



ECTC
European Counter
Terrorism Centre

ECTC ADVISORY NETWORK CONFERENCE

9-10 APRIL 2019
AUDITORIUM

**TERRORISM
EVOLVING:
INSIGHTS
FROM
RESEARCH
2019**



TUESDAY 9 APRIL

Introduction, **Catherine De Bolle, Executive Director of Europol**

Panel 1: (Not) Getting Involved in Terrorism

Barriers to terrorism: a first look at why most extremists never become terrorists, **Bart Schuurman**

This presentation is predicated on the idea that the question of how and why involvement in terrorism occurs has been approached from the wrong direction. By studying people already in terrorist groups, existing research has been unable to assess how they differ from the majority of radicalized individuals who, despite having similarly extremist worldviews, and despite being exposed to similar socio-political circumstances, never cross the threshold to terrorist violence. To advance our understanding of this form of political violence, we need to reorient our research to ask why most people who radicalise never actually become terrorists. What distinguishes them from those who do cross this threshold, and how can understanding these differences help policy makers and practitioners more effectively prevent and respond to terrorism? This presentation underlines the importance of studying non-involvement in terrorism.

Lone actor terrorism and mental health, **Paul Gill**

This talk synthesises the evidence base of a number of papers on the links between mental health problems and engagement in lone-actor terrorism. The evidence suggests that the prevalence of disorders is higher in this terrorist population than in group-based offenders, and higher than in general society. The evidence also suggests that particular disorders (e.g. schizophrenia, autism, delusional disorders) are particularly acute compared to the national base rate. Other disorders (e.g. anxiety, depression, sleep disorders) are significantly lower compared to the national base rate. The talk will also demonstrate that mental health problems are rarely the sole contributing factor but often crystallise with a number of other stressors and affordances.

The important role of trust and distrust in the psychology of terrorism, **John F. Morrison**

This talk assesses the dichotomous role of trust/distrust in understanding an individual and organisation's engagement in terrorist activity. By having the focus trust/distrust this allows us to engage with the ordinary aspects of human and organisational interactions and decision-making in extreme situations. The talk focuses on the effect that trust/distrust can play when an individual is joining a terrorist organisation, when they engage in terrorist activity, and also when they ultimately disengage and leave terrorism behind. It moves the discussion away from a radicalisation centric analysis, in order to broaden our understanding of terrorism engagement. Leading on from an individual's involvement it will also take a look at the role of trust/distrust in relation to organisational splits and alliances. This will all be brought together by assessing how this trust/distrust based understanding can assist in the development of approaches to countering terrorism, and an individual's engagement with terrorist groups.

Panel 2: Terrorism in Europe

The threat of terrorism in Europe: a historical perspective, [Andreas Gofas](#)

Transnational terrorism remains often discussed but historically unscrutinised. This is so because the bulk of traditional research on terrorism has been dominated by a blocking presentism. The talk addresses this shortcoming by providing a historical comparison of the current wave of transnational terrorism with the anarchist wave of the late 19th century. By restoring historicity to the evolution of transnational terrorism, the talk offers a remedy to the prevailing blocking chronocentrism that abstracts terrorism from its broader socio-historical context and contributes to the development of a general theory of the origins of transnational terrorist waves.

Hybrid threats and online narrative-led operations: rhetorical model for jihadi videos, [Felipe Pathé Duarte](#)

Hybrid threats combine multidimensional attacks, both coercive and subversive. The aim is not only kinetic, but also to influence different forms of decision making. It can range from cyberattacks on critical information systems to narrative-led operations, particularly through social media. Both states and non-state ac-

tors use hybrid approaches to pursue their political and military aims. However, social media seemed to have become the weapon of choice for a non-state actor. It is an asymmetrical offensive capability.

DAESH is not the first in using social media for information activities and gaining support, but they do it more effectively than their counterparts – with a strong communication strategy. This presentation analyses the Portuguese references in jihadi videos content. Through semiotic analysis, with both qualitative and interpretative content analysis, we will figure if there is a rhetorical/communication strategy specifically aimed at Portuguese speakers, and how it is conveyed, analysing language, gestures and other non-verbal codes.

Objective 1: What is the role of social media in hybrid warfare? How is it ‘weaponised’? What techniques and tactics do non-state actors employ to support their political and military aims using social media? What effects can they achieve?

Objective 2: What rhetorical topoi and figures are adopted to terrify, intimidate, and threaten, and entice potential sympathisers? What kind of subject is posited by the discourse, and what sort of addressee?

Right-wing extremist terrorism in Germany, Jörn Hauschild

The experience concerning the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU/National Socialist Underground) has changed the view of the security agencies of the right-wing extremism scene and has led to a modified approach to monitoring the violent scene. Right-wing extremism in Germany is not a homogeneous movement. It appears in various forms incorporating nationalist, racist and anti-Semitic ideology elements to different degrees. The exorbitant increase in right-wing extremist violence is a development, which marked the year 2015. Against the backdrop of increasing numbers of refugees, anti-asylum propaganda became a dominating factor in 2015. This development led to the establishment of right-wing terrorist organisations such as the “Oldschool Society” and the “Group Freital” in particular. Events in Chemnitz in 2018 show that the risk of right-wing extremist crimes remains high. The presentation will explain the various elements of the investigative concept of the German Federal Attorney-General and the criminal investigations in connection with right-wing extremism in Germany.

