Counter-terrorism as crime prevention: a holistic approach

Tore Bjørgo

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Tore Bjørgo[*]

Research Department, Norwegian Police University College, Oslo, Norway

Within democratic societies, counter-terrorism is almost exclusively about crime prevention. A broad and holistic approach to preventing terrorism can be based on nine preventive mechanisms: building normative barriers against terrorism, reducing radicalisation and recruitment, deterrence, disruption, incapacitation, protecting vulnerable targets, reducing benefits to terrorists, reducing harm, and facilitating disengagement from terrorism. Counter-terrorist policies which are only based on a narrow range of repressive mechanisms and military measures tend to become overly heavy-handed, producing serious negative side effects which serve to enhance the problem rather than reducing it. A more holistic approach, making use of the entire range of preventive mechanisms, may lighten the impact of the "hard" measures by relying more on the impact of the "softer" and more positive measures to build moral barriers, reduce recruitment, and facilitate exit from terrorist movements.

Keywords: terrorism; prevention; counter-terrorism

What does a counter-terrorism strategy look like if we consider terrorism primarily as a severe form of crime and base our counter-measures on a holistic crime prevention approach?[1]

Within democratic societies, counter-terrorism is almost exclusively about crime prevention. In the history of terrorism, the 9–11 attacks were an exceptional outlier. For almost all terrorist attacks taking place in modern democratic countries, a military response is totally inappropriate. We need to treat such terrorist attacks as crime and make full use of our tools for crime prevention. The main objective should be to reduce future occurrence of such crimes, as well as the harmful consequences. In other words, our primary approach to terrorism should be crime prevention in a broad and holistic sense.

The need for more comprehensive thinking with regard to fighting terrorism became clear in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. For the first five years, the Bush administration's *War on Terror* one-sidedly focused on strategies based on the use of military force, repression and control. Fortunately, in US policy, and likewise in many other countries, a narrow counter-terrorism strategy has gradually been supplemented with a broader Counter Violent Extremism approach, with a stronger emphasis and priority to prevention, counter-narratives, deradicalisation and rehabilitation of former extremists. However, in some situations, repressive means are needed to stop terrorist campaigns. The challenge is to find a balanced and constructive

*Email: torbjo@phs.no

synergy between the short-term, repressive and controlling strategies and the more long-term, constructive strategies. This article attempts to contribute to developing such a holistic and balanced strategy for preventing violent extremism and terrorism, based on nine preventive mechanisms.

A holistic model of crime prevention

Several models exist for crime prevention and other security threats. These models overlap to some extent, but also appear to a great degree to be competing ways of thinking. Since they have very different theoretical bases and concerns, they can to some extent appear incompatible, both theoretically and practically.

The criminal justice crime prevention model is based on the preventive effects of punishment. In its simple form, it differentiates between "individual prevention" and "general prevention". Laws set norms about unacceptable behaviour, bolstered by the threat of punishment: Specific deterrence against those who directly feel the consequences of breaking the laws, and general deterrence against those who see that others are punished. Prison is also used to incapacitate offenders for some time.

The social crime prevention model attempts to influence the conditions that make people criminals or get them involved in crime, addressing risk factors as well as protective factors. Social prevention measures can therefore be introduced at a societal level (macro), group level (meso) or individual (micro) level.

The situational crime prevention model aims to change those situations in which criminal acts occur and to remove opportunities for crime. Measures can be introduced in order to (a) increase the effort necessary to carry out a specific criminal act; (b) increase the risk of being detected and stopped; (c) reduce the benefits from a specific criminal act; (d) reduce provocations that could trigger a specific criminal act; and (e) remove excuses for committing the criminal act (Clarke, 1997).

These three models of crime prevention all provide important insights. They do not fit well together, however, and separately they are too narrow. By extracting the key preventive elements of these three approaches, a more holistic model of crime prevention can be constructed, using a preventive mechanism as the basic principle. On this basis, we can identify at least nine different, general prevention mechanisms that can be applied to all forms of crime:

- Establishing and maintaining normative barriers
- Reducing recruitment
- Deterrence
- Disruption
- Protecting vulnerable targets
- Reducing harm
- Reducing rewards
- Incapacitation
- Desistance and rehabilitation

Preventive mechanisms are simple theoretical explanations of *how* a measure is causing an effect, in this case, reducing crime or terrorism. Some mechanisms are mental, such as deterrence, whereas others are more physical and observable, like incapacitation (through the use of incarceration or handcuffs). *Measures* are the means or methods implemented to activate a mechanism in order to achieve a specific outcome. A

measure (e.g. arresting someone) may activate several different mechanisms, but also unintended mechanisms (side effects). Different measures may also be used to activate the same mechanism.

To develop *the general model of crime prevention* into a *strategy* for crime prevention, it must be concretised with regard to specific types of crime, such as terrorism. Each of the nine mechanisms must thus be specified and described for the actual crime problem:

- How do the various *preventive mechanisms* work to reduce a specific crime problem?
- Which *measures* or methods can be used to activate these mechanisms?
- Who are the *principal actors* in the implementation of the various methods?
- Who are the *target groups* for the various strategies and their relevant measures?
- What are the *strengths and the positive side effects* of the various measures?
- What are the *limitations, costs and negative side effects* of the various measures?

A more extensive explanation and discussion of this holistic model of crime prevention is provided in my two recent books (Bjørgo, 2013, 2015). In the following, this generic model will be applied to the crime form terrorism.

Norm setting against violence and terrorism

For most people it would, under normal circumstances, be almost unthinkable to carry out acts of violence and inflict death or suffering upon other people to promote a political cause. It would contradict their conscience and moral values of right and wrong to inflict pain on other people. For the vast majority of those who might be angry or frustrated by political injustice, this normative barrier will be sufficient to refrain from getting involved in political violence and terrorism.

