

## **Europe's experience in countering radicalization: approaches and challenges**

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For the last decade Europe has perceived itself to be under a constant threat from jihadist-inspired terrorism. Terrorist organizations motivated by other ideologies are still active throughout the European Union, but the 2010 Europol annual report clearly states that “Islamist terrorism is still perceived as the biggest threat to most Member States,” and statements from the highest-ranking officials in most European countries confirm this observation (EUROPOL, 2010, p. 6). Authorities base their assessment on the extensive intelligence and investigative activities directed against jihadist networks taking place in virtually every European country. On average, in fact, European authorities arrest some 200 individuals and thwart a handful of plots of jihadist inspiration every year (EUROPOL, 2009). Keeping the global scenario in mind, European authorities deem this dynamic likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

The nature of the terrorist threat of jihadist inspiration has changed significantly over time. While Europe's first jihadist networks in the 1990s were made up mostly of first generation immigrants with close ties to organizations operating outside of Europe, today most militants are so-called homegrown. In fact, whether they are operationally connected to al Qaeda and affiliated movements outside of Europe, as in the case of the London July 7, 2005 bombers, or operate independently, as in the case of Mohammed Bouyeri, the Amsterdam native who killed Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004, European jihadists tend to have embraced jihadist ideology independently in Europe. The fact that Europe is not only a terrorist target but

also a place where small cross sections of the continent's growing Muslim population absorb radical ideas is considered a major problem by authorities.

In order to challenge this threat authorities in virtually all European countries have boosted their traditional counter-terrorism weapons, improving legislations and increasing intelligence agencies' manpower and capabilities. But, over the last few years, several European countries have also made an additional and innovative step, introducing counter-radicalization strategies seeking to de-radicalize or disengage committed militants and, with even greater intensity, prevent the radicalization of new ones.

The pioneer in the field has been Great Britain, which already in 2003 launched a scheme, called Prevent, to implement a comprehensive domestic counter-radicalization strategy to tackle jihadist terrorism. Despite its many revisions and the widespread criticism it has attracted, Prevent remains a model from which most European governments have taken inspiration. After the 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh various Dutch municipalities devised their own counter-radicalization strategies. In 2007 the Dutch government rolled out a national plan called *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan*, which was conceived as a national strategy seeking to distill the experience of the few municipalities that had pioneered counter-radicalization activities, rationalize them and extend them to other municipalities throughout the country (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006). In 2009 Danish authorities released their own national strategy and Norway did the same in 2010 (Government of Denmark, January 2009; Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, 2010).

While Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway possess a comprehensive national strategy precisely outlining goals, budget, methods and responsibilities, many other

European countries have devised less comprehensive programs, often simply at the local level. European counter-radicalization programs differ greatly from one another in terms of aims, structure, budget, and underlying philosophy and each experience is deeply shaped by political, cultural, and legal elements unique to that country. Moreover, the programs have been in place for just a few years and it is therefore difficult to fully assess their impact. Nevertheless, the experience to date points to certain key characteristics and challenges common to all European counter-radicalization programs. This article seeks to broadly describe counter-radicalization initiatives implemented throughout Europe and the challenges they face.

### General preventive initiatives

European counter-radicalization programs can be broadly divided into two categories: general preventive initiatives and targeted interventions. The former are initiatives aimed at challenging extremist ideas and influence in society, promote tolerant, moderate and democratic principles, and address factors that can increase vulnerability to radicalization. They are preventive programs that target at-risk segments of society (mostly Muslim youth), seeking to make them resilient to radical ideas, or the population at large, aiming to reduce intra-societal tensions.

These initiatives vary significantly in characteristics and underlying philosophy, not only from country to country but also within every country. Yet most of them follow a line of thinking that Dutch authorities have eloquently outlined in several published documents. According to Dutch authorities, general preventive measures are implemented to prevent the “processes of isolation, polarization and radicalization by the (re-) inclusion of people who are at risk of slipping away from Dutch society and the democratic legal order.” That is to be achieved through

various measures, from macro-level initiatives seeking to reduce tensions within society to more targeted actions such as education, traineeships and personal development programs aimed at “binding” at risk individuals to mainstream society (interview with Saskia Tempelman).

The strategy outlined by Dutch authorities in their 2007 Action Plan is modeled on the theory of supply and demand of radicalization, which has shaped the way the Dutch counterterrorism community sees the problem (Mellis, 2007). The model argues that there is a potential demand for ideology among young Dutch Muslims concerned about their identity, as they seek answers and guidance over “the meaning of what it is to be Muslim in today’s world.” At the same time, there is a supply of jihadist ideology coming from preachers, mosques and the internet “which intends to appeal to these young people as they search for answers relating to their identity.”

