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Guns and glory: Criminality, imprisonment and jihadist extremism in Europe

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PREFACE

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Interest in the nexus between crime and terror has increased in recent years. This is due in part to terror attacks in Europe carried out by individuals with a criminal history and in part to the large number of European foreign terrorist fighters with criminal backgrounds.

This publication presents new research intended to help solve a deep-rooted and ever-evolving problem. It is the result of vigorous and fruitful cooperation between experts at the Counter Extremism Project and the European Policy Centre. We are grateful for the additional support from EPC in the production and design of this important report.

The urgent need for the European Union to counter radicalisation in all its forms is clear, but the solutions are complex. We hope that readers will find the following chapters illuminating, and that decision makers use them to inform their policies. This report is a starting point for further deliberation on how to tackle the growing problem of the nexus between crime and terror in the European Union and its neighbourhood.

David Ibsen
Executive Director,
Counter Extremism Project (CEP)

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The **European Policy Centre (EPC)** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate.

The Europe in the World Programme scrutinises the impacts of a changing international system on Europe, and probes how the EU and its member states can leverage their untapped potential to advance their interests and values on a regional and global level. It thus examines the evolution of EU relations with major powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, and how Europe can contribute to a rules-based global order.

Second, the Programme focuses on the role of the EU in fostering reforms, resilience and stability in neighbouring regions. It looks closely at the developments in Turkey and Ukraine.

Third, the Programme examines how the EU can strengthen its security in the face of terrorism, jihadist radicalisation or hybrid and cyber threats. It also seeks to advance the debate on Europe's defence policy.

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The **Counter Extremism Project (CEP)** is a not-for-profit, non-partisan, international policy organisation formed to combat the growing threat from extremist ideologies. Led by a renowned group of former world leaders and diplomats, it combats extremism by pressuring financial and material support networks; countering the narrative of extremists and their online recruitment; and advocating for smart laws, policies, and regulations.

Extremists are spreading their ideology and recruiting support across the globe, posing a complex and urgent challenge that cannot be addressed by government alone. There is a responsibility for private groups and individuals to organize in opposition to extremists. To this end, CEP is:

- assembling an extensive research and analysis database on extremist groups and their networks of support, providing an indispensable resource to governments, the media, NGOs and civil society organizations, and the general public;

- exposing channels of financial and material support to extremist groups;

- using the latest communications, social media, and technological tools to identify and reveal the extremist threat and directly counter extremist ideology and recruitment online; and

- assisting policymakers around the world to devise legislation and regulations that effectively combat extremism.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

From October 2018 until the summer of 2019, the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) partnered in a research project looking at the link between criminality – including organised crime groups, local petty crime gangs or individuals – and jihadist terrorism, which culminated in this book.

These days, terrorist groups, in particular the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), are increasingly recruiting individuals with backgrounds in crime and using their skills, connections in the criminal world, and experience with law enforcement bodies to finance, plan, prepare and execute their attacks. This recruitment takes place both outside and inside prisons.

In this context, EPC and CEP experts have carried out an independent assessment of these urgent challenges as they occur in ten European countries (Albania, Belgium, France, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). Drawing on this, they have proposed a number of bold recommendations to European governments and EU institutions to counter the ongoing threat when criminality intersects with jihadist terrorism.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ian Acheson is an international expert on violent extremism in prisons and prison reform. Much of his experience is operational, having been gained from 25 years of experience in the UK criminal justice system, from the frontline to command and policymaking. In 2016, he led the ground-breaking independent review of the threat posed by Islamist extremism in the British prison and probation system on behalf of the UK government. He writes and speaks widely in the media on prison regimes for ideological offenders and the reintegration of terrorist offenders after custody. In 2018, Acheson joined the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) as a Senior Advisor on this critical challenge.

Amanda Paul is a Senior Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme at the European Policy Centre (EPC), where she focuses on Turkey, conflict resolution in the Black Sea region, EU foreign policy in its Eastern neighbourhood and Russian foreign policy in the former Soviet space and Middle East. Since 2016, she has also led EPC work on preventing and countering violent extremism and the challenge of jihadist radicalisation. Paul is also a Senior Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Policy Studies, a leading Kyiv-based think tank, and Senior Advisor for issues related to the Eurasia region at Stober, Poltavets and Associates Consultants. She has also worked as a columnist in the Turkish media for ten years. Prior to joining the EPC, Paul worked with the Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies, the German multinational Türk Henkel, and for the European Commission. Paul holds an MA in International Relations from the University of Staffordshire.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIVD	Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (*Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst*)
BCRP	French Central office for prison intelligence (*Bureau central du renseignement pénitentiaire*)
BfV	German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*)
BKA	German Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt*)
BMI	German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (*Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat*)
CPS	United Kingdom's Crown Prosecution Service
CTI	Irish Counter-Terrorism International
CVE	counter violent extremism
DDP	United Kingdom's Desistance and Disengagement Programme
DES	Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions
DGSE	French Directorate-General for External Security (*Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure*)
DGSI	French Directorate-General for Internal Security (*Direction générale de la Sécurité intérieure*)
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
GDP	gross domestic product
GTAZ	German Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (*Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum*)
HKE	Hesse Information and Competence Centre against Extremism (*Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus*)
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRC	Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia (*Islamskata Verska Zaednica vo Makedonija*)
IRU	Europol's Internet Referral Unit
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (*Qendra Kosovare për Studime të Sigurisë*)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*)
KMSH	Muslim Community of Albania (*Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqipërisë*)
MAD	German Military Counterintelligence Service (*Militärischer Abschirmdienst*)
MI5	United Kingdom's Security Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	United Kingdom's National Crime Agency
NCTV	Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (*Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid*)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NI	Northern Ireland
OCAD/OCAM	Belgian Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (*Orgaan voor de Coördinatie van de Analyse van de Dreiging/Organe de coordination pour l'analyse de la menace*)
OCG	organised crime gang
ONA	North Macedonian National Liberation Army (*Osloboditelna narodna armija*)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PVE	prevent violent extremism

QER	French radicalisation assessment area (*Quartier d'évaluation de la radicalisation*)
QPR	French radicalisation processing area (*Quartier de prise en charge de la radicalisation*)
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
SÄPO	Swedish Security Service (*Säkerhetspolisen*)
SDU	Irish Special Detective Unit (*Aonad Speisialta Bleachtaireachta*)
SPPS	Swedish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalvården*)
STICS	Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision
TA	Dutch terrorist prison wing (*Terroristenafdeling*)
Team TER	Dutch Team Terrorists, Extremists and Radicals
TI	Transparency International
UBK	North Macedonian Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (*Uprava za bezbednost i kontrarazuznavanje*)
UCLAT	French Co-ordination Unit of the Fight Against Terrorism (*Unité de coordination de la lutte antiterroriste*)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
VERA	Violent Extremism Risk Assessment

Introduction

by **Ian Acheson**, *Senior Advisor, Counter Extremism Project*
and **Amanda Paul**, *Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre*

The evolving relationship between terrorism and crime poses a significant challenge to Europe, with the activities and milieus of terrorists and criminals increasingly overlapping and reinforcing each other. Many of today's European jihadists have a criminal record and have already spent time in prison. They have used their criminal skills to facilitate terrorist attacks, including by helping to finance operations, smuggling operatives, procuring arms, obtaining forged documents and more. Criminals, in general, are usually well plugged into the illicit economy and both local and transnational black markets.

While the crime-terror nexus is not a new phenomenon, it has grown and become more visible over the past few years. This is due in part to the wave of terrorist attacks that have been carried out in Europe by individuals with a history in crime, and in part to the large number of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) with criminal backgrounds. In fact, French expert Olivier Roy's database of jihadis in France between 1994 and 2016 counts almost 50% with such a background.[1] Abdelhamid Abaaoud, leader of the November 2015 Paris attacks; Amedy Coulibaly, a key perpetrator of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, also in Paris earlier that same year; Anis Amri, who drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin in December 2016; and Khalid Masood, the March 2017 Westminster terrorist, all had histories of petty crime.

Terrorists have become increasingly innovative. Cooperation between criminals, organised crime groups and terrorist groups has increased in recent years due to the latter's need for diverse sources of financial support. The so-called Islamic State (ISIS) relies in part on various criminal activities for funding, such as robbery and human, arms and drug trafficking. Angry, disillusioned young men for whom crime and violence have become ways of life, and are looking for new purpose and meaning, are key targets for recruiters for waging jihad.

If terrorists are opportunists who recruit whomever and however they can, criminals are particularly attractive candidates as they already have important skill sets and useful broader criminal connections. While some are seduced by narratives of redemption that provide, in their eyes, legitimacy to carry out further crimes and which appear to offer a gateway from marginalisation, others are drawn by the excitement of violent action. According to radicalisation experts Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, *Rumiyah*, the former online magazine of ISIS, frequently published articles which encouraged criminal activity in the name of jihad. For example, one piece heavily encouraged the taking of *ghanima* (wealth taken through force), *fay* (wealth taken without force) and *ihtihab* (wealth taken through fraud and deception).[2]

While the majority of jihadists are recruited from the streets (through groups of friends which may already include radicalised individuals) or via social media platforms, mosques or schools, prisons have also repeatedly been flagged up as hotspots for recruitment and mobilisation. Prisons in Europe – many of which are underfunded and overcrowded – often act as incubators for jihadists while also facilitating the expansion of networks between criminals and jihadist ideologues. Ordinary criminals may be vulnerable to recruitment by terrorists and radicalised individuals, given that they are socially marginalised and harbouring resentment against the state. Prison staff are often ill equipped to spot the signs of radicalisation or deal with it once it develops. For example, violent criminal Michael Coe, an associate of hate preacher Anjem Choudary, was radicalised in a British prison in 2007 by Dhiren Barot, an al-Qaeda-inspired jihadi who was then serving time for planning a series of terrorist attacks.[3] Barot was able to mingle with the prison population and spread his radical jihadist ideology.

Traditionally, criminality and terrorism have been dealt with as separate topics in law enforcement and government policy, with different agencies dealing with them respectively. However, there is an increasing need to improve cooperation between these bodies and the sharing of information across the fields to be able to understand and quantify the threat posed by the crime-terror nexus and respond appropriately.

This joint publication between the European Policy Centre and the Counter Extremism Project examines European countries with evidence of growing links between criminality and terrorism, including in prisons. This is done by way of ten case studies addressing Albania, Belgium, France, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The book's conclusions and recommendations are rooted in some far-reaching though practical proposals for European governments and European Union institutions. Jihadist terror draws on criminality and requires a full spectrum calibrated response engaging all relevant agencies and actors, from prevention to reintegration. The potential return of foreign terrorist fighters to Europe gives this endeavour added urgency. Deeper cooperation and robust action through the rule of law is the key to protecting European citizens from the threats this nexus continues to pose. In this respect, institutions will need to be as agile as those who seek to do harm.

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1. Roy, Olivier (2017), *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of the Islamic State*, London: Hurst, pp. 20, 28.

2. Basra, Rajan and Peter R. Neumann (2017), "Crime as Jihad: Developments in the crime-terror nexus in Europe", *CTS Sentinel*, Volume 10, Number 9, p.3.

3. *The Independent*, "Man radicalised by hate preacher jailed for attacking schoolboy in London street", 05 December 2016.

Albania

1

by Ian Acheson

Albania is a former communist state that emerged from Stalinist isolation in 1992 to become one of Europe's youngest multiparty democracies. Approximately 80% of Albania's population is Muslim, with the remainder composed mainly of Christian denominations. The country has boasted a long history of religious tolerance and cohesion.

However, since gaining independence, Albania has suffered from the twin challenges of Islamic extremism and organised crime, thus demonstrating the susceptibility of post-conflict and post-authoritarian nations marked by corruption, ethnic tensions and weak institutions to further exploitation by fluid and often closely related criminal and/or extremist networks.

A 2012 study for the European Parliament into Europe's crime-terror nexus estimated that the expansion of criminal activity following the collapse of communism accounted for 20% of Albania's GDP.[1] An important stop in the transit route for illegal drugs from Afghanistan to Western European markets, Albania is a notable confluence of criminally and ideologically motivated hybrid types of offending. These phenomena interact with growing social exclusion, particularly amongst youth, and weak governance, which creates a conducive environment for extremism.

The history of the Albanian crime-terror nexus

The Western Balkans is home to Europe's largest indigenous Muslim population. The region has traditionally been a place of moderate Islam, dating back to the conquest of the Balkan Peninsula by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. Prior to the Second World War, the Sunni tradition predominated in peaceful coexistence with the Bektashis, a moderate Sufi sect. However, the communist regime of Enver Hoxha suppressed, then totally eliminated religion as a stated policy goal between 1967 and 1990, in an attempt to make Albania the world's first atheist state.

The collapse of the communist regime in 1990 led to an unprecedented era of freedom in Albania. With this came an Islamic revival, partly encouraged by investments from Arab Islamic foundations, including the construction of mosques and other religious institutions. Although this led to the spread of more purist and fundamentalist forms of Islam, it is generally held that the long hiatus in religious practice and long history of religious tolerance has made Albanian society less susceptible to Islamist penetration.[2] Most representatives of Albania's rehabilitated Muslim community do not question the secular structure of the state.

However, Albania's involvement in neighbouring Kosovo provides a different example of how national self-determination can become entangled with violent extremism. During the 1990s, when the carefully stitched ethnic fabric of Yugoslavia began to unravel, conditions were conducive for militant Islamist extremism to take hold. Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, in conflict with Serbian Orthodox Christians, were supported by their compatriots in Albania. There was reportedly a clear relationship between the Albanian mafia and the main separatist organisation in Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA),[3] as well as a range of Muslim organisations. Many of the latter adhered to Wahhabism,[4] an extremely conservative

branch of Islam founded in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi organisations provided humanitarian aid, supported the construction of hundreds of mosques and madrassas (Islam-centred schools) and trained a new generation of young clerics in Saudi Arabia to run them.

Coupled with this overriding influence was the relative weakness and immaturity of political and social institutions in Albania. Its enduring family clan structures and affiliations have made it possible for Albanian mafia gangs to achieve prominence, particularly in the area of human trafficking and the international global illegal drugs market. For example, a 2017 assessment of the UK's National Crime Agency stated that Albanian gangs, many of whose members had entered the UK purporting to be refugees or asylum seekers, had "considerable control" over the United Kingdom's (UK) cocaine market and distribution. Characterised by logistical efficiency and extreme violence, these gangs had effectively taken over European drug markets, dealing directly with manufacturers in Latin America.[5]

The resilience of clan structures against communist collectivism and the presence of an Albanian criminal diaspora across the Adriatic Sea in southern Italy and beyond can create the conditions for a dangerous mix of religious fundamentalism, nationalism and combat experience. It is difficult, however, to establish to what extent this has happened in practice so far.

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The challenge of radicalisation

In a 2018 speech, the Head of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Presence in Albania, Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, stated that radicalised Albanian extremists being held in custody was "a limited problem", with the entire prison population's share of highly radicalised inmates on a par with, for example, Germany.[6] Moreover, although Albania has been a significant exporter of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to join the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), researchers say the distribution of combatants has been concentrated in small areas of the country. For example, the Yzberisht mosque in the capital Tirana accounted for 70 members being radicalised and travelling to ISIS-held territory.[7] Two self-proclaimed imams at this and another city mosque were arrested and charged with encouraging terrorism.[8] Both mosques operated outside the authority of the

country's official Muslim organisation, the Muslim Community of Albania (KMSH), responsible for selecting and training imams.[9] The fact that such a significant number of congregants were radicalised in this way, reportedly over a two year period, underlines the particular threat of radicalisation in countries with weak or ineffectual institutions.

In 2015, the State Committee on Cults – the government agency tasked with regulating mosques – stated that out of 727, at least 200 places of worship did not conform to at least one of the required community legal standards, of which 89 operated outside of KMSH jurisdiction entirely. This has prompted something of a crackdown by authorities, as many of these institutions hosted fundamentalist preachers who used extreme interpretations of Islam to condone or even encourage violent extremism.[10]

During the 1990s, when the carefully stitched ethnic fabric of Yugoslavia began to unravel, conditions were conducive for militant Islamist extremism to take hold.

There have been a number of initiatives – mainly funded by foreign donors – to strengthen civil society resistance against the threat posed by violent extremism.[11] These have had a mixed impact. Albanian officials maintain that the best way to tackle the twin threats of criminality and terrorism is to increase and improve job opportunities. In 2016, the then Minister of Justice Ylli Manjani stated:

"'The real challenge is economic development,' [...]. 'We have to give these people jobs, because if we fail to fight poverty and ignorance, things will only get worse. Meanwhile, what we get from the [West] is the same promises for more training and more "capacity-building." What does that even mean?'"[12]

It is not unreasonable to infer that the lack of economic opportunities in Albania was a powerful push factor that drove young people into the arms of extremists.

This frustration is not uncommon in countries that face threats from violent extremist groups and receive help from donor nations, often directed at them in terms of narrow professional assistance and information sharing as opposed to a more ambitious (and costly) 'whole spectrum' response that prioritises providing access to the official economy and social mobility.

According to the International Labour Organisation's estimates, youth unemployment in Albania topped 40% in 2015 (against a global rate of 13.1%). It has since dropped considerably, but is still high and points to a developing country with few job opportunities or incentives and a lack of infrastructure, resulting in isolated communities.[13] Furthermore, the high levels of youth unemployment coincided with the peak of the Syrian insurgency in mid-2014. It is not unreasonable to infer that the lack of economic opportunities in Albania was a powerful push factor that drove young people into the arms of extremists.

Moreover, difficult socioeconomic conditions at home have also triggered a large flow of Albanian migrants to Western

Europe, including the UK. Statistics show increasing involvement of part of this diaspora in criminal activity, including drug importation and distribution. Albanian nationals comprise the highest number of foreign prisoners held in UK prisons at 802 or 9% of the total population, according to the latest official data.[14] The export of disaffected and alienated youths (from countries like Albania) who are involved in criminality into the European Union (EU) ought to worry host countries. There is a risk that young people involved in illicit activities are vulnerable to manipulation by extremist recruiters, who value their criminal skills. Although estimates suggest that Albanian nationals make up only 0.8% of organised criminals in the UK, what sets them apart from the rest is their propensity for extreme violence to maintain their turf and dominance over competitors.[15]

These extended global networks of Albanian nationals – heavily involved in various criminal activities and the illicit trade of drugs, weapons and human beings – bring them into direct contact with violent extremists, particularly in regions where states are weak. This creates another dimension of the crime-terror nexus: criminal exploitation that threatens the social cohesion of the country. In countries facing serious challenges from organised crime as with Kosovo, where it sometimes operates as a shadow state, social disorder and weak institutions are creating the conditions for violent extremism to take root.

Weak governance institutions

Violent extremism in Albania seems to have manifested itself more in the threat posed by the export of FTFs to ISIS-controlled territory than in internal strife. This is consistent with a country whose domestic problems have been framed in terms of political and ethnic identity, as opposed to religious affiliation. However, with the collapse of the ISIS caliphate and the potential return of an estimated 100 to 150 experienced FTFs[16] into an environment with few employment opportunities in the legal economy, Albania may yet face an additional threat where grievances and ideology are mobilised, combining organised crime with combat-experienced violent extremism.[17] As researcher Annette Hübschle has noted, convergence between criminal and extremist objectives has occurred globally, especially in structurally weak countries.[18]

This structural vulnerability in the fight against criminality and terrorism, particularly where it intersects financial crime, was illustrated by a negative report from the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL) in July 2018:[19]

"Albania classifies its TF [Terrorist Financing] risks as "low", justifying this by the low level of terrorism threats in the country. However, according to the NRA [National Risk Assessment] there was an increase of religious radicalism observed and there were cases of recruitment of FTFs identified. There has been a limited number of successful counter-terrorism prosecutions and convictions, which include indictments in foreign fighting cases linked to the Syrian conflict since 2014. However, no prosecutions and convictions of TF offences have occurred either as a stand-alone prosecution or as a part of a counter-terrorism prosecution. There is no systematic approach to identify and investigate financing aspects of terrorism-related offences and therefore there is a threat that financial

aspects of occurred terrorism-related offences are not always properly investigated." [20]

Corruption is a particularly entrenched problem within the Albanian state and has pervaded all of its institutions, including the judiciary. This has implications for carrying out effective action both against organised criminals and violent extremists. In the latest Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International (TI), Albania is ranked 99th out of 180 nations in terms of how corrupted its institutions are.[21] The judiciary in particular has long been poorly rated in TI's National Integrity Assessment for Albania: meagre salaries, low social status, poor ethical standards and dependence on political patronage render judges particularly vulnerable to intimidation, bribery and other corrupt behaviour.[22]

Thus, the Albanian criminal justice system – which would have to cope with the fallout from returning FTFs – is far from resilient. However, there have recently been hopeful signs that the country recognises the threats posed by corruption and is acting. For example, in 2018, constitutional and legal reforms by the government started the process of vetting 800 Albanian judges and prosecutors for corruption, efficiency and links to organised crime.

In countries facing serious challenges from organised crime, social disorder and weak institutions create the conditions for violent extremism to take root.

Prison radicalisation

As of writing, the Albanian prison system has 5,280 individuals detained across 23 institutions. This equates to a rate of incarceration of 185 per 100,000,[23] which is higher than most Western European countries but broadly similar to many of the recent EU accession countries in the east. The Albanian authorities signed an agreement with the Council of Europe in late 2018 to begin a four-year improvement project designed to modernise the country's antiquated prison system. There is a specific emphasis on improving "the coordinated approach to countering violent extremism (CVE) in Albania particularly in relation to prisons, civil society, and religious communities." [24]

The OSCE is involved in this supportive work and has begun a process of 'benchmarking' the threat posed by extremists in prisons. In the aforementioned speech by Ambassador Borchardt, the problem is acknowledged in broader terms:

"Radical Islamist extremists in prisons – this is a problem many OSCE participating States are facing. And experts in many of

these countries agree: the risk of "infection" of normal prisoners is high. […]

"[I]t is crucial that any efforts in prisons to address violent extremism must not lead to undermining human rights to which all people, including violent extremist prisoners, are entitled. In fact, violation of their human rights may contribute to increased radicalization."[25]

This latter point is interesting because it illustrates the challenge that all countries face when dealing with extremism in prisons. Many of the necessary steps to guarantee the safety of prisoners, staff and the state necessarily impinge and constrain the qualified rights of extremist prisoners. Achieving a calibrated response is necessary to ensure that the protective measures do not, in fact, accelerate the very risk that the prison institution is trying to prevent or control in the first place. This is illustrated by a 2018 US Department of State report which identifies deficiencies in the main Albanian prison holding terrorists:

"Prisoners serving sentences for terrorism convictions in Fushe-Kruja were frequently isolated without adherence to a clear process governing their detention or a deradicalization or rehabilitation program."[26]

There have recently been hopeful signs that the country recognises the threats posed by corruption and is acting.

In countering violent extremism in prisons in Albania and elsewhere, there is a need for a delicate balancing act between the fundamental rights of law-abiding citizens to be protected from terrorism, and the rights of violent extremists, while the degrading treatment of inmates cannot be tolerated and would, in fact, be counterproductive.

It is difficult to obtain accurate information on the numbers of terrorist prisoners in custody in Albania since the statistical classification information provided by the Albanian Government General Directorate of Prisons website has no formal classification for them. However, in the three main high-security prisons of Korçë, Peqin and Fushë-Krujë, all built recently using foreign and/or EU donations by March 2019, a total of 237 prisoners remain uncategorised. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that given the amount of police and judicial activism around counterterrorism, some of this number accounts for those convicted of terrorist offences. Meanwhile, there is a category for organised crime, which includes 26 inmates.[27]

The response to violent radicalisation

Albania launched a three-year national CVE strategy in November 2015, focusing on four areas: education, engagement with religious leaders, economic opportunity, and research. However, substantive evidence of progress on delivery is yet to be produced. This is due in part to the complexity of the Albanian CVE situation as well as the entrenched and endemic corruption, and the absence of a meaningful methodology for measuring the stated goals of the strategy.[28] In 2017, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee – a non-governmental organisation on human rights – obtained EU funding to institute a programme aimed at strengthening Albanian civil society against violent extremism. Its three main objectives are to empower civil society organisations, strengthen the education system and to assist "the penitentiary system in providing effective and human rights sensitive measures to prevent radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism among risk groups in prisons and as part of re-integration processes of foreign terrorist fighters and other persons convicted of extremism." [29]

In countering violent extremism in prisons in Albania and elsewhere, there is a need for a delicate balancing act between the fundamental rights of law-abiding citizens to be protected from terrorism, and the rights of violent extremists, while no degrading treatment of inmates can be tolerated and would, in fact, be counterproductive.