The term "terrorism" is basically a normative concept, used to describe illegitimate use of violence. Most of us accept that the use of violent force *may* be legitimate in some contexts. The state has given the police and military armed forces a monopoly on the legitimate use of force – within specified limits. However, if the state's machinery of power exceeds these legal limits it can result in what we consider as police brutality, war crimes or state terrorism. When non-state actors use violence for political purposes, they will often be accused of carrying out terrorism. This is another way of saying the violence is illegitimate and unacceptable. The violent actors and their supporters will naturally dispute this – hence the saying "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". They will refer to other forms of injustice, to it as reprisal or act of defence or to superior moral, political or religious principles which they assert legitimise their actions. They want to put their methods in a context that gives their violence legitimacy and a just cause. Radicalisation may be understood as a process whereby individuals or groups come to embrace violence as a legitimate means to achieve political, ideological or religious goals. Thus countering radicalisation and terrorism is to a great degree a normative battle on whether the use of violence is legitimate or not.

Within militant movements, there are also different degrees of acceptance of various forms of violence and targets (Hoffman, 2006, p. 229). Some groups will only accept violence against material targets, not human beings. Others groups condone violent attacks on specific categories of people only. And still others promote mass murder

against broad categories of people as long as it serves their cause. But hardly any ter-
rorists, not even the most ruthless ones, will operate without any kind of restraints. In
most cases, there will be divergent views within the movement on how ruthless the
means they may employ, and to what extent they should be restrained by moral and
strategic considerations. Such discord is frequently a source of defection, splits and
fragmentation in militant movements, serving to limit their violence and weaken
their capacity. This may provide opportunities which informed counter-terrorist pol-
icies should make use of.

The preventive mechanism here consists of reinforcing objections and normative
barriers to the use of violence and terrorism, and eliminating excuses and reasons for
using violence.

Many different *actors* can play important roles when it comes to establishing nor-
mative barriers to violence and terrorism, and through different *measures*. Parents,
schools and religious communities play leading roles in instilling moral attitudes in
children and helping them develop empathy for other people. This can be consolidated,
developed further or changed through interaction and socialising with other people,
especially those who are close to them, such as friends and workmates. Politicians
can pass laws that criminalise certain activities such as providing financial or other
support to terror organisations. Religious leaders can demonstrate that terrorism tar-
geted at the civilian population is contrary to religious moral systems. Those who
are closest to us are often those having the strongest impact on our values and world-
views. That is one of the reasons why violent radicalisation often occurs via an entire
peer group becoming adherents to a violent doctrine together (Sageman, 2004, chap. 4).

The target group for the normative strategy is primarily the entire population or
specific population groups. In some contexts, it may be the population the terrorists
claim to be fighting for or on behalf of, and from whom they may be able to obtain
material support and normative legitimacy. It may also be important to construct or
reinforce normative barriers to violence in people and groups who are at risk for becom-
ing radicalised and recruited to a militant movement. And in some cases, it may also be
possible to influence the norms of people and groups who are already actively involved
in terrorism.

The advantages: The measures are not repressive. Empathy and moral norms
against inflicting suffering and injury on other people are the barriers that make most
people view terroristic violence as both repugnant and something they could not envi-
sage getting involved in. However, paradoxically enough these are still very fragile bar-
riers to terrorism.

The limitations of the normative preventive mechanism include the fact that some
people are more poorly equipped with normative barriers and empathy than most
others, and some individuals appear to be completely devoid of moral scruples and
compassion for others.

The other principal limitation of the normative preventive mechanism is that people
who are basically equipped with normal inhibitions against inflicting harm and suffer-
ing on other people, can under certain circumstances bring themselves to carry out hor-
rible acts of terrorism. One such process may be triggered by external events that shake
a person's perceptions of the social, political and moral order, something which creates
a "cognitive opening" to turn upside down customary notions and norms (Bjørgo, 2005,
pp. 3–4; Wiktorowicz, 2005). These could be dramatic events such as military inva-
sions, massacres, police brutality, or the publication of blasphemous caricatures.
There are also many examples of traumatic events on a personal level leading people

into terroristic circles (Nesser, 2010, pp. 90–91). Coming under the influence of strong leaders, groups or organisational structures may also cause completely normal people to carry out gruesome acts (Milgram, 1974). Furthermore, acts of terrorism are in most cases a group phenomenon. Violent radicalisation and involvement in terror activities often occur through peer groups becoming radicalised together, typically by one of the friends being more ideological, politically motivated and charismatic than the others. The others follow him into militant activism primarily due to strong social bonds of friendship and group loyalty (Nesser, 2010; Sageman, 2004). Over time they absorb the militant ideology themselves – more as a consequence of, rather than the reason for, joining the violent extremist group (Bjørgo, 1997, p. 245; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009, p. 3).

Even if normative barriers cause the vast majority of people to view acts of terrorism as both repugnant and a completely unacceptable measure of achieving political change, this is nonetheless a fragile barrier that is not strong enough to prevent some people from getting involved in terroristic violence. Perhaps these people can be stopped by some of the other preventive mechanisms?

Reducing the emergence of and engagement in terrorism

Terrorism does not arise in a vacuum. Social and political conditions can provide fertile ground for the growth of terrorism and violent radicalisation in a society. Provocative events can trigger a radicalisation process at an individual or a group level and may lead to further engagement in violent activism. Is it possible to prevent this by eliminating or changing the conditions that give rise to such a negative development?

The preventive mechanism is reducing the driving forces behind and motivation for adopting the use of terroristic violence by eliminating or reducing the root causes and sources of frustration and anger, and stopping recruitment and engagement processes into terrorism at as early a stage as possible.

Research and policy development in this field has involved two partly overlapping perspectives. One of the perspectives focuses on the root causes behind the emergence of terrorism in a society (Bjørgo, 2005; English, 2009, pp. 123–127; Pedahzur, 2006). The second perspective looks at violent radicalisation and recruitment as processes and motivations at an individual and a group level (Coolsaet, 2008; Ranstorp, 2010). The fundamental idea is the same: that it is possible to reduce the problem of terrorism by doing something about the causes or processes behind the emergence of the problem.

