

Report on the Wilton Park conference 841

Dr Doron Zimmermann, BA, PhD

Political Violence Movements Project, Center for Security Studies ETH

Countering terrorism in Europe and North America: How can a community-based approach be developed?

Monday 26–Wednesday 28 February 2007

Key queries: What is the potential for using community-based, “bottom-up” approaches in countering terrorism in the EU and north America? To what extent are terrorists integrated into their local community? What can be done within communities to counter radicalization and prevent individuals turning towards terrorism? How can policies be operationalized at national and local levels? What are the implications for authorities’ relations with local communities? What are the challenges for policing in countering terrorism?

Disclaimer: In order to remain compliant with the so-called Chatham House Rule, the names of the speakers at this conference will not be divulged throughout this report.

MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY

Speaker #1

- 20 per cent of the UK’s Muslims feel sympathetic towards the 7/7 bombers; 51 per cent feel that 9/11 was a conspiracy perpetrated by the US & Israel; 79 per cent feel that since these events there is more hostility towards the Muslim communities in the UK.

- UK security services maintain that the time needed for terrorist recruitment is getting shorter.
- Key strategies: Promotion of common values and interfaith dialogue (which requires structuring!); challenge terrorists' message that seeks to undermine common values; encourage traditional, moderate focus in local communities; develop targeted intervention to protect those most vulnerable to extremism and also in order to disrupt extremists.

Speaker #2

- The transatlantic blame game is singularly unhelpful in the resolution of fighting Jihadism, for fact is that young Europeans are fighting Americans in the "Jihad lands," i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq.
- The US, meanwhile, is pursuing a security policy that is premised on the idea of "zero risk" and barricading itself (cf. extensive measures by the Dept of Homeland Security since its inception), which is why Europe, as one of the US' closest allies, is targeted by default as the softer target (within which we, in Switzerland, represent an even softer target, as our value as terrorist back office is slowly but surely called into question by increasingly effective security measures).
- The extremism of the Jihadist kind is fostered by correlating or creating reciprocal resonances/linkages between active Jihadists in a war against the West and immigrant communities in Europe.
- The target audience for this linkage is the Muslim diasporic youth of Europe, who feel discrimination more keenly than their parents.
- The UK, France and Spain have the oldest Muslim diasporas, as opposed to e.g. Italy, where no 2nd generation has yet emerged.
- Recommendations: The potential internal Jihadist threat to/in Europe cannot only be managed in terms of security, but must be increasingly

addressed in political terms!! Equally, integration and counter-radicalization measures ought to be in the vanguard of this effort.

Speaker #3

- Where are we now? We are caught in the headlights and everything looks like an oncoming juggernaut. As a result of this perspective, we have over reacted to the problem posed by radicalization. Usama bin Laden and his cohorts would be truly pleased with our (over) reaction.
- Communities can provide more than intelligence and act as informants for law enforcement: through consent communities become robust bulwarks against extremism. Community cohesion creates resilience. Equally, a culture of debate and dissent is valuable in this context.
- Measures to be taken include: socio economic enhancement and grass roots projects, e.g. infrastructure investment, political and community leadership training, foreign policy debating fora, security and counter terrorism discussion in the community.
- Is there, really, a dichotomy between good community cohesion and good counter terrorism?
- One of the key problems is the absence of positive politics in counter terrorism.
- Resilient communities are strong, not meek.

Speaker #4

- The orchestration of a community as a process is a key factor to countering radicalism: cultural competence needs to be actively supported. Too many diasporic communities in the UK are caught in a post-colonially imprinted “us” versus “them” frame of mind.

