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COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

COUNTERTERRORISM YEARBOOK 2019

Edited by Isaac Kfir and Georgia Grice

Contents

Preface

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The global threat of terrorism is more diffuse and more diverse than ever before, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remains the driving influence. ISIL's military losses in Syria and Iraq, while great, will not eliminate the threat it poses to Australia and Australian interests globally, and I expect that the threat from ISIL-inspired lone actors will endure. ISIL continues to inspire, radicalise and direct individuals in Australia to support and engage in politically motivated violence. And, while focus and attention remain squarely on ISIL, we must not forget that al-Qaeda and its affiliated organisations continue to permeate and operate and, in some cases, are stronger now than they were a decade ago.

The global reach of terrorist violence has been emphasised by numerous attacks around the world. Those attacks vary in sophistication, scale and impact, yet despite the variance, the common underlying theme is their ambition to generate fear, cause mayhem and inflict harm. In Australia—like all civil societies—our community is entitled to feel safe and secure. However, in this global environment, Australia and Australians (wherever they may be in the world) are not immune to the global reach and impacts of terrorism, which seeks to destroy the social cohesion at the heart of open, liberal democracies. Experience has taught us that we cannot take our security and peace for granted; we must remain constantly vigilant, as those who seek to do us harm adapt continuously and remain committed to their goal of undermining the fabric of our society to achieve their aims.

Counterterrorism (CT) is a necessary and evolving challenge that remains at the forefront of Australia's—as well our regional and global partners'—national security policy, underpinned by our need to balance security and respect for the rule of law. Since 2014, we have seen 12 tranches of national security legislation pass through the Australian Parliament. Numerous other pieces of supporting legislation have passed through state and territory parliaments. The strengthening of Australia's national security legislation has made a necessary, material and enduring difference to the security of Australians and our national interests.

In my view, there are three main challenges for CT efforts in Australia and across the world:

- First, terrorists continue to develop new and evolving tactics to propagate attacks. Across the world, there has been a noticeable shift away from large-scale, coordinated, sophisticated attacks towards smaller, low-level attacks with rudimentary or readily available weapons such as trucks, knives and guns, carried out by individuals who may have no clear connection to established terrorist groups. Such attacks are a challenge for intelligence and law enforcement to predict and prevent, especially as security resources are finite. However, the threat of large-scale attacks remains extant, as shown by the attempt by ISIL to bring down an Etihad flight travelling from Sydney to the Middle East in 2017. Security and intelligence services must continue to monitor, predict and respond to all vectors of attack.

- Second, terrorists' use of digital platforms to recruit supporters and mobilise ideas has proven to be a complex yet critical issue. The pace and scope of technological change require security and intelligence services to continually adapt. Despite consistent attempts to remove content and censor accounts, there is more to be done to limit the creation of new profiles and platforms through encrypted software.

- Third, the threat of returning foreign fighters— whether they are going back to their countries of origin or to a third 'host' nation—remains problematic. Government agencies have sound processes in place to manage the return of Australians with a possible terrorism connection. It is important that foreign fighters who have returned or may return to Australia are considered by agencies on a case-by-case basis, while still ensuring and maintaining robust levels of national security.

In Australia and Western countries more generally, we can anticipate enduring risk from people who are committed to Islamist extremism. The ideology will continue to be promulgated by those individuals and groups that adhere to violent, misguided beliefs. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), in partnership with other Australian agencies, is resolute in continuing to do all it can to protect Australia, its people and its interests. ASIO continues to work closely with other intelligence and law enforcement agencies to investigate threats posed by terrorism. The strength of those partnerships is reflected in the seamless collaboration in the Joint Counter Terrorism Teams, which bring together the Australian Federal Police, state and territory police and ASIO. The teams provide a coordinated and consistent approach to combating terrorism and have been responsible for the successful disruption of a number of terrorist attack plans in recent years. The decline of ISIL in Syria and Iraq will not necessarily see the decline of the threat in Australia; however, the breadth and depth of collaboration and information sharing are an enduring strength in Australia's CT and countering violent extremism strategies.

I had the privilege of launching the inaugural ASPI *Counterterrorism yearbook 2017* and am equally honoured to commend this third edition in 2019, as ASIO celebrates its 70th anniversary since its foundation in 1949. ASPI's *Counterterrorism yearbooks* provide an excellent and wide-ranging summary of CT issues, and this yearbook presents expert analysis and comprehensive assessments of region-wide and country-specific CT policy, strategy, legislation and operations. Moreover, it situates those elements within a broader framework of international security challenges. ASPI *Counterterrorism yearbooks* are an important resource to advise academics, practitioners and policy advisers on global developments in CT, as well as ensuring these matters remain front of mind for lawmakers, governments and the broader community. I commend this publication to you.

Introduction

ISAAC KFIR AND GEORGIA GRICE

The 'defeat' of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in 2017 ushered in the post-'caliphate' period, which in 2018 was broadly characterised by a dual sense of optimism and trepidation. The military takedown of the caliphate, which has inflicted such horror and devastation, was a long-awaited breakthrough against an evil organisation that acted with unprecedented brutality towards millions of people.

The success, however, was sobered by the overwhelming opinion that what we're seeing isn't the end of IS, but only a strategic pause in its evolution—and that what's to come could be far worse. Not only does IS continue to pose a threat, but so do other *Salafi-jihadi* groups. It's in this context of uncertainty that the *Counterterrorism yearbook 2019* strives to expound and relay key developments in counterterrorism (CT) over the past 12 months.

For the past two years, the *Counterterrorism yearbook* series has presented comprehensive analyses of the threat of terrorism across states and regions, and how governments across the world have responded to the threat. By including several thematic chapters, the 2019 edition expands that scope to examine elements of CT that extend beyond geographical boundaries. Those chapters explore countermeasures, including negotiating with terrorists, and new domains such as cyberspace and social media.

The yearbook chapters are written by subject-matter experts. The intention is to shed light on the major developments in their fields over the past 12 months, and to include an outlook for the following year. Each chapter and the yearbook in its entirety reflect the evolution of the terrorism landscape, to which governments are expected to respond effectively.

Our hope is that through the *Counterterrorism yearbook* we can stimulate discussions on the evolution of the threat and provide an opportunity to forecast innovations and highlight emerging trends in the field. By looking at different regions, and looking at thematic issues including chapters on forecasting terrorism, preventing radicalisation, social media, cyber, and the future of countering of violent extremism.

By delving into these areas, we want to underline the evolving nature of terrorism and the increasing need to consider traditional and non-traditional responses. This is especially important as the threat advisory in Australia remains at 'Probable'—there's credible intelligence to persuade the security establishment that individuals or groups continue to possess the intent and capability to conduct a terrorist attack in Australia. This threat advisory has been in effect since 2014, with the security services foiling 14 major operations and several terrorist attacks most recently in Bourke Street, Melbourne when Hassan Khalif Shire Ali stabbed three people, one fatally.

To better bridge the intersection of research and practice, we've encouraged our authors to bolster their nuanced examination of their state, region or concept with thought-provoking recommendations for the next 12 months, morphing the *Counterterrorism yearbook 2019* from an analytical publication into a practical instrument.

Throughout the *Counterterrorism yearbook 2019*, four themes emerge.

First, Salafist-jihadism continues to have an appeal. While defeated, militarily IS hasn't been extinguished (it's reported that IS can rely on between 21,000 to 30,000 fighters, roughly the same number that it had several years ago); nor has al-Qaeda and many other jihadist groups. What we're seeing is a strategic pause. IS may resurface with a revised mission, up-ending what we know of the group and what we've come to expect from it. Such a veiled threat ensures political anxiety, as we remain unsure about whether we'll face another mass-casualty attack.

Second, there's been a shift in the *modus operandi* of terrorist attackers: from groups to individuals. The spike in attacks by individual perpetrators is evident in the Australian, European and Israeli landscapes, among others. While this new phase of terrorist attacks has claimed only a few casualties, it fuels widespread fear, as perpetrators engage in high-impact, low-cost attacks which affect social cohesion, feeds the extremists' narrative and causes enormous economic damage (the fear of an attack is enough to discourage many people from travelling). Unlike past terrorist operations, which were generally time consuming, costly and meticulously planned, the new phase can be defined as highly unsophisticated but effective. Individuals can attack anytime and anywhere. This complicates response efforts, leading countries such as Australia to develop specialised policies for dealing with 'ambiguous attacks' and to explore new ways of gaining access to intelligence to forestall attacks.

Third, the global CT landscape has altered, largely due to the changes in the fortunes of IS and in Syria. In their wake, we're just beginning to appreciate the consequences and calamity we must manage. This includes foreign fighters (those arrested or detained and those 'in limbo'); judicial proceedings against fighters in conflict areas and against returning foreign fighters in distant jurisdictions; devastated infrastructure throughout conflict areas; displaced persons; and potentially radicalised youth. These are complex issues that demand comprehensive responses for which governments, amid a military offensive or with a tactical mindset, haven't prepared. The arguably unexpected 'defeat' of IS leaves states scurrying to develop processes to manage the aftermath, but in the interim we could see these issues fester, potentially culminating in a whole new threat.

Fourth, following on from the changed landscape and emerging issues, we've seen states adopt conflicting responses. For example, within the European Union, where one could reasonably expect relative consistency, member states have demonstrated starkly different attitudes towards returning foreign fighters and potentially radicalised people. In the Middle East, government had preferred a more hard-power, military response that may feed a grievance narrative that Salafi-jihadis exploit in their recruitment drive. This lack of coordination could create gaps in the system or be inherently detrimental to the establishment of sustainable peace. While we don't necessarily call for a blanket approach to CT, the differing nation-level policies are something that should be considered in the broader, global, context of CT in future.

The *Counterterrorism yearbook 2019* indicates that CT strategies must adapt to the changing global landscape in order to pre-empt, respond to and mitigate the terrorist threat we face. While the terrorism conundrum is as protracted as it is perverse, we have strived to illuminate the key issues in 2018 and potential responses in 2019 to prompt dialogue, stimulate minds and generate new ideas on how to develop more effective CT policies to address future threats.