Conclusion

Albania illustrates the challenges that many countries in the Western Balkans have faced since the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Weak governance, corruption and ethnic tensions have opened up the country to exploitation by different crime and terrorism networks, which are increasingly intertwined. As with its neighbours Kosovo and North Macedonia, economic stagnation increases the risks further due to the few legitimate opportunities for sustainable employment. Continuing problems of competence in the judiciary, the poor design and execution of strategies to prevent violent extremism and an absence (as yet) of robust and sustained action against endemic corruption by the state pose serious risks to Albania's successful execution of measures addressing the threat of the crime-terror nexus.

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Belgium

2

by Amanda Paul

Belgium has suffered several terrorist attacks since 2014. These include the 2014 attack at the Jewish Museum of Belgium, the 2016 Brussels bombings of Brussels Airport and Maelbeek Metro Station and the 2018 attack in Liège. While many positive steps have been taken since the 2016 Brussels attacks, significant challenges remain. These include the threat from returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), along with the many hard-core radicals that are due to be released from Belgian prisons in the coming years. As a federal country, Belgium has a complex governance system, making a coherent approach towards countering terrorism and radicalisation more challenging. Their response (and competences) has been spread over the many different levels of government, with the various communities (i.e. French, Flemish, German) and regions (i.e. Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) playing central roles.

These terrorist attacks of recent years were largely perpetrated and coordinated by an underworld where crime and extremism blur together. Disillusioned youth, mainly of North African origin, have joined street gangs, becoming involved in petty crime which often brings them into contact with jihadist groomers. The majority of said terrorist attacks were planned and executed by individuals with criminal backgrounds: criminal skills help terrorists to better organise attacks, for example by providing them with easier access to weapons, forged documents or finance. Furthermore, criminals are often capable of handling weapons and explosives and are accustomed to violence, deceit and evading the police. While online radicalisation is a serious problem, the majority of those involved in these attacks had been radicalised within their circle of friends, family or acquaintances, or during a spell in prison. Another common feature to highlight is that the crime-terror nexus generally thrives in areas of economic deprivation, such as the municipality of Molenbeek in Brussels.[1]

Extremism in Belgium

Belgium is no stranger to terrorism: the country has had to endure a number of violent non-state actors with different ideologies throughout the 1970s and 80s, from Marxist factions to liberation movements. The first organisation that used Islamist ideology for terrorism in Belgium was the Syrian Mujahideen in 1987.

While far-right extremism remains a significant and growing concern today, Islamic extremism represents a greater security threat. Belgium was a transit country for recruits of Islamist terrorist groups, like the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria from as early as the 1990s. Belgium has also been home to a number of jihadist networks, including those of Afghani and Chechen origin. In fact, the al-Qaeda hit team that assassinated Ahmad Shah Massoud, the head of the Northern Alliance, two days before the September 11 attacks were residents of Molenbeek.[2] By 2005, Molenbeek was a magnet for Islamist imams and sheikhs recruiting jihadists for places like Afghanistan, Chechnya and Iraq.[3] Radical preachers, such as Sheikh Bassam Ayachi, who arrived in the neighbourhood in the 1990s, have been accused of sowing the seeds of extremist ideology. Many of those involved in later terrorist attacks in Belgium and France were influenced by his teachings.[4]

In fact, Belgium has been a prime location for plotting terrorist attacks elsewhere, including the 2015 Paris attacks. While links between

Belgium-based terrorists and those in France are particularly well-established, links with other countries exist too. For example, the ringleader of the 2017 Barcelona attack, Abdelbaki Es Satty, had connections with Belgian terrorist cells.[5]

Furthermore, Belgium has been one of the major recruitment grounds for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). Within Western Europe, Belgium has one of the highest number of FTFs who travelled to Syria and Iraq per capita.[6] More specifically, just over 450 individuals joined ISIS.[7] By share of population, Belgium ranks tenth worldwide, surpassed only by Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina within Europe.[8] The number could have been higher if it were not for the creation of a national list of individuals suspected of being radicalised, which was made available to all police districts,[9] as cooperation and the sharing of information between Belgium's numerous police units were previously limited.

Belgium has been a prime location for plotting terrorist attacks elsewhere, including the 2015 Paris attacks.

While the majority of fighters stemmed from what has been known as the "north-south axis" encompassing the cities of Brussels and Antwerp,[10] smaller towns like Vilvoorde have also witnessed an outflow of FTFs.[11] An article published by the Royal United Services Institute states that by the end of 2017, nearly a third of Belgian FTFs had been killed, a further third remained in Syria and some 125 had returned to Belgium.[12] 93 FTFs have been prosecuted and jailed.[13] This includes Vilvoorde local and returning FTF "Hakim E.", who was sentenced to 28 years in prison in February 2017 and stripped of his Belgian nationality.[14]

Another report concludes that the Belgian response to returning FTFs has improved and become more systematic. All returning FTFs that are identified are arrested upon return. This includes women, which was not the case earlier, as they were previously considered to be victims rather than perpetrators.[15] Efforts to repatriate children have also begun. In June 2019, six Belgian children were brought back to Belgium.[16] However, many more remain in camps in northern Syria.

Belgium has a long history in manufacturing, handling, repairing, reactivating and exporting weapons. Arms trafficking, including that from the Balkans is problematic.

A history of organised crime

Belgium's geographic location and major Port of Antwerp have made the country popular for organised and transnational crime gangs. For example, Antwerp is viewed as an important

lynchpin for European drug trade.[17] According to a 2018 report, 251 criminal organisations with some 2,718 members were under federal investigation.[18] These groups are involved in multiple criminal activities, including drug, people and arm trafficking; money laundering; and forgery. Belgium is also one of the three main European entry points for cocaine.[19] In 2018, Belgian authorities seized over 50 tonnes of cocaine at the Port of Antwerp.[20]

Belgium has a long history in manufacturing, handling, repairing, reactivating and exporting weapons.[21] Arms trafficking, including that from the Balkans (in particular Albania), is problematic. In April 2019, police forces from five European countries, including Belgium, carried out a large operation against a gang of Albanian drugs traffickers, resulting in 67 arrests. 55 alone were made in Belgium.[22]

ISIS have successfully tailored redemption narratives to appeal to those with a criminal past.

While Belgium has tightened its gun laws, a considerable black market remains, with the area around Brussels-South Station being notorious for gunrunning.[23] While traditionally deals take place face-to-face, the dark web is now also playing a growing role in the illegal arms trade.[24]

Many of the FTFs that went to Syria and Iraq came from the same neighbourhoods: there is a strong sense of familial loyalty.

The crime-terror link

The link between criminals and jihadists was already recognised in 2015 by the Belgian Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, which stated that some 50% of those arrested for terrorist-related activities have a criminal record.[25]

Terrorists have used their criminal skills and ties to criminal networks and gangs to facilitate terrorist plots. There is strong evidence to show that the terrorist networks responsible for the November 2015 Paris attacks acquired much of their firearms in Belgium,[26] as did those in the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shooting.[27] Criminal links have also been used to obtain forged documents, such as those used by the network involved in the 2015 Paris attacks. Criminals turning to terrorism are much more numerous in areas where criminal networks had already developed before the appearance of Salafi jihadist recruiters. This was the case in Molenbeek, where a significant number of jihadists were former criminals.[28] The fact that deprived and socially-excluded areas of Brussels – and Belgium more generally – are known for their high rates for criminality resulted in their popularity with recruiters, which has brought the crime and terror worlds together. Like many other terrorist

groups, ISIS relies on a range of criminal activities, robbery, theft and antiquity smuggling to help fund their endeavours. To this end, ISIS has promoted crimes such as robbing tourists as the 'spoils of war' against the 'infidel enemy'. ISIS have successfully tailored redemption narratives to appeal to those with a criminal past. Innovative methods to attract criminals have been used, including the diffusion of a poster of an ISIS fighter holding a Kalashnikov with the message "sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures." This was shared on Facebook by Rayat al-Tawheed, a group of British ISIS fighters from London calling themselves the "Banner of God".[29]

The case of the El Bakraoui brothers – two of the perpetrators of the 2016 Brussels attacks – is exemplary of this link. Raised in the north-western Brussels municipality of Laeken, they had amassed a formidable record of violent crime involving firearms by their mid-20s. They were part of a network of violent criminals that carried out armed robberies and car-jacking,[30] and are believed to have been radicalised during their prison sentences.

From criminal to jihadist

The process of radicalisation and/or transforming a criminal to a jihadist does not entail a single fixed recipe: there are different paths and push-and-pull factors. For example, a mix of mental health issues, extremist convictions and personal grievances can lead an individual towards radicalisation. When studying the profiles of Belgium terrorists, it is apparent that the majority hail from socially-excluded areas with high rates of unemployment and low standards of living.

Furthermore, many terrorist networks usually include friends from the same neighbourhood or even family members, in particular brothers. For example, besides the previously mentioned El Bakraoui brothers, Salah Abdeslam was joined in the Paris attacks by his brother Ibrahim. Many of the FTFs that went to Syria and Iraq came from the same neighbourhoods: there is a strong sense of familial loyalty.

While many individuals are radicalised online, many more are radicalised by recruiters or groomers on the ground who play on the vulnerabilities or grievances of individuals. According to an interview given by the Mayor of Vilvoorde, Hans Bonte, in December 2015:

"[Recruiters] indoctrinate with the same message: 'You are born to be a hero,' [...]. They say: 'You can be someone. You can be the one and only. You can lead the caliphate. You don't need these school troubles, these job worries, this family life.' They say you are unemployed because you are Muslim; you are not accepted because you are Muslim. They say the cowards stay here: the real heroes go to Syria." [31]

Three local networks played a pivotal role in converting criminals to terrorists in Belgium: Sharia4Belgium, Resto du Tawheed and the Zerkani network. Sharia4Belgium and the Zerkani network in particular are responsible for radicalising nearly half of Belgium's FTFs.[32]

Sharia4Belgium was a neo-Salafist, Flanders-based extremist group established in 2010 by Fouad Belkacem, an Antwerp-based radical with a history of petty crime.[33] Initially, the group's main activities were to host *da'wah* sessions[34] across Belgium and organise protests against what they claimed were violations of Muslim rights, such as the ban

on headscarves in Antwerp's public schools.[35] Many youngsters were attracted by the highly charismatic Belkacem. At first, the group was not considered a threat by the Belgian authorities, as they were transparent in all of their activities. It was only by the end of 2012 that the authorities began to take steps against the group as Belkacem became more openly radical, and when individuals from Sharia4Belgium began travelling to Syria and Iraq. However, by then hundreds of followers had been radicalised. Belkacem was sentenced to 15 years in a high-security wing of the prison of Hasselt in 2015, while Sharia4Belgium was labelled a terrorist group. When listing a long line of speeches and videos in which Belkacem equalled "military jihad to praying and fasting", public prosecutor Ann Fransen stated that his words can only be interpreted as a call to violence and jihad.[36] In October 2018, the Antwerp Court of Appeal decided to strip Belkacem of his Belgian nationality, leaving him a Moroccan citizen only.[37]

The exchange of information between the police and prison services reportedly functions well. Cooperation between prison and intelligence services is more complicated however, as some information and approaches are classified and not shared with the former.

Resto du Tawheed could be considered the smaller sister network of Sharia4Belgium. Led by the convert Jean-Louis "Le Soumis" Denis, the group operated around the Brussels-North Station, often distributing food to needy Muslims. According to scholar in Islamic Studies, Pieter Van Ostaeyen, Denis was responsible for the recruitment of at least 63 individuals for the Syrian jihad[38] – for which he was jailed in 2013. Following his release in December 2018, he said that his time spent in the high-security wing of the prison of Ittre had only reinforced his beliefs.[39]

Meanwhile, the Zerkani network was a clandestine operation led by the eponymous Khalid Zerkani. According to the Deputy Federal Public Prosecutor Bernard Michel, Zerkani is the biggest recruiter of jihadists Belgium has ever known.[40] The network operated like a criminal gang, drawing in numerous unemployed people from the Brussels Canal Zone, where the neighbourhoods of Molenbeek, Laeken and Anderlecht meet. The majority had criminal backgrounds but little to no Islamic background. According to Van Ostaeyen, at least 60 Belgium-based extremists linked to the Zerkani network travelled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2014; their travel covered by proceeds of the network's thefts.[41] Those subsequently plotting terrorist attacks were able to draw on their contacts from criminal milieus to source weapons as well as chemicals needed for bomb-building, in addition to cars and safe houses.

Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who is believed to have coordinated the Paris attacks on the ground, was a Zerkani recruit. Prior to this, he had spent time in at least three different prisons for assault and other crimes.[42] There are many other Zerkani protégés with criminal backgrounds who played pivotal roles in recent European terrorist attacks. Zerkani himself is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence in the isolation area of high-security prison of Ittre.

The prison-terror nexus

Many of Belgium's 45 prisons are overpopulated and understaffed, affecting the ability of Belgian prison staff to effectively deal with radicalisation. Several of Belgium's best-known terrorists, including the El Bakraoui brothers, were reportedly radicalised while serving sentences for criminal offences. Still, the majority of terrorists were radicalised in other contexts.

Belgium's current prison population amounts to nearly 11,000 inmates. Of this, some 221 are serving sentences for terrorist-related crimes. This includes those that have carried out terrorist attacks or were involved in planning an attack, returned FTFs and radical preachers.[43] CelEx, a unit based in the Justice Federal Public Service and linked to the Directorate-General Houses of Justice, monitors these individuals along with those deemed to be at risk of radicalisation, including screening their visitors and tracking all their communications.[44] Prison staff receive basic training to spot signs of radicalisation. Once individuals are placed on the radar, they are monitored by CelEx. Observation forms must be filled out by officers on a daily basis, keeping record of the interactions of these individuals with staff, visitors and other inmates, resulting in a monthly summary. However, due to a lack of experience and knowledge and high workload, many staff are reportedly unable to carry out this task effectively.

Several formal risk assessment tools are currently used in a number of European Union member states to assess the risk believed to be associated with people suspected or convicted of violent extremism. For example, the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA) is an instrument specifically designed to assess risks related to terrorism and violent extremism.[45]

Belgium has no prison intelligence service. However, each prison has an information officer who consults other security services within local working groups regarding high-risk prisoners. Prisons can also rely on the services of the counterterrorism organ, known as the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (OCAD/OCAM). The exchange of information between the police and prison services reportedly functions well. Cooperation between prisons and intelligence services is more complicated however, as some information and approaches are classified and not shared with the former.[46]

Terrorists and other individuals linked to extremist activities are held in several facilities: 24 in "Reradex", top-security wings of the already high-security prisons of Hasselt and Ittre,[47] and includes preachers, groomers and hard-core radicals. The remainder of those monitored are dispersed among the general prison population. This includes FTFs, though some exceptions remain and individual security measures apply.[48] Still, this increases the risk of other inmates – particularly the most vulnerable, such as those with mental health or drug-related issues – being radicalised.

Prisons facilitate connections between gang members and terrorism-related offenders. They often lead to a sharing of contacts and skills which are manifested outside prison. Inmates manage to find ways to communicate with the outside world, despite efforts to prevent this. There are growing ties between the different networks and gangs as cooperation can be mutually beneficial. For example, individuals are prepared to sell drugs in order to finance the purchase of arms or forged documents. This symbiotic problem is not unique to the crime-terror nexus: cooperation between sex traffickers and paedophiles is also growing.[49]

Belgian prisons remain a less than ideal environment for programmes on disengagement and reinsertion of jihadi convicts. In some cases, sentences are so short that disengagement programmes have little to no chance of exerting any profound impact. For example, being part of a terrorist network or supporting terrorist activities – including being a FTF – does not necessarily imply a long sentence: the current Belgian standard is a mere five-year sentence. Still, both during and after imprisonment, disengagement and rehabilitation trajectories have become general practice.[50]

While the federal Belgian government is responsible for prisons, local authorities and communities carry out activities and programmes related to disengagement and rehabilitation along with other activities such as vocational training and sports. Local authorities engage social workers, mental health practitioners and other relevant experts to carry out this task. However, this work is frequently underfunded.

There is a common recognition of the need to create a bottom-up, "all of society" and multi-agency approach which brings together all the major actors, including practitioners and community leaders.

Once released from prison, local communities and the regions are responsible for the convicts' rehabilitation in cooperation with the police, intelligence services and non-profit organisations. Special task forces have been created specifically for this task; the most notable being the security-centred Local Task Forces, composed of police and intelligence forces.

However, despite these initiatives, challenges remains. According to some Belgian terrorism experts. These include the monitoring and mentoring of veteran jihadists after their release from prison, especially given the relatively high rate of recidivism in Belgium.[51] If an individual moves from one city to another, it is possible they can simply disappear from the radar. Furthermore, given the short prison sentences for being affiliated with a terrorist group, many hard-core radicals – including those involved in the Sharia4Belgium and Zerkani networks – will be released from prison within the next decade. Despite being monitored by the intelligence service and police, they can still cross the Belgian border and disappear.

Conclusion

Today, Belgium's terrorist threat is ranked at a level 2 out of 4.[52] This reflects in part the efforts Belgian authorities have made to counter terrorism and jihadist radicalisation. Despite the country's complex institutional set-up, which complicates fashioning a coherent approach, important steps

have been made. Belgium has revised its counterterrorism policy and Action Plan Against Radicalism (i.e. Plan R), increased resources for security services and reformed the penal code criminalising a number of terrorism-related offenses (including traveling for terrorist purposes). Cooperation between different agencies has increased, including across the country's numerous police forces. The authorities have created shared databases and established new platforms to facilitate the exchange of information. The prevention-focused Local Integrated Security Cells, which bring together local 'prevention de-radicalisation officials' and police under the chairmanship of the local mayor, play an important role. According to a report by Egmont Institute researchers, these officials were first appointed in 2013 and tasked with mapping the FTF phenomenon and stemming the flow of "Syria travelers" by developing innovative efforts to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.[53] There is also a common recognition of the need to have a better balance between prevention and security; and to create a bottom-up, "all of society" and multi-agency approach which brings together all the major actors, including practitioners and community leaders. Yet, while those networks responsible for terrorist attacks in Belgium and beyond have been dismantled, preventing radicalisation still remains a serious challenge, as will preventing the rebirth of likeminded networks in the future.

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France

3

by Francesca Fabbri

France has long faced terrorist threats driven by different ideological and political inspirations or motivations, such as those posed by Corsican separatists. However, the largest threat to the country's security today comes from jihadist terrorism. Since the 2018 Strasbourg Christmas market terrorist attack, the security threat level has remained at "attack emergency" – the highest level.[1]

France is generally viewed as the epicentre of Europe's recent terrorist activities, both because of the large number of French foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in Syria and Iraq as well as the amount of terrorist attacks perpetrated or foiled over the past few years.[2] Since January 2015, 12 jihadist terrorist attacks have taken place, killing 246 people and injuring hundreds more. The latest incident at the time of writing is the 24 May 2019 Lyon parcel bomb attack. More than 80 plots have been foiled since 2016.

France is home to the highest number of FTFs in Europe in absolute terms. Almost 2,000 French citizens are believed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join jihadist groups, including the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).[3] The French Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization estimated in February 2018 that there were almost 680 adults and over 500 children in the Syrian-Iraqi zone.[4] More recently, it is estimated that 250 were still fighting before the fall of the last ISIS-held territories in Syria.[5] More than 300 FTFs are known to have returned to France, with some now in custody. However, bringing evidence-based cases against FTF remains challenging. Moreover, some – particularly those that went to Syria with their wives and children – argue they went for *Hijrah*, or to live under Islamic rule, which does not constitute a criminal offence per se. France, as other European states, is also increasingly under pressure from the US to repatriate its FTFs who are currently held in camps or prisons run by the US-backed Kurds in northern Syria.

As in other European countries, the crime-terror nexus is an issue of growing concern when assessing terrorism trends in France. Case in point, many of the French FTFs had criminal backgrounds prior to their terrorism-related offences. Recent statistics from the French Co-ordination Unit of the Fight Against Terrorism (UCLAT) show that almost half (48%) of the 265 French jihadists killed since joining ISIS were already known by French law enforcement prior to their radicalisation, and usually for minor criminal activities.[6]

Another dimension of the crime-terror nexus concerns the number of radicalised individuals behind bars. For example, the perpetrators of the January 2015 attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Hypercacher kosher supermarket had one thing in common: they had all encountered and come under the influence of the radical Islamist preacher Djamel Beghal while serving time in prison.

Drivers of radicalisation

There is not one single path to radicalisation which leads to terrorism. According to expert Magnus Ranstorp, violent extremism can be best conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, including individual socio-psychological, political, cultural and identity issues, traumas and other trigger mechanisms. Other factors that Ranstorp cites as a "motor for radicalisation" are group dynamics, radical groomers and social media. It is the combined interplay of (some of) these factors that causes violent extremism.[7]

For example, a mix of mental health issues, extremist convictions and personal grievances can lead an individual towards radicalisation. As a 2018 Center for Strategic and International Studies report states, "some profiles are more prone to radicalization than others: young males (24 years old on average), single, no children, with a relatively low education level, unemployed or living in precarious conditions. Half of those convicted for terrorist activities had prior run-ins with the judicial system."[8] Criminal skills such as access to weapons, pickpocketing and psychological familiarity with violence are useful to terrorist groups. Hence, ISIS has been encouraging criminal activity 'as a form of worship', lauding those with criminal backgrounds.[9] This approach has drawn numerous criminals into the world of terrorism.

In France, the drivers of radicalisation are highly debated among experts. The profiles of terrorists and radicalised individuals are diverse, both in terms of social backgrounds and of the prominence of religious or ideological belief as a trigger. For one, Olivier Roy talks of an "Islamisation of radicalism", rather than a radicalisation of Islam.[10] He analyses a process of radicalisation in France which seems to mostly affect second- or third-generation immigrant youths who are excluded from mainstream society and find comfort in a group dynamic that holds nihilistic views on Western society. For them, religion plays a role only to the extent that it justifies violence. By contrast, Gilles Kepel argues that religion and ideology do, in fact, play a primary role in the radicalisation of individuals in France, especially in the process of Islamisation in the heavily Muslim-populated *banlieue* suburbs.[11] Another study suggests that French recruits join jihadi groups as a way to gain social recognition.[12]

While the suburbs of other large cities, such as London, are integral parts of the overall metropolis, many *banlieues* are not. Most are now ghettoised, characterised by high levels of crime, including carjacking and theft. Unemployment is high, while those that are in employment earn salaries that are lower than the national average. The social stigma surrounding *banlieues* has caused "employment opportunities to leave […] creating permanent sites of marginalization for immigrant communities."[13] Matthew Moran of King's College London defines these individuals as the *internal outsider*: "Immigrants, and especially those of Maghreb origins, find themselves in a no-man's land at the outer reaches of the Republic – officially and legally citizens, but socially stigmatised and permanently viewed as outsiders".[14] Jihadist recruiters take advantage of this: they operate in a variety of places including mosques, sports facilities, outside school grounds and social media platform. Even snack bars can serve as recruiting grounds, as exemplified by the one owned by Omar Diaby, one of France's most notorious recruiters and former criminal.[15]

France is generally viewed as the epicentre of Europe's recent terrorist activities, both because of the large number of French FTFs in Syria and Iraq as well as the amount of terrorist attacks perpetrated or foiled over the past few years.

Violent extremism can be best conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, including individual socio-psychological, political, cultural and identity issues, traumas and other trigger mechanisms.

Organised crime and the crime-terror nexus in France

Similarly to its European counterparts, France faces challenges from internal and external criminal groups and networks. However, international, mafia-style organised crime does not have a strong presence in France with the exception of Corsica and the French Riviera, where certain groups of criminals have long been identified as members of the so-called "grand banditry".[16] Gangs originating from Corsica and broadly labelled as 'Corso-Marseillais' are well-known for their drug trafficking and money laundering activities along the French Riviera, particularly in Marseilles. They include gangs such as Gang du Petit Bar, Gang de la Brise de Mer, and Bergers Braqeurs. There are also groups emanating from the Balkans (particularly Albania and Kosovo), but they mainly operate in Paris and the Rhône-Alpes region. Drug trafficking is also a major activity for them.

