Menachem Begin—freedom fighter or terrorist? Before becoming Israeli Prime Minister and jointly winning the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, Begin was the leader of Irgun, responsible for the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel, killing 91 people.

Elective Overview

Terrorism is a major challenge to both national and international security. Yet, despite decades of collective experience worldwide in combating and researching this threat, it is often still poorly understood. This elective will help participants gain a deeper understanding of terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT) today. It begins with an exploration of the fundamental challenge of defining terrorism, followed by a session dedicated to understanding terrorist motivations. Sessions 3 and 4 are focused on the critical issues of so-called jihadist foreign fighters and Mumbai-style urban assaults. Session 5 deals with the role of intelligence in CT. Session 6 examines the rapidly developing area of countering violent extremism (CVE), and in the final session, we discuss how terrorism ends. Elective sessions include a variety of desktop exercises and will be highly interactive.

Session 1: What is Terrorism?

Learning Objectives

On completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the challenges surrounding the definition of terrorism.
- Appreciate why a common definition of terrorism is important.
- Formulate a personal working definition of terrorism.

Required Reading

As the famous saying goes, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. This simple phrase refers to a very real problem: although different states and agencies have their own working definitions, there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. This is primarily because of the political nature of terrorism and the derogatory nature of the term. People are often willing to forgive terrorists their wrong-doings if they agree with their political aims. In such cases, they will be referred to as ‘rebels’, ‘militants’, ‘insurgents’ or ‘freedom fighters’. Conversely, people will use the term terrorist only when they disagree with the political goals.

Far from being a purely academic debate, failure to agree on definitions of terrorism results in numerous practical problems. At the domestic level, the difficulty of defining terrorism offences in law often means that terrorism cases are difficult to investigate and prosecute. It can also create difficulties in terms of cooperation between different agencies if each is using different definitions, procedures or authorities. Without a proper definition, governments can easily label legitimate political opponents or protestors as terrorist, circumventing legal safeguards, leading to the politicization of the criminal justice system. Such politicization can create fear regarding the loss of civil liberties and can give rise to perceptions of inequality.
and injustice. Such perceived inconsistency in the application of law can undermine the legitimacy of government, and weaken efforts to combat terrorism.

Problems relating to definitions of terrorism are even more acute at the international level. Despite 14 United Nations (UN) conventions on counterterrorism (CT) and a universally agreed upon UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, there is still no single, formally accepted UN definition of what terrorism is. This raises a very significant question: How can we effectively cooperate to fight something when we are not able to agree on what it is? One method is the use of international organizations to develop agreement on a list of designated terrorist organizations and state sponsors of terrorism. Problems of definition also raise questions about when a military or law enforcement approach is more appropriate and legally acceptable. It also creates difficulties in terms of extradition and broader political and diplomatic ties between countries. In light of these difficulties, it is important to understand the key components of terrorism and try to be as objective as possible when using the term.

These components include:

• **Purpose/Motive**: Terrorism is done to achieve an ideological, political and/or religious objective by using intimidation and fear. If there is no ideological motive, then it is not terrorism, it is some other form of violence.

• **Violence**: All terrorism definitions include a reference to either the use of, or threat of violence. This, of course, applies to terrorist attacks; however, we must also bear in mind that there are many other non-violent criminal acts which terrorists commit that are done in support of the violent act which are also often against the law, such as recruiting, fundraising, and distribution of propaganda.

• **Targets/Audience**: The immediate targets of terrorist attacks are usually civilians or non-combatants. These immediate civilian targets are rarely directly responsible for the terrorists’ grievances. The goal of the attacks is to send a message to a wider audience, which generally includes a particular government’s leadership, whom the terrorists wish to coerce into changing its policies; the civilian population whom the terrorists wish to intimidate; and the terrorists own (or potential) supporters, whom they wish to mobilize to support their cause. The more attention an act of terrorism receives, the bigger the audience and the greater potential to achieve the desired results. This is why terrorists seek publicity.