Demand and supply do not necessarily meet, but when they do their encounter does not take place in a vacuum (Demant and De Graaf, 2010). Rather, the encounter is often favored by what Dutch authorities refer to as the “breeding ground,” that is the various frustrations many young Dutch Muslims might experience and which might lead them in the direction of a radical ideology. These frustrations could be the actual discrimination they face in Dutch society or simply the perception of it, lack of perspectives, a public discourse hostile on Islam and several other factors.

The 2007 Action Plan and the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy make the point that the Dutch government should act on all three aspects. More specifically, when it comes to the demand, Dutch authorities hope to make individuals more resilient to radical messages and have parents, imams, community leaders, local key figures provide those crucial answers on

issues of identity and religion that young people so desperately seek, encouraging critical thinking and pointing out the flaws of extremist narratives. In the words of the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy, “specific measures are taken to reinforce the resilience of those groups which are the target of jihadist recruitment and propaganda, and groups which are or may be sensitive to the extremist supply. Examples of such measures are creating social networks, setting up programmes to increase the capacity for critical judgment, reinforcing democratic awareness, providing resilience training, and cooperating with role models and leaders.”

On the supply side the aim of the Dutch government is twofold. On one hand it seeks to disrupt the flow of jihadist propaganda by taking measures such as deporting radical preachers and shutting down extremist websites. Authorities are nevertheless well aware that, although some of these efforts are useful, it is virtually impossible in a liberal democracy to completely prevent the flow of ideas. They therefore believe that arguably more important than censoring radical ideas is their effort in providing an alternative supply of ideas. “Undermining the supply means tackling the content of the terrorists’ narrative,” argues the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy. “The government is taking steps to analyse this ‘narrative’ and, where possible, provide counterarguments or a ‘counter narrative’. The exact content of this counter narrative will be different on each occasion, depending on the type of arguments used (political, moral, religious, etc.), the environment in which the discussion is held (a region, country, city, etc.) and the size of the target group at which the message is directed (individual, group, etc.)” (National Counterterrorism Strategy, 2011, p. 71)

Finally, Dutch authorities seek to operate on the breeding ground by seeking to reduce factors that can cause frustration in the youth. Actions ranging from seeking to favor access to

the job market or improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods are seen not only as diminishing the societal context that is conducive to radicalization but also important to achieve larger integration goals.

General preventive measures, in the Netherlands as in all European countries, vary significantly in their nature and underlying philosophy, largely due to the awareness that no single approach works in all cases. Some projects are explicitly 'Islamic' and have a strong religious component. An example of this is the "Radical Middle Way," a British Foreign Office-sponsored project that specializes in bringing moderate traditionalist Muslim scholars to speak to mostly young British Muslim audiences. Other projects seek to help young vulnerable Muslims to integrate into mainstream society and to access employment and education. While some are forms of traineeship, others are courses designed to strengthen the assertiveness and interpersonal capacities of young Muslims. The underlying idea is that individuals who are proud of their identity and comfortable with other groups are likely to be more resilient to extremist messages that distort Islam and demonize non-Muslims (interview with Halim El Madkouri). For example, the municipality of Slotervaart, a sub-district of Amsterdam with a large Muslim population, has introduced psychological/cultural programs by the telling titles of "Deal with disappointment," "Deal with dissent" and "Learning to deal with criticism of their own faith," all designed to promote self-control and self-criticism (Municipality of Slotervaart, 2007, p. 10).

Other courses encourage critical thinking, the ability to listen to and objectively evaluate opposing views, and the capacity to express thoughts in a non-confrontational way. Some programs are designed to allow youngsters to vent, as in the case of an essay contest in Utrecht where high school students were asked to write about what made them angry and what their ideal

society looked like. These exercises were followed by discussions led by experts who commented on the essays (interview with Halim El Madkouri).

Other courses focus on having youngsters debate about democracy, multicultural society and foreign policies. The underlying philosophy of most of these courses is to present basic facts to the participants and stimulate a constructive discussion that seeks to undermine stereotypes and misconceptions. Many experts agree that the best way to do so is not to be confrontational but rather stimulate fact-based critical thinking without challenging the participants too directly. As part of the country's counter-radicalization policy, for example, officials from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other Danish officials regularly meet with young people in schools and other venues, explain Denmark's positions on various foreign policy issues and seek to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding them (Government of Denmark, 2009).

Several programs seek to promote role models and mentors for youngsters. The municipality of Amsterdam, for example, has organized seminars and other targeted forms of support for a small group of potential future leaders within the city's Muslim community, youths between the ages of 19 and 26 who have been active in society and could be potential positive role models. In other Dutch municipalities authorities have asked human resources managers at large companies to meet with and possibly provide internships with local Muslim students. The idea is that such outreach would dispel the widely held notion that Muslims face discrimination in the job search.

While youngsters are the main targets of these courses, others seek to engage parents. Authorities throughout Europe have understood the importance of explaining the dangers of radicalization to parents and have devised specific courses to do so in culturally sensitive ways.