Criminals and terrorists are frequently recruited from the same communities, in areas of high crime and social deprivation.

Criminal gangs and bandits have become an increasing problem in some of the major French cities' suburbs, including Paris, Nice and Lyon. Criminals and terrorists are frequently – although certainly not always – recruited from the same communities, in areas of high crime and social deprivation. Jihadists with criminal pasts are able to use their skills and connections to facilitate terrorist plots, including acquiring firearms, forging documents and accessing financing.

Groups composed of acquainted individuals who share collective identities and are bound by a strong sense of loyalty are extremely important in the radicalisation process.

Dealing drugs and stolen goods and, in some cases, armed robbery and assault seem to be prevalent in the track record of criminals that have been radicalised.[17] Studies show the connection between crime and terror. A database of jihadist profiles compiled by Roy shows that almost half of them had a previous background in petty crime.[18] The sentiment of brotherhood is a crucial aspect of this process and is further demonstrated by the high numbers of jihadists who are related and even brothers. They are able to radicalise each other while reinforcing a sense of purpose and ideological calling. According to experts Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, "violent extremism spreads through social contact, and for most people, siblings are a big and important part of their social environment."[19]

Groups composed of acquainted individuals who share collective identities and are bound by a strong sense of

loyalty are therefore extremely important in the radicalisation process. In fact, group dynamic often operates within one family. For example, three brothers known for their affiliation with jihadist groups, and the wife of one of them, were tried in March 2016 for having attempted to travel to Syria. They hailed from the deprived Parisian suburbs of Trappes and Plaisir.[20]

A 2019 quarterly report by GLOBSEC also points to similar conclusions: having compiled terrorist data from 11 European Union (EU) member states, 48.7% of individuals from this database have a record of arrests prior to their terrorism-related offence.[21] The report denotes a recurring "delinquency of habit" before the start of the radicalisation process, which usually occurs at the onset of criminal careers.[22] Meanwhile, those who did not have a previous criminal record were still close to criminal spheres. The report suggests that the jihadist phenomenon "hybridises itself to a pre-existing social environment", and in some cases these environments are marked by criminality.[23]

Radicalisation in prison

Preventing radicalisation in prisons is a serious challenge for French authorities. Prisons are not only an incubator for radicalisation but can also further harden the ideology of those inmates who are already radicalised. In fact, the French prison system has come under significant scrutiny due to its high number of radicalised inmates. More than 500 prisoners are currently incarcerated for terrorism-related offences while over 1,000 inmates, detained for other crimes, are considered to be vulnerable to radicalisation.[24] Between mid-2018 and the end of 2019, as many as 450 radicalised prisoners will be released in France.[25]

Prisons serve as recruiting grounds for terrorist networks. Some of France's most infamous terrorists were radicalised while they were serving prison sentences. Think of Mohammed Merah, the mastermind behind the 2012 Toulouse and Montauban shootings, or Amedy Coulibaly, the perpetrator of the attack at the 2015 Hypercacher kosher supermarket.[26]

Terrorist attacks have even been planned and perpetrated within prison walls, the latest being a knife attack by a radicalised individual in the Condé-sur-Sarthe prison in March 2019, which left two prison officers seriously injured.[27] This raises doubts about the French authorities' capacity to control inmates' access to weapons and communication technology. Following the March knife attack, prison officers blocked the entrance to some 20 prisons across France to raise the alarm on the dangers they face on a daily basis due to the number of radicalised prisoners and the lack of protection.[28] The situation is likely to deteriorate further if and when French returning FTFs are placed into custody. With prisons already overcrowded, there is a high chance that they will be held with the general prison population, posing a major risk of proselytising other prisoners.[29]

French prevention efforts are increasingly focusing on disengagement strategies for radicalised inmates. Their prevention strategy of 2018 created specific 'radicalisation assessment areas' (QERs) in prisons, establishing multidisciplinary assessments on the level of risk presented by inmates in the prisons of Fleury-Mérogis, Fresnes, Vendin-le-Vieil and Osny, as well as the 'radicalisation processing areas' (QPRs) in the

prisons of Lille-Annoeullin and Condé-sur-Sarthe. These specialised divisions provide tailor-made de-radicalisation processes and isolation to restrain the most dangerous individuals from grooming recruits.[30]

Indeed, according to a report by the European Forum for Urban Security,

"[p]risoners are examined by a pluridisciplinary team […]. A written report is produced analysing their attitude. This pluridisciplinary report includes biographical elements, information about what happened during their stay in prison, how to position themselves regarding the crimes they were convicted for, and the risk and protection factors."[31]

This evaluation aids the prison authorities in selecting an appropriate detention regime.

The French approach to countering violent extremism

Since 2015, France has made important developments in response to new terror dynamics, including fundamentally rebooting its security, intelligence, and judicial bodies to address its jihadist challenge both internally and externally. In late 2017, France revoked its state of emergency, which was initially declared and prolonged several times since the November 2015 Paris attacks.[32]

The Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE) plays an important role in dealing with terrorism beyond French borders: it is tasked with infiltrating terrorist networks and identifying groups who could potentially carry out attacks on French territory. Reversely, the Directorate-General for Internal Security (DGSI, formerly the Central Directorate of General Intelligence) monitors dangerous individuals and terrorist groups within its borders. The DGSI employs the *Service Central de Renseignement Territorial*, which operates on the ground in cities, mosques and 'difficult' neighbourhoods. The DGSI also identifies at-risk individuals in cooperation with the National Gendarmerie, which also has its own intelligence service.

Recently, the French authorities have also sought to enhance their intelligence operations in prisons. The central office for prison intelligence (BCRP), created in April 2017, operates in prisons which house radicalised inmates, considered dangerous or charged or convicted of terrorist offences.[37] Moreover, a service to monitor activities through telephone tapping and mobile phone traffic interception was recently created.

All the relevant French security services – which are coordinated by UCLAT – supply the *"fiche S"* directory. Individuals who are considered to pose a threat to national security are included in this list, regardless of whether they have carried out a terrorist attack or crime, or not. In February 2018, 19,745 names were listed, including 12,000 radicalised and almost radicalised individuals.[38]

The French government's third National Plan to Counter Radicalisation of February 2018 focuses on long-term efforts to build resilience through education, and greater interactions between Muslim communities and the state by adopting a 'whole of society' approach.[33] For example, more than 25,000 people have been trained to better detect and handle radicalised individuals: "From classrooms to gyms, policemen to families, local representatives to religious leaders, state institutions to civil society organizations, psychiatrists to

social workers, every segment of French society has a role to play."[34] The February 2018 national plan especially focused on counter-radicalisation in prisons and schools, stressing the need to separate radicalised individuals from other inmates while establishing more control over private and religiously-oriented schools.

Having said this, there has also been much controversy in France concerning its shortcomings in the field of disengagement. As an example, France's first Centre for Prevention, Integration and Citizenship in 2016 was strongly criticised due to its questionable approach to de-radicalisation.[35] Numerous services and institutions are tasked with responding to the terrorist threat, whether it be in the form of prevention, reaction or judicial coordination. And yet despite the latest terrorism legislation, which introduced additional security measures, strengthened the authority of intelligence services and police to monitor released jihadists more closely,[36] closed down religious facilities and restricts the movement of those suspected of extremist ties, an effective disengagement programme is needed to complement the overall approach.

Prisons are not only an incubator for radicalisation but can also harden the ideology of those inmates who are already radicalised further.

Conclusion

French prevention efforts are increasingly focusing on disengagement strategies for radicalised inmates.

Going forward, it seems that the crime-terror nexus in France presents three main features that remain particularly problematic, considering the number of individuals concerned.

- First, while no intrinsic link between socioeconomic conditions and terrorist involvement has been identified, it is clear that a pattern of jihadist recruitment closely linked to delinquency is emerging from specific areas and milieus. Roy refers to a generational nihilism, linking religious extremism to pre-existing behaviours.[39] President Emmanuel Macron has indicated on several occasions that he believes that radicalisation has taken hold in areas that the *République* has left behind.[40] Adopting a whole-of-society approach to prevent radicalisation is therefore crucial in order to reduce the links between crime and terror.

- Second, returning FTFs pose a serious challenge. There is a significant risk that many of these individuals will radicalise others with their war stories of 'heroism' from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq – and this can happen both in- and outside of prison. Such security concerns are at the centre of France's

reluctance to repatriate French FTFs currently held in camps and prisons in northern Syria, under the control of the US-backed Kurdish forces. With the US calling for Europeans to take back their nationals or else have them released, France – along with other European nations – urgently requires a unified policy to respond.

- Third, prisons pose a major problem to French authorities in their fight against terrorism. The expanded operational capacity of the intelligence services within prisons is an important initiative. If successful, it could lead the fight against prison radicalisation. For the moment, however, the challenge only seems to be getting more complicated rather than less. Systematic efforts to rid prisons of crime, terrorism and the links between are yet to bear fruit. Simultaneously, the high number of detainees charged with terrorism offences or considered to be radicalised who are due to be released soon will add to the already high number of individuals currently being monitored in non-custodial settings. Furthermore, post-release arrangements, including re-integration and monitoring, are very sensitive matters – especially considering the importance of the crime-terror nexus in France.

More than 25,000 people have been trained to better detect and handle radicalised individuals.

Adopting a whole-of-society approach to prevent radicalisation is crucial in order to reduce the links between crime and terror.

Overall, France is one of the European countries that has suffered profoundly from terrorist attacks and where radicalisation has become a nation-wide problem. This threat is expected to heighten in the upcoming years due to the returning FTFs and the release of people convicted of terrorism.[41] Despite the several attempts undertaken by the French authorities to strengthen their de-radicalisation programmes and counterterrorism measures, it is still too early to assess their real effectiveness. However, recent French policy developments show signals of a more integrated and holistic approach to fighting terrorism and breaking the nexus that links criminality with terrorism.

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Germany

4

by Ivano di Carlo

With one of the largest groups of radical Islamists in Western Europe,[1] Germany is among the major countries in the European Union (EU) facing serious challenges from international jihadism. As demonstrated by the December 2016 Christmas market attack in Berlin and the subsequent smaller scale attacks since the beginning of 2017, Islamist terrorism remains a major security threat in Germany.

A common feature found in the majority of terrorist attacks carried out in Germany and other EU member states is that most of the perpetrators had a history of crime, be it petty or serious. Of these, some were radicalised in prison while serving time for a criminal offence. However, the vast majority were 'small-time' criminals radicalised on the streets of their hometowns. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the relationship between criminals and terrorists to tackle the challenge of violent jihadism in Europe.

Extremism in Germany

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in Germany. For decades, the country has endured violent extremism and terrorism from the far-right and -left in addition to Islamist terrorism, the main focus of this publication.

International terrorist groups have carried out several attacks in Germany, the most notable being the Munich massacre at the 1972 Summer Olympics, which saw a Palestinian terrorist group kill 11 Israeli Olympic team members and a German police officer. International terrorism never disappeared from the German authorities' radar during the 1970s and 80s, with a series of incidents occurring in West Berlin, such as the 1982 bombing of a Jewish restaurant and La Belle discotheque in 1986, or at the Frankfurt Airport in 1985.

Radical Islamists based in Germany have also carried out attacks in other countries. In 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, evidence showed that a group of Hamburg-based jihadists and led by Mohamed Atta[2] – namely the "Hamburg Cell" – played a central role in the planning and execution of the attacks, marking a turning point in the German security architecture.[3] Thereafter, Germany took further steps to strengthen its counterterrorism policy through the establishment of a Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (GTAZ) in 2004: a platform of 40 internal security agencies sharing information. Further developments reflected the agenda of the broader international fight against Islamist terrorism, including the strengthening of the domestic security architecture through the establishment of operational centres as well as legislative and policy reforms.

In the past few years, Germany has been the target of several terrorist attacks and has witnessed a rapid increase in Islamist extremists and jihadist networks. The Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community (BMI) estimated in a recent report that the Islamist extremist following currently amounts to 26,560,[4] of whom 2,240 are considered to be radical jihadists.[5] Salafists have experienced the most significant and constant expansion – 9,700 in 2016, 10,080 in 2017 and 11,300 in 2018[6] – and some of the primary recruiters of jihadists come from this group. Currently, there are over a thousand ongoing investigations with 1,300 suspects related to Islamist terrorism in Germany.[7]

According to the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Germany ranks high in terms of the number

of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) travelling to take part in the wars in Syria and Iraq.[8] Indeed, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) reported that since 2013, German FTFs accounted for 1,050[9] of the estimated 5,000 jihadists who left Europe for Syria and Iraq.[10] From this number, some 220 are believed to be dead,[11] while one third is believed to have returned to Germany.[12]

The crime-terror nexus

In Europe, more than 50% of jihadists have a criminal past[13] – a pattern shared by both perpetrators of terrorist attacks who have never been in a conflict zone and FTFs. Analysis conducted by the German Federal Criminal Police (BKA), BfV and Hesse Information and Competence Centre Against Extremism (HKE) on a group of 778 FTFs confirmed this trend, given that two-thirds of them had prior criminal convictions or police records.[14]

It is crucial to understand the relationship between criminals and terrorists to tackle the challenge of violent jihadism in Europe.

The crime-terror nexus should be unpacked to single out two levels of relatedness. For one, the link between organised crime and terrorist groups; for another, the phenomenon of individuals involved in petty crimes turning into radical Islamists.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, evidence showed that a group of Hamburg-based jihadists played a central role in the planning and execution of the attacks, marking a turning point in the German security architecture.

Experts are still debating whether the connections between criminal and terrorist milieus are the result of a series of unpredictable circumstances or of a deliberate strategy undertaken by terrorist groups, such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), seeking to enlist individuals with criminal backgrounds. What is clear, however, is that the connection between these two groups is the result of a sort of 'marriage of convenience'. Serious and petty criminals recruited by terrorist groups or radicalised individuals use their skills and experience to fundraise and procure, through crime, the weapons and logistic means to strengthen the operational capacities of terrorist networks. While in Germany there is no known connection between organised crime groups and terrorist organisations for the time being, this does not negate the possibility that terrorists may have used criminal services,[15] nor that the boundaries between these milieus are blurring. Indeed, these groups can share the same recruitment pools.

For example, in Berlin, organised crime groups of people of Arab origin are exploiting the poor socioeconomic situation of refugees to channel them into criminal activities.[16] Asylum seekers, often living in conditions of serious deprivation and experiencing high levels of psychological stress, can be vulnerable to radicalisation

and recruitment by terrorist networks. This explains why asylum seekers were behind some of the terrorist attacks that took place in Germany in 2016 and 2017.[17]

Moreover, with the Syrian Civil War coming to an end, many returning European FTFs will probably not enter the national criminal justice system due to insufficient evidence to support any charges or draw definitive conclusions.[18] Hence, returnees can reinforce the crime-terror nexus by posing a severe risk to public safety in Germany, because they may continue to support jihad and, in contrast to petty criminals, have acquired military skills that make them capable of conducting serious lone wolf attacks.

Asylum seekers, often living in conditions of serious deprivation and experiencing high levels of psychological stress, can be vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment by terrorist networks.

The process of radicalisation plays a fundamental role in turning criminals into jihadists. Radicalisation is a complex phenomenon where individual and situational factors are strongly intertwined.[19] Frequently, the hope of redemption and rehabilitation and the need for belonging can trigger the radicalisation process. In Germany, both charismatic leaders such as Abu Walaa or René Marc Sepac and extremist cells in mosques have been of utmost importance in recruiting individuals. Since 2005, Salafist mosques have played a distinctive role in recruitment, whether through personal contacts or online campaigns. It should also be recognised that radicalisation does not always lead to violent extremism and can occur anywhere. As such, warning signs of radicalisation are difficult to recognise or predict. The German Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) has investigated at least 300 suspected cases of radical Islamists in the German armed forces since 2011, with one-third confirmed and 76 individuals having left the military service before being charged.[20]

In prisons, the crime-terror nexus unfolds in an isolated setting where criminals and terrorists are in close proximity.

Another story, in particular, summarises the complicated and convoluted nature of the crime-terror nexus. In December 2016, Tunisian extremist and asylum seeker Anis Amri hijacked a truck and drove it into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people and leaving a further 56 seriously wounded. What has been one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in German history was the result of a series of miscalculations and underestimations by a number of European states. Prior to the attack, Amri had fled from Tunisia to Italy to avoid imprisonment for the theft of a truck, yet was eventually arrested for arson and sentenced to four years of prison – this is where he started to be radicalised by Tunisian preachers.[21] Following his release, he went to Germany and applied for asylum. He was continuously monitored by national authorities during this period since he was already associated with the Abu Walaa jihadist network[22] and had indicated an intention to commit an attack. Yet despite the German law enforcement agencies' awareness of his intentions, they failed to prevent him from committing the deadly attack. He subsequently

returned to Italy under one of his 14 known aliases before dying in a shootout with the police in Milan.[23] Amri's story not only confirms the link between petty criminals and terrorism and the role of radicalisation in and outside of prisons, but also shows gaps in transnational, multi-agency cooperation and intelligence sharing.

Physical and virtual patterns to radicalisation

The crime-terror nexus is linked to the physical and virtual places where criminals and terrorists can potentially interact. In prisons, the crime-terror nexus unfolds in an isolated setting where criminals and terrorists are in close proximity. In this context, radicalisation can occur in an extremely short space of time.

Vulnerable inmates who feel marginalised and discriminated or are afflicted with mental health or drug-related issues are more likely to be targeted by extremist recruiters.[24] Despite the efforts of prison authorities, recruiters continue to find ways to communicate with external terrorist networks. The latter view their imprisonment as an opportunity to continue to preach, radicalise and recruit vulnerable individuals. Hence, prisons provide a platform for networking opportunities for recruiters.[25] One example of prison radicalisation is that of Harry Sarfo, who was imprisoned in Bremen after having committed an armed robbery in a supermarket. During his incarceration, he was influenced and convinced by René Marc Sepac to leave for Syria after his release. Sarfo received military training during his stint in Syria but eventually decided to return home before being arrested on terrorism charges.[26]

In 2017, there were at least 300 Islamists considered to be violent religious extremists in the German prison system,[27] with another 351 being the subject of pending arrest warrants.[28] Most of the extremist inmates are located in the federal state prisons of Hesse, Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia and Berlin, and are housed separately from other extremists in order to avoid mutual influence.[29] The German prison system comprises numerous different regimes since there is no unique national penal system: responsibility for both prison legislation and the execution of prison sentences falls upon the federal states (*Länder*). However, federal authorities frequently consult with each other across their jurisdictions to coordinate prison-related issues. In 2018, the average German prison sentence for terrorist offences was five years.[30] When sentences are relatively short, complementary rehabilitation and reintegration programmes may only have a limited impact, if any at all. An adequate risk assessment policy, along with well-prepared staff are essential in order to identify the signs of radicalisation among inmates and prevent recidivism.[31]

Even though prisoners are in a psychologically vulnerable situation, radicalisation actually appears to be more likely to occur *outside* of prisons, whether in public spaces such as parks and mosques or homes of friends. According to a 2016 analysis of the BKA, BfV and HKE, most German FTFs were radicalised by "real-world connections".[32] Furthermore, for more than half of the 572 German FTFs subject to this analysis (54%), friends were the main factor of radicalisation, while mosques accounted for 48% and the Internet 44%. In fact, contacts in penal institutions only accounted for a meagre 2%.[33] However, the number of

Islamist inmates and the growing amount of returning FTFs can be expected to increase the chances of radicalisation in prison in the future.

Unlike physical places like prisons, cyberspace has no borders, allowing for radical ideology and propaganda to have a global outreach. Many FTFs and petty criminals – such as Ahmad Alhaw, a Palestinian asylum seeker who committed a knife attack in a Hamburg supermarket in July 2017 – were radicalised through social media.[34] The study carried out by the BKA, BfV and HKE confirms that online Islamist propaganda has become an important source of radicalisation,[35] especially following ISIS' territorial loss. Germany already began to take countermeasures in 2007 with the establishment of the Joint Internet Centre, to monitor and analyse any online content of Islamist or jihadist nature. Recently, a further step has been taken with the adoption of the Network Enforcement Law, which holds social networks accountable for the content that is shared on their platforms.

The German prison system comprises numerous different regimes since there is no unique national penal system: responsibility for both prison legislation and the execution of prison sentences falls upon the federal states.

Prevention: Partnership between government and civil society

Adequate measures to counter radicalisation and violent extremism need to embrace a holistic approach where the state and grassroots organisations work side by side. Thus, the prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation are constitutive parts of Germany's integrated counterterrorism approach. The *Länder* enjoy a great deal of autonomy in shaping relevant policies, with the federal government allocating additional funds yearly.[36]

Civil society organisations and frontline practitioners – think social workers, educators, psychologists – play a crucial role in de-radicalisation. For example, they interact with inmates as well as engage and monitor them after their release to rehabilitate and reintegrate them back into society. However, while intelligence services and police forces are able to monitor released terrorists or radicalised individuals within Germany, once they cross the border, which is often, they fall out of the former's sight. A common, Europe-wide database for released prisoners is currently missing.

Preventing radicalisation in the first place is also a priority of the German authorities. Radicalisation flourishes in deprived socioeconomic areas, where groomers target many youths. To counter this phenomenon, Germany has implemented a robust grassroots approach where non-govermental organisations (NGOs) work alongside the government. EXIT-Germany, Violence Prevention Network and HAYAT are a few examples of civil society organisations working in vulnerable communities.[37]

Over the past few years, German authorities have foiled several terrorist plots while simultaneously improving multi-agency coordination to prevent and counter violent extremism (PVE, CVE).[38] The efforts of the German authorities along with the civil society to counter every form of radicalisation have resulted in a more coherent and multidimensional approach to better cope with the complexity of the issue. Understanding the nature of the crime-terror nexus is an important component of anticipating these problems through adequate prevention strategies.

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Kosovo

5

by Ian Acheson

Kosovo is at significant risk, both as an incubator and exporter of terrorism. While Kosovo has never experienced any terrorist attacks first-hand, Islamist extremism still poses a major problem: Kosovo has exported more foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) per capita than any other Western state. Despite the Kosovan authorities having taken steps to tackle this phenomenon, extremism remains challenging not least vis-à-vis potential attacks from returning FTFs, and is viewed as a major national security threat.

Furthermore, terrorist network operations in the country have become increasingly linked to those of organised crime. Drugs and arms trafficking remain a huge problem for the Kosovan authorities and is also impacting their efforts to integrate into the European Union (EU). Weak governance structures which allow for high levels of corruption continue to work as serious impediments to solving this problem effectively. Efforts made by international actors – including the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) – are yet to make a decisive difference.

While Kosovo has never experienced any terrorist attacks first-hand, Islamist extremism still poses a major problem: Kosovo has exported more FTFs per capita than any other Western state.

Like Albania and North Macedonia (see their respective chapters), Kosovo is another illustration of a post-conflict Balkan state where the combination of fragile institutions, an enduring legacy of corruption and ethnic rivalries result in a fluid relationship between criminals and extremists, who are often interchangeable. Resistance to state control can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and involve offenders with criminal expertise who adopt and adapt politics or ideology to justify their criminal behaviour. Similarly, jihadists may commit crimes for personal gains, utilising resources, criminal networks and moral justifications to do so. In some cases, the same people operate on either side of this line.

History of the Kosovan crime-terror nexus

Kosovo was previously an autonomous region of Serbia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its population is made up predominantly of ethnic Albanian Muslims, specifically over 95% in 2011.[1] Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008. A decade later, 102 United Nations (UN) states recognised its independence, including all of its contiguous neighbours, apart from Serbia.