Here, it is useful to make a distinction among macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. Developments at the macro level (e.g. a military invasion or other major political development) may impact on the meso and micro levels, such as giving rise to militant movements and individual radicalisation. Sometimes, events at meso (or even micro) levels may also have macro level impact, such as the publication of the Mohammed cartoons in a Danish newspaper. News media and internet-based social media connect these macro, meso and micro levels in ways that make events taking place far-away places such as Iraq and Syria coming very close to individuals in our own neighbourhood, inspiring young people to volunteer as foreign fighters in these war theatres. If we can understand the causes and social mechanisms behind the emergence of terrorism at macro, meso and micro levels, this insight might help us to limit these causes and influence the processes in such ways that recruitment to terrorism can be reduced.

Is it then possible to counter negative trends towards violence by reducing some of the preconditions and precipitants (triggers) for violent radicalisation and the emergence of terrorism? It is possible to do something about some of the preconditions, for example, a lack of democracy, discrimination and social injustice, or social and political conflicts. However, it might take time for such measures to make a sufficient impact to produce a reduction in terrorist radicalisation and recruitment to violent activism. Sometimes, settlements of conflicts are not perfect but sufficient to reduce the level of violence considerably, as seen in Northern Ireland after the peace process. Moreover, it is also possible to avoid some of the provocative actions and incidents that can trigger radicalisation and engagement in terrorism.

The measures within this prevention strategy are many and complex: At the macro level, this may include conflict resolution, political processes, social development, equal opportunities, and making democracy and the rule of law prevail. At the meso level, extremist groups may be dissolved and recruiters put out of business through police interventions. At the micro level, young potential recruits may be stopped on their path into engagement with extremist groups through preventive dialogues or other forms of early intervention.

Key *actors* are youth and social workers, teachers, NGOs, religious leaders, politicians, various authorities, mediators and ordinary people. The police can also play an important role in detecting individuals and groups influenced by militant tendencies, and use early intervention methods to stop a process of violent radicalisation.

The target groups are primarily the risk groups most vulnerable to violent radicalisation and engagement in violent extremism, for example, frustrated young men in Muslim minority populations, or "white" youth who feel threatened by immigrant gangs. These can be individuals, but more often than not it involves groups of friends and loose social scenes. However, entire population groups affected by a conflict or a political and social situation that could provide fertile ground for radicalisation and violent activism may also be included in the target group.

Studies of people who become radicalised and are recruited into terroristic activism show that there is no consistent profile that characterises them. However, some researchers (Bjørgo, 1997, pp. 48–53, 2011; Nesser, 2010) have demonstrated that three or four main types of people can be identified (or constructed as «ideal types»), each type characterised by different backgrounds and motivations for involving themselves in violent extremism and various roles in militant groups. The "ideological activists" are typically resourceful and idealistic, and primarily driven by political and ideological motives. They often gain leadership roles and may radicalise their friends. The "fellow travellers" are first and foremost driven by a need for belonging, friendship and acceptance. They are easily led into participating in militant activities due to their need for recognition and acceptance, and they often gradually become radicalised as a consequence of (rather than it being the reason for) participation in the group and its militant activities. The "socially frustrated" often have problematic family backgrounds, personal experience of discrimination and marginalisation, little social capital, and personal experience as both victims and perpetrators of violence and crime. They are not ideologically oriented, but have a lot of anger and aggression that can be channelled at an enemy. They can find roles in a militant group in which they receive recognition for their violent and criminal competence. They are also often seekers of action and excitement. This type may also fade over to or overlap with a fourth type which can be described as "adventurers". Involvement in violent

extremism is for them primarily about excitement, action and the experience of being heroic fighters. They are fascinated by violence, weapon and fighting.

Obviously, a diverse range of measures are needed to prevent the radicalisation processes in such different types of people, as "one size does *not* fit them all". Since the causes and processes behind radicalisation and engagement in violent activism are complex, the prevention measures also have to be.

The advantage of the social and political crime prevention strategy is that it can have positive effects in more problem areas that just terrorism. Conflict resolution, democratisation, social development and integrating minorities and individuals have their own intrinsic value beyond preventing violent radicalisation and terrorism.

However, the social and political prevention strategy also has its *weaknesses and limitations*. At a societal level, this is a long-term strategy in which it often takes years or even decades before the measures have results in the form of less fertile ground for violence and terrorism. Many of the root causes are difficult to do anything about because they are rooted in conflicts and deep social and structural problems.

Deterring involvement in terrorism

Deterrence refers to the use of punishment or other negative sanctions as a threat to make someone refrain from carrying out acts of crime, terrorism or other forms of aggression due to fear of the responses and negative consequences they would result in. The question is to what extent deterrence is effective as a counter-terrorist tool.

According to Miller (2013, pp. 132–133), scholars have argued that deterrence policies may be ineffective in counterterrorism because (a) terrorists are not rational (a claim most experts dismiss); (b) terrorists are so highly motivated that they do not fear punishment, be it prison or death; (c) terrorists possess little of value against which states can retaliate as a form of punishment; or (d) that tough policies may radicalise moderates, so that even if deterrence "works" temporarily, it leads to more terrorism in the end.

However, rather than dismiss completely that deterrence may have a role in preventing terrorism it is more fruitful to ask, under what circumstances may deterrence influence terrorist behaviour, and when will it not? Miller (2013, p. 144) argues that although deterrence has its limitations because terrorist decisions are not always the product of fully rational, unitary decision-making, governments can nevertheless deter some forms of terrorism. Deterrence is most likely to be effective against unified movements and groups, and against individuals who act egoistically. It is least likely to be effective against fragmented movements, decentralised groups and idealistic individuals who act on behalf of a larger community or cause.

The preventive mechanism in the deterrence strategy is to reduce the motivation of the terrorists or their supporters through threats of punishment, reprisals or other negative consequences. The premise is that terrorists are rational actors who calculate the costs of committing acts of terrorism and weigh them against the benefits. The knowledge that they risk a harsh punishment is intended to change this calculation in a negative direction such that they choose to refrain from carrying out the act.