- Though nomenclature critical of Muslims has in turn been criticized by Muslims, only few terminological alternatives have been brought forward.
- We are struggling with an insufficient deconstruction of the Jihadist narrative, e.g. the meaning of the Ummah (community of believers), which does not originally or necessarily mean only the Salafi or Wahabi version of Ummah. Terrorists have become adept at and are clearly using Muslim mainstream ignorance of Islam to their own ends.
- Violent Muslims groups and minorities, as well as sects, have historically been challenged and confronted by the mainstream of Islam: This needs to happen now.
- In terms of fostering enduring partnerships with Muslim communities: blacklisting is counterproductive, e.g. Tariq Ramadan etc. (though I personally disagree with this assessment, as Mr Ramadan has repeatedly demonstrated his equivocalcy, not least regarding his so-called moratorium on the literalist implementation of the Sharia in the West; and with his evasive manner, recently displayed in the context of an aborted interview with the Swiss weekly "Weltwoche.")

Speaker #5

- Jihadist terrorism does not and ought not to be qualified as "New Terrorism," for there are many common patterns with ethno-nationalist terrorism.
- Role of the community in containing radicalization has become a minority phenomenon; it must be brought back to the majority.
- Church and other religious leader must speak out in order to delegitimize Jihadists.

- Unfortunately, radicalized individuals are frequently insulated by so called “greedy” terrorist groups, which claim all of their recruits’ time and attention.
- Nomenclature is not as important, as the influence of the ideology behind it, for at the end of the day “you must follow the bad guy.”
- **Non co-operation with exponents of Islamism (Salafis & Wahabis et al.) is actually necessary in order not to encourage radicalization,** as our democracies leave open more than one path to express dissent, while we should also not forget that terrorism tends to be motivated by utilitarian considerations, i.e. “violence works.”

TUESDAY 27 FEBRUARY

Speaker #1

- Canadian integration and counter terrorism efforts are rooted in community approaches. No preconditions are asked of participants for discussions with Muslim communities, e.g. the role of the equality of women. No differentiation is made between communities; no contradiction is seen between Canadian citizenship and Muslim identity.
- The overriding objective is to create security and safety for all.
- One of the initiatives is a multiethnic and multicultural roundtable on security. The idea is to address all cross-sections of the community, up to and including the radicals themselves. This method deprives the extremists of an otherwise powerful argument, that of exclusion.
- In Canada, the roundtable approach has resulted in calls for more inclusive fora—also by extremists.

Speaker #2

- Community policing tends to work better when officers wear uniforms.
- The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) rarely ever uses—against public assumption—counter terrorism legislation: it was used for the second time only in the intervention against the so called “Toronto eighteen” case (i.e. the case of late last year involving eighteen Muslim youth in Toronto, who conspired to blow up landmark sites in the city using fertilizer bombs in lorries).
- Multiple RCMP initiatives are currently underway, including the cross-cultural roundtable on security. The Canadian Security and Intelligence Service is a part of this initiative, too. Another program is the “citizens’ academy,” in the context of which security and law enforcement services try to dispel the mystique surrounding their work. During eighteen hours over several weeks of instruction, citizens can participate in this program.

Speaker #3

- The majority of the Muslim community in Canada does find that their co-religionists do not support terrorism, although many Muslims do sympathize with Jihadists.
- In Canada, the prevailing policy is one of accommodation versus forced assimilation: Canadian Muslims feel very strongly attached to Canada.
- There is a distinct lack of Muslim leadership: this circumstance, in turn, creates a vacuum that is frequently filled by radicals, who reject Canada’s policy of accommodation.
- It is very difficult to participate in community outreach, whilst being misrepresented (as a threat) by the media.
- Recommendations: Teach Muslim communities that the safety and security of their country is a matter of collective interest and welfare!

Speaker #4

- The Netherlands had very little experience with terrorism.
- More recently, the Netherlands government had to contend with two political assassinations, the intent of which was terrorist: that of Pim Fortuyn and that of Theo van Gogh. The Dutch reaction to the second murder was for the most part arson attacks on places of Islamic worship or teaching.
- In prison, convicted terrorists are strictly segregated in order to minimize the possibility of radicalization among inmates.
- Many radicals in the Netherlands were “primed” in Dutch mosques.
- The national coordinator for counter terrorism in the Netherlands initiated a “multi disciplinary” approach, talking to boards of mosques.
- The rise of Salafist preachers came about with the advent of itinerant proselytizing by radical preachers.
- The challenge: In most cases radicalization processes occur within the pale of the law; they may well represent more of a sociological than a legal issue.