The existence of an organised crime-terrorism nexus in Kosovo is well documented. In 1997, following the fall of the neighbouring Albanian government due to an economic crisis,[2] the Albanian mafia took advantage of near anarchy on the streets to seize huge amounts of military weapons and forged links with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), who were fighting the Serbian Government to secede. A 2012 study on crime-terror conducted for the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee of the European Parliament recognised this important relationship.[3] As reported by *The Washington Times*, "a very specific relationship developed between the political wing of the KLA [...] and Albanian criminal groups to smuggle heroin. These ties thus 'provided a well-oiled arrangement: the profits from the Pristina cartel, estimated to be in the 'high tens of millions', were funnelled to the KLA, where they were used primarily to buy weapons, often in 'drugs-for-arms' arrangements'."[4]

Transnational drug supply chains between Afghanistan and the West – via Turkey and the Balkans – have relied along the route on relationships between various extremist groups, motivated by religion or ethnic nationalism. For example, numerous allegations have been made that Bosnian criminal gangs have established connections with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to facilitate the trafficking of heroin.

Numerous allegations have been made that Bosnian criminal gangs have established connections with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to facilitate the trafficking of heroin.

A 2005 study by the American National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign pointed out that illicit drug trafficking in and out of Kosovo was "also linked to international terrorist organizations that need money to finance their activities. By forging advantageous relationships with drug traffickers or becoming actively involved in the drug trade themselves, terrorist groups such as Hezbollah or al-Qaeda use money from drug sales to further their political agendas."[5] These links are further strengthened by the continuing absence of enduring and fully legitimate state institutions in Kosovo.

The international community still views Kosovo as a transitioning country with fragile infrastructure; a weak rule of law; pervasive economic backwardness; and a strong, militarised mafia composed mainly of ethnic Albanians or Serbs, all of which has corrupted public life and has done so with the tacit concession of the state.[6] Besides playing a central role in the drug trafficking supply chain, Kosovo is both a departure point and destination for human trafficking, too: "Kosovo ranked high on both the origin and destination lists and also as a transit country. Victims are mostly women, girls and children – 'goods' of the prostitution and trafficking industry."[7]

Membership to Europol and access to its databases and alert systems would arguably improve Kosovo Police's capability to respond to serious crime and terrorism threats.

The main agency tasked with combatting crime and terrorism in Kosovo is the Kosovo Police. In November 2018, they were

unfortunately denied entry into INTERPOL as it failed to bag the necessary two-thirds of the member state votes, with an opposition led by Serbia and Russia. Membership to INTERPOL and access to its databases and alert systems would arguably improve the Kosovo Police's capability to respond to serious crime and terrorism threats.

Radicalisation in Kosovo

The fragility of Kosovo's state institutions and its fractured society, which plays more to ethnic or religious affiliation than national, have permitted the spread of hateful ideologies. Research on local conversions to violent extremism has suggested that several push factors exist, including an insecure labour market, poor social mobility and a search for religious purity that is sometimes augmented by social media and a lack of education on critical thinking in secondary education.[8] Kosovans themselves persistently believe that a lack of economic opportunity is what leads to radicalisation in their country, although this is put into question by the relatively high socioeconomic status of many extremists, particularly those who departed to wage jihad abroad.

In fact, Kosovo has exported more FTFs per capita than any other Western state. According to a 2017 report from The Soufan Center, out of a population of 1.8 million, 317 Kosovo citizens travelled to Syria to fight for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). At that time, 117 had returned, leaving 138 at large.

Kosovan society, fractured by years of conflict and interethnic rivalries, has reported high levels of radicalisation. A 2017 survey revealed that nearly three-quarters of Kosovans believe that there are radicalised extremists in their surroundings, nearly 70% consider there to be a radicalisation problem within their own community, and nearly 25% know someone who has been radicalised.[9]

Violent Islamist extremism is not the only threat that Kosovo faces, however. The complexity of criminality and terrorism in the country is compounded by the government's lack of legitimacy in the north of the country, where several municipalities have majority Serbian populations. The risk of Serbian extremists, financed by criminal gangs attacking state institutions and ethnic Albanian citizens, is regarded as a real possibility.[10] These predominantly Serb municipalities or enclaves, including the divided city of Mitrovica, have not been meaningfully incorporated into the Kosovar state, as most of the Serbs regard themselves as part of a 'Greater Serbia'. Overall, Kosovan state institutions and the formal rule of law are extremely weak with little legitimacy. The multinational North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led security and stabilisation operation Kosovo Force, which is present in Kosovo under a UN mandate, still plays a central role in maintaining stability while simultaneously training a multi-ethnic Kosovo Security Force to eventually take over their duties.

There are distinct parallels between this security situation and that of Northern Ireland during the violent period of the Troubles, whereby the British Army performed a peacekeeping and internal security role which was heavily resisted by extremists and resented by large parts of the local community (see the chapter on the Republic of Ireland). Where there is a lack of legitimate community policing and trust

in state institutions, the possibilities for organised crime and extremism to flourish and the potential merger of actors from both groups is heightened.

In addition to creating circumstances favourable to extremist Serb nationalism, the Serb-majority enclaves have also attracted the interest of Islamist extremists in Kosovo. In 2018, six Kosovan residents[11] reportedly belonging to a group called "Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of Eagles" were indicted on terrorism charges of planning large-scale attacks on nightclubs and an orthodox church in the Mitrovica enclave. These plans also included an attack on the Israeli national football team in 2016 during a match in neighbouring Albania, as well as on France and Belgium which were devised to mirror the November 2015 attacks in Paris. Prosecutors in the case discovered that the planning was supported and financed from Syrian ISIS operatives.[12]

The role of gender in extremism adds another dimension to the crime-terror nexus. Research carried out by Audrey Alexander[13] and the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)[14] show the importance of women involved in violent extremism, not only as sources of moral support and validation to their male partners but as combatants in their own right, too. For example, one of the six convicts indicted of planning the attacks mentioned above is Edona Haliti, a Kosovan woman and girlfriend of Gramos Shabani, accused of masterminding the plot. Much of the evidence of the increasingly assertive roles of women in Kosovan extremism, both domestic and foreign, has been made available to prosecutors through their increasing presence on social media and intercepted text messages.[15]

Kosovan society, fractured by years of conflict and interethnic rivalries, has reported high levels of radicalisation.

As of 2018, Kosovo was regarded as the only Balkan country with an operational strategy to reintegrate returning FTFs in play.

Kosovo's response

The Kosovan government is showing signs of positive engagement to clamp down on Islamist extremism. Since 2013, over 120 people have been arrested on terrorism charges, including imams suspected of recruiting jihadists to fight in Syria. However, many of those convicted under old counterterror laws have only served modest terms in prison, and have since been released. There seems to be little in the way of coherent reintegration programmes for these offenders. One former ISIS fighter, interviewed by *The Washington Post* in August 2018, summarised the challenge as follows: "We are growing stronger and getting smarter. Terrorists will not be reintegrated, and there may be attacks here."[16]

Against this background, the KCSS and other civil society actors have been supported by the likes of the European Union External Action Service and US Department of State to deliver programmes aimed at preventing violent extremism and countering its manifestations. These initiatives include strengthening the Kosovan media's ability to recognise, analyse and report on violent extremism; youth prevention outreach in Pristina-based schools to strengthen critical thinking and help youths recognise radicalisation; and countering terrorist organisations' misuse of social media.

There is a significant way to go, however, and the threat of home-grown or exported Kosovar extremism remains potent, as *The Times* reported last year:

"Six Kosovan Albanians, men and women, were arrested at home and in Germany last June for involvement in two plots targeting NATO troops in Kosovo and civilians in Belgium and France. A month earlier eight were jailed in Kosovo for a plot to kill Israeli footballers. […]

"'We don't have a problem putting Islamic State members in prison,' said Fikrije Krasniqi, 57, one of two prosecutors dealing with new terrorist cases in Kosovo. 'It is changing their minds that is difficult. We find that most Isis members are beyond repair.'"[17]

Radicalisation in prisons and the community

The Kosovo Correctional Service manages a total prison population of 1,648 across 12 prisons, running at a filled capacity of 87%.[18] One high-security prison near the village of Gërdoc/Grdovac, with a capacity of 390 prisoners and constructed according to European standards with EU grant funding, commenced operation in 2014. It is extremely difficult to determine the number of terrorist offenders in custody in Kosovo as official statistics do not appear to exist. One conservative estimate from research carried out in 2015 suggests 26.[19] However, in recent years, well-trailed action by state authorities and high-profile arrests of returning FTFs suggest the number may be significantly higher. For example, the chief prosecutor reported in April 2019 that since 2014, 119 people had been charged with terrorist offences, with a further 156 under investigation.[20] Given their profile and risk, it is highly likely that the majority of Kosovo's extremist offenders would be located in this prison alongside other prominent organised crime convicts. However, the modern construction of this prison should allow for offenders who might otherwise network or influence others to be located separately if security warrants it. There is some evidence that unlike its neighbour Serbia, Kosovo does not house radicalised and non-radicalised prisoners together.[21]

The US, in particular, has been offering advice to the Kosovo Government on de-radicalisation programmes for terrorist offenders, training psychologists and social workers, and vetting moderate prison imams who can address prisoners' ideological dangerousness. In December 2017, the US' Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund approved $2.5 million for a countering violent extremism (CVE) programme funding to bolster the government's capacity to implement its own CVE action plan. Meanwhile, EU funding has largely focused on pre-accession preparation, amounting to €646.5 million

over the 2016-20 period.[22] This funding also includes improvements to police and judicial effectiveness in countering corruption and organised crime, which are both linked to the presence and potency of extremist sentiment.

As of 2018, Kosovo was regarded as the only Balkan country with an operational strategy to reintegrate returning FTFs in play. In fact, months of patient work with US authorities led to the repatriation from Syria of 110 Kosovan citizens, comprising of 4 male fighters, 32 female supporters and 74 children in April 2019.[23] All four fighters were arrested on return and are facing trial, as of writing. This bucks the trend in other European countries, which have been reluctant to even consider repatriating combatants due to fears of security risks and public opinion.

The bold decision to repatriate FTFs back to Kosovo and reintegrate them into society could be a useful template for the EU more widely. However, little is known about the hiring processes to be employed at the secure facility established to receive and process returning FTFs and dependents. Given Kosovo's historically high unemployment rates, it is reasonable to conclude that without proper and sustained economic and social rehabilitation of former combatants in this process, the pull factors of the more prosperous EU countries could drive some alienated and dangerous people into the EU. That factor alone ought to provide EU institutions the impetus for close attention to the safety of EU citizens – specifically in the realms of extremist risk management and supervision, support for disengagement from hateful ideologies and, above all, targeted economic intervention in isolated and vulnerable communities – to ensure that these former ISIS combatants and affiliates have meaningful and sustained alternatives to their radicalised past. However, due to a lack of infrastructure, poor and isolated communities with weak institutions and a large black economy, factors seen in studies of other Balkan nations, success is far from guaranteed.

Conclusion

Kosovo faces significant challenges in relation to criminality, terrorism and the specific way in which they interact. Fragile institutions, ethnic rivalries, entrenched criminality and returning FTFs create a milieu almost unique in Europe in terms of its potential to mobilise extremism. However, the large international presence supporting local authorities also creates possibilities for an intelligent and long-term commitment to socioeconomic approaches to reintegrate extremists and provide legitimate alternatives to ideological violence and criminality.

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The Netherlands

6

by Amanda Paul

While the Netherlands has not witnessed a major terrorist attack since 2004, the terrorist threat level is at four ("substantial") on a scale of five, indicating that the chance of an attack is real.[1] This is due in part to returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), who are viewed as a serious security threat, and in part to the concern generated by several foiled attacks.[2] The high number of known jihadists in the Netherlands is a further factor. According to the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), the "Dutch jihadist movement consists of more than 500 individuals as well as several thousand sympathisers."[3]

Many convicted terrorists, radicalised individuals, FTFs and those identified as being part of jihadi movements have a background in petty crime and violence. Understanding the nexus between criminality and terrorism – including the cooperation between organised criminal gangs and terrorists – is therefore crucial in designing policies to prevent jihadist radicalisation that would lead to terrorism.

International networks are continuing to develop, bringing Dutch and European jihadists more generally into contact with others outside of Europe.

Extremism in the Netherlands

Dutch society woke up to the fact that the ideology of violent jihad had taken root in the Netherlands and that terrorism was no longer just an import from abroad, but rather a home-grown reality.

While there remains a residual threat from far-right and -left extremism, Islamist extremism is a particular concern. The Dutch National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2016-2020 evaluates that the "threat posed by extremism and terrorism is variable and unpredictable".[4] This assessment was vindicated in September 2018 when a major plot concocted by a terrorist cell based in the city of Arnhem and inspired by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) was thwarted.[5] In March 2019, a tram shooting in Utrecht – which Dutch Prosecutors stated had terrorist intent – left four people dead and seven injured.[6] International networks are also continuing to develop, bringing Dutch and European jihadists more generally into contact with others outside of Europe.[7] Meanwhile, counterterrorism efforts are equally collaborative: cooperation between the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and various international and national partners led to the arrest of three individuals in Rotterdam on 17 June 2018, two of whom are suspected of planning a terrorist attack in France.[8]

Extremism in the Netherlands is nothing new. According to a report by the Dutch Ministry of Interior, the Netherlands has faced extremist groups and jihadist networks and individuals since the 1990s:

"Migration processes played a central role in the emergence of these networks. Persons affiliated with extremist Islamist organisations and networks from North Africa and the Middle East, as well as jihad veterans from Afghanistan, Chechnya and Bosnia arrived in the Netherlands as asylum seekers or illegal aliens at the time. Many of these individuals were already known to one another from training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan."[9]

According to the AIVD, veteran fighters have played a central role in radicalising second- and third-generation Dutch Muslim youths. While efforts were initially focused on radical Salafi mosques, recruiters subsequently enlarged their range of action to also include homes, cyberspace, schools and prisons. The majority of those targeted come from deprived districts of major Dutch cities such as Rotterdam, The Hague, Delft and Amsterdam and were often targeted by radical Salafist preachers. For example, Syrian imam Fawaz Jneid gave sermons from the Salafist As-Soennah mosque in The Hague, calling for the deaths of critics of Islam.[10] This mosque, like many others, has been financed by sources in the Gulf.[11] Once influenced by radical Salafists, many of these youths turned against Dutch society and state. Think of Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch citizen of Moroccan descent who killed Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004. Bouyeri had a history of petty crime and violence and had spent several months in prison prior to the murder.

The assassination of van Gogh stunned Dutch society. People woke up to the fact that the ideology of violent jihad had taken root in the Netherlands and that terrorism was no longer just an import from abroad, but rather a home-grown reality.[12] The anti-Islam and -immigration narrative of politicians like Geert Wilders began to gain support. Consequently, more centrist politicians, including current Prime Minister Mark Rutte, began to adopt more conservative views on immigration and assimilation.[13] This increased tensions with the Dutch Muslim community.

However, it was only once the conflict in Syria hit global headlines that the Dutch authorities were truly confronted with the extent of the problem. The high influx of refugees in 2015 raised concerns amongst Dutch society. A year later, the AIVD noted that radical Salafists were attempting to expand their networks among moderate Muslims, occasionally through intimidation and personal violence.[14] There are two known incidents where men were apprehended for recruiting refugees in asylum reception centres in 2015 and 2016 as potential FTFs.[15] Furthermore, in early 2013, the head of the AIVD warned about a significant rise in the number of Dutch youngsters travelling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS, al-Qaeda and other similar groups.[16] Among them was Dutch rapper Marouane Boulahhyani, who was sentenced to six years in jail i*n absentia* in April 2018.[17]

The Netherlands ranks seventh among European Union (EU) member states as a source of FTFs, in both absolute and per capita numbers, with some 285 citizens having travelled to Syria and Iraq.[18] As of today, around 90 of them were killed in the combat zone, and 60 returned to the Netherlands.[19] Identified returnees are arrested and put on trial. While some have been jailed, others have returned to their communities. The possibility that returned FTFs recounting exciting stories of their adventures in Syria runs the risk of more individuals becoming radicalised. The Netherlands, as other European countries, is under pressure to repatriate its FTFs that are currently being held in prison camps in northern Syria. There are currently some 55 adults, of which three quarters are women, and 85 children.[20] However, repatriating FTFs remains unpopular with Dutch authorities, including the House of Representatives.[21]

An important social dynamic in the radicalisation process is related to familial relations and friendship networks. There are many cases of siblings from a single family becoming radicalised – often, the

older sibling influences the younger. Many radicalised individuals have come from dysfunctional families where social control was weak. For example, according to extremism expert Maria Komen,

"many fathers spend a lot of time outside the home, with other men, and scarcely concern themselves with their young children's upbringing. They see childcare and upbringing as women's work. The father is someone who has to be obeyed, not someone with whom the children discuss their problems."[22]

Peer and friend recruitment is also a decisive element within circles that already contain radicalised individuals. Moreover, many of those who joined ISIS already knew someone in Syria, like family members or friends from their old neighbourhood. Groups of friends departing from the cities of Delft and The Hague are evidence of this.[23] Furthermore, a significant number of radicalised Muslims have come from inner-city areas with high rates of crime or have criminal records.[24] Disadvantaged suburbs of major Dutch cities are recruiting grounds for both criminals and terrorists, bringing the two worlds together. This includes Schilderswijk, a suburb in The Hague with immigrants accounting for 90% of the population.

There are also concerns related to the activities of Islamic schools and some mosques. According to the AIVD, radical Islamic preachers have increasing influence on the education of young Muslims in the Netherlands,[25] specifically through afterschool classes on Arabic and Islam. For instance, the Cornelius Haga Lyceum School in Amsterdam's Nieuw-West borough has been accused of recruiting people associated with the terrorist group, the Caucasus Emirate, which is held responsible, among other things, for the 2010 Moscow Metro attack. According to the AIVD, the controversial British Sharia preacher Haitham Al Haddad, well-known for his radical hate speeches, gave "covert" lessons at the Lyceum.[26] The AIVD has repeatedly warned the Mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema of concerns of "anti-democratic and anti-integrative behaviour" at this school.[27] Furthermore, the El Tawheed Mosque in Amsterdam has also frequently been at the centre of allegations that it supports extremists.[28]

Of the terrorist networks, the Hofstad Group, formed in 2002 and closed down two years later, is the most well-known. A radical Islamist group of mostly young Dutch Muslims, including the aforementioned Bouyeri, many members had criminal backgrounds, while the radical behaviour of its members resulted in close monitoring by Dutch intelligence.[29] Hofstad Group members listened to *da'wahs*[30] of radical Salafi preacher Abu Khatib in so-called 'living room meetings'.[31] Audiotapes on jihad and al-Qaeda manuals for bomb-making circulated within the group.[32] In 2005, eight members were sentenced up to 15 years of imprisonment for belonging to a terrorist organisation, plotting attacks and recruiting people. The Hofstad Group was one of the first examples of new home-grown terrorist networks that are increasingly taking root in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe.

Following the group's closure, other radical movements such as Behind Bars, Straat Dawah and Sharia4Holland were born. An off-shoot of Sharia4Belgium, the latter was led by Abu Imran, who had been sentenced with two years in prison for inciting hatred and violence towards non-Muslims.[33] Some of the members of these groups were radicalised on the Internet. Social media, such as De Ware Religie's website, became major radicalisation tools. The first wave of jihadist travellers to Syria was primarily composed of members of Behind Bars and Sharia4Holland.[34]

Organised crime

Organised crime is a serious problem in the Netherlands. The country is a hub for drug production and international trafficking across Europe, not least via the Port of Rotterdam. Of the 11 million containers that pass through the port each year, only 50,000 are scanned, making it a logical entry point for drugs.[35] Arms trafficking is also problematic: while Dutch firearm legislation is strict, there remains a significant black market, mainly sourced from the Balkans. Outlawed motorcycle gangs are also often involved in the trafficking of weapons. The Flemish Peace Institute reports that in recent years both criminals and members of terrorist networks have demonstrated their deft ability to acquire weapons on the Dutch illicit firearms market. Efforts have been made to crack down on illegal gun trafficking as well as to improve the monitoring of the access to firearms by radicalising/radicalised individuals with a criminal profile, or who are members of a criminal network.[36]

Albanian and Italian mafia gangs are particularly problematic and include the notorious 'Ndrangheta. According to the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), this "aggressive, mafia-style organised criminal group is one of the most powerful criminal networks in the world, and controls much of Europe's cocaine trade, combined with systematic money laundering, bribery and violent acts".[37] The Dutch-Moroccan mafia ("Mocro Maffia") is another major challenge. In November 2018 Dutch authorities offered €100,000 for any tips leading to the arrest of Redouane Taghi and Said Razzouki.[38] Both men are on the Netherlands' "most wanted" list for their involvement in drug trafficking and violent crime, including several assassination charges.[39]

An important social dynamic in the radicalisation process is related to familial relations and friendship networks.

Organised crime is a serious problem in the Netherlands. The country is a hub for drug production and international trafficking across Europe, not least via the Port of Rotterdam.

The crime-terror link

There is not a great deal of evidence to demonstrate a deep and sustained relationship between large transnational organised crime groups and terrorist networks in the Netherlands; cooperation mainly occurs on a case-by-case basis. For example, according to Europol, some terrorist groups have made use of migrant-smuggling networks to allow their operatives to enter the EU, along with acquiring firearms and fraudulent documents.[40]

However, the link between criminality and terrorism is much more established when it comes to the radicalisation of individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, particularly in petty crime, violence and drug use. This is apparent when looking at the profiles of Dutch jihadists including Soufian El Fassi, Reda Nidala, Noureddin Benzouagh and the brothers Mourad and Choukri Massali.[41] The relationship between jihadists and criminals has been recognised by the Dutch House of Representatives, which reported that "Dutch jihadists often have a criminal record and use the services of criminal networks, such as the acquisition of forged documents, weapons or explosives."[42]

Organised crime is a serious problem in the Netherlands. The country is a hub for drug production and international trafficking across Europe, not least via the Port of Rotterdam.

Many of the Dutch FTFs that travelled to Syria or Iraq were already known to the Dutch National Police Corps, often for petty crime, but occasionally for more serious offences, too. According to a recent police report, 64% of Dutch FTFs hold a criminal record. 42% of individuals known, suspected or convicted of involvement in terrorism-related offences by the Dutch Prosecution Service previously had criminal careers. 73% of those with such a background had prior convictions for violent crime.[43] Many grew up in relative deprivation, in an environment with relatively high crime rates, or came from broken homes.[44] These are all pivotal recruiting pools for jihadist recruiters.

The link between criminality and terrorism is much more established when it comes to the radicalisation of individuals with a history of criminal behaviour, particularly in petty crime, violence and drug use.

A large number of terrorist offenders are also reported to have mental health problems that might have made them more susceptible to recruitment and vulnerable to radicalisation.[45] According to a study by a researcher for the police force, Anton Weenink, 60% of FTFs were diagnosed with psychological problems.[46]

Prison radicalisation

The Dutch prison system is well-resourced and -staffed. Unlike other prisons in Europe, violent extremist offenders – those charged with or convicted of terrorist activities – are separated from the rest of the prison population, along with individuals that show signs of radicalisation. They are housed in specific wings of two high-security prisons in Vught and Rotterdam – *Terroristenafdeling* (TA) – to reduce the risk of other prisoners being radicalised or prevent the formation of networks between crime and terrorist milieus. As of late 2018, TA Vught had 41 cells spread over 5 subunits, while TA De Schie (Rotterdam) had 7 cells in one unit, totalling a holding capacity of 48.[47] Three new

wings are planned at Vught. A central goal of the TAs is to ensure that the offenders do not leave in a worse state than they come in.

However, according to a 2018 Report by the Open Society Foundations' Justice Initiative and Amnesty International Netherlands, Dutch authorities automatically assign people suspected or convicted of terrorist offences to the TA without proper assessment:

"the TA's legal framework allows the authorities to automatically place individuals suspected or convicted of terrorist offences under Dutch law in a high-security facility, without ever assessing if it is necessary and proportionate to do so."[48]

The same report also reveals that some offenders spend up to 22 hours a day in isolation with limited contact with others, even when they are out of their cell.[49] There are concerns that this isolation exacerbates inmates' radical nature spawned by alienation, thus making any potential rehabilitation programme futile.