Australia

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Australia experienced a relatively low level of terrorist activity by international standards in 2018, but with nonetheless tragic results. In February an Islamic State (IS) supporter carried out a brutal stabbing in Melbourne, and in November another IS supporter attempted a vehicle bombing in Melbourne's central business district before stabbing three members of the public, one fatally.[1] These attacks were the most visible manifestations of the persistent terrorist threat facing Australia.

This made 2018 a busy year for CT. It was a busy year for the courts, as many CT prosecutions were resolved and new legislation was tested. It was a busy year for parliaments, which introduced further terrorism-related legislation at both the federal and state levels. It was a busy year for public administration due to the reform of the security establishment. And it was busy, as always, for the intelligence and law enforcement services, which faced new CT challenges.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

IS posed the central, but not the sole, terrorism threat to Australia in 2018, just as it has ever since its dramatic rise in 2014.

BACKGROUND

Over the past five years, an estimated 230 Australians have travelled to join IS and other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, acting as frontline fighters, as suicide bombers, as propagandists, as medical practitioners and as instigators of attacks abroad.[2] Within Australia, IS supporters have sent money, recruited fighters and attempted terror attacks. Seven violent attacks have been carried out inside Australia in the name of IS since September 2014, killing five members of the public.[3] During the same period, 11 terror plots inspired or guided by IS have been proven in court, while several alleged plots are yet to go through the courts.[4]

However, the threat of terrorism and violent extremism hasn't come solely from IS. Authorities have also prosecuted Australians for supporting Jabhat al-Nusra (since renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) which leads the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham coalition.[5] Al-Qaeda, which has long posed a threat to Australia, has meanwhile been rebuilding its strength across the world, which could impact Australia's national security as afterall Australia has many interests around the globe.[6] Additionally, the 2002 Bali bombing was carried out by an al-Qaeda ally, Jemaah Islamiyah.

There is also concern from far-right activists. For example, a far-right extremist in Melbourne was charged for allegedly plotting a terror attack against left-wing activists in 2016, while another far-right extremist burned down a Sydney church in the same year.[7]

There have also been ambiguous incidents that weren't considered acts of terrorism, as they lacked clear ideological motivation. This was most evident with two high-profile vehicle attacks against pedestrians in Melbourne in 2017, killing five people in January and one in December, which echoed methods used by IS supporters in France and Germany.[8] These horrific vehicle attacks didn't meet Australia's legal definition of terrorism, or most scholarly definitions. However, they had a public impact comparable to a terrorist attack by causing carnage in the street and evoking widespread fear. These ambiguous attacks pose a challenge to authorities (a Victorian Government review explored whether CT powers might need to be used in such situations) and affected Australia's CT landscape in 2018.[9]

Australia therefore faces a diverse range of potential terrorist threats.

THE THREAT IN 2018

Despite the diversity of threats, IS has inspired the bulk of the terrorist activity that Australia has encountered since 2014. This continued to be the case in 2018, as shown by two violent attacks.

On 9 February, a 24-year-old Bangladeshi student named Momena Shoma stabbed a man in Melbourne's Mill Park a week after entering Australia.[10] Her sister was arrested in Bangladesh for allegedly stabbing a police officer the next day.[11] The Melbourne victim survived, and Shoma pleaded guilty to a terrorism offence. She stated that she was inspired by IS's calls to violence and interacted with the group through Facebook.[12] The incident was unusual for being not only Australia's first IS-inspired attack by a female perpetrator, but also the first by someone who entered Australia specifically for the purpose of carrying out an attack.[13]

On 9 November, another terrorist attack occurred. Hassan Khalif Shire Ali drove a utility vehicle laden with gas canisters into Melbourne's pedestrian-filled Bourke Street and set the vehicle on fire in a failed attempt to ignite the canisters. He then stabbed nearby members of the public, murdering one person and severely injuring two others. Police officers arrived within 90 seconds and, after Shire Ali repeatedly ran at them with his knife, shot him fatally.[14] Police believe that the attack was inspired by IS; the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) had cancelled his passport three years earlier, suspecting that he planned to travel to Syria to join the group.[15]

Other types of terrorist activity also occurred in Australia during 2018. On 23 January, the NSW Joint Counter Terrorism Team (JCTT) charged a 40-year-old woman named Linda Merhi for allegedly trying to send $30,000 to her brother, who was fighting in Syria for IS.[16] On 16 June, the NSW JCTT charged a 26-year-old man named Nowroz Amin for allegedly 'planning to travel to Bangladesh to meet with people who held similar beliefs and to possibly engage in terrorist acts outside of Australia'.[17] On 30 June, the Queensland

JCTT arrested a 21-year-old man named Abdus Samad Zaid, charging him with attempting to join IS and recruiting others.[18] On 30 August, the NSW JCTT charged a 25-year-old Sri Lankan student for possessing material 'connected with preparation for, the engagement of a person in, or assistance in a terrorist act', but those charges were withdrawn on 19 October and police later concluded that a 'jealous love rival' had tried to frame him.[19] Finally, on 20 November the Victorian JCTT arrested three men, Ertunc Eriklioglu, Samed Eriklioglu and Hanifi Halis, and charged them for allegedly plotting an IS-inspired mass shooting attack against a public gathering in Melbourne.[20]

Despite the tragic results of the February and November attacks in Melbourne, 2018 appears to have involved less terrorist activity directly threatening Australians than the immediately preceding years. A total of eight people in Australia were charged with terrorism-related offences in 2018, which was fewer than in any year since 2014. Furthermore, no Australians were known to have been killed in terrorist attacks abroad—a sharp contrast with 2017, when four Australians were killed by terrorists in Baghdad, Barcelona and London.[21] This seeming decline isn't unique to Australia, as IS's devastating territorial losses in 2017 appeared to set back its transnational mobilisation efforts throughout 2018.[22] However, the Bourke Street attack in November demonstrates how a single attacker can prove deadly and ASIO Director-General Duncan Lewis recently testified that the threat remains high.[23]

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN COUNTERTERRORISM

CT developments involving new legislation, administrative changes and the resolution of several CT prosecutions occurred throughout 2018.

LEGISLATION

Australian CT has never been just a federal responsibility, as the states have the primary responsibility for public safety and run the first responder and corrections services. Several state parliaments have passed CT legislation since 9/11 and continued to do so in 2018. On 28 June, the Western Australian Parliament passed the Terrorism (Extraordinary Powers) Amendment Bill 2018, providing greater legal protection for police officers to use force when responding to a terrorist incident.[24] This was introduced partly in response to the coronial inquest into the

Lindt Café siege in New South Wales which identified a need to more clearly define when police can use lethal force, and was also in response to a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decision in October 2017 to call for national consistency in CT laws.[25] On 26 July, the Victorian Parliament passed the Justice Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill 2018, which adjusted preventive detention powers, bail and parole arrangements, and similarly clarified the scope for police use of lethal force. This Bill was in response to recommendations from the Expert Panel on Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention and Response Powers appointed after the May 2017 Brighton siege.[26] On 5 October, the Tasmanian Parliament passed the Terrorism (Restrictions on Bail and Parole) Bill 2018, which places limits on bail and parole for individuals convicted of terrorism offences or subject to control orders.[27] No one in Tasmania has yet been convicted of a terrorism offence or subjected to a control order, but the legislation demonstrates that COAG's call for greater national consistency is being heeded.

For the Australian Parliament, CT receded among its national security priorities in 2018. Unlike in earlier years, only a small portion of the total national security legislation passed in 2018 specifically addressed terrorism. Instead, the parliament focused on legislation addressing espionage and foreign interference, partly as a result of a classified report on covert Chinese activities in Australia produced in 2016 by ASIO and the Office of National Assessments.[28] Other national security legislation focused on implementing the recommendations of the 2017 Independent Intelligence Review, which among other things called for transforming the Office of National Assessments into the Office of National Intelligence, giving it a coordination role over Australia's other intelligence agencies.[29]

On 6 December 2018 the federal parliament passed the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill 2018. The federal government also introduced the Australian Passports Amendment (Identity-matching Services) Bill 2018 and the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Police Powers at Airports) Bill 2018, but these did not pass through parliament before the year ended. These bills all have implications for CT, particularly for the ability of police and intelligence services to intercept encrypted communications, but also have a wide range of other national security and public safety purposes. The limited perceived need for specific new CT legislation was probably due to the extensive amount already introduced since 2014 and the prominence of other security concerns, such as Chinese espionage, Russian electoral interference abroad and information security.

The main exception was the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2018, which passed through both houses of the Australian Parliament on 16 August. The bill didn't introduce specific new powers but amended a range of existing CT powers, such as control orders, preventive detention orders, declared areas offences, questioning powers, and stop, search and seize powers.[30] After the Bourke Street attack in November, the federal government announced that it would introduce further counter-terrorism laws in 2019.[31]

Another important piece of federal terrorism-related legislation was the Home Affairs and Integrity Agencies Legislation Amendment Bill 2017, which passed both houses on 9 May 2018.[32] This bill wasn't primarily concerned with CT but substantially altered administrative arrangements by providing a legislative basis for the newly created Department of Home Affairs.[33]

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES AND REVIEWS

The finalisation of the federal government's creation of the Department of Home Affairs, responsible for all immigration, border control, domestic security and law enforcement agencies, marked the major CT-related administrative change in 2018.[34]

On 20 December 2017, the portfolios of the Minister for Justice and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counter-Terrorism were abolished and their responsibilities were subsumed by the new Home Affairs portfolio. Most of the Attorney-General's CT roles were also handed to Home Affairs, with the exception of responsibility for ASIO. As ASIO is a statutory agency, it couldn't be transferred without new legislation. However, with the passing of the Home Affairs and Integrity Agencies Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 on 9 May 2018, responsibility for ASIO was transferred from the Attorney-General to the Minister for Home Affairs.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet similarly transferred some of its CT responsibilities by moving the Commonwealth Counter-Terrorism Coordinator to Home Affairs. This position was created by the Abbott government in 2015 and is formally responsible for coordinating all federal CT arrangements through the Centre for Counter-Terrorism Coordination, as well as acting as a central contact point for the states by chairing the Australia – New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee within COAG.[35] The result of these changes is that almost all federal domestic CT responsibilities are now administered by the Department of Home Affairs.