Despite the usual focus on civilian targets, many terrorist organizations also frequently attack security services and government targets. This may be because they feel threatened by the efforts of security forces, they may be trying to undermine their morale, or they may be demonstrating to the civilian population the weakness or inadequacy of the security forces.

The challenge for CT is to overcome these various difficulties and put aside political preferences and biases in order to effectively cooperate, defeat terrorist groups, and bring terrorists to justice.

**Discussion Questions**

• How is it possible to distinguish terrorism from other forms of violence such as warfare or insurgency, criminal acts such as kidnapping and murder, or transnational organized crime?

• How does the lack of an internationally accepted definition of terrorism impact our efforts to combat international terrorism?

**Recommended Reading**


The assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, May 21st 1991, by a female suicide bomber acting on behalf of the (secular) Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Session 2: Terrorist Motivations

Learning Objectives

On completion of this session, you will be able to:

- Understand the different levels of analysis for explaining terrorism.
- Describe the range of different motivations that drive individual terrorists and terrorist organizations.

Required Reading

Making sense of the range of different motivations for terrorism is extremely challenging. There are three overlapping levels of analysis, or types of explanation, that must be examined: individual; societal; and social explanations.

Individual explanations for terrorism try to find answers in the terrorists themselves. For example, it has long been assumed that there must be a certain terrorist “profile” that helps explain why people become involved in this type of activity. Most terrorists are young males, but, other than this generalization, there is a great deal of variety. Many terrorists come from relatively wealthy backgrounds and are well-educated. In short, there is no distinct terrorist profile. Others have suggested that there must be a terrorist “personality” or that terrorists must be mentally ill. However, this does not appear to be the case. Although we can find examples of terrorists with mental health problems, the vast majority are psychologically “normal”. Nevertheless, there are certain experiences which are common to many terrorists. One is the experience of trauma or adversity, such as the death of family or friends, and a desire for revenge. Another is the experience of an identity crisis whereby individuals feel torn between competing identities. In either case, terrorism provides a strong sense of purpose in life and an opportunity to address perceived grievances. This helps us to explain why some people are more susceptible to radicalization; however, millions of people experience such difficulties and do not become involved in terrorism. Similarly, it is well-established that being part of a terrorist organization can offer excitement, a sense of meaning in life and sometimes financial rewards. Yet the vast majority of people are able to satisfy these needs in other types of activities.

Societal explanations look at problems in society, such as political oppression, poverty, lack of education, and experiences of injustice. These so-called “root causes” of terrorism are believed to generate frustration, which leads to aggression and acts of terrorism. Moreover, deprivation and frustration can be experienced relative to a comparison group, or vicariously. Even very wealthy people can therefore become terrorists, not because they are personally deprived, but because they identify and sympathize with other people whom they wish to help. These altruistic motivations are extremely important for understanding terrorism. Root causes thus help us to understand why terrorism can occur in countries with significant social and political problems, and also why people from relatively stable countries can become involved. However, the evidence for the root causes of terrorism is mixed. Higher rates of education are sometimes found to be associated with increased support for terrorism, and developed countries (such
as the UK or France) often have higher rates of terrorism than nations with much more significant problems. More importantly, societal explanations cannot explain why it is that only a very few people become involved in terrorism despite the fact that so many experience the same negative conditions. Root causes can certainly lead to grievances and increase the chances of terrorism, but there are clearly other factors involved as well.

**Social explanations** help us to understand how and why people radicalize and either form or join terrorist organizations. Leaders or “entrepreneurs” are vital to the formation of groups, which often become increasingly violent in response to actions by the state. Internal group dynamics are also critical. “Groupthink” and “risky shift” refer to the tendency of group members to conform and to become more extreme over time. Leaders introduce new ideas and followers tend to be supportive. However, they also compete with one another to demonstrate who is the most committed to the cause, and this drives them to increasingly extreme behavior. New group members are then recruited primarily by way of friendship and family connections. In fact, people often join terrorist organizations to begin with for social reasons such as friendship, status and belonging. Over time, new recruits then gradually come to accept the terrorist narratives and ideology, which define “good” and “evil” and prescribe a violent course of action.