As a strategy for preventing terrorism, deterrence is based on *measures* such as various forms of the use of force, primarily prison sentences but sometimes also other forms of physical or military force. In most Western countries, the Penal Code reserves most severe prison sentences for serious acts of terrorism. Obviously, the intention behind having the option of imposing such a severe sentence is that it will

act as a deterrent, although retribution may also be an important aspect (Silke, 2011). However, the possibility of the authorities employing deadly violence may also be intended to have a deterrent effect. Military reprisals as a response to acts of terrorism have been used quite frequently as a deterrent (or at least as punishment) by countries such as the USA and Israel. For years, Israel had a policy of demolishing the family houses of those who had been involved in terrorist attacks. Such measures of collective punishment have been widely criticized for being a violation of international law.

Most European countries have generally argued for a criminal justice approach rather than a military approach to terrorism. They have also been more inclined to promote economic and diplomatic sanctions as the main measures in a deterrence strategy against terrorism, in particularly directed against states sponsoring terrorist activities. English (2009, pp. 127–128) argues for the importance of avoiding over-militarization of responses to terrorism: " . . . the history of terrorism [is] teaching us in particular that large-scale military force used against civilians has tended to be counter-productive".

The actors in the deterrence strategy are primarily police detectives and the criminal justice system, though the police's counter-terrorism forces, military forces and political authorities may also play key roles, depending on the measures chosen. Some countries, such the USA and Israel, have relied more heavily on the military for retaliation after terrorist attacks and as a pre-emptive measure. When economic or diplomatic sanctions are used, a wide range of public agencies and private companies may get involved in the implementation of such policies.

The target groups for deterrence are people and groups considering committing acts of terrorism, or who are already involved in terrorism. However, the target group has also included states that sponsor or make use of terrorism as a political instrument.

The advantage of the deterrence strategy in particular is that it appears to have been relatively effective against state sponsors of terrorism. While in the 1970s and 1980s there were a number of states that openly or covertly supported terrorist groups, providing bases, sanctuary, weapons, practical assistance and political support, such state support has been significantly reduced in the last few decades. Both international economic and political sanctions and direct military strikes have made it far more costly for states to support or make use of terrorist groups. Military reprisals after terrorist attacks have also been very popular with the general public of countries such as the USA and Israel because they portray an image of the authorities and politicians taking action and not being cowed by terrorists. Herein also lies a great temptation to resort to punishment strikes even if it is doubtful that they will have a deterrent effect.

Herein also lie some of the most serious *limitations and negative side effects* of the deterrence strategy. First and foremost, it is questionable whether deterrence has a genuine effect on very motivated terrorists, either at an individual or a group level. It is also difficult to impact actors who cannot be located (e.g. the people behind suicide actions) and who thus avoid punishment. This can easily result in military punitive attacks harming innocent third parties. Several studies have shown that such reprisals do not lead to a reduction in the number of acts of terrorism, rather they result in an escalation in terror activities (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 263–267; Parker, 2007). Revenge and reprisals are one of the key driving forces behind terrorism. They are also one of the driving forces behind states' retaliations for acts of terrorism. Provoking the state into overreacting is one of the classic terrorist strategies.

The alternative way authorities can react is to strictly adhere to the principles human rights and the rule of law, and respond to acts of terrorism as ordinary crimes that must

be dealt with by the police and criminal justice system. The dilemma of course is that some terrorists and the people behind them are beyond the jurisdiction of the attacked states' criminal justice systems and treaties for extraditing and prosecuting terrorists and other criminals.

Not all potential terrorists allow themselves to be deterred from attempting to carry out violent acts. Disruption may then be the next prevention barrier.

Disrupting planned terrorist attacks

During the 10-year period from 2001 until 2010, there were 58 more or less well-documented terrorist plots which Islamist extremists planned to carry out in Europe. Among these, only 3 were carried through successfully, 11 were undetected but failed due to incompetence or other reasons, whereas 44 (76% of the total) were detected and disrupted by the police and/or security services.[2] Several of these disrupted attacks were of a scope that – had they been carried out – probably would have been just as deadly as the train bombings in Madrid in March 2004 (in which 191 died and 1800 were injured) and the suicide actions on the underground and buses in London in July 2005 (56 died and 800 injured). Thus, disruption of planned terrorist attacks saves lives.

The preventive mechanism in disruption is to stop terrorists from carrying out their attacks by discovering and exposing preparations for attack in advance, and through various means prevent the actions from being carrying out. Disruption has two phases: detection of some suspicious activities or preparations for a terrorist plot and intervention to stop these activities.

The principal actors in the disruption strategy are the security and intelligence services and the police, though the general public may also play an important role by providing information about suspicious activities and people. *The target group* for the measures are people actively planning and preparing acts of terrorism.

The measures in a disruption strategy will vary from phase to phase. In the detection phase, information is received that provides a basis for carrying out further checks on whether there are grounds for suspicion. If confirmed, this may lead to and further investigation and surveillance. If this provides grounds for believing that preparations are being made to carry out a serious act of terrorism, intervening by making arrests in order to disrupt it will be the next step. Incapacitation may be seen as the second stage of a disruption process. A recurrent dilemma is whether there is sufficient evidence to convict the people concerned or whether the risk of serious consequences is too great. The police or security service might lose control if they choose to await developments with the expectation of gaining conclusive evidence.

Disruption of terrorist activities or attacks can take place at earlier or later stages. Early disruption is when the intervention happens before any criminal acts have been committed. The police or security service may for example discover that a group young people are in a radicalisation process towards militancy, that they engage with extremist milieus and are discussing violent actions. Instead of waiting until they have committed something really criminal, the police or security service may approach the young people and warn them about the severe consequences of what they are contemplating, and informing them that they will be monitored closely. This may or may not be sufficient to make them abort their militant plans. If they stop, this is the best outcome, with least costs for the youths as well as for society. If they continue despite warnings, intervention may take place when they have crossed the border of

crime and they can be convicted for preparing or attempting acts of terrorism. Late disruption may happen when they have started the actual terrorist operation (e.g. on their way to the target with weapons) but not yet committed any harm. If the plot has not been detected in advance, the attack may still be disrupted in the execution phase by the intervention of armed police or body guards. The later in the process disruptions takes place, the higher is the risk of serious harm. Earlier disruption gives more control of the situation and carries less risk of harm. On the other hand, there is a risk that this may involve police intervention against young people who are merely playing with the idea of violence rather than having any serious plans for preparing terrorist attacks.