Some courses seek to teach parents how to educate Muslim children in a Western society or how to dialogue with them on issues that are commonly considered taboo (such as sex, drugs and crime). Women are also considered a particularly important group to reach out to. Not only have some authorities organized courses specifically for them but they have also fostered the growth of grassroots Muslim women organizations. These organizations serve multiple purposes, from helping otherwise marginalized women familiarize themselves with society and culture to providing a support network to women in distress, including female relatives of convicted radicals. In many cases these organizations teach women how to spot signs of radicalization in their children and relatives and explain the dangers related to the process. In many cases these organizations liaise directly with the municipalities, providing an important window on an otherwise difficult to penetrate world.

British authorities have invested significant resources in establishing trust-building measures between police forces and local Muslim institutions aimed at increasing communications between the two and, not secondarily, making it more likely for such communities to report potential terrorist plots. Authorities have reported various successes. In Bristol, for example, police outreach and confidence-building projects with local Muslim communities, including invited local Muslims to awareness-raising sessions on Prevent, led directly in 2008 to a relatively conservative local Somali mosque reporting radical convert Andrew Ibrahim to police after mosque-goers noticed burn marks on Ibrahim's hands when he attended weekly prayers. Ibrahim was consequently arrested and an incomplete bomb was found in his flat along with evidence that he planned to target a local shopping center (Daily Telegraph, 2009; interview with Kalsoom Bashir, 2011).

Targeted interventions

The second macro-type of programs implemented by European authorities are individualized interventions. Rather than targeting the general population or large cross sections of it with preventive actions, these interventions aim at “recuperating” well identified individuals who seem to be on the path to radicalization. These initiatives seek to target individuals that, while displaying obvious signs of radicalization, have not yet fully embraced jihadist ideology or committed criminal acts. There are important variations from country to country in these programs, from which authorities administer them to what kind of intervention is set up, but throughout Europe there is an understanding that these “soft” programs are a crucial component of a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy.

In most cases interventions start when the case of an individual displaying signs of radicalization is referred to authorities. In the countries where such programs are in place a wide range of government employees and partners, including people from the police, schools, colleges and universities, health services, social workers, housing officers, prisons and probation officers have received a more or less extensive training on radicalization, explaining its manifestations, why it occurs and why it is dangerous. After having received this training these individuals are supposed to detect potential cases of radicalization among the individuals they are in contact with through their professional lives and refer them to authorities.

The composition of the body to which the referral is made changes from country to country. Under the Channel Program, Great Britain’s targeted intervention scheme, the referral is made to a coordinator who is appointed for each local government district, and who is usually from a police background. In various Dutch and Danish municipalities law enforcement agencies are not involved in the process. In Amsterdam and Copenhagen, for example, the case is referred

to a specific unit within the city administration that is composed of city workers and experts from a variety of backgrounds.

Once the person believed to be at risk of radicalizing has been identified, the evaluating body assesses if the risk of radicalization is genuine. If that is found to be the case, authorities proceed to craft targeted interventions aimed at swaying the individual away from militancy and back to a normal life. In most cases the intervention entails the designation of a mentor, somebody who already has or could potentially establish a trust-based relationship with the radicalizing individual. The dynamics of this work, which is constantly monitored by authorities, are complex and different from case to case, but ideally the mentor would shake the radicalizing individual's belief in radical views and eventually sway him from them.

Despite some obvious difficulties and the fact that long-term effects cannot yet be assessed, European authorities tend to be quite satisfied with the introduction of targeted interventions. Sir Noman Bettison, who as Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Lead for Prevent Policing is the British police's de facto overseer of national Prevent work, stated in late 2010 that: "Thus far not one of the 1,500 people that have been intervened with [under the Channel Programme] have been arrested for any terrorist-related offence" (Bettison, 2011). Dutch and Danish authorities have intervened on a significantly smaller number of individuals but express similar confidence (Interviews with Dutch and Danish officials, 2011).

Moreover, these referral schemes have been criticized as intrusive and as targeting people for expressing a view. The issue was raised in hearings held in the House of Commons in March 2010. Charles Farr, director general of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism at the Home Office, gave an explanation as to why, in the British government's view, Channel is not set

up to criminalize individuals whose views are radical but not a criminal offense but, on the contrary, “precisely to avoid them criminalising themselves” (H.C. Communities and L.G. Committee, 2010, p. 8). In the same testimony, Farr pointed to the poignant example of Hasib Hussain, one of the four British Muslims who carried out the suicide attacks in London on July 7, 2005:

*We started to unpick what was known about Hasib Hussain. He had never come to the notice of the police at any stage in his young life and therefore in terms of opportunities for the police to intervene to prevent what went on to occur, there were just no hooks there. However, what we did discover is that as a model student whilst at Matthew Murray School his exercise books were littered with references to al-Qaeda, and the comments could not have been taken as other than supportive comments about al-Qaeda. To write in one’s exercise book is not criminal and would not come on the radar of the police, but the whole ethos, the heart of Prevent is the question for me of whether someone in society might have thought it appropriate to intervene. What do I mean by intervention? I do not mean kicking his door down at 6 o’clock in the morning and hauling him before the magistrates. I mean should someone have challenged that? They are the sorts of cases that get referred through the Channel scheme. ((H.C. Communities and L.G. Committee, 2010, p. 16)*