In addition to these three levels of analysis, it is also important to appreciate the importance of opportunity and circumstance. For instance, simply growing up in the “wrong” neighborhood can be a risk factor for involvement in terrorism. Furthermore, many thousands of people are radicalized but never join a terrorist organization simply because they have no practical opportunity to do so. This helps us to understand why some people become terrorists when others do not.

In order to make sense of all these different motivations, it helps to think of them in terms of **predisposing risk factors**, **direct motivators**, and **necessary conditions**. Individual explanations mostly contribute to predisposing risk—things that raise the potential susceptibility to terrorist narratives, but which are also experienced by millions of people who will never become terrorists. Societal explanations also help us to comprehend predisposing risk but also the specific grievances which terrorists seek to exploit in their ideology. Social connections and group dynamics are direct motivators for involvement in terrorism—they explain why specific individuals get involved and why groups radicalize and ultimately choose violence. The necessary conditions for involvement in terrorism are social contact (either with recruiters, facilitators, or simply likeminded individuals—either face-to-face or online), exposure to the extremist propaganda and ideology, and opportunity. Both social and societal explanations thus contribute to our understanding of necessary conditions.

There are certain exceptions to this model for understanding terrorist motivation (in particular, some lone actor terrorists, criminal opportunists and those who are forcibly recruited). However, the vast majority of terrorists are motivated by a combination of the different factors discussed. Understanding the range of different motivations, and how they each contribute to terrorism, can help us to prioritize issues and devise more effective strategies for counter-terrorism (CT).

**Discussion Questions**

- How and why did you become a CT professional? How are the motivations for terrorism different to the reasons for joining the police or military for example?
- What drives *individuals* versus *organizations* to commit suicide bombings?
- How can we *apply* our understanding of terrorist motivations in CT? What are the policy and practical implications?
Recommended Reading


A piece of jihadist propaganda produced by Rayat al-Tawheed, a group of mostly Western foreign fighters that was active in Syria.

Session 3: Jihadist Foreign Fighters

Learning Objectives

On completion of this session, you will be able to:

- Assess the nature and level of threat that jihadist foreign fighters present.
- Describe the strengths and limitations of both “hard” and “soft” measures for dealing with jihadist foreign fighters.

Required Reading

By December 2015, it was estimated that 30,000 foreign fighters from as many as 100 countries had travelled to Syria and Iraq. Most of them are believed to have joined the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIS) or other jihadist organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). Although thousands of foreign volunteers previously fought in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya, the numbers who have gone to Syria and Iraq are unprecedented. Numerous factors have combined to make this possible, including:

1) the widespread perceived legitimacy of the struggle against Assad;
2) the theological and political significance of the region;
3) ISIS’ declaration of a Caliphate in June 2014;
4) the use of social media for popularizing the cause and facilitating recruitment; and
5) the relative ease of access to the conflict zone.

Many foreign fighters who joined ISIS burned their passports on arrival. In addition, growing numbers are volunteering as suicide bombers or have been killed in air strikes or during battle. Nevertheless, significant numbers have already returned to their countries of origin and there is great concern about the threat that they pose. Indeed, there are numerous historical and contemporary examples where, following overseas training and/or combat, foreign fighters have planned and conducted terrorist attacks. Some of these have been directly supported by foreign terrorist organizations (such as the 9/11 attacks), while others appear to have been carried out more-or-less independently (e.g. Mehdi Nemmouche’s assault on the Jewish museum in Brussels in May 2014). Attacks involving foreign fighters, especially when combined with continued logistical support, tend to result in greater numbers of casualties. The November 2015 attacks in Paris are a stark reminder of this. All of the 9 assailants are believed to have been foreign fighters, recently returned from Syria and Iraq where they had trained with ISIS. Armed with automatic weapons and suicide vests, they killed 130 people — the largest number of fatalities in a terror attack on the West since 2004.

