-terrorism budgets, this new reality may be an opportunity to rebalance national priorities.

However, other States, including those most impacted by terrorism, were already facing significant resource challenges prior to the pandemic and often relied on bilateral or multi-lateral support to counter the terrorism threat. It is therefore essential that counter-terrorism remains high on the international agenda and that Member States continue to prioritize international and regional cooperation to counter the evolving global terrorist threat.

- The proliferation of pandemic-related conspiracy theories and misinformation/disinformation presents an enormous challenge, as they can enhance societal divisions and increase distrust in Governments and State institutions. Terrorists and violent extremist groups across ideological spectrums are already seeking to exploit social alienation and grievances arising from pandemic-related measures and perceived State excesses by weaponizing those divisions.
- In this altered geopolitical landscape, understanding and regulating the use of new technologies to prevent abuse by terrorist and violent extremist groups remain a priority.

United Nations entities are working with Member States and other partners (including private-sector and civil society actors) to promote the effective and responsible use of new technologies, assist in the development of advanced monitoring methods, provide expertise in preventing abuse of the digital space for any terrorism-related purpose (including terrorism financing), and ensure that the use of technology to monitor border-control measures, enforce travel restrictions, and conduct contact tracing takes privacy concerns into consideration.

Conclusion

The pandemic has caused unparalleled upheaval to the existing global order and laid bare social inequities and structural challenges. A comprehensive, collaborative, and tailored approach is required to address its effects, as terrorists and violent extremists seek ways to exploit the resulting socioeconomic fault lines. Ongoing recovery efforts will provide an opportunity to rebuild social structures, based on the principles of cooperation, shared responsibility, enhanced multilateralism, and the meaningful inclusion of women, including in developing and implementing policies to address pandemic-relat-

ed challenges. However, this will be achieved only if Member States effectively address emerging terrorist trends in the post-COVID-19 threat land-

scape; develop counter-terrorism and CVE responses that are coherent, targeted, gender-sensitive, and human rights compliant; and adapt

existing policies and measures to adequately respond to evolving challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Club for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Turin (Club per l'UNESCO di Torino) promotes UNESCO ideals and programmes in the Piedmont Region (Italy). Since 1984, it plans and implements activities for young people, students and citizens within the framework of UNESCO's fields of competence: Education, Science, Culture and Communication.

These initiatives aim at promoting the knowledge and practice of human rights; facilitating dialogue among cultures and generations, and raising awareness about the United

Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The International Mediterranean Women's Forum is a UNESCO and ECOSOC NGO based (since 1997) at the Club for UNESCO in Turin. Its main purpose is to further cooperation and the exchange of experiences between women of the Mediterranean countries in order to develop and carry out sustainable solutions for the effective improvement of women's condition at a global level and, more specifically, throughout the Mediterranean.

VISITS TO THE UN CAMPUS IN TURIN



The Club for UNESCO in Turin organizes **guided visits to the UN Campus**, addressed, primarily, to high-schools students, coming from all over Italy.

The UN Campus in Turin is a unique place where three international organizations, namely the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITCILO), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) **and two associations** (Club per l'UNESCO di Torino and SIOI Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta) are located.

During the guided visits to the UN Campus and through the written materials pre-

pared by the Club per l'UNESCO di Torino, students have the opportunity to learn about the international organizations and associations based on the Campus, deepen their understanding of the UN and the 2030 Agenda, and actively engage in specific themes.

This activity is also part of the Turin Club for UNESCO engagement in the promotion of **Global Citizenship Education**.

In January-February 2023, we welcomed **300 students from Istituto Magistrale Da Vinci in Alba (CN)**. During the visits, representatives from **ITCILO, UNICRI, and UNSSC** presented the mandate and work of their organizations.

UNICRI is constantly expanding its activities in the field of postgraduate education, offering a wide range of on-campus and decentralised training opportunities to meet a variety of professional needs. UNICRI's work is based on an extensive network of high-level universities and research institutions around the world.

The Institute also offers a series of highly specialized postgraduate short-courses on topics within the scope of UNICRI's crime prevention and criminal justice mandate.



INTERVIEW

NEW GENERATIONS WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A SENSE OF BELONGING

A conversation with Olivier Roy about terrorism, extremism and identity

by Adil Radoini

THE GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX (GTI) SHOWS HUGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF EXPOSURE TO TERRORIST ACTIVITIES. AS AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION ADDRESSING TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM, WHICH GROUPS SHOULD WE FOCUS ON? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT IS THE STATE OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS?

That's a complex question! It depends on the areas of the world that you are considering, but a global trend can be distinguished. Major organized, radical groups like Da'esh and Al-Qaida are currently going through a crisis; they are in fact far less effective than they used to be due, for example, to internal turmoil, military defeats and efficiency of the law enforcement and intelligence services. Above all, Da'esh and Al-Qaida pri-

oritized suicide actions that resulted in their best people losing their lives. The Bataclan terrorist attack in France was certainly well organized – the organizers had logistical support and had planned the coup for over one year – but they are now dead or in jail. As a result, that was the last organized terrorist action on French soil.

In recent years, we are facing an increase in individual actions where the connection between the terrorists and the centre of the attacks is becoming looser. We can in fact observe individuals who pledge allegiances – at least formally – to Al-Qaida and Da'esh, yet without being supported by those networks. This trend can be described as an 'individualization' of the actions which is both good and bad news. It is good news because these types of ter-

rorist actions are less lethal (overall) but – on the negative side – they are more difficult for the police to spot and track. Additionally, local jihadist groups – active in, for example, Chad, Mali, Nigeria, and Yemen – do not indulge in global terrorism i.e., there is no global spill over from these local movements. This is very paradoxical as France has been fighting jihadist groups in Mali since 2013 but there has been no terrorist attack in France that can be traced back to them, rather all terrorist attacks were related to Syria and Iraq where France had a lower profile. If we look at the USA, lots of mass murders – which are sometimes considered terrorism – are driven by different motivations, but the patterns of the actions are the same: an individual goes somewhere to kill as many people as s/he can. Therefore, there is something

“**In recent years, we are facing an increase in individual actions where the connection between the terrorists and the centre of the attacks is becoming looser**”

that transcends political affiliations; there is a pattern of terrorist action that is transversal.

AFTER READING YOUR BOOK ON DA'ESH, I BECAME CURIOUS ABOUT HOW THE IDEOLOGY BEHIND EXTREMIST GROUPS THAT ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES TO ISLAM HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS. IF WE GO BACK 10 YEARS, WE SAW DA'ESH ESTABLISH ITS CALIPHATE IN IRAQ AND THEN EXPAND TO SYRIA WHERE MANY MILITANTS WERE ATTRACTED FROM ALL OVER EUROPE WITH A "NO FUTURE" MENTALITY, AS YOU DEFINE THEIR PERSPECTIVE IN THE BOOK. I BELIEVE THIS IS AN APT WAY TO DESCRIBE THAT GENERATION'S MENTALITY, WHERE THERE IS NO LONGER AN APPEAL IN BUILDING A SOCIETY NOR A DRIVE OR ATTRACTION FOR THESE KINDS OF RADICAL IDEOLOGY. HENCE,

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ALTER THE WAY THESE TERRORISTS THINK, AT SOME POINT? DO YOU THINK THE IDEOLOGY OF DA'ESH CHANGED AFTER ITS DEFEAT IN IRAQ AND SYRIA, AND IF SO, HOW IS THIS CHANGE NOW REFLECTED IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE IDEOLOGY?

Well, we have no alternative ideology: there is no text nor writing explaining how the situation has changed. This confirms what I wrote: it is not a matter of ideology but more of narrative. Militants joining Da'esh were not attracted by its strong ideology, but rather by the narrative of the "lonely hero" inflicting losses on the dominant society. This is the narrative of the heroic soldier who ultimately dies. This narrative is still working, but not so much with Muslims: among them there is clearly an idea that jihad is lost. Many people

believed that because democracy is becoming less rooted in Tunisia and Egypt, more people would join Da'esh, but this is not true. Young Tunisians merely try to go to Europe and that's all. We are witnessing a 'depoliticization' phase, which is clear among Muslim youth, and for me this is closely associated with the fact that the jihad moment was a generational phenomenon. I would compare it with the revolution of the leftists in the 1960s and 1970s: indeed, during the 1970s 'revolution' was as big of a word as jihad in 2010. However, when the generation of the revolutionaries became adult, the movement ended. Since the 1980s we still have some revolutionaries in the radical left, but the momentum disappeared. The same goes for jihad, however the paradigm of the "lonely hero" continues

to exist. The idea now is that you don't need to be very well organized, one guy – see the Christchurch Mosque shootings for example – can still have a tremendous impact. At this point, we can say that the narrative is more important than the ideology as we don't have very well-organized groups, but feeble networks and internet communities which are not yet very structured but potentially still very dangerous.

**“
when the generation
of the revolutionaries
became adult, the
movement ended**

I BELIEVE IT IS ALSO INTERESTING TO COMMENT ON THE SHIFT IN PREVALENCE, FROM ISLAMIST EXTREMIST NETWORKS TO THE IDEOLOGY OF EXTREME-RIGHT GROUPS. I WAS HAVING A LOOK ON TELEGRAM WITH COLLEAGUES, AND WE NOTICED THAT MANY GROUPS WERE FULL OF WHITE SUPREMACISTS AND PEOPLE SUPPORTING FASCIST OR NAZI IDEOLOGY; WE WERE WONDERING HOW THIS 'NEW' FORM OF FANATICISM SHOULD BE PREVENTED AND TACKLED? WITH THE ADVENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA YOU CAN IN FACT HAVE AN ECHO CHAMBER OF IDENTICAL IDEAS WITH THE RESULT THAT THE USER MAY EASILY BE CONVINCED THAT EVERYBODY THINKS AS S/ HE DOES. IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO MANAGE THESE PRIVATE SOCIAL NETWORKS AND TO PREVENT SUCH ENVIRONMENTS FROM

GROWING INTO SOMETHING DANGEROUS FOR SOCIETY. HENCE, WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN TACKLING THESE TYPES OF DYNAMICS?

That's very difficult because these people play on fears; they see themselves as victims, as a threatened minority, and similarly to jihadists they have this recurring idea of some sort of apocalypse approaching i.e., a very pessimistic vision of the future. The white supremacists are not trying to build a political coalition; they can easily be spotted by the security services, because they often speak 'too much' and in unprofessional ways. The discrepancy between their radicalism and their approach to a coup d'état is fascinating; Hitler did the same when he tried to organize his first coup in Mu-



Militants joining Da'esh were not attracted by its strong ideology, but rather by the narrative of the "lonely hero" inflicting losses on the dominant society



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nich, but somehow it worked. Hence, the only way to prevent these movements from spreading out is to look at the possible connection between these people and the more organized groups. This sort of shift to the right is now typical of politics in Europe: however, this is dangerous because politicians speaking about a *grand remplacement*¹ are playing in their favour. Therefore, it would be beneficial to push these extremist people to the margins; however, with the lines between normal politics and extreme politics becoming more blurred this approach works less and less. Ultimately, I would say that in terms of communication it is essential to isolate these groups, without sticking to a purely moral narrative, until they appear as losers as opposed to heroes.

MY QUESTION WAS ALSO TRYING TO LOOK AT THE PROBLEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. SINCE NETWORKS LIKE FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND TELEGRAM ARE OWNED AND MANAGED BY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS, HOW SHOULD THE STATE REGULATE CONTENT THAT IS TOO DANGEROUS OR THAT QUALIFIES AS A HATE CRIME? ON ONE EXTREME, ONE CAN LOOK AT CONSERVATIVE COUNTRIES WHERE UNAPPROVED CONTENT IS EASILY CENSORED, ON THE OTHER HAND YOU HAVE STATES RESPECTING FREEDOM OF SPEECH, BUT LEAVING IT UP TO SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES TO SCREEN ONLINE CONTENT IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT, BECAUSE THE SIZE OF PLATFORMS IS



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Hitler did the same when he tried to organize his first coup in Munich, but somehow it worked

¹ According to *The Guardian*, the *grand remplacement* or 'great replacement' conspiracy theory is a "racist premise that white Americans and Europeans are being actively "replaced" by non-white immigrants." (Steve Rose, "A deadly ideology: how the 'great replacement theory' went mainstream", *The Guardian*, 8 June 2022.)

GROWING EXPONENTIALLY . SO MAYBE STATES SHOULD GIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO THE PRIVATE SOCIETIES THAT ARE IN CHARGE OF REGULATING THESE PLATFORMS. AND IF THE PRIVATE MANAGERS CANNOT DO SO, THE STATE SHOULD INTERVENE TO REGULATE IT. WOULD THIS BE A GOOD WAY TO DEAL WITH THE EMERGING PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES? ARE THERE OTHER STRATEGIES THAT, IN YOUR OPINION, COULD BE USED?

In theory, it is a good way, the problem is that there is much disagreement on what qualifies as 'hate speech', racism and incitement to violence. So, we may all agree that any reference to Hitler is bad but then you will have some coun-

tries labelling rebel and pacifist groups as terrorists. This is the case of non-violent Salafists who are accused of fueling terrorism, leading to a call to censor speeches that are not necessarily terrorist, but which are fundamentalist, meaning that the problem lies in where to put the cursor. There is a lot of disagreement between governments on these topics, but we must strive to isolate political extremists, even though the balance between freedom of speech and hate speech is very fragile. I believe we should work in this direction, but I am not very optimistic when you see some people in power, who are regulating social media, and what they can do.

“

There is much disagreement on what qualifies as 'hate speech', racism and incitement to violence

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO GO BACK TO SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING THE VIOLENT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN AFRICA. AFTER THE DEFEAT OF DA'ESH IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WE SAW A DECREASE IN ATTACKS IN THAT AREA OF THE WORLD AND THEN A MOVEMENT TOWARDS AFRICA, IN PARTICULAR, THE SAHEL REGION. WHAT CAN EXPLAIN THIS DEVELOPMENT? IS IT LIKE AN ALGEBRAIC EQUATION WHERE YOU HAVE MINUS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND PLUS IN AFRICA? IS IT A PHYSICAL MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE OR A CHANGE THAT IS TAKING PLACE BECAUSE OF OTHER DYNAMICS AND PHENOMENA?

It is not a physical movement of people, you may have some individuals who move, but we have no example of hundreds of fighters from Syria going to Somalia or Nigeria. It's home-grown radicalism: it comes from the country where they are operating. Hence, in Mali the militants are from there and the same goes for Somalia, Mauritania, etc. If compared to Da'esh and Al-Qaida, the jihadist groups in the Sahel have an anthropological

basis that is relatively well studied. This is largely also because of climate change: when you have less water, more demographic pressure, and a change in the balance between agricultural labourers and nomads, people are more likely to be recruited into jihadist organizations. So, each country's case might be explained by its local conditions as opposed to ideology. The Tuaregs were nationalists 30 years ago, now they are largely jihadists. This shift has a local, anthropological basis, which is 'good' news because it means that those groups are not interested in exporting their jihad abroad, they may be interested in cooperating with other countries, but they don't need to have foreign fighters, while for Da'esh

and Al-Qaida foreign fighters were central. In the military operations of Da'esh foreign fighters were on the frontline, but this is not the case in the Sahel or in Somalia. Additionally, the fact that France left Mali is good because that was an internationalization of a local conflict. Ultimately, the few people from the Sahel who joined global jihad did so because of Syria and not Mali. So, we should tackle this phenomenon from a political perspective and look at success stories, Mauritania – for example – did well by using repression and support from the traditional tribal system of relations. There is ultimately a political dimension to the story where there is a need to fight corruption, as usual.

WORLDWIDE USE ISLAMISM AS A PLATFORM TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL CONFLICTS?

First because we had a wave of 'Islamization' of society in the 1990s; Islam became the way for young generations to contest traditional hierarchies. In a tribal system, people from dominated clans often use Salafism to contest the dominant higher clans. The same logic was used by the Taliban with Karzai in Afghanistan. But because everybody now claims to be an Islamist, Islam is no longer seen as the solution; when you have Da'esh fighting Al-Qaida you cannot say that Islam is the solution, so many religious figures like Mahmoud Dicko in Mali are also trying to play a role. Islam is thus no longer the monopoly of the radicals.

I HAVE A MOROCCAN BACKGROUND AND I AM WONDERING WHETHER YOU WOULD CONSIDER MOROCCO TO BE A POSITIVE EXAMPLE HERE. I REMEMBER SEEING STRONG TELEVISION CAMPAIGNS DEDICATED TO CLARIFYING WHAT ISLAM IS, IN OPPOSITION TO THE EXTREMISTS' NARRATIVE, WHICH I WOULD SAY WORKED QUITE WELL BECAUSE EVEN MOROCCO STARTED TO ACT AS A TUTOR TO OTHER COUNTRIES IN AFRICA IN TERMS OF ISLAMIC TEACHING AGAINST

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In the military operations of Da'esh foreign fighters were on the frontline, but this is not the case in the Sahel or in Somalia

ISLAMISM IS EXPLOITED BY MANY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGM TO TACKLE POLITICAL AND LOCAL ISSUES. WHY DO YOU THINK SO MANY DIFFERENT GROUPS

We should push to have Muslim communities, and not Muslim cultural minorities. But I am quite optimistic that the new generations will be able to find a sense of belonging

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THE PROLIFERATION OF THE EXTREMIST NARRATIVE. DO YOU THINK IT WAS SUCCESSFUL?

I would say it worked relatively well because it was done in a subtle way: in Morocco they were able to find a narrative of legitimization based on traditions. These networks were thus used as a tool of soft power. It worked; it didn't solve the issue globally but inside Morocco it worked.

DUE TO MY WORK IN THE CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR (CBRN) RISK MITIGATION UNIT, I KNOW THAT THESE MATERIALS CAN BE MISUSED AS WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. SINCE 9/11, WE HAVE BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL USE OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION BY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS, BUT EXCEPT FOR DA'ESH – WHO PROBABLY USED THESE TOOLS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA – THERE IS NO OTHER EVIDENCE. WHY DO YOU THINK THE JIHADIST ORGANIZATIONS NEVER USE THESE WEAPONS?

Well, Al-Qaida dreamed of having nuclear weapons of mass destruction, but it never worked. It is not because they have an ideology or religious duty, it simply didn't work.

THAT'S TRUE, I CAN TELL YOU FROM MY PERSPECTIVE THAT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO

WEAPONIZE SUCH MATERIALS, YOU NEED CERTAIN TECHNICAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS AS WELL AS EXPERT KNOWLEDGE. WHAT COULD THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE UNITED NATIONS, DO TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES POSED BY VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS?

I would say that it is important to go back to politics when possible. When states or movements have a clearly identified political goal as in Tajikistan for example during the early 1990's, it is not a matter of ideology but rather of civil war between different factions which want to have the power. When this happens, you can negotiate. The problem is when you have no possible political management i.e., there is nothing to negotiate with Da'esh or Al-Qaida. For individual terrorism, it is important to avoid adding fuel to the fire by too repressive means. For instance, a takedown on religion in France is counterproductive and won't help. But the most important thing is to dismantle the biased narrative of the radicals. Sometimes we tend to exaggerate the danger of the radicalized, which makes radicalism even more attractive for some people. Hence, it is important to create a counternarrative which makes these guys appear as losers.

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS LESS ATTRACTION TOWARD RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, ISLAM IN PARTICULAR, AMONG MARGINALIZED MIGRANT COMMUNITIES?

That was very typical of the 1990s and early 2000s where there was a shift from migrant identity to religious Muslim identity. Now there is no mass movement of Muslims in the European Union (EU), no political party, no unions. Now the interest in religion is more and more individualized, it is about personal salvation. If we look at the propaganda on TikTok, people are less radical, it is more about identity and less about jihad and the caliphate.

IT IS COMMONLY BELIEVED THAT THE SENSE OF BELONGING OF THE AMERICAN MUSLIMS TO THE UNITED STATES IS STRONGER THAN WHAT THE EUROPEAN MUSLIMS FEEL VIS-À-VIS THEIR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES OF ADOPTION, EVEN AFTER TWO OR THREE GENERATIONS. DO YOU THINK THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES CAN DO MORE TO INTEGRATE MIGRANTS? IS THERE SOMETHING THAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO TO MAKE THESE COMMUNITIES FEEL MORE AT HOME?

I think there is clearly a big difference when we compare Europe to the USA in this do-

main. Muslims there are middle class, while in the EU they are the children of immigrant workers. There is a cultural gap as traditions don't get transmitted from parents to the younger generation. This is not the case for Turkish people, for example: you don't have Turkish people among Da'esh

and Al-Qaida in Germany, for instance. This is the general story of migration. There is a confusion between religion as faith and religion as culture, but the more the youth are integrated the more they build a religious identity anchored in Western culture. We should push to have Muslim religious

communities, and not Muslim cultural minorities. But I am quite optimistic that the new generations will be able to find a sense of belonging.

Thank you, Professor, for this conversation!

Thank you!



INTERVIEW

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWED AND THE AUTHOR

Mr. Olivier Roy is presently Professor at the European University Institute (Florence): he is the scientific adviser of the Middle East Directions programme

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He headed the OSCE's Mission for Tajikistan (1993-94) and was a consultant for the United Nations Office of the Coordinator for Afghanistan (1988). He also worked as a part-time consultant for the Policy Planning Staff of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1984-2009).

His field works include Afghanistan, Political Islam, Middle East, Islam in the West and comparative religions. Mr. Roy received an "Agrégation de Philosophie" and a Ph.D. in Political Sciences.

He is the author of, among other books, "The failure of political Islam", "Globalized Islam", "Holy Ignorance", "Jihad and Death", "In search of the Lost Orient", and "Is Europe Christian?".

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The Taliban in Afghanistan: assessing new threats to the region and beyond

This report has been prepared by **Arian Sharifi**, under the guidance of **Matthew Burnett-Stuart**, **Carlotta Zenere**, and **Leif Villadsen**



Background:

This brief threat assessment report (originally published in October 2022) by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute (UNICRI) aims to analyse and assess the recent developments in Afghanistan and their broader implications on the security context at the domestic, regional, and international levels. This is a prelude to a more comprehensive report that will aim to explore and identify: (i) current sources of Taliban funding; (ii) the relationship between the Taliban and foreign terrorist groups, notably Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and

the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K); (iii) the use of sanctions, and their unintended consequences; (iv) regional relations and dynamics; and (v) potential implications for the European security context. The overall objective of this research is to provide actionable recommendations to guide the design of an integrated programme for neighbouring countries.

Introduction:

The rapid collapse of the Afghan state following the hasty withdrawal of the United States (US) and NATO forces from the country in August 2021 took the world by surprise. Given indicators such as

political fragmentation, weak legitimacy, pervasive corruption, reliance on foreign aid, the successful insurgency and others, it could be argued that the Afghan Republic was not sustainable in the long run. However, the pace at which it fell within days was hardly predictable. Exploring the reasons and context of the withdrawal of international military forces merits extensive research, but what is more urgent and critical is to keep an eye on the present situation and assess what the future may hold for Afghanistan, the region, and beyond. Using insights from reliable sources inside and outside Afghanistan, supple-

mented by secondary data, the brief analyzes the current trends in Afghanistan and outlines the related emerging threats to stability in Afghanistan, the region, and the world.

Trends and Threat Assessment:

More than one year into the Taliban rule, Afghanistan faces an increasingly precarious situation. The departure of foreign military forces, the halting of development projects, the breakdown of the Afghan state, the banking crisis, the economic and monetary sanctions against the Taliban, and many other developments have caused a total collapse of the Afghan economy, driving millions of people into poverty, and causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.¹ Meanwhile, as the de facto authorities, the Taliban face widening internal fragmentation, increased desertion in their rank and file, depletion of their financial resources, thriving organized criminal activity, the presence of foreign terrorist organizations, erosion of their domestic legitimacy, and failure at gaining international recognition.

Given the security and political dynamics on the ground, at least five major trends, with potential regional and global implications, are emerging in Afghanistan. These are (1) intra-Taliban fragmentation, (2) prevalence of regional and



What is more urgent and critical is to keep an eye on the present situation and assess what the future may hold for Afghanistan, the region, and beyond



global terrorist groups, (3) rising anti-Taliban resistance, (4) thriving illicit economy and drug trade, and (5) large-scale movements of people. These trends are briefly discussed below, and their implications for regional and global security are subsequently analysed.

1. Intra-Taliban Fragmentation:

At present, four major fault lines exist within the Taliban:

a. **Tribal Fragmentation:**

The historical power politics between the two main Pashtun tribes – Durani and Ghilzai – is manifesting within the Taliban, creating a serious rift in the movement.² The foundation of the movement was laid by the Duranis – Mullah Mohammad Omar and his close aides – in 1994, while the Ghilzais joined them later, mainly through the Haqqani family and other commanders.³ While the rivalry between the Durani and Ghilzai Taliban existed from the outset, the contest was substantially exacerbated after their return to power.⁴ Sources in Kabul report that this has already caused political discontent and violent skirmishes between the two.⁵ Given its historical roots, the Durani-Ghilzai rivalries with the Taliban are likely to become a significant problem in the future, which may lead to

political incoherence, structural disintegration, and violent conflict.