Farr’s statement highlights the dilemma facing European policymakers. On the one hand, the idea of establishing a police-led system that singles out individuals simply for expressing views that, according to very vague and subjective standards, could be considered extremist is at odds with the ideals of all Western democracies and could stigmatize the Muslim population. On the other hand, traditional law enforcement techniques cannot always detect and neutralize the ever-evolving terrorist threat, and seemingly intrusive means such as Channel could serve a valid

purpose. Policymakers therefore find themselves dealing with a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” dilemma in implementing some of the more intrusive measures of a counter-radicalization strategy.

### Defining aims

European authorities have been faced with a myriad of problems when devising and implementing counter-radicalization strategies. Arguably the first major challenge they have had to face has been understanding the radicalization process. Few issues have proven more divisive and controversial among experts, both within and outside government, than trying to identify the reasons that drive people to embrace radical views and then to act on them in violent ways. As a consequence, and absent reliable supporting evidence, theories about radicalization abound (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). Some focus on structural factors such as political tensions and cultural cleavages, sometimes referred to as the root causes of radicalization. Others emphasize personal factors, such as the shock of a life-changing event (for instance, the death of family members, imprisonment, unemployment or educational failure) or the influence of a mentor.

Most scholars and policymakers seem to agree that radicalization is a complex and highly individualized process, often shaped by a poorly understood interaction of structural and personal factors. And just as there is no grand theory of radicalization and no common terrorist profile, there is no single explanation for why people de-radicalize or disengage from a militant group. The factors that trigger this process are as many and varied as those that lead individuals to radicalize. Aware of these complexities, most authorities have understood the need to adopt highly flexible approaches to counter-radicalization. There is broad consensus that no single approach will work in all cases, and in some cases none will. Methods used in radicalization

prevention might not be appropriate in de-radicalization. Efforts should be adapted to the specific circumstances, supported by a deep knowledge of the characteristics of the individual or group they are directed to, and continuously assessed.

Few issues are more heavily debated than the importance of religion in the radicalization of jihadist militants, with outliers in the debate attributing to it either a central role or no role at all. Most Muslim-majority countries that have implemented counter-radicalization programs view religion as a major factor, though not the only one, in radicalization. They generally see jihadists as having absorbed a twisted interpretation of Islam and consider their own interpretation of Islam to be the antidote. Therefore countries such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Morocco and many others have created more or less comprehensive de-radicalization and preventive programs that focus on religion.

Many argue that European countries should follow a similar approach. Although in some cases addressing socioeconomic and personal factors might suffice, in others it will be necessary to address ideological and theological aspects of the radicalization process. European governments have therefore often resorted to supporting individuals and organizations that have challenged jihadist ideology from a theological perspective. Authorities have created university courses to train imams, organized lectures of Muslim clerics, funded “moderate” Muslim organizations, and more generally provided a platform for various voices considered moderate. The underlying idea is to help these voices reach a wider audience and thereby to counter-balance more hardline voices. This approach is also endorsed by those who believe that radicalization is the result of an absence of religion in the lives of vulnerable young people. In both instances, the underlying thinking is that those who are exposed to moderate or mainstream

interpretations of Islam are in turn expected to be less likely to embrace (or to become more resilient to, in counter-radicalization parlance) radical interpretations of it.

Such an approach on the part of European countries is not universally endorsed, however. Some hold that other factors, such as politics and socioeconomics, play a much larger role in the radicalization of European Muslims. Others acknowledge the importance of the religious aspect but object on grounds of pragmatism or principle. Most Western countries embrace the principle of separation of religion and state. Steep constitutional and legislative limits therefore prevent many governments from supporting, even indirectly, religious activities. But even if these limits could be bypassed, governments that funded some groups over others could expose themselves to the charge of exercising an undue influence in religious affairs. It is not the role of the government, critics of this approach say, to promote a certain sect (for example, the Sufis) as a way to counter the influence of a school of thought (such as Salafist) that authorities deem dangerous. This approach may help to explain why strongly secular countries such as France have not developed a counter-radicalization program and have done relatively little to promote “moderate” religious interpretations compared to countries such as Great Britain, where the state and religion are constitutionally intertwined.