Speaker #5

- The Netherlands police has invested much in identifying and using pre-incident and pre-radicalization indicators.
- One, albeit key, aspect of community policing in the Netherlands is that you must know where to look for radicalization in order to spot it; and, in order to be able to identify radicalization, you must be sensitive to change in process.
- One other manner of halting radicalization, though falling short of direct intervention, is visible surveillance, i.e. obviously shadowing suspects and thereby inhibiting their potential extremism action.

- The 'community father project' involves fathers of the Moroccan immigrant community in the Netherlands and empowers them to directly intervene in ongoing radicalization processes, whilst constantly exchanging and co-ordinating with law enforcement.

Speaker #6

- The principal problem in Amsterdam is on the one hand a sense of indifference across the communities and on the other the pervasiveness of political correctness.
- The Amsterdam mayor and aldermen have marshaled academic research concerning the dynamics of tensions between communities for their cause. This research has inter alia helped identify the processes of group tensions.
- The conclusion of the research undertaken in the Amsterdam context is that there is a perceived sense of injustice; of unequal treatment before the law; widespread mutual recrimination for one's own inequities across all sections of the community; and the almost complete absence of individual encounters, which leads to a dynamic of collective dehumanization, largely due to an overemphasized group identity.
- Anti-dotes: Inter-community events have been organized with an eye to build social capital toward community cohesion.

Speaker #7

- A frequent problem in the UK is the almost complete lack of certification of Imams and teachers in the instruction of Islam. A perennial lack of funds is only one of the difficulties. More significantly, there appears to be a sense of complacency about the professionalization of teaching in the UK Muslim community.

- Regarding the building of new mosques, there is frequently no transparency regarding the funding sources. This is not entirely surprising, as many of the new mosques are funded with petrodollars from oil rich states, whose involvement with extremist Islamist doctrine is evident (this being an obvious reference to Wahabism, which is the preponderant sect in Saudi Arabia).

Speaker #8

- Many youths do not attend mosques; they attend alternative, radical for a. The best way to counter this radicalization is to create experiences with extremism and to critically review them, e.g. watching and then discussing extremist propaganda.
- The principal difficulty is that converts to Islam, of which there are currently more than at any time in recent memory, introduce their own 'previous' culture into their practice of Islam, i.e. gun- or violent youth sub culture.

Speaker #9

- Radical groups are setting up alternative schooling; they seek to dominate communities by creating and upholding schisms.
- It is key to take ownership of scriptural interpretations in order to counter literalist (ultra orthodox and/or newer radical) interpretations of the Qur'an, Hadith and Sunnah.

Speakers #10 & 11

- A disproportional amount of the Muslims in the UK are in prison: while only 3 per cent of the total population are Muslim, 9 per cent are in prison, that is, three times more than the overall percentage of Muslims in the UK.
- Although 74 per cent of the UK Muslims are South Asians, only 42 per cent of the male inmates stem from that group; 34 per cent are African or Caribbean black Muslims.
- Only 3 per cent of the overall UK Muslim community are considered extremist. This is not an official figure and only collated on the basis of the UK prison population.

Speaker #12

- 'Radicalization' does not capture the meaning of what happens to young Muslims eventually succumbing to extremism.
- Why has the media representation of Islam in the UK and elsewhere been generally understood to portray the mainstream, when it clearly is not?
- Latent support in the Muslim communities for terrorism derives from the foreign and security policy of the UK, media hype and social islamophobia.
- Serious trust issues between Muslims employed by local or national government and their constituents are hampering counter-radicalization efforts.

Speakers #13 & 14

- 3 million Muslims live in Germany, of which 2 million are of Turkish origin. The government estimates that 32,000 German Muslims must be considered radicals.