The historical power politics between the two main Pashtun tribes – Durani and Ghilzai – is manifesting within the Taliban, creating a serious rift in the movement

b. **Factional Fragmentation:**

Related to the tribal fragmentation within the Taliban is the structural rift between the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network – the two main factions within the movement. The Haqqani Network predates the Taliban movement by at least two decades, and while it joined the Taliban in the early months of the movement's conception in the mid-1990s, the Haqqanis maintained de facto autonomy and their main power base in eastern Afghanistan.⁶ Now in the seat of power, both factions are attempting to gain key positions in the government. The Quetta Shura Taliban, being the founders and the majority, want the largest share of power,⁷ while the Haqqani-

nis claim they deserve the most because they have been more active militarily and have led some of the most “spectacular” attacks against Western and Afghan forces. Moreover, they have also conducted some of the most gruesome suicide missions in the last two decades.⁸

c. **Ideological Fragmentation:**

The stark disagreements between the hardliners and moderate Taliban leaders further intensify the rifts within the Taliban movement. Figures such as Supreme Leader Mullah Haibatullah, Mullah Mohammad Hassan, Mullah Yaqub, Qayoom Zakir, Sadr Ibrahim, Qari Fasihuddin, Mullah Tajmir Jawad, and others are hardliners who believe that the Taliban must maintain their loyalty to their strict interpretation of Islam, excluding all non-Taliban political figures from the government, and passing puritanical laws and regulations.⁹ On the other hand, individuals like Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, Mullah Abdul Salaam Hanafi, and others within the leadership are moderate.¹⁰ They have advocated for inclusion in the government structure and moderation in policy, arguing that those two would help gain domestic



legitimacy and foreign recognition. This difference of opinion has created a major rift within the Taliban leadership.

d. **Structural Fragmentation:**

The final crack within the Taliban movement is due to the differences of opinion between the leadership and some mid-level commanders. For years, the core of the Taliban's war machine has been the “*Delgais*” – units of 70 to 90 fighters led by a “*Delgai Meshr*” or commander.¹¹ While under the overall command of the top leadership, the *Delgai Meshers* have always enjoyed great autonomy in combat de-

isions at the operational and tactical levels and have had direct operational relations with foreign terrorist groups.¹² Since the Taliban took power over a year ago, a rift has emerged between these commanders and the movement's leadership. The commanders claim that they have borne the real burden of the war for years and that the leadership is spoiled with luxurious lifestyles, is abandoning the global “jihad” mission since they took power in Afghanistan.¹³ This has resulted in grave disobedience of orders and directives issued by the top leadership. To bring the *Delgais* under

control, Taliban leaders have tried to dismantle the movement's structure and integrate the *Delgais* into the formal structures of the Ministries of Defence and Interior Affairs. To their dismay, however, the *Delgai* commanders are said to have openly refused such integration and vowed to remain intact in their structures.¹⁴

Threat Assessment:

The implications of the Taliban's fragmentation can be manifold for Afghanistan and beyond. At least four potential threats can be assessed as a result of the Taliban's disintegration:

a. **Political Instability:**

Fragmentation within the Taliban movement could lead to further political instability within Afghanistan, creating a more conducive environment for radicalism, terrorism, and organized crime. Given the trans-border nature of these activities, the likelihood of spillover effects into the region and beyond is high.



Fragmentation within the Taliban movement could lead to further political instability within Afghanistan

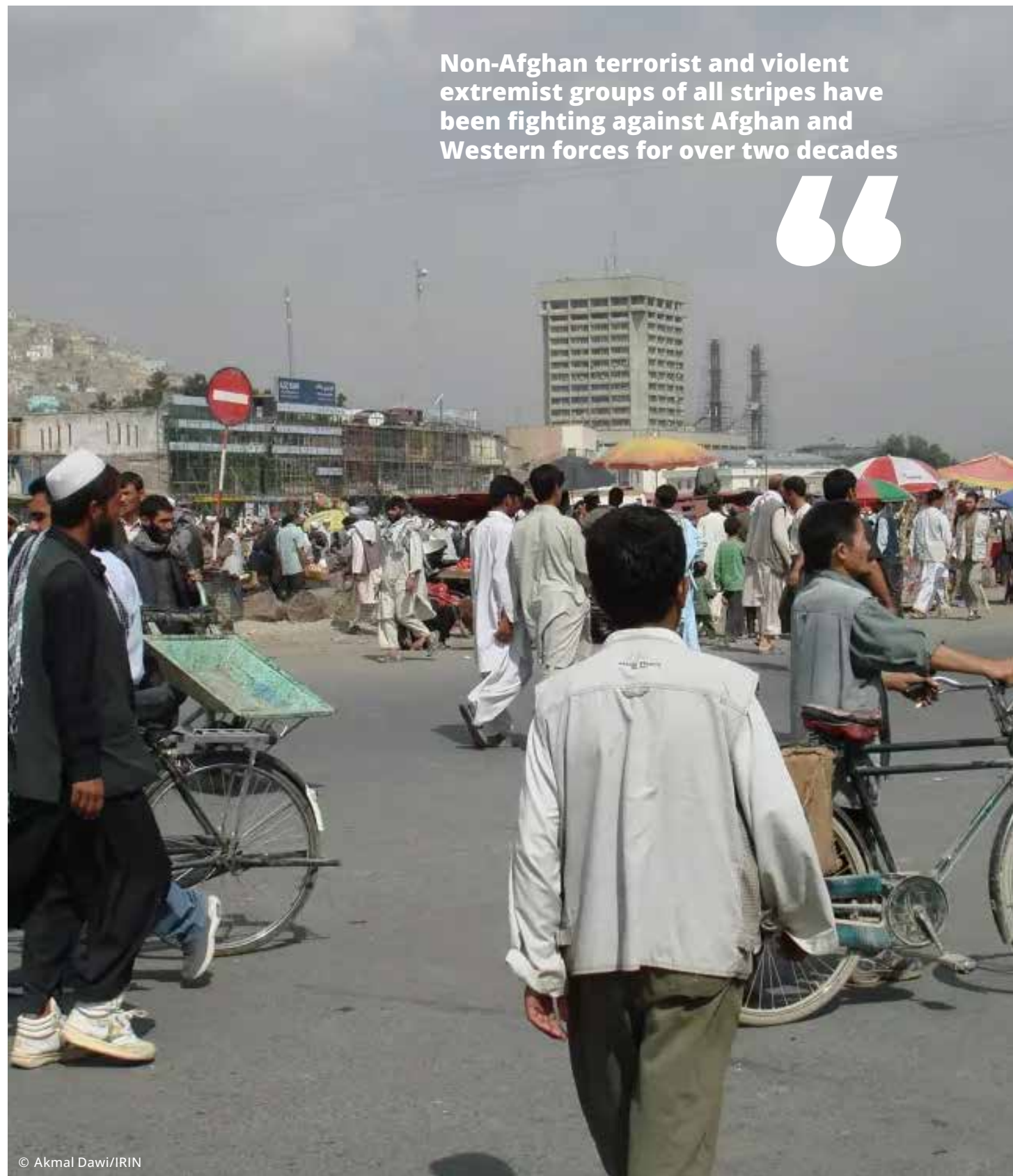
b. **Armed Conflict:** Disintegration entails the strong risk for armed clash within the different factions, which in turn may exacerbate socio-economic conditions, leading to both increased outward migration, as well a spillover of violence into the region and beyond. Further, violent conflict might cause widespread killing and the death of innocent people, war crimes, and large-scale human rights violations, which could eventually compel the international community to intervene.

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Disintegration entails the strong risk of armed clashes within the different factions, which in turn may exacerbate socio-economic conditions

c. **Unclear Lines of Communication:** While the Taliban have not been internationally recognized as the government of Afghanistan, many currently communicate with them as the de facto authorities. Maintaining such communication is important for humanitarian operations and

urgent political and security issues. Fragmentation within the Taliban eliminates a single interlocutor with which the international community can communicate, which may lead to confusion, uncertainty, and unpredictability. In such a situation, the international community would not be able to hold anyone accountable for any action, causing a situation of chaos and instability.

d. **Favourable Environment for Foreign Terrorists:** Fragmentation within the Taliban makes the environment more conducive to the thriving of foreign terrorist groups, as they can play one faction against another to their benefit. Factions could have special relations with foreign terrorist groups without other factions knowing and without the possibility of being held accountable by the international community. The presence and killing of al-Qaeda Leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is one example of this, as some observers, including Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad, the Former US Special Envoy for Afghanistan, suggest that only some Taliban may have known about Zawahiri’s presence in Kabul.¹⁵



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2. Regional and Global Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups:

Non-Afghan terrorist and violent extremist groups of all stripes have been fighting against Afghan and Western forces for over two decades. These groups are not only still present but are also finding unprecedented opportunities to consolidate their forces, and seek to plan, stage, and conduct terrorist activities across the region and the world.¹⁶ These include the following three categories:

a. **Pakistani Violent Extremist Groups:** Between 10 to 14 Pakistani violent extremists groups, including Tehrik-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), Sepah-e-Sahaba (SeS), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Mohajideen-e-Albadr (MeAB), Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI) and others are at large, and poised to take advantage of the new situation. Except for some fractions within the TTP, all other Pakistani violent extremist groups have traditionally been allied with the Taliban and still seem to be.

b. **Regional Terrorist Groups:**

Four main regional groups, including the Chinese East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Tajikistani Jundullah and Jamat-e-Ansarullah are present in Afghanistan. These groups have been allied with the Taliban for years and aim to use Afghan territory as a training ground and then infiltrate Central Asia, China, and Russia to conduct attacks.

c. **Global Terrorist Groups:**

Three main globally-oriented groups are in operation in Afghanistan. These include Al-Qaida (AQ), Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). Of these three, the last one is the largest and strongest, having managed to survive and thrive despite heavy attacks by Afghan and US forces for years. Afghan and coalition forces claimed to have killed or captured over 13,000 of its fighters, including five consecutive emirs between 2015 and 2020.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the group has shown spectacular resilience, managing to replace and regain its lost manpower, expand its geographical foothold, and increase the number and intensity of its operations. The group's attack at Kabul airport last August

and bombings in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz, Herat and other provinces over the past months show that it has all intentions to escalate its operations.

Sources interviewed for this research project that the ISKP will continue to bring together many of the regional groups, including some ETIM, IMU and Ansarullah fighters, as well as many dissatisfied Taliban fighters either under its flag or through some other arrangement, and will most likely be the next chapter of regional and global terrorism.¹⁸

Al-Qaida, and its affiliate AQIS, also seem to be increasing their presence and operations, although in an advising, training, and relation-building role.¹⁹ Besides running training camps for Afghan and foreign terrorists in southern Afghanistan, Al-Qaida is trying to build relations with ISKP and its affiliates and ultimately create a unified front for global jihadists.²⁰ The organization is also making inroads into northern Afghanistan, particularly Badakhshan province, to train as well as unify members of terrorist groups belonging to the Central Asian states.²¹



Al-Qaida, and its affiliate AQIS, also seem to be increasing their presence and operations

Threat Assessment:

The composition of the foreign terrorist and violent extremist groups in Afghanistan illustrates the wide range of threats they pose to the region and the world. These groups may intend to conduct terrorist attacks on the world stage and are now assembling people to use the Afghan territory as a safe haven. Given the geographical proximity, countries in the region, including the Central Asian states, China, Russia, and India, could become the main targets followed by Europe and North America. Threats could be posed in at least five ways:

a. **Coordinated Member Attacks:**

Terrorist groups could plan, stage, coordinate, and conduct attacks across the world, using the Afghan territory as a safe haven and utilize all resources that are now at their disposal – training ground, volunteers, financial resources, access to weapons and explosives, means of communication, and others. These attacks could be carried out by group members, planned and facilitated by groups from inside Afghanistan and their cells worldwide.

b. **Lone Conspirator Attacks:**

Terrorist groups from inside Afghanistan could facilitate the preparation of attacks carried



out single-handedly by lone individuals affiliated with the groups worldwide. Facilitation of precursor activities – preparation of needed funds, weapons and explosives, selection and surveillance of targets, know-how and knowledge of attacks, and others – is a critical component of terrorism. Without safe havens and resources from terrorist groups at the disposal of terrorist groups, conducting these activities is extremely difficult for lone actors.

c. **Affiliated Loner Attacks:**

Terrorist groups with a presence in Afghanistan can send their affiliated members to various target destinations with a general idea of attacks, who would then plan, stage, and conduct operations on their own without receiving any further assistance from the groups. Such attacks are difficult to predict and prevent since individual attackers often act on their own without much or any communication with their groups. Again, the existence of groups in safe havens is critical for these lone actors' identification, recruitment, radicalisation, and motivation.

d. **Lone Wolf Attacks:**

Terrorist groups in Afghanistan may inspire individuals who, without affiliation

or communication with the groups, would then plan, stage, and conduct terrorist attacks worldwide.

- e. **Spread of Violent Extremism:** The Taliban's 'victory' over the US, NATO and the Afghan Republic has already given an ideological boost to violent extremist Islamist groups and individuals across the globe, signifying the possibility that violent radicalism can win. The prevalence of regional and global terrorist groups alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan could continue to generate and inspire violent extremism in Central Asia, the Chinese Muslim population, and marginalised Muslim populations in Europe and America. This could potentially translate into any of the four forms of terrorism discussed above.

3. Anti-Taliban Resistance:

Armed resistance against the Taliban is on the rise. So far, at least 14 armed groups, including the National Resistance Front, Afghanistan Freedom Front, Supreme Resistance Council, Freedom Uprising, and others, have sprung up, many of them already conducting military operations against the Taliban in various parts of the country.²² While these groups are small at the moment, they could conceivably

morph into a large and serious resistance movement against the Taliban. This is because all the ingredients needed for the emergence of a significant resistance against the Taliban are present: many grievances are present and growing, given the state of the economy and the Taliban's disregard for human rights; there are many individuals willing to fight; the country is overrun with weapons and ammunitions, and sponsorships for proxies have never been in shortage in Afghanistan.

**“
Armed resistance
against the Taliban is
on the rise**”

Sources interviewed for this research confirm that commanders in Parwan, Kapisa, Jawzjan, Faryab, Sare Pul, Baghlan, Herat, Bamiyan and Dai Kundi have already started to emerge.²³ In the emerging resistance, known figures such as Marshal Dostom, Atta Mohammad Noor, Mohammad Mohaqqiq, Karim Khalili and others, and new and young figures within the Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek communities will be instrumental. Ahmad Masoud and his group are one such new front. The Fatemiyoun Army is another – a Shia group within the Hazaras that is reported to have already started reorganizing itself for a war against the Taliban.²⁴

Should this happen, the Taliban will find themselves in other potentially protracted conflict. This could have long-term socio-political impacts on Afghanistan and beyond.

Threat Assessment:

While the emergence of anti-Taliban armed resistance could be used as a pressure point against the Taliban to soften their stances on political and social rights, the exacerbation of armed conflict in Afghanistan does not serve the interest of the region and the world. It would lead to further instability and violence in Afghanistan. It could also have spillover effects into the region, cause even larger waves of migration, and further facilitate transnational organized criminal activity, particularly boosting the drug industry.

4. Illicit Economy and Drug Smuggling:

There has traditionally been a symbiotic relationship between transnational terrorism and transnational organized crime, each feeding the other. At least seven types of transnational organized criminal activity are present in Afghanistan. These include the narcotics trade, cannabis trade, arms smuggling, illicit mining, human trafficking, human smuggling, and wildlife crimes.²⁵

While the Taliban seem to benefit from most of these illicit activities, sources stated that narcotics, illicit mining, and illicit logging are instrumental in providing financial resources for the Taliban and ISIS-K.²⁶ The drug industry is said to have

boomed since the Taliban's takeover, including opium-related drugs (supplying about 80 percent of the world's consumption) and methamphetamine, Tablet-K, and cannabis.²⁷ Illicit mining and logging are also said to have greatly increased since the Taliban's takeover, as "they have abandoned the lengthy bidding and contracting procedures of the previous government, and handle the sale of these resources as if they owned them."²⁸

The Taliban vowed to disrupt all illicit economic activities, including the drug industry²⁹ and illegal mining and logging, to project the image of a strong national government domestically and internationally. However, these activities provide livelihood for a large number of



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the rural Afghan population, as well as powerful warlords and strongmen whose support the Taliban urgently needs, in addition to significant sources of revenue for the cash-strapped Taliban government. Any move to disrupt these activities would anger large swaths of the population, offend powerful warlords and tribal leaders, undercut major support for the Taliban government, and deny the Taliban key sources of income. As a result, the Taliban seem to have allowed and taxed the opium production and trade in the south, joined

forces with warlords that run the illicit mineral extraction in the north, and turned a blind eye to illicit logging by tribes in the east.³⁰ Some of the proceeds from these illicit economies return to Afghanistan, but most outflows into the region and the world, particularly Pakistan, Turkey, and the UAE, for investment.³¹

In addition, the Taliban are said to be misappropriating humanitarian assistance, effectively deflecting the impact of international monetary sanctions on the movement.³²

A former official in the Afghan Finance Ministry stated that “on average, about 48 million dollars of aid money gets into Afghanistan, all in cash, and the Taliban gets a substantial part of that.”³³ This means that the sanctions have thus far had the unintended effect of creating an economic and financial disaster for the people of Afghanistan, allowing the Taliban to exploit humanitarian assistance.

Threat Assessment:

Given the transnational nature of organized criminal activities and their symbiosis with transnational terrorism, they are likely to have significant repercussions worldwide. Drug flows from Afghanistan into Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian states, China, Russia, Turkey, and Europe are likely to increase. This includes heroin, opium, methamphetamine, and cannabis, among others. With the precarious situation in Afghanistan, other illicit activities, including illegal mining and logging, as well as human smuggling and trafficking, seem to be on the rise. This may also lead to the increased illicit trafficking of gemstones, semi-precious metals and minerals, timber, and fauna (and related animal products). Given that illicit goods and services often need wealthy consumers, countries in Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe are likely to be the primary destinations for most of these.

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Drug flows from Afghanistan into Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian states, China, Russia, Turkey, and Europe are likely to increase

While Europe has been a significant destination for such illicit goods for decades, the substantial increase in their production and the ease of smuggling out of Afghanistan due to the Taliban’s takeover will likely worsen this trend.

5. Large-Scale Movements of People:

Given the Taliban’s harsh rule, restrictions on political activity and fears of widespread persecution, as well as a general lack of economic opportunities, vast numbers of Afghans are seeking outward migration. Much of this happens through human smuggling networks. Countries affected by this include Iran, Pakistan, Central

Asian states, Turkey, and European countries. Official statistics are lacking, but almost every source interviewed for this research stated that the number of Afghans who have fled the country since the Taliban’s takeover is in the millions. Moreover, the trend seems to be growing with an increased reliance on smugglers, the formation of new routes, and escalating protection risks.

Threat Assessment:

Many Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran have been vulnerable to poverty, and human rights violations for years. Displacement and socio-economic vulnerability have been driving factors for recruitment by radical and terrorist groups. The increase in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and lack of safe and regular routes out of Afghanistan could exacerbate these problems. Migrant smuggling / trafficking of human beings is a potential source for terrorist financing and can also be used by organized crime groups to facilitate the infiltration of terrorists. In

Europe, the issue of refugees has been a contentious and divisive debate for years, and the arrival of new vulnerable Afghans seeking refuge will continue to be a significant topic of political discussion.

6. Next Steps:

Given the transnational aspect of the five trends and their relative threat assessment discussed above, it is critical that the international community takes steps to mitigate their adverse impact, not only in Afghanistan, but also across the region and the world. In the next months, UNICRI will hold a virtual expert-level meeting with representatives from UN entities, EU institutions, and selected regional and national experts to further outline these initial findings and discuss key areas where the international community can take mitigative measures. Following this, UNICRI will publish the final report, including detailed recommendations for short-term and medium-term activities. The final report will be launched in early 2023.

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The Taliban seem to have allowed and taxed the opium production and trade in the south, joined forces with warlords that run the illicit mineral extraction in the north, and turned a blind eye to illicit logging by tribes in the east



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arian Sharifi is a lecturer and associate research scholar at Princeton University’s School of Public and International Affairs. He has over 15 years of high-level policy experience, including serving as a senior advisor to Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister and as Director General of national threat assessment at the Afghan National Security Council. He has published widely in Afghan and international media, and is a frequent commentator on issues related to terrorism and security in Afghanistan and South and Central Asia.

ENDNOTES

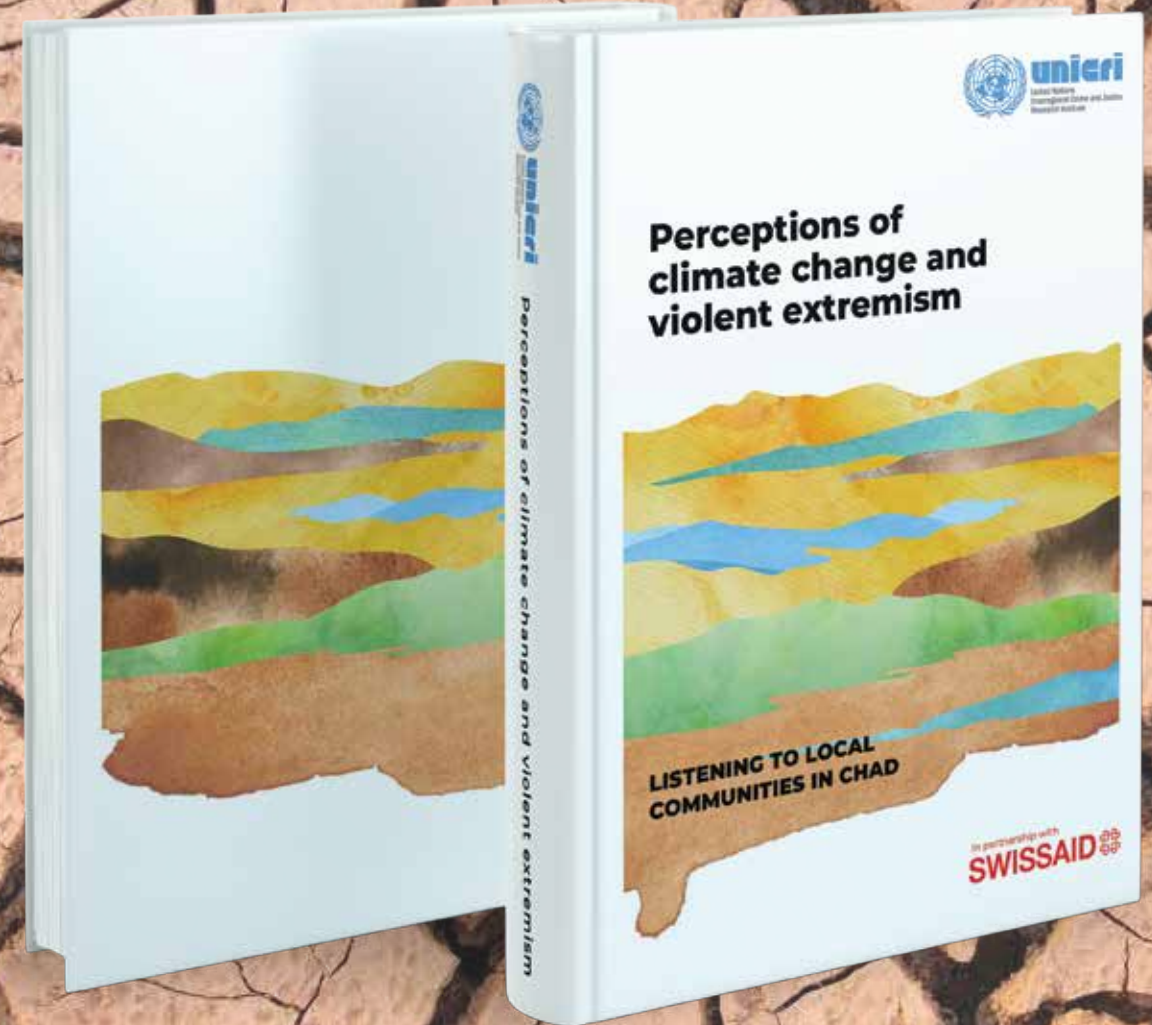
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IN FOCUS

by Barbara Schiavulli

Terror and dark power in Afghanistan

On 15 August 2021, the Taliban took power in Afghanistan after a devastating agreement which did not take into account the desires of the population. Since then, every right painstakingly gained by women and ethnic and religious minorities over the last 20 years has been erased, despite promises to the contrary. In addition to gender apartheid, the economy has collapsed, and the country has sunk into despair and poverty after 17 months.

I have been covering Afghanistan for 21 years, and since the Taliban arrived, I have returned every four or five months to prevent the spotlight on Afghanistan (and the West's guilt) from being turned off.

A few years ago, I founded [Radio Bullets](#) with other colleagues, an independent and reader-funded news organisation that covers foreign affairs, human rights, and inclusivity, because we believed that mainstream media did not adequately cover stories that deserved to be known.

It's not a country for women

By law, women in Afghanistan can no longer work or attend school beyond the age of 11. Only female doctors, elementary school teachers, and female prison police officers can continue their professions. Women cannot walk in parks, go to hammams, or go to the gym. They have no voice in the political process and must always be accompanied by a man to go out. In Afghanistan, there are tens of thousands of widows who do not know how to make ends meet. In one of the Taliban's recent decrees, even women employed by NGOs cannot work anymore.

And since only women can help women, millions of human beings no longer have access to aid. Fatima (not her real name), a widow with children, does not send her sons to school because they have to go and collect plastic to bring home some money. The rent for the two rooms she occupies is US\$25 a month. After five months of non-payment,



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the owner proposed that he should be given her youngest daughter in exchange. I intervened, paying off the debt and preventing her from selling her daughter, and getting her into the Dignity project of Noveon-lus. Now, she can survive. The sale of children to feed other children has increased in Afghanistan, the age of marriage for girls has lowered, and human trafficking has grown exponentially.

The protest girls

Protests in Afghanistan last five minutes. The girls are almost immediately stopped by

the Taliban who shoot in the air, beat them, arrest them, and then force them to sign a paper promising to behave. The few girls who protest have had to leave their families to avoid putting them in danger. They ask men not to join their battle because they know that if a man is imprisoned or killed, the rest of the family will not survive because without men working or accompanying them, they cannot do anything.

Ismail Mashal

On 26 December 2022, Ismail Mashal, a professor and found-

er of a university centre, during a debate on ToloTV, takes his degree and tears it up on live television, saying that if his Afghan sisters cannot study, he will no longer teach. The video goes viral, and he does not return home to avoid putting his family in danger. He says, "Even if they kill me, I did it for my daughters. When they asked me why they couldn't go to school, my heart broke. If they have to remember their father, I want it to be because I did the right thing." A few days after our interview, while distributing free books on the street to boys and girls, he was beaten by the Taliban and

arrested. More than a month has passed. Mashal is the only Afghan man who has openly come out against the restrictions to girls' right to education.

Abdul Rahman Chakari

Abdul Rahman Chakari is an Imam and university professor in Kabul. We asked him if it was religiously permissible for the Taliban to ban girls from attending school and women from working. Chakari explains that Islam does not forbid it. In fact, the Quran, which is the holy book, must be accessible



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to anyone and contains the essence of education. All Muslim countries, even other conservative countries, have pointed out to the Taliban that education is necessary and that an educated society is better. The Taliban have thus changed the narrative; education is not banned, it is only suspended until the necessary conditions are created for girls to return to school. Several Taliban leaders, steeped in their convictions, have told us that girls in university contract HIV/AIDS, but without providing any statistics or evidence.

The Minister of Education denied me an interview because I am a woman. If women do not continue to go to university, one of the short-term prob-

lems will be the lack of female doctors, with the resulting collapse of every aspect of women's health.

A young country

Afghanistan is a young country. The average family has six or seven children. The main maternity hospital in Kabul, also known as the "baby factory," delivers 11,000 babies per month. If there are no problems, new mothers are discharged within six hours of giving birth. Outside, men wait in desperation, especially if a girl is born, and super desperation because the unemployment rate is very high, and a child is another mouth to feed. Despite this, there is great love for children because

they represent the future and the possibility that if the children are boys, they can leave and find work anywhere. Today, most Afghans and women do not work. The Taliban have taken over all administrative positions, former military personnel are unemployed and for the most part hiding, as are those women who had a role in civil society and were unable to leave during the August 2021 evacuation, when 150,000 people were exfiltrated, including artists, politicians, magistrates, athletes, activists, and humanitarian workers.