The advantage of the disruption strategy is that it is targeted and specific once a terrorist threat has been identified. When it can be established that a prepared act of terrorism has actually been disrupted, it becomes very clear that lives have been saved and suffering avoided. There have been several successful cases where the police, security services or others in a position of influence have been able to persuade people at the airport on their way to Syria that it was a bad idea to become a foreign fighter. This "soft" disruption approach allows them to avoid both criminal prosecution, exposure in the news media, and the dangers of involvement in violent extremism.

The limitations and side effects of the disruption strategy are however substantial. Some planned actions will not be discovered. As mentioned above, only about three quarters of terrorist plots by Jihadi groups ($N = 57$) were detected and disrupted by police and security services in Europe during the period 2001–2010. That also means that every fourth terrorist plot went undetected. Fortunately, most of these attempts failed. Still, the high number of failed attacks is in itself very unsettling, because they passed undiscovered "below the radar" and failed mainly because of the terrorists' bad luck or incompetence. If the number of terror plots is significant, some are bound to slip through and if they succeed they can cause great harm. Terrorists may learn from their own mistakes or from the mistakes committed by others and improve their success rate.

Solo terrorists are particularly challenging to detect and disrupt. Such lone actors are preparing their attacks in isolation; communication with others is reduced to a minimum, thereby limiting opportunities for security services to detect and monitor suspicious behaviour. Another development which makes it more difficult to detect terrorists in advance is the increasing use of very simple weapons, such as knives or cars. This reduces the need for complicated preparations such as acquiring guns and bomb materials, which may expose terrorists to detection. This strategy increases the terrorists' success rate but decreases their kill rate.

A serious side effect of the disruption strategy is that in order to catch the genuine threats, a large number of people will be subjected to various forms of checks, monitoring and interventions, and in some cases their personal integrity will be significantly violated. In a number of cases, people have been wrongly monitored and arrested with significant negative consequences for them, both in the short term and in the long term.

Incapacitation – eliminating the capacity of (potential) terrorists to cause harm

Disruption will often be accompanied by or followed by incapacitation. The *mechanism* of incapacitation is to reduce or eliminate the ability of malicious actors to commit criminal acts through measures such as confinement or physical "neutralisation", or by reducing their access to tools or targets. This tangible prevention strategy has also

been extensively used to put terrorists out of action – and in some contexts undeniably with some success. This strategy has been especially effective against hierarchical organisations in which the group has been paralysed when the leadership has been arrested or killed, or where one has succeeded in putting key nodes in a network out of action.

Possible *measures* in an incapacitation strategy may range from arresting and incarcerating (potential) violent perpetrators, to take away their access to weapons or funding, to the more radical measures of killing those considered a threat. Stopping an on-going terrorist massacre by shooting or arresting the perpetrator(s) is an obvious example of crime prevention by incapacitation. One recurring counter-terrorism strategy is that of "decapitation" – cutting of the head of a terrorist organisation by arresting or killing the top leader. Prime examples of this strategy is the killing of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 and USA's and Israel's "targeted killings" by using drones and missiles against Taliban, al Qaida, Hamas and IS leaders and fighters. However, depriving terrorists of their capacity to carry out acts of terrorism, for example, their access to explosives, weapons and training, is also a form of incapacitation in the wider sense.

The most important *actors* in this strategy are the military, the police and the prison authorities. However, other authorities and control bodies can also play important roles in reducing the capacity of terrorists by regulating access to the means required for carrying out terrorist attacks, such as guns, explosives or financial resources. The *target group* for the measures is primarily those who are directly involved in carrying out terrorism. However, in some countries, "administrative detention" (i.e. incarceration without trial) of potential terrorists is used extensively against people who are suspected that they might do something terrorist-related.

The advantage of the incapacitation strategy is that it is an effective and tangible way of putting key activists and groups out of action. This particularly applies to groups with limited numbers of members in which new recruitment is limited or in which a lot of the activities depend on a few key leaders, as in some hierarchical organisations. There is little doubt that American efforts to "take out" the leadership of Al-Qaida have had a devastating effect on the organisation's ability to prepare and coordinate major terrorist attacks. Israel's "Targeted Killing' Campaign" has also reduced fatalities due to Palestinian suicide bombings. This reduction is partly explained by an incapacitation of bomb-makers and leaders but possibly also by deterring the new leaders who replaced those killed and who probably did not want to suffer the same fate (Falk, 2015, p. 21). In his study of terrorist networks, Sageman (2004, pp. 140–141) argues that incapacitation should be used selectively against hubs in terrorist networks.

However, there are *significant costs, limitations and disadvantages* from using incapacitation as a primary strategy. One of the main problems is the great uncertainty associated with predicting people's future criminal or terroristic behaviour. Imprisoning (or killing) someone to prevent them from committing an act of terrorism that they perhaps would never actually commit is problematic. It is also highly doubtful that incarcerating or killing individual activists has a particularly limiting effect on groups that have a high level of recruitment and a broad social base. Innocent people will also often be impacted by such measures, either in the form of mass arrests or the use of military force. The USA's and Israel's targeting killings of Taliban and Hamas activists frequently harm children and other innocent people. The increased use of drones to kill suspected terrorists has been described by the UN and legal

experts as extra-judicial killings and a breach of international law because these attacks take place outside armed conflict zones regulated by the laws of war.

Heavy-handed repression may reinforce recruitment and the motivation to use extreme violence, and strengthen the movement's social and political base. The violent repression that some governments have employed to crush such movements also had as a consequence that the state itself make use of terrorist methods. The state would thus undermine its own moral and political legitimacy in relation to both its own population and the international community, which is often one of the terrorists' primary objectives. Moreover, too heavy use of force can undermine more long-term prevention strategies. Incapacitation should therefore be considered a sub-strategy that must be applied selectively in combination with other, more long-term strategies to achieve a lasting reduction in terrorism.