Estimates of the likelihood of returning foreign fighters engaging in acts of terrorism vary from around 5–30%, depending on the particular country and the methodology used to measure it. On the one hand, it seems that most returnees do not pursue violence back home. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to assess which specific individuals will become violent or not and it is impossible to monitor all of these individuals all of the time. In addition, experience has shown that
jihadist foreign fighters sometimes remain active as influential recruiters, fundraisers and facilitators. These non-violent support roles can strengthen and expand terrorist networks over time and therefore arguably present an even greater, long-term threat.

In terms of counter-measures, most efforts so far have focused on strengthening repressive (“hard”) counter-terrorism (CT) capabilities. Many states have introduced new legislation to broaden the range of proscribed terrorism offences, in several cases outlawing participation in overseas conflicts. Other legislative changes have included steps to enhance intelligence capabilities, improve sharing of information, facilitate greater cooperation and secure borders. There has also been increasing application of special administrative sanctions that can be applied in the absence of a conviction. These include powers to confiscate travel documents, freeze financial assets, withdraw social benefits, restrict civil liberties and revoke citizenship.

As a result of these measures, an increasing number of people have been prevented from travelling overseas and there are more and more successful prosecutions. However, there are still significant gaps in capability. As noted above, risk assessment is far from perfect and the sheer numbers involved place a tremendous strain on security services. Furthermore, evidence is frequently difficult to obtain and it is not possible to prosecute or sanction every suspect. There have now been several cases where known persons-of-interest have gone on to join terrorist organizations overseas, or else have conducted terrorist attacks at home. However, perhaps the greatest challenge of all is the sharing of information. Interpol and Europol databases contain only a fraction of the number of foreign fighter suspects worldwide and interagency sharing of intelligence (in particular across international borders) remains inadequate.

In recognition of these difficulties, the United Nations has called for enhanced cooperation and the implementation of comprehensive strategies to include “soft” CT measures, collectively referred to as countering violent extremism (CVE). This includes efforts to counter terrorist ideology, to “de-radicalize” suspected or known violent extremists and to reintegrate returning foreign fighters back into society. CVE cannot solve the problem alone and is not intended to replace existing CT arrangements. There are also lingering questions about just how effective CVE programs can be. However, there is mounting empirical and anecdotal evidence that CVE can succeed in leading some people away from violence. Investing in soft approaches also expands the range of available resources and includes many “non-traditional” actors in the fight against terrorism, in particular non-governmental organizations and communities. Even if CVE programs sometimes fail to reduce the level of risk that an individual presents, they provide added opportunities for monitoring and risk assessment. If coordinated with “hard” CT, CVE has the potential to play an important role as part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at preventing, managing and mitigating the threat of jihadist foreign fighters.

Discussion Questions

- How can you assess the level of risk of returning foreign fighters?
- Among the recent wave of foreign fighters are unprecedented numbers of females and children. To what extent are they a threat and how should they be dealt with?
- What are the limitations of “hard” CT measures for dealing with this problem? How important is CVE?

Recommended Reading


Understanding and Combatting Terrorism
PASS Elective: Blocks 1, 2 & 3

Session 4: The Mumbai Attacks

Learning Objectives

On completion of this session you will be able to:

- Explain why the Mumbai attacks were so successful.
- Describe why urban armed assaults are so difficult to deal with.
- Identify lessons learned for CT.

Required Reading

In November 2008, 10 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists mounted a “commando-style” attack on the Indian city of Mumbai, assaulting 8 different high profile “soft” targets including the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, a railway terminus, restaurants and a Jewish community center. The attack lasted 60 hours and claimed the lives of 165 civilians and security personnel as well as 9 of the terrorists. Among the dead were 28 foreign nationals from 10 countries.