Mursal Nabizada

On January 15, 2023, Mursal Nabizada was killed in her



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sleep at home. Her brother, with whom she shared the room, was wounded by three gunshot wounds. Nabizada, 29 years old, was a former parliamentarian who did not want to leave the country. She had started working with an NGO but continued to talk to people in her neighbourhood and try to solve their problems. No one has claimed responsibility for her murder, but several women former politicians, activists, and journalists have been killed, both before and after the Taliban's arrival. There is no longer freedom of expression and dissent in Afghanistan. At least 250 media outlets have been closed, 700 women journalists no longer work, and male journalists are controlled, threatened, and often end up in prison.

Dying of cold and starvation

There are 3.5 million internally displaced people in Afghanistan. They live in tents or mud and brick huts, without heat-

ing, electricity, or food. And now that women humanitarian workers cannot work, except in the health sector, the situation has become even more complicated. This winter has been the coldest in the last 50 years, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with hundreds of children dying of cold with temperatures dropping below -33 degrees. The World Food Programme (WFP) delivers about 20 million food parcels per month to a total population of 36 million people; 6 million children suffer from acute malnutrition and 97 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line.

Dreaming about leaving the country

For the first time in the last 20 years, most Afghans says



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that if they could, they would leave. For the first time, many people do not see a future for themselves and their family. If security has improved because Americans, allies, and the Afghan army no longer fight against the Taliban, ISIS attacks continue (against the Taliban, foreign interests like China and Iran, and minorities like the Hazara), targeted killings have increased, and crime has increased due to poverty. At bus stops leading towards the border, there are hundreds of boys ready to take their chances to leave the country.

Whatever it takes to leave, find a job, and support the family back home. Trafficking to Europe costs about \$8,000, and sometimes it takes months without any guarantee to reach the destination. But the “maybe” represented by the journey cancels the risks, because at home, many have the certainty of not surviving.

Drugs and violence

The situation in Afghanistan regarding the production of opium and the spread of drug addiction is dire, even with the

recent takeover by the Taliban. The country remains the largest producer of opium in the world, and drug trafficking and international crime continue to thrive. The Taliban do not like drug abusers and conduct raids in the cities every 45 days, rounding up drug addicts and placing them in detoxification centres that are essentially concentration camps. The conditions in these centers are inhumane. These places are infested by lice and people receive just a handful of rice per day, no soap, and no medication during withdrawal.

Survivors often return to drug use and end up sleeping on the streets. The use of opium and heroin has increased due to the widespread depression in the country. Women are particularly vulnerable, as many are forced to use drugs by their husbands to keep them submissive. Children are also often given drugs by their mothers for the same reason. Additionally, 80 percent of women in Afghanistan experience violence in their homes, and the Taliban have shut down all anti-violence centres. When prisons were reopened,



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all husbands who had been arrested for abusing their wives were sent back home.

A new moral order

Mohammad Sadik Aqek, 34 years old, is the spokesperson for the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which replaced the Ministry for Women's Affairs that was dissolved. The morality police, present only in three countries (Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran), control the habits of Afghans: from how to wear the veil, to accusations of theft or the length of the beard, or the regularity

of prayer. The law of retribution has been reinstated as well as the death penalty. Cutting off the hand of thieves, and whipping women accused of betraying their spouse are among the forms of punishment.

The music is over

Every form of art that is not religious has been banned. From music to painting. Faiz taught in at a music school performed at embassies or during concerts. A few days after the arrival of the Taliban, he rushed with his children to his school to save traditional

instruments. Then the Taliban arrived to destroy them. During the scuffle, his 17-year-old son was stabbed. Today, musicians, as well as artists, have hidden instruments and musical scores. They live on the run, without work, dreaming of leaving. The same goes for actors and street artists. Afghanistan is the only country in the world where music is forbidden. Even weddings have become silent. Thanks to the internet, Afghans still listen to music, but in secret, and let's not forget that the country has little electricity, Kabul, the capital, has no more than two hours of electricity a day.



Ms. Barbara Schiavulli is a war correspondent and writer who has covered conflict zones for the past 26 years, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, Yemen, Sudan, Chile, Haiti, and Venezuela. Her articles have been published by several newspapers, including Repubblica, l'Espresso, Il Fatto, and La Stampa. She has also collaborated with radio and TV stations and currently works with the BBC. She directs Radio Bullets, an online news outlet that focuses on international affairs, human rights, and inclusivity. Ms. Schiavulli reflects the world through the stories of the voiceless. She has received numerous national and international awards, including the Lucchetta Prize, Antonio Russo Prize, Maria Grazia Cutuli Prize, Enzo Baldoni Prize, and Koinè Prize. She has published several books, including "Butterflies do not die in the sky", "War and war", "The war within", "Bulletproof Diaries: Stories of a War Reporter", "When I'll die, I'll tell God: stories of ordinary extremism", and her latest book, "Burqa Queen," set to be released in May. She always travels with a pink trolley and a fountain pen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The nexus between terrorism and transnational organized crime

North Africa and the Sahel, and Latin America: a brief introduction

by Chiara Bologna and Christian Vianna de Azevedo

Introduction

Over the last decade, South American based drug trafficking organizations have increasingly partnered with African based terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and ISIL's affiliates and breakaways in West Africa and the Sahel, mainly. Terrorist organizations in Africa have been taking advantage of the opportunities for profit generated by their knowledge of the trans-Saharan land routes. They charge a fee per kilogram to escort,

transport or store cocaine across North Africa to be delivered at the Mediterranean shores to Europe-based drug trafficking organizations. Therefore, West and Northern Africa have become key transshipment points for South American cocaine destined for Europe and the Middle East. Moreover, these terrorist organizations mentioned above are also involved in moving other types of drugs such as heroin and cannabis through the main hubs located in Africa.

Apart from the crime-terror nexus on drug trafficking, there are other myriad of instances in which different criminal activities may converge with terrorism. In the case of the Sahel there has been a lot of interplay between migrant smugglers and traffickers, and terrorists, as well as between them and cultural heritage smugglers, for instance. On top of that, criminal organizations launder the revenue acquired by terror organizations in an array of countries in Latin America and Africa, especially in real

state enterprises and through different kinds of businesses.

Illicit trafficking and smuggling have been present in Africa for decades and the profits they generated amount for a large portion of the economy. The African continent plays a significant role in the global criminal economy, especially over the last two decades. It has a strategic geographic position, which connects the Americas with Europe and Asia and enables smuggling and trafficking between these continents.

The complex ties that link jihadist groups, criminals, smugglers, traffickers and local communities in West and Northern Africa and the Sahel areas have for years been the subject of scrutiny and concern. Therefore, financing of terrorism through engagement in organized crime activities is often discussed broadly by the international community regarding this region.

Several sources indicate connections between smugglers and terror groups/organizations in West and Northern Africa and the Sahel. As introduced above, the terror groups benefit from the collaboration more specifically in relation to funding. However, collaboration in the following

areas is also present: tactical collaboration; taxing or protection money for smuggling and trafficking activities; mutual tolerance; individual conversions or radicalizations; and provision of weapons, among others.

fit in the category of "terrorism" or "transnational organized crime" – corruption is a good example. The nexus can manifest in numerous ways, taking on distinct characteristics, depending on the geographic region in question and the political predis-



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Terror organizations in Africa have been taking advantage of the opportunities for profit generated by their knowledge of the trans-Saharan land routes

What is the nexus

The nexus that exists between organized crime and terrorism (henceforth called the nexus for short) is complex and dynamic. There are a variety of ways in which the two phenomena, which are distinct in nature, either overlap or form varying degrees of stronger bonds together. This nexus often involves a range of peripheral and facilitating crimes which may not

position of a particular state or region in which the nexus operates.¹ The way the nexus develops has been seen to be opportunistic, as it grows and operates in the most convenient form, which allows for smoother operations by the different groups. Moreover, the nexus is transnational in nature, cutting across different countries and regions and spanning across continents.

Although the objectives of organized crime and terror-

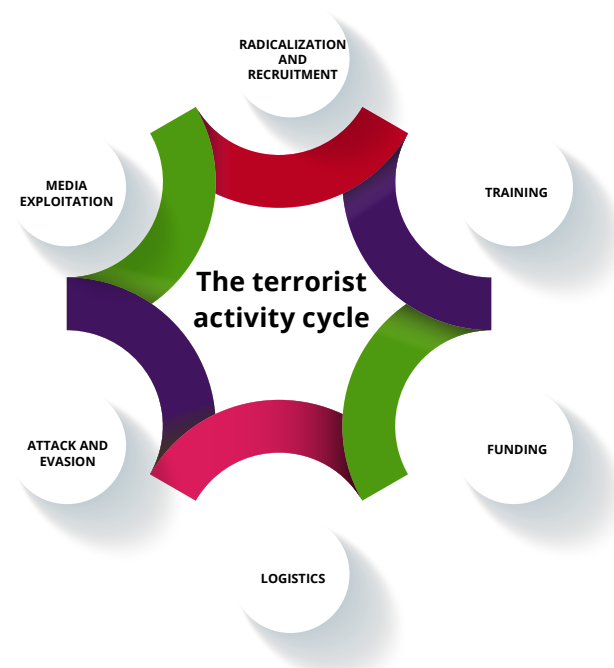
¹ The Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism, UNICRI and GCTF, p.2

ists groups are discrete, as traditionally organized crime groups seek material (monetary) gain,² whereas terrorist groups carry out their activities to incite political or social change, the nexus can occur through various means along what we can perceive as a continuum of connecting points, i.e.: alliances between the groups for operational purposes, through the sharing of tactics, based upon mutual operational territory, or a desire for profit or personal connections – including those developed within a prison setting. There is also evidence that in different regions of the world members of organized criminal groups are increasingly using terrorist-like tactics, and terrorists are benefiting from a myriad of transnational organized crime activities.³ This demonstrates that the different ways in which one group can benefit from the other, and vice-versa, are plenty and are highly dependable on specific needs or on certain groups and the geographical and political area they operate in.

In order to clarify the nexus, it's important to introduce a concept that is closely attached to the crime and ter-

ror nexus dynamic, which is the “terrorist activity cycle”. Terrorism functions as a cycle – with discrete activities leading up to the attack and being followed after the attack. The ‘terrorist activity cycle’ comprises the following actions: radicalization/recruitment, training, funding, logistics, attack, evasion and media exploitation.⁴ When we see the word ‘terrorism’ from outside the discipline we tend to focus only upon the attack. However, the attack is actually only one of the stages in the context of the terrorist activity cycle. Consequently, it is important to understand that

terrorist attacks are the product of a long chain of actions and accurate planning. In all the steps of this long chain of actions one can observe the nexus between crime and terrorism.



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The ‘terrorist activity cycle’ comprises the following actions: radicalization/recruitment, training, funding, logistics, attack, evasion and media exploitation

The nexus: theoretical framework

In recent years a growing number of case studies revealing the impact of the nexus across the globe have helped push authors to revisit the relationships between crime and terror and thus formulate a more adequate and more straight forward framework to categorize it. These new suggested concepts/categorizations were introduced in 2019 through the “[Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism](#)” published and researched in tandem by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), under the framework of the “Nexus Initiative.”⁵ This initiative has categorized the

interactions between crime and terror as transactional nexus and organizational nexus, to be described in the coming paragraphs.

This ‘coming together’ mate-

“
The transactional nexus normally involves the coming together of a criminal organization and a terrorist group to execute specific operational needs

rializes in basically two forms: an alliance or an appropriation of tactics through organizational learning. The alliances do not generally occur as a long-term relationship, due to the vulnerabilities posed in such type of association. The appropriation of tactics, on the other hand, features the

ability of either the crime or terror group to learn how to better integrate the tactics of the other.

Alliances typically happen when either the terror or the criminal group needs to have access to specialized knowledge (e.g. money laundering), specialized service (e.g. counterfeiting) or operational support (e.g. access to a smuggling network), and/or financial support (e.g. money transfers, access to markets).

The appropriation of tactics refers to the situation in which either the crime or the terror group will adopt the tactics of the other in order to develop in-house capabilities. For example, a terror group gets involved in profitable criminal activities (drug trafficking, arms trafficking, extortion, etc.) to finance its terrorist and political goals. Or a criminal



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Alliances typically happen when either the terror or the criminal group needs to have access to specialized knowledge

² As per UNTOC (2000), and ‘organized crime group’ is a: “structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offenses in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.”

³ Including from the illicit trafficking of arms, persons, drugs, and cultural property and artefacts and from the illicit trade in natural resources including gold and other precious metals and stones, minerals, wildlife, charcoal and oil, as well as from kidnapping for ransom and other crimes including extortion, and bank robbery.

⁴ These are the steps of the terrorist activity cycle we chose to work with. However, it is possible to decompose some of these steps into other steps.

⁵ The “Nexus Initiative” involved representatives of governments, international experts and practitioners, international and regional organizations and academia to discuss on existing knowledge and practices and to provide information on regional contexts. The Initiative was developed after an extensive collection and analysis of data from different regions as follows: West Africa and the Sahel, The Balkan Region, Southeast and South Asia, and the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

organization that learns how to conduct terror acts in order to instil fear within a segment of the society it wants to control or to influence.

Furthermore, there are two associated ideas attached to the 'appropriation of tactics' stemming from the current global environment; the first is 'organizational learning', and the second is 'prison radicalization, as follows:

Organizational learning essentially refers to the ability of a group to evolve over time by actively adapting to its operational environment. All organizations, whether licit or illicit, obtain knowledge from individuals within the group, from the group's past failures and successes, and from other groups. It is through this process that groups will gauge the need to adopt new tactics, explore the uses of technology, shift their geographic focus, or target recruitment to obtain a required skill-set. Dissecting the evolution of various terrorist groups, and the composition of ad hoc militant cells, provides strong indications that some degree of organizational learning has taken place.

UNICRI (2019), Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism (p. 3).

Organizational learning has been conceptualized within a typology of learning and innovation that identify and presents four main categories in which it may happen: first, intergroup learning within a single domestic setting; second, intergroup learning between two or more groups across a state/nation boundary; third, intergroup learning through the interactions of transnational groups with one or more domestic ones; and fourth, intragroup learning.

Additionally, throughout the years 'prison radicalization' has been seen in the constant evolving of recruitment tactics. Nowadays, there is enough evidence demonstrating that in several terror groups, people with criminal pasts not only expedite radicalization, but are also given a key-role in the recruitment process. This indicates that terror groups value recruits with criminal experience.⁶

Prison radicalization, or prison recruitment, has been identified as a very specific point of organizational learning that has had a significant impact on the increasingly nuanced evolution of the Nexus; particularly in the more politically stable countries of Western and Northern Europe. More pointedly, (former) prisoners – and by extension, communi-



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Terror groups value recruits with criminal experience

ty-based criminals – have increasingly become the driving individuals of many militant cells. This was seen as early as the 2004 Madrid attacks, perpetrated by several former criminals and nuanced through the sale of drugs; and regularly through to the more recent attacks perpetrated in Europe.

UNICRI (2019), Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism (p. 3).

As for the organizational nexus, it occurs when the criminal and the terrorist activities occupy the same space and time. When the nexus emerges as an organizational one, there are variations in extent of the activities' overlap. Theoretically speaking this can be basically divided into: integration, hybrid, transformation and black hole.

Integration can be actually split into two distinct situations, the first one results in an alliance that evolves to an extent that the criminal organization is integrated into a terrorist one, or vice versa. The second one happens when there is a targeted recruitment into a terrorist cell. The reason behind this type of integration is to obtain tactical capability within a potentially short time frame. This is

6 This observation comes from the authors' extensive fieldwork in the issue.

not about mobilizing individuals with criminal background, but integrating a radicalized group of experienced criminals, generally the ones that already operate in the immediate community.

The hybrid type of nexus occurs when there is a shift in the core purpose of a group. A hybrid group will feature simultaneously ideological and economic motivations by conducting terror attacks and also engaging in profitable criminal enterprises. The group in question can be either defined as criminal or terrorist. This type of group is the one that has the greatest potential of being overlooked by both anti-crime and counterterrorism agencies.

As for transformation, this is an evolutionary instance of the nexus, it happens when a terrorist group evolves both organizationally and operationally into a criminal network or vice versa. The transformation is corroborated when the essential aims and motivations of the group change to a point that the original *raison d'être* ceases to exist. Or, in other words, a terrorist group becomes a criminal one, or vice versa.⁷

There's another concept, which is not actually a manifestation of the nexus, but

rather an expression that can be described as an extreme environment that is the perfect breeding ground for the nexus in many of its forms: the "Black Hole Syndrome". This is generally associated with a geographical defined area that lacks governance and security, where territorial rule is normally taken by the groups that control the illicit economy and people. The 'Black Hole' is the worst-case scenario for the nexus manifestation, in which the convergence of crime and terror help perpetuate the extreme insecure conditions of a region where groups vie for the control of the economic and/or political power through the spread of violence and an array of criminal activities.

In short, we could summarize it as follows:

Transactional nexus:

1. Alliances: Seeking efficiency, each group begins to *outsource* services such as forgery or bomb making.
2. Appropriation of tactics: terror and criminal groups may *imitate* each other methods.

Organizational nexus:

1. Integration: two forms, first an alliance between the groups that evolves

and they start to *collaborate more regularly* and share goals and methods; or second, which is a targeted recruitment into a terrorist cell through the integration of a radicalized group of experienced criminals.

2. Hybrid: The group's terror and crime activities become *equally important* for the group and central to its existence.

Transformation: This happens when the essential aims and motivations of the group *change* to a point that the original *raison d'être* ceases to exist. Or, in other words, a terrorist group becomes a criminal one, or vice versa.

Now that the essence of the elements that characterize crime/terror nexus have been delineated in this section, it is important to understand how the United Nations has been approaching this theme through many actions that have converged into the making of the Policy Toolkit mentioned above which was published in 2019.

The United Nations response

The evolving relationship between terrorism and organised crime has posed



⁷ Criminal entities evolving to become terror groups are much less frequent. It can be said this is an exception to the rule. There is one documented case which is the group called D-Company (Dawood Ibrahim Group).

significant challenges to the international community. Progressing from simple co-existence towards a symbiotic relationship, the lines between these seemingly distinct activities are now becoming increasingly blurred, making it difficult to differentiate between “pure” terrorist groups, their criminal counterparts, or something in-between. Therefore, in time, the Security Council resolutions on this topic, starting from the first being 2195 (2014), have increasingly developed into something more focused in order to clarify the relations between crime and terrorism in a progressive way.

It has been seen that the nexus erodes the security and development of states and entire regions. It undermines the rule of law and state ca-

phenomena. And indeed, in recognition of this, numerous Security Council resolutions have addressed this topic, the most recent being [2482 \(2019\)](#) which states that the nexus can complicate conflict prevention and resolution efforts, and calls for Member States to strengthen, where appropriate, their criminal justice, law enforcement and border-control capacities, and to develop their capacity to investigate, prosecute, disrupt, and dismantle trafficking networks to address the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, whether domestic or transnational.

UNICRI has been working since 2016 on better understanding and addressing the links between organized crime and terrorism, as called upon by Security Council resolution

the Institute began working on the [Nexus Initiative](#) in partnership with the Global Counter-terrorism Forum (GCTF) under which regional meetings were organized to cover different global areas.⁸ This led to the development by UNICRI of [The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism](#). The 25 good practices provide non-binding recommendations for Member States and interested stakeholders to assist them in developing policies and strategies to counter the nexus. To support Member States further in operationalizing the good practices, UNICRI developed the [Nexus Policy Toolkit](#),⁹ which is divided into two sections: the first provides a conceptual overview of the nexus and its manifestations in diverse settings and ena-

bling factors; and the second provides guidance on actionable steps to implement each good practice, and suggests actors to involve. The Toolkit has been used since 2019 for tailor-made awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, for practitioners of different levels and different sectors, and from requesting Member States across different continents.

Conclusions/ Recommendations

Considering the differences in how the nexus is manifested in the Sahel region and in Latin America, despite there being clear links between the two, the recommendations on what to look out for in terms of identifying and addressing the nexus are similar in most regions, the latter two included. Following the extensive research carried out in different regions, as well as information gained through discussion with Member States in different regions, the below are the conclusions about

how an effective approach to counter the nexus should be structured.

1. It is paramount that coordination and cooperation between countries takes place to counter the nexus. Since the nexus usually happens as a cross border activity and is transnational in nature. We have seen from the above examples that trafficking routes and the links between the different steps of activities can occur across different regions and even continents.



capacities to combat these... **“The nexus erodes the security and development of states and entire regions”**



The Toolkit has been used since 2019 for tailor-made awareness-raising and capacity-building activities

⁸ Regions covered included: East Africa and the Horn, West Africa and the Sahel, the Balkans, and South Asia and Southeast Asia regions.
⁹ We encourage readers to take a quick look at the Nexus Policy Toolkit.

2. Considering that the nexus involves several types of crimes within the distinct steps of the 'terrorism cycle' (which includes the terrorist incident but also the radicalization and recruitment, the financing, and so on), interactions between criminals and terrorists make up a matrix of relations that demand a whole-of-society approach within a given country. Hence, the lack of interagency (and private sector) cooperation when it comes to sharing intelligence and fieldwork, inevitable prevents an effective State response.
3. Governments should engage civil society actors in the process of raising awareness on the nexus. Actors such as NGOs, religious leaders, scholars, community leaders, journalists, and others at the community level should be involved. These actors are not only very often the first to notice the development of the nexus within the community, but they are also strategic partners needed to build community resilience towards the nexus and peripheral activities occurring in and around their community.
4. Many actors remain unaware of the nexus, not understanding how to recognize it and its enabling factors, and lacking analytical, investigative and prosecutorial capacity to better address this threat. Thus, judicial officers, prosecutors and those in other sectors should be trained to recognize the nexus when they see it, and trained to effectively develop strategies to address it.
5. Addressing the prevention aspect of the nexus is paramount. It is important to look at what the grievances are: this means that countries should focus on human rights issues, civil liberties and social inclusion policies which are fundamental to ensure that lack of these does not create a fertile ground for the nexus to propagate.



“ Governments should engage civil society actors in the process of raising awareness on the nexus ”



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As an academic researcher, his main themes of research are: terrorism/CT, insurgency/COIN, countering transnational organized crime and asymmetric conflicts. He is a research fellow at research centres in Brazil and abroad. He has written and published a number of articles and book chapters in Portuguese, English and Spanish. He is also a lecturer and instructor at post-graduation level in Brazil and overseas.

IN FOCUS

by Monzer Alaily



From Manhattan to Tripoli: the odyssey of the looted lady and the bearded man

One year later – 31 March 2023

It was a warm and sunny March morning when the dust gathering at Mitiga International Airport was cleared and the landing strip was prepared to receive officials from the top echelons of Libyan, American, French and United Nations ranks. By 9:00 a.m., the officials made their way onto the tarmac to witness the arrival of a private jet dispatched by Bancroft Global Development for a special reason: the repa-

triation of Libyan cultural artefacts dating back to 300-400 B.C. pillaged from Cyrene (now called Shahhat) in the 1980s and 1990s amid growing instability and upheaval in the region. What the officials were witnessing was the fruition of years' worth of efforts by an *ad hoc* network of archaeologists, law enforcement officials, and diplomats working tirelessly across the globe to preserve cultural artefacts.

■ The archaeological sites of Cyrene (modern-day Shahhat).

From Libya to the New York Metropolitan Museum: the journey of smuggled artefacts

Cyrene, located in North-East Libya's Cyrenaica region, was an ancient Greek and later Roman metropolis akin to Ephesus, Athens and Rome, is known today as Shahhat. Under Greek rule, Cyrene was one of the greatest intellectual centres of the Classical world: it boasted a medical school and was abuzz with illustrious scholars, philosophers and geographers. The stunning city is now on the UNESCO World

Heritage List, although it is unfortunately considered one of the most neglected and endangered sites in the Mediterranean region. Today, the city hosts several world-class archaeological sites, such as five ancient theatres, including the colossal Temple of Zeus, the holy Sanctuary of Apollo, and a public gymnasium, which was later turned into a forum.

“Due to political strife, the Cyrene Necropolis, home to the repatriated Libyan statues, was the target of pillaging and looting from the 1980s.

World-renowned French archaeologist Dr. Morgan Belzic (*French archaeological Mission to Libya*) has catalogued over 200 looted artefacts from Cyrene over the course of a decade. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg; according to Belzic, the 200 catalogued artefacts constitute roughly 10 percent of the actual number of looted relics from the 50 square-kilometre Cyrene site.

Interestingly, the markings and the form of the statues repatriated have a unique Cyrenaic trait. The invaluable cultural artefacts returned to Libya on 31 March 2022 indisputably originated from the ancient city of Cyrene.

The *Veiled Head of a Lady*, valued at approximately USD 500,000, originates from a tomb in Cyrene and her style and delicate veil make her an archaeological masterpiece. According to archaeologists, there are likely fewer than 10 ancient sculptures of a veiled face, all women, in the entire ancient world, all of them are from Cyrenaica. Such statues may have been looted by impoverished residents looking for income or criminal organisations seeking to finance other illicit activity. Regardless of who looted them, most of these particular artefacts traversed a route through Egypt, before ultimately being placed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where they had been on view since 1998.

In the early 2000s art dealers linked to the smuggling of artefacts have generally been able to exploit the Dark Web to take advantage of lax art market regulations (or lax enforcement mechanisms), which

Belzic describes as being “less stringent than the banana market”. The lax regulations enable art dealers to “self-report” the origin and value of statues and other artworks, with little effective oversight or scrutiny.

“Dealers linked to the smuggling of artefacts have generally been able to exploit the Dark Web to take advantage of lax art market regulations

As a result, we frequently become aware of masterpieces, such as those repatriated to Libya in March 2022, on display in foreign museums or in the mansions of wealthy people. An even more hidden aspect of this already very complex illegal web of transactions, is the link between the smuggling and sale of cultural artefacts and other serious

crimes such as money laundering, terrorist financing and trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation.