Disengagement and reintegration

Dutch prison staff are trained to spot signs of radicalisation in the general prison population. A manual has been published with instructions on what they should look out for, ranging from changes in behaviour and beliefs to displaying Messiah-like attitudes and a desire to convert fellow inmates. The Netherlands does not have a prison intelligence service; however, its security service does work closely with the prisons' security departments. Prison imams are carefully selected: they now have to fulfil a language requirement, provide evidence of religious competence and commit to training exercises.[50]

The Netherlands places significant focus on rehabilitation and disengagement. Detention and Reintegration Plan programmes are tailor-made for each inmate, intending to disconnect them from their ideology and violent tendencies. The programmes begin from the moment a prisoner is placed in the TA and consist of regular psychological and medical assessments.[51]

The Dutch Probation Service engages with persons suspected or convicted of terrorism-related crimes, including recruitment and financing. Suspected or convicted individuals are referred to Team TER (Terrorists, Extremists and Radicals). This team aims to disengage radicalised Muslims – mainly home-grown jihadis – from radical movements using a tailor-made probation approach and in close cooperation with institutional partners (judicial, prison, police and municipal authorities) and psychological and theological experts. Biweekly meetings between these different actors are held to discuss the most appropriate steps to take with the individual.[52]

Following release from prison, local authorities are responsible for the management of ex-convicts' cases with a 'person-specific approach' to help individuals reintegrate. However, this often proves difficult due to the stigma of being a convicted jihadist, and the continued close surveillance by the police and intelligence forces. The Dutch approach to countering terrorism is based on choosing an appropriate intervention on a case-by-case basis whenever a threat arises.

The involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is also crucial. For example, one of the goals of Safety House – an organisation working with youths, persistent offenders, victims and

perpetrators of domestic violence – is to prevent recidivism.[53] While recidivism in the Netherlands is very low, keeping track of released offenders can be difficult if they leave the country, as no Europe-wide database profiling radicalised prisoners currently exists.

Conclusions

In response to the increased terrorist threat, the Dutch government has taken important steps in a continuously evolving approach. Over time, the Netherlands has moved from a method predominantly focused on security response to place more emphasis on prevention, including on the post-prison phase.

The Netherlands places significant focus on rehabilitation and disengagement. Detention and Reintegration Plan programmes are tailor-made for each inmate, intending to disconnect them from their ideology and violent tendencies.

Counterterrorism policy has been strengthened, and tougher legislation depriving known FTFs of their citizenship and passports has been brought into force. A multiagency approach in dealing with the challenge of radicalisation that leads to terrorism has also been adopted: the AIVD, the Military Intelligence and Security Service, the National Police Corps, the Public Prosecution Service, the Tax and Customs Administration and local municipalities working hand-in-hand with NGOs and frontline practitioners to bring together an 'all of society' approach. Central to this is the focus on young people, their environment and on strengthening their resilience to extremist indoctrination and recruitment.

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North Macedonia

7

by Ian Acheson

North Macedonia contains several of the precursors for a relationship between criminality and violent extremism in a post-conflict situation: relatively weak government institutions, widespread corruption and an ongoing transition from authoritarianism to democracy that has allowed ethnic and religious tensions to emerge are common features. In addition, there is a large minority of ethnic Albanians and a severely dysfunctional penal system that is starved of funds and rehabilitation.

North Macedonia is a landlocked Balkan state in Southeast Europe that was once part of the former Yugoslavian federation until its disintegration in 1992. Like Slovenia, North Macedonia was largely spared the intercommunal violence that disfigured the region following the breakup, but a civil war did become a potential reality a decade later when the predominantly Muslim, ethnically Albanian minority rose up against systemic discrimination. More recently, the name of the state was finally settled after years of dispute with neighbouring Greece, which also claims a right to the name, in February 2019. Complex relationships with Bulgaria also feed a view that North Macedonia, in all its post-communist guises, has failed to reconcile minorities, particularly the half a million ethnic Albanians who form 25% of the population.[1]

The involvement of US diplomacy in the conflict resolution points towards their desire to see stability in the region as both North Macedonia and Serbia move towards NATO and EU membership.

In dealing with violent extremism, the predominant threat in terms of numbers, potential lethality and criminal justice activity relate to FTFs returning from the war in Syria.

In July 2017, a new centre-left social democratic government replaced a regime associated with widespread corruption, ethnic nationalism and stagnation. The new government maintains that this change represents an opportunity for the country to recover momentum in its economic and social development – particularly regarding its candidature for accession to the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The US and Russia both have geostrategic interests in North Macedonia, as is made apparent from the size of their embassies. In fact, the new US embassy is one of the largest in Southeast Europe. One US diplomat even emphasised the mediation role the US played in the North Macedonia name dispute and its strategic objectives:

"Our strategy is animated by the realization that the threat from Russia has evolved beyond being simply an external or military one; it includes unprecedentedly brazen influence operations orchestrated by the Kremlin on the soil of our allies and even here at home in the United States."[3]

The involvement of US diplomacy in the conflict resolution points towards their desire to see stability in the region as both North Macedonia and Serbia move towards NATO and EU membership. Furthermore, at the heart of this stability is the control of violent extremism and its criminal counterpart, which

have been a feature of the Balkan landscape since the dissolution of Yugoslavia unleashed ethnic, religious and nationalist divisions.

The legacy of increasingly corrupt and authoritarian rule – from its independence to the establishment of a new government in 2017[4] and ethnic tensions have affected the nature and extent of actions taken to date to counter violent extremism (CVE) in North Macedonia. They also influence the capacity and capability of the authorities to effect practical and tangible improvements to protect their national security.

The challenge of violent extremism

The current threat from violent extremism is well understood, with a particularly strong focus on the risk posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) – citizens of North Macedonia who have fought in Syria and Iraq for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and have, or intend to, return home.[5] Other 'vectors' include the mobilisation of the ethnic Albanian minority within North Macedonia and of nationalist sentiment among the ethnic Macedonian majority, and increased religiosity within either group as an 'accelerant' of violence.

These drivers of radicalisation are a familiar mix in the Balkans more widely, where there is a complex intersection of religion and ethnic groups over time and space. This is illustrated by the impact of demography and religiosity in North Macedonia as a whole and the cities of Skopje and Tetovo in particular. While the capital Skopje is largely Macedonian in ethnic composition, Tetovo is the only largescale settlement with a majority of ethnic Albanians. They complain that they have been marginalised, persecuted and pushed out of the capital, where they claim there has been an overt attempt to make the city more 'Macedonian', with public architecture and symbolism promoting an overtly nationalist past.[6] This contrasts with the much more ethnically diverse Tetovo, where a long tradition of moderate religiosity untainted by fundamentalism is said to have hindered radicalisation. The net effect seems to be that in areas where there is a dominant *and* triumphalist Macedonian Orthodox majority, the minority Albanian Muslim community is more at risk of being radicalised, trading on long-standing grievances and alienation. This assessment is supported by the fact that the majority of FTFs from the country hailed from Skopje or Kumanovo and surrounding districts, the centre of the 2001 Macedonian insurgency.[7]

In dealing with violent extremism, the predominant threat in terms of numbers, potential lethality and criminal justice activity relate to FTFs returning from the war in Syria. Estimated numbers of Macedonian FTFs, their precise motivations and affiliations vary. In 2017, the US Department of State claimed:

"the Ministry of Interior [...] and Intelligence Agency estimated that at least 150 Macedonia nationals travelled to join terrorists in Syria and Iraq. Of that number, 30 were killed, 40 remain there, and 80 returned home to Macedonia."[8]

Government responses to violent extremism

CVE requires a criminal justice response as part of an overall strategy to counter radicalised (and radicalising) behaviour. This has led to a small number of citizens being convicted of terrorist offences and imprisoned.

As a result of the Government's response to the threat posed by returning FTFs, a total of 21 people were arrested between 2015 and 2016 in two high-profile operations, of which 11 received prison sentences for enabling or participating as FTFs for ISIS-affiliated groups. These sentences for terrorism offences ranged from two to seven years. While some of these prisoners have since been released from custody, they have been succeeded by others convicted or suspected of terrorism offences, again mainly related to (support for) ISIS.

Figures concerning the overall number of those convicted for Islamist-related terrorist offences vary.

More recent counterterrorist activity has centred on the 2018 convictions for offences committed by ethnic Albanians in Kumanovo in 2016, in which nine police officers were killed by an armed gang claiming to represent the paramilitary National Liberation Army (ONA). These offences are not considered to be religious in nature but rather spurred by agitated militant separatism demanding independence, even though the true identities and motivations of the group remain contested.[9] Interestingly, there is considerable evidence that this grouping had combat experience in Kosovo and developed links with organised crime syndicates, including the sale of weapons to terrorist organisations.[10] The ONA formally dissolved in 2001 and many of its commanders made the transition to the formal political process, forming the Democratic Union for Integration, the third largest party in North Macedonia and the largest Albanian party in the country.

Various observers agree that the inhumane and violent conditions inside many North Macedonian prisons are conducive to radicalisation.

Finally, in February 2019, the North Macedonian Minister of Interior Affairs, Oliver Spasovski, claimed that an attack by Islamist terrorists had been thwarted through raids and the confiscation of "objects and devices".[11] This police action coincided with the US Embassy in Skopje issuing a warning to US citizens, stating that there was a heightened risk of attacks by extremists.[12]

Figures concerning the overall number of those convicted for Islamist-related terrorist offences vary: in information disclosed by personnel to this author in 2017, the British Embassy estimate was 26. North Macedonia's prison directorate, or Directorate for

the Execution of Sanctions (DES), provided a figure of 19 while its Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) stated it was 27.[13] Despite the dynamics of a fluid prison population, this lack of precision is surprising, indicating that there is a lack of 'real-time' capacity to track and categorise extremist offenders correctly, both in the prison system and post-release.

A dysfunctional prison system

The prison system in North Macedonia consists of 14 institutions: 11 prisons and 3 juvenile correctional facilities. It has an operating capacity of 2,476 and an incarceration rate of 146 prisoners per 100,000, which places it at the lower end of global incarceration rates. Yet the occupancy rate of 122.3% implies that many institutions suffer from chronic overcrowding. The trend of imprisonment in absolute numbers and percentages has climbed steadily since 2000.[14]

The largest penitentiary in North Macedonia is Kolonija Idrizovo prison, on the outskirts of the capital Skopje. It also holds the majority of the country's convicted violent extremists and those accused of such crimes in pre-trial detention. In 2016, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture reported that the "violence in Idrizovo Prison is integrally linked to the endemic corruption that has pervaded the whole prison and implicates prison officers, including officers of all grades up to the most senior officers, and educators."[15] Furthermore, "[a]t Idrizovo Prison, every aspect of imprisonment is up for sale, from obtaining a place in a decent cell, to home leave, to medication, to mobile phones and drugs."[16]

There are significant staffing problems at Idrizovo: the actual number of resources available was and reputedly remains well below the required complement to run the prison safely or effectively. This author observed a chronic and long-term problem aggravated further by a lack of formal training for the prison staff. In fact, recruitment is rather random and haphazard, based on basic security checks. Various observers agree that the inhumane and violent conditions inside many North Macedonian prisons are conducive to radicalisation.

Corruption within the North Macedonian prison police is another problem which is regularly highlighted in existing research.[18] Uniformed staff operate in high-gain/low-risk prison environments where rewards far outweigh the risk of being detected and a culture of impunity or resignation reigns. Authorities have taken action in recent months to tackle corruption in prisons, but the sheer volume of allegations is evidence of an endemic problem and should give cause for serious concern. Staff can be lured by financial inducement, blackmail or ideology. The latter possibility is particularly dangerous as it creates more room for manoeuvre for terrorist prisoners. While no instance of this was reported until 2017, even the slightest shift in prisoner dynamics (i.e. an increase in convictions following more assertive police action) could easily enable it.

There was no evidence of any relationship between organised crime and extremist groups until 2017, despite the unfettered access each had to the other within the North Macedonian prison estate.[19] Given the absence of any meaningful intelligence-gathering mechanism, however, this assertion must be dealt with cautiously. The likelihood of such a link actually existing in a country with a significant organised crime problem is high and has been recognised by the

European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol):

"The threat emanating from links between serious and organised crime and terrorism is two-fold. Firstly, the potential exploitation of OCG [organised crime groups] infrastructures to procure tools, such as firearms or fraudulent documents, and move goods and people may deliver lethal weapons used in attacks in the EU to terrorist groups. Secondly, involvement in serious and organised crime may allow terrorist actors to generate funds to finance terrorism-related activities."[20]

Moreover, the socioeconomic disparity between the Albanian minority and ethnic North Macedonian majority most likely plays a role in the disproportionate representation of Albanians in the prison population and their vulnerability, as a religious group, to violent extremism:

"Commentators argue that the staggering disparity in the quality of life and public investments along ethnic lines was exploited by radical and extremist groups in Macedonia, especially in Skopje and Kumanovo, where such groups continue their activities unabated by the authorities. The alleged discriminatory approach of the state authorities has affected motivations among the Albanian youth in Macedonia and made them look for other alternatives, including a search for a broader identity category in an attempt to reframe the power relations between the Macedonian majority and the disempowered Albanian community."[21]

According to UBK officers, Islamist extremism is becoming a more serious phenomenon in the country, and they identify Albanian nationalism as an influential factor. Regarding prison radicalisation, they confirmed that radical Islam was being preached in some prisons and that corruption within the prison police allowed jihadists to network with each other and external audiences. The interception and eradication of illicit mobile phone and social media communication were hampered by the introduction of stricter controls on the interception of communications after an illegal wiretapping scandal that precipitated the collapse of the previous government.[23]

The CVE approach

Although there is some evidence that the UBK is working with prison authorities to develop a special regime for violent extremists which attempts to minimise the threat of extremist contagion to other prisoners, it is unclear whether this has been sufficiently realised.[24] This work, part of an overall counterterrorism (CT)/CVE strategy developed by the government in 2017, will also need to cope with the significant number of returning FTFs. In 2017, North Macedonia became the first European country to repatriate its FTFs in an operation reputedly coordinated by and at the behest of US authorities; namely seven North Macedonian jihadists who had been captured and held by the Syrian Democratic Forces – the Kurdish-led, Western-backed militia – in Syria.[25] Like many other Balkan countries with fragile institutions and poor resources, the long and specialised process of reintegration and disengagement of these offenders is still in its infancy.

The national four-year counter-extremism strategy was launched in 2018 by the North Macedonian Government's National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism. A comprehensive document, it includes a specific section on prisons which focuses on reforms to combat the rise of extremism. These include engaging religious leaders in dialogue; improving

detention conditions, risk assessment and training for staff; providing education for prisoners; and installing a reintegration task force.[26] Many countries facing a threat from violent Islamist extremism have enlisted the support of moderate Muslim theologians to counter extremist narratives – this is still very much a work-in-progress in North Macedonia, however.

The Islamic Religious Community of North Macedonia (IRC) is the independent yet officially recognised voice of Islam in North Macedonia. Former leader Sulejman Rexhepi stated in an interview with this author that the IRC represented multi-ethnic Islam and had been present in North Macedonia for 628 years.[27] The organisation represents North Macedonian Muslims from a wide range of ethnic groups, including North Macedonian, Albanian, Turk, Bosniak, Egyptian and Roma, as well as the country's Muslim diaspora.

Rexhepi informed the author of this chapter that the IRC was ready to provide moderate imams for North Macedonian prisons, to provide an antidote to the Wahhabist influences that were corrupting Muslim inmates. In 2015, the IRC created a programme that sought to support the families of FTFs in Syria and tackle the social stigma of those returning, in an attempt to de-radicalise them. It appears that this project floundered due to a lack of political support and resources, but it still illustrates the important role of religious communities in disengagement efforts.[28]

According to UBK officers, Islamist extremism is becoming a more serious phenomenon in the country, and they identify Albanian nationalism as an influential factor.

In 2017, North Macedonia became the first European country to repatriate its FTFs in an operation reputedly coordinated by and at the behest of US authorities.

Conclusions

North Macedonia is a country in transition after years of conflict and ethnic tensions. Like its Balkan neighbours, it is a relatively fragile state and is challenged by incompetent officials, severely limited resources, entrenched corruption and nationalism, that frequently operate together to allow the potential for relationships between criminal elements and ideologues to develop. However, there are signs that the state is attempting to reduce the alienation of its Albanian minority, tackle economic stagnation and reform its institutions. As for the relationship between terrorism and crime, the main threat seems to emanate from the institutional corruption and ineffectiveness of the North Macedonian prison service, and the lack of effective police action to understand and combat the national security risk this poses behind prison walls and through the gates into the community.

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Republic of Ireland

8

by Ian Acheson

The relationship between crime and terrorism in Ireland has changed over time. The creation of the modern Republic of Ireland following the Easter Rising in 1916 is built on the myths and truths of an armed insurrection against British rule. The historically complex and sometimes fraught relationship between some actors in the new Irish state and subversives claiming to be the holders of the 'true Republican ideal' is contentiously debated over. The complexity of this relationship has reportedly affected the ability of those combatting extremist violence to operate effectively during the intercommunal violence in Northern Ireland (NI) through the 1970s to 90s.[1] However, the commitment to fight extremism is now not in question.

The border between the Republic of Ireland and the UK has been a contested zone since the inception of the Irish state.

The partition of Ireland set the conditions for a series of terrorist campaigns by militant Irish republicans, who were committed to (forcibly) removing the new border and ending British jurisdiction on the six counties of NI. The last phase of that campaign formally ended with paramilitary ceasefires and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998,[2] which committed all of NI's main political actors to pursue political objectives, including reunification, through exclusively peaceful means. The Agreement also resulted in the early release of a significant number of paramilitary prisoners from both Loyalist and Republican groupings. Despite two decades of relative peace and slowly growing economic prosperity, the benefits of this peace process have not permeated all sections of society in NI. Polarisation – and the violent extremism that it energises – still exists in deprived communities, and the collapse of the power-sharing NI government in January 2017[3] is both a cause and a consequence of this failure.

A series of up to four shipments of armaments, from Libya to the IRA in the mid-1980s, has resulted in the strong possibility of a very significant amount of weaponry, ammunition and explosives in hidden dumps on either side of the border.

The history of the Irish crime-terror threat

The factors cited above are significant in terms of the contemporary relationship between criminality and terrorism in Ireland. The political environment of Brexit has soured formerly excellent relationships between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK), who will share the European Union's (EU) only land border with Britain in the event of Brexit happening. This creates a national security dilemma for both the UK and Republic of Ireland in the event that the rules of movement of goods and people across this contested frontier are not agreed upon. In light of the domestic (non-jihadist) terrorism, a failure

to settle the border issue creates a pretext for political violence that might eventually lead to the 're-securitisation' of the frontier. Regarding transnational violent extremism, an unsecured and unsettled border remains an attractive, highly vulnerable 'backdoor' into the UK for jihadist terrorists, now potentially coupled with the assistance of mobilised dissident republican terrorists, who are themselves also involved in lucrative, cross-border organised crime.

The border between the Republic of Ireland and the UK has been a contested zone since the inception of the Irish state. It winds across 499 kilometres, cutting through communities and sometimes even private dwellings, and has 208 crossing points – many of which are minor roads that are bisected more than once. The difficulties in policing such a border, often used by terrorists to evade capture, have always existed. During the "Troubles" from 1969 to 1998 in NI, the border became increasingly militarised in an attempt to deny republican terrorists the opportunity to operate with impunity and move between jurisdictions. Traditional law enforcement existed but was severely curtailed by the security threat that personnel faced from terrorists. Fiscal, customs and currency differences between the two jurisdictions made smuggling attractive. In fact, there is detailed evidence that senior commanders in the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) were involved in the smuggling of pigs, cattle, fuel and oil, and that this money was used to finance terrorist operations.[4] The latest analysis of a joint crime taskforce between the UK and Republic of Ireland confirms the continuing vulnerability:

"The Common Travel Area (CTA) in existence between IRL and the United Kingdom (UK), provides major benefits (economic, cultural and societal) to those who live and work in both jurisdictions and enables and encourages the free movement of goods, money, people and information. It however also provides opportunities for exploitation by criminals, illegal immigrants and extremists who use the border to facilitate and enable criminality."[5]

Factors fuelling the crime-terror nexus are currently present in Ireland. These include: a large number of combat-experienced and technically competent bomb-makers at liberty, an unknown amount of hidden weaponry that may not have been decommissioned, a small number of active dissident terrorists capable of mounting attacks against British state personnel and institutions, a border zone still fraught with symbolism and difficult to police even at the most peaceful of times, and an intimate culture and relationship where terrorists use and connect with criminals to further their ideological aims.

At the height of NI's Troubles, the UK side of the border was policed by the British Army using fortified and permanent vehicle checkpoints and huge surveillance towers placed in the contested region of South Armagh. A combination of hundreds of regular army and Special Forces were required to protect the Royal Ulster Constabulary and contain a sophisticated, active and lethal insurgency. Meanwhile, on the southern side of the border, three battalions of the Republic's Defence Forces and an armoured squadron were required to fulfil the same duty in support of their civil police, An Garda Síochána or more commonly known as the Gardaí.

The militarisation of the border effectively ended in the early 2000s, when bases on both sides were closed, and the British Army returned to its barracks. According to a former senior officer of the Republic's Defence Forces,[6] such is the poor state of their capability and morale[7] – already one of the smallest armies in the EU – that it can no longer provide the necessary backup protection against organised crime gangs (OCGs) with close ties to domestic extremists exploiting this contentious border area. These assertions have been backed up by comments from other former officers in

the approach to Brexit. According to former senior Defence Forces officer Sergeant-Major Noel O'Callaghan, speaking about the withdrawal of forces from the border,

"[t]he closing of the Mullingar, Longford, Cavan and Monaghan barracks has created a dangerous strategic vacuum. […] The border is now policed from Dublin, even in the best of times that is logistically difficult. […] Concern is now rife throughout the ranks over their capacity to police the border. […] We are in a worse state in protecting our territorial integrity than the scenario in the 1970s. We have lost corporate knowledge, infrastructure and logistical capacity."[8]

In relation to police primacy in the fight against crime-terror and the capability of new Gardaí recruits to counter it, he added: "Forget about foreign extremists, our smugglers and extremists are even more dangerous, and the border is no place for a young lad just out of Templemore."[9]

Aggravating this already potent threat is the almost certain existence of a large number of illegal arms still hidden in the Irish countryside. A series of up to four shipments of armaments, from Libya to the IRA in the mid-1980s,[10] has resulted in the strong possibility of a very significant amount of weaponry, ammunition and explosives in hidden dumps on either side of the border. Unionist politicians insisted on the decommissioning of these weapons as a necessary condition for entering into a power-sharing executive devolved administration. The initial failure of the IRA to do so led to the first suspension of the NI assembly in 2000.[11]

The British and Irish governments created a mechanism for the decommissioning of all terrorist arms, and that process concluded in relation to arms held by the IRA in 2005.[12] However, there has been intense speculation that significant amounts of material that could be used by other terrorist groupings, including dissident republican terrorists who reject the Belfast Agreement, still remain hidden and potentially accessible. Reports of recent weapons finds linked to the "New IRA" – a post-ceasefire, dissident republican terrorist splinter group which rejects the terms of the Belfast Agreement – reinforce the notion that due to splits in the Provisional IRA ranks over decommissioning during the Troubles era, the arms caches 'put beyond use' in the decommissioning process were not the whole of the PIRA inventory.[13]

Organised crime gangs

There is evidence that given the lack of capacity in the Republic to counter the crime-terror threat, there is a well-developed if often fractious relationship between dissident republican terrorists in various post-ceasefire iterations of the IRA and OCGs that plague some parts of the country, notably Dublin and Limerick.[14]

As far back as 2012, the state had identified 25 crime gangs operating in the Republic, with at least five being transnational in nature. At the time, almost all were focused on the importation of drugs. Irish police expressed "serious concern" about the "friction and facilitation" relationship between OCGs and dissident republican terrorists[15] who reject the Belfast Agreement peace deal, which formally ended the conflict in NI in 1998. This relationship of facilitation includes terrorist extremists involved in criminal protection rackets, money laundering and the trade of illicit drugs; and OCGs that manage and enable the logistics. In one example, a

dissident republican grouping allegedly offered OCGs associates in the Hutch crime family syndicate explosives for criminal use. The "friction" emanates from near continuous feuds within and between OCGs and extremist groups that have resulted in multiple fatalities over the last five years.[16] In another example, a feud between the Hutch OCG and another crime family, the Kinahan's, resulted in the deaths of 12 gang members in under two years, with two of these associates having direct links to dissident republican groups.[17]

The police response has been continuous attrition of crime family syndicates through regular arrests, imprisonment and confiscation of criminal assets. The latter method has proven to be so effective that several central members of the most prominent OCGs have fled the Republic and are now in hiding in Spain or NI, where ex-loyalist paramilitaries largely control the supply and distribution of drugs.[18]

The Gardaí primarily manages the combat against criminality and terrorism. It is worth noting that, unlike other EU member states, the Republic of Ireland has neither a domestic nor a foreign intelligence service, as both roles are spread over several state agencies instead. The Gardaí's Special Detective Unit (SDU) is responsible for managing all threats to the security of the state, as well as monitoring individuals who pose a risk. Specifically, the Garda Counter-Terrorism International (CTI) unit within the SDU is responsible for the analysis and investigation of the risks posed by individuals, from or based in Ireland, suspected of engaging in foreign terrorism, including Islamist extremism. The Irish state has counterterrorism legislation to deal with offenders; much of it originates from the Offences Against the State Act, 1939,[19] as amended to take into account the evolution of the nature of terrorism, from domestic to international threats.