Moreover, some argue on purely pragmatic grounds that such an exercise in religious engineering could prove counterproductive. Western policymakers, who often lack even a basic knowledge of Islam, are unlikely to determine its evolution, and their attempts to do so could backfire. Scholars at London’s International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, for example, argue that “promoting ‘good Islam’ means that the ‘other Islam’ (or ‘bad Islam’) is what the West fears most, and it therefore unwittingly promotes al-Qaeda’s claim to be the only alternative to Western globalization” (International Centre for the Study of

Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2008, p. 13). In substance, a government's support of an interpretation of Islam it considers more attuned to its views could be seen as strengthening the jihadist argument that the West is at war with Islam, as well potentially discrediting such western-endorsed versions of Islam in the eyes of some Muslims.

### Cognitive or behavioral radicalism?

Another challenge that has faced European authorities is that of clearly defining the aims of their counter-radicalization strategies. An important determination to be made is whether the program seeks to counteract the violent form of radicalization or, more broadly, its cognitive form. Cognitive radicalization is the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system. Violent radicalization occurs when an individual takes the additional step of using violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism. Violent radicalization poses an immediate threat to the security of the collectivity, and all counter-radicalization programs therefore target it. But should a government also target cognitive radicalism?

A number of European governments have limited their interventions to what could be termed a narrow definition of radicalism, indissolubly linking it to violence. The declared aim of Prevent, the British government's counter-radicalization strategy, for example, is "stop[ping] people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism" (Home Office, 2009, p. 80). Under this interpretation the state should not concern itself with the fact that an individual espouses ideas considered radical, not least because such an assessment is highly subjective.

Governmental intervention is warranted only when such radicalism clearly leads to the commission of acts of violence.

Authorities in other countries have opted for a broader definition of radicalization and therefore a more encompassing statement of aims. The AIVD, the Netherlands' domestic intelligence agency, states that its role is to monitor radicalization leading to terrorist violence, but it is equally concerned about "forms of non-violent radicalisation which could severely disrupt society" (AIVD, 2007). These include "the creation of parallel community structures with forms of self-defined justice and the propagation of anti-democratic behaviour which could result in polarisation, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and serious social unrest." Therefore, the working definition of radicalization used by Dutch authorities is "the growing preparedness to wish to or to support fundamental changes in society that do not fit within our democratic system of law." Whether these sentiments are accompanied by the use of violence will determine how Dutch authorities will intervene, but both violent and cognitive radicalization are considered phenomena the government should tackle.

The reasoning behind adopting the broader definition of radicalization is that, aside from its impact on the social cohesion of the extremely diverse societies of Western Europe, cognitive radicalism is widely understood to be the logical antecedent to behavioral radicalism. Because all terrorists have undergone a radicalization process and hence, before becoming violent radicals, were cognitive radicals, it is argued, the state should intervene as early as possible in the process to prevent the spread of radical ideas. Critics who challenge this position state that there is "no empirical evidence of a causal link between extremism and violent extremism" (Briggs, 2010). They point out that though it might be true that all terrorists are radicals, the vast majority of radicals never make the leap into violence (Bartlett and Birdwell, 2010, pp. 8–9.). The rhetoric of

a “slippery slope from political mobilisation to anger and, finally, to violent extremism and terrorism” is, according to some, flawed and not supported by facts (Briggs, Fieschi, and Lownsbrough, 2006, p. 43).

Another criticism comes from those who believe that cognitive radicals should be “tackled as social problems, not as a ‘subset’ of the al-Qaeda threat” (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010, p. 14). A report by the British think tank Demos clearly describes this position:

Certain kinds of behaviour, dress and attitudes—for instance among the Salafi community—are problematic for a secular, liberal state such as the UK, and raise wider questions about the status of faith in British politics, the legitimacy or otherwise of certain forms of sharia law, and an individual’s right to behave in the private realm in ways that might be at odds with social norms or even laws. These are important questions that we need to debate as a society, but we must not let them get in the way of the priority of tackling terrorism (Briggs, Fieschi, and Lownsbrough, 2006, p. 17).

In substance, it is argued that certain ideologies do undermine social cohesion and that the government should aim at fostering integration and empowering disenfranchised communities to prevent the diffusion of such ideologies among them. Yet these efforts should be pursued separately from counterterrorism efforts (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010). According to critics of current approaches, a counter-radicalization strategy that blurs the line between supporting social cohesion and countering terrorism is likely to achieve neither (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010). Authorities in various European countries have pointed out that linking well-intended integration and social cohesion initiatives with counterterrorism efforts

irremediably taints the former, as the Muslim community feels stigmatized and believes itself to be perceived by the government as a security threat. These sentiments further alienate some members of the Muslim community, possibly fueling a turn to radicalization.

The single most important factor influencing the decision of policymakers to focus counter-radicalization efforts on violent radicalism or cognitive radicalism is the security threat facing their country. Governments confronting a severe threat of a terrorist attack are more likely to focus on violent radicalization than on more general and less immediately visible threats to social cohesion. Another factor influencing the decision is the institutional mandate of the body making the decision. Institutions whose mandate is simply to prevent acts of violence are likely to focus solely on violent extremism. On the other hand, institutions that aim at preserving a harmonious and cohesive society are more likely to adopt a broader definition. A country's political culture is also important. Great Britain has a long tradition of tolerance for extreme rhetoric and potentially subversive activities, and some continental European countries, such as Germany, have a much lower threshold and are more prone to move against cognitive radicalism before specific acts of violence emerge.