The Mumbai attack was by no means the first seaborne terrorist assault, nor was it the first to feature the indiscriminate shooting of civilians. However, it was arguably the most sophisticated urban assault by terrorists to date. The attack was carefully planned and extensive reconnaissance had been conducted at the target sites. The terrorists were well trained, motivated and equipped for their assault, knowing their assigned targets well and easily outgunning the local police. Attacks were mounted on a variety of soft targets, initially convincing the Indian authorities and media that a much larger assault force was involved. The situation was also greatly complicated and prolonged by the fact that the terrorists took control of two exceptionally large hotels, each with hundreds of rooms, and further proceeded to take hostages.

The iconic Taj Mahal, in particular, provided a spectacular propaganda opportunity and once the terrorists set it on fire the images of the blazing hotel were broadcast around the world. Using mobile phones the terrorists’ handlers back in Pakistan were able to exercise remote command and control. By monitoring live international media coverage of events, they could pass information and direction to the terrorists on the ground, including the position of security forces and the location of potential hostages. Later, when the attackers came under pressure and began to tire, their handlers kept them motivated, encouraging them to kill the remaining hostages and fight to the death.

The Mumbai attack was a “wake up call” to security services around the world as it demonstrated just how vulnerable modern cities can be to ruthless and determined attackers armed with just assault rifles, grenades and improvised explosives. Yet the attack could have been better handled if not outright prevented. Intelligence separately held by India, the US and UK could have provided a far more accurate advance warning that could have been used to thwart LeT’s plans, but the respective agencies failed to share with one another until after the attack had begun. Because of this, the Mumbai police were taken by surprise. In addition, they were inadequately armed and unable to mount a coordinated response for several hours. The local anti-terrorist squad at least had adequate equipment, but had not trained for such a scenario. The National Security Guard
India’s lack of preparedness provided a stark warning to other countries facing similar potential threats. Despite this, however, others have since been caught unprepared for similar reasons – notably Norway in July 2011 and Kenya in September 2013. Some commentators also remain skeptical about India’s ability to handle such an attack again, in spite of significant CT reforms including the introduction of a National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), a National Intelligence Grid (Natgrid), a Criminal and Crime Tracking Network System (CCTNS), NSG hubs, and enhancements to coastal security and police capabilities. Indeed, even with the best training, equipment and preparation, a Mumbai-style assault presents such tactical and operational challenges that it remains a nightmare scenario for anyone that has to face it.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think are the most important lessons learned from the Mumbai attacks? What could the Indian security forces have done differently?
- In an armed assault similar to Mumbai, do you think it would be better to shut down or continue monitoring the terrorists’ communications?
- How can other countries best prepare for a Mumbai-style assault?

Recommended Reading

General Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) which provides signals intelligence (SIGINT) for UK intelligence agencies and foreign partners.

**Session 5: The Role of Intelligence in Counter-Terrorism**

**Learning Objectives**

On completion of this session, you will be able to:

- Understand the role intelligence plays in national and international CT strategy.
- Identify ways intelligence agencies can better cooperate to combat terrorism more effectively.
- Recognize the challenges confronting intelligence agencies engaged in CT in a democracy.

**Required Reading**

Good intelligence is a key factor in a successful strategy to combat terrorism. Accurate and timely intelligence allows leaders and agencies to use their resources most effectively and efficiently against terrorist groups. Terrorist groups must recruit, communicate, acquire weapons, spread ideology, travel, raise money and collect target information — all of these actions are collection opportunities. There are a number of sources and opportunities to collect data on a group’s activities. Putting this data together to predict a group’s likely actions and identify opportunities for disruption or defeat requires fusion of the data and sharing the resulting intelligence across national agencies or international boundaries.

There are a wide variety of sources of intelligence that are available for exploitation against terrorists. Law enforcement officials, community members and local leaders have important observations and insights that are important to integrate into a collection plan. The internet and social media are valuable and timely sources and have become perhaps the most important source of intelligence regarding terrorist activities today. Signals intelligence against terrorist communication can be gathered by monitoring telephones and the internet. Photographic images, which can be collected in a variety of ways, are useful in identifying group members and their activities.