The department was created on the stated grounds of a need to provide 'a better coordinated, better integrated counterterrorism structure', following the template of the UK's Home Office.[36] Critics have argued that it was an unnecessary shake-up of a CT community that was already regarded as cooperative and collegial, that it could have overlapping responsibilities with the new Office of National Intelligence, and that such a large department would risk reducing accountability.[37] However, nothing in the public domain during 2018 shed much light on whether the department will prove as beneficial as promised or as harmful as feared.

Administrative changes also occurred at the state level. In March 2018, Victoria's Fixated Threat Assessment Centre was announced as fully operational.[38] It was established in response to the ambiguous violent incidents mentioned above, such as the vehicle attacks in Melbourne during 2017. The centre is intended to deal with fixated individuals (such as stalkers of public figures) considered to have the potential to act violently, regardless of whether the violence would necessarily be considered terrorism. Victoria was the third state to establish a fixated threat centre. Queensland had a similar Fixated Threat Assessment Centre established in 2013, modelled on the UK centre established in 2006.[39] New South Wales established its Fixated Persons Investigative Unit in 2017, partly in response to the December 2014 Lindt Café siege.[40]

Several terrorism-related reviews were also published in 2018. At the federal level, on 1 March the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security tabled its *Review of police stop, search and seizure powers, the control order regime and the preventative detention order regime*.[41] The report recommended that the powers be continued, with some minor modifications mainly relating to reporting requirements. The federal government also announced two new reviews in 2018 with potential to affect CT. On 4 May, then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service, which could indirectly affect CT given how many different parts of the public service have CT-related roles.[42] On 30 May, the Attorney-General, Christian Porter, announced a review of the legal framework under which Australia's intelligence agencies operate, headed by former ASIO Director-General Dennis Richardson.[43]

At the state level, on 6 June the NSW Inspector of Custodial Services announced the release of a report on the incarceration of radicalised prisoners, *The management of radicalised inmates in NSW*, which recommended making greater rehabilitative efforts, increasing intelligence capacity, improving risk assessment and bringing NSW Corrections into the NSW JCTT.[44] On 18 October, the Western Australian Parliament's Community Development and Justice Standing Committee tabled the *Near enough is not good enough* report, which argued that CT authorities were providing insufficient security advice for events held in crowded places.[45]

One review, released by the NSW Department of Justice on 7 June 2018, points to a potential divergence between the two states with the most significant terrorism problems. This was the *Statutory review of the Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002*, which recommended minor amendments to NSW CT laws.[46]

One little-noticed aspect of this review was that it took issue with a recommendation made in 2017 by Victoria's Expert Panel on Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention and Response Powers. The Victorian review called for Australia to broaden its definition of terrorism by removing the requirement to prove a political, religious or ideological motivation, due to the sorts of ambiguous attacks noted above. The NSW Department of Justice argued that changing the legal definition of terrorism was an unnecessary response. This inter-state discussion is worth watching, as this may become a bigger issue in future, and it demonstrates the divided reaction to high-profile attacks that haven't normally been considered to be terrorism.

PROSECUTIONS AND PROCESSES

Throughout 2018, several terrorism prosecutions resulting from arrests over the preceding years were resolved in the courts. Three IS supporters in Sydney, Raban Alou, Talal Alameddine and Milad Atai, were sentenced for their role in the October 2015 murder of NSW police employee Curtis Cheng.[47] Alou had played the central role and was sentenced to 44 years imprisonment. This was the longest sentence ever imposed for a terrorism offence in Australia, because it was the first time someone was sentenced under CT laws for an attack that resulted in someone's death, rather than for a plot that was foiled before anybody was murdered.

These were the only cases in 2018 of Australians being sentenced over a fatal terrorist attack, but several others were sentenced over foiled terrorist plots. On 2 March, IS supporter Tamim Khaja was sentenced to 19 years for plotting a terrorist attack in Sydney in early 2016.[48] On 22 June, an unnamed juvenile was sentenced to 12 years for planning to carry out a shooting attack in Sydney on Anzac Day in 2016.[49] On 31 July, Agim Kruezi was sentenced to 17 years and four months for having attempted to travel to Syria to join Jabhat al-Nusra in early 2014, and then switching his allegiance to IS and plotting a terrorist attack in Brisbane in cooperation with some Sydney-based men.[50] This was the first time someone had been convicted for a terrorist plot in Queensland. On 11 December, an unnamed teenage boy was sentenced to 16 years for plotting a terrorist attack in Sydney involving the use of bayonets.[51]

Several other terrorism trials came close to completion in 2018 as juries rendered their verdicts. On 5 October, a Sydney couple, Alo-Bridget Namoa and Sameh Bayda, were found guilty of plotting a terrorist attack.[52] On 1 November, a Sydney man named Omarjan Azari was found guilty of being part of a plot to murder random members of the public under instructions from a Syria-based Australian member of IS.[53]

The next day three men, Hamza Abbas, Abdullah Chaarani and Ahmed Mohamed, were found guilty for planning to detonate improvised explosive devices at popular locations in and around Melbourne's Federation Square.[54] Hamza Abbas's brother, Ibrahim Abbas, was the plot's ringleader and had pleaded guilty earlier in the year.[55]

Prosecutions involving other types of terrorism and foreign incursions offences were also resolved in 2018. On 27 April, Mehmet Biber was sentenced to 4 years and 9 months for having joined the Syrian jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham.[56] On 17 September, South Australian woman Zainab Abdirahman-Khalif was found guilty of being an IS member. She had communicated with IS members online, including some who were behind a bombing in Kenya, pledged allegiance to the group, and unsuccessfully attempted to travel to Turkey.[57] On 24 September, a South Australian man who had been charged with advocating terrorism through a series of videos he had made was found not guilty, on the grounds of being mentally impaired at the time of offending.[58] On 13 December, Sydney man Muhammed Abdul-Karim Musleh was sentenced to two years and one month for assisting other men (including Biber) to join the conflict in Syria.[59]

However, not all terrorism suspects were within the reach of Australian law enforcement. The government has so far failed in its bid to have Neil Prakash, a high-profile Australian IS member connected to a terrorist plot in Melbourne, extradited from Turkey.[60] Early in 2018, it was revealed that Australian terrorist suspect Ahmed Merhi had been arrested in Iraq, but whether there will be an extradition attempt is unclear.[61]

Some suspects beyond the reach of law enforcement have been dealt with in a different way, by having their Australian citizenship revoked under a power that was controversial when it was introduced in 2015.[62] The law has been criticised on the ground that it could undermine the presumption of innocence, and that that could amount to Australia abandoning its responsibilities to bring such people to justice.[63] Before 2018, the only Australian subjected to this CT power was Khaled Sharrouf, who had served jail time for his involvement in a 2005 Sydney terrorism plot and joined IS some years after being released. In 2018, the Department of Home Affairs announced that 11 more Australians had lost their citizenship due to alleged involvement with IS.[64] One of these was Neil Prakash, but the names of the others have not been released.

CHALLENGES ARISING FROM THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

There's been no shortage of challenges facing Australian CT authorities. One has been the increased involvement of children, most brutally demonstrated when 15-year-old Farhad Jabar murdered Curtis Cheng. Eight Australian juveniles have now been charged with terrorism offences, and at least four have been convicted.[65] The Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, James Renwick, has conducted a review into the dilemmas raised by this phenomenon, as the laws weren't designed with children in mind. Renwick investigated 'troubling and unforeseen problems in the juvenile justice system, often because of considerable differences in trial and punishment depending upon which state or territory the federal prosecution takes place in'.[66] He has stated that parts of Australia's CT legislation (the presumption against bail and the mandatory three-quarters non-parole period for convicted terrorists' prison terms) may violate Australia's international obligations regarding the rights of children.[67]

Women have also played a larger role in the IS threat than in earlier terrorist threats to Australia.[68] In 2018, we saw the first case of IS-inspired violence in Australia by a female perpetrator, Momena Shoma, and the first Australian woman convicted of a terrorism offence, Zainab Abdirahman-Khalif. Court proceedings in March 2018 revealed the key role Farhad Jabar's sister, Shadi Mohammad Jabar, had played in Curtis Cheng's murder. The judge stated that she had 'played a major role in the radicalisation of Farhad', that 'she knew that her 15-year-old brother was to play a part in the terrorist act' and that she 'played a part in the drafting of the note found on the body of her brother after he had shot Mr Cheng'.[69]

The Shadi Mohammad Jabar case doesn't raise the same legal difficulties that the role of children does, but it raises the question of whether Australian CT is sufficiently gender-aware. For example, one study has argued that defence lawyers for female terrorist defendants in the US were able to achieve lighter sentences by playing on stereotypes of women being passive participants.[70] Some scholars have argued that Australia needs to ensure that its approaches to terrorism and violent extremism are aligned with the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which will be redesigned in 2019.[71]

A further challenge has been the prospect of terrorist involvement by radicalised prisoners after their release. This has occurred with convicted terrorists such as Khaled Sharrouf and Ezzit Raad, who were jailed for their role in a 2005 terror plot and joined IS shortly after leaving prison. The NSW Government has been highly concerned about this risk and passed the Terrorism (High Risk Offenders) Act 2017 on 22 November 2017.[72]

The Act allows authorities to apply to courts to place restrictions on released prisoners considered to pose a terrorism threat after they have served their sentences, regardless of whether they were originally convicted of terrorism offences. Such released prisoners can be subject to extended supervision orders, which extend parole-like conditions on them, or continuing detention orders, which return them to prison.[73]