Protecting vulnerable targets

Some potential terrorist targets are especially attractive to terrorists because of what they represent (e.g. embassies, government buildings, symbols of "the system") or because of the major adverse effects an attack could cause (e.g. on air traffic or other important infrastructure, or how many people might be hurt). In our context, it will therefore be important to try and identify and eliminate opportunities for specific types of acts of terrorism against such particularly attractive targets and reduce the target's vulnerability. This is what the "situational prevention strategy" seeks to address (Clarke, 1997; Clarke & Newman, 2006). This section combines two central elements of the situational prevention strategy: implementing measures that increase the risk of detection, and making it more difficult and demanding for malicious actors to carry out their actions.

While most prevention measures try to influence terroristic or other criminal actors directly, situational prevention measures try to influence actors indirectly by changing the situations in which terrorist attacks and related activities take place. The means are intended, both separately and together, to change the terrorists' rational calculations of the costs and benefits of carrying out specific actions such that they decide to refrain from their intended actions. The measures work by increasing the demands on capacity such that the relative ability to carry out specific actions is reduced. As a consequence, the motivations for attacking these specific targets can be reduced.

The situational prevention strategy provides room for an enormous spectrum of *possible measures* in relation to terrorism. An important measure to make it more difficult to hijack an aeroplane was the introduction of access controls and the x-raying of hand luggage before boarding an aircraft. This contributed to decreasing the number of aeroplane hijackings during the 1970s and 1980s. Another measure is reducing terrorists' access to the tools of their trade such as weapons, explosives or chemicals for bomb-making. CCTV surveillance is a typical example of measures that increase the risk of detection. Such situational measures can influence the terrorists' calculations of whether or not trying to carry out specific acts of terrorism is worth the effort.

A very large number of different *actors* can contribute to a situational prevention strategy against terrorism and through the multitude of measures they have at their disposal. These could be security companies that enforce access controls, banks that report suspicious financial transactions, public control bodies that regulate access to hazardous substances, imams and committee leaders in Muslim congregations who prevent violence-oriented Islamists recruiting young Muslims for Jihad on their premises, to

mention just a few examples. One main principle of the situational prevention strategy is that all "place owners" bear a primary responsibility for securing their facilities against terrorism or other crime.

The target groups for situational prevention are also complex. Most of the measures aim to modify the behaviour of malicious actors in order to get them to refrain from doing what they want to do.

The advantage of the situational prevention strategy is first and foremost that some measures can have immediate and measurable effects on specific terrorism problems. The aforementioned introduction of stricter access controls and hand luggage checks were clearly one of the main reasons for the heavy reduction in the number of aeroplane hijackings in the 1970s and 1980s (Clarke & Newman, 2006, p. 46).

Situational prevention measures also have some *limitations and side effects*. It is by no means certain that situational prevention measures will reduce the number of terrorist attacks. Some of the (relatively few) measures to prevent terrorism that have been properly evaluated have been shown to have either a positive effect (with some displacement to other targets), no effect, or a negative effect (Lum, Kennedy, & Sherley, 2006). Since situational prevention measures are designed to prevent specific terroristic actions against specific targets, and not affect the terrorists' general motivations, these measures will not necessarily cause them to refrain from other types of acts of terrorism against other targets. This displacement effect is one of the great debates on situational prevention. Critics claims that if "target hardening" makes it more difficult to impact some types of target, the terrorists will instead target their attacks at less protected "soft" targets. If it becomes too difficult to smuggle bombs onto aeroplanes, terrorists will choose to strike at other targets instead, for example, trains, where it is practically impossible to check passengers and luggage in the same way as one can in airports (Cauley & Im, 1988; Enders & Sandler, 1993). Although the introduction of metal detectors in airports more than halved the number of aeroplane hijackings from 1972 to 1973, there was a significant increase in the number of hostage taking actions in the following years, including against embassies. And when the embassies' security was reinforced, the number of assassinations increased (Enders & Sandler, 1993).

One fundamental limitation of the situational prevention strategy is that there is an infinite number of possible terrorist targets and no limits with respect to how many security measures one could envisage introducing or the amount of financial means that could be expended to secure against all possible terrorist attacks. However, despite these limitations, some potential terrorist targets are obviously necessary to protect. People will not travel by plane if they do not have a sense of security against hijackings and bombs on board, or go to work in high-profile public building unless a reasonable level of security in place.

Reducing the harmful consequences of terrorist attacks

If an act of terrorism has not been successfully stopped by some of the preceding strategies, the next step in the prevention chain is to reduce the negative consequences and adverse effects as much as possible. The objectives of this sub-strategy are to save lives, alleviate suffering, reduce fear, restore social functions and infrastructure, and maintain confidence in institutions and authorities. The *preventive mechanism* lies in reducing the harmful effects and consequences of acts of terrorism through preparations made in advance of any incident.

Many *actors* play important roles in the field of what is called crisis management. One of the main challenges after an act of terrorism will be to coordinate the many actors who are going to contribute to the effort to reduce the harmful consequences of the attack. Commission reports after large-scale terrorist attacks show that the same faults appear time and time again: There was inadequate communication and coordination vertically between different levels of organisation as well as horizontally between different agencies. Crisis management systems are overloaded. There was a lack of imagination about the possibility that the impossible could actually happen.

The target groups for this strategy and its means are those who are affected, directly or indirectly, by acts of terrorism. Ultimately, this strategy aims to reduce the harmful effects for society as a whole.

The measures are complex and varied, and exist on different strategic and operative levels. As the essence of terrorism is to deliberately create fear, one of the main keys to counter the impact of terrorism is to manage and reduce fear (Bakker & de Graaf, 2014). Inadequate crisis management and communications could create a secondary crisis which primarily involves a lack of confidence that the authorities are capable of taking care of their citizens. At a physical level, a number of measures might reduce injuries to people or damage to infrastructure in the event of a terrorist attack.