An important change in the intelligence field has been the increased use of intelligence in the legal system as evidence. Intelligence is a powerful tool in building a case of activity to justify arrest and then pursue prosecution both before and after terrorist attacks take place. Public trials, which show the criminal nature of terrorist acts and demonstrate a nation’s ability to defeat terrorism lawfully, are an important part of any nation’s strategy to combat terrorism. The use of intelligence within the legal system can however create challenges for intelligence organizations who desire not to reveal their sources and methods in public.

Sharing information goes against the traditional mindset and business practice of intelligence services, but collaboration between agencies and analysts, both domestically and internationally, is essential to produce timely and useful intelligence. Terrorist plots are rarely only within a single country; more likely they involve transnational communications, international travel and the movement of materiel across national boundaries. International intelligence partnership and cooperation are critical to interdict such activities and not allow terrorists to exploit seams and divisions within the international community.
The decision to share intelligence is a political decision, based upon mutual benefit. A key factor is each nation’s ability to trust the other to appropriately protect intelligence provided by the partner. Intelligence sharing agreements are usually between two nations. They are usually quite specific regarding the types of intelligence to be exchanged, who it can be disclosed to and the specific purposes the intelligence can be used for. For example a nation may not lawfully be able provide intercept or telephone data about its own citizens to another country or a country may specify that the information it provides cannot be used in lethal counter terrorism operations.

Intelligence services have a variety of ways to share information both domestically and internationally as they try to move from a “need-to-know” to a “need-to-share” policy. Liaison officers who regularly meet to exchange information or who are assigned to the staff of another organization is one way. A more effective means is regular, routine distribution of products or access to an organization’s classified webpage where products are posted for release. Routine access to an organization’s databases allows for rapid and common understanding and research into a terrorist group and its activities and aids in predictive analysis. Fusion centers manned by intelligence professionals from a variety of organization or nations represent the most effective means of intelligence collaboration. Fusion centers collect and analyze information from all available sources across jurisdictional and geographical boundaries to produce and disseminate actionable intelligence.

Significant improvements have been made in recent years in the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence, but many challenges remain. The sheer volume of raw data challenges even sophisticated information processing systems. The “need to know” cultural legacy, human error, and incompatible communication systems can result in crucial information not being shared. As terrorist groups evolve in sophistication and imagination, intelligence professionals, while working within the confines of government ministry bureaucracies must match the imagination of their foes. The friction between a citizen’s right to privacy and the intelligence services’ requirement to collect data to identify terrorists is an important issue in democratic societies. The oversight of intelligence organizations and activities by a properly mandated and informed body ensures that the collection and use of intelligence against terrorists is done in a way that balances the protection of citizens in an appropriate lawful manner in accordance with the laws and norms of a democratic society.

**Discussion Questions**

- What needs to be done to encourage intelligence services in your country to share information with other agencies both domestically and internationally?
- How can the need to protect the civil rights of citizens be balanced against the need to collect intelligence to defeat terrorists?

**Recommended Reading**


Session 6: Countering Violent Extremism

Learning Objectives

On completion of this session, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between disengagement and deradicalization.
- Describe the role of disengagement and deradicalization programs within a broader CVE strategy.
- Explain the potential value, as well as limitations, of CVE efforts.

Required Reading

The terms disengagement and deradicalization are often used together in discussions on CT, although they have different meanings. Disengagement refers to a change in behavior. In terms of CT it involves attempting to persuade individuals to abandon terrorist activities, without necessarily changing their commitment to the cause or ideology.

Disengagement strategies normally involve a mix of “carrot and stick” motivations. “Hard” CT measures against a terrorist group can be combined with incentives for individual terrorists to leave the movement and abandon violence. The Italian government’s campaign against the Red Brigades in the early 1980s is a classic example of this dual approach. The authorities sought to defeat the Red Brigades by the introduction of a tough CT legal regime—but at the same time, they offered amnesties, reduced prison sentences and/or rehabilitation for those terrorists who left the organization and repented of their crimes. This disengagement strategy proved effective in prompting a large number of defections and fatally weakening the Red Brigades.

