

Panel 2: Addressing the Causes - How Can Embracing Community and Diversity Approaches Contribute to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Diffusing Destructive Devotions: Deploying Counter Terrorism

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Introduction

Radicalisation and violent extremism, both under the ubiquitous umbrella of terrorism are nebulous, fluctuating and challenging to define. These terms generally consist of psycho-cognitive constructions of mental/emotional social processes often occurring in closed communities with an impetus to pursue violent behaviour and the adoption of extreme positions to intimidate the public and threaten security (Foret & Markoviti, 2019; Prislán, et al., 2019). Cross-cultural research and fieldwork on violent extremism indicates that the most influential and dangerous operators are devoted or committed actors (Atran, 2021). In this complex terrain, of destructive devotions to left-wing, right-wing, Islamic and other forms of extremism, there are no easy answers, but **wounding** through structural and political conditions, in tandem with idiosyncratic personal motives and circumstances create deep complexities in deploying counter terrorism measures (Belanger, 2021; Bjorgo & Sikle, 2019; Pio & Syed, 2018; Schuurman, 2020; Syed, et al., 2016; Tomkinson et al., 2020). Military and police involvement need to be bolstered by **nurturing** stances through whole-of-nation approaches to diffuse the seeds of destructive devotions.

Wounding

Wounding focuses on the causes of destructive devotions such as ideology, religion, media and perceptions of dispossession. Ideological obsession and its connections to violent extremism has its roots in needs frustration with disenfranchisement and loss of personal significance. Socio-cognitive processes such as goal-shielding and ego-defensiveness further bolster ideological blinkered thinking. Causes for radicalisation and violent extremism, could include economic and social exclusion/polarisation, low community resilience, inequality, disenfranchisement, perceptions of being under siege/humiliated, post-colonial legacies, immigration, crisis of political representation, social networks, the internet, a thin religious repertoire and religiously motivated terrorism. High risk environments include prisons and diaspora communities who can be malleable targets for political and religious radicalisation. Research indicates that the co-existence of misogynistic attitudes, high levels of social isolation, a criminal record, a psychological disorder and gang membership, indicate an increased propensity towards violence and violent extremism.

Religious repertoires which bind communities and provide direction can be value-loaded and controversial and can lead to religious extremism. Youth tend to be high on the list of radicalisation and potential violent extremism, with the search for identity and the need to belong creating fissures for entry of extremist groups and violent ideologies (Sas, et al., 2020). Media is a powerful source of information. It can be a breeding ground for terrorism, polarising messages, lethal transfers and pressure tactics on authorities by extremist groups (Vorontsov et al., 2020). Liability for any harm transmitted online is often evaded, since such actors can claim that toxic messages stem from unknown or unidentified source/s and misrepresentation, with algorithmic patterns of online platforms providing recommendations based on search history (Atran, 2021). Terrorist and extremist groups employ specifically designed propaganda, youth-centric communication channels and products that young people find attractive such as fashion, music, sports, video games, concerts, and other leisure activities and recruiters try to instil honour, pride, joy and positive feelings. Contagion and magnitude effects refer to terrorism tactics in media coverage which are likely to be copied,

particularly pertinent with 24-hour news channels and social media with more attacks leading to more coverage, and more coverage leading to increased attacks (Bjorgo & Silke, 2019).

Lone actor terrorists, another source of terrorism, tend to be isolated individuals who are silent until they plan and execute their attack. They are dangerous and hard to combat, with ties to extremists, groups, or wider movements. Compared to group-based terrorists, lone wolves may suffer from personality disorders or psychological problems (Kenyon, et al., 2021; Knudsen, 2021), yet they may engage in sophisticated and structured planning in the lead-up to and execution of violent extremist activities.

Women are generally victims of violence, but they are also involved in extremist activities (Wickham, et al., 2020). Women resort to extremism as an exit from personal despair, such as anger over the loss of a loved one, reactionary measures to religious practices, feelings of hopelessness and embarrassment or family issues and survival, falling in love with a member of an extremist group, rape and threat of extermination of loved ones (True & Eddyono, 2021). Male security personnel are hesitant to check women, and extremist groups exploit this by recruiting women, as well as to shame and inspire men to participate in violence (Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2020).

Being part of the violent extremism milieu holds substantial physical and mental health risks and toxic stress. This may be due to exposure to an environment of parental separation, abuse, violence, death, imprisonment, harsh parenting, brutalisation in which fear, anger and hatred dominate (Vorontsov et al., 2020).

Preconditions are the fertile ground for the emergence of radicalisation and terrorism such as social injustice perceptions, discrimination based on ethnicity and religion, though they are insufficient to cause terrorism, unless coupled with precipitants or trigger events. The pivotal role of social relationships and inspiration provided by ideological communities in real/virtual life are stressed in the weave of both agency and structure in deploying counter terrorism.