The advantages: Adequate crisis management and harm reduction can help to reduce the suffering of the victims and restore a degree of confidence and trust even if all other prevention barriers fail. Many of the measures, resources and skills deployed to manage terrorist incidents can also be used to manage other types of crises and disasters.

The disadvantages: Preparing for the worst is very costly in terms of both personnel and other resources. If no terrorist attack ever happens, this may be considered a waste of resources. However, if a disaster does happen, the political, social and human costs of poor crisis management will be severe.

Reducing the rewards from acts of terrorism

Terrorists are unable to achieve their aims through violence alone, depending on others reacting to the terrorist violence in a manner that reinforces the impact of the violent acts. Thus, we have to ask both what the terrorists want to get their enemy (authorities and others) to do and what makes these target groups respond in a manner that makes the terrorist violence effective in the eyes of the perpetrators.

Most terrorist groups make use of some common, basic terroristic strategies, which they combine in different ways.

- Communication – gaining attention and communicating a message
- Creating a climate of fear, overreactions or paralysis
- Extortion/coercion – getting the authorities or others to give in to specific demands

Through these strategies, terrorists are trying to achieve specific responses from a variety of target groups. The counter strategy is to avoid responding as the terrorists want them to, or minimising these responses if it is impossible to avoid them completely. *The preventive mechanism* consists of making it less attractive for (other potential) terrorists to repeat a form of action that has not provided the desired return. The *actors* in this counter strategy will vary depending on what the terrorists are trying to achieve

and from whom. Political authorities, news media and hostage negotiators may play central roles. *The target groups* are both those who have already adopted terroristic means and those considering doing so.

Most terrorists are trying to gain attention and media coverage through the use of spectacular violence. They are seeking to communicate political messages to different target groups: enemies, (potential) supporters and the general public. They also want to multiply the fear-producing terror effect of the violence through extensive media coverage, tailoring incidents to ensure they fit the journalists' news criteria. Journalists and news editors need to resist being manipulated by the terrorists' media strategy. Obviously, the news media cannot abstain from covering major incidents extensively. However, some perspectives are more likely to provide the terrorists with the sort of coverage they desire, while other angles will not.

Another terrorist strategy is to create a climate of fear and provoke overreactions by the authorities in the form of excessive repression or the use of military force against civilians, or alternatively, become paralysed. Far left terrorists had a theory that the state would, by overreacting, show its true, repressive face, which in turn would cause the people to rise up against it and carry out the revolution. This has never happened. However, there are plenty examples of acts of terrorism provoking the authorities into overreacting so brutally they reduce their own legitimacy. The counter move by the authorities is to strictly adhere to the rule of law in dealing with criminal acts of terrorism and not allowing themselves to be tempted into excessive use of force, surveillance or witch hunts against minorities and oppositions. The reaction of the authorities to a terrorist threat must be proportional to the threat and rooted in the criminal justice system.

Extortion or coercion is also a classic terrorist strategy. Terrorists try to force authorities or others to give in to demands by threatening to injure some primary victims, for example, kidnapped hostages. By giving in, fundamental societal values may be compromised, and blackmail is shown to be effective. By not complying with the demands, hostages might be killed and the authorities will be blamed for not saving them. Practice and research relating to hostage situations and negotiations show that it usually *is* possible to save lives and reduce harm by negotiating with hostage takers – without necessarily being at the expense of fundamental social values, or at least at an acceptable cost (Faure & Zartman, 2010). However, some terrorists primarily take hostages to humiliate the authorities, not to have some demands met. Striking a balance between the costs and benefits of different responses may require difficult decisions, with both human and political dilemmas.

Disengagement from terrorism

The final prevention strategy involves getting individuals and groups involved in terrorism to give up their participation in such activities – often referred to as disengagement, desistance or exit processes. *The preventive mechanism* is to bring individual terrorist careers and collective terror campaigns to an end, with no more involvement in terroristic activities. The desired outcome of such a process is that terroristic violence ceases or is reduced. Knowledge of how these processes occur is necessary in order to be able to develop result-oriented prevention measures based on this mechanism.

The prevailing belief has been that "once a terrorist, always a terrorist", and that the only way to get them to cease their terror activities is through physical incapacitation: imprisonment or death. Recent research shows that terrorist careers and campaigns can

be ended in a number of ways and for different reasons (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Cronin, 2008; Jones & Libicki, 2008). Some come to end because the terrorists are killed or imprisoned for a long time, but many give up terrorism because they choose to do so – more or less voluntarily. The goal must be to get more to quit *earlier* rather than later, before they have time to inflict suffering on others and before they themselves have blood on their hands. Interrupting a radicalisation process early on in a terrorist career is better than waiting until the person or group concerned has managed to do a great deal of harm. It is useful to differentiate between an individual end to a terrorist career and a collective end to a terror campaign or group, as the measures that can be employed to achieve this are quite different. Again, the notion of macro, meso and micro level factors and processes may guide our understanding of how and why terrorists disengage, collectively or individually.

The most effective way of preventing terroristic violence in the long term is to get entire terrorist groups to lay down their arms. Macro level developments such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ideological bankruptcy of the communist model and the collapse of the DDR precipitated the demise the left-wing "Red Army Faction" in Germany.

Factors at national as well as group levels led to "The Good Friday Agreement" in Northern Ireland in which the IRA and the Protestant paramilitary groups laid down their arms and eventually decommissioned them in a verifiable fashion. In Egypt, the two largest Islamist terror organisations, "The Islamic Group" and "Jihad", ended their terror campaigns after the leaders of the two organisations realised their violent struggle was the wrong path. These leaders have provided comprehensive theological justifications for this to persuade their followers.

