Counter-Terrorism as Crime Prevention: A Holistic Approach

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Counter-terrorism as crime prevention

- What does a counter-terrorism look like if we base it on a holistic crime prevention approach?
- The goal of CT is primarily to prevent future acts of terrorism - in other words, crime prevention.
- There is a need for a broader and more holistic approach to crime prevention and counter-terrorism, integrating both "soft" and repressive measures.
- Goal: to show how different strategies and different preventive actors may complement and support rather than compete and undermine each other.
- Apply *preventive mechanism* as the basic principle for developing a set of coherent strategies.
Starting point:
There are several competing models of crime prevention which (apparently) are incompatible, theoretically and practically.

- The criminal justice model of crime prevention (general and individual prevention)
- The social model of crime prevention
- The situational crime prevention model

Each of these models are too narrow and do not incorporate the other perspectives but tend to see them as competing strategies. Result: An ideological debate on which strategy is "better", "more effective" or "evidence-based".

An alternative approach: Develop a more holistic model based on the principle of preventive mechanisms.
A general model for crime prevention

- Establishing and maintaining moral (normative) barriers against committing criminal acts
- **Reducing recruitment** to criminal social environments and activities by eliminating or reducing the social and individual root causes and processes that lead to criminality
- **Deterrence**: Getting potential perpetrators to refrain from criminal acts through the threat of punishment or other negative consequences
- **Disruption** by stopping criminal acts before they are carried out
- **Incapacitation** (or neutralisation) by denying perpetrators the ability (capacity) to carry out new criminal acts
- Protecting vulnerable targets against criminal acts, reduce opportunities
- Reducing the harmful consequences of criminal acts
- Reducing the rewards from criminal acts
- Rehabilitation: Helping people who have been involved in or punished for crime to settle back into a normal life

**This general model needs to be specified for specific crime types to become a preventive strategy!**
Some basic concepts

- **Measures** = the specific means or methods implemented to reduce terrorism/crime
- **Preventive mechanism** = *how* a measure is reducing terrorism / crime
- A measure is *what* we do, a mechanism is *how* it works
- Some mechanisms are mental, others are physical
- A measure may activate several different mechanisms, including unintended side-effects
- Different measures may activate the same mechanism
Analytical approach for specifying preventive strategies:

- Describing each of the preventive mechanisms: how does it reduce (future) acts of terrorism (or other forms of crime)?
- Measures used to activate these mechanisms
- Actors possessing the relevant measures
- Target group(s) to be influenced by the measures
- Strengths and benefits of the measures
- Limitations, costs and negative side-effects of the measures
Norm setting against terrorism

- **Mechanism:** Reinforce objections and moral barriers against the use of violence and terrorism; reducing radicalisation
- **Actors:** Political, ideological or religious leaders, opinion-makers, media, education, family members, peers, victims.
- **Measures:** Socialisation, law-making, public statements and debate, public diplomacy and campaigns to influence public opinion, demonstrations, etc.
- **Target groups:** Entire populations and risk groups
- **Advantages:** Measures are non-repressive and not controversial. Low costs in economic and human terms.
- **Limitations and side effects:** Norms are weak barriers; easily overcome by strong leaders and group processes, or by shocking ‘trigger events’. Hard core activists are difficult to reach and influence; easier to win over their constituencies.
Social and political prevention to reduce emergence of terrorism and engagement in violence

**Mechanism:** Reduce motivation for terrorism by removing causes, grievances and frustrations leading to radicalisation and engagement.

**Actors:** Governments, political activists, NGOs, youth workers, etc.

**Measures:** Conflict resolution, political processes, social development, non-discrimination, rule of law, etc.

**Target groups:** Entire populations and/or specific groups at risk for radicalising into violence

**Advantages:**
- Addresses the “roots” of the problem, not merely the symptoms
- May have long-term effects if successful
- May have positive effects other social and political problems than terrorism alone.

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- There is no single root cause of terrorism; but many and complex
- Many root causes are difficult to solve or remove
- Measures will often take a long time before they make an impact
- Effects are difficult to measure
- Terrorism is frequently sustained by other reasons than those which gave rise to the terrorist campaign initially
Deterrence

- **Mechanism:** Increasing the costs of terrorism by (threat of) punishment / retaliation to reduce motivation
- **Actors:** Police, criminal justice system, military force
- **Target groups:** Individuals, groups or states involved in terrorism or considering it
- **Measures:** Repression, violent force, punishment, media attention, economic and diplomatic sanctions

**Advantages:**
- May be particularly effective towards state sponsors of terrorism
- Popular! May increase public support of the government

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Deterrence is generally not effective against terrorists
- Limited effects towards highly motivated (e.g. suicide) terrorists and fragmented or decentralised groups
- Difficult to impact actors who can not be located
- May easily hit innocent third parties ("collateral damage"),
- May turn the state into a mirror image of the terrorists
- May reinforce the spiral of violence without addressing root causes
- May play into the hands of terrorists, making governments respond in ways where they weaken and undermine themselves
Disruption of terrorist attacks