Nurturing

Nurturing underscores deploying counter terrorism through a plurality of approaches. Detering terrorism relies on legislative strategies and the certain, severe and swift implementation of punishment which is publicised to the general public (Freilich et al., 2019). However, this may have a back-lash effect of increasing criminal behaviour and research has been mixed. Situational crime prevention seeks to make terrorist actions more difficult and less rewarding by changing scripts and removing identified opportunities/facilitating conditions, so that sub-goals in the chain of decisions and actions are identified and removed. Along with targets, which could have varying degrees of vulnerability, the availability of weapons and tools, their use, delivery and concealment are other crucial aspects of terrorism. Building intelligence capacity with organised mechanisms to receive and manage information are part of the prevention mosaic. The government's role in preventing extremism is enormous. Policies pertaining to people may involve safeguarding the rights of minorities or socially/politically marginalised groups, ensuring diversity and inclusivity within the community (Ezzati, 2021), engaging religious leaders on how to educate youth, building a spirit of patriotism to avert future threats and working with youth around a policy of ideological fight against extremism and terrorism. The creation of suspect communities is eschewed, as this facilitates social prejudices, noting that a potentially suspect community contains individuals who may never commit violence (Tomkinson et al, 2020).

A multi-stakeholder, whole-of-nation approach incorporating civil society, business and public sector segments (Pio, Kilpatrick & Pratt, 2021; Prislán et al., 2019) and deploying a range of strategies beyond

virtue signalling, can diffuse destructive devotions. The approach will be dependent on strategic government initiatives, traditions, sensitivity to unstable funding time horizons, budget constraints, trust flows between communities and governments, credible actors with well trained and confident professionals, clearly defined protocols and alliances and relevant cultural context. Such an approach would emphasise diversity narratives for social cohesion and the creation of rationally compassionate disruptors for capacity building, through both intervention and deradicalisation.

Religious extremism is an important consideration where faith groups, religious communities and leaders can serve as formal and informal connectors for social inclusion (Jerome & Elwick, 2020; Stephens et al., 2021). Youth organisations, unions and professionals are influential partners to promote dialogue and democratic values, myth-busting forums and role models to develop social skills and critical thinking. Additionally, women as the hub of families can link with ethnic and immigrant women to facilitate social and psychological help in countering radicalisation. Such a strengths-based resilience approach must address systemic and institutional issues, or the intertwining of a social-ecological perspective with securitisation. This approach can facilitate and compound resilience through interventions and deradicalisation to identify vulnerable individuals and destroy moves towards radicalisation and extremism. Nurturing includes careful consideration of perceived injustices, building habits of engagement, activism for social justice with frameworks for tolerance and togetherness, understanding rights and responsibilities. Controversial issues pedagogy through cognitive resources to think through complexity rather than black/white, right/wrong dichotomies can foster safe and intelligent spaces to explore, validate and address issues pertaining to identities (e.g. national, ethnic, religious), and present choices and actions, to counter the magnetism of extremist groups and ideologies.

Policies around media encompass safeguarding national security, regulating the amount of news coverage devoted to terrorist acts and ensuring that terrorist activities are covered exclusively by negative positions (Vorontsov et al., 2020). Non-violence as a counter ideology to terrorism (Baldoli, 2020; Besley & Peters, 2020) is not confined to resisting violence, but involves the removal of hatred, revengefulness and animosity. Exposing the extremist to compassionate perspectives of religious teaching, tolerance, peaceful co-existence, community involvement in accepting the extremist back in society and psychological support to bounce back from trauma, are some interventions for countering further terrorist involvements (Corner & Gill, 2020; Weisburd et al., 2020). Gravititas in community engagement and support programs for preventing radicalisation can be achieved through former members of extremist or radicalised groups in providing alternative scripts and empowering conversations with appropriate resources in tandem with securitisation. A comprehensive, coordinated and nuanced response with global solidarity is necessary to counter terrorism.

High-impact policies:

1. ***Accentuate and incentivise diversity narratives*** through acknowledging and invoking repertoires for inclusion, to avoid the miniaturisation of human beings. Focus on being global citizens; equip educators, media, and families for critique, inquiry, reflexivity through religious literacy, creative expression and appropriate knowledge bases to negate hooks of discontentment.
2. ***Create and incentivise rationally compassionate disruptors*** through focusing on a deep kindness in organisations, educational institutions, unions and communities, to facilitate capacity building, discipline and accountability for social cohesion.
3. ***Legislate for specific nation-building content courses*** to be passed before gaining permanent residency and citizenship

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