Most European countries have struggled to find a balance. In the interests of social cohesion and security, should a democratic state fight ideas it dislikes? Or, to put it another way, to what extent should governments and societies "tolerate the intolerant"? There are many reasons why any government would want to oppose the spread of radical views, both from a social cohesion perspective and from a security perspective. Although the means to counteract violent and nonviolent radicals should be different, some argue that the latter should also be challenged. Yet the legal, political, and moral issues arising from doing so are significant. In a free democratic society, being a radical is a sacrosanct right, and the state should not impinge on

its citizens' freedom to espouse any kind of idea. As a consequence, most European democracies, lacking the legal tools and the political will to engage in an all-out war of ideas, have often found it easier to focus on violent extremism.

Although reasons, intensity and departing point of this process vary from country to country, European authorities are increasingly reducing the focus of their efforts to violent radicalization rather than the broader phenomenon of extremism. That is not to say that authorities do not see a relation between non-violent forms of extremism and violent radicalization or that they do not wish to tackle the non-security related challenges posed by extremism. But reasons that range from lack of clear empirics on the radicalization process to budgetary constraints are leading authorities to increasingly concentrate on the more narrowly defined phenomenon of violent radicalization.

Consequently, authorities are increasingly isolating their efforts to counter violent radicalization from initiatives aimed at achieving goals related to integration and social cohesion. Efforts to achieve these latter goals are important *per se* and authorities tend to believe that they can also help in countering violent radicalization. At the same time, it is increasingly believed that a counter-radicalization strategy that blurs the line between supporting social cohesion and countering radicalization is likely to achieve neither. Efforts are therefore increasingly kept separate and the entities implementing them are different. In general, counter-radicalization efforts are being increasingly led by police, while a range of other departments are given responsible for cohesion and integration work.

Budgetary constraints, the narrowing of the definition of radicalization and the increasing separation of social cohesion and counter-radicalization work have caused authorities to scale

back large preventive initiatives aimed at the general public or large cross sections of it. Authorities still believe that public ceremonies, civics courses and interfaith meetings might have a role in promoting integration and social cohesion and, consequently, in indirectly creating a climate less favorable to radicalization. But these efforts, whose impact is difficultly measurable, are increasingly kept separate from “pure” counter-radicalization initiatives. This scaling down of large-scale preventative actions is also perhaps the consequence of declining threat levels in most European countries and of counter-radicalization gradually being de-prioritized. This may be partly a consequence of counter-radicalization work bearing fruit, partly a result of declining al-Qaeda potency globally and also because security services have gained a more precise understanding of where and how surviving groups of radicals operate.

If the overall narrowing of counter-radicalization focus has decreased the propensity for large-scale preventive initiatives aimed at large groups, it has, on the other hand, heightened the appeal of targeted interventions. Carefully planned one-on-one interventions targeting well identified individuals who clearly espouse radical views or, *a fortiori*, are involved in radical networks, are increasingly seen as a sensitive tool authorities can add to their counter-terrorism quiver.

### Choice of partners

No counter-radicalization effort can succeed without the help of the Muslim community, and establishing strong trust-based partnerships with individuals and organizations in it is considered of paramount importance. But Western Muslim communities are deeply divided along ethnic, national-origin, linguistic, sectarian, socio-economic and political lines (Warner and Wenner, 2006). The consequence of this fragmentation is that in all Western countries, no

single organization can legitimately claim to represent a section of the Muslim community even close to being a majority. Unlike their counterparts in Muslim-majority countries and even in Singapore, which can count on an established and widely recognized and respected Islamic leadership, Western policymakers have to decide which of these many organizations to partner with. Choosing many local partners, which are more likely than large national organizations to have roots in the specific community, is the best way to address this problem. Further, creating partnerships with multiple organizations is more likely to harness the full potential of the Muslim community than is relying on few self-appointed middlemen.

Issues of credibility and legitimacy are paramount. Which voices are listened to in the community and can deliver the government's message? In this regard, a particularly controversial matter is the role of nonviolent Islamists. In virtually all Western countries, networks and organizations close to the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami, or to the non-jihadist/political Salafists have gained a certain amount of influence, particularly among second- and third- generation Western Muslims. These groups espouse various tenets of Islamist ideology or conservative Islam that make them radical in the eyes of most Western observers, particularly those having to do with religious freedom and women's rights. Yet even though they endorse acts of violence in certain Middle Eastern theaters, they do not generally advocate violence in the West. On the contrary, most have often publicly condemned terrorist acts carried out by al-Qaeda in Europe and North America. Could these "nonviolent Islamists" become partners of the government against violent radicalization?