The NSW Government used this power five times in 2018. An extended supervision order was placed on Ahmed Elomar, who had been repeatedly convicted for violent crimes and who was the nephew of a convicted terrorist and the brother of one of Australia's most notorious IS fighters.[74] This power was also used against Ricky White, the far-right extremist who burned down a church in Sydney in 2016.[75] The NSW Government similarly sought extended supervision orders against two other men, Greg Ceissman and Mohamed Naaman.[76] Both had served prison time for various violent offences and were suspected to have since become radicalised or to have made terrorism threats.[77] However, the NSW Supreme Court rejected the application against Naaman as the judge was unconvinced that the evidence showed that he posed a sufficient risk.[78] The government has also applied for a continuing detention order against one man whose name has been suppressed.[79]

CT authorities face many other challenges. There's the challenge of international cooperation evident in the attempts to extradite Neil Prakash. There's also the persistent challenge of community relations, as CT authorities endeavour to build trust inside stigmatised communities.[80] A particularly significant challenge is posed by new technologies, as Australia's former Minister for Law Enforcement and Cyber Security has said that '95 per cent of ASIO's most dangerous CT targets actively use encrypted messages to conceal their communications.'[81] The dilemma is that measures to address terrorists' use of encryption pose potential risks for cybersecurity more widely.[82] The passing of the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Bill 2018 in December, which placed obligations on telecommunications companies to help authorities circumvent encryption, proved highly controversial and the PJCIS was immediately tasked to consider a range of amendments.[83]

Australia's CT challenges have two common themes. One is changes in the *nature* of the threat, such as the increased involvement of women and children in jihadist violence, or the increased use of encryption. The other is changes in the *expectations* placed on CT authorities, which face greater pressure to pre-empt any prospect of an attack.

For example, recidivism isn't new, but in terrorism cases it can result in dramatic controversies. This was evident after the May 2017 Brighton siege perpetrated by Yacqub Khayre, who had been imprisoned multiple times for violent offences and was released on parole six months before his attack. The then federal Attorney-General, George Brandis, placed blame on Victorian parole authorities, and other federal government ministers accused the Victorian judiciary of being soft on terrorism.[84] This shows a political dynamic that goes beyond the expectations placed on security agencies to disrupt terror plots before the perpetrators manage to harm anybody (a task they've performed well since the early 2000s). The Khayre case shows how a wide range of authorities, including courts and parole boards, now also face expectations to anticipate, well in advance, who may end up becoming involved in a terror plot. Similarly, the creation of fixated threat assessment centres shows, in part, an expectation for violent attacks that might not necessarily be considered terrorism to similarly be pre-empted.

The response to such increased expectations often takes the form of passing new laws. The current Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, James Renwick, has commented that 'there have probably been about 74 laws in relation to counterterrorism', and international legal scholars have noted Australia's unusually large volume of CT legislation.[85] Renwick has warned about the increasing complexity of CT legislation and of unintended consequences resulting from interactions between different laws.[86] The frequent introduction of new legislation also tends to result in increasingly exceptional government powers, so that we now have a situation in which measures such as citizenship revocation and extended detention generate relatively little debate. Such powers can have CT benefits but don't address the unrealistic expectations of consistently effective pre-emption. Exceptional powers also carry serious risks, whether of misuse or simply the perception of misuse; powers that are widely accepted at one time can face a dramatic backlash at another time.[87]

Therefore, both the ongoing evolution of the terrorist threat and the political dynamics of CT can pose challenges to the practice of CT. In 2018, various components of Australia's system of government—parliaments, oversight bodies, police and courts—attempted to deal with challenges resulting both from the changing nature of the threat and changing expectations about pre-empting it.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Rather than being recommendations for further action, the following points are intended to help make sense of the broad dynamics underpinning Australian CT and the rapid changes of recent years:

- Australian CT is about much more than the decisions made in the nation's capital, Canberra. CT encompasses state responsibilities (such as public safety, emergency response and corrective services) to a greater extent than many other national security concerns, such as counter-espionage. Much day-to-day CT work occurs at both the state and the federal levels and is consequently affected by all the advantages and disadvantages of federalism.

- The threat evolves continuously. Terrorists adapt, methods of attack vary and the perpetrators change, as shown by the increased involvement of women and children in recent years. IS has continued to pose the central threat but has never posed the only threat. There are also ambiguous attacks that aren't considered terrorism but evoked similar fears, and authorities often face messy realities that don't fit into neat categories.

- CT occurs in a political context, just as terrorism does. Australia's CT politics have tended to involve increasing numbers of often complex laws, increased security powers, regular reviews, administrative adjustments, and increased expectations placed on authorities to pre-empt potential risks. These increased expectations, along with the reality of an evolving threat that can defy such expectations, reinforce these dynamics.

- This doesn't mean that these dynamics occur in a uniform way. In 2018, fewer formal CT Bills passed at the federal level than in the years from 2014 to 2017, but 2018 involved the most substantial administrative changes through the creation of the Department of Home Affairs.

- The threat remains persistent, but CT measures have helped contain the carnage. For example, the quick police response to the Bourke Street attack in November saved many lives. A large number of terrorists in Australia were brought to justice in 2018, as several prosecutions resulting from arrests between 2014 and 2016 were eventually resolved. Alongside the horrors of terrorism and the complexities of CT, there's good news to be found.

TABLE 1: Proven and alleged terrorist plots in Australia from September 2014 to December 2018

Violent incidents	
Month of incident	**Incident**
September 2014	Melbourne-based teenager Numan Haider was inspired by IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani's global call to arms and stabbed two Victorian Joint Counter-Terrorism Team (JCTT) officers before being fatally shot.
December 2014	Harun Man Monis used a shotgun to take hostages in the Lindt Café in Sydney shortly after pledging allegiance online to IS. The 12-hour siege ended with the deaths of two hostages and Monis.
October 2015	Fifteen-year old Farhad Jabar, who belonged to a group of Sydney-based IS supporters, used a handgun to murder NSW police employee Curtis Cheng at Parramatta Police Station before being fatally shot. One accomplice, Raban Alou, pleaded guilty to a terrorism offence for conspiring in the murder. In March 2018, he was sentenced to 44 years imprisonment. Another accomplice, Talal Alameddine, pleaded guilty to supplying the handgun and was sentenced in May 2018 to 7 years and 2 months imprisonment. Milad Atai, who also pleaded guilty to a role in the murder, was sentenced in November 2018 to 38 years. Other alleged accomplices are still before the courts.
September 2016	A man allegedly inspired by IS stabbed a member of the public in the Sydney suburb of Minto. He acknowledged that he committed the stabbing but pleaded not guilty on mental health grounds.
June 2017	Yaqcub Khayre used a shotgun to murder a hotel clerk in the Melbourne suburb of Brighton, before taking a hostage and seeking media and police attention. After the police arrived, he fired at them and was shot dead. He had claimed that the action was in the name of both al-Qaeda and IS.
February 2018	Inspired by IS, Bangladeshi student Momena Shoma stabbed a man in Melbourne's Mill Park. She has pleaded guilty to a terrorism offence but hasn't yet been sentenced.
November 2018	Hassan Khalif Shire Ali, believed to be inspired by IS, drove a vehicle laden with gas canisters into Melbourne's Bourke Street, set it on fire, and stabbed multiple members of the public. He murdered one person and injured two others before being fatally shot by police.
Proven plots	
Month of key arrests	**Incident**
September 2014	A Brisbane-based man, Agim Kruezi, plotted to carry out an attack using firearms and Molotov cocktails while in contact with IS supporters in Sydney. Kruezi was arrested under the Queensland JCTT's Operation Bolton, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 17 years and 4 months imprisonment.
September 2014	Omarjan Azari was part of plot in Sydney to murder random members of the public. Under instructions from Syria-based Australian IS member Mohamed Ali Baryalei, the plan was for the victims to be killed with a blade and for videos of the murders to be sent to IS. Azari was arrested under the NSW JCTT's Operation Appleby and was found guilty by a jury on 1 November 2018.
December 2014 to May 2016	Six IS supporters plotted to attack government buildings in Sydney but were arrested over many months in a series of raids under the NSW JCTT's Operation Appleby. All six pleaded guilty and were sentenced to prison terms that ranged from 8 years to 22 years.
February 2015	Two Sydney-based men, Omar al-Kutobi and Mohammad Kiad, plotted an attack while in communication with an IS member in Syria. The plot involved firebombing a Shia institution and then attacking one or more people with a blade. Al-Kutobi and Kiad were arrested under the NSW JCTT's Operation Castrum, pleaded guilty, and were sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.
April 2015	Sevdet Besim plotted to kill police officers in Melbourne on Anzac Day (25 April). He was in communication with two Syria-based Australian IS members and a 14-year-old UK child pretending to be a significant IS member. Besim was arrested in the Victorian JCTT's Operation Rising, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, later changed on appeal to 14 years.