**Mechanism:** Preventing terrorists from carrying through prepared attacks by detecting and stopping them in advance

**Actors:** Security services, police, security guards, the public, media

**Target groups:** individuals and groups already radicalised and involved in militant activities

**Measures:**
- Intelligence, surveillance, security controls
- Intercepting and apprehending terrorist before they attack
- Early intervention with warnings, dialogue with radicalised youths
- Information sharing between agencies and to the public

**Advantages:**
- Targeted and concrete, saving lives, reducing suffering
- High legitimacy, reinforcing confidence in the police and government
- May break a potential cycle and escalation of violence

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Innocent people may become targets of surveillance and arrests
- Danger of stigmatising ethnic and religious minorities
- Risk of striking too early for conviction or too late to prevent disaster
- Some prepared actions may slip through
Incapacitation

**Mechanism:** Removing the capacity of violent actors to carry out (more) attacks and cause harm

**Actors:** Police, courts, prison services, control regimes, military

**Target groups:** Individuals or groups involved in terrorism

**Measures:** Detention, ”kill or capture”, (violent) force, but also reducing access to economic funding, weapons or bomb precursors

**Advantages:**
- Effective when taking out key activists or groups with limited membership
- Governments usually possess relevant capacities

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Limited effects on groups with a high recruitment and a strong social basis
- May reinforce recruitment and extremism
- Repression may undermine human rights and the moral legitimacy of the government
Protecting vulnerable targets

Mechanisms:
- Identify and remove opportunities for specific types of terrorist action, making it more difficult to carry through attacks.
- Increase the efforts needed to carry through a specific attack
- Increase the risks for detection

Measures: Large spectre of possible means

Actors: Many! (Security guards, control agencies, various authorities, place owners, the public, etc.)

Target groups: In principle active and potential terrorists, but measures tend to impact everyone

Advantages: Often immediate and measurable effects on specific problems.

Limitations and side effects:
- May displace attacks from hardened targets to “softer” targets
- Increased security measures may create a ‘Big Brother’ society
Reducing harmful consequences of attacks

Mechanism: Reducing harmful consequence through interventions which are planned, prepared and trained before an attack takes place.

Actors: Police, fire brigade, medical emergency units, various authorities, NGOs, place owners, citizens.

Target group: Victims of terrorism - individuals, groups, institutions and society in general.

Measures: Crisis management, immediate relief, psychological assistance, restoring critical infrastructure, communication, impact reduction.

Advantages: Reducing suffering, restoring a sense of safety and confidence in authorities.

Limitations and side effects: Expensive, resource intensive; deficient crisis management will undermine confidence and perceived security.
Reducing rewards for carrying out acts of terrorism

- **Mechanism:** Make use of violence less attractive by reducing rewards; thereby reducing motivation.  
  *Basic question:* ‘What do the terrorists try to achieve?’

- **Actors:** Political authorities, business, news media, hostage negotiators etc.

- **Target group:** Terrorist actors and those considering to make use of terrorist means

- **Means:** Not acting as terrorists wish

- **Advantages:** May reduce future acts of terrorism and reinforce governmental legitimacy

- **Limitations and side effects:** Difficult dilemmas, hostages might be killed, ”patriotic journalism”
**Disengagement from terrorism**

- **Mechanisms:** Make active terrorists quit their participation in terrorism, individually or collectively, voluntarily or involuntarily.
- **Actors:** Governments, criminal justice system, NGOs
- **Target groups:** Those involved in terrorism
- **Measures:** ‘Stick and carrot’, amnesty and witness (protection) programmes, resocialisation and deradicalisation programmes, negotiations, political processes, alternatives to violence.

**Advantages:**
- May bring an end to terrorist campaigns
- May reduce violence and suffering
- May reduce the size of terrorist groups and prevent recruitment
- May provide vital intelligence and witnesses in court cases

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Amnesty programmes may easily be abused; risk of recidivism
- Amnesty may be difficult to accept by the victims of terrorism
- May undermine principles of the rule of law and sense of justice
Main strategies for preventing terrorism:

**Short-term preventive strategies**
- Deterrence by threat of retaliation or punishment
- Pre-emptive disruption of planned terrorist attacks
- Incapacitation
- Protecting vulnerable targets

**Long-term preventive strategies**
- Reducing harm from terrorist attacks
- Reducing rewards from terrorism
- Norm setting to delegitimize terrorism
- Social and political prevention by reducing root causes and motivations for violent radicalisation and recruitment
- Disengagement from terrorism - making individuals and groups discontinue their involvement in terrorism

**Main challenge:** To make short-term and long-term strategies support rather than undermine each other
You have seen the movie...
now read the article in ...

... and the books!

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