Deradicalization refers to a change in beliefs. For CT, this represents a step further than disengagement as it requires a terrorist to abandon violence, but also to reject their commitment to a violent political or religious ideology. Deradicalization programs involve many of the same kind of measures associated with disengagement strategies. However, in addition they often employ persuasive scholars, clerics or other individuals who can offer credible alternatives to terrorist propaganda. The best known contemporary de-radicalization program exists in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi program was launched in 2003 to deradicalize selected individuals imprisoned for al-Qaeda-related terrorism. Saudi authorities have employed credible clerics and psychologists to work with detainees and explain “correct” interpretations of Islam. The program has also enlisted support from prisoners’ families and has included generous financial help, vocational training and other forms of support to rehabilitate former terrorists and reintegrate them back into society. Several other Muslim majority states have also introduced deradicalization programs aimed at violent Islamist extremists with varying degrees of success. Various European governments have been active for over twenty years in trying to counter right-wing radicalization. Norway, and later Sweden and Germany developed EXIT programs to support young people wanting to disengage from nationalist and xenophobic extremist groups. Additionally, EXIT seeks to train and utilize counselors from a wide variety of psychological, educational, and police backgrounds to support the effort. More recently, many Western European countries have expanded
their disengagement and deradicalization programs to address violent Islamist extremism. In the United Kingdom’s Prevent strategy, the government makes use of existing mainstream social services and works with a variety of non-governmental partners in order to prevent recruitment and facilitate disengagement from extremist organizations of all types.

Most disengagement and deradicalization programs rely on voluntary enrollment. However, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which refers to ‘soft’ CT measures, also includes broader approaches, such as efforts to improve social harmony in society. In addition, both governments and civil society organizations are making increasing efforts to counter terrorist narratives. As the Internet and social media have become important platforms for extremist propaganda and recruiting, they have also become key battlefields for CVE. The most effective CVE programs employ credible voices from local communities—including clerics, scholars, and rehabilitated extremists—to directly challenge terrorist narratives. Programs which are directly operated by governments face a greater challenge in trying to establish credibility, although they tend to have greater resources at their disposal. One such organization, the U.S. State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) formerly known as the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, was created to coordinate the US government’s counter-messaging activities targeted against violent extremism. In addition, the GEC directly challenges extremist narratives online in a variety of languages. Although it is difficult to judge the impact of this, the rationale is that extremists are no longer allowed to have free reign on the Internet.

The more effective disengagement and deradicalization programs seem to have a number of common factors. First, they use credible individuals to get their message across. Second, they use a supportive approach by providing education and vocational training as a pathway to a legitimate lifestyle. Third, they employ multiple methods, sometimes unique to a particular cultural and social context. Fourth, they use both public and private resources and expertise. Fifth, they acknowledge and exploit the positive role of the community, family, and friends. Finally, most effective programs provide continuing support as a means to prevent relapse and to monitor the behavior of “rehabilitated” individuals.

Like most CT efforts, there are challenges in measuring the effectiveness of these programs. Recidivism is more obvious than a creeping return to previously held extremist beliefs, although the ultimate goal is to prevent violent behavior. Other critics have challenged claims of success because relatively few hard-core extremists have been enrolled in these programs; therefore, it is difficult to tell if they work with high-risk offenders. Although prevention is a better option than treatment, it is even more challenging to measure.

The fundamental premise of CVE and disengagement/deradicalization programs is to reduce violent extremism by preventing or “curing” it. Most experts would agree that CVE efforts are not enough by themselves, but are important, necessary, and complementary measures to an effective and holistic CT approach.

**Discussion Questions**

- What CVE measures are used in your country? Do you think they are effective?
- How can police/military/intelligence services contribute to CVE? Give specific recommendations.
- Do you think it is possible to deradicalize terrorists? Give evidence to support your views.
Recommended Reading


Koehler, D. 2017. Structural Quality Standards for Work to Intervene with and Counter Violent Extremism (Ministry for Interior Affairs, Digitalisation and Integration, Baden-Württemberg and German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies).