Proven plots	
Month of key arrests	**Incident**
May 2015	An unnamed 17-year-old male plotted an attack in Melbourne involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) under instructions from British IS member Junaid Hussain. Targets are unclear, but there was discussion of a police station or train station. He was arrested under the Victorian JCTT's Operation Amberd, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment, later changed on appeal to 11 years.
February 2016	An IS-supporting couple, Alo-Bridget Namoa and Sameh Bayda, planned a knife attack in Sydney. The two were arrested under the NSW JCTT's Operation Chillon, and one was convicted and sentenced for refusing to answer questions. Both then faced trial on terrorism charges and were found guilty in October 2018, but haven't yet been sentenced.
April 2016	An unnamed Sydney-based IS-inspired teenager plotted to carry out a shooting attack against people attending a memorial service for Anzac Day. He was arrested under the NSW JCTT's Operation Vianden, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced in June 2018 to 12 years imprisonment.
May 2016	A Sydney-based IS-inspired man, Tamim Khaja, plotted to attack targets such as Parramatta Court or an Army or Navy base. He was charged under the NSW JCTT's Operation Sanandres, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to 19 years.
October 2016	Two unnamed Sydney-based teenagers, inspired by IS, were accused of plotting to carry out a beheading attack in Sydney. They were charged under the NSW JCTT's Operation Restormal in September 2018. One was found guilty at trial and sentenced in December 2018 to 16 years, while the other is facing a retrial.
December 2016	Four men (Ibrahim Abbas, Hamza Abbas, Abdullah Chaarani and Ahmed Mohamed) plotted to detonate IEDs at popular locations in Melbourne's central business district. They were charged under the Victorian JCCT's Operation Kastelhom. Ibrahim Abbas pleaded guilty in February 2018 and was sentenced in September 2018 to 24 years. The other three were found guilty by a jury on 2 November 2018 but haven't yet been sentenced.
Alleged plots	
Month of key arrests	**Incident**
August 2016	A far-right extremist in Melbourne is alleged to have plotted a bomb attack against left-wing activists. He was charged under the Victorian JCTT's Operation Fortaleza and is facing trial.
September 2016	A NSW prisoner is alleged to have plotted an attack, the details of which are currently unclear. One suspect was charged under the NSW JCTT's Operation Broughton and is facing trial.
August 2017	Two people are alleged to have plotted to bomb a plane and then to build a chemical dispersal advice under instructions from IS. Two people were charged with terrorism offences under the NSW JCTT's Operation Silves and are facing trial.
November 2017	A person is alleged to have plotted a shooting attack at Federation Square in Melbourne on New Year's Eve. The suspect was arrested under the Victorian JCTT's Operation San Jose and is facing trial.
November 2018	Three men in Melbourne are alleged to have plotted a mass shooting attack against a public gathering. The suspects were arrested under the Victorian JCTT's Operation Donabate and are facing trial.

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COUNTERTERRORISM IN

Southeast Asia

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Terrorism is a persistent but manageable threat in Southeast Asia. While there's no shortage of armed groups, there's little cooperation between them. They remain divided in their goals and ideologies as well as by personal rivalries and egos. While the region's borders are porous, the tyranny of geography and lack of secure communications makes terrorists' coordination difficult, so cells remain small and disparate. That's all the more so, now that the Islamic State (IS) group is in flux.

The impact of IS's loss of over 99% of its territory in Syria and Iraq on Southeast Asia remains unknown. Will the region become more central as IS transitions to a global insurgency model? Will it become more relevant in IS central media? The four leading IS militants in Iraq and Syria have been killed,[2] and their successors have less influence and fewer followers. They're less able to martial the resources to mount attacks and have less charisma to inspire followers. IS has reportedly declared the establishment of an East Asian *wiliyat*, or province.[3] While the claim was quickly walked back, what's clear is that pro-IS militants in Southeast Asia are eager for the *wiliyat* to be established.

Yet there are also signs of concern within pro-IS ranks that the movement has experienced setbacks not only in Iraq and Syria but in Southeast Asia as well. The May 2018 suicide bombings in Surabaya in Indonesia, which involved entire families, and the unprecedented suicide bombing by a foreign fighter in Basilan in the Philippines[4] may have been attempts to goad others into action and may have been a reflection of internal debates and frustration over the loss of momentum and commitment to the cause.

INDONESIA

Indonesia faced a range of attacks in 2018. Most were amateurish and were conducted by lone actors inspired by IS propaganda. They included a grenade attack on a police station in Makassar and a student's machete attack in a Yogyakarta church, which wounded six.[5] A group of eight sword-wielding militants killed a policeman in Pekenbaru; four of them were killed.[6] In May, police arrested two men in Palembang in possession of volatile acetone-based TATP bombs, which raised concerns simply because of the technical sophistication required to manufacture them. Most of the other attacks focused on either sectarian targets or the police.

The headline attacks of the year were a series of suicide bombings in Surabaya in May, in which entire families were involved. A family of six, including four children aged from nine to 18 years, carried out three suicide bombings on three separate churches in Surabaya, killing 14 people and wounding 40. This was the first successful suicide bombing by females in Southeast Asia. Another family set out to detonate their improvised explosive device (IED) at a police housing complex outside Surabaya.

The bomb, which authorities have said was made of TATP, went off prematurely, killing the parents and their son; two daughters survived.[7] While these attacks were unprecedented in their use of entire families, there's now the potential for copycat attacks.

The families involved in the Surabaya attacks were all members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD),[8] which has morphed from being an umbrella grouping for all pro-IS organisations into a terrorist organisation in its own right.[9] IS quickly took credit for the attacks in an online posting. By the middle of July, Indonesian security forces had killed 20 JAD suspects and arrested nearly 180 in follow-up operations to the Surabaya attacks. In July, an Indonesian court banned the JAD,[10] while another court sentenced the spiritual leader of IS in Indonesia, Abdurrahman Aman, to death.[11] The government banned the non-violent but pro-caliphate Hizb ut-Tahrir in 2017.[12]

But the real impact of the Surabaya bombings was the immediate passage of Indonesia's controversial Counterterrorism Bill, which had been stalled in parliament for nearly two years.[13] The new Act superseded Indonesia's 2003 legislation passed after the October 2002 Bali bombings, which security forces deemed insufficient to meet the growing challenges posed by IS. The new law has several important improvements, such as criminalising joining terrorist groups overseas and longer jail sentences for terrorism-related crimes. However, it has many controversial provisions, including the ability to strip citizenship, longer periods of detention before charges can be brought, and preventive detention.[14]

The most disconcerting aspect of the Act is that it gives the Indonesian National Armed Forces (the TNI) a formal CT role. The TNI had long clamoured for this, and it must be seen in the context of Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryucudu's *Bela Negara* doctrine, or 'Total People's Defence', through which the TNI seems to be trying to claw back many civilian roles that it has ceded since the restoration of democracy in 1998. There's a case to be made for the TNI having a CT role. It played a key role in decimating the pro-IS Mujahidin Indonesia Timur in Central Sulawesi Province. The police simply did not have the capabilities or will to fight sustained jungle warfare.

But the TNI has now requested some 1.5 trillion rupiah (about A$137.8 million or US$100.3 million) in parliamentary funding to establish an elite CT unit, Special Operations Command, or Koopsus. Although the Office of the President is drafting a presidential regulation (*Perpres*) that would clarify the military's expanded role in CT, human rights and democracy activists' concerns linger.[15]

There's concern that the new CT law will cause blowback if the security forces begin to cast a wider net for terrorism suspects and abuse their new legal powers, reinforcing the narrative of both Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and IS that the government is inherently anti-Islamist and repressive, thereby justifying a 'defensive jihad'. The restraint shown to date has mitigated that narrative. And there's ample concern that President Widodo isn't standing up to the TNI

as it claws back civil authorities that it ceded in 1998, especially in an election year in which his opponent, Prabowo Subianto, seeks to cast him as weak on security.

Indonesia faces a range of other CT challenges. The first and foremost is what to do with the more than 600 Indonesians who went to Syria and Iraq. At least 200 of them are women and children who did not fight. Moreover, Turkey returned to Indonesia more than 500 people who were *en route* to the war zone, creating a legal quandary.[16] Roughly 100 Indonesians have been killed in combat, while the authorities actively prevented 171 more from travelling. Some 90 people who were in Iraq and Syria are confirmed to have returned to Indonesia.[17]

In late 2017, in response to a 10-fold increase in the number of 'persons of interest', the government announced that the elite CT police force, Densus-88, would double in size to 1,300 men, from 16 to 34 detachments, deployed in all 34 provinces of the archipelago.[18]

With these new resources and legal tools, the number of arrests increased quickly in the second half of 2018. However, that served only to remind the authorities of the central importance of prison reform to CT.

Twice in 2018, prisoners rioted at the prison within the headquarters of Brimob (the Indonesian National Police Force's special operations and paramilitary unit) in Depok outside of Jakarta, where some 150 IS suspects were held. In the second riot, five Brimob personnel were killed and several were held hostage before the riot was suppressed. The inmates had somehow armed themselves with about 30 weapons taken from an area where contraband and evidence seized during police operations were stored. The rioters were able to make crude IEDs. One hundred and forty-five surrendered and were sent to Nusubangan Prison.[19] A handful of other JAD militants were killed or arrested *en route* to join the prison siege.[20]

Prisons remain permissive environments where terrorists continue to radicalise and recruit, if not plan terrorist attacks. Nearly 300 terror suspects are housed in 113 different prisons, where they're able to indoctrinate the general prison population.[21] The new 'super-maximum' Karanganyar Prison, specifically for terror convicts, is being built on Nusakambangan Island, Central Java. It will have a capacity of 500, but it's way behind schedule and would immediately exceed capacity.[22]

Just as challenging is what to do with people once they're out of prison. Large numbers will be released in Indonesia in the coming year, including the first wave of IS detainees. While Indonesia does have some countering violent

extremism (CVE) programs in the prisons, they're small, under-resourced and non-compulsory. Post-release monitoring puts an additional burden on Densus-88 who are already spread thin. Around 60 terror suspects were released in 2018, and some 140 will be released in 2019. They have created important 'alumni' networks. And, if the lesson of JI is anything to go by, they'll remain in-tight knit communities, dependent on the jobs and social welfare accorded to them. While this isn't an insurmountable problem for Indonesian security forces, it's a further drain on resources.

The arrest of a growing number of women, either terror suspects or simply those returning from Syria or deported from Turkey, poses both new challenges. Women have gone from being terrorist recruiters and socializers to terrorists in their own right. And even recruitment by women tends to be different, taking place on social media.

It's important to note that al-Qaeda-linked JI hasn't renounced violence, although it's been given ample space to regroup, organise and proselytise as long as it eschews violence. This group's social networks are as vibrant today as they ever have been, and there's ample reason to believe that it's simply biding its time, letting rival IS networks bear the brunt of the security forces' efforts. While pro-IS cells remain the immediate concern, the government's approach to JI seems dangerously naive and short-sighted.

Indonesia has shown a willingness to take on big tech. In July 2017, it threatened Telegram with closure if it didn't shut down certain public channels. Telegram complied, closing 55 channels.[23] More importantly, Indonesia compelled Telegram to set up an office in the country, so now it has legal liability for failing to comply. While it's all but impossible for the firm to shut down encrypted private communications, the intensified cyber campaign has appeared to have some effect, prompting pro-JAD hacktivists to respond in mid-2018 with the hacking of government networks.[24] With some of the highest rates of social media usage in the world, Indonesia is looking to demand greater data localisation from tech firms.