A large number of experts believe that any government would be foolish not to harness the enormous potential that a partnership with nonviolent Islamists could hold (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010, p. 14). Although some of their views might be offensive, many Islamists

genuinely oppose violence in the West and are in a unique position to influence those most likely to engage in violence. Only they have the legitimacy and street credibility to be listened to by young Muslims on the path to radicalization. Governments should therefore, it is thought, empower the work of these groups, which constitute the ultimate bulwark against violent radicalization.

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of this view is Robert Lambert, the former head of the Muslim Contact Unit, the section of the London Metropolitan Police devoted to engaging the city's Muslim community. Lambert argues that the "ideal yes-saying" Muslim leaders lack credibility in their communities and have no knowledge of radicalism (Interview with Robert Lambert). Claiming that only nonviolent Islamists have the credibility to challenge the narrative of al-Qaeda and influence young Muslims who might be on the path to violent radicalization, he advocates "police negotiation leading to partnership with Muslim groups conventionally deemed to be subversive to democracy" (Lambert, 2008). Lambert uses as an example of this potential the counter-radicalization program STREET (Strategy to Re-Empower and Educate Teenagers), run by strict Salafists in the Brixton area of London (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010). According to Lambert, STREET, thanks to its combination of "street skills and religious integrity," has been particularly successful in counteracting the recruitment efforts of al-Qaeda-linked preachers in the area.

Lambert's position is based on his extensive professional experience and his view of nonviolent Islamists as a firewall, preventing cognitive radicalization from becoming behavioral. The Danish counter-radicalization strategy shares this view, arguing that in some cases "it is precisely these individuals who have the best chance of influencing the attitudes of the young people who are in a process of radicalisation, in a non-violent direction" (Government of

Denmark, 2009, p. 36). Others disagree and see nonviolent Islamist organizations not as firewall but rather as a conveyor belt for further radicalization. German security services, for example, publicly state in their annual reports that nonviolent Islamist organizations “do not carry out recruitment activities for the purpose of the violent ‘Holy War’ (Jihad). They might rather claim to immunise young Muslims against Jihadist indoctrination by presenting to them an alternative offer of identification. However, one has to critically ask whether their activities that are strongly directed at preserving an ‘Islamic identity’ intensify disintegration and contribute to the development of Islamist parallel societies” (*Integration as a Means to Prevent Extremism and Terrorism*, 2007, p. 5). Moreover, they argue, there “is the risk that such milieus could also form the breeding ground for further radicalization,” laying the ideological groundwork for violent groups (Annual Report, 2005, p.190).

In light of these divisions it is difficult to assess whether Western governments can achieve their interests by engaging with nonviolent Islamists. Different perceptions of what the state interest is lead to different answers. If the state interest in counter-radicalization programs is to prevent terrorist attacks, then, *prima facie*, there are reasons to think that engagement might bear fruit, at least in the short term. But if success in counter-radicalization is deemed the almost complete marginalization of extremist and anti-integration ideas among young Western Muslims, then many believe that partnering with nonviolent Islamists is counterproductive. In that case, short-term and occasional forms of cooperation with nonviolent Islamists might be used to achieve gains against jihadists, but such tactical partnerships should not develop into a permanent strategy. The long-term implications would likely offset the results obtained in the security field.

Many security officials in European countries embrace the view that identifying the enemy only in violent groups is self-deceiving. Alain Grignard, deputy head of the Belgian police force's antiterrorism unit and a professor of Islamic studies at Brussels Free University, calls al-Qaeda an "epiphenomenon," the most visible aspect of a much larger threat that is political Islam (Besson, 2005, p. 40). Alain Chouet, the former head of France's counterintelligence service DGSE, agrees with Grignard, observing that "Al-Qaeda is only a brief episode and an expedient instrument in the century-old existence of the Muslim Brotherhood. The true danger is in the expansion of the Brotherhood, an increase in its audience. The wolf knows how to disguise itself as a sheep" (Fourest, 2008, p. 103).

Chouet's comparison of the Muslim Brotherhood to a wolf in sheep's clothing is echoed by many security experts, who fear that nonviolent Islamists are attempting to benefit from what in social movement theory is known as positive radical flank effect (Haines, 1997). According to the theory, more moderate wings of a political movement improve their bargaining position when a more radical fringe emerges. Applied to nonviolent Islamists, the positive radical flank effect would explain why the emergence of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups has led European governments to see the less radical fringe—the nonviolent Islamist groups—more benignly, and even to flirt with the idea of establishing forms of partnership. The emergence of a severe and prolonged terrorist threat, argue people like Chouet, has led European governments to lower the bar of what is acceptable and to endorse extremist organizations as long as they oppose violence on the Old Continent.