Revolutionary Organization 17 November, a Greek Marxist terror group, is believed to have disbanded since the 2002 arrest and trial of key members.

Session 7: How Terrorist Groups End

Learning Objectives

On completion of this session you will be able to:

- Identify the ways which terrorist campaigns have ended.
- Analyze the lessons about the end of terrorist groups to identify policy recommendations for defeating terrorist groups.

Required Reading

Understanding the outcomes of historical terrorist campaigns is an important factor for forming realistic expectations about the future. Do terrorist groups succeed? Can military responses defeat terrorism? Does “decapitation” of terrorists groups achieve the desired result? By analyzing the fate of terrorist groups in the past, CT professionals can learn about the specific conditions that were responsible for each type of outcome. This information then becomes useful for developing counterterrorism policies with the best chances of success.

While acknowledging the unique historical, cultural, social, and political contexts of past terrorist groups, certain common patterns emerge. Renowned terrorism scholar Audrey Cronin’s review of the history of various terrorist organizations revealed seven major categories of inter-related outcomes which are described below.

1. Capture or killing of leader(s). There have been a number of cases where the death or arrest of a prominent terrorist leader or leaders has led to the demise of their organizations. One of the most notable examples was the collapse of Sendero Luminoso in Peru after the capture of Abimael Guzman in 1992.

2. Failure to transition to the next generation. If a terrorist organization’s cause doesn’t change to adapt to ongoing changes in the social and political environment, it runs the risk of dying out as a viable movement. The fate of various left-wing European groups such as the Red Army Faction and the Red Brigades are examples of this phenomenon.

3. Achievement of the group’s aims. Sometimes terrorist organizations achieve their political goals. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 hastened the demise of the Jewish terror organization Irgun Zvai Leumi.

4. Transition to legitimate political process. Negotiations between governments and terrorist organizations can lead to some groups transforming into more legitimate political movements, although they often splinter into different factions in the process. The case of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is a good example. After entering the peace process with Israel in the 1990s, the PLO became a more legitimately recognized political actor. However, some elements within the PLO objected to negotiations and independently continued a strategy of violence.

5. Undermining of popular support. Loss of public support, usually caused by ill-considered targeting or
especially heinous acts, can lead to the collapse of some terrorist groups. For example, a dramatic shift in public sentiment after the Omagh bombing of 1998 precipitated the rapid demise of the Real Irish Republican Army.

6. Repression and Force. The use of significant military or police force has led to the downfall of a number of terrorist organizations. The Tupamaros, a communist terror group in Uruguay was crushed by a heavy handed military counterterrorism campaign, but with terrible costs.

7. Transition to other forms of violence. In many cases, terrorists can shift over time from focused attacks against civilian targets to criminal activity or to classic insurgency. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is a prominent example of the former. A good example of the latter was the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) which essentially became an insurgent movement after previously relying on mostly terrorist tactics.

It is difficult in most cases to attribute a terrorist group’s end to a single factor. Most terrorist organizations end as a result of a combination of causes. Even in the examples cited above, there were multiple factors involved. This subject does not easily lend itself to pie charts or matrices, and a critical student of the subject should treat such depictions with caution. Committing government resources into a single line of effort to defeat terrorist groups is unlikely to be successful, combining different methods to address a particular group is more likely to succeed.

Of course to be truly effective, defeating a terrorist group also involves addressing whatever ideology or motivations gave rise to the group. As discussed when attempting to define terrorism - terrorists carry out their actions for a political or ideological purpose. Governments which do not acknowledge and take actions against whatever root causes may have led to the formation and growth of the group risk having a similar group arise.

Discussion Questions

- Under what conditions might a terrorist group be susceptible to a “decapitation” approach?
- Has the use of force been effective in ending terrorist organizations? What conditions increase the chances that this can work?

Recommended Reading