Panel 3: Terrorism and the Internet

#ISIS Twitter Fans' Visual Narratives: Contextualising Profile Pictures, **Moign Khawaja**

This paper examines how pro-Islamic State (IS) supporters on Twitter projected themselves via avatar images. Avatar images, also known as profile pictures, are an important aspect of contemporary social networking, and have a number of functions. These include giving users a way to express their unique identities, allowing like-minded users to easily identify each other, and permitting collective shows of solidarity with some cause/ideology. The nature and functions of avatar images on Twitter and other social networking platforms have not been widely researched to date, and have been totally ignored by online violent extremism researchers. This paper supplies analysis of the profile pictures of 500 IS supporters collected from Twitter in 2016, with the aim of not just plugging the literature gap, but expanding the current literature on the use of avatars in social media. Our findings show that avatar images were an important component of IS supporters' online signalling and wider community-building efforts until they were faced with severe disruption from Twitter. Our next step will be to undertake a similar analysis of extreme right profile pictures and compare the two cohorts.

Mapping the demand-side dimensions of 'terrorist' media, **Donald Holbrook**

This paper discusses research involving evidential material gathered in terrorism investigations into home-grown plots in the United Kingdom between 2004 and 2017 with the aim of examining the nature of extremist material found in these cases. The paper describes how this media landscape can be mapped through a system of qualitative content grading that can define the contour lines as we try to navigate this space. Five key findings are discussed: the nature of media content found in terrorism investigations; the 'levels' of extremities within this collection; the source origin of the material; differences between lone and group actors; and longitudinal changes that emerged over time, including preference patterns and popularity across the cases examined.

Jihadist exploitation of social media and experiments with the decentralised web, Peter King

The presentation will look at how propaganda from jihadist groups surfaces on the Internet, and the platforms and technology exploited in the dissemination process. It will explore the latest techniques employed by jihadist media operatives to extend the shelf-life of their propaganda on the messaging app Telegram - their favoured platform - which has become more active in its efforts to remove jihadist material over the past year. But it will also explore a variety of new platforms that media operatives have experimented with as alternatives to Telegram. Specifically, it will look at platforms on the so-called decentralised web, such as RocketChat, Riot and ZeroNet, which give them more control over their material and make it harder for authorities to remove. The presentation will give a simple introduction to how these platforms work. It will also look into some of the key factors that dictate how jihadists choose which platforms to exploit - e.g. reach and resilience - and when they might choose to move on from Telegram.

WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL

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Panel 4: The external-internal security nexus

The impact of the Syrian conflict on Jihadi-Salafi ideology after the advent of the 'Arab Spring', Joas Wagemakers

The so-called Arab Spring has caused internal debate among Jihadi-Salafis on various issues. The first of these was the subject of democracy: the Arab world suddenly became open to the possibility of having truly elected governments, which caused some Jihadi-Salafis to re-evaluate democracy. This development was halted by the increasingly violent Syrian conflict, however. The second issue debated since the advent of the "Arab Spring" was Jihadi-Salafi statehood. While this had always seemed a utopian dream, the conflict in Syria appeared to offer a genuine opportunity for an Islamic state. As such, the debate among Jihadi-Salafis shifted from jihad to statehood. The third Jihadi-Salafi debate after the uprisings was a renewed confrontation with "extremism" within the trend's own ranks taking place in Syria. Thus, the Syrian conflict is not just im-

portant from a military, political and humanitarian point of view, but has also been crucial in shaping recent developments in Jihadi-Salafi ideology.

Sectarian conflict in the MENA region and its implications for European security, Florence Gaub

Events in the Middle East and North Africa have had ripple effects on Europe since the 1970s: whether the Palestinian conflict, Libya's regime or the Algerian civil war, terrorism in Europe has had a regional note. Current events just stress this linkage only further, but to novel and worrying extents. The region has attracted foreign fighters, provided the strategic and tactical breathing space for several terrorist groups which have the ambition to strike Europe, and converged dangerously with organised crime. Terrorist patterns might differ between Europe and the region, but they are moving closer together – meaning that monitoring the region will serve as an early warning system for Europe.

State of terror, the jihadi revolution: history and influence of the Belgian ISIS contingent, Pieter van Ostaeyen

The presentation deals with the history of the Belgian FTFs in Syria and Iraq. By looking into personal stories of some fighters we reconstruct how they left Belgium, inspired by groups like Sharia4Belgium, Resto du Tawheed and the Zer-kani network, first joined Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin and then split up between Jabhat an-Nusra and ISIS. We will take a closer look at the motivations, the number of FTFs left, the impact some Belgians had in the creation of The Islamic State and how the Belgian fighters were at the core of the network that was responsible for the attacks in Paris and Brussels. Subsequently we look into how ISIS further evolved and which major attacks took place in Europe. In addition we shall use brief quotes of the former ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani as he pointed out, years before the eventual (apparent) demise of ISIS we now witness, what future The Islamic State could expect. We will conclude with an overview of the current threat posed not only by ISIS but also by the worldwide al-Qaeda network.