Yet, argue many, the social engineering program envisioned by nonviolent Islamists, which entails a rejection of many core Western values, is the real problem. And by empowering

them through various forms of partnership, authorities make an enormous mistake of shortsightedness. Espousing this view, Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton have written that

*the central theoretical flaw in PVE [Preventing Violent Extremism, Britain's counterradicalization strategy] is that it accepts the premise that non-violent extremists can be made to act as bulwarks against violent extremists. Non-violent extremists have consequently become well dug in as partners of national and local government and the police. Some of the government's chosen collaborators in "addressing grievances" of angry young Muslims are themselves at the forefront of stoking those grievances against British foreign policy; western social values; and alleged state-sanctioned "Islamophobia". PVE is thus underwriting the very Islamist ideology which spawns an illiberal, intolerant and anti-western world view. Political and theological extremists, acting with the authority conferred by official recognition, are indoctrinating young people with an ideology of hostility to western values (Maher and Frampton, 2009, p. 5).*

Both arguments have some merit, and it is easy to see why the choice of partners can be the most challenging decision officials have to make. Intuitively, it can be argued that in some cases nonviolent Islamists act as a firewall, in others as a conveyor belt, yet there is little conclusive evidence to support either argument. It is fair to say they could serve a role in limited de-radicalization efforts, in that they seem best positioned to intervene with already radicalized individuals. Partnering with them in radicalization prevention, on the other hand, is more controversial. Such a decision should be made only after an informed and non-ideological assessment of the short- and long-term consequences of any form of engagement.

In sum, therefore, the lack of a clearly defined path to radicalization and the dearth of evidence on it make conclusive assessments of the role of nonviolent Islamist organizations in the radicalization process impossible. As a consequence, policies swing almost erratically and, and in light of such developments in Arab countries, are likely to continue to do so. Most recently, though, British authorities, who had arguably been the most open among Europeans to tactical partnerships with nonviolent Islamist groups, have signaled a change of policy. Making clear that those who express views “which fall short of supporting violence and are within the law, but which reject and undermine our shared values and jeopardise community cohesion” should not be criminalized, the government also stated such groups would no longer receive any form of public support (Home Office, 2009, p. 80).

In keep with these developments, there is now a consensus against funding, empowering or employing Islamists or Salafists in counter-radicalization, other than in the most exceptional circumstances. That said, most counter-radicalization programs are willing to conduct non-empowering engagement with Islamists and Salafists, in the belief that as law-abiding citizens they cannot be excluded and because such links with such individuals can potentially lead to better understanding of issues of radicalization in local communities and the identification of at-risk individuals.

### Future trends

European counter-radicalization strategies are, as seen, relatively new, having been implemented only for a few years even in the countries that have pioneered them. Over time authorities have adapted, tweaked or completely revised them, often learning from their

mistakes. On three particular areas authorities throughout the Continent have been making major corrections: communication, training and assessment.

At their onset counter-radicalization strategies have often been met with severe criticisms from various sources and for various reasons. Authorities have understood that they need to explain their strategy and aims to the public, the professional categories they seek to work with and, in particular, the communities they aim to reach out to. Language does matter and certain words have been proven to be better received than others. Communication and “marketing” are therefore no less important aspects of a counter-radicalization program than its substance is.

Similarly European authorities are increasingly aware of the complexities of the radicalization process and how it works differently for different individuals. Because of this complexity it is necessary for any individual who is in any capacity involved in counter-radicalization work to be as knowledgeable as possible about the issue. Authorities throughout Europe are therefore seeking to provide extensive and balanced education on the subject to a large pool of individuals involved in counter-radicalization work.

Finally, authorities have also struggled to establish clear metrics to assess the effectiveness of their programs. Measuring the effectiveness of counter-radicalization programs is an inherently difficult task. Even the most comprehensive and well-thought-out de-radicalization programs are unlikely to be completely successful. If, for example, one hundred individuals go through a de-radicalization program and only a handful of them revert to terrorism, how is the program to be assessed? The success of radicalization prevention is even more challenging to evaluate because it requires planners to prove a negative: the number of individuals who did not become terrorists because of the program. Governments have attempted

to set clear metrics to empirically verify the effectiveness of their actions, ranging from simple quantitative analyses of program participation to more complex indexes seeking to determine the level of community engagement. Yet all these attempts fall short of providing a clear assessment. Nevertheless, measuring effectiveness is increasingly necessary. In times of deep budget cuts, demonstrating that the resources dedicated to counter-radicalization programs are allocated for a reason is of paramount importance.

Despite all the difficulties and controversies faced by such programs, most counter-terrorism practitioners believe that at least some forms of counter-radicalization are important components of a comprehensive counter-radicalization strategy. Despite budget cuts some counter-radicalization initiatives—particularly one-on-one interventions—are likely to be further developed in the countries that have already pioneered and to be introduced in others. Additional research is therefore needed to inform and shape initiatives that, if correctly implemented, hold an enormous potential but that, if poorly applied, could do more harm than good.

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