Some groups give up terrorism by admitting defeat (e.g. the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Islamic Group in Egypt), because their leaders are arrested (Aum Shinrikyo in Japan and Shining Path in Peru) or because they lose popular support (Red Brigades in Italy during the years after the killing of Prime Minister Aldo Moro). Others end their armed struggle through negotiations and peace agreements (IRA, Fatah/PLO). In some cases, groups that have previously used terroristic methods come to power (FLN in Algeria, Fatah, ANC in South Africa) (cf. Crenshaw, 1991; Cronin, 2008; Hoffman, 2006). A study of how long terror groups remain active (LaFree, 2011) shows that almost 75% are no longer active one year after their first attack, while only 6% of groups are active for more than 10 years. Another study that looked at *how* terror groups give up terrorism (Jones & Libicki, 2008) showed that 47% of the terror groups in the study gave up using terroristic means because they were defeated by police, intelligence or military forces. More surprisingly, no less than 43% gave up terrorism because they became participants in a political process. Typically, giving up terrorist methods involves a gradual process rather than a sudden halt. 10% of the groups gave up terrorism because their campaign ended in a form of victory (mainly anti-colonialist movements). Meanwhile, other studies (including Cronin, 2008) show that many groups also disintegrate through internal splits or disappear due to a lack of popular support, disillusionment among their members, or weak leadership.

Individual members of terror groups may also disengage. Different types of activists tend to become disillusioned for different reasons. Those who initially were motivated by political idealism and altruism are more disposed to losing their illusions because they realise there is a contradiction between the means and the ends, or that the violent actions go too far and harm innocent people, or those they are fighting on

behalf of. Those who primarily joined the militant group out of loyalty to friends or a desire to belong to a group, will often become disillusioned because the comrades, group and leaders do not live up to their high expectations. They might be attracted towards alternative social bonds or finding a spouse outside the group (Bjørgo, 2009, 2011).

The *mechanism* involved both when groups and individuals disengage from terrorism can be understood as being the result of a combination of push and pull forces. "Push" forces are the negative social incidents and circumstances that make it uncomfortable and unappealing to remain in a specific social setting. "Pull" refers to positive factors attracting the person to a more rewarding alternative (see Bjørgo, 2009, pp. 36–49). A policy aimed at encouraging groups and individuals to quit terrorism and political violence has the best chance of succeeding if one can reinforce both the pull and the push forces such that they interact and work in the same direction – the well-known carrot and stick method.

The target group for the exit strategy of getting individual and groups to give up terrorism and violent extremism is of course those who are involved in this type of activism. The aim is to avoid a continuation or repeat of such violent activities.

The actors are the criminal justice system (police, prosecutors, courts and prison authorities), the social authorities, religious leaders, voluntary organisations and families can help guide former extremists back into society. Political authorities must make the difficult evaluations and decisions on whether it is desirable to start negotiations or allow ex-terrorists to make such a return to society and what measures are needed to make this possible, for example, by establishing rehabilitation or amnesty programmes.

The measures vary based on whether we are talking about a collective or individual process of disengagement, and whether they are aimed at people who are in prison or not. Some measures depend to a great degree on a voluntary choice to break with violent extremism, while other measures involve a large degree of coercion, and very often there is a combination or something in-between.

In some countries in which hundreds of participants in terrorist movements are imprisoned, the authorities offer full or partial amnesties, sometimes providing resocialisation or deradicalisation programmes to ensure that they are no longer a danger to society.

Another type of programme targets defectors from militant extremist groups – primarily people who are not in prison and who wish to break with a group. The purpose is to offer a way out for individuals who otherwise would be trapped in a violent group, and thus prevent them from continuing their destructive activities there. Examples of the latter include the Exit programmes for participants in neo-Nazi and racist groups, which started in Norway in 1997 and later spread to Sweden, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands (Bjørgo, Donselaar, & Grunenberg, 2009). Other examples are the rehabilitation programme for defectors from the FARC guerrillas in Colombia (Ribetti, 2009) and recent efforts to rehabilitate returning foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq. Such defectors will often have reason to fear reprisals, both from former comrades and from former enemies, or possibly prosecution by the authorities if they have committed criminal acts. The measures partly involve practical help with dealing with the circumstances surrounding the break with the group and possibly security and legal problems. It also involves finding a new footing in life, (re-)establishing social networks and contact with public agencies, and building up an understanding of reality that more closely resembles that of "normal" society.

The advantage of trying to get terrorist entire groups to give up terrorism collectively is that this can help to bring terrorist campaigns to an end. When individuals disengage it can help to reduce the size and capacity of terrorist groups, especially if many people quit without the ranks being replenished with new recruits. Some of these former participants can help reduce recruitment by telling the stark truth about these movements and breaking down the romanticised image that makes these movements attractive to some young people.

A strategy of facilitating collective or individual disengagement from terrorism has many *limitations*. One of the problems has been that some of the amnesty programmes have been misused to get out of prison quickly and then return to terroristic activities or other criminality. Another problem is that terrorists with "blood on their hands" walking around free may be difficult to accept for the terrorists' victims.

Concluding remarks

A major challenge in preventing terrorism is to find an appropriate balance between short-term and long-term prevention strategies, and between the repressive and the constructive measures. Developing a broad, comprehensive strategy that employs multiple preventive mechanisms and their pertinent measures instead of focusing on a narrower range of mechanisms and measures may become possible to reduce the pressure from each individual measure. If the focus is narrowly on deterrence, disruption, incapacitation and protecting vulnerable targets (as in the Bush administration's first 5 years after 9−11), the measures have to be heavy and repressive in order to achieve sufficient effect. However, this heavy-handed approach will also produce many negative side effects. On the other hand, if one relies on a broader strategy that employs multiple preventive mechanisms, this will construct more barriers that can catch potential terrorists and acts. This means that every measure alone does not need to be as heavy for the total effect to produce adequate protection. This broad and holistic approach may serve to lighten the pressure from the more repressive prevention measures and reduce the negative side effects.

Notes

1. This article is a shortened and revised version of my book *Strategies for Preventing Terrorism* (Bjørgo, 2013) and chapter 6 in my book *Preventing Crime: A Holistic Approach* (Bjørgo, 2015).
2. Figures are based on data from Nesser's (2008, 2010) *Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994−2007: Planned, prepared and executed terrorist attacks* and his update *Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 2008−2010*. Coding of the events and descriptive statistics was done by this author. See Bjørgo (2013, p. 61) for details about these statistics.

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