An ad hoc network vs. criminal networks

Modalities of art smugglers

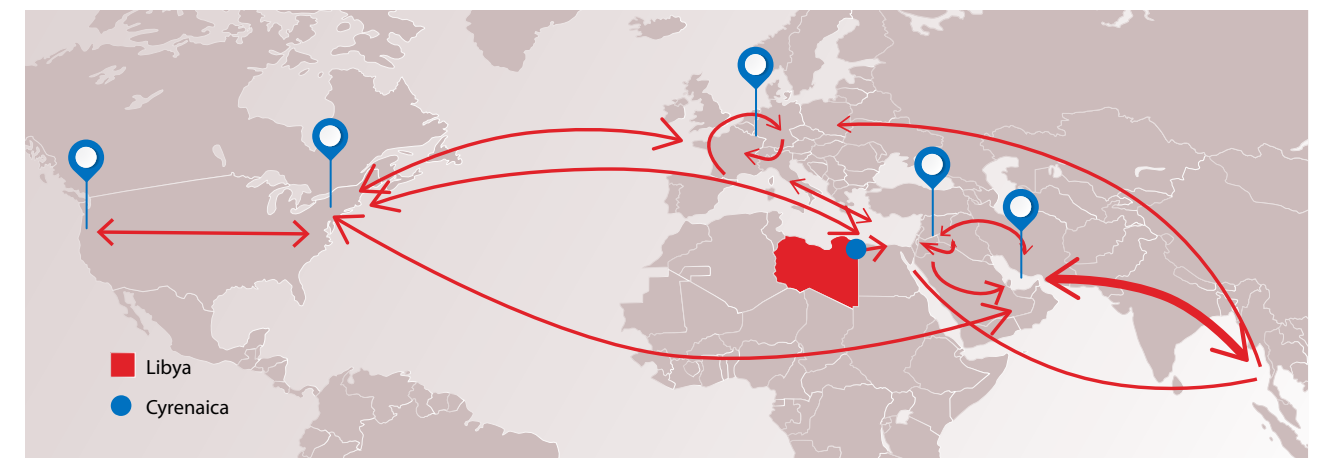
Criminal networks can be so profit-driven that they chop ancient coffins and sarcophagi into smaller pieces to facilitate cross-border smuggling and sales.

Still, what is art crime? Art crime is a global phenomenon that encompasses theft, fraud, looting, and trafficking of cultural goods. This criminal activity generates billions of dollars every year. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) defines trafficking in cultural property as “a low-risk, high-profit business for criminals with links to organ-



Such statues may have been looted by impoverished residents looking for income or criminal organisations seeking to finance other illicit activity

© Thomson Reuters - In the picture: archaeologist, historian and archeologist Dr. Morgan Belzic (left) and the Veiled Head of a Lady (middle), Museum of Libya (Tripoli), 31 March 2022.



ised crime". To combat the illicit trade of art, INTERPOL has established an online [Stolen Works of Art Database](#) to tackle the illicit trade of art.

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Art crime is a global phenomenon that encompasses theft, fraud, looting, and trafficking of cultural goods

As explained by Belzic, “Sophisticated criminal networks are dedicated to profiteering from looted cultural artefacts”. Dr. Belzic and the French Archaeological Mission to Libya have formed a dedicated group of volunteer archaeologists, specialists from other archaeological missions and key Libyan officials from the Department of Antiquities into an *ad hoc* network dedicated to protecting Libyan archaeological sites and museums and to track down artefacts smuggled out of Libya and trafficked in international markets.

“Blood Antiquities”

In its heyday, the Islamic State (ISIS) generated substantial revenues (estimated at 100 billion dollars annually) through the systematic looting of over 4,500 ar-

chaeological sites under its control between 2014 and 2018. The revenues from this lucrative activity pushed the terrorist group to institutionalise it through the creation of a dedicated body within its organisational structure. This body was in charge of trading in “blood antiquities”. Similarly, in Libya, political instability and violence placed UNESCO World Heritage sites at the mercy of armed factions, forcing archaeologists exploring these sites to abandon their work.

Compared to the resources available to criminal syndicates who, according to Dr. Belzic, have very sophisticated means of concealing their crimes from authorities, the only real resources available to his *ad hoc* network are time, dedication, and expertise. This is because the resources allocated for researchers, historians, and law enforcement agencies to combat what is frequently perceived as white-collar crime are relatively scant. However, the nexus between cultural and violent crime is becoming more apparent, suggesting that the sale of such artefacts sustains multiple forms of organised criminal activity.

The Manhattan District Attorney’s office led by Alvin Bragg who has established a dedicat-

ed Antiquities Trafficking Unit sees cultural artefacts as “windows into thousands of years of culture [which] deserve to be returned to their country of origin”. The Manhattan D.A. has worked tirelessly over the past years to ensure that any looted cultural goods are located and repatriated. While the Manhattan D.A. was entirely responsible for the investigation of the looted Libyan artefacts which were successfully returned to Tripoli on 31 March, the repatriation was the result of collective efforts of multiple actors. Among the entities involved were the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, archaeologists that provided technical expertise (e.g., determination of origin)



■ Meticulous unloading and protection of fragile antiquities, with the involvement of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), at Tripoli’s Mitiga International Airport, 31 March 2022

to law enforcement, the Libyan Department of Antiquities, and the Libyan Asset Recovery and Management Office (LARMO), which was created with the technical support of asset recovery experts from the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). Journalists and NGOs also played a pivotal role in shining a light on art

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The Manhattan D.A. has worked tirelessly over the past years to ensure that any looted cultural goods are located and repatriated

looting and smuggling, and on the efforts needed to successfully recover looted artefacts.

The repatriation ceremony at the Royal Palace of Tripoli was attended by high-level Libyan officials, including the Deputy Prime Minister of Libya, officials from the Libyan State Antiquities Authority and National Museum, the *Chargé d’Affaires* of the Libyan Embassy in Washington D.C., officials of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the European Union and UNICRI, ambassadors from multiple embassies based in Libya and internationally-renowned archaeologists such as Belzic, as

well as investigative journalists and the key NGO that facilitated the actual and safe transport of the assets.

While there is useful international law with respect to the return of looted artefacts, such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, repatriations such as this remain few and far between. Still, there is an increasing call to prioritise the recovery and return of cultural



■ High-Level Libyan officials, along with other key stakeholders who collectively coordinated the repatriation of the cultural assets, on arrival at Mitiga Airport in Tripoli. 31 March 2022

1 Siggia, S. (2020) *Financing terrorism: The billion-dollar blood antiquities art dealing* <https://pideeco.be/articles/terrorism-financing-blood-antiquities-looted-aml/>

artefacts to their place of origin. The recovery of smuggled artefacts also shines a light on the multi-pronged enterprises of transnational organised crime, and the corruption that allows it to proliferate, indicating that effective responses

must be holistic in nature, with many stakeholders involved.

The return of these artefacts to Libya highlights the importance of involving multiple stakeholders (especially those from foreign jurisdictions

where such artefacts are located, or jurisdictions through which they were smuggled). This will strengthen their vigilance, investigations and cooperation efforts in order to prevent and combat art crimes.

“ Cultural property speaks a universal language. It educates people and depicts their values and beliefs. Long before television and social media, people communicated through art; they told the stories of their civilisations, and many people, including me, believe that these artists, who create such artefacts, have special insights into life as it unfolds. Pieces such as these today have such historic and artistic importance that they reflect the spirit of the Libyan people. Cultural rights are human rights, and having access to their priceless antiquities is a right of every people”. They cannot and should not be considered commodities to trade for profit on illicit or licit markets.

Antonia Marie De Meo, UNICRI Director

For more information on good practices in the tracing, seizure, confiscation and recovery of cultural artefacts, please visit:

<https://unicri.it/index.php/organized-crime-illegal-trafficking-and-illicit-financial-flows>

For additional reading on the nexus between organised crime and the financing of terrorism, see:

https://unicri.it/topics/nexus_transnational_organizedcrime-terrorism

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Monzer Alaily is an analyst specializing in combatting the trafficking of cultural goods. Passionate about international criminal law, he obtained his master's degree with distinction in International Law from the University of Kent in Brussels, Belgium. He completed his undergraduate studies in Political Science at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon.

Additional editing was done by **Giulia Traverso** and **Yasmine Chennoukh**. The article was written under the guidance of **James Shaw**, Senior Legal Officer (Asset Recovery).

Series of reports about studies on ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS AND ASSET RECOVERY REPORTS



Climate change and violent extremism: a threat to peace and security

by Matthew Burnett Stuart and Manuela Brunero

“How much profit do you make from fishing every day? One thing for sure, it’s not much. With us, it’s with American dollars that you’ll be paid.”

We are in Guité, a small village in Chad’s Hadjer Lamis province. Our team arrived in February 2022 to interview local communities and investigate how climate change vulnerability can affect various aspects of community life, including increased exposure to violent extremist activities and propaganda. In these words, one interviewee recounted the case of a particularly pointed appeal in which Boko Haram members explicitly linked climate change vulnerability to their recruitment efforts.

Indeed, climate change and violent extremism may appear unrelated, but evidence suggests they are inextricably

linked. Climate change can act as a “risk multiplier”, exacerbating existing tensions, poverty, and conflict. In many cases, it creates an environment conducive to the recruitment of violent extremist groups

In Chad, a country located on the banks of Lake Chad in the Sahel, this intersection of climate change and extremism is particularly acute. The country’s geography, high poverty levels, and the population’s dependence on natural resources for productive activities have made it particularly vulnerable to climate change and the growing insecurity that has rocked the Sahel in the last decades. The changing weather patterns, such as rising temperatures,



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Climate change can act as a “risk multiplier”, exacerbating existing tensions, poverty, and conflict

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unpredictable rainfall, and receding lakes, threaten the already unstable livelihoods and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. At the same time, in recent years, Chad has also been greatly affected by violent extremist attacks, mainly from Boko Haram, as well as by its offshoot, the Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP). Attacks have been particularly prevalent in two provinces, Lac and Hadjer-Lamis, due to their proximity to northern Nigeria and location along Lake Chad, which - with its remote islands - allows Boko Haram militants to seek easy refuge.

tremism. Through over 100 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted between January and February 2022 with community members and institutional representatives, the study found that community members and authorities throughout the four targeted areas widely reported having observed or directly experienced the effects of climate change in recent years. These effects were most often described in the form of variable temperatures and rainfall, including floods and longer dry seasons, as well as increasing desertification.

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These changes in livelihoods have led to increased competition for resources and tensions between communities

This, in turn, has had clear and nearly unanimous effects on community members' economic and productive activities. Farmers reported noticing decreases in crop yields, and herders reported losing animals due to the changing weather patterns. These changes in livelihoods have led to increased competition for resources and tensions between communities, which can be easily exploited by violent extremist groups looking for recruits and territorial



control. These direct effects on the land and productive activities also notably affected social cohesion and inter-communal conflict. Every economic group interviewed - farmers, herders, and fishers - and local and traditional authorities reported higher levels of conflict and deadly violence within and between communities.

The study underscored the devastating impacts of climate change on the local economy, which have caused a rise in poverty and social displacement, creating increased economic and survival pressure in an already fragile and conflict-affected context. The erosion of social cohesion is then instrumentalized by armed

groups to aid recruitment and exacerbate destabilization, triggering a vicious cycle. As was often repeated by the respondents of this research, Boko Haram has exploited poverty to recruit fighters in Hadjer-Lamis and Lac provinces from the very beginning of their operations in Chad. Over the years, Boko Haram has adopted various recruitment techniques, including religious indoctrination, kidnapping, as well as enticing people to join voluntarily by using monetary incentives. Among these techniques, the offer of financial incentives and the promise of a better future to impoverished community members have been the most effective in attracting recruits.

In Guité village, in Hadjer-Lamis province, an interviewee recounted how Boko Haram members would meet with the parents of young people and make tempting financial offers. Additionally, inhabitants of the village recalled the case of some young fishers kidnapped by Boko Haram and then released without ransom, likely as a way to spread their message and promises of wealth throughout the community. As climate change continues to cause economic hardship, this promise of wealth can become even more alluring to people desperately trying to make ends meet.

This alarming situation is further exacerbated by the lack of state capacity and support to assist communities in adapting to the rapidly changing environment. In the targeted areas, particularly Hadjer-Lamis and Lac, public services are often severely limited, significantly increasing the potential for tensions and providing a ripe opportunity for Boko Haram to capitalize on. Similarly,

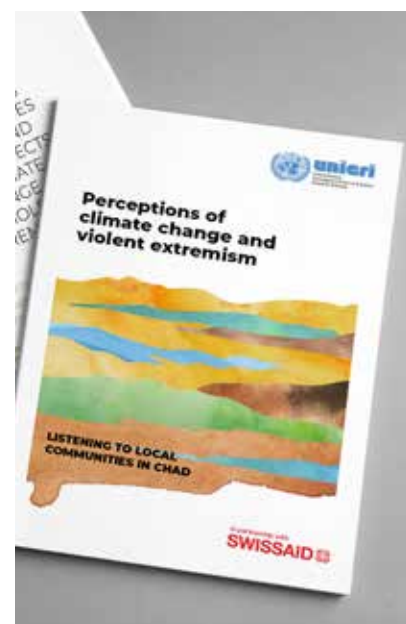
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This alarming situation is further exacerbated by the lack of state capacity and support to assist communities

the military operations against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, such as restrictions on movement and closure of fish markets, have harmed local communities' access to resources, further increasing their vulnerability.

“ **The research conducted by UNICRI has highlighted the potential for climate insecurity to create an enabling environment for the propaganda and recruitment** ”

In conclusion, the case of the Lake Chad Basin is a stark reminder of the need to address the complex nexus between climate change and violent extremism in the Sahel. The research conducted by UNICRI has highlighted the potential for climate insecurity to create an enabling environment for the propaganda and recruitment efforts of violent extremist groups. The data suggest that the primary mechanism through which climate change and violent extremism are linked in the region is economic vulnerability and related food insecurity. These factors interact with existing poverty exploitation by Boko Haram, making communities more likely to be receptive to propaganda.



A recent study conducted by UNICRI in Chad's provinces of Hadjer-Lamis, Lac, Logone Occidental, and Mandoul sought to better understand the relationship between climate change and violent ex-

To mitigate the risk of violent conflict and extremism in the Sahel, it is therefore essential to address the environmental and security aspects.

To effectively prevent violent extremism (PVE) in the Sahel, it is essential to recognize that PVE strategies must target the underlying drivers of radicalization, including weak governance, marginalization, lack of state services, and state abuse. To achieve this, it is crucial to have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the local context and dynamics to avoid the potential instrumentalization of climate change to justify inadequate or disproportionate responses.

Local civil society is a key partner in this process, and strengthening its capacity to implement participatory mechanisms for natural resource management could improve the re-establishment

of strong social cohesion in the region. It is also important to deconstruct the recruitment narratives used by violent extremist groups, who often exploit the scarcity of natural resources and food insecurity to boost their propaganda and recruitment, particularly among young people. Programmes to support and strengthen the capacity of government and civil society actors to design and implement counter-narrative projects and resilience-boosting approaches, specifically targeting young people and women, should be encouraged.

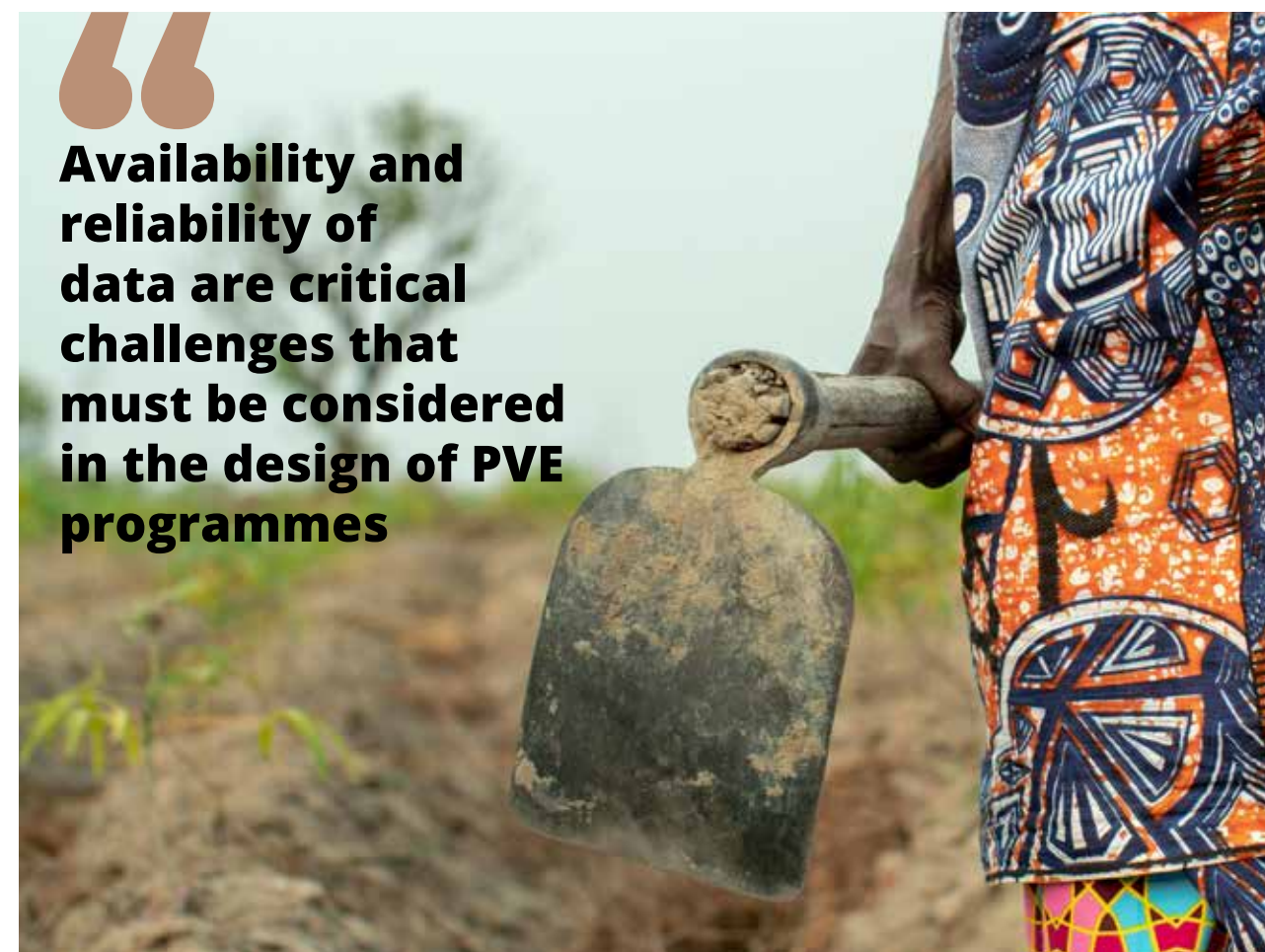
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Supporting climate-resilient alternative livelihoods for vulnerable groups, such as farmers, herders, and fishers

Supporting climate-resilient alternative livelihoods for vulnerable groups, such as farmers, herders, and fishers, can help to strengthen livelihoods and decrease the risk of violent conflicts. For instance, members of local communities interviewed by UNICRI have expressed interest in market gardening to cope with increased financial pressure and poverty. To expand these initiatives, it is important to provide technical, financial and infrastructure support and to develop strategies to ensure access to resources, particularly for vulnerable populations, women, and young people.

Finally, it is important to have more and better data to inform decisions about PVE strategies, including research on the differentiated effects of climate change and violent extremism on men and women and the efficiency and sustainability of adaptive



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mechanisms implemented by local communities. Availability and reliability of data are critical challenges that must

be considered in the design of PVE programmes. To ensure the long-term success of PVE strategies, it is essential to

invest in data collection and analysis to better understand the complex dynamics of the region.

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Preventing “lone wolf attacks” in Japan: lessons from western research on radicalization

by Mana Yamamoto

On 8 July 2022, the death of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was shot during a campaign speech, sent shockwaves through Japan. The assassination was perpetrated by a lone attacker who did not belong to a specific political group or gang, and a homemade gun was used. The attacker had a wealthy life when he was young, but after his mother began to donate a large amount of money to the Unification Church, the specific religious group that she joined, his family collapsed – his father and his brother committed suicide and his mother declared bankruptcy. As he fell into poverty, changing jobs many times, he began plotting to kill former Prime Minister Abe, isolated himself from society and started making homemade guns. Despite having one of the lowest

crime rates in the world, the ‘lone wolf’ threat has become a growing problem in Japan, particularly in the form of non-ideological attacks that result in mass murder.

Lone attackers, who plan, prepare, and carry out violent acts without direction from a specific organization, have long been a problem in Western countries, and the threat has grown in recent years. Because lone attackers are relatively isolated compared to organized violent groups and their attacks are perceived as being spontaneous, it is more difficult for law enforcement to detect and thwart their plans. To tackle this issue, there is ongoing research in Western countries on their profiling, their psychological aspects, and the challenges of identifying them. According to Buuren G.M. van (2018),¹ “academic research has explored

topics like the demarcation between lone attackers and terrorist cells or networks, typologies of lone attackers, the motivation of lone attackers, and – lately – the attack patterns of lone actors”.

Definition of “lone wolf attacks”

A research investigating data related to 120 cases of violent extremism, has shown that 71 per cent of the cases involved right-wing extremists and religiously inspired extremists, while 29 per cent of the cases were attributed to other motives involving left-wing, ethno-nationalist ideologies etc.² Research has shown that assigning clear-cut motives to lone attackers is difficult; this is despite the fact that most definitions of terrorism refer to political, ideological, or religious motivations or goals as a consti-



As he fell into poverty, changing jobs many times, he began plotting to kill former Prime Minister Abe

¹ Buuren, G.M. van (2018), Patterns of Lone Attackers [Patterns of Lone Attackers] (translation: Buuren G.M. van). In: Echle C., Gunaratna R., Rueppel P., Sarmah M. (Ed.) *Combating Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe. From cooperation to Collaboration*. Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 55-66.

² Ellis, C., & Pantucci, R. (2016). Lone-actor terrorism. Policy paper 4: ‘Leakage’ and interaction with authorities. Royal United Services Institute.

tuting part.³ Although there are many terms and definitions for lone attackers (lone wolf, loner, lone attacker, solo terrorist, etc.), no single, universally accepted definition has been agreed on by academics.⁴ According to Cohen, L.,⁵ “the more closely some of the known lone wolf attacks are examined, the clearer it becomes how common ‘hybrid’ characteristics are.” The issue remains complex and requires further discussion.

Major commonalities among lone attackers in Japan

Lone attackers, in which one perpetrator kills many unknown people at the same time and in the same place, shock society as a whole. These cases occur every year in Japan, and 15 cases occurred in 2021.⁶ In Japan, research continues to elucidate the attributes, crime patterns and backgrounds of these perpetrators. Here are some of the main commonalities:

1) Financial distress

The perpetrator of the 2019 “Kyoto anime arson murder case” (36 died and 34 were injured (including the perpetrator)) was a welfare recipient; the perpetrator of the 2021 “Kitashinchi psychosomatic medicine arson murder case” (27 died and 1 was injured) could not cover living expenses because his application for welfare support was rejected. The suspect in the former prime minister’s assassination case could not afford to get in the university of his choice because of his family’s financial problems. Economic vulnerability is often part of many of these mass murderers’ backgrounds.

2) Low self-esteem

The perpetrator of the 2008 “Akihabara Street murder case” (7 died and 10 were injured) was isolated from society but felt that he had a comfortable place where he belonged on social media. However, he thought that the virtual space was being destroyed by someone and, therefore, his place and the meaning of his existence were

being threatened. He grew up seeking attention from his mother (he regarded his mother as a shogun), but he could not pass the entrance exam of the university that his mother wanted him to enroll, he could not get the job he desired, and he no longer felt he was the child that his mother wanted. In the case of the assassination of the former Prime Minister, it became clear that the perpetrator felt his existence was denied by being neglected by his parents for so long. Hence, these lone attackers in addition to failing to build healthy identities during the course of their development, had been socially isolated under circumstances in which they lost their self-esteem.

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They blamed others, such as their parents, companies, and society for their dissatisfied lives

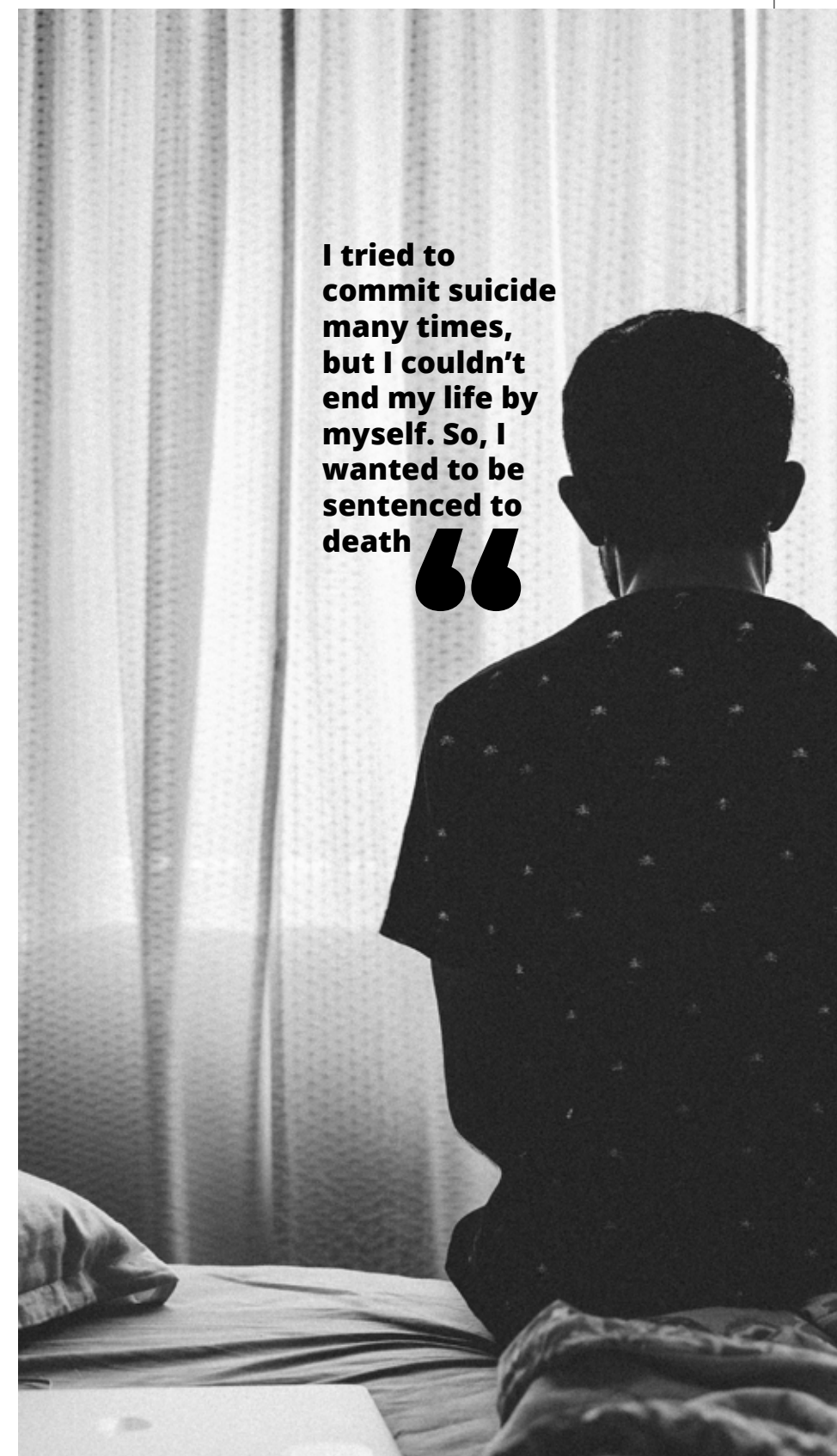
3) Self-victimization and blaming others

In situations where they failed to build healthy identities and lost self-esteem, they tended to think that it was not their fault that their work or private life was not going well and tended to think of themselves as victims. They blamed others, such as their parents, companies, and society for their unsatisfied lives. The perpetrator of the “Ikebukuro Street murder case” (2 died and 6 were injured) that occurred in 1999 went to the United States in search of a new life before he committed the murders. At that time, he wrote a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claiming that he was a “victim” of this unequal world.