- How to define a radical, though? Those suffering from discrimination; those advocating the application of Sharia in the West, those on the threshold to advocating violence.
- Government rhetoric hostile to Muslims renders the task for Imams difficult to rein in the great frustration of German Muslim youth.
- Many Muslims feel under represented in the current Muslim leadership (e.g. age groups).
- Radicalism is acceptable in the German Muslim community—mostly due to the breakdown in local integration programs.

Speaker #14

- Only 2 per cent of women form mosque community boards in the UK.
- There are presently an estimated 1,500 to 3,000 mosques in the UK: 40 per cent admit women and this, according to participants at the conference, constitutes a major improvement over the past decade!
- Women use civil rights tactics (petitions, lobbying etc) to gain access to mosques.
- Liberal education also is empowering women to discover Islam on their own terms.
- Women have, moreover, come to employ in their cause the discourse of counter terrorism to criticize the restriction of access to mosques, labeling the restricters “foreign agents,” a “mafia” and “terrorists.” Yet these female activists are themselves very conservative and frequently devout practitioners.

Speaker #15

- ‘Community’ in the main is a buzz word in government discourse.
- Communities are seen as both the problem and the solution to radicals.

- Radicalization is understood as an exclusive problem, not part of the solution.
- The issue of countering radicalization is heavily politicized, especially in communities, e.g. editorial boards of academic journals have connections with government agencies.

WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY

Speaker #1

- Radicalization is not per se a crime and is thus difficult to prevent for law enforcement.
- Should law enforcement pursue hard or soft policing? The scope of the international terrorist threat as it may manifest locally compels police to intervene at an earlier stage than previously thought and practiced.
- Short term objectives of public safety may impact—negatively—on long term objectives, i.e. social and community cohesion.
- Local/national versus international considerations: local realities may be overshadowed and overtaken by international events.
- Experts versus generalists: there is a need to integrate both perspectives.
- Who should law enforcement partner with in the community
- Strategic and theoretical vantage versus the practical, i.e. the applicability of national strategy to idiosyncratic local settings poses a challenge to law enforcement.
- How do you measure trust in the community? Trust cannot be quantified.
- Systemic impact is an unwelcome side-effect of community policing due to changes in policy priorities, as opposed to local requirements, e.g. international influences with local manifestations: the UK police cannot be expected to affect the UK's foreign policy, however controversial that policy may be to the Muslim minority in the UK.

Speaker #2

- The Pakistani community in the north of England feels very much under scrutiny by law enforcement.
- The police force in northern England is not proportionally representative of demographic reality.
- Proximity to the community is key in order to gather meaningful intelligence.
- Major problems arise in having to ask communities to support counter terrorism measures without explaining the threat to them due to the classified nature of the operational intelligence.
- Further, problems arise when intervention occurs more regularly before prosecution and charges come to play a role in a line of investigation.
- In order to build community trust, the discussion about radicalization must include daily crimes, especially hate-crimes, against the Pakistani and other South Asian communities to which they are vulnerable.

Speaker #3

- In France, 140 people were arrested in recent years, albeit only one third of the arrestees were charged with membership in Islamist groups.
- Yet even more Basques were incarcerated in the same period (163) in terrorist related criminal activity.
- Ordinary criminal processes must be used against terrorism with the aim of dissociating the terrorist perpetrator and the terrorist ideology (de-politicization of counter terrorism legal measures has in the past resulted in serious deficiencies—lack of robust instruments—for mandating both law enforcement and security organizations, e.g. Munich 1972 caught the Bavarian police completely unawares, the South Moluccan political

violence in the Netherlands required the constitutionally questionable intervention of the armed forces).

- According to the French vantage on terrorism related issues, the community does not constitute the origin of terrorist activity, which is why France and its security agencies have chosen not to engage with communities.
- Collaboration with communities occurs in the context of integration policy.
- Currently, 49 mosques in France are under the control of Islamists. Counter terrorism activity thus centers on surveilling places of Muslim worship and community activity.

BTW: I had to leave the conference early due to my travel itinerary and hence could not attend the wrap up session of the conference. If you have any further queries, please contact me at your leisure.

DZ