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Threat from jihadist radicalisation

Census data in 2016 shows that the Muslim community in Ireland numbers approximately 63,000 – a 29% increase from 2011.[20] Islam is now the Republic's third largest religious affiliation behind Christian denominations and is widely regarded as one of the most integrated in Europe. However, there is evidence that the threat of radicalisation does exist within the community, especially amongst youths. One

prominent theologian and imam at Al-Mustafa Islamic Centre of Ireland, west of Dublin, Shaykh Dr. Umar al-Qadri, has been vocal in warning against the threat of extremist indoctrination that has led to what the Irish Department of Justice and Equality estimates to be around 50 people leaving their homes in Ireland to fight for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria.[21] This number is relatively small in absolute terms, but compared against Ireland's Muslim population, it does mean that the country is one of the biggest per-capita exporters of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in Europe.[22]

According to interviews with senior Irish security sources,[23] the Republican state does not have wide powers to detain ISIS extremist suspects who return to Ireland from abroad. Unlike the UK, which has strong legal powers to stop and detain persons suspected of involvement in foreign terrorism at all entry points, the Gardaí prefer a more low-key consensual approach. This typically involves the police developing a long-term relationship with those suspected of engaging in violent extremism, but for whom proof to a criminal standard is lacking. This mirrors the government's approach to counter-extremism,[24] where the dispersal of new migrant arrivals from Syrian conflict zones occurs across Ireland. The importance of reintegration and community policing to support it are emphasised to prevent youth from becoming radicalised by ideologues.

There have been criticisms of the Gardaí and other agencies for their low-key approach to dealing with the threat of radicalisation. This was revealed when it was established that Moroccan national Rachid Redouane, one of the 2017 London Bridge terrorist attackers, had lived in Dublin for five years prior to the incident and had not been subject to any form of investigation or surveillance while there.[25]

Another point of difference between Irish and British authorities' approaches is illustrated by the different treatments of Lisa Smith, an Irish woman who converted to Islam, travelled to Syria in 2014 and is suspected of affiliation to ISIS; and of UK national Shamima Begum, who has been denied return to Britain and stripped of her citizenship by the Government. The Irish Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has indicated that Smith will be allowed to return to Ireland, though she may be subject to criminal sanction.[26]

Extremism and organised crime in prisons

It is estimated that there are five people within the Irish prison system who have been convicted for Islamist extremism related offences. Security sources suggest that all of these relate to terrorism funding offences, as opposed to active engagement in terrorist plots.[27] This reinforces other evidence which suggests that ISIS and its affiliates regard the Republic of Ireland as a target for criminal exploitation for fundraising, as opposed to a target for a terrorist attack.

A small number of prison staff have received training by the Irish Prison Service to identify signs of radicalisation.[28] Domestic terrorists – largely dissident republican terrorist groups – are the predominant extremist threat group in the state. They are held separately in a high-security wing, E Block, in the country's maximum-security Portlaoise Prison. The perimeter of this prison is protected by the Irish Army which maintains a permanent presence there. It would be logical to assume

that any new generation of Islamist terrorist prisoners would also be housed in secure and separate conditions. These arrangements also have value in separating ideologically inspired prisoners from criminal gangs and thus preventing networks from being established across the two groups.

It is clear that, like other member states, the Irish prison system does suffer from endemic gang problems. A union official, speaking at the Irish Prison Officers' Association conference in May 2019[29] referred to the existence of 28 active gangs in one medium-security prison with up to 230 prisoners isolated for their own protection. Gang members were reported of using violence and intimidation against staff and exploiting vulnerable people to subvert the power structure in the prison environment and carry on criminal activity.

Islam is now the Republic's third largest religious affiliation behind Christian denominations and is widely regarded as one of the most integrated in Europe. However, there is evidence that the threat of radicalisation does exist within the community, especially amongst youths.

It is clear that, like other member states, the Irish prison system does suffer from endemic gang problems.

Conclusion

The significance of an entrenched and sophisticated culture of collaboration between criminals and terrorists in the Republic of Ireland – with clear evidence that both have successfully interacted in the past to provide mutual aid – ought to concern policymakers in regard to the crime-terror nexus. Added to this is the already sensitive and contested land border in Ireland, which is destined to become an EU external border if Brexit happens. There is little evidence yet to indicate any direct cooperation between Irish-born or -based Islamist extremists and dissident extremists or OCGs. However, transnational terrorism operating over this border and within the Republic of Ireland still poses a real risk. Given the convergence of interests and tactical opportunities and the strong historical cooperation of such groups in a domestic context, the possibility of that extending to jihadist groups cannot be discounted.

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Sweden

9

by Amanda Paul

Sweden has long been viewed as a tolerant state with a history of being a safe haven for those fleeing conflict. However, this positive image has been tarnished in recent years by growing violent gang crime and extremist Islamist radicalisation.[1]

The problem stems in large part from the geographical segregation and socioeconomic inequality of immigrants in large cities, which has led to their social exclusion from mainstream Swedish society and institutions. These "parallel societies" have, over time, become incubators for crime and jihadist radicalisation, with many moving from one world to the other.

"Parallel societies" have, over time, become incubators for crime and jihadist radicalisation, with many moving from one world to the other.

According to the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO), while gang crime along with far-right extremism are considered serious challenges, the greatest threat to security comes from jihadist terrorism.[2] Sweden has not only suffered and thwarted terrorist attacks, but has also witnessed a high mobilisation of Swedish nationals travelling to Syria and Iraq as foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). In fact, the country has one of the highest mobilisation rates per capita in Europe, with approximately 300 FTFs.[3] The majority of these FTFs have a history of criminality and originate from the same neighbourhoods.

While Sweden became one of the first countries to adopt a policy of multiculturalism, they also failed to integrate Muslims within the rest of society. As such, Sweden is a prime case of mass immigration without assimilation.

Today the overall threat to Sweden from terrorism is assessed as "Elevated (3)", out of a maximum of five levels.[4] In 2017, SÄPO was monitoring some 2,000 individuals identified as national security threats, while thousands more are thought to sympathise with their Islamic extremist ideology.[5] According to the head of SÄPO, Klas Friberg, in 2019 there are some 3,000 people that the Swedish authorities suspect could commit terror crimes on Swedish soil.[6]

Ever since Swedish artist Lars Vilks portrayed the Prophet Muhammad as a cartoon dog in 2007, Sweden has become a more prominent target for violent extremists. In December 2010, Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, a 28-year-old Iraqi-born Swedish national, detonated a car bomb and a suicide belt in Stockholm. In April 2017, Uzbek citizen Rakhmat Akilov, who had been denied asylum, mowed down pedestrians in the capital with a truck, killing five people.

There have also been several foiled plots: in December 2018, SÄPO arrested a person suspected of "preparing or inciting" a terror attack and of possessing illegal weapons.[7] In January 2019, six men of Uzbek and Kyrgyz nationality were charged with planning a terrorist attack and financing terrorism.[8]

As with other countries, there is also a transnational element to the Swedish terrorist threat. Osama Krayem, a Swedish

citizen from Malmö, was involved in both the November 2015 Paris attacks and 2016 Brussels bombings. Like many other radicalised individuals, Krayem became involved in petty crime and drugs before becoming radicalised and leaving to join the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria.[9]

All in all, Swedes have woken up to the stark new reality that their country is facing a serious threat from terrorism. According to SÄPO, there are alerts of potential terrorist plans every other day.[10]

The roots of extremism

Since the 1970s, large numbers of non-European immigrants and asylum seekers have moved to Sweden, introducing different religions and ethnicities to its social and demographic fabrics. This includes large Muslim diasporic flows, first from the Balkans and later from other conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. In 2015, Sweden accepted more refugees per capita than any other European country, having received nearly 163,000 asylum applications.[11]

The majority of asylum seekers have been housed in the same districts, creating areas of geographical segregation from mainstream Swedish society. Over time, this has led to the social exclusion of immigrants. While in 1975 Sweden became one of the first countries to adopt a policy of multiculturalism, embracing ethnic and religious diversity and offering state support to safeguard minority identities and cultures,[12] they also failed to integrate Muslims within the rest of society. As such, Sweden is a prime case of mass immigration without assimilation.

One of the key factors leading to this phenomenon is a decade-long programme that began in 1965 to build a million new housing units on the outskirts of Sweden's big cities, including Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Over time, these neighbourhoods have become socioeconomically disadvantaged and rundown, while according to a police report the number of socially-excluded areas has significantly grown in just under three decades, from 3 to 61. The same report estimates that there are around 5,000 criminals and 200 criminal networks in these vulnerable areas.[13] However, experts such as the economist Tino Sanandaji report that the figure is even higher today.[14] Participation in the formal labour market is significantly lower than the Swedish average in these areas, as is the average salary of those in employment.[15] There is also poorer student achievement and higher crime rates than in areas with a minor population of immigrants.

Take for example the district of Rosengård in Malmö: its major social problems, poverty and deteriorated physical environment is reflected in its poor school performances, riots and high crime rates.[16] In fact, as a whole the city of Malmö has suffered from serious gang crime. Angered, one of Gothenburg's poorest suburbs, is another case. While a third of Gothenburg's population is of immigrant descent (mainly Muslim), the (dis)proportion of Muslims rises to over 70% in Angered. Furthermore, at least 100 Swedish FTFs, male and female, originate from the city of Gothenburg. Two-thirds of children have dropped out of school by the time they are 15 and unemployment is at 11%, which is high by Swedish standards.[17] Young, disillusioned high school dropouts are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by either criminal gangs or jihadist groomers.

Salafism has also spread in these areas. A recent study by the Swedish Defence University concludes that Salafist milieus have been growing stronger during this past decade. The study estimates that there are currently up to 150 "Salafist jihadists" in the Stockholm area alone.[18] According to Magnus Ranstorp, author of the report and a prominent researcher on extremism, "Salafists advocate gender segregation, demand that women veil themselves to limit 'sexual temptation', restrict women's role in the public sphere and strongly oppose listening to music and some sports activities".[19] Such a social milieu has bred distrust towards institutions, and not least the police, who often have trouble maintaining public order in these areas to begin with.[20] This has led to the police implementing more rigorous surveillance and stop-and-search policies. Consequently, they have been accused of racism and ethnic profiling. Against such a background, social tensions between mainstream Swedish society and what has been termed by some experts as a "parallel society" have increased.

Radicalisation

The majority of Sweden's jihadists come from deprived neighbourhoods, although this is clearly not the only factor for radicalisation. For one, radicalisation does not necessarily depend on the urban context. Aydin Sevigin, who was apprehended before he could execute a bomb attack in 2016, hailed from an affluent area of Stockholm. Furthermore, numerous individuals from deprived neighbourhoods go on to have successful lives, including Swedish footballer and Rosengård native Zlatan Ibrahimović.

Secondly, the process of radicalisation has several push-and-pull factors. Social, political and economic grievances; a sense of injustice and discrimination; identity crises; social exclusion; alienation and marginalisation are key push factors. Meanwhile, pull factors include a sense of belonging to a cause, ideology or social network; as well as personal redemption.[21]

In the case of Sweden – as in other countries – there is a mix of both push and pull factors. In particular, an important social dynamic is present in the process of radicalisation, which is related to familial and friendship networks. Many of those radicalised in Sweden have come from the same areas and share similar grievances, and were also often part of a social circle which already contained radicalised individuals. Online radicalisation also remains a serious challenge. The aforementioned Akilov used the Internet to seek help and inspiration through encrypted messaging apps, and had extensive virtual links to ISIS.[22] The Internet also played a key role in Aydin Sevigin's radicalisation.

In response, Swedish authorities have adopted a multiagency and cross-sectoral prevention approach, which includes a national Network of Experts made up of state and local officials, organisations and faith communities that have insight on how violent extremism can be prevented.[23]

Some mosques and religious foundations and schools also play a role in radicalisation, as they can serve as the meeting grounds between individuals and radical preachers. For example, Abdel Nasser El Nadi, the head of the Vetenskapsskolan science school, had been on the radar of the intelligence agencies for a considerable period as a recruiter of Islamic extremism[24] before authorities finally cracked down. He was placed in custody on 17 May 2019. Three prominent imams were also arrested in May:

Abo Raad in Gävle, Hussein Al-Jibury in Umeå and Fekri Hamad in Västerås.[25]

Sweden has also seen a flood of its citizens leaving to fight for ISIS. Swedes joining terrorist organisations is not a new phenomenon: about 30 Somali-Swedes joined al-Shabaab between 2006 and 2009.[26] What is new, however, is the unprecedented number that left for ISIS-held territories. According to recent statistics, of the 311 that went to Syria and Iraq, a third have returned, a third have been killed and the final third are either still in the conflict zone or elsewhere.[27] Returning FTFs remain a significant security threat: it has proven so difficult to prosecute returning FTFs due to the lack of evidence, that none of them are currently convicted or imprisoned. Rather, they have returned to their communities, where according to some experts they are "often welcomed like rock stars" by some groups and individuals.[28] Some of these individuals are viewed as being so dangerous that they are intensely monitored by security services. The Swedish authorities have recently proposed the establishment of an international tribunal to try ISIS fighters.[29]

Young, disillusioned high school dropouts are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by either criminal gangs or jihadist groomers.

According to another study carried out by the Swedish Defence University, the majority of FTFs come from four of Sweden's 21 counties – Västra Götaland County, Stockholm County, Skåne County and Örebro County. More than 70% were residents of socially-deprived areas suffering from high criminality and a low socioeconomic status. Some were groomed by recruiters, while many others were recruited via social media. The study also reveals that many of those that went to Syria already had criminal backgrounds. Of the known Swedish FTFs that have been killed, 68% were previously investigated for criminal behaviour, while 34% were tried for criminal offences.[30]

Many of those radicalised in Sweden have come from the same areas and share similar grievances, and were also often part of a social circle which already contained radicalised individuals.

Organised crime

Since the late 1980s, Sweden has witnessed increasing violence committed by criminal and organised crime gangs. Gang-related gun murders, mainly a phenomenon of socially-deprived areas with high (male) migrant populations, increased from 4 per year in the early 1990s to around 40 in 2017.[31] The figure increased further a year later, with police statistics reporting that 45 people were killed and 135 people were injured in a total of 306 shootings.[32] Despite tightened guns laws, firearms are easily available in Sweden, the majority of which originate from the Balkans.[33]

Organised crime in Sweden has significantly grown over the last three decades and many of those involved are minors. Much of the country's gun crime is linked to drugs, including drug trafficking. New figures from the Swedish National Forensic Centre also show that the number of drug cases has doubled in a decade, from just over 22,000 cases to slightly over 44,000. Gun crime frequently revolves around drug deals, (gang) rivalry and revenge (attacks).[34]

According to a recent report by the Institute for Future Studies think-tank, biker gangs, including Hells Angels MC and Bandidos MC, are the biggest criminal groupings in Sweden with 5,693 registered individuals, while 5,094 are associated with criminal networks in socially-deprived areas. Of these, some 835 people were considered to have direct links with 'football firms'[35] and 785 with Islamist groups.[36]

The Swedish authorities have recently proposed the establishment of an international tribunal to try ISIS fighters.

In the early 2000s, new criminal gangs emerged in Sweden, broadly made up of youths with marginalised backgrounds. They include Brödraskapet ('The Brotherhood'), the Original Gangsters, the Werewolf Legion, the Naserligan ('Naser Gang'), the Black Cobra and the Asir.[37] Some of these groups were founded in prisons. As with extremists, criminal gangs are generally made up of individuals that have close familial or friendly connections, often hailing from the same neighbourhood. Ethnic ties can also play a role. A final point to make is that 5,000 people who can be linked to organised crime have been diagnosed with psychiatric problems.[38]

Organised crime in Sweden has significantly grown over the last three decades and many of those involved are minors.

The crime-terror nexus

A new Swedish report on extremism and organised crime studying a total of 15,244 people – who police and intelligence services identified as suspected members of Sweden's violent extremist or organised crime groups – concludes that both worlds cooperate with each other.[39]

Many ISIS recruits have relied on drug trafficking as a means of generating revenue. Ranstorp has dubbed this grassroots phenomenon as "microfinancing the Caliphate", in which jihadists engage in various types of fraud, petty theft and other low-level criminal activities.[40] Proceeds garnered from peddling narcotics allow jihadists in Europe the financial flexibility to travel back and forth to ISIS-held territories, as well as procure the necessary resources for a terrorist attack, such as weapons, vehicles and cell phones.

Yet, overall, there is little evidence of an institutional nexus between organised crime and terrorism. Rather, what is apparent is that there is a *social* nexus, with a partial merging of criminal and jihadist milieus, whereby jihadists are often recruited from the same demographic and social pools and urban environments as criminals.

Prison radicalisation

To return to the previous topic of jihadist radicalisation, this phenomenon occurs not only on the streets of Sweden, but in its prisons, too. Out of a total of 48 prisons and 30 remand units, 7 consist of largescale, high-security prisons, of which 3 have secluded maximum-security units for 72 extremely high-risk prisoners.[41]

The Swedish authorities have identified radicalisation in prisons as a security concern. 80 inmates are presently monitored for signs of radicalisation or their (potential) vulnerability to extremist narratives and networks. This number is much higher than that of inmates locked up for terrorism-related offences, which currently only amounts to six.

Prisoners not considered extremely high-risk are dispersed throughout the prison system in order to avoid the formation of cliques. However, the prison environment increases the risk of connections between criminal gang members and extremists, which can include skills transfer or exchange of external contacts.

Since 2015, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) has actively begun educating its staff on radicalisation, how to deal with radicalised individuals and the warning signs to look out for. A central feature is to build dialogue and trust between the detainees and prison staff. For example, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) programme focuses on the values and thought patterns of offenders using cognitive behavioural therapy.[42] Prison officers use observation forms to keep a record of the radicalised inmates, including their interactions with other prisoners. The SPPS also reviews religious counsellors employed at the prisons.

The SPPS plays a central role in the identification of individuals at risk of being radicalised. Their backgrounds, contacts and prison activities are all checked and monitored. Disengagement programmes have also become general practice in Sweden. Programmes such as Entré, which was originally developed for criminal gang members and has proven to be successful, are now being tested for violent extremism inmates, too.

Released individuals are closely monitored by Swedish intelligence services in cooperation with others, including local authorities, police and social services. However, the fact that released inmates are returning to the very same environment that contributed to their radicalisation in the first place remains a challenge, as does the prospect of having a fresh start and leaving behind the stigma attached to being a jihadist.

Preventing radicalisation

Efforts to counter violent extremism have evolved over time, moving from a predominantly security-centred response to focus more on prevention. The role of municipalities and frontline practitioners has been elevated and there has been greater efforts to have a joint multiagency approach.

In 2014, a temporary National Coordinator for safeguarding democracy against violent extremism was appointed. One of the chief tasks of the coordinator was to improve cooperation between government agencies, municipalities and civil society organisations on the national, regional and local levels. 290 municipalities were asked to formulate action plans on the prevention of violent extremism. In 2018, the National Coordinator was replaced with a Swedish Center for Preventing Violent Extremism.

There is little evidence of an institutional nexus between organised crime and terrorism. Rather, what is apparent is that there is a *social* nexus, whereby jihadists are often recruited from the same demographic, location and social conditions as criminals.

Efforts have also been made to strengthen the cooperation between municipalities, and between municipalities and the police. Overall, exchanges of information between the different stakeholders are deemed necessary. In a pilot project, Sweden attempted to develop a multiagency approach in four cities through so-called *Kunskapshus* or 'knowledge houses', which gather both police and municipal expertise to meet the challenge of extremism more effectively at the local level.[43]

City-specific projects, such as the Communities That Care project in Malmö, have also been developed. It is designed to help community stakeholders and decision-makers understand and apply information on risk and prevention factors, and offer programmes that are proven to make a difference in promoting healthy youth development, in order to address most effectively the specific issues their community's youth face.[44]

Conclusion

As with other countries, there is a need in Sweden to further strengthen the collaboration between the main actors in national and local governments, the police and frontline practitioners, which include social workers, educators, probation officers, civil society workers and faith communities. At the same time, it is crucially important to

take steps to address the issues related to the environment in which young people are turning to both crime and extremism – this is imperative for breaking down the chains of the crime-terror nexus. This means more investment in rundown neighbourhoods in terms of infrastructure, schools and sport centres. Ultimately, violent extremism can be only remedied if society works together to prevent the underlying causes of radicalisation.

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United Kingdom

10

by Ian Acheson

The threat level from international terrorism in the United Kingdom (UK), set by the Security Service (MI5) and the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, is currently classed as 'Severe', implying that an attack is deemed to be highly likely.[1] The main source of this threat emanates from groups or individuals inspired or directed by Islamist extremism. Since the 7/7 London attacks in 2005, there have been a significant number of attacks on UK citizens, ranging from carefully orchestrated incidents by groups of terrorists to opportunistic attacks by radicalised lone actors.[2] This includes the Manchester Arena attack in May 2017 and the Westminster attack in March 2017. That same year, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) estimated that there were more foiled, failed and attempted attacks on the UK than any other European Union (EU) member state.[3] The threat remains potent and the response by UK security agencies, honed by years of domestic Irish republican terrorism, has been equally robust.

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The number of terrorist plots and individuals of concern actively being investigated or monitored are often speculative since the official agencies are reluctant to disclose the scale of their endeavours and classified intelligence. Speaking at a rare public event in May 2018, Sir Andrew Parker, the Director General of MI5, stated that his agency and police were thwarting terrorist atrocities at the rate of one a month since the Westminster attack more than a year prior.[4] Concurrently, after being appointed as Home Secretary in June 2018, Sajid Javid indicated in his first speech that limited biographical details held by MI5 on up to 20,000 "persons of interest" and at risk of being drawn into extremism would be shared with other agencies to increase effective counter-radicalisation. He also described the scale of the threat in terms of 25 Islamist-linked plots foiled in the last five years, and four extreme-right plots thwarted since March 2017.[5]

The link between organised crime and terrorism

In terms of a relationship between organised crime gangs and terrorism in the UK, this is most pronounced in Northern Ireland (NI), where a Paramilitary Crime Taskforce was established in June 2018 to coordinate a response from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, HM Revenue and Customs and the National

Crime Agency (NCA).[6] The threat originates from former violent and extremist combatants in NI's conflict who are involved in criminality for personal gain, as well as the paramilitary structures which reject the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and use criminality to raise money for terrorist activity more generally.

In 2018, a survey conducted by the NI Community Relations Council revealed that over 86.5% of NI citizens surveyed believed that a link between organised crime and paramilitary activity indeed exists.[7] The prevalence and entrenched nature of this relationship have cross-border implications for the Republic of Ireland, too (see the chapter on the Republic of Ireland).