4) Murder-suicide

In Japan, the term “extended suicide” became widely known after the “Ikeda Elementary School murder case” (8 died and 15 were injured) that occurred in 2001. Extended suicide is the act of committing suicide (including attempted suicide) after or at the same time as committing murder, but there is still no consensus on what kind of situation can be defined as an extended suicide. The perpetrator of the Ikeda Elementary School murder case after being arrested stated: “I tried to commit suicide many times, but I couldn’t end my life by myself. So, I wanted to be sentenced

I tried to commit suicide many times, but I couldn’t end my life by myself. So, I wanted to be sentenced to death “



3 Buuren, G.M. van (2018), Patterns of Lone Attackers [Patterns of Lone Attackers] (translation: Buuren G.M. van). In: Echle C., Gunaratna R., Rueppel P., Sarmah M. (Ed.) Combatting Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe. From cooperation to Collaboration. Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 55-66.

4 Spaaij, R. & Hamm, M.S. (2015). Key Issues and Research Agendas in Lone Wolf Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38 (3), 167-178.

5 Cohen, L. (2012). Who will be a lone wolf terrorist?: Mechanisms of self-radicalisation and the possibility of detecting lone offender threats on the Internet, *Avdelningen för Informations-och aerosystem, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI)*

6 NHK (2022). Naze issen wo koerunoka: Musabetsu makikomi jiken no shinso [なぜ一線を越えるのか:無差別巻き込み事件の深層, Why Crossing the Line: The Depths of Indiscriminate Cases] NHK Special. 21 Jun 2022. <https://www.nhk.jp/p/special/ts/2NY2QQLPM3/blog/bl/pneAjjR3gn/bp/ppxPVZog-Mp/05 Nov 2022>

to death.” After this case, there have been many cases where similar statements have been made, and recently, in 2021, the perpetrator of the “Keio Line stabbing case” (18 were injured) after his arrest said that he would be sentenced to death for killing people. In addition to such cases in which the offender is seeking the death penalty, there are many cases in which perpetrators commit suicide after killing and injuring unrelated people. The stronger the desire for revenge, which comes from self-victimization and the tendency to blame others, which was mentioned in the previous section, the stronger the desire to die and to not die alone. In relation to that, the desire to get revenge becomes stronger, and it can lead to murder–suicide involving many people.

Typology in western countries and its application to cases in Japan

In addition to the difficulty of clearly defining “lone attackers”, a motive cannot always be assigned with precision to one of the sub-groups mentioned above. But various approaches have been attempted to better understand lone attackers’ characteristics and attack patterns. The study carried out by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) in 2021⁷ referred to the research conducted by an American government task force that classified lone actors into four subgroups; “Loner”, “Lone follower”, “Lone vanguard” and “Lone soldier”. The classification was based on two dimensions: “ideological autonomy” (the extent

to which individuals share an ideology with others), and the “social competence” (the social and psychological difficulties that contribute to their isolation). The RAN’s study attempted to map the findings from the European research onto the American lone-actor typology (Table 1). If we apply the mass murder cases that have occurred in recent years in Japan to these four types, it can be said that most major cases can be classified as “Loner.” These classifications offer some hints for intervention in their described characteristics.

Examples of models of the radicalization process

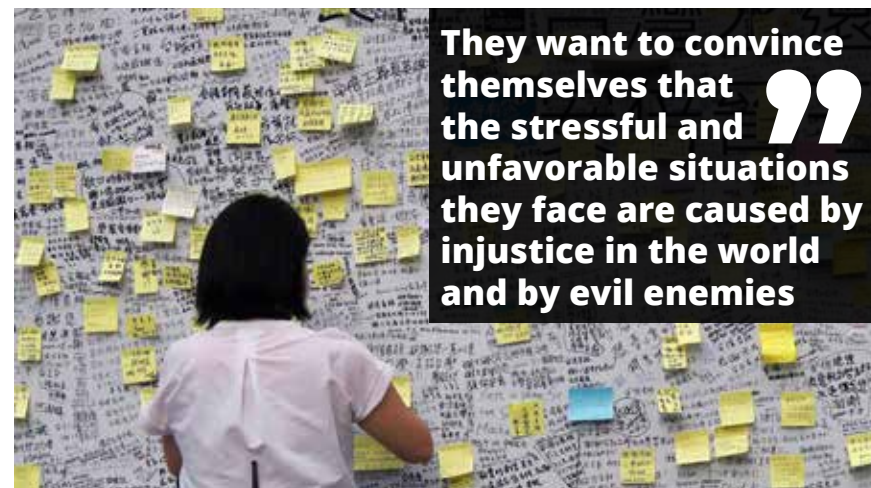
Various studies have also been conducted on the process of how thoughts and actions actually radicalize. Based on the model of Hamm and Spaaij,⁸ Ohji⁹ creates a model of the radicalization process peculiar to “lone wolves”. These, at least, seem to apply to a considerable degree to the perpetrators of the mass murders in Japan in recent years, and the five steps leading towards violence are summarized below:

Table 1: A proposed typology of lone-actor terrorists

National Security Critical Issue Task Force, USA (2015) n=98, US only*	Type 1 Loner	Type 2 Lone follower	Type 3 Lone vanguard	Type 4 Lone soldier
	Low social competence; ideological autonomy	Low social competence; shared ideology	High social competence; ideological autonomy	High social competence; shared ideology
Lindekilde et al. (2019), Europe n=33, USA, UK & Europe	Isolated, unstable, peripheral-withdrawn, weak social ties, rejected by group, unstable employment, long-term attack planning	Unstable, peripheral-volatile, violent, weak social ties, rejected by group, drug use, jihadi convert, ad hoc shorter planning, poor operational security, desire for martyrdom	Embedded-supported, ruptured relationship with group, stable, organised long-term attack planning, good operational security, far-right leanings	Embedded-autonomous, stable, organised attack planning, good operational security, occasional low-level criminality
Clemmow et al. (2020) * n=125, USA, UK, Europe & Israel	Unstable mental health/personality, relationship failure, isolated and unconnected to a network, low level of leakage Example: Franz Fuchs, Austrian mail bomber	Unstable networks, low stress, high level of violence and criminality, potential leakage Example: Anis Amri, Berlin Christmas market attack	Solitary but stable, little interaction with others, low level of networking and leakage, and of personal stress Example: Anders Breivik, Norwegian massacre ³⁰	Stable, but subject to strain and stress, bolstered by networks, potential leakage Example: Mohammed Bouyeri, Amsterdam murder of Theo van Gogh

* US data set 1940–2013; Lindekilde et al. selected subset of Gill data set; Clemmow et al. expanded data set from the Gill data set (1978–2015).

SOURCE: Adapted from Table 1 in Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2021). Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE, p. 7-8. Retrieved from https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021_en



Most major cases can be classified as “loner”

Step 1 Personal anguish, doubts, and anger at political and social injustice

They want to convince themselves that the stressful and unfavorable situations they face are caused by injustice in the world and by evil enemies who propagate it. Self-es-

teem is preserved by believing that the cause of their predicament is external. It is also characterized by mixing extremely personal grudges with various ideologies, but cognitive biases influence information gathering. In other words, humans have a “confirmation bias”, that is, the unconscious search for evidence that confirms what they think, because they feel uncomfortable when they hold information that contradicts their be-

liefs (“cognitive dissonance”), characterized by ignoring or disregarding information that contradicts assumptions. In addition, social media algorithms are designed to keep users engaged by funneling them toward increasingly extreme and radical content, i.e., “recommended videos”. Thus, those who are socially isolated are in an environment that reinforces biases, without the opportunity to incorporate different perspectives.

7 Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2021). Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE, p7-8. Retrieved from https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/lone-actors-challenge-pcve-july-2021_en

8 Hamm, M., & Spaaij, R. (2017). The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism. Columbia Univ Press.

9 Ohji, T. [大治朋子](2020). Yuganda Seigi: “Futsuu no hito” ga naze kagekika surunoka [歪んだ正義:「普通の人」がなぜ過激化するのか, Distorted Justice: Why 'Ordinary People' Are Radicalized]. Tokyo, Japan: Mainichi Shinbunsha [毎日新聞社].

Step 2 Narrative making

They create stories/narratives that reduce stress and trauma. They find “heroes” on the Internet who can empathize and resonate with them, actively incorporate their narratives, and try to follow in their footsteps. People tend to adopt ideas that are close to the belief system they already have and that they can emotionally sympathize with.

Step 3 “Radicalization tunnel”

“ Through self-victimization, they regard the other person as “bad” and themselves as “good”, ”

and by viewing the outgroup as lower than human beings, the value of their own existence, which has been suppressed, rises. In addition, this awareness of dehumanization becomes an essential requirement when finally carrying out indiscriminate attacks. Due to the habit of confirmation bias already mentioned, when they start to think radically, they will collect only information that matches it, leading to self-radicalization. People who

enter the process of radicalization often have failed to develop their own identities for various reasons, so they try to develop their identities to restore self-esteem through the process of radicalization.

Maslow’s theory¹⁰ states that human needs can be divided into five stages: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Towards the ultimate goal of self-actualization, humans are motivated to fulfill their needs in a hierarchical order from the most basic needs. People who enter the radicalization process aim for self-actualization in the same way as ordinary people, but the goal and the process leading to it become illegitimate.

Step 4 Leakage/Foretelling

It seems normal to think that giving advance notice before committing a crime could lead to intervention by the security authorities, but lone wolves tend to focus more on how they will be seen by others than on how they carry out the operation itself. There is a tendency to foretell or suggest the attack in advance by posting on social media, and to try to satisfy their desire for approval by receiving likes and positive reactions.

Step 5 Trigger

“ Radical thinking does not necessarily lead to radical behavior, ”

but a trigger can lead to a turning point and stimulate this change. One of the most common triggers is a sense of loss. Aggression is often directed at the person, group, or society, who they believe caused the loss. In addition, the experience of loss causes a sense of despair in the real world, and the thread with society that was slightly connected through human relationships and work is completely cut. As a result, they no longer feel the need to comply with norms such as rules and laws that govern the world.

Preventive measures that can be considered throughout the “process”

“ In order to prevent the behavior from actually becoming radicalized, prevention-oriented interventions should take place at each stage ”

of the process addressed in the previous section. Such interventions may include: critical thinking training to acquire different perspectives; clinical psychology approaches to behavioral change; vocational training and employment assistance; and direct support

by the government for those who post on social media complaining about social dissatisfaction and isolation or other issues.

Conclusions

Even if the number of cases is still low, considering the magnitude of the impact on society, and the fact that the lone attackers can inspire copycat behavior and become role models for other alienated youths, an immediate response is required. To enhance understanding of these “black swan” events, sharing experiences, data, and ideas regarding this particular threat between practitioners, policymakers and researchers from various regions and countries is essential to develop viable interventions to prevent lone attacks.

Lone wolves tend to focus more on how they will be seen by others than on how they carry out the operation itself



10 Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.

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Gender-based norms and violent extremism: what's the way forward for prevention?

by Marta Pompili and Alice Roberti

The importance of gender mainstreaming in preventing violent extremism (PVE) has increasingly been highlighted by many United Nations instruments. Amongst others, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism recognize women's empowerment as an essential element for sustainable peace, while [UN Security Council Resolution 2242](#) urges Member States to “gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women.”¹ In 2015, a Good Practice non-binding document on [Women and Countering Violent Extremism](#) was adopted by the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and an [Addendum with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender](#) was published in 2019. In the for-

mer, Good Practice 2 recommends parties to “identify gender dynamics in radicalization leading to terrorism and preventing it among women and girls.”²

“As suggested by the GCTF Good Practice document, gender discrimination might play a role in the radicalization process:

“women and girls’ inequalities, sexual and gender-based violence, marginalization, and lack of opportunities, may make them more susceptible to the appeal of terrorism.”³ In light of this, the need to develop a holistic analysis of violent extremism that takes into consideration gender relations has increasingly gained international attention and context-specific and gender-sensitive research should

inform parties to better understand the reasons behind women and men’s support to violent extremist groups.

For instance, as far as men and boys are concerned, socio-economic conditions leading to the inability to provide for their families might become a push factor to join violent extremist groups as they seek to comply with the ideal of the male breadwinner, provider, and head of the family. Violent extremist groups indeed usually provide a strict hierarchical structure and have been reported using women and children to exploit expectations around masculine roles by pressuring men and boys into committing acts of violence under the guise of protecting their families and demonstrating stereotypical “masculinity,” associated with (assumptions of) strength, violence, and authority.⁴ Men

“Men and boys may thus be radicalized by women themselves who encourage male actors in their families (e.g., brothers, sons, husbands) to take up arms



1 UN Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015), page 6.

2 Global Counter Terrorism Forum (2015). *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*, page 3.

3 Ibid., page 3.

4 International Alert (2020). *Dogmatism or Pragmatism? Violent extremism and gender in the central Sahel*.

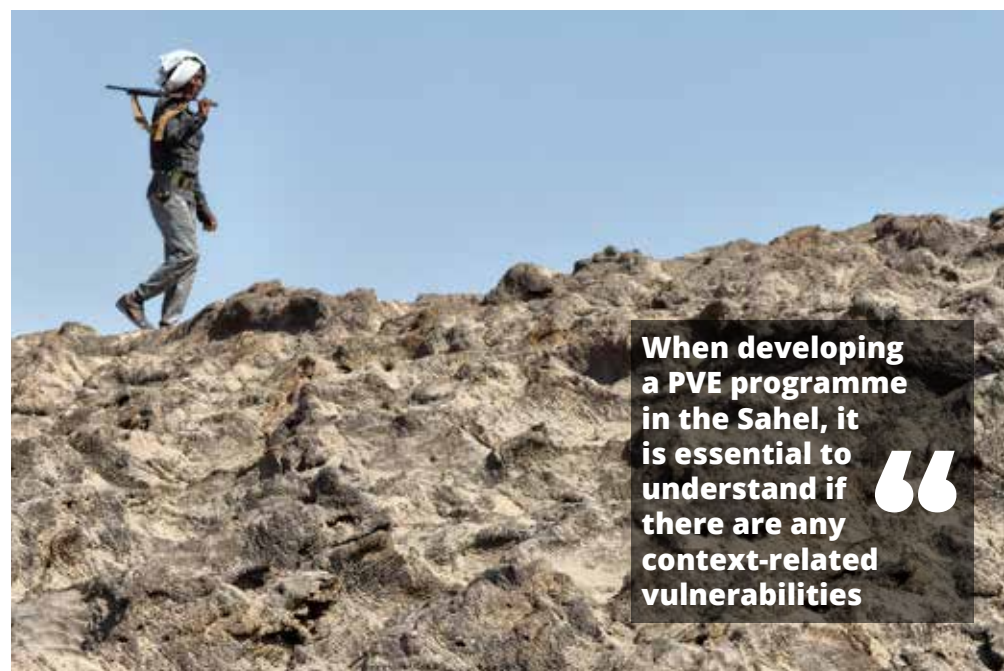
and boys may thus be radicalized by women themselves who encourage male actors in their families (e.g., brothers, sons, husbands) to take up arms and join extremist groups, which is sometimes considered a route to greater power and status.⁵ As mentioned by a 2022 report by the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the International Peace Institute (IPI),⁶ these examples show how violent extremist groups can exploit masculinities by idealising the idea of the warrior and the protector.

Concerning women and girls, in the context of violent extremist groups it is important to recognize that their roles are neither confined solely to victims nor to perpetrators. Women and girls can indeed be victims of gender-based violence and at the same time be activists, recruiters, fundraisers, and perpetrators. Women may also take active roles in logistics, finance, intelligence collection, reconnaissance, enforcement of morality laws, or in the provision of auxiliary services.⁷ In this con-

text, violent extremist groups may play a dual role: on one hand, they target female actors as a means of control, segregation, and subordination and women can be radicalized to violence through marital obedience and loyalty as well as family status.⁸ On the other hand, violent extremism may be an actively chosen route by women to escape conditions of subjugation and violence, gain opportunities and change the status that existing gender norms do not allow. This may appear particularly appealing for youth, even without necessarily sharing the violent extremist ideology. It is also worth noting that, in other cases, women are indirect victims of violent radicalization, i.e., by becoming widows, lacking a source of income, and/or by being displaced.⁹

According to UNICRI's experience, this analysis is particularly relevant in the Sahel, where restricted access to education and healthcare, lack of economic opportunities and widespread diffusion of violence against women constitute a breeding ground

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When developing a PVE programme in the Sahel, it is essential to understand if there are any context-related vulnerabilities “

for violent extremist ideologies. As outlined in the report “*Dogmatism or Pragmatism? Violent extremism and gender in the central Sahel*” published in 2020 by International Alert in the context of a project of UNICRI, in this region gender roles and related expectations can contribute to individuals' support to violent extremism, since “the ‘jihadist governance’ often takes a strongly gendered approach, combining elements of continuity and disruption of the social norms of rural communities.”¹⁰ On one side, violent extremist groups make significant efforts to ensure women conform to jihadist behavioural ideology, disciplining communities, and instituting power relations. For instance, in Mauritania, Soninke women — known for their colourful clothing and jewellery — need to cover themselves in public spaces with thick black robes, following the ‘correct manner’.¹¹

On the other hand, the same gendered ‘jihadist governance’ may challenge the current power relationships marked by extreme patriarchy by suggesting progressive measures — including relaxed conditions for access to mar-

riage or respect for marital obligations. Therefore, individuals living in a context with fixed and rigid gender roles, as well as widespread gender discrimination and violence, may be more susceptible to violent extremist groups propaganda, as these groups often target women by attacking their bodies or integrity, or on the contrary, by using false narratives of women's empowerment.¹²

The ‘jihadist governance’ often takes a strongly gendered approach

For these reasons, when developing a PVE programme in the Sahel, it is essential to understand if there are any context-related vulnerabilities that might be exploited by violent extremist groups in relation to gender. A project that aims to build resilience to violent extremism must consider how gender discrimination and violence have an impact on women's marginalization and on their appeal towards extremist groups' propaganda.¹³ The prevention of violent extremism requires a mul-

5 Johnston, M., True, J., Monash University and UN Women (2019). *Misogyny and Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism*; and OSCE, WIN (2022). *The Linkages between Violent Misogyny and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism*.

6 Dier, A. and Baldwin, B., United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), International Peace Institute (IPI) (2022). *Masculinities and Violent Extremism*.

7 Global Counter Terrorism Forum (2019). *Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender*; and OSCE (2019). *Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism - Good Practices for Law Enforcement*; and Johnston, M., True, J., Monash University and UN Women (2019). *Misogyny and Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism*.

8 Monash University and UN Women (2019). *Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya*.

9 International Alert (2020). *Dogmatism or Pragmatism? Violent Extremism and Gender in the Central Sahel*.

10 Ibid. p. 61.

11 UNICRI (2020). *Many Hands on an Elephant. What Enhances Community Resilience to Radicalisation into Violent Extremism?*

12 UN Women (2021). *In brief: Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Focus Areas*.

13 For instance, the 6th Review Resolution of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018) urges, inter alia, the integration of a gender analysis on the drivers of radicalization of women to violent extremism and terrorism in relevant programmes. Available from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/198/80/PDF/N1819880.pdf?OpenElement> (lastly visited on 28 February 2023).



tifaceted approach that addresses the underlying causes of radicalization and acknowledges the significant role played by gender relations and related dynamics. This includes addressing social, economic, cultural, and political factors that contribute to an individual's susceptibility to violent extremist ideologies. It also involves providing individuals with alternative narratives and opportunities that can help them become more resilient to violent extremist messages and choose a more peaceful and inclusive path.¹⁴

Furthermore, PVE programmes that exclusively consider men as violent actors, and women and girls as victims or nurturing educators, fail to address other significant and relevant aspects that lead to violent extremist radicalization. Designing a PVE programme following a binary analysis of gender fails to transform gender relations and it is ineffective in achieving a full understanding of the linkages between gender dynamics, roles, expectations, and discrimination on one side, and radicalization leading to violent extremism on the other.¹⁵ In addition, it is also essential to conduct context-specific

research, considering that strategies, tools and messages vary according to the different violent extremist group taken into account. In conclusion, to develop an effective programme against violent extremism, gender-sensitive and comprehensive interventions are required. Such interventions must rely on the assumption that the interactions between men, women and violent extremist groups are not uniform throughout the Sahel and need to be analysed in consideration of the specific contexts, demands, needs and expectations of local communities.¹⁶

It is also essential to conduct context-specific research

To this end, in December 2022, thanks to the generous support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), UNICRI officially launched the project "[Gender-based Discrimination and Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel](#)". In the context of this two-year project, the Institute will con-



Context-specific and gender-sensitive research will help parties to better understand the reasons behind women and men's support to violent extremist groups

duct research in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to generate knowledge on the impact of gender-based discrimination on radicalization leading to violent extremism. The research findings will form the basis for the development of tailor-made training modules

for national authorities as well as for civil society organizations from each of the three countries. Context-specific and gender-sensitive research will help parties to better understand the reasons behind women and men's support to violent extremist groups

in the target countries and, consequently, will support the development of effective PVE policies and programmes, contributing to building safer, more equal, and more empowered communities in the region.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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¹⁴ Asante, D. and Shepherd, L.J. (2020). *Gender and Countering Violent Extremism in Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans*, European Journal of Politics and Gender, 3(3); UN Women (2019). *Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for PVE*.

¹⁵ Asante, D. and Shepherd, L.J. (2020). *Gender and Countering Violent Extremism in Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans*, European Journal of Politics and Gender, 3(3).

¹⁶ Context-specificity is underscored in many international documents. See, for instance, Global Counter Terrorism Forum (2015). *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*, in particular Good Practice #11.

IN FOCUS

by Godfrey Mpandikizi



Join the fight against human trafficking: the role of TATLI in Tanzania

Human trafficking, commonly referred to as 'modern slavery', continues to be a global issue and an industry that generates estimated annual profits of USD 150 billion worldwide.

From 2012 to 2017, 89 million people experienced some form of human trafficking. According to the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report from July 2022, poverty human is an exacerbating cause of human trafficking in Tanzania.

Tanzania is among the countries greatly impacted by this phenomenon, and has recently witnessed an increase in trafficking crimes, predominantly involving online sexual exploitation. Tanzania is committed to preventing and combating human trafficking in and outside the country; this commitment was demonstrated by signing and ratifying the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and

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its supplementing Protocol to Prevent, Punish and Suppress Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) in 2000 and 2006 respectively.

Tanzania went further in the implementation of the International Protocol by enacting the Anti Trafficking in Persons Act (Act No. 6 of 2008). Apart from criminalizing all acts amounting to the trafficking in persons, this legislation aims to provide care, assistance, and treatments for victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, it establishes an institutional framework for effective coordination of all efforts by state and non-state actors in combating human trafficking in Tanzania. There is an obvious need to prevent human trafficking from happening. However, preventing human trafficking is compromised by a huge lack of resources - ranging from legal to psychological, the latter to address emotional issues - and by insufficient data-based evidence. Tanzania is affected by human trafficking as a source, transit and destination country.

Based in Dar es Salaam, TATLI (Tanzania Anti-Human Trafficking and Legal Initiatives) is committed to fighting human trafficking and providing legal assistance to trafficked survivors. Collaboration with other stakeholders in implementing various initiatives like capacity building to frontline officers,



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Tanzania is affected by human trafficking as a source, transit and destination country



awareness raising, and capacity building to investigators and prosecutors is also one of the TATLI's pillars.

Focusing on promoting and respecting the rights of trafficked survivors, TATLI works to bring about legal and social transformation. The organisation does this in four main areas: legal aid and assistance; research for spotlighting key systemic failures that enable trafficking; advocating for legislative reform; and raising awareness to end human trafficking.

TATLI employs the "4Ps approach" of the United Nations, which stands for prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership. This four-pronged approach includes the implementation of education and training programmes within local communities and human trafficking stakeholders such as judges or immigration officers.

A large basis of its work lies in advocacy and lobbying focusing on national politics, as well as on generating data-driven research and publications.

In monitoring and documenting as many incidences and cases of human trafficking as possible, the organisation is tackling the issue on a nationwide scale. This means interrogating and bringing a structural shift to Tanzania's legal systems to "bridge the disparities between the legal sys-

tems and trafficking survivors." Identifying good practices and critical issues to be addressed with respect to victims' support policies and practices and ultimately focusing on building

resilience is fundamental to prevent and counter trafficking in persons.

TATLI is also committed to working with survivors on

an individual level, whether through counselling, logistical issue (including) transportation, medical assistance, or economic empowerment.