But there are limits to what can be done. Between encryption, mirroring and other technical workarounds, the use of social media and messaging apps by terrorists will continue unabated. And Indonesia's democratic gains aren't irreversible.

Indonesia has made great strides in CT, and its professional security forces now have more tools and resources at their disposal. More importantly, Indonesia has not just tremendous social resiliency, but has shown a willingness to experiment with creative solutions, such as

establishing schools for the children of terror suspects to get them out of the JI or IS social networks.[25] The government assumed responsibility for and vowed to rehabilitate seven orphans of Surabaya terror suspects. By mid-2018, it had cared for 81 children whose parents committed terrorism and were either killed or arrested.[26] Indonesia should continue to support these innovative policies, whether through direct state support or through civil society.

The concern, though, is that the overall context for CT is worsening. Going into the 2019 elections, we've seen the empowerment of 'anti-vice' organisations, such as the 212 Movement that played such a central role in getting the Christian Chinese governor of Jakarta, Basuki Purnama (Ahok) arrested. While much attention is on the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front), a host of smaller and more regionally based anti-vice organisations are important conveyors into terrorist groups. President Joko Widodo's selection of conservative cleric Ma'ruf Amin, who as the head of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (the Indonesian Ulema Council) has authored some extremely intolerant *fatwas* against liberal Islam, pluralism and gender and minority rights, as his vice president may be a good short-term political move for Jokowi, but it creates a context in which society is increasingly less tolerant and diverse. Tolerance and diversity have always given Indonesia the cultural resilience to withstand the spread of militant Salafism. While popular support for IS is decreasing in Indonesia, according to the latest poll, at 1.3%, who support IS (in Malaysia support for IS was at 5.2%, 3.8 % in the Philippines, 2.4% in Thailand). Support for violence to achieve religious goals was at 26% (in Malaysia support was at 28% whereas in Thailand it was 21%).[27]

MALAYSIA

CT concerns in Malaysia mirror those in Indonesia, with a few key differences.

On a per capita basis, there were more Malaysians than Indonesians in the Bahasa-language IS company in Syria, Khatibah Nusantara. Malaysia, too, is dealing with the influx of returnees and those being returned by Turkey. While Malaysia is smaller and has more resources than Indonesia, the scale of the problem is arguably greater.

As of August 2018, some 53 Malaysians remained in Syria. Since February 2013, the Special Branch of the Royal Malaysia Police has arrested 425 suspected militants, including 44 women. Of those, 314 are Malaysians, while the remaining are foreigners from the Philippines (39), Indonesia (35), Iraq (8), Bangladesh (5) and Yemen (4).[28] In June 2018, the government said that it had stopped 18 terror plots.[29]

Moreover, IS recruitment in Malaysia has been across the socio-economic spectrum, unlike in Indonesia, which has demonstrated recruitment and radicalisation patterns along the lines of JI.[30] Recruitment and radicalisation in Malaysia remain very much online

affairs, and faster, compared to Indonesia's face-to-face and gradual recruitment patterns.[31] Several Malaysians in Syria remain key recruiters, including Wan Mohd Aquil Wan Zainal Abidin (Akel Zainal) and Mohd Rafi Udin, who appeared alongside an Indonesian and a Filipino in a June 2016 IS decapitation video.

While Malaysia was never a target for JI, it became one for pro-IS groups. The one amateurish attack to date (a hand grenade in a pub in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur on 28 June 2016) obscures a concerted effort to execute a major bombing. Malaysian police have arrested more than 320 suspected militants since 2013 and claim to have stopped three terror plots in 2017 alone, and 18 since 2013.[32] While most of those were in the very early planning stages, several were much further along, and the police were able to recover quantities of explosives.

Indeed, there's interesting reporting that senior IS militants in Syria were under pressure for failing to deliver an attack in Malaysia. IS is cognisant that Indonesia has far more social resiliency, and that any attack in Malaysia would have a greater impact, causing more social rifts, and an overreaction by the government. In March, police arrested a pro-IS cell that was planning attacks on Christian and Hindu places of worship in order to cause social divisions.[33]

Malaysian police arrested a steady stream of militants throughout the year. The most important arrests, however, all took place in the eastern state of Sabah, which remains a key transit point for Southeast Asian and other foreign militants trying to get in and out of the southern Philippines (discussed below). The police have disrupted key logistics cells in the state.[34]

In the past few years, the Malaysian Government increased resources for the interagency Eastern Sabah Security Command and provided more resources for the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency in order to improve the security situation in Sabah. The maritime agency has stepped up patrols in the Sulu Sea and engaged suspected militants thought to be planning kidnapping raids into Sabah.[35] The military deployed two battalions in eastern Sabah in September 2018, but they came from existing border units in Sarawak. The build-up of security forces in Sabah demonstrates the government's concern about the threat posed by militants engaging in both terrorism and kidnapping, as well as Sabah's role as a critical transit point to the southern Philippines.

In February 2018, Malaysian police killed three suspected Filipino militants during a gunfight in a palm oil plantation in eastern Sabah.[36] That month, police in Sabah arrested 10 people, including seven Filipinos and three Malaysians, who were setting up a cell to move people into the southern Philippines.[37]

Other cells that police disrupted were relatively unsophisticated but focused on attacking Christian and Hindu minorities.[38] The one exception to this was a five-man cell of Shias arrested in August that was plotting to attack Saudi Arabia from Yemen.[39]

In October, Malaysian police arrested an eight-man cell, including seven foreigners, with ties to a Yemeni madrasah, for spreading religious extremism. This served as a reminder of the threat posed by Malaysia's fairly open borders and attempts to position itself in the greater Muslim world.[40]

The surprise victory of the Pakatan Harapan coalition in April's national election brought some changes in CT policy. The government quickly shut down the Saudi Arabian Prince Salman Peace Centre, all too aware of the absurdity of the Wahhabists running CVE programs. The government also fired the Department of Islamic Advancement official who was in charge of CVE for his extremely intolerant positions on minority rights.[41] The former government of Najib Razak railroaded through a number of controversial laws, including the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015. While the new government is unlikely to repeal them, it could amend them.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed had the head of the Malaysian External Intelligence Organisation arrested and has largely disbanded the agency for using state funds to go after dissidents and prop up the government of former prime minister Najib Razak.[42] While the police Special Branch has always played a lead role in CT, the Malaysian External Intelligence Organisation had an important liaison function with foreign counterparts. More importantly, it played key roles in mediating peace talks in the southern Philippines and southern Thailand, both of which conflicts have important spillover consequences for Malaysia.

While Malaysia has also been releasing terrorism detainees, it too faces questions as to the degree to which they have been deradicalised, or at least disengaged from militant activities. A major case in point is the forthcoming release of Yazid Sufaat, who was a leader of al-Qaeda's anthrax program at the time of his arrest in 2001.[43]

Nonetheless, Malaysian officials feel very confident about their four-phase disengagement program, citing a 97% 'success rate' with JI suspects (that is, no terrorist recidivism) between 2001 and 2012.[44] Malaysia will soon be releasing its first tranche of nine IS suspects. Unlike Indonesia, it has more resources and procedures in place for post-monitoring oversight and assessment. It will need to continue those programs.

However, Malaysia is saddled with debt and confronted by a slowing economy and shrinking government revenues. There's concern that CT resources will be cut back in 2019, in particular in Sabah, which remains the key not just to Malaysian but to regional security.

As in Indonesia, the context for CT is changing in Malaysia. While the government has large representation from minorities, the result of that and its electoral drubbing has been for the United Malays National Organisation to double down on identity politics, forging a closer relationship with the Malaysian Islamic Party to win back the Malay vote.[45] The Malaysian Islamic Party has pushed wedge issues to force the government into defending or upholding un-Islamic values. And popular support for IS in Malaysia, remains the highest in Southeast Asia, at 5.2%, though down considerably from a 2017 poll. The same old sound that 28% of Malay Muslims thought that it was permissible to use violence in defence of their religion.[46]

SINGAPORE

While the Lion City is highly secure, with extremely well-resourced, vigilant and professional security forces, the government remains cognisant of how deleterious a terrorist attack would be to the economy. The top security concern remains self-radicalised individuals who are inspired by IS propaganda. One Singaporean is known to be part of the IS Khatibah Nusantara unit in the Middle East and was featured in a late-2017 IS execution/propaganda video alongside a Malaysian and a Filipino.[47] Singapore arrested two self-radicalised men in May 2018 and deported three suspected Malaysian militants.[48] The government remains concerned about the radicalisation of women, especially domestic workers, following a number of arrests in 2017.[49] Singaporean authorities also keep a close eye on the Bengali and Rohingya community (discussed below).

Singapore remains troubled by the evolving security situation in the southern Philippines and has continued training of its Philippine counterparts in a program that commenced during the 2017 Marawi siege. It has tried to join trilateral maritime policing in the Sulu Sea (discussed below) and has offered to establish a fusion centre along the lines of the Changi Fusion Centre for the Strait of Malacca. To date, it's been rebuffed.

THE PHILIPPINES

The situation in the southern Philippines remains tenuous, which has regional consequences. It's the only place where IS can control physical space. As such, it will continue to draw in foreign fighters. Foreign fighters may bring some technical expertise, but the reason that they're so important—especially in the Philippines—is that they can bridge parochial divides and rivalries.

One only has to look at the Marawi siege to see the potential if different groups are able to join forces or coordinate their actions.

While not discounting the leadership role of the Maute family and Isnilon Hapilon, at the end of the day, they're replaceable. Today it's Abu Dar, who's the head of IS in Southeast Asia. The Philippines' CT strategy under President Rodrigo Duterte and many of his predecessors has been based on decapitation, which is necessary but insufficient.