Meanwhile, the links between organised crime and violent Islamist extremism are less obvious. The UK's latest Serious and Organised Crime Strategy 2018 suggests that this relationship poses the greatest risk to national security in terms of gun trafficking from abroad, the return of UK combatants from warzones with weapons, and their capability to offer these to criminal diaspora communities (including those of Balkan origin).[8] Operation Dragonroot, which tested the UK's response to a mass casualty incident complete with automatic weapons, underlined the seriousness of this threat in 2017. Having said this, in terms of the scale and potency of this specific aspect of the crime-terror nexus, the Strategy mentions 'terrorism' only once in its horizon-scanning conclusions. In subsequent public announcements, Director-General of the NCA Lynne Owens has stated that organised crime in UK society is "chronic and corrosive", thus posing a greater danger than violent extremism.[9] Some observers argue that organised crime has flourished due to recent government-mandated austerity savings degrading frontline and community policing services, while other protective services, such as counterterrorism, received additional funding in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.[10] However, the combined threat of organised crime and extremism is currently attracting political concern. Speaking in June 2019, UK Security Minister Ben Wallace warned that the scale of this joint challenge was pushing police and security services to near "breaking point" and emphasised the need to resource these services sufficiently to be able to keep pace with evolving threats.[11]

Some observers argue that organised crime has flourished due to recent government-mandated austerity savings, while other protective services, such as counterterrorism, received additional funding in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

Due to the high burden of evidential proof required by British courts and the difficulty of amassing actual battlefield evidence, it is unlikely that returning FTFs will be successfully prosecuted for any other offence in the statute books.

The issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) – UK citizens who left the country to fight for the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) – adds another dimension to the threat posed by the crime-terror nexus. During a February 2019 House of Commons debate, Wallace estimated that approximately 900 people had left for ISIS-held territory in Syria and Iraq. The UK government evaluates that 20% have been killed there, while approximately 400 people of "national security concern" have returned. Of this number, only 10% have been successfully prosecuted, either for crimes linked

to the battlefield or subsequent offences in the UK linked to their violent ideology.[12] There is little evidence that the FTFs who are known to have returned have either continued to be involved in terrorism or have (re-)established criminal links, but this may be due to the poor capacity of police and security services to monitor their activities as much as it is a result of genuine disengagement from violent extremist ideologies.

However, it is clear from the admission of Cressida Dick, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, that there is no accurate way of knowing about FTFs who have re-entered the UK clandestinely.[13] Moreover, the criminal law to prosecute FTFs for travelling to former caliphate areas only came into being with the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019,[14] which provides that persons who have entered an area deemed a terror "hotspot" by the Home Secretary are committing an offence under the Terrorism Act 2000.[15] The law is not retroactive and, therefore, due to the high burden of evidential proof required by British courts and the difficulty of amassing actual battlefield evidence, it is unlikely that returning FTFs will be successfully prosecuted for any other offence in the statute books. No separate figures exist for FTFs prosecuted under other terrorism legislation – for example, the membership or glorification of a proscribed organisation.[16] However, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the UK's independent prosecuting authority, stated:

"In the year ending September 2018 91 individuals were prosecuted for terrorism-related offences, a 15% increase compared to the previous 12 months. Of those 91 individuals SCCTD [CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division] obtained convictions against 81 for terrorism offences."[17]

Radicalisation in prisons

Official statistics show that at the end of March 2019, 223 prisoners who had been accused or convicted of extremism-related offences were being held in custody in the UK. Of these, 197 were convicted and 26 were awaiting trial or sentence. This represents a slight fall, compared to a pattern of steady increase between 2013 and 2017. 80% of those imprisoned were motivated by Islamist ideologies, 13% by far-right ideologies, and the remainder had varying motivations across the political and ideological spectrum. The 7% fall of those holding Islamist views from a peak in December 2017 is offset by the steady rise in those imprisoned for crimes linked to far-right ideology.[18]

Prisoners convicted of serious terrorist offences are held in a number of high-security prisons with adapted physical and procedural security measures to complicate escape. Following a report studying the threat posed by Islamist extremists in the British prison system in 2016,[19] a small number of those terrorist prisoners who are highly subversive in their attempts to convert other inmates to violent extremism are now located in two "separation centres", in the hopes of containing their danger and preventing them from threatening national security any further.

A minority of those prisoners were exposed to criminality prior to their terrorist offending. In 2018, a study of terrorist biographies revealed that out of a cohort of UK terrorists, 32% had previous criminal convictions. This stands out in comparison to the very strongly prevalent relationship in France, or the (very) weak correlations in Spain and Italy, as noted in the same study.[20] No recorded involvement in criminality does

not, of course, negate the possibility that there was, in fact, any involvement and may, therefore, under-record prevalence, but it still serves as a counterpoint to other EU countries that appear to have a much stronger relationship (see the chapters on Belgium and France).

The most concerning relationship between criminality and extremism in the UK emanates from the severely disordered conditions of prisons. Overcrowding, understaffing and chronic underinvestment have reached crisis levels, with violence and self-harm at record highs.[21] Approximately 83,000 prisoners are being held in often overcrowded and squalid conditions.[22]

Although the high-security estate where the majority of the most dangerous terrorist offenders are held is relatively well-resourced, these ideologically inspired prisoners are still lodged in close proximity of prominent members of criminal gangs. Moreover, with an increase in police reform and judicial activism, more offenders are being identified and sentenced to shorter sentences for extremism-related activities, as they are detected further upstream from actual events or for supporting 'glorification' activities, which are now considered explicitly criminal. Many of these offenders will not be held in conditions of highest security, and are instead in prisons where some of the structural problems mentioned above have rendered the environment extremely volatile and unsafe for both the prisoners and staff. Such conditions – a lack of stability combined with alienation and a ready supply of potentially violent and criminally experienced young men in search of meaning – are fertile grounds for radicalisation.[23]

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The separation of the most highly subversive extremist prisoners, as recommended by the Ministry of Justice[24] and implemented by the British government, has been challenged by some academics, including Peter R. Neumann.[25] Many operational professionals, however, who actually have experience in dealing with violent extremists in Britain's disordered prison system, would argue that a lack of organisational capacity or appetite to respond robustly to the threat by allowing charismatic 'hate preachers' the possibility of radicalising others creates fertile grounds for extremism to flourish and, potentially, for new alliances to be established across the crime-terror spectrum.

Unlike many other countries where the role of imams who work in prisons is restricted to spiritual guidance, those employed by the UK's Prison Service have additional obligations conferred on to them by the "Prevent duty", which was introduced in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This requires institutions and, by extension, those employed by them to pay

"due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".[26] In practice, this means that prison imams are expected to provide information if and when they become concerned that certain Muslim prisoners are at risk of being radicalised, or of radicalising others. However, as the 2016 Ministry of Justice study found, prison imams often lacked the capacity and sometimes even the will to be involved in the identification and disruption of a prisoner's transition from non-ideological offender to extremist.[27] The presence of easily-accessible extremist literature in prison chaplaincies and the slow organisational response to combat it[28] also called into question the prison authorities' commitment to shielding vulnerable and suggestible prisoners from hate-promoting, sectarian ideologies.

Such conditions – a lack of stability combined with alienation and a ready supply of potentially violent and criminally experienced young men in search of meaning – are fertile grounds for radicalisation.

The actual incidence of offenders being radicalised in UK prison custody is harder to quantify than in other EU countries. Whereas there is incontrovertible evidence that some of the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attackers and the 2018 Liège lone actor terrorist were radicalised while in prison, there is a weaker association between violent jihadists and imprisonment periods in the UK. The UK has one of the highest rates of incarceration per capita in the EU. Muslim men are dramatically overrepresented in the prison population of England and Wales, at a whopping 15% in contrast to their 4% community representation. Recent research has however pointed to terrorist offenders in high-security prisons, overwhelmingly Islamist, as occupying senior roles in Muslim gangs. The possibility of violent criminal offenders being groomed by ideologues inside prisons, therefore, remains a real and potent danger.[29]

Many people convert to Islam in prison for entirely legitimate reasons (i.e. to find solace, discipline and meaning in their previously chaotic lives), or at least non-extremist ones (i.e. for support and protection in a group with a powerful identity). For example, Khalid Masood, the 2017 Westminster attack perpetrator, converted to Islam during a prison sentence; but whether or not he was also radicalised during his incarceration is contested.[30] However, it is clear that in some cases conversion risks leading to radicalisation. In other cases, converts are being driven to extremism because they are treated as potential radicals while in jail.

The Parole Board for England and Wales, an independent public body that decides the release of offenders – including those convicted of terrorist offences – noted in response to a consultation with the Sentencing Council that the risk of conversion to extremism and absence of effective de-radicalisation programmes in prisons meant that low-

risk terrorist offenders could be better dealt with by way of community penalties, as is the case in other EU jurisdictions.[31]

The challenge of de-radicalisation and disengagement

The numbers of persons imprisoned under terrorism legislation and who qualify for release in 2018 and 2019 are at the highest levels since 2009, with 31 in each year, according to research conducted by *The Guardian*.[32] Some also qualify for the Home Office's highly secretive Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP), which sees non-governmental organisation practitioners working with people convicted of terrorist offences to reduce their threat. The content of the programme and the criteria by which success is achieved are all withheld by the government for security reasons; however, a recent freedom of information request by *The Guardian* revealed that 116 prisoners were enrolled in the DDP between October 2016 and September 2018.[33] Unfortunately, a recent report, citing unnamed security insiders, pointed to a resurgence in extremist groups like al-Muhajiroun, which coincided with the release of its central figures from prison.[34]

Recent research has pointed to terrorist offenders in high-security prisons, overwhelmingly Islamist, as occupying senior roles in Muslim gangs. The possibility of violent criminal offenders being groomed by ideologues inside prisons, therefore, remains a real and potent danger.

The numbers of persons imprisoned under terrorism legislation and who qualify for release in 2018 and 2019 are at the highest levels since 2009, with 31 in each year.

After their release, the influence of terrorist offenders outside of prisons can be effectively curtailed, and at the very least, they are faced with programmes designed to reduce their danger. Pro-social attitudes can be fostered by the presence of skilled staff who challenge and change toxic worldviews. If necessary, the most actively subversive proselytisers of hateful ideologies can be separated from their target audience. The mutually reinforcing psychological dependence between the extremist preacher and his adherents can be severed to create cognitive openings for change.

The successful reintegration of terrorist offenders into their community post-release is of utmost importance to achieve lasting disengagement from hateful ideologies. While simpler and cheaper, enforcing desistance through legal constraints attached to release is unlikely to achieve these aims. Convicted terrorist offenders face formidable obstacles after leaving custody. The importance of reintegrating terrorist offenders back into civil society post-custody was emphasised by a report on differing approaches to this phenomenon.

Unlike many other EU jurisdictions, UK state agencies hold the monopoly on surveillance and short-term desistance through, for example, extended licences for public protection thanks to the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011[35] and the DDP. These largely punitive and restrictive measures lack a long-term focus on disengagement and do not engage in any meaningful partnership with civil society organisations. This creates a risk that alienated offenders – including those given relatively severe sentences for relatively trivial extremism-related offences – may return to violence. However, the rate of terrorist recidivism to date is very low.[36]

The successful reintegration of terrorist offenders into their community post-release is of utmost importance to achieve lasting disengagement from hateful ideologies.

The mobility of transnational terrorism and crime will not cease once Britain's formal relationship with EU intelligence and security institutions ends.

The impact of Brexit on tackling the crime-terror nexus

The departure of the UK from the EU will have a definite, but as yet unquantifiable, impact on efforts to understand and combat evolving links between criminality and extremism. Despite pledges from both the EU and the UK to continue a deep and valuable relationship, the UK's impending departure from the EU (better known as 'Brexit') will cause an inevitable deterioration in existing partnerships. The mobility of transnational terrorism and crime will not cease once Britain's formal relationship with EU intelligence and security institutions ends.

Moreover, Britain will forfeit – in formal terms at least – its widely acknowledged leadership role in shaping and driving EU counterterrorism policy and capability. As the then Secretary of State for Exiting the EU David Davis said to the UK Parliament in January 2017, "Britain is the intelligence superpower in Europe; we are critical to the defence of Europe from terrorist threat, and we are critical to the military support of Europe and to dealing with migration, with our Navy at work."[37] He continued to assert that these arrangements would continue even after Brexit – but it is hard to imagine how they could in the same effect, as so few of the EU- or Schengen-wide systems and institutions are configured to allow full 'third party' participation. The draft Brexit withdrawal agreement[38] and the UK government's earlier "Security, law enforcement and criminal justice" paper[39] both point to a mutual desire for continued close cooperation on combatting violent extremism, but the

reality cannot hope to match the full integration which currently exists in systems built with significant UK input. The vulnerability of the UK's border with Ireland, both presently and post-Brexit, as a facilitator of a crime-terror nexus is further considered in the chapter on the Republic of Ireland.

Conclusion

The UK's response to the threat posed by the crime-terror nexus has been iterative and is informed by its unfortunate four decades of experience dealing with domestic insurgency in NI. This has produced mixed results; since the new generation of transnational Islamist terrorism is very different in philosophy, scale and lethality from violent Irish extremism. This divergence implies that mobilising an active policy response has taken some time. Conversely, the direct relationship between paramilitary extremism in NI and cross-border organised crime has led to a ground-breaking multiagency and multijurisdictional response that convenes state agencies to pursue poly-criminals who operate on either side of the offender/ideologue equation. However, a lack of capacity in the security service and a dearth of focus on the long-term disengagement of released or returning extremists offenders and suspects will continue to hinder an effective response to Islamist terrorism, especially as the UK seeks to leave the EU.

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Conclusions: Addressing the causes and consequences of the crime-terror nexus

11

by Ian Acheson and Amanda Paul

An increasing number of terrorist attacks carried out in Europe over the last few years were perpetrated by home-grown jihadists. Many of these individuals had a background in crime and spent time behind bars. Some, such as Chérif Chekatt, the perpetrator of the December 2018 Strasbourg Christmas Market attack, were radicalised during their time in custody or serving sentences.[1]

Throughout Europe and beyond, criminal and extremist milieus are increasingly overlapping or merging, with many jihadis and foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) having criminal pasts.[2] These connections take place at the local, national and transnational levels and represent a growing challenge to Europe. Jihadism has provided a specious morality to urban delinquency, while delinquents have provided opportunities for jihadists.

The overlap between these two worlds is particularly noticeable amongst those with immigrant backgrounds, and particularly young people who have become disengaged or excluded from mainstream society. Such alienated youths are especially targeted by jihadist recruiters, including the so-called Islamic States (ISIS). Both criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences as to how individuals radicalise and operate.

Radicalisation is a process by which an individual or a group adopts a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology with political, social or religious content that disputes the political, social or cultural order. The process of radicalisation and/or transforming from a criminal to a jihadist does not have a single recipe. There are different paths, and a myriad of push-and-pull factors can create a 'perfect storm', crafting the conditions under which radicalisation can occur and potentially, at the end of the process, lead to terrorism.[3]

The country-specific case studies collected in this book underline that online radicalisation remains a significant challenge, as does radicalisation in prison. More broadly, a profile typically vulnerable to criminality and/or radicalisation is that of a young male, hailing from a socially-excluded area, having a low standard of living and/or suffering from a mental illness or substance abuse, and/or being part of a network (including friends and family) that may already include radicalised individuals.

Deprived neighbourhoods and social exclusion

The case studies reveal that many cases of radicalisation take place in socioeconomically deprived and isolated neighbourhoods with large immigrant populations. With the exception of the Balkan case studies, there have been repeated waves of migration dating back to the 1960s and 70s. In many cases, there has been a failure to successfully integrate these immigrant communities into mainstream society or even turn suburbs with a high immigrant population into an integral part of the city. In some cases, this has created almost "parallel societies".

Many, but certainly not all, of those who carried out recent terrorist attacks hail from such neighbourhoods. In these areas, youths in particular often feel that they are excluded from mainstream society

and the possibility of a better future. There are high levels of unemployment and low levels of educational achievement. Infrastructure is generally poor. There is often also a high level of intergenerational criminality, including gang crime involving both younger and older generations.

It should be noted, however, that youths are often the driving force of such gangs, given their propensity to violence and risk-taking. In many cases, the loss of bonds to mainstream society or the failure of mainstream societal norms to compete with other loyalties and narratives are pivotal factors that make certain individuals vulnerable to radicalisation. In the case of France, President Emmanuel Macron concluded that "radicalisation happened because the Republic gave up and we allowed, in too many cities, too many districts, representatives of a distortion of a religion who are full of hate and disenfranchisement to provide solutions that the Republic no longer gives."[4] Again referring to France, Matthew Moran of King's College London terms individuals from such neighbourhoods as the *internal outsider*: "Immigrants, and especially those of Maghreb origins, find themselves in a no-man's land at the outer reaches of the Republic – officially and legally citizens, but socially stigmatised and permanently viewed as outsiders".[5]

Radicalisation is a process by which an individual or a group adopts a violent form of action directly linked to an extremist ideology with political, social or religious content that disputes the political, social or cultural order.

Many of this publication's case studies reveal that young, disillusioned high school drop-outs, along with those afflicted with mental or substance abuse issues, are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by either criminal gangs or jihadist groomers. Such a social milieu has bred distrust towards public institutions, including the police, bringing together people with common grievances which have grown over time. Stints in juvenile prison custody can entrench gang affiliations and antisocial behaviour. Difficulties in social reintegration after prison sentences and a search for meaning make young people particularly susceptible to seductive extremist narratives that explain and excuse alienation.

Difficulties in social reintegration after prison sentences and a search for meaning make young people particularly susceptible to seductive extremist narratives that explain and excuse alienation.

Furthermore, in many cases, extreme forms of Salafism have also spread in these parallel societies, often going unchecked for decades due to institutional timidity and cultural relativism. In some cases, fears of being accused of racism or xenophobia have deterred politicians, experts and practitioners from denouncing extremist propaganda and have inadvertently played into the hands of the extremists. Consequently, in the majority of case studies, Salafist milieus and networks have grown stronger, wielding increasing influence. The most extreme strand of Salafism is preached in some religious schools, foundations and mosques, inciting young men to join jihad.[6]

Furthermore, when looking at the profiles and personal histories of radicalised individuals in many of the case studies, their life stories and/or family situations are often complicated. This could be the result of a parent suffering from mental health problems or substance abuse problems, domestic violence, sexual abuse, a death in the family or social dislocation caused by imprisonment. Such circumstances often make a young person far more vulnerable to recruiters.

Personal connections

Criminals have been particularly targeted by ISIS recruiters. It is estimated that between 50% to 80% of Europeans involved with ISIS have a criminal record.

Extremists and terrorists have learned to exploit the power of technology. ISIS has used the Internet and social media platforms to fuel its rise around the globe by spreading their extremist ideology and recruiting new members online.

Becoming involved in crime or terrorism often also has much do to with personal connections and social dynamics, irrelevant of whether an individual is from a poor or rich background. The case studies reveal that criminal gangs or terrorist networks frequently include friends from the same neighbourhood or family members, in particular brothers. There are also cases of individuals being radicalised in certain institutions including mosques, religious schools and foundations, and even universities. For example, several students from the London-based University of Westminster travelled to Syria to join ISIS, including Zakariyya Elogbani and Mohammed Emwazi (alternatively known as "Jihadi John").[7] As the majority of our case studies demonstrate, social cohesion within groups of young people in these circumstances seems strong.

The case studies show how many of those involved in the November 2015 Paris and March 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks, as well as the FTFs that went to Syria and Iraq, originated from the same neighbourhoods. Many are siblings or cousins; some spent time together in prison. Overall, there is a strong sense of familial loyalty. This was demonstrated by the cases of Salah Abdeslam and Abdelhamid Abaaoud, two of the perpetrators of the Paris November 2015 attacks. Abdeslam's friends and family kept him hidden from the Belgian police for several weeks, including reportedly smuggling him from one location to another in a wardrobe.[8] Abaaoud was offered a safe house, courtesy of his cousin's drug supplier, a known gangster who was consequently sentenced to four years in prison in March 2019 for his involvement.[9]

Individuals who have become close to each other often reach out to each other when they need help to commit an offence. This was the case with Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly: the two met in 2007 while they were incarcerated in the same wing of Fleury-Mérogis Prison in France; Coulibaly for armed robbery and Kouachi

for attempting to travel to Iraq to carry out jihad. They became friends and subsequently collaborated to coordinate the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Hence, radicalisation is often not an individual experience but rather something subject to social dynamics.

Returning foreign terrorist fighters

All the case studies analysed in this book highlight concerns over the potential security threat posed by returning FTFs both in and outside of prisons. Given the current legislation in a number of countries, many of the hundreds of known returning FTFs were not prosecuted due to a lack of evidence for specific criminal offences beyond travelling to warzones. FTFs can simply return to their communities where an unopposed narrative of heroism in war turns them into insurgent "rock stars", with the potential to radicalise others and create new jihadist networks.[10]

Furthermore, FTFs that have been convicted are in most cases serving relatively short sentences; sometimes as brief as three years. Therefore, in many cases, it seems unlikely that jihadist ideology and intentions will be abandoned. This is particularly true in countries such as France, Belgium, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK), where the prison systems are afflicted by problems of overcrowding, understaffing, insufficiently trained staff, and inadequate programmes aimed at disengagement and rehabilitation. France also suffers from growing problems of violence in prison, which the presence of returning FTFs might exacerbate. In June 2019, an armed inmate held prison guards captive with a handmade weapon in the prison of Condé-sur-Sarthe.[11] Furthermore, a new report by the *Observatoire international des prisons* reveals that acts of brutality are being carried out by prison staff towards inmates.[12]

A further challenge pertains to the estimated 800 European FTFs, along with women and minors, being held in prison camps in Syria and Iraq, run by US-backed Kurds. While some progress has been made for the repatriation of minors, several countries, including the UK and the Netherlands, have not only refused to repatriate FTF nationals but have gone as far as to revoke their citizenship. This issue is becoming increasingly urgent following US President Donald Trump's announcement that Europe should repatriate nationals or Washington "would be forced to release them."[13] These ideologically indoctrinated, hardened fighters can pose a serious threat to their country of origin and elsewhere in the event that they would return. They have witnessed or perpetrated large-scale violence, are capable of handling weapons and explosives, and frequently hold a grudge against the West – which could be exacerbated if their nationality is revoked.

Furthermore, leaving individuals in prison camps or having them tried by local courts is not the answer and can lead to terrible consequences. For example, an Iraqi court sentenced a Belgian citizen, Bilal al-Marchohi, to death by hanging in March 2019 for being part of ISIS.[14] Some of the countries covered in our case studies, particularly Sweden and the Netherlands, support the idea of an international tribunal to try FTFs and are currently looking for support from other European Union (EU) member states.[15]

Skills transfer and terrorist financing

Criminals have been particularly targeted by ISIS recruiters. It is estimated that between 50% to 80% of Europeans involved with ISIS have a criminal record.[16] Furthermore, many criminals have an attractive "skill set" including deceit, action-readiness and violence. According to a 2016 study carried out by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, up to 40% of terrorist plots in Europe are at least partly financed through petty crimes.[17]

Intelligence gathering on convicted extremist offenders during and after their release is still in its infancy across the EU and beyond.

Crimes committed before radicalisation range from petty theft and drug dealing to document forgery, trafficking and violent crime. Legally operating companies and businesses are often used by criminal gangs to launder money made from drug dealing, robberies and gunrunning. Furthermore, many criminals are experienced in avoiding the attention of authorities, are familiar with the limits of police powers, can act under pressure, often have access to weapons – and are able to use them along with explosives – and illicit funds, and are accustomed to violence.

It still remains very difficult for released terrorism-related offenders to rehabilitate or be reintegrated back into society.

According to a report by the RAND Corporation, at the height of its territorial control in 2015, ISIS generated over $6 billion. While a large part of this originated from the territories it held (and not least from oil revenues), ISIS also relies on a range of criminal activities (like many other terrorist groups), including theft, and antiquities smuggling.[18] Thereby the organisation is also funded from the bottom up through petty criminality, including pickpocketing. After all, the financial costs of organising a terrorist attack are generally relatively low. To this end, ISIS has promoted crimes such as robbing tourists as the 'spoils of war' against the 'infidel enemy'.