To support victims of human trafficking and to help prevent it, familiarise yourself with TATLI's educational resources and campaigns within Tanzania, and learn how to identify trafficking in your local area and report it to the organisation please visit our website: <http://www.tatli.or.tz/>

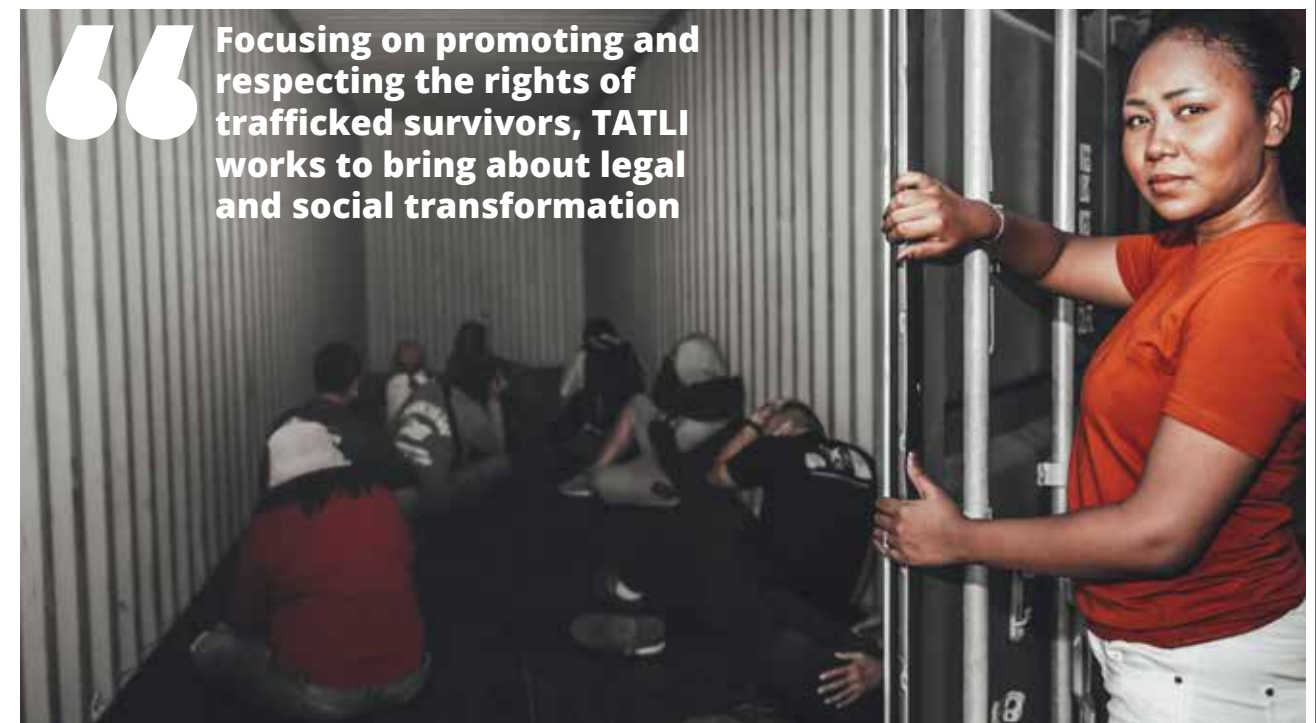
Alternatively, you can share the NGO's work and help raise awareness on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to help reaching people at risk and victims.

ABOUT THE THE AUTHOR

Godfrey Mpandikizi is the Executive Director of Tanzania Anti Human Trafficking and Legal Initiative (TATLI) which is a Non-Governmental Organization operating at national level to fight, deal and combat human trafficking in Tanzania, with a focus on defending and promoting the rights of survivors.



Focusing on promoting and respecting the rights of trafficked survivors, TATLI works to bring about legal and social transformation



The voices of the victims/survivors of terrorism and their role in preventing radicalization

by Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc

In general, the victims of terrorism have not been personally targeted by terrorist acts. Through a dehumanizing phenomenon, they suddenly become the tool that allows, through the generated terror, to strike a social group, a state or a society as a whole. They are thus involved in the conflict between the terrorists and their real target. The support offered by the target to the victims is often insufficient, which can lead to a feeling of victimhood, and anger. The anger of the victims of terrorism can then be turned against the target, thus increasing the effectiveness of the attack by isolating the victims and weakening the coherence of the social group. It also happens that victims of terrorism get involved themselves later in terrorist activities.

My personal experience has shown me that another path is possible: a path of resilience through action and testimony. I was 26 years old when I lost my father in the attack perpetrated by the Libyan secret services on 19 September 1989, against a civilian plane, the UTA DC10. This bombing killed the 170 passengers and crewmembers of the flight UT772 Brazzaville - N'Djamena - Paris, over the Sahara Desert (Niger). What followed for me was an erratic and complex personal journey. At the age of 38, in February 2002 - almost 13 years after the bombing. The negotiations took two years. Other relatives of the victims of the attack have joined me in the process; the French Government has supported us. On 9 January 2004, we obtained that Libya recog-

This bombing killed the 170 passengers and crewmembers of the flight UT772



nize its responsibility in this heinous attack and compensate the 170 families up to 1\$170 million dollars.¹ This was the beginning of my personal reconstruction, which is still going on today.

“

I began negotiations with Saïf al Islam Kadhafi, the son of my father's assassin

My experience showed me two main things. One, is the power of storytelling when used in a constructive way, purged of elements of distress or hatred. The other, is the importance of getting out of the victim position - necessarily passive - and starting to build your own future instead of letting, or expecting, the others to decide for you. Thus, within the framework of the French Association of Victims of Terrorism that I created in 2009,² I have set up a support process for victims of terrorism based on action. In this framework, we have created events, for various audiences, focusing on the victims' narrative: "Terrorism: and if we listened to the victims...".

The role of victims in the fight against radicalisation

In a working group on the voice of victims of terrorism, that I co-directed within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) from 2010 to 2014, we have drafted best-practice guidelines on the use of victim testimonies in the fight against radicalization.

We have also produced video testimonies of victims in several languages. Knowing that it may be quite difficult for victims to repeat their stories often, in front of different audiences, the videos allow a much larger-scale use of the testimonies. They also allow complementing face-to-face testimonies of volunteers with testimonies of other victims, especially from other countries. The videos were produced with the financial support of the United Nations, the European Commission, the French "Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation" (CIPDR), the French Ministry of Justice, and in partnership with the International Federation of associations of victims of terrorism (IFAVT).

In 2015 and 2016, the first scientific study on the prevention



of radicalization in prison was conducted by a multidisciplinary team that I have led. In the frame of this study, carried out in two French prisons, we have tested the effectiveness of the testimonies of victims of terrorism on radicalized prisoners. Only three types of actors have a certain credibility on with the target audience: experts (religious leaders, sociologists, historians, etc.), former radicalized people (it was not possible to verify the de-

gree of disengagement), and victims. Our method consisted on involving these three types of actors in a multidisciplinary approach, with each type of intervention having its own objective and being part of a more comprehensive process.

Victims are “legitimate to testify because of what they have undergone, but the main interest of their testimony lies in their journey towards resilience”

The effectiveness of victims' testimonies is based on a status of 'otherness' and requires a real interaction with the target audience. **Victims who take part in the process must have progressed on their own path of resilience far enough to be able to speak without hatred or a spirit of vengeance.** What is expected from the victims is not that they position themselves as experts, but that they bring the human factor. They should tell, in their own words and in all sincerity, their complex and singular journey: the moment of the attack, the difficult return to a "normal" life, their reintegration into society, their current life and vision of the future. The victims may also tell how this painful experience has raised their interest



¹ « Mon père était dans le DC10 ...19 septembre 1989 : un attentat attribué à la Libye frappe un avion français. Histoire secrète d'une négociation », Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc avec la collaboration de Candice Bal, éditions Privé, 2006.

² The author founded the French Association of the Victims of Terrorism (Association française des Victimes du Terrorism) and was the Director General of the Association from 2009 to 2022.

in the complexity of the world and of human relationships.

As a general principle, any testimony of a victim of terrorism emphasizes three complementary notions: otherness, victim position, and free will. The testimonies are adapted to the different audiences and are especially intended to initiate discussions with them. When they target teenagers or the general public, they allow addressing the anxiogenic and taboo subject of terrorism. In prison, these testimonies allow for very strong exchanges, full of humanity and sincerity – in this frame however, each party involved keeps his or her place as victim or perpetrator.

“

Any testimony of a victim of terrorism emphasizes three complementary notions: otherness, victim position, and free will

We have noted during the exchanges with radicalized inmates (or those in the process of being radicalized) that they almost always see themselves as victims – often they even tell us: “I am a victim too”. Indeed, it is their feeling of (real or supposed) injustice that has made them vulnerable to extremist ideologies, and can lead them to join a terrorist cause. Face

to the victims’ sincerity in talking about their life path, and through a totally counterintuitive process, the extremists get to identify themselves with the victims of terrorism. They get to think that they are like us: “wounded by life”. At that moment, their question is: “How did you manage not to hate?” This is a key moment, when they are open to listen to the victims’ testimony about his or her choice and life path after the terrorist act. Listen and compare with their own choices, which led them to being in prison.

“

We have noted during the exchanges with radicalized inmates (or those in the process of being radicalized) that they almost always see themselves as victims

Indeed, there are two possible reactions to experiencing injustice. The first, instinctive and primal, leads to anger, revenge and violence. This is the one that was taken by the prisoners, and it is a dead end. The second is much more complex, involving introspection – without denying reality -, intellectualization, explanation, justice and dialogue. This is the one chosen by the victims of terrorism who are in-

involved in the fight against radicalization, and it is the only one that has a future. For each victim, leaving the victim position and taking back the control of his or her life was a very personal choice, generally followed by a chaotic and complex journey. The new life of the victim, totally different from the one before the attack, integrates the traumatic experience.

“

The testimony of the victims can be the trigger for a new roadmap for the radicalized inmate, if other actors involved in detention or probation accompany the process. “

In prison, among radicalized inmates (convicted of common law offences or terrorism), it often happens that the detainees tell us in turn about their journey through a collective “we” narrative, which then returns to the “I”. Even in front of their fellow inmates, they take off their shell and present themselves with sincerity, encouraged by the way the victim has done the same exercise. They, too, have chosen action, or to embrace a cause, in an attempt to escape their position of failure, but this choice was guided by a sense of re-

sentment and hatred. They have become radical losers.³

In all cases, at the very least, the testimonies of the victims cast doubt on the simplistic vision of the world of radicalized inmates. The approach of a benevolent, listening, non-hateful, non-judgmental victim who has made peace with himself or herself, and wishes to meet them in prison, is incompatible with their binary vision of the world. We bring the grey area and the shades of colour into an intellectual structuring of the world in black and white. Our action opens a fissure in their ideological construction. This doubt opens the way for other actors to widen the breach, to deconstruct the ideology, and to accompany them towards an exit from radicalism.

“

In recent years, the testimonies of victims of terrorism have been increasingly used by the French Government in the counter violent extremism process. “

Our approach and hope is that the interaction with a victim of terrorism will inspire people,



“ **Our action opens a fissure in their ideological construction. This doubt opens the way for other actors to widen the breach, to deconstruct the ideology, and to accompany them towards an exit from radicalism**

as it did with the survivors of the Shoah.

In high schools and colleges, these testimonies can support preventing or stopping the radicalization processes. This is primary prevention. In the frame of the French national education system, victims of terrorism intervene very regularly in French schools, at the

request of teachers. A structured educational process is jointly defined and continuously adapted by teachers and victims’ associations. In France, as in Spain, the study of terrorism is nowadays a mandatory subject of the national educational program.

The French administration of prisons also employs more

3 « Le perdant radical : Essai sur les hommes de la terreur » Broché, 19 octobre 2006, de Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Auteur), Daniel Mirsky.

and more often the testimonies of victims of terrorism, either face-to-face or on video, as part of the work conducted by the evaluation or counter-radicalization units.

Only resilient victims can effectively participate in the prevention of radicalization.

A prerequisite for any involvement of the victims in the prevention of radicalization is multidisciplinary support for them in the short, medium and long term (provided by the State, associations and civil society) to obtain their rights: access to justice, compensation,

physical and psychological care, recognition, and memory. This approach was developed in France by the Government and the associations after the 2015 attacks. But this is another subject, just as important and interesting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR **Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc:** Founder and President of the International Federation of Associations of Victims of Terrorism (IFAVT) since 2011. Ambassador of the RAN (Radicalisation Awareness Network). Vice-President of V-Europe. Founder of the French association for victims of terrorism (AFVT); Executive Director from April 2009 to May 2022.

Son of Jean-Henri Denoix de Saint Marc, killed in the terrorist attack against the flight UT772, DC10-UTA, perpetrated by Libya: 170 dead victims from 18 nationalities, 19 September 1989. Negotiated directly with the son of the murderer of his father (Mouamar Kadhafi) from 2002 to 2004 and obtained the recognition of responsibility from Libya. Created a Memorial on the crash site (Sahara Desert).



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Disengaging from violent extremism: what can we learn from crime desistance research?

by Sigrid Raets

People with a history of violent extremism face different obstacles than those who are convicted of other types of offences



Introduction

It now seems obvious that knowing how and why people leave extremism is just as important as knowing why they join. From being something of an afterthought in extremism research, the study of disengagement has grown immensely over the past 15 years. The main reasons driving disengagement decisions are now starting to emerge. However, we still have much to learn about exiting extremism. There is a clear and urgent need for more theoretically developed, more empirically wide-ranging, and more methodologically varied research in this area. To advance our understanding, this paper draws lessons from a literature review¹ on an extensive body of work addressing a similar topic: desistance from crime.



A number of scholars have pointed out the added value of examining extremist disengagement through a criminological lens.

Still, barring a few notable exceptions (see for example Cherney, Putra, Putera, Erikha, & Magrie, 2021; LaFree & Miller, 2008; Marsden, 2016;

Simi, Sporer, & Bubolz, 2016), desistance and disengagement have been the focus of separate literatures, resulting in knowledge silos. This paper tries to bridge these disciplinary and topical divides. Despite the differences between desisting from crime and disengaging from extremism, criminological research offers important insights both for understanding and supporting the process of disengagement.

Key lessons from the desistance literature

How much does desisting differ from disengaging? The short answer to this question would be “not much”. The slightly longer answer is that criminal desistance and extremist disengagement share far more similarities than differences. Disengaging, like desisting, is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process of change. Both can take different shapes and take place under different circumstances. Both can occur naturally, with or without outside intervention. Both tend to involve lapses and relapses, stumbles, and successes. Social support is essential to both, as are shifts in maturity, cognition, emotions, and identity.



Criminal desistance and extremist disengagement share far more similarities than differences

While the mechanics involved in both processes of change overlap substantially, research does reveal some specifics for the process of disengaging. Crucially, these differences are differences of degree, not of kind. People with a history of violent extremism face different obstacles than those who are convicted of other types of offences. These obstacles relate to group membership and ideological convictions, but also to how these people are treated by the criminal justice system and society at large. Still, this makes disengaging from extremism no more distinct than desisting from other specific types of crime such as sexual offending or organised crime.

Clearly then, we can – and should – build on the knowledge that is already out there. Why reinvent the wheel when there is no need to do so? Moreover, interventions designed to prevent crime or assist desistance could inform efforts to prevent and coun-

¹ For the full review: see Raets, S. (2022A). Desistance, disengagement, and deradicalization: a cross-field comparison. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*. doi:10.1177/0306624X221102802

“ Many CVE initiatives already seem to be grounded in tried-and-tested crime prevention or rehabilitation practice ”



new social network, or simply opening a bank account can all become major stumbling blocks on the road to reintegration. Reintegrating is not a one-man job but a two-way street. Recognising society's role in supporting change and fostering acceptance is therefore vital.

“ Recognising society's role in supporting change and fostering acceptance is therefore vital ”

Reducing stigma, supporting the (re-)building of prosocial relationships, and providing positive opportunities for self-development all emerge as instrumental in promoting change. But what about addressing extremist ideologies? Strategies aimed at changing these beliefs, also

ter violent extremism (CVE). In fact, many CVE initiatives already seem to be grounded in tried-and-tested crime prevention or rehabilitation practice (see also Shanaah & Heath-Kelly, 2022; Raets, 2022B). It must, however, be stressed that the effectiveness of generic crime reduction interventions in the context of violent extremism should be assessed rather than assumed.

While desisting and disengaging are similar, they are not the same. It is important that we acknowledge the barriers that can make disengagement difficult to achieve. Even when individuals are highly motivated to change, they often face serious challenges. Some individuals, like women and children, may encounter specific barriers during their reintegration (see also Bosley, 2020). Finding a job, building a



referred to as deradicalisation programmes, might not always be necessary. Firstly, ideologies are not the problem – violence is. From a public safety perspective, giving up violence matters more than giving up beliefs. Secondly, more research is needed to assess to what extent lingering extremist beliefs influence one's chances of relapsing. As Horgan and colleagues note (Horgan, Meredith, & Papatheodorou, 2020, p. 17), “our knowledge of what precise ingredients comprise the best recipe for deradicalization is limited.” Recent studies suggest that addressing ideology can be helpful in some cases, but not all (Cherney & Belton, 2019). Supporting disengagement demands a holistic approach, and sometimes this includes assisting people in changing their beliefs.

Concluding remarks

Too often, extremist offenders are considered to be in some way ‘special’ or ‘unique’. Practitioners, policymakers, politicians, and the public continue to assume that there must be something very different about people with a history of violent extremism. The findings presented in this paper challenge this assumption. As demonstrated above, desisting from crime and disengaging from extremism are more similar than they are different. What the field of disengagement studies needs is less navel-gazing about “the intractable complexity of violent extremism” (Bosley, 2020, p. 34) and more engagement with its neighbouring research domains. Criminology, as we know, lends itself particularly well to the task. Continuing this research line

of criminologically unwinding and unspooling the process of extremist disengagement can therefore only be encouraged.

Besides bridging knowledge silos, connecting theory, research, and practice in this field is surely needed. Nowhere is this disconnect more evident than in the many worries, uncertainties, and inconsistencies surrounding efforts to counter violent extremism and promote disengagement. We know relatively little about how individuals may be encouraged to disengage. But we also know little about the effectiveness of current CVE efforts, as few initiatives have been evaluated (see also Glazard, 2022). Practice-based knowledge development and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of CVE efforts appear particularly valuable in answering these issues.

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A “Fresh start through sport”? Supporting positive youth development in marginalised communities in Northern Ireland

by Dr Brendan Coyle, Dr Conor Murray, Dr Gavin Breslin (Ulster University),
Mr Mark Dennison, Mr John Marshall (Irish Football Association Foundation)

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For young people in
Northern Ireland,
growing up and
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complicated

Often described as a ‘post-conflict’ society, Northern Ireland remains in a state of transition following a 30 year period of widespread sectarian conflict involving State and non-State armed groups. In 1998, following a series of ceasefires and cross-party talks, the *Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement* (CFA) marked the commencement of a long process of political transition. This has involved fragmented periods of devolved power-sharing between the parties representing the unionist, largely Protestant majority, and those representing the nationalist or republican, predominately Catholic minority. Despite significant progress in the 25 years following the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society, with divisions



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and fault lines cutting across many aspects of daily existence.

For young people in Northern Ireland, growing up and making a successful transition to adulthood is uniquely complicated, as the legacy of the conflict can continue to affect the day-to-day negotiation of important transitional moments and milestones. This is particularly true for those living in areas of multiple deprivation, as they seek status, opportunity, and stability at the social and economic margins of Northern Irish society. In the context of limited developmental opportunities, issues relating to the legacy of the conflict have more of an opportunity to texture the lives of young people, both in terms of sectarianism and the influence of paramilitary activity.

For the majority of young individuals, the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland may manifest in feelings of marginalisation and exclusion, a mistrust of the police and those in positions of authority, and a lack of knowledge of those in the “other” ethno-political community. These experiences of deprivation and exclusion, while locally textured in the life stories of young people, are shared across communities, cross-cutting politics, ideology and culture. For others it manifests in an acute awareness and often first-hand experi-

ence of paramilitary activity and sectarian violence.

In October 2020, four of the largest sporting organisations in Northern Ireland, the Irish Football Association (IFA), Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), Ulster Rugby and the Belfast Giants partnered to deliver a sport-based intervention: "Fresh Start Through Sport (FSTS)". Supported by the Department for Communities, Department of Justice, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the programme involves young people, aged 16 to 24, from areas of multiple deprivation who may be at risk of becoming involved in paramilitarism and/or organised crime. The premise of the FSTS interventions is that sport has a universal appeal and can be used as a hook to motivate young people to develop agency, self-confidence, and self-efficacy through opportunities for physical activity, sports-

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The programme involves young people, aged 16 to 24, from areas of multiple deprivation who may be at risk of becoming involved in paramilitarism and/or organised crime

based learning and support for individuals.

The four sporting partners deliver a series of sport-based modules, focusing on disability, bias, tackling racism, resilience, and the mental health benefits of sport. The objectives of these modules are to guide and support participants in identifying and making positive life choices, with the eventual goal of providing a pathway away from paramilitarism, and an active route into community work, coaching, an ambassador role, and/or volunteering through

sport. The programme also provides educational pathways through Ulster University and the completion of Open College Network (OCN) qualification credits at Level 2 in Sport and Volunteering.

The evidence concerning the impact and effectiveness of the FSTS programme - now in its third phase of delivery - is becoming more readily apparent. We have seen some positive examples of the impact that FSTS can have on the lives of young people in marginalised settings, even despite the social, physical and practical limitations wrought upon the programme by government-imposed public health restrictions put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Through the ongoing evaluations of each phase of delivery, we have found that bringing young people from different communities together through the conduit of sport has a positive impact on their aspirations and can



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Sport has a universal appeal and can be used as a hook to motivate young people to develop agency, self-confidence, and self-efficacy

serve as a vehicle for developing positive peer influence and building cross-community rapport.

The voices of participants involved in the programme have highlighted a number of important themes. The programme has played a role in helping marginalised young people in Northern Ireland to break down a range of barriers, be they related to personal circumstances, physical and mental health, or cross-community tensions:

“Definitely through sport it is one of the best ways to break down barriers and especially when it comes to cross-community... being part of a team, having a general purpose or cause and things like that there helps bring people together.”

“It makes you more willing to give anything a go, like any sports or like anything in general. You going oh flip, I might not do that, but do you know what, I’ll just do it, what’s the worst that can happen?”

FSTS provides young people from different community backgrounds with the opportunity to realise that they exist in similar circumstances and are confronted with similar life challenges:

“Whenever you get talking to other people it brings them tensions down because whenever you are out and about, you are seeing each other as enemies... when you just get to speaking to them you realise everyone’s just dead on.”

The programme also offers participants viable pathways to learning opportunities, the development of new practical and social skills, and developmental opportunities which may be otherwise limited by context:

“Well, you can’t get enough qualifications like but definitely everything helps, it leads you to the person you are today. It is good for qualifications but it’s not even about it, it makes you a good person like.”

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The programme has played a role in helping marginalised young people in Northern Ireland to break down a range of barriers
”



Well, you can't get enough qualifications like but definitely everything helps, it leads you to the person you are today

The programme also supports community embeddedness by integrating and promoting local volunteering opportunities for participants:

"Give everything a go. Never say no. Just try it. I mean it did open a lot of doors like. Obviously, it gave me more confidence to go down and actually volunteer, and go to actually help the community, and do it more often."

Researchers at Ulster University who evaluated the programme have identified some of the lessons to be learned from the delivery of sport-based interventions in

Without sports-based intervention programmes the risk for young people is higher

communities. Identifying the right partners is essential in promoting and developing programmes. Within FSTS, the partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland is crucial in examining current data relating to paramilitary incidents and activity throughout Northern Ireland. This evidence is used to select areas for programme delivery and identify community partners who are working with the young people most at risk. Engagement with those groups has provided an understanding of the threats of paramilitarism within communities. Without sports-based intervention programmes the risk for young people is higher as they do not have a focus and can be encouraged to take part in paramilitary activity on different levels. Providing pathways upsills young people and also improves their mental health

and well-being. Sports-based interventions work best when delivered in the right locations, to the right young people at the right time.

As an exemplar of cross-sectoral and multi-sport partnered delivery, FSTS represents a creative, and potentially highly impactful, means of engaging with and supporting marginalised young people, providing them

FSTS has the capacity to identify FSTS has the capacity to identify, develop and enhance the strengths of the young people involved, develop and enhance the strengths of the young people involved

with opportunities that they may not otherwise have been afforded. Not solely about managing "risks", FSTS has the capacity to identify, develop and enhance the strengths

of the young people involved, which can in turn serve to mitigate some of the factors that may render them vulnerable to the influence of paramili-

tary organisations in their local communities.

A report of the evidence from the FSTS programme is available on request.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brendan Coyle is a Lecturer in Criminology (School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences) and Course Director of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Ulster University, Belfast. His research explores relationships between the transition to adulthood, maturity, and desistance from crime.

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Gavin Breslin is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology, School of Psychology and Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing at Ulster University, Northern Ireland. His research explores the role of sport and exercise in enhancing health and wellbeing.

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Investigation, prosecution and adjudication of radiological and nuclear terrorism

by Talgat Toleubayev

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Terrorists and organized criminal groups constantly seek to obtain radiological and nuclear materials to kill or cause substantial injury to others

Terrorists and organized criminal groups constantly seek to obtain radiological and nuclear materials to kill or cause substantial injury to others by detonating “dirty bombs”, dispersing these materials, or exposing others to toxic and harmful health effects. Their ultimate objective is to cause the maximum level of harm and panic among the population due to the destructive and psychological consequences of such attacks. Although a sophisticated level of education as well as special conditions are needed to create a very powerful bomb, the availability of certain open source literature and the relatively easy access to radiological and nuclear materials facilitate these criminal actors’ capacity to acquire materials that can be used to build radiological and nuclear weapons.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) Incident and Trafficking Database (ITDB), 4,075 confirmed incidents were reported from 1993 to 2022. Given the fact that only 143 participating countries in the ITDB report about their incidents on a voluntary basis, we do not have a real picture of the scale of incidents worldwide. Out of this overall number of incidents reported, 344 of them were related to incidents likely to be connected with trafficking or malicious use. This explains why almost 8,5 percent of all

reported incidents to the IAEA attracted the attention of investigators, prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant authorities.

For the purpose of thwarting the illicit trafficking of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials, investigative and prosecutorial authorities may intervene at any stage in the process of their acquisition, stockpiling, production, transfer, use or misuse. Prosecutors need to provide a very strong case in a court of law to convince the judge and jury of the deliberate nature of such crimes and this must be supported with immaculate evidence. Yet, it takes many years for the criminal case to go from the crime scene to the adjudication in the courtroom. This long process may impact the evidence’s integrity.

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Investigative and prosecutorial authorities may intervene at any stage in the process of their acquisition, stockpiling, production, transfer, use or misuse.

It is obvious, that the probability of radiological and nuclear terrorism may be low due to stringent regulatory and control regimes enforced by

states, but the impact of such incidents when materials fall into the wrong hands will be very high. Criminals tend to target the weakest link of the entire security chain in order to obtain these materials during their production, legitimate use, transportation, and storage. Access to radiological and nuclear materials has also recently become more realistic due to such negative factors as the growing nexus between crime and terrorism; ongoing regional instabilities; uncontrolled territories; and the abundance of materials

as part of some failed states' historical heritage.