There's an important opportunity with President Duterte's signing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law, which is the implementing legislation for the 2014 peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and which has been in limbo since the botched counterterror raid in Mamasapano in January 2015. Assuming that the agreement is implemented in 2019, the MILF has every incentive and expectation that it will become a responsible stakeholder and effectively police its territory, denying pro-IS groups sanctuary.

While there's been some recent momentum towards implementation, the peace remains very fragile and easily reversible. The plebiscite on the Bangsamoro Organic Law, scheduled for January 2019, isn't a foregone conclusion, and failure—or lacklustre endorsement—would further weaken the already weak MILF leadership and vindicate the pro-IS groups. In addition, disengagement, disarmament and rehabilitation (DDR) programs are woefully underfunded, which means the region remains awash in weapons and underemployed young men. The pro-IS Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters group (which broke away from the MILF in 2008) has stepped up its attacks as it seeks to spoil the peace process.[50] Their attacks continued through the end of 2018.[51] Meanwhile, violent incidents caused by the communist New People's Army continue to rise,[52] stretching the poorly resourced Philippine security forces very thinly.

The next Marawi will be Marawi. The residents and internally displaced people continue to seethe over the government's mishandling of reconstruction. Over one year after the conflict ended, more than 100,000 people remain displaced, unable to return their homes, while the government continues to push for a large-scale Chinese effort to redevelop the city.[53] Reconstruction commenced in late October 2018, but the challenges of reconstruction in a country with endemic corruption, and with disputed property rights, will continue to irritate the local population. The government continues to impose martial law in parts of Mindanao, further alienating the local population.[54]

Mid-2018 saw a series of clashes between government forces and Maute 'remnants' who have been recruiting from the ranks of the displaced and regrouping in ungoverned territory.[55] And of course, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) continues to battle the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu; late November saw the death of 5 soldiers, with 23 wounded, in a single battle.[56]

While Australia and Singapore have joined the US in providing the AFP with both training and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, the AFP remains poorly trained and led. It continues to use artillery as a CT tactic (which is why Marawi looked like Raqaa). It does so knowing that this will lead to civilian casualties and anti-government sentiment. Moreover, the AFP is riddled with endemic corruption. Few hard questions have been asked about where the Mautes got enough guns and ammunition for a five-month siege.

Despite the AFP's US$4.4 billion budget (it's gone up substantially in the past few years), 80% goes to personnel costs. There's little for training and equipment, so US$50 million in American CT assistance and for other training exercises, such as Balikatan, really subsidises the AFP's training and operations. And exercises have increased as the AFP pushes back against President Duterte's diplomatic lurch to China. With more training and assistance from Australia and Singapore, the problem has only exacerbated the moral hazard, in that the AFP has little incentive to end the conflicts.

THAILAND

The insurgency in the three Malay-dominated provinces of southern Thailand is now in its 14th year. It remains an ethnonational conflict that to date has eschewed any ties to transnational groupings. Violence continues to decline (part of a trend since 2015), which is both a positive and a negative. The low levels of violence (there were only 235 deaths in 2017, and 2018 is set to record far fewer) are now at a rate that the government can attribute to criminal activity. This minimises any pressure on the government to make any meaningful concessions, despite its lip-service to continuing talks with the umbrella group MARA-Pattani. Both Thailand and Malaysia have recently appointed new members to their peace panel and mediating body, respectively. However, the main rebel group, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, continues to sit out the talks, having come to the conclusion that the Thai junta will never accede to its demands for political devolution, waiting for a return to democratic rule after elections are held in 2019.[57] But the pattern of attacks does demonstrate that the insurgents are still able to strike at will—a reminder to the Thai state that without a durable political solution the conflict will continue to fester.

More importantly, there are concerns that younger militants have grown frustrated with the current stasis. All out-of-area attacks in the past five years have been carried out by younger militants operating without formal permission from the Barisan Revolusi Nasional leadership. In 2018, two Thai nationals, both with ties to Pattani-based rebel groups, were arrested in Malaysia in conjunction with terror cells, including one Johor-based IS cell.[58]

Southern Thailand remains a poorly governed space and an important source of weapons for Malaysian militants. More importantly, the technical know-how from a conflict that has included more than 1,600 successful IED attacks since 2009 is ripe for exploitation by others.

MYANMAR

The ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya population since 2012 has led to more than a million people living in Bangladeshi refugee camps. There'll be no political solution or likely return of the refugees in the foreseeable future. More than 100,000 Rohingyas who remained in Myanmar are living in what can only be described as concentration camps, while government pogroms continue. The humanitarian crisis is insurmountable.[59]

The nascent insurgency led by the Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army (ARSA),[60] whose ill-advised attacks against border posts in late 2016 and early 2017 were the government's *casus belli* for what the UN has described as a campaign of 'genocidal intent',[61] has done little to defend the interests of its people.

Bangladeshi security forces have tried to curtail ARSA's activities in the camps, and more importantly tried to suppress any ties between ARSA and transnational militants. Malaysia has arrested a number of people who have tried to travel to Bangladesh to fight in solidarity with the Rohingyas.[62]

While both al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and IS issued statements in support of the Rohingyas at the height of the refugee crisis, threatening revenge and calling for a global response to punish the Myanmar Government, neither has acted.[63] ARSA has repeatedly denied any ties to transnational jihadist organisations.[64] However, regional security forces remain very concerned that militants among the Rohingya diaspora will lash out against Myanmarese interests. In January 2018, for example, Malaysian police arrested an Indonesian construction worker who was planning to attack Buddhist targets in revenge for the Myanmar government's campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.[65] In November 2017, Indonesian security forces prevented a JAD attack on the Myanmar embassy in Jakarta.

Regional cooperation on the Rohingya issue is unlikely, as it remains one of the clearest fault lines within ASEAN.

REGIONAL EFFORTS

While there are a number of things that individual states can do to mitigate the threat of terrorism, by far the most important lines of effort need to be at the regional level.

Trilateral maritime policing between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, which commenced in April 2017 following a spate of maritime kidnappings by the Abu Sayyaf Group, has exceeded expectations. The incidence of maritime ship-boardings and hijackings and kidnapping raids into Sabah has plummeted. The maritime kidnapping of two Indonesian sailors in September was the first in over a year. Yet, while the three transit corridors have safeguarded intra-regional trade, that opens up the rest of the Sulu Sea to militants and smugglers. Coordinated aerial patrols have followed but need to be made more routine.

Maritime security goes beyond the kidnapping problem. There's some evidence that proceeds from ransoms have gone to support terrorist operations, including the Marawi siege.[66]

Maritime security also plays an important role in stemming the flow of foreign fighters into Mindanao. While I don't want to overstate the numbers of foreign fighters, they're important for a few reasons. First, IS central has directed them to go to Mindanao. As mentioned above, should IS formally declare a Southeast Asian *wiliyat*, Mindanao would be at its core; nowhere else in the region can pro-IS cells physically control territory. Second, there's still too much ungoverned space in the southern Philippines, and that remains a draw for militants fleeing crackdowns elsewhere in the region. If nothing else, it remains a place to regroup, train, and plot attacks. Third, foreign fighters often bring in new connections to overseas resources, not to mention technical skills. More importantly, they're often able to bridge parochial divisions among Philippine groups. Look no further than at what happened in Marawi, when the Mautes teamed up with an Abu Sayyaf faction.

For those reasons, increasing multilateral patrols and maritime domain awareness capabilities will remain critical for combating terrorism in the region.

Likewise, regional states have every interest in supporting the successful implementation of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the establishment of the autonomous Bangsamoro government. The onus will now be on the MILF to bring smaller, more radical groups to heel. Donor governments must support DDR programs in a region that's awash with poorly educated and underemployed young men with weapons. Nothing would diminish the justification for the militants' struggle more than the successful establishment of the Bangsamoro government.

NOTES

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China:

REPRESSION AT HOME, EXTENSION ABROAD

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China's problem with terrorism has until recently been largely isolated to the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in the far northwest of the country. However, this has changed as Uygur militancy and terrorism increasingly impinge upon Chinese interests in Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. China's response to the issue of terrorism is now framed by domestically and internationally oriented postures.

Domestically, Beijing's explicit framing of Uygur opposition as directly inspired or supported by externally based militant jihadist organisations has served to justify the implementation of a pervasive security state in Xinjiang, defined by a hi-tech surveillance apparatus and the mass internment of up to 1 million Uygurs in 're-education' facilities.[1] Internationally, the existence of Uygur militants abroad, particularly in Afghanistan and Syria, fighting under the banner of the al-Qaeda affiliated 'Turkestan Islamic Party' (TIP) has generated a more prominent profile for CT in Chinese diplomacy throughout Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East.