Keynote speech "The New Normal", Renske van der Veer

Panel 5: Terrorism risks & best practices

Analysing lone-actor terrorism risk in context: The “S5” framework, **Noémie Bouhana**

Managing the risk of lone-actor terrorism is an on-going challenge and the case has been made that structured professional judgement, which combines reliance on indicator-based risk assessment tools and practitioner experience, is the way forward. This begs the question of how to provide generalisable guidance to analysts, given the evolving nature of the threat and the diversity of decisions that their assessments must inform. This paper presents analyses of 125 lone-actor terrorism cases to demonstrate the following: a) risk indicators of radicalisation, attack preparation, and attack commission are multifinal; b) ideological groups of lone actors do not vary significantly on the basis of most indicators; c) lone actors can be differentiated along 4 kinds of person x environment patterns (PEPs). This suggests that, to analyse risk, we need a structuring framework that can 1) support analysts in the identification and interpretation of changing and unstable risk indicators; 2) apply across the ideological board; and 3) clearly articulate how individual factors interact with contextual factors to produce risk. The “S5” framework is introduced, which was developed to tackle these unique challenges and which redefines vulnerability, capability and motivation as fundamentally situational.

A review of transatlantic best practices for countering radicalisation in prisons and terrorist recidivism, **Lorenzo Vidino and Bennett Clifford**

Counter-terrorism practitioners throughout the European Union and the United States have long considered radicalisation within prison systems and the release of incarcerated terrorist offenders as major challenges. The problem has worsened during the past half-decade, as the number of extremist offenders in Western prison systems has metastasised, and previously incarcerated extremists were responsible for attacks that rank amongst Europe’s deadliest. Significant barriers remain to developing effective radicalization prevention and disengagement programs in prisons, jails and parole systems, as well as inculcating prison authorities within the counter-terrorism infrastructure. Nonetheless, some innovative programmatic responses, albeit on a small scale, are currently

in effect. This paper reviews efforts in the European Union and the United States to combat extremism in prison and parole systems, highlighting the guidelines, methods, and practices which have proven effective or ineffective in certain circumstances.

Similarities and differences between online terrorism and online child sexual abuse and their implications, *Maura Conway*

Politicians, policy makers and commentators continue to yoke together “terrorists and paedophiles” and their online activity in an oftentimes cynical manner to sell various policy responses and items of legislation to publics. Whilst there are very good reasons to seek to steer clear of such reductive approaches, there are also numerous ways in which online terrorism activity and online child sex abuse (OCSA) appear to overlap. The purpose of this paper is therefore to engage in preliminary exploration of the similarities and differences between online terrorism and OCSA and the implications of these. In particular, the paper addresses major points of cross-over between the latter, including the concept of ‘online grooming,’ law enforcement personnel and activity, detection technology and takedown processes, prevention strategies, and emerging and future trends, including the use of the ‘Dark Web,’ messaging apps, and related.

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Panel 6: Online counter-terrorism

A strategy for terrorism propaganda content countermeasures, *Hiroyasu Nagata*

This paper discusses a strategy for analysing the use of the Internet by terrorist groups, media wings and terrorist supporters and ensuring tracking of terrorist content. Terrorist content spreading over the Internet has an impact on “lone actor” attacks. Removal of online terrorist content is an important theme. As methods of dissemination change and evolve constantly, tracking content becomes increasingly difficult. A thorough strategy is needed to comprehensively monitor terrorist content. Particularly, it is important to specify the content URLs, which is necessary information for content deletion, freezing and site

takedown, among other measures. It is also necessary to collect information on future terrorist content. Strategies and methods that have proven effective on a personal level will be presented.

Counterterrorism Efforts Online: Human Insights, Machine Learning and Cross-Sector Collaborations, Erin Saltman

The presentation will give an overview of the state-of-play with counterterrorism efforts on Facebook and cross-industry efforts. How has in-house expertise grown? Where can machine learning, and other online tooling, be effective in counterterrorism? Where can knowledge or insights be shared more effectively across sectors to stay ahead of the threat through mechanisms like the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism? This presentation will cover these fundamental questions and open up the conversation to more grey area topics such as CVE work and challenges in identifying and countering processes of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Pitfalls of ‘Taming the Internet’s Wild West’: Content Removal in the light of new technologies, Gareth Mott

Violent extremists experiencing difficulty maintaining viable, persistent presences on social media platforms may elect to eschew mainstream platforms in favour of those which were not. An example is Twister, a fully peer-to-peer social network that operates using a Blockchain and both the DHT and BitTorrent protocols. Peer-to-peer social media and content hosting platforms are likely to present challenges for voluntary content removal, which rely on the cooperation of domain owners and ISPs. If online violent extremist practices were to migrate to decentralised peer-to-peer online spaces such as Twister and ZeroNet, where access cannot be blocked and content cannot be removed, it is plausible that counter-extremist practices towards online content may need to shift from a focus on content removal to content contention.

Closing remarks, Manuel Navarrete, Head of the ECTC