Access to radiological and nuclear materials has also recently become more realistic

The most challenging parts of investigating and prosecuting these criminal cases is when the crime scene is contaminated with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials. As a result, different response methodologies and

additional mechanisms will be required to protect investigators, first responders and other actors involved in the crime scene and to keep the evidence intact. Fortunately, some of these procedures are already well referenced and covered in various manuals published by partner international organizations.

One such publication is the [IAEA's Nuclear Security Series 22G, entitled Radiological Crime Scene Management Implementing Guide](#). This document was jointly sponsored by

the IAEA, UNICRI and Interpol when it was initially published in 2014. Currently, the guide is being updated by the IAEA with some inputs provided by UNICRI. This joint initiative between the IAEA and UNICRI led to the design of a second complementary publication: the Prosecutor's Guide to Radiological and Nuclear Crimes, which UNICRI is developing in close coordination with the IAEA, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Nuclear Forensics Centre of the European Commission Joint Research Centre

(JRC) and the International Association of Prosecutors (IAP).

The Prosecutor's Guide to Radiological and Nuclear Crimes will be a complementary document for prosecutors, investigators and judges with some useful tips, lessons learned and best practices from previous real criminal case examples, which may serve as a precedent. A step-by-step recommendation, aimed at successful investigation and building a criminal case for the prosecution of radiological and nuclear crimes will be

an integral part of this manual. A guidance manual covering international conventions and legal instruments, touching on legislation and criminalization aspects, explaining national capabilities in investigation and prosecution, including investigative intelligence, and outlining prosecutorial challenges, success stories and appeal processes will support all relevant players in this process.

The initial story with the UNICRI's series of action-oriented guidance manuals "From the

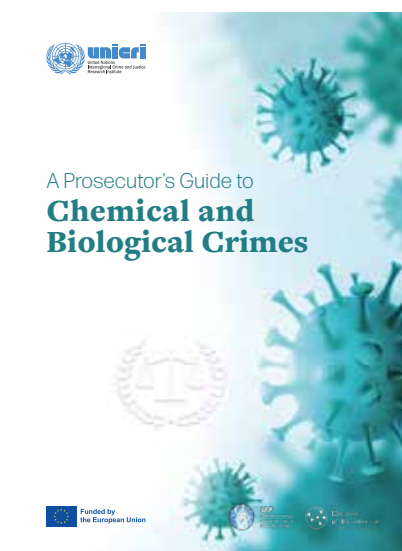
The Prosecutor's Guide to Radiological and Nuclear Crimes will be a complementary document for prosecutors, investigators and judges



Crime Scene to the Courtroom”, started back in 2020. In close cooperation with relevant partner international organizations and subject matter experts, UNICRI started developing its guidance manuals dedicated to prosecutors, investigators, law enforcement and judicial authorities. This action was endorsed by partner countries within the framework of the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (EU CBRN CoE) and fully funded by the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) Service of the European Commission.

The process of successfully going from the crime scene to the courtroom requires the different agencies to understand the complex scientific regulations and procedures and acquire the necessary awareness and knowledge related to the CBRN materials used by perpetrators. The investigation, prosecution and adjudication of such crimes require authorities to possess knowledge on the different CBRN materials, the methods that perpetrators use to plan and execute the crime, the forensic capabilities, the intelligence and information sharing methods, and many more. The involvement, coordination, and cooperation of national CBRN teams, prosecution and justice authorities, investigation and law enforce-

ment officials, forensics laboratories, research facilities, and intelligence agencies, all contribute to safely addressing the different aspects of the crime. Moreover, while such crimes are under the responsibility of national authorities, international and regional cooperation is extremely useful and necessary.



This initiative brought its first results with the issuance and dissemination of [A Prosecutor's Guide to Chemical and Biological Crimes](#), which became central in the development of capacity-building activities aimed at enhancing knowledge and skills about the entire process of the case investigation, starting from the crime scene contaminated with chemical and biological materials to the eventual prosecution and adjudication of the crime in the courtroom.

“ While such crimes are under the responsibility of national authorities, international and regional cooperation is extremely useful and necessary

A comprehensive capacity-building and training package was developed by UNICRI to integrate the provisions of these CBRN Guides into the professional duties of prosecutors in the partner countries and strengthen their investigative, prosecution and adjudication capabilities. The training package consists of the following theoretical courses and practical exercises:

- The **Table top exercise (TTX)** which brings together the strategic and operational level decision makers from the beneficiary countries by using some of the real-life case examples integrated in the Guide. The TTX helps beneficiaries to identify their needs, gaps and priorities, as well as help them to effectively address those needs and tackle the gaps during the activities and in the long-term.
- **Building a case for the prosecution of CBRN crimes training** is a standalone, modulable course

that consists of 37 lessons that can be adapted based on the specific needs of the beneficiaries. The training package allows the participants to learn about the entire process of investigating a case from the crime scene contaminated with chemical and biological materials to the eventual prosecution and adjudication of the crime in the courtroom.

- The **Moot court or mock trial**, a practical simulation training activity of the court proceedings. Participants have the opportunity to apply the theoretical

skills they learned during the training courses and to successfully practice the prosecution of a CBRN crime in a simulated moot court with the participation of real judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers and other relevant authorities.

- The **Train-the-Trainer (TTT)** course that aims to incorporate these training courses into the curriculum of training institutions or academies for prosecutors, law enforcement or police. Participants develop the knowledge and skills needed to incorpo-

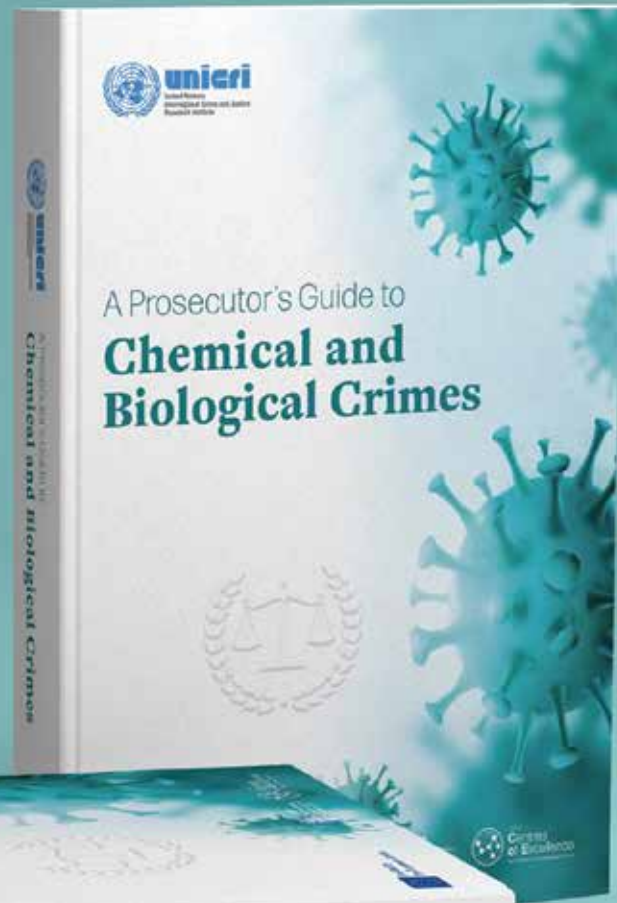
rate the guides and the training package as part of their training curriculum. Training institutions will be involved in this initiative from the outset to ensure their support and engagement.

While this training package is intended primarily for prosecutors, it is also targeted at other judicial and investigative agencies due to the cross-cutting nature of prosecutorial work. This includes relevant law enforcement authorities which are leading the investigation and prosecution from the crime scene to the courtroom.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Talgat Toleubayev works as the Regional Coordinator within the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute's CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance Programme since 2019. In this position, he coordinates activities and projects for 10 countries in South East and East Europe region within the framework of the European Union's CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative. He also coordinates the development of a series of action-oriented guidance documents and the capacity building and training packages of the UNICRI, aimed at successful investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of CBRN crimes. He is a retired police Lieutenant-Colonel.




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A Prosecutor's Guide to Chemical and Biological Crimes



The role of technology in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear disinformation: risks and benefits

by Mariana Diaz Garcia and Francesco Marelli

Social media platforms have been maliciously used by violent non-state actors to spread false information and conspiracy theories, often with the intention to jeopardize the credibility of governments and radicalize public opinion. “

Technology plays a central role in the area of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) disinformation.¹ Social media platforms have been maliciously used by violent non-state actors to spread false information and conspiracy theories, often with the intention to jeopardize the credibility of governments and radicalize public opinion. It could even be said that social media platforms have changed the “rules of the game” in the history of disinformation. While in the past CBRN disinformation was often part of covert operations conducted by governments with the intention to influence the opinions and actions of individuals and Member States (disinformation campaigns and disinformation mitigation tactics), in recent years, terrorists, violent extremists, and organized criminal groups have started to exploit vulnerabilities in the social media ecosystem to deliberately disseminate conspiracy theories and manipulate people in relation to CBRN threats. Violent non-state actors can sometimes operate as voluntary or involuntary proxies of governments, but their direct involvement and their ability to manipulate information has

introduced a new variable that significantly amplifies the spread of disinformation.

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in recent years, terrorists, violent extremists, and organized criminal groups have started to exploit vulnerabilities in the social media ecosystem

At the same time, technology offers innovative solutions to detect and respond to disinformation. There are a variety of technology solutions that can be used easily and often at no cost to ascertain whether the information or claim is correct, to analyse a website and determine if and to what extent the source is reliable, to verify the contents of photos and videos and so on.

“
The global exchange of content in real-time on social media has modified citizens' behaviours regarding news consumption.

This article analyses some of the technology risks and advantages related to disinformation. Let us start with the risks by clarifying that technology is not inherently bad or harmful. The development of new digital platforms has created new forms of communication and greater connection between millions of users. The global exchange of content in real-time on social media has modified citizens' behaviours regarding news consumption. Easy and rapid access to a great wealth of data and information has permitted citizens to expand their knowledge and introduced innovative journalistic practices. However, as so often with technological advancement, social media platforms have also posed new challenges, including the proliferation of false information and conspiracy theories.

Manipulating data and misleading the public on social media is rather simple. For example, forging an official letter by a United Nations organization is relatively simple considering that, most likely, the logo and even the signature of the Director General of that organization can be found and downloaded through a search engine. Manipulating

¹ Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) disinformation is intentionally misleading and deceptive information about CBRN threats, that can potentially cause serious political, financial, and physical harm to governments, international organizations, the scientific community, academia, industry, and the population at large. CBRN disinformation has become a significant problem in the last few years. False information and conspiracy theories on CBRN risks, such as exposure to toxic chemicals, infectious disease outbreaks or theft of radioactive material, can cause confusion and mistrust in governments and even jeopardize the public health response in case of emergency. To find out more see UNICRI *Handbook to combat CBRN disinformation* available at <https://unicri.it/Publication/Handbook-to-combat-disinformation>.



quake of 11 March 2011) and adding the sentence “[Breaking News] Japan’s Fukushima nuclear power plant swept up in a red blaze” as if the event were taking place now.²

By mastering complex techniques, it is possible to break into a web server and replace a hosted website with a completely different one (website defacement). It is even possible to generate videos or photographs that misrepresent people by generating images that are nearly indistinguishable from the original (deepfake video). Artificial intelligence techniques can also produce fake news reports, including realistic video and audio, to influence public opinion, impact political campaigns and erode trust in government (e.g., in the area of vaccines).

Social media platforms can be also used maliciously to create echo-chambers, that are



photos and videos is also relatively simple. For example, someone can mislead users of social media by posting an

original picture of a fire at a Japanese oil refinery next to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant (after the terrible earth-

virtual environments where a group of individuals participate in online discussions and find their opinions constantly echoed back to them, without exposure to alternative ideas or opinions. Virtual echo-chambers have been used, for example, by far-right groups to spread conspiracy theories related to the origin of COVID-19 and the immunization campaigns.

Another example is represented by social media algorithms. Although designed to support users to identify what might be more interesting for them and avoid potentially irrelevant or low-quality content, social media algorithms can also be used to link a video with extremist views to other similar videos or facilitate interaction between users with extremist views.

“Viral online and sometimes physical attacks have been conducted against almost every stakeholder operating in the area of CBRN risk mitigation”

Today, the malicious use of social media platforms related to CBRN threats has the poten-

tial to cause serious political, financial, and physical harm to governments, international organizations, the scientific community, academia, industry, and the population at large. More individuals and organizations than ever have been targeted by CBRN disinformation. Viral online and sometimes physical attacks have been conducted against almost every stakeholder operating in the area of CBRN risk mitigation, including policy-makers, managers of institutions, researchers from universities and research centres, spokespersons from different government departments, in particular the public health sector, journalists and representatives from international organizations. The Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine has further reinforced this trend, with a massive disinformation campaign that, together with cyberattacks, has targeted infrastructures of Black Sea countries, starting with Ukraine. In this respect, the misuse of social media has become a serious new challenge.

Having said that, we can now analyse the other side of the coin: the advantages brought by technology to combat disinformation. To begin with, there are simple tools that can support the analysis of sources. These include the use of web browser extensions (e.g.,

WeVerify, CrowdTangle, NewsGuard) that automatically analyse information and images in websites (e.g., Google Image Search or TinEye) and determine if and to what extent the source is reliable. Other tools can confirm that the visual content is correctly attributed to the original source or understand the context in which the image has been used.

There are also tools that help users to verify the recording and upload time of video content (e.g., YouTube Data Viewer). Other tools can be used for the geolocation of photos and videos (e.g., Wikimapia or Google Earth). Some software has also been developed with a gamification approach to practise pre-bunking and debunking skills (e.g., Fake It to Make It, Bad News, Harmony Square, WHO Myth Busters Quiz, Captain Fact).

“Artificial intelligence has allowed for the creation of tools that address specific issues in disinformation, like the spread of deepfakes,”

Emerging technologies have also been used in the efforts to combat disinformation. Artificial intelligence has allowed for the creation of tools that

² See UNICRI Handbook to combat CBRN disinformation.

address specific issues in disinformation, like the spread of deepfakes, which include manipulated photos, videos, or audio files. Some tools (e.g., Microsoft Video Authenticator) can analyse a still photo or video frame and provide a percentage chance that the content is artificially manipulated. In some cases, artificial intelligence and big data visualization have been used to automatically detect if a Twitter account is a bot (e.g., Bot Sentinel).

Social listening with artificial intelligence has also been used by the World Health Organisation to more accurately target their campaigns against misinformation. Social listen-

ing can be used to identify which topics are currently being discussed by the most people. By frequently obtaining an updated analysis of what the popular topics are, researchers can identify relevant health-related topics and focus their efforts on these. This is done by using machine learning to analyse pieces of information on various social media platforms.

**“
Machine learning can also obtain insights into the kind of emotions users are experiencing**”

Machine learning can also obtain insights into the kind of emotions users are experiencing. Language analytics can analyse anxiety, sadness, denial, acceptance, and other emotions expressed in social media posts. This information can develop an effective offensive strategy and assuage the public's concerns before misinformation can gain steam.

To summarize, the process of designing and employing new technologies for good or bad purposes has become so fast that almost every new technology, such as ChatGPT (launched in November 2022), can be used by opponent parts to spread or combat disinformation in a sort of technological race.

**“
Is there still a role for human skills in such a fast-paced technological race?”**

We think that the answer is yes. To explain why, we can borrow a famous assertion from the philosopher Michael Polanyi of 1958: “we can know more than we can tell”³. It means that human beings possess information (tacit knowledge) that is difficult to transfer to others, including



3 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, (1958).

Technology cannot replace the human ability to manipulate other people and make them believe in conspiracy theories”



to an artificial intelligence. This includes personal or professional experience or abstract concepts such as intuition. An example is beauty: everybody knows what beauty is, but we often find it difficult to explain.

In this sense, technology, including artificial intelligence and big data, can assist us to design and spread conspiracy theories or, alternatively, to detect disinformation and ex-

plain why a conspiracy theory is false, but it cannot replace us in *convincing* another person that a conspiracy theory is true or false. Technology cannot replace the human ability to manipulate other people and make them believe in conspiracy theories. Equally, technology cannot replace human skills when evaluating the veracity of information, judging a situation

and convincing a human being why a certain piece of information is wrong or why an echo-chamber does not help you to grow your knowledge and judgment.

If this is true (and we believe it is), we can still empower people using social media so that they can make their own informed decisions about what is true and what is not.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Francesco Marelli has been working for the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) since 2003. As Head of the CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance Unit, he is the coordinator of UNICRI's activities in the area of CBRN risk mitigation, which include the CONTACT programme to strengthen Member States' capacities to prevent illicit trafficking of radiological and nuclear materials, and the implementation of the European Union CBRN Centres of Excellence, a network-based initiative that supports more than 60 countries in strengthening their national CBRN policies and capabilities.

He is also responsible for the Knowledge Centre on Security through Research, Technology and Innovation (SIRIO) in Geneva (Switzerland), which assesses emerging risks and identifies, tests and promotes innovative solutions to reduce the risk of crime, including in the field of technologies such as big data, biotechnology and blockchain.

He received his PhD from the School of History at the University of Leeds in 2002. He is the author of several publications.

Mariana Diaz Garcia is a Fellow at the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), in the Knowledge Centre on Security through Research, Technology and Innovation (SIRIO) and the CBRN Risk Mitigation and Security Governance Unit. She also collaborates with UNICRI's Centre to Combat Disinformation in Geneva. Her research focuses on the malicious use of social media by extremist groups; and technology strategies to improve chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense. Her research also focuses on the ideology, radicalisation and legitimisation of armed groups.

The image shows the cover and an open page of the 'Handbook to combat CBRN disinformation'. The cover features a tree silhouette and the title. The open page shows a chapter titled '2.1 What are the objectives of CBRN disinformation?'. The background is a blue digital interface with code snippets.

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Handbook to combat CBRN disinformation

2

2.1 What are the objectives of CBRN disinformation?

CBRN disinformation has three different purposes:

1. Persuade
2. Mislead
3. Confuse

Handbook to combat CBRN disinformation

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CICTE: Regional cooperation to prevent and counter terrorism



OAS Member States came together to create the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE)

Established in 1948, the Organization of American States (OAS) is the world's oldest regional organization. It works to achieve peace, promote solidarity, strengthen collaboration and defend sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. With its four core pillars of democracy, human rights, security and development, the OAS serves as the Western Hemisphere's primary political forum and today is comprised of 34 Member States and 71 permanent observers.¹

In 1999, in response to the region's evolving terrorist threat, including the actions of the Shining Path in Peru and the attack against the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires (Argentina), OAS Member States came together to create the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE), the region's primary and most preeminent political body charged with promoting cooperation and coordination in order to prevent and counter terrorist activities. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks OAS Member States went a step further and established the CICTE Secretariat in 2002 to better support countries in meeting their counter-terrorism obligations.

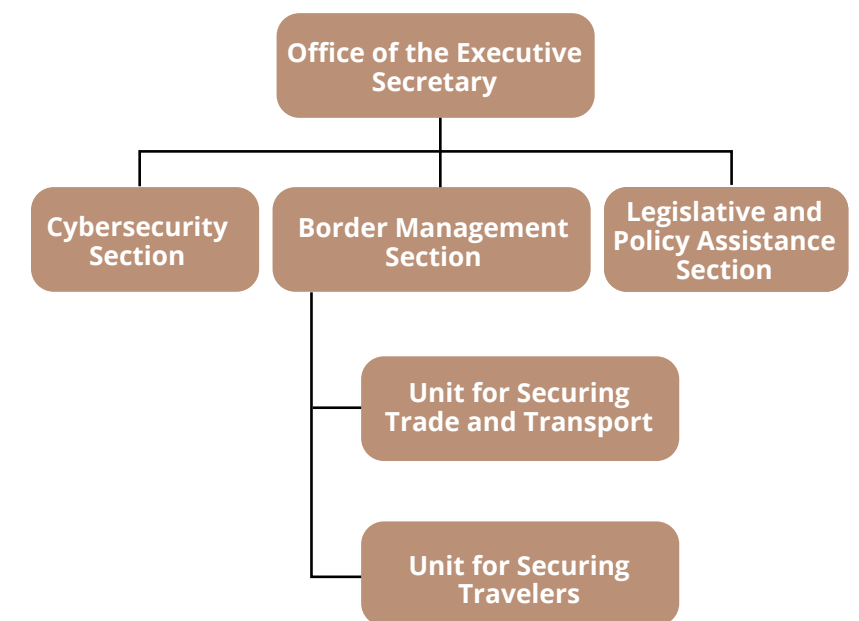
Through the designated National Points of Contact, the CICTE Secretariat provides technical assistance to Member States to respond to their changing needs and priorities. As a result, CICTE's efforts are today focused primarily on cybersecurity; border management (including maritime and port security, supply-chain security, cargo and container security, aviation tourism, and major events security); disarmament and non-proliferation of CBRN materials; prevention of terrorism financing and prevention of violent extremism. In addition, the Secretariat organizes an annual meeting to facilitate Member States dialogue, identify new terrorist threats, and define

new regional counter-terrorism priorities.

As such, CICTE has become a key player in the multilateral counter-terrorism architecture, and its work has contributed to the identification of emerging security issues and the development of national and regional policies. CICTE is particularly well-known for establishing information-sharing networks to facilitate the exchange of good practices and lessons learned between diverse public and private sector stakeholders involved in preventing and countering terrorism.

While the support of its Member States is essential, close

CICTE Secretariat



¹ Today, the OAS brings together all 35 independent states of the Americas and constitutes the main political, juridical, and social governmental forum in the Hemisphere. In addition, it has granted permanent observer status to 70 states, as well as to the European Union (EU).

cooperation and coordination with other international, regional, and subregional organizations are equally critical for CICTE's success. CICTE is particularly proud of its 15-year partnership with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and of the combined efforts of both organizations to build greater capacity in the Americas to better protect vulnerable targets.

Tourism and major events security

Through the implementation of four distinct, yet related, programs financed by the Government of Canada, CICTE and UNICRI trained more than 6000 authorities from 34 OAS Member States to strengthen integrated security planning to protect soft targets and tourism destinations. For instance, training on security practices and techniques was provided to Chile in preparation for the XIX Pan American Games in Santiago; to Mexico for the XVI Pan American Games in Guadalajara and the XXII Central American and Caribbean Games in Veracruz; to Costa Rica for the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup 2022; and to Brazil in preparation for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Capacity-building activities have also been provided to

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CICTE and UNICRI trained more than 6000 authorities from 34 OAS Member States

beneficiary Member States when organizing national festivals and carnivals, and to Mexico for the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. Also, when drafting the report [“Tourism Security in Mexico, Central America and The Caribbean 2016-2019: Key Findings and Recommendations Report”](#) 11 OAS Member States, including Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Jamaica, Ecuador, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic received training on basic tourism security and risk management for tourism destinations.

CICTE and UNICRI have also collaborated on the development of several security planning tools designed to help Member States to better protect crowded or public spaces. As a result: a) four countries of the region now have a national tourism security strategy; b) two different networks – the Inter-American Network on Tourism Security and the Network in the Americas for the Security of Major Events – are in place to pro-

vide regional information sharing among designated authorities; and c) all OAS Member States can now refer to the [“Practical Manual on Security Planning on a Large Scale”](#) which offers a proven methodology for designing, implementing and analyzing security plans for tourism sites and other vulnerable targets. This publication is also available in [Spanish](#).



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Member States can now refer to the “Practical Manual on Security Planning on a Large Scale”

Preventing violent extremism through sport

More recently, as part of CICTE's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism, CICTE and UNICRI have been working together to foster greater regional un-

derstanding of violent extremism, including the threat that extremism poses to regional and global security, and the cross-cutting actions that are needed by diverse stakeholders to prevent it.

Recognizing the important role that sports can play in promoting peace through tolerance, respect, integrity, and solidarity, the two organizations hosted the 2020 webinar on [“Preventing violent extremism: good practices of youth engagement through sport”](#), in collaboration with the Government of Mexico, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Save the Dream, a global non-profit organization.

This ground-breaking event highlighted different sport-led initiatives underway throughout the region to empower youth and communities by promoting positive values and transferable skills on teamwork and mentoring. We hope that the lessons learned from this webinar, namely the importance of linking sports, youth participation and empowerment, will influence the design and implementation of national strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization, in line



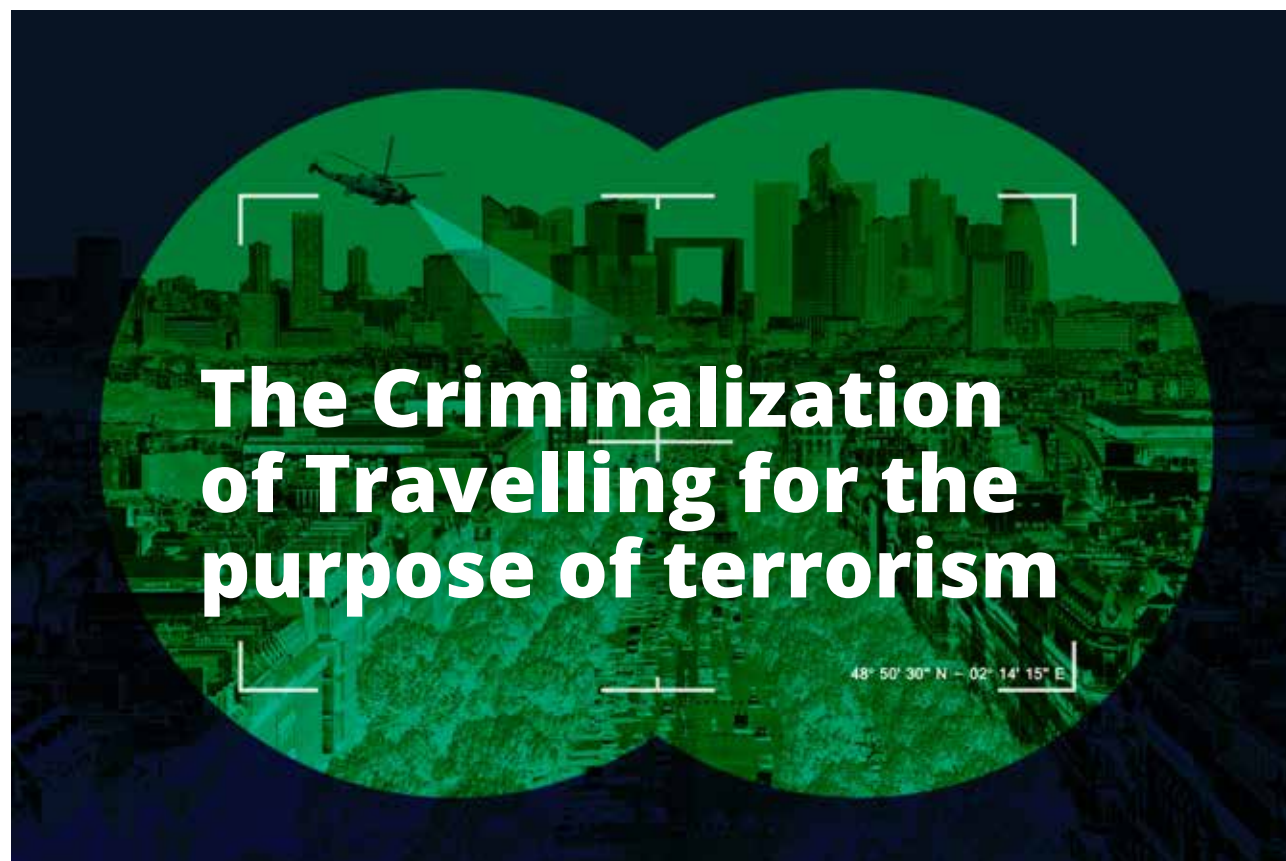
with the recommendations established by the [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 \(2015\)](#).