ISIS has successfully tailored redemption narratives which offer forgiveness, belonging and meaning to those with a criminal past. Turning to jihad in many cases has been sold as a way of legitimising crime or of guaranteeing the perpetrator and his/her family a 'place in paradise'. Such redemption narratives have been effective, used both in and outside of prisons. Social media has also been key, including the (now shuttered) online ISIS magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. Innovative methods have been used to attract criminals, including the production and circulation of a poster of an ISIS fighter holding a Kalashnikov rifle behind the slogan, "Sometimes people with the worst pasts create the best futures". This was shared on Facebook by Rayat Al-Tawheed, a London-based group of British ISIS fighters calling themselves the "Banner of God".[19]

Online radicalisation

Extremists and terrorists have learned to exploit the power of technology. ISIS has used the Internet and social media platforms to fuel its rise around the globe by spreading their extremist ideology and recruiting new members online. As such, the Internet has been weaponised into a far-reaching propaganda machine with "slickly produced videos, glossy magazines et cetera" which "has added a new dimension to the global war on terror".[20] All of the case studies reveal that despite efforts to remove extremist content, online radicalisation remains a significant threat. Individuals can find, connect, communicate and plan attacks with other likeminded people via the Internet. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) provides a common EU response for identifying and removing malicious online content through its Internet Referral Unit (IRU). Since its establishment in 2015, IRU has "assessed in total 87 819 pieces of content, which triggered 85 477 decisions for referral, with a success rate of removal of 84.85%".[21]

Developments in content-removal technology, including that pioneered by the Counter Extremism Project,[22] has pushed extremists toward more private communication channels and encouraged groups such as ISIS to adopt more sophisticated tools to hide and spread their online messages. For example, according to a report by the European Council on Foreign Relations, "Twitter's suspension of more than 200,000 extremists' accounts in August 2016 resulted in an online exodus to end-to-end encrypted messaging services like Telegram, WhatsApp and Viber, thereby making it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to monitor extremist activities."[23] ISIS also uses messaging applications popular with gamers to spread propaganda, including Discord.[24]

Untraceable encrypted applications have become commonplace, putting further strains on intelligence services' capacity to keep pace with developing threats. While WhatsApp and other messaging services defend encryption as a vital shield to privacy, they are also working with the EU and US to find solutions.

Prison radicalisation

While a significant amount of radicalisation takes place outside of prisons, they are an equally important theatre for radicalisation and hardening existing radical ideology further. In some cases, such as France, the UK and Belgium, the issue is particularly problematic.

Prisons assemble many socially-marginalised and resentful individuals. In many cases, it is here that criminals and extremists intermingle due to their proximity and linkages between the two are forged. This results in the most vulnerable being prime 'recruitment material'. Those with mental health issues or substance addictions are particularly vulnerable, as are those that feel socially stigmatised for the crime they have committed.

Those serving a prison sentence for the first time are often especially vulnerable to and unprepared for potential threats inside prisons. Therefore, in order to protect themselves, some prisoners make the

pragmatic decision of affiliating themselves with Muslim prisoners who band together for prayer, study and self-protection. Turning to religion in prison can be a positive and redemptive experience. However, experience shows that prisoners who convert to Islam to find a sense of belonging are often particularly vulnerable to extremist groomers, as they are on most occasions ill equipped to judge any claims set forward about the 'correct' way to practice the faith.

Thus, certain prisoners can face a huge risk of falling under the influence of violent extremists who teach them a dangerous interpretation of Islamic beliefs, such as those adopted by ISIS and al-Qaeda. Simplistic explanations that cast the subject as a victim rather than a perpetrator and offer a quick route to redemption, even if through (violent) crime, are particularly attractive. Harry Sarfo, a German of Ghanaian descent, was radicalised while serving time for armed robbery in a German prison. He subsequently travelled to Syria to join ISIS and was later accused of participating in ISIS executions. Belgian Benjamin Herman, widely accepted as being radicalised in prison following his conversion to Islam, murdered a drug dealer before killing two policewomen in Liège during a two-day temporary release in 2018.[25] His case underlines the danger emanating from career criminals who have converted to Islam in prison before subsequently becoming indoctrinated by jihadist ideology.

Furthermore, among other criminal gangs operating within prisons, Muslim ones are also a growing challenge, particularly in the UK, where religious affiliation is conflated with resistance to authority and control of territory and the illicit drug economy. According to a recent study carried out by the UK's Professional Trades Union for Prison, Correctional and Secure Psychiatric Workers, Muslim criminal gangs calling themselves the "brotherhood" are operating in Britain's top-security prisons, using violence to force inmates to convert to Islam.[26]

Recruiters are usually very charismatic and possess high emotional intelligence, capable of exploiting prisoners' grievances, be they real or perceived. The specific nature of the offence of the recruited is irrelevant. On many occasions, the message of the recruiters is attractive to confused and scared first-time offenders, who are suddenly reassured that their criminal background is nothing to be ashamed of. In many cases, recruiters will congratulate individuals for committing a crime against *kafirs* or 'unbelievers' and encourage them to continue, but now 'in the name of Allah'. This approach not only wipes away any shame they may be feeling for having been convicted but also often places the recruiters on a pedestal.

Based on the case studies, the ability of groomers to recruit varies from case to case. It is often related to the exposure a recruiter has to vulnerable and naive inmates. The type of containment system adopted by individual prisons plays an important role. The Netherlands is the only case study with a prison system which separates terrorist and radicalised inmates from the general prison population. While some European countries have special housing units for the 'most dangerous', many radicalised individuals are still dispersed throughout the general prison population. Overall, there is no common approach to managing terrorist offenders and violent extremist prisoners.

Prisons also offer networking opportunities for inmates. A number of case studies reveal that prisons facilitate contact between criminals and terrorists, enabling cooperation even after release. For example, individuals are ready to sell drugs in order to finance the purchase of arms or forged documents. Intelligence gathering on convicted extremist offenders during and after their release is still in its infancy across the EU and beyond. An emphasis on reintegration and the rights of extremist offenders, while important, must not impede the imperative to collect and share

information about terrorist networks, tactics and thinking, which does not stop at prison walls.

As already noted, many prisons, notably in France, Sweden and the UK, suffer from overcrowding and violence between inmates and towards the prison staff. In January 2019, the UK's Ministry of Justice reported that assaults on staff were up by 29% to more than 10,000 cases, while prisoner-on-prisoner attacks rose by 18% to more than 24,000.[27] Such violence complicates the full control of inmates and their activities. In March 2019, Michaël Chiolo, an extremist serving a 30-year sentence also in Condé-sur-Sarthe, severely wounded two prison officers in a jihadist-inspired attack with a knife.[28] The terrorist threat posed by offenders to prison staff, who are constantly present yet often poorly protected, poses another national security threat. Furthermore, in some cases, prison staff are understaffed or undertrained in challenging hateful ideologies, dealing with radicalised individuals or spotting the signs of radicalisation, although some marginal improvements have been made in this area.

It is apparent that there are significant gaps in the transfer of information and intelligence on extremist prisoners between European countries, from their time in custody to their release.

Gathering jihadists in prison blocks without effective measures for rehabilitation allows them to share their ideological views and tradecraft, and provides idle time to further their networks and plot for the future once released. All of the prison services in our case study countries carry out activities and programmes related to disengagement and rehabilitation along with other activities such as vocational training and sports – but they do so to different degrees and with varying success. The Netherlands stands out as a positive example: unlike its counterparts, the Dutch prison system is well-resourced, -staffed and -trained to spot signs of radicalisation in the general prison population. A manual has been published with instructions on what prison staff should look out for, including changes in behaviour and beliefs, displaying Messiah-like attitudes and a desire to convert fellow inmates.[29] The Netherlands also places significant focus on rehabilitation and disengagement: tailor-made programmes – detention and reintegration plans – are designed for each inmate. The Danish Prison and Probation Service's "Deradicalisation – Back on Track" model is also promising: it offers a holistic intervention that targets extremist individuals, provides mentoring and offers a sustained relationship with a significant positive influence beyond release.[30]

Discussing radicalisation should not be considered a taboo.

In some cases, prison probation services engage social workers, mental health practitioners and other relevant experts to carry out disengagement or de-radicalisation programmes. However, this work is frequently underfunded and, in some countries, jurisdictional and legal obstacles can hamper sustained intervention. More broadly, cooperation between the prison system and probation services needs to be strengthened.

Post-prison challenge

The series of recent terrorist attacks that have taken place in Europe, along with returning FTFs, intensified counterterrorism efforts by police and intelligence services. Diplomatic pressure on Balkan states has contributed to the surge in terrorism-related arrests and convictions over the last few years. This poses the problem of how to deal with the growing numbers of individuals convicted for terror-related offences once they are released; both in terms of their reintegration (back) into society and of acquiring the necessary intelligence to make sure that they do not reiterate criminal behaviour.

Yet there is no magic solution or quick fix to effectively reintegrate violent extremist offenders. Despite increased efforts by authorities to monitor released offenders and develop rehabilitation programmes with multiple actors including the police, intelligence services, social workers and local authorities, it still remains very difficult for released terrorism-related offenders to rehabilitate or be reintegrated back into society. This has to do in part with the stigma attached to terrorism-related activities, and in part with the fact that in many cases individuals are returning to the communities, social environment and networks in which they were radicalised in the first place. In other cases, the time spent behind bars has further hardened the inmates' radical ideology and helped them establish new networks.

There are very few examples of released terrorist offenders successfully disengaging from extremist ideology and reintegrating into society so far. Some, like the former French extremist David Vallat,[31] were "first generation" jihadists radicalised by outrages perpetrated against the Muslim community in Bosnia in the early 1990s. However, these cases are very different from the contemporary generation of ISIS extremists, who often kill because they believe they have been granted theological permission to do so, as opposed to feeling legitimised by a perceived moral stand against oppression. Former experiences, therefore, offer few clues to address contemporary radicalisation.

It is also apparent from the authors' discussions with frontline operational prison and police staff that there are significant gaps in the transfer of information and intelligence on extremist prisoners between European countries, from their time in custody to their release. Given the freedom of movement across Europe, opportunities for released extremist offenders who still present a public threat to relocate elsewhere without the knowledge of the host country are very high. Moreover, the behaviour of incarcerated extremist prisoners provides a unique understanding of the routes into, and hopefully out of, violent extremism.

Unfortunately, the huge intelligence asset created in prisons is still not recognised or utilised properly in the fight against ideological terrorism. In some countries, for example the UK, special secret programmes have been created for the most dangerous of released terrorist offenders, designed to stop them from endangering the public. In fact, more than 100 convicted and suspected terrorists living in the UK are subject to the government's secretive Desistance and Disengagement Programme.[22]

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: PREVENTION REMAINS THE NUMBER ONE CHALLENGE – THE NEED FOR AN "ALL OF SOCIETY" APPROACH

Preventing individuals from turning to crime or falling prey to radical individuals is the number one challenge in countering jihadist radicalisation. This means tackling the factors that push them into the radicalisation process in the first place, including social exclusion.

► Ultimately the war against jihadist radicalisation, and indeed all forms of violent ideologies leading to terrorism, will be won or lost at the local level. To this end, more needs to be done to **develop effective programmes to target marginalised communities and build up their resilience**. Crucially these communities must want to fight back against the phenomenon and should be at the heart of prevention efforts. More focus and resources need to be allocated for this purpose. Given that the majority of the terrorists that perpetrated attacks in recent years are in their early twenties, this needs to start by targeting youth. By equipping them with the skills and knowledge, young people are empowered to speak up, be heard and, ultimately, create the change they want to see. Youths in socially-excluded areas need to stop feeling that they are bottom of the heap and are destined to fail in life. Local communities and families need assistance to fight recruiters. Parents need reassurance that there are people they can turn to for help when a child is acting out of character, like specially trained social workers.

► **Community police play a crucial role in prevention**. They are often the first contact point with radicalised youth either when members of the public tip off police or when youth come to police attention through surveillance.[33] However, their actual numbers are often too low to effectively carry out the tasks they are supposed to fulfil. Furthermore, in some countries, their makeup is often not sufficiently representative of the communities they are working in. With that in mind, community police should be supported by other important frontline actors (e.g. social workers, psychologists, educators, local mayors, imams). Bringing representatives of the police together with troubled youths who view them as the enemy should also be encouraged, as it can help build bridges and create a better understanding. Having the police join important events, such as celebrations at Ramadan, could also help them to integrate and build trust with local communities.

► **Education is crucial, and schools and universities have a very important role to play, including teaching youths about tolerance**. Teachers must be properly trained to spot signs of radicalisation, and should also feel empowered enough to be able to speak out against the risks of recruitment and extremism without being branded a racist. Regular exchanges between teaching staff, social workers and parents should become the norm. More extracurricular activities should be made available since it is during unsupervised afterschool hours that children are most likely to be introduced to drugs and crime or led astray. Research has shown that afterschool programmes are a powerful antidote to feeling excluded or unhappy in life and may even have more of an impact on the lives of youths than the formal classroom setting.[34] Participating in sports, arts and culture can also provide students opportunities to develop constructive goals and leadership and social skills. Engaging communities in their children's education and building trust between schools and communities must also become an objective.

Community service opportunities, interfaith activities, team sports, adult literacy classes, family-friendly events can all strengthen the link between communities and their schools.

► **Introducing youths to role models** – footballers, artists, successful businesspeople – **who come from similar (disadvantaged) backgrounds should be encouraged**. At-risk children should also be paired with a mentor who can work with them and their families.

As EU member states admit their FTFs back, it is likely that many will end up in the criminal justice system or face administrative detention. This will potentially create serious challenges, particularly in smaller EU countries which lack the resources, expertise or infrastructure to cope with an influx of risky former combatants.

► **Local municipalities should provide young people with activities during the holidays**, located away from possible antisocial behaviour. For example, staying on a farm or being part of environmental projects allows them the chance to meet other children from different backgrounds and feel that they are contributing something valuable to society.

► Efforts must also include **alternative paths for at-risk individuals**. This includes work experience or training programmes aimed at individuals who may have previously spent time in prison or been involved in the crime-terror nexus so that they have a chance to learn a skill and be reintegrated into mainstream society and not feel stigmatised. Local municipalities working with local and national businesses could take the lead on this.

The future security of the EU and member states depends on active and assertive approaches to addressing ideologically inspired violent offenders and offering them a better alternative.

► It is important to **carefully monitor the activities of mosques, religious schools, organisations such as Islamic foundations and their far-right equivalents** to ensure that teachings are devoid of extremist content. Governments should also adopt a clear and consistent policy related to the selection of imams, engaging local Muslim community leaders and other stakeholders to ensure imams and other religious teachers are properly educated and able to help prevent the spread of jihadist ideology. Islamic societies and clubs in universities and other educational institutions should also be carefully monitored, with the backgrounds of visiting speakers scrutinised. The University of Westminster came under huge criticism when several of its students were identified as FTFs. Some of these students had regularly attended lectures containing extremist ideology.[35]

► Given that petty criminals are major targets for jihadist recruiters, **efforts to crack down on petty crime should be stepped up**, including increasing penalties.

► **Sharing ideas and good practices is crucial** – there are a number of examples of effective policies to learn from. For example, valuable insight can be drawn from the efforts undertaken by the Belgian city of Vilvoorde. Mayor Hans Bonte's plan to counter radicalisation emphasises the

importance of implementing initiatives at the grassroots level, working on social inclusion and building bridges between the population and the local authorities. He has also organised roundtable discussions with the participation of Salafist youths and local police staff. Bonte believes that investing in youth and education, as well as the relationship between the police and local youths, is crucial.[36] All in all, discussing radicalisation should not be considered a taboo. There need to be open and frank exchanges with all groups, from civil society to the police. Local communities should also be able to feel that they can trust their political representative, like a mayor.

► **Information sharing should be widened and become more commonplace**. While much positive progress has already been made in this respect, there is always room for improvement. This should not only include the sharing of information between the different security services, from the local to counterterrorism and criminal police, but also include other crucial authorities, like customs authorities at ports, which regularly come across organised crime activity.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ENHANCING THE WORK OF THE RADICALISATION AWARENESS NETWORK FURTHER

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is an important EU umbrella project connecting and bringing together thousands of frontline practitioners for an exchange of expertise, experiences and good and bad practices on a range of different areas, including education, probation and prison radicalisation. Numerous reports with important recommendations have been published, following these exchanges of best practices. Many of Europe's most well-known and credible experts have also contributed to the papers and policy recommendations. However, **while plenty of great work has been achieved thanks to the RAN, the results should be more widely distributed, and the impact of recommendations better monitored**.[37]

RECOMMENDATION 3: CREATING AN EXTREMIST PRISONER INFORMATION CENTRE (EPIC)

An Extremist Prisoner Information Centre (EPIC) should be set up to create a new, practitioner-led and -built simple and effective electronic information conduit between EU prison information systems on high-risk/high-harm terrorist offenders. The goal would be to ensure that crucial information about such prisoners' behaviour and intentions are disseminated, both for the protection of EU citizens as well as to enhance the capacity of prison systems to detect and deter radicalised behaviour. The objective is to create pathways for the relevant information to flow across borders, whereby member states would retain all ownership of said information. A pilot scheme could be launched in the first instance, involving two to three co-terminus countries inside the Schengen area.

RECOMMENDATION 4: SETTING UP A EUROPEAN ENTRY/ DISPERSAL MODEL (EEDM) FOR TERRORIST OFFENDERS

The return of defeated, psychologically traumatised and combat-experienced FTFs to EU member states presents a number of pressing security challenges, not least because it is unlikely that they will all have the capacity or even desire to reintegrate, as shown in a number of the case studies outlined in this book. Moreover, as EU member states admit their FTFs back, it is likely that many will end up in the criminal justice system due to crimes they have committed, their membership to proscribed terrorist organisations; or face administrative detention. This will potentially create serious challenges, particularly in smaller EU

countries which lack the resources, expertise or infrastructure to cope with an influx of risky former combatants.

As such, **cooperation between EU member states' prison systems should be deepened in order to share the burden of returning EU citizen FTFs**. This could be achieved by significantly enhancing the capability of the European Border and Coastguard agency to work with Schengen frontier states and their neighbours outside the EU border to provide the capacity for a high quality, security-focused common response to the debriefing, risk assessment and onward transit of FTFs, including any relevant criminal justice intervention.

RECOMMENDATION 5: ESTABLISHING EU PRISON CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

The EU prison system, housing convicted extremists serving relatively severe sentences, cannot merely be a place for further delaying criminal behaviour – it must also set the basis for reintegration back into society after sentence. The future security of the EU and member states depends on active and assertive approaches to addressing ideologically inspired violent offenders and offering them a better alternative. Of equal importance is the need to ensure that prison staff and other vulnerable groups of prisoners are protected from the physical and psychological threats posed by extremist inmates who must at all costs be prevented from proselytising their hateful ideologies. Finally, prisons must be able to prepare extremist offenders for release with the best chance of peaceful reintegration with society, taking into account that they can potentially move to other EU member states with different legal frameworks concerning further supervision and risk management after time in prison.

Creating a network of high-security prisons across the EU would support and enhance the complex and continually evolving challenge to balance secure, humane detention with effective rehabilitation and the control of risk. This network could exchange ideas, expertise, practices, policies and, potentially, professional staff on secondment. These 'centre of excellence' prisons would become beacons of experimentation, building and exchanging good practices that can then be extended to other member states' prisons. Moreover, once established, this network could 'twin' with prison institutions outside the EU, particularly in candidate countries who have an incentive to benefit from enhanced practice and policy.

RECOMMENDATION 6: FOSTERING A LONG-TERM, "ALL OF COMMUNITY", MULTIAGENCY APPROACH FOR DISENGAGEMENT AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES

The risks of returning to violent extremism will be reduced if terrorist offenders leaving custody are offered meaningful ways to disengage from hateful beliefs and rebuild their lives. However, this goal is very difficult to achieve and sustain, particularly with high profile offenders who have received media attention and who will face formidable obstacles in finding a legitimate way to live. Former terrorists and radicalised criminal offenders are particularly vulnerable to reconnecting with their former networks or being recruited (again) by extremist groups.

Only a long-term, multiagency approach and strategy has the potential to achieve successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Furthermore, it is imperative to get the buy-in of local communities for this process. This requires building **strong and durable relationships with community organisations** and local actors working separately from but in concert with state agencies that can help prevent potential backlash, reduce stigma and set ex-offenders up to achieve. Hence the process of reintegration should start *prior* to a prisoner being released, drawing up credible

reintegration plans that will deliver the interventions and set the goals to create the possibility for hope and change during the sentence. To this end, the prison service must be more connected to probation. Implementing credible disengagement and rehabilitation programmes while in prison are a crucial part of this process. Risk assessment prior to release, along with addressing the needs of the released prisoner's family is also an important step of the process. This can range from social and psychological aid to financial assistance. These measures help build trust all-round, which is crucial for the rehabilitation process.

This necessitates credible rehabilitation programmes that are tailor-made to individual offending 'pathologies' in order to be successful since offenders differ in terms of their social background, age, prison sentence, cognitive skills, deviance precursors and level of affiliation with terrorist organisations.

Only a long-term, multiagency approach and strategy has the potential to achieve successful rehabilitation and reintegration.

Psychologists, credible Islamic scholars and other significant 'pro-social' mentors should play crucial roles here, since disengaging a radicalised individual requires understanding the reasons why someone would embrace violent extremism, and what continues to fuel this mind-set. The role of the police is also very important as they hold a unique position in society due to their presence and engagement with local communities and their responsibility for establishing a safe environment. In this sense, and as recommended by the RAN, police have the ability to influence, or establish, public trust. **As such, police should receive special training on dealing with radicalised and former extremists**.[38]

Efforts to reduce corruption, increase legitimacy and build confidence in the rule of law and state institutions are crucial in defeating the deeply entrenched crime-terror link.

Creating employment and job training opportunities and offering mentoring programmes are all important ways of reducing this risk of recidivism. Such measures should be part of multiagency protection plans, including the relevant security services, in order to simultaneously manage the level of risk and ensure public safety. Ultimately, paths towards disengagement and rehabilitation will, at least in the short-term, remain very much trial and error. Thereby the exchange of information and best and worst experiences at the local, national and international levels is crucial.

RECOMMENDATION 7: STRENGTHENING COOPERATION WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

Further strengthening ties with partner countries, including the Western Balkans, should be an important part of the EU's counter-extremism policy. In 2016, EU leaders appointed counterterrorism experts to some EU delegations, including in the Western Balkans. A crucial part of their mandate is to work with local authorities and contribute

to joint counterterrorism efforts. Dealing with returning FTFs and their families has been an important aspect of this cooperation. Efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism must be conducted as part of a broader approach under the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Western Balkans Strategy. This includes the EU improving the integration of its counter terrorist (CT) and counter violent extremism (CVE) efforts in the national reform agendas.[39]

Efforts to reduce corruption, increase legitimacy and build confidence in the rule of law and state institutions are crucial in defeating the deeply entrenched crime-terror link in countries such as Albania. Targeted 'street level' economic intervention to create and sustain legitimate alternatives to criminality and extremism is equally imperative, especially in those damaged or isolated areas that foment extremism and where a business is reluctant to invest on its own. The enticing prospect of EU membership for all the Western Balkan countries can play a crucial role in advancing these reforms – as long as the EU remains genuinely committed to this goal. Furthermore, hurdles should be overcome to allow Kosovo to join INTERPOL as the country's current exclusion is clearly hindering cross-border efforts to fight organised crime and extremism.

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ABOUT THE EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE

The European Policy Centre (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The EPC is grateful to its main supporters that enable its five thematic programmes to provide insight in EU policies and develop practical prescriptions.

The King Baudouin Foundation's mission is to contribute to a better society. It promotes change-makers and innovators that serve the public interest and increase social cohesion throughout Europe. In 2002, it established a strategic partnership with the EPC to set the stage for an informed debate about the future of Europe with a wide range of stakeholders. The foundation's sustained support allows the EPC to fulfil its vision while preserving its independence.

The EPC has been awarded an annual operating grant for the period 2018-20 from the Europe for Citizens programme, funded from the EU budget, along with other similar think tanks and civil society organisations. The EPC contributes to the aims of the programme through activities designed to promote citizens' understanding of the EU policymaking process and their involvement in the European public policy debate, as well as through its work on the future of Europe.

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From October 2018 until the summer of 2019, the European Policy Centre (EPC) and the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) partnered in a research project looking at the link between criminality – including organised crime groups, local petty crime gangs or individuals – and jihadist terrorism, which culminated in this book.

These days, terrorist groups, in particular the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), are increasingly recruiting individuals with backgrounds in crime and using their skills, connections in the criminal world, and experience with law enforcement bodies to finance, plan, prepare and execute their attacks. This recruitment takes place both outside and inside prisons.

In this context, EPC and CEP experts have carried out an independent assessment of these urgent challenges as they occur in ten European countries (Albania, Belgium, France, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). Drawing on this, they have proposed a number of bold recommendations to European governments and EU institutions to counter the ongoing threat when criminality intersects with jihadist terrorism.

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