Looking ahead

CICTE and UNICRI share these and many other common priority areas of work, including cybersecurity and strengthening national capacity to prevent the misuse of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, so it is hoped that the collaboration and coordination between the two organiza-

tions will continue to grow in the future. In the short term, and building on UNICRI's successful [“Policy Toolkit on The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism”](#), research is currently underway to help practitioners and policymakers better understand the linkages between terrorism and organized crime in Latin America so that they can design practical and more effective responses. It is expected that this last working paper will be published in mid-2023.

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CICTE and UNICRI have also collaborated on the development of several security planning tools
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The Criminalization of Travelling for the purpose of terrorism

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An analysis in light of Article 49(1) of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights

by Anna Terrone

Introduction:

Since the 9/11 attacks, terrorism has continued to pose significant challenges at both the national and international level.¹ In the past decade, the phenomenon of

the so-called “foreign-terrorist fighters”² (FTFs), and the growing concern caused by FTFs returning from conflict zones, have in turn added a new dimension to the evol-

ving terrorist threat.³ From a legislative point of view, this resulted in new counter-terrorism measures being swiftly adopted by the European Union (EU) to align the existing

rules with those of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the Council of Europe.⁴ As a result, Directive 2017/541 now constitutes the cornerstone of the EU’s response to counter-terrorism, especially in relation to FTFs.⁵ In accordance with Article 9, Member States are required to criminalize outbound and inbound travelling for the purpose of terrorism to “stem the flow of FTFs.”⁶ However, the broad delineation of the *actus reus*⁷ together with the difficulties in the establishment of the terrorist intent and purpose may in practice lead to arbitrariness in the application of the law.⁸ This could in turn undermine the principle of legality on the basis of which criminal offences and penalties are to meet a certain standard of clarity and precision for individuals to be able to regulate their conduct accordingly.⁹

“

In accordance with Article 9, Member States are in fact required to criminalize outbound and inbound travelling for the purpose of terrorism

I. The principle of legality

The principle of the legality of criminal offences and penalties (*nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege*) – as part and parcel of the constitutional traditions of the Member States – constitutes an essential element of the rule of law.¹⁰ Pursuant to Article 49(1) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), criminal law provisions must

define and clearly delineate the offences and the relevant penalties which they attract.¹¹ This requirement will be satisfied to the extent that the individual concerned is able to infer “from the wording of the relevant rule and if need be, with the assistance of the courts, which acts and omissions will make him criminally liable.”¹² Further conditions with respect to the “qualitative requirements”¹³ of the law have been better delineated by the European Court of Human Right (ECtHR) in relation to Article 7(1) ECHR.¹⁴ In accordance with Article 52(3) CFR, Article 49 is in fact to have the same meaning and scope as the corresponding right guaranteed by the ECHR. Hence, it follows from the ECtHR’s established case-law that legal rules must be drafted in such a way as to be “accessible to the persons concerned and sufficiently

1 Francesca Galli, ‘The criminalisation of terrorism risk within the European Union: a suitable choice?’ in Clive Walker, Mariona Llobet Angl and Manuel C. Meli (eds), *Precursor Crimes of Terrorism* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2022).

2 OSCE/ODIHR, ‘Guidelines for Addressing the Threats and Challenges of “Foreign Terrorist Fighters” within a Human Rights Framework’ (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) 2018), <https://www.osce.org/odihr/393503> accessed 4 March 2020.

3 European Commission, ‘Proposal for a Directive on Combating Terrorism and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/ 475/JHA on Combating Terrorism’ COM (2015) 625 final.

4 European Parliament, ‘Briefing: EU legislation in progress’ (2017), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/> accessed 4 March 2020.

5 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism — Impact on fundamental rights and freedoms’ (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2021) <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/combating-terrorism-rights-impact> accessed 4 March 2020.

6 Recital 12 of Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA OJ L 88.

7 Actus reus refers to the act or omission that comprise the physical elements of a crime as required by statute. Actus reus includes only a voluntary affirmative act, or an omission (failure to act), causing a criminally proscribed result. https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/actus_reus

8 Tarik Gherbaoui, ‘Criminalising Foreign Fighter Travel in Order to Prevent Terrorism in Europe: An Illegitimate Assault on Human Dignity?’ in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (T.M.C. Asser Press 2020).

9 Valsamis Mitsilegas, ‘Counterterrorism and the rule of law in an evolving European Union: Plus Ca Change?’ (2020) *New Journal of European Criminal Law* 1.

10 Valsamis Mitsilegas, ‘Article 49 – Principles of Legality and Proportionality of Criminal Offences and Penalties’ in Steve Peers, Tamara Hervey, Jeff Kenner and Angela Ward (eds), *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. A Commentary* (Hart/Beck, Oxford and Portland OR 2014) and Case 303/05 *Advocaten voor de Wereld VZW v Leden van de Ministerraad* [2007].

11 Case 634/18 *Criminal proceedings against JI* (2020).

12 Case 303/05 *Advocaten voor de Wereld VZW v Leden van de Ministerraad* [2007], para 50.

13 *Scoppola v Italy* (no. 2) Application no. 10249/03 (ECtHR, 17 September 2009), para 99.

14 Christina Peristeridou, ‘The Principle of Legality in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice’ in Sara Iglesias Snchez and Maribel Gonzlez Pascual (eds) *Fundamental Rights in the EU Area of Freedom, Security and Justice* (Cambridge University Press 2021).

foreseeable as their effects.”¹⁵ More specifically, provisions of criminal law are to be articulated in a clear and precise manner so that individuals can regulate their conduct accordingly.¹⁶ This corollary of the legality principle aims, in particular, to shield individuals from “arbitrary prosecution, conviction and punishment.”¹⁷ Aside from these substantive aspects, the principle of legality also requires laws to be enacted in a “transparent, accountable, democratic and pluralistic”¹⁸ way. In this respect, the adoption of counterterrorism policies on emergency grounds – for the most part by non-legislative actors – led to significant concerns being raised by scholars and relevant NGOs as to the effects of such norms on, *inter alia*, the principle of legality.¹⁹

II. Normative framework

In response to the heightened security threat posed by FTFs, the UNSC endorsed Resolution 2178 (2014). Based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the latter defines FTFs as “individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training [...]”^{20,21} On the basis of operative paragraph 6, all States Parties were thus required to criminalize such conduct as the travel or attempt to travel abroad, the funding and the organization or facilitation of such travels when committed for terrorist purposes. As it can be seen, by way of Resolution 2178, the UNSC imposed binding and far-reaching legal obligations on States to prevent the movement and activ-

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The principle of legality also requires laws to be enacted in a “transparent, accountable, democratic and pluralistic way

ities of FTFs.²² In response to the Security Council’s ‘legislative’ action, an Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism was adopted in 2015. In line with Resolution 2178, Article 4(2) of the Additional Riga Protocol similarly required measures to be taken by the Contracting Parties to outlaw the “travelling abroad for the purpose of terrorism.”^{23 24} Shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris, a European initiative – in the form of Directive 2017/541 – was eventually put forward by the European Commission

to address the shortcomings of Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA in view of the evolving terrorist threat in the EU.²⁵ Directive 2017/541 significantly extended the categories of preparatory offences to cover *inter alia* the outbound and inbound travelling for the purpose of terrorism.²⁶ In light of the repercussions that such preemptive criminal law obligations might have on people’s lives, the absence of an impact assessment on the part of the Commission was highly criticized in that it allegedly promoted an “unbalanced legal response to terrorism.”²⁷

III. Criminalization of travelling and the principle of legality

On the basis of Article 9(1) of Directive 2017/541 all Member States were required to adopt the necessary measures to criminalize travelling for the purpose of terrorism where the intended purpose of such travel is to commit or contribute to the commission of a terrorist offence or participate in the activities of a terrorist group, or ultimately to provide or receive training for terrorism. The *actus reus* of the offence – i.e., the act

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In response to the heightened security threat posed by FTFs, the UNSC endorsed Resolution 2178

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15 *Coëme and Others v Belgium* Applications nos. 32492/96 (ECtHR, 22 June 2000), para 145 and *Scoppola v Italy* (no. 2) Application no. 10249/03 (ECtHR, 17 September 2009), para 99.

16 Stéphanie de Coensel, *Counter-Terrorism & Criminal Law A Normative Legitimacy Test of Terrorism-Related Offences on Expression, Information and Movement* (Maklu 2020).

17 *Scoppola v Italy* (no. 2) Application no. 10249/03 (ECtHR, 17 September 2009), para 92.

18 European Commission, ‘A New EU Framework to Strengthen the Rule of Law’ (Communication) COM (2014) 158 final. Valsamis Mitsilegas, ‘Counterterrorism and the rule of law in an evolving European Union: Plus Ça Change?’ (2020) *New Journal of European Criminal Law* 1.

19 Joint submission by Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Open Society European Policy Institute on European Commission’s proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Combating Terrorism and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA on Combating Terrorism <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior60/3470/2016/en/> accessed 5 March 2020.

20 UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014).

21 John A.E. Vervaele, ‘Foreign (Terrorist) Fighters: Combatants and/or Terrorists or Just Enemies?’ in Marc Engelhart and Sunčana Roksanđić Vidlička (eds) *Dealing with Terrorism Empirical and Normative Challenges of Fighting the Islamic State* (Duncker and Humblot 2019).

22 Lisa Ginsborg, ‘One step forward, two steps back: The Security Council, ‘foreign terrorist fighters’, and human rights’ in Manfred Nowak and Anne Charbord (eds) *Using Human Rights to Counter Terrorism* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2018).

23 Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism No. 217 (2015).

24 Tarik Gherbaoui, ‘Criminalising Foreign Fighter Travel in Order to Prevent Terrorism in Europe: An Illegitimate Assault on Human Dignity?’ in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (T.M.C. Asser Press 2020).

25 Alejandro Sánchez Frías, ‘The EU Directive on Combating Terrorism and the Criminalisation of Travelling’ (2018) 8 *European Criminal Law Review* 201.

26 Article 9 of Directive (EU) 2017/541.

27 Meijers Committee, ‘Note on a Proposal for a Directive on combating terrorism’ (CM1603 2016), 2.

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The notions of ‘risk’
and ‘danger’ may
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the criminalization
of offences related to
terrorist activities

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of travelling abroad – constitutes as such a perfectly legal behavior which is, however, to be condemned when an intended terrorist purpose can be established.²⁸ In the absence of “distinctively illegal objective elements”²⁹, the terrorist intent and purpose will thus play a central role in distinguishing lawful activities from crimes.³⁰ Hence, in the interests of crime prevention, criminalization appears to be substantially based on mere thoughts and beliefs rather than on culpable conduct.³¹ In practice, however, the construction of the intent often proves to be rather challenging for the prosecutors to the extent that a person’s background, religious belief, or ideology might in turn influence such an assessment.³² In the field of counter-terrorism, the notions of ‘risk’ and ‘dan-

ger’ may thus severely affect the criminalization of offences related to terrorist activities.³³ Hence, the broad scope and the lack of clarity in the formulation of the offence pose significant challenges to the principle of legality, thereby increasing the risk of arbitrary and discriminatory results on the part of the public authorities.³⁴ This is even more true if one considers that – on the basis of Article 13 – it will not be necessary to establish a link between the travel *per se* and any other offence under Directive 2017/541, or that a terrorist offence is actually committed.³⁵ The criminalization of conduct at such an early stage – and in the absence of any concrete harmful act or endangerment – may ultimately lead to unforeseeable consequences for the individuals concerned and to “over-

28 John A.E. Vervaele, ‘Terrorism and Anticipative Criminalization. Ius poenali sine limite?’ in Marc Engelhart and Sunčana Roksanđić Vidlička (eds) *Dealing with Terrorism Empirical and Normative Challenges of Fighting the Islamic State* (Duncker and Humblot 2019).

29 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism - Impact on fundamental rights and freedoms’ (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2021), page 34 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/combating-terrorism-rights-impact> accessed 4 March 2020.

30 Niovi Vavoula, ‘Prevention, Surveillance, and the Transformation of Citizenship in the ‘Security Union: The Case of Foreign Terrorist Fighters’ (2018) Queen Mary School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 293/2018.

31 Tarik Gherbaoui, ‘Criminalising Foreign Fighter Travel in Order to Prevent Terrorism in Europe: An Illegitimate Assault on Human Dignity?’ in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (T.M.C. Asser Press 2020).

32 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism — Impact on fundamental rights and freedoms’ (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2021) <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/combating-terrorism-rights-impact>> accessed 4 March 2020.

33 Tarik Gherbaoui, ‘Criminalising Foreign Fighter Travel in Order to Prevent Terrorism in Europe: An Illegitimate Assault on Human Dignity?’ in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (T.M.C. Asser Press 2020).

34 Meijers Committee, ‘Note on a Proposal for a Directive on combating terrorism’ (CM1603 2016), 2.

35 Antonio Caiola, ‘The European Parliament and the Directive on combating terrorism’ (2017) 18 ERA Forum 409.



criminalization.”³⁶ Therefore, the criminalisation of terrorist travel in such abstract, unpredictable, and possibly discriminatory ways cannot arguably be reconciled with the principle of legality as enshrined in Article 49(1) CFR.

Conclusion and room for improvement

In view of the growing threat posed by FTFs, a renewed ‘securitization’ impetus led to the strengthening of counter-terrorism legislation on a global level.³⁷ However, within such a logic of prevention, the anticipative criminal in-

tervention, together with an excessively broad and unclear formulation of the offence, may have caused inconsistencies with the principle of legality.³⁸ An otherwise lawful activity – i.e., travelling abroad – may in fact turn into a criminal offence where a terrorist purpose can be established. In this context, the risk exists that such terrorist intent may arbitrarily be inferred from stereotypical elements as for example the person’s origin, religious background, or belief resulting in the notion of ‘danger’ essentially guiding criminalization.³⁹ Hence, in light with what has been suggested by many scholars, defence lawyers and independ-

ent organizations, outbound and inbound travelling for the purpose of terrorism should be criminalized under strict criteria and only to the extent that the intent required as to the terrorist purpose can clearly be established on the basis of objective and distinct



An otherwise lawful activity like travelling abroad may turn into a criminal offence where a terrorist purpose can be established.

factual evidence.⁴⁰ In this way, the risk of arbitrary prosecution and punishment could significantly be averted. Furthermore, the offence at hand should be worded with greater clarity and precision to en-

sure a close enough nexus between the prohibited conduct and the potential terrorist offence.⁴¹ This appears to be essential to strengthen the foreseeability of the law so that individuals can ultimately

predict whether their actions will be lawful or not. If these elements were to be considered, the demands of the legality principle with respect to Article 9 of Directive 2017/541 could be met more distinctly.



Outbound and inbound travelling for the purpose of terrorism should be criminalized under strict criteria



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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³⁶ Valsamis Mitsilegas, ‘Counterterrorism and the rule of law in an evolving European Union: Plus Ça Change?’ (2020) *New Journal of European Criminal Law* 1, page 11.

³⁷ Valsamis Mitsilegas, ‘European Criminal Law and the Dangerous Citizen’ (2018) 25(6) *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law* 733.

³⁸ Tarik Gherbaoui, ‘Criminalising Foreign Fighter Travel in Order to Prevent Terrorism in Europe: An Illegitimate Assault on Human Dignity?’ in Christophe Paulussen and Martin Scheinin (eds), *Human Dignity and Human Security in Times of Terrorism* (T.M.C. Asser Press 2020).

³⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism — Impact on fundamental rights and freedoms’ (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2021) <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/combating-terrorism-rights-impact>> accessed 4 March 2020.

⁴⁰ Meijers Committee, ‘Note on a Proposal for a Directive on combating terrorism’ (CM1603 2016), 2.

⁴¹ Joint submission by Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Open Society European Policy Institute on European Commission’s proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Combating Terrorism and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA on Combating Terrorism <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior60/3470/2016/en/>> accessed 5 March 2020.

IN FOCUS

by Maria Eira and Emma Kristina Persson



How can AI combat online sexual exploitation and abuse of children?

The human behind the badge and the AI behind the human
 From an exclusive interview with a law enforcement officer about her 10 years working on child sexual exploitation and abuse cases, learn how artificial intelligence is used in the investigation process and why it is crucial for both revolutionizing investigations and for the wellbeing of investigators themselves

It is 6:00 a.m. and darkness still blankets the peaceful suburb as the team of officers assembles outside the house of a suspected child sexual abuser. The tension rises as they approach the front door – Detective Sherry Torres stands in front – a position of greater stress and, of course, greater risk. They know the suspect owns a gun.

But she has seen the children in the pictures; and worse, heard them in the videos. They are in need of rescue, and she is determined. She knocks on the door – it is the protocol, to avoid breaking it down if possible – and sure enough, the suspect answers in a groggy state. He does not stay groggy for long upon seeing the officers in their tactical gear.



Join the AI for Safer Children Global Hub

If you are in law enforcement and would like to learn more about the AI tools and techniques available to fight child sexual exploitation and abuse online, join us and become part of the AI for Safer Children community. Complete in the questionnaire below or scan the QR code to join the Global Hub.

<https://forms.office.com/r/NjAUz0ZmZX>



Police Detective Sherry Torres served 19 years as a law enforcement officer in the United States and was a member of the North Florida Internet Crimes against Children Task Force for 10 years. Sherry Torres is still contributing to the field as the Training Manager at Griffeye, the company that develops a tool that supported her in doing the job.

“And his wife comes in wondering, ‘what’s going on?’” said Detective Torres. “I can see that she’s scared, and the suspect takes off running.” The team chases him down and makes the arrest.

This was just a normal day for Detective Torres, only one part of the long process of investigating an online child sexual exploitation and abuse case. And the worst is yet to come.

After arresting the suspect and securing the site, the officers work quickly and efficiently to gather any evidence they find. Detective Torres and her team interview the suspect and any potential witnesses, and seize several electronic devices including computers, thumb drives, camera memory cards and mobile phones.

Gone are the days when child sexual abuse material was captured on Polaroids, 35mm film, or DVD collections concealed under attic floorboards. Modern technology has seen the amount of this material skyrocket, exacerbated by the [COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of new gaming technology](#) - recent estimates put the occurrence as high as one in ten children. In the United States alone, child sexual abuse material reports numbered [100 thousand in 2008 and increased to nearly 30 million in 2021](#).



➤ **Figure 1: About 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before they turn 18. That includes about 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 25 boys.**

And someone has to review all these files.

Detective Torres pauses as she describes to us how it was seeing these files for the first time, when she joined the unit.

“I still remember the first [child abuse] file that I ever saw,” she said. Before joining the Internet Crimes against Children Unit ten years ago, her colleagues brought her into a room and had her view “the worst of the worst” to test her reaction and see if she could handle the job.

“As soon as I saw it, I felt sick,” she said, but Detective Torres wanted to prevent more children from being abused like the child in that video.

“Any display of weakness on my part, whether emotional or mental – especially as a female in law enforcement during that

time – you didn’t show it to others,” she said.

“That first video was” – she begins, but her eyes constrict as well as her words – “really bad.” It takes a few moments before she continues.

After starting work in the unit, Detective Torres experienced what is called “unwanted recall”. Every time she closed her eyes to sleep, a reel of all the videos and images she had seen that day would start to replay in a loop in her head. Many investigators experience this unwanted recall as a vicarious trauma, as though by watching child sexual abuse material, “it’s almost like you’re there and you’re a witness to it.”

“

Many investigators experience this unwanted recall as a vicarious trauma, as though by watching child sexual abuse material.

“I’ve seen really terrible things that people do to other people over my career,” she said. “But I didn’t know people did that to children.”

Detective Torres named a few healthy habits like exercise, work-life balance and having a good support system that

help her to deal with the difficult dimensions of this job, and then, “technology - having the right tools.”

While at the scene, Detective Torres finishes seizing and documenting evidence - gathering as much information as possible to strengthen their case. Back in the office, she prepares for the digital forensic examination. This is where the ‘right tools’ for processing the exorbitant amount of seized data are crucial.

She begins by using software to eliminate known material which prevents investigators from seeing the same traumatic images that are commonly shared and re-shared on the internet. The software she uses also cuts down the bulk of files by removing non-pertinent material. This includes, for instance, things like Hollywood movies or random icons, which are not relevant for child exploitation cases.

“With these techniques, a case with 1.5 million pictures and videos then becomes 300,000,” Detective Torres explains, “which still sounds like a lot,” but is made more manageable with advanced technologies.

This is where she turns to artificial intelligence. AI

techniques such as a child sexual abuse material classifier can automatically sort the materials according to their probability of containing child abuse – from low to high probability. She will focus her efforts on the latter. Facial recognition then allows her to search for videos and images in this group that are possible matches for the suspect and the children known to be accessible to that suspect.

Through these techniques, Detective Torres finds an image from the seized files depicting child sexual abuse material in a setting of relevance and uses AI to find visually similar pictures that bring investigative leads.

She remembers her first case when she had no advanced software to help her, which meant that she had to go through these files manually – one by one. “For 30 work days straight, that was my entire day,” she said of the time it took her to review all the material for that case.

“I went into the office, loaded the evidence and then looked at each file one at a time. Then I would go home. Then I would come back to the office and repeat the same thing. There was no break.”

“

She begins by using software to eliminate known material which prevents investigators from seeing the same traumatic images that are commonly shared and re-shared on the internet.

Besides helping her find the right evidence, these AI tools have inbuilt safeguards protecting investigators' wellbeing, so the ones flagged as child sexual abuse material are immediately pixelated until she must look at them. Other features include muting audio or even simply converting images to black and white.

"It minimizes the mental impact of the violence in those files. Seeing the videos in color and hearing the sound makes the review of that material more traumatic for the investigator."

“
The AI tools she uses significantly cut forensic backlogs from over 1.5 years down to 4 to 6 months.

These features help distance disturbing images from reality, but only slightly. Because, in the end, AI tools cannot replace human investigators, who still have to look at the files they are investigating.

Detective Torres also uses the software to look for more files linking evidence to specific dates or victims, helping build a case against the suspected offender. As she knows from experience that there are many other potential victims, she uses text analysis to quickly flag suspicious conversations in the suspect's chat histories involving the grooming or luring of other children.

"The technology just really makes it easier both for mental wellness and also for finding that critical evidence - the needle in the haystack," said Detective Torres.

In fact, the AI tools she uses significantly cut forensic backlogs from over 1.5 years down to 4 to 6 months - time that can make a world of difference for victims.

Using these technologies, however, requires specialised training. It takes about three years on average for a law enforcement officer to be properly trained to use these tools and learn efficient investigative methods. This is right about the time they burn out. Detective Torres also thought about moving to a different unit during the first few months, but she knew she would not be able to investigate other types of crimes knowing that children were being abused in such horrific ways.

"I just would not be able to do that, knowing what I already know is happening," Detective Torres said. Like most people - even police officers - she did not know about the extent or severity of child sexual exploitation and abuse until she joined the Internet Crimes against Children Unit.

Safeguarding the children is what motivates her every day. "We've kept in touch with some of the children that we've safeguarded and it's rewarding to see them in a better environment," she said. But "they're still not going to be the same as a child who's never experienced child sexual abuse."

Detective Torres continued, "in my opinion, it's the hardest job in law enforcement". But with the support of the 'right tools', she has been able to do this job for 10 years - identifying indecent images and tying

the suspect to those images and the devices on which they were found.

Detective Torres' experience is not the same everywhere. In many countries, investigators are still working as she was years ago, opening folders and files one-by-one and watching video-by-video. The resulting high turnover rate from such mentally strenuous work decreases the chances that knowledge, experience and technological know-how is reached, much less passed on.

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There are many currently accessible tools but there is little to no divulgation of their potential within law enforcement.

Technology providers are overwhelmingly eager to work with police, but are hindered partly due to a lack of communication between them, for reasons such as limited resources and classified information.

To bridge this gap between law enforcement and technology providers developing such AI tools, the UNICRI Centre for AI and Robotics have joined efforts with the Ministry of Interior of the United Arab Emirates to launch the *AI for Safer Children initiative*.

This initiative was created both to promote knowledge of these technologies and the widespread nature of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as support law enforcement agencies to solve cases faster and safeguard children while protecting their officers through a platform called the Global Hub cataloguing over 60 currently available AI tools - including the tools used by

Detective Torres - as well as a learning section and communication section to help build and share experiences.

Detective Torres remembers that it was a fellow examiner who introduced her to her first AI program so that she did not need to "scrub" through videos manually.

"When the technology made it easier, I thought to myself that I was going to be OK, and resolved to continue the important work to fight these crimes against children."

“
This initiative was created both to promote knowledge of these technologies and the widespread nature of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Maria Eira is the Information and Technology Fellow at the Centre for AI and Robotics of United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). For the past 3 years she has been providing technical advice to the ongoing projects of the Centre, related with the benefits and risks of AI and emerging technologies, particularly on the issues of crime prevention, criminal justice and rule of law. With a background in Biomedical Engineering Maria holds a Master in AI and Cognitive Science from Tilburg University where she has been a teacher assistant of Machine Learning and Data Processing classes. Prior to joining UNICRI, she has worked as a Human Interface Engineer in the research and development of augmented reality glasses, and also in the development of hardware solutions for space industry.

Emma Persson is coordinating the *AI for Safer Children initiative*, a project aimed at leveraging the positive potential of AI for law enforcement worldwide. She specialized in emerging technologies after completing two master programmes in international relations and international law at King's College London and Leiden University respectively, and continues to work towards responsible AI innovation in the international environment.



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