Crucially, these dynamics have combined to stimulate changes in the ideological, legal and institutional underpinnings of Chinese CT policy. Those changes can largely be seen as a response to Chinese perceptions that radical Islamist-inspired Uygur terrorism poses threats not only to the security of Xinjiang but also potentially to Chinese interests in key geopolitical regions in President Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy agenda, the Belt and Road Initiative.[2]

CHINA AND THE 'NEW FRONTIER'

Despite China's contemporary claim that Xinjiang (literally 'new dominion' or 'new frontier') has been 'an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation' since the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 24 AD), it often remained beyond Chinese dominion due to its geopolitical position as a 'Eurasian crossroad' and the ethno-cultural dominance of Turkic and Mongol peoples.[3] The Qing emperor, Qianlong, conquered the region in the 1750s, but by the mid-1800s Qing rule was challenged by widespread Turkic-Muslim rebellion. Most significant was Yaqub Beg's rebellion of 1864, centred on Kashgar in the southwest of Xinjiang, which resulted in the expulsion of the Qing and the establishment of an independent emirate that lasted until 1877. However, this was the culmination of over nearly 60 years of instability in the south of Xinjiang, driven by the repeated attempts of the Naqshbandi Khojas—a lineage of Sufi masters who had wielded significant political power in Kashgar before the Qing conquest—to oust the Qing.[4] The Khojas were aided by the Khanate of Khoqand (in present-day Uzbekistan), which sought to use the Khojas as a means of obtaining commercial and trading privileges from the Qing.[5]

Yaqub's emirate was, however, extinguished by a determined Qing military reconquest in 1876–77 and the region's subsequent incorporation as a province of the empire.[6]

From the collapse of the Qing in 1911 to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Xinjiang experienced a significant period of autonomy from China during which it was ruled by a succession of Han Chinese 'warlords' increasingly influenced by the Soviet Union. The region also experienced two significant rebellions in 1933 and 1944–1949 that resulted in the establishment of an 'East Turkestan Republic' (ETR) by Uygur and other Turkic-Muslim nationalists.[7] The ETR of 1944–1949 was heavily influenced and supported by the Soviet Union and was ultimately incorporated into the new PRC with the People's Liberation Army's 'peaceful liberation' of Xinjiang in October 1949.[8]

UYGUR TERRORISM: A REAL BUT EXAGGERATED THREAT

The PRC has faced periodic episodes of unrest from the region's Uygur population since that time. The approach of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to combating such opposition has been based primarily on two strategies: an aggressive strategy of integration defined by tight political, social and cultural control, encouragement of Han Chinese settlement, and state-led economic development, backed by the repression of overt manifestations of opposition by the security forces.[9]

This has stimulated periodic violent opposition from the Uygur population, who have bridled against demographic dilution, political marginalisation and continued state interference in the practice of religion. Significantly, much of this opposition was framed by Beijing until the late 1990s as separatist or 'splittist', inspired by the 'reactionary nationalism' of Uygur elites that sought an independent 'Eastern Turkestan'.[10]

However, 9/11 provided Beijing with the stimulus to reframe its efforts in Xinjiang as 'counterterrorist' in nature. This began immediately after 9/11, when Beijing released its first documentation of terrorist incidents in Xinjiang, blaming a previously unknown group, the 'East Turkestan Islamic Movement' (ETIM), for 'over' 200 'terrorist incidents' between 1990 and 2001.[11]

A number of high-profile attacks in more recent years, such as the October 2013 SUV attack in Tiananmen Square and the April 2014 Kunming railway station mass stabbing attack, have reinforced China's narrative that it faces a genuine terrorist threat stemming from Xinjiang.

The presence of the al-Qaeda aligned TIP in Syria from 2012 onward has also added further weight to Beijing's narrative that Uygur militancy has now in fact become more interconnected with global 'jihadist' forces.[12] China's English-language tabloid, *Global Times*, for instance, published an editorial on 12 August 2018 asserting that China's hardline approach in the region had prevented it from becoming 'China's Libya' or 'China's Syria'.[13] Prior to this, it argued, 'young people were brainwashed by extremist thoughts and manipulated by terrorist organizations', resulting in terrorist attacks not only in Xinjiang but also 'in places such as Tiananmen Square of Beijing and Kunming Railway Station'.[14]

Such a claim stretches credulity on a number of fronts.

First, the Chinese have defined 'extremism' in such an encompassing manner as to criminalise everyday religious practice and observance in Xinjiang. According to the March 2017 XUAR 'de-extremification' regulations, for example, 'extremification' refers to 'speech and actions under the influence of extremism, that imbue radical religious ideology, and reject and interfere with normal production and livelihood' and can include 15 'primary expressions' of extremist thinking, including 'wearing, or compelling others to wear, gowns with face coverings, or to bear symbols of extremification', 'spreading religious fanaticism through irregular beards or name selection', and 'failing to perform the legal formalities in marrying or divorcing by religious methods'.[15] This, as Newcastle University expert on Uygur culture Joanne Smith-Finley argues, has seen the state 'securitize all religious behaviours, not just violent ones', leading 'to highly intrusive forms of religious policing' that violate and humiliate Uygurs.[16] Thus, 'extremism' is clearly identified by the state as inherent in everyday markers and practices of the Uygur profession of Islam.

Second, the CCP's narrative that 'extremism' has been the primary cause of terrorism and anti-state violence in the region paints the Uygur practice of Islam as penetrated by radical Salafist thinking from the Middle East. However, this ignores the fact that historically Uygurs have practised a syncretic form of Islam—characterised by the moderate Sunni Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, the prominence of Sufi mysticism and the incorporation of local traditions—that's diametrically opposed to Salafism.[17]

Third, China's December 2015 Counterterrorism Law also provides an expansive and ambiguous definition of terrorism that further enables the state to criminalise a wide array of actions.

The law states that terrorism is:

> Any advocacy or activity that, by means of violence, sabotage, or threat, aims to create social panic, undermine public safety, infringe on personal and property rights, or coerce a state organ or an international organization, in order to achieve political, ideological, or other objectives.[18]

This law, combined with the XUAR 'de-extremification' regulations noted above, has enabled the state to target an array of activities in Xinjiang, from sharing or possessing Uygur or Arabic-language media or social media apps to the wearing of beards, as amounting to 'advocacy' of 'terrorism'.[19]

Fourth, while there have clearly been terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, there remain doubts regarding the accuracy of the identification of incidents as terrorism. Data collected by the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database, for example, records 135 attacks in Xinjiang across the 1992 and 2017 period resulting in 767 fatalities.[20] However, those figures count as terrorist attacks a number of incidents—such as the 7 July 2009 violence in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, which resulted in 184 fatalities—even though they're more accurately defined as inter-ethnic rioting or communal violence prompted by the long-term marginalisation of the Uygur population.[21] Omitting this incident alone decreases the death toll from terrorism in Xinjiang to 583 over the 25-year period.[22]

Fifth, attributions of attacks to known terrorist groups also don't match Chinese claims of a large-scale *Salafi*-inspired insurgency in Xinjiang. Of the 135 listed attacks in the Global Terrorism Database, only six are directly attributed to TIP or ETIM—the two groups that Beijing consistently blames for violence in Xinjiang.[23]

ETIM functioned in Afghanistan from 1998 to the early 2000s and established links to al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan during that time. However, it effectively ceased to function after the death of its leader, Hasan Mahsum, during a Pakistani military operation in Waziristan in October 2003. TIP emerged as a successor organisation to ETIM in 2007 and gained some prominence by issuing various threats to attack the 2008 Beijing Olympics.[24] However, with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the geographical locus of TIP has shifted to Syria, where evidence emerged over the past year of the group's significant battlefield presence involving potentially hundreds of its fighters with Jabhat al-Nusra (until recently, an al-Qaeda affiliate).[25]

Beyond Syria, Beijing has claimed in the past that there may be somewhere between 300 and 500 Uygurs fighting for Islamic State (IS), primarily in Iraq.[26] However, 'entry' and 'exit' data for IS recruits analysed by Nate Rosenblatt at the New America Foundation identified 114 Uygurs as fighting with the group between 2013 and 2014.[27] The data collected by IS on those Uygurs suggests that 'not a single fighter in the sample reported to have previously fought in a jihad, suggesting that the sample isn't comprised of seasoned veterans of foreign wars, such as with Uygur separatists in the al-Qaeda-affiliated Turkistan Islamic Party.'[28] Uygur links to, and involvement with, IS thus appear to be much less significant than those related to TIP and al-Qaeda.

Despite these linkages, however, there's in fact little available evidence of TIP's direct involvement in attacks in Xinjiang. TIP has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile attacks, such as the so-called SUV attack of October 2013 in Tiananmen Square, but, as the Jamestown Foundation's terrorism analyst, Jacob Zenn notes, 'only a 2011 hit-and-run attack in Kashgar' has been 'credibly proven' to have been organised by the group from Afghanistan.[29]

In contrast, there's some evidence of Uygur militant involvement in a number of attacks beyond China's borders. First, the bombing of the Erawan Shrine, frequented by Chinese tourists, in Bangkok on 18 August 2015 has been connected to Uygur militancy. In particular, some have speculated that this was a retaliatory attack for Thailand's July 2015 deportation of 109 Uygurs—discovered by Thai authorities in a people-smuggler-run camp in southern Thailand—back to China.[30] However, there's been little subsequent evidence of a definitive link to any specific organisation, such as TIP. Second, on 30 August 2016 a suicide bomber drove a van packed with explosives into the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz media reported that the bomber was a Uygur and 'a member of the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement', who 'had a passport registered in the name of a Tajik citizen'. An ethnic Uzbek who had undergone 'terrorist training' in Syria was suspected by Kyrgyz authorities of having assisted in making the explosive device and procuring the vehicle used in the attack before leaving the country on an Istanbul-bound flight just hours before the attack.[31] Finally, the gunman involved in the Istanbul nightclub attack on New Year's Eve 2016 was reported by Turkish police to be a Uygur with links to jihadist groups in Syria.[32]

COUNTERTERRORISM IN XINJIANG: SURVEILLANCE, 'DE-EXTREMIFICATION' AND MASS REPRESSION

Accurately assessing the nature and scale of the threat of terrorism in Xinjiang matters, given the manner in which China has seized on TIP/ETIM links to al-Qaeda as proof not only that Uygur terrorism is 'spiritually supported and commanded by foreign terrorist organizations', but also to firmly embed CT as a pre-eminent national security priority.

This convergence has resulted in a variety of security, legislative and institutional changes at both the national and provincial levels since 2015.

In the security context, the regional government's expenditure on public security ballooned in 2017, amounting to approximately US$9.1 billion, a 92% increase on such spending in 2016.[33] Much of this expenditure has been absorbed by the development of a pervasive, hi-tech 'surveillance state' in the region,[34] including the use of facial recognition and iris scanners at checkpoints, train stations and gas stations; the collection of biometric data for passports; mandatory apps to cleanse smartphones of potentially subversive material; and the use of surveillance drones.[35]

Significantly, this system relies not only on technology but also on significant manpower to monitor, analyse and respond to the data it collects. Its rollout has thus coincided with the recruitment of an estimated 90,000 new public security personnel in the region.[36]

Legislatively, the past few years have also seen the rollout of China's first national CT law in December 2015, XUAR CT legislation in August 2016 and XUAR regulations on 'de-extremification' in March 2017.[37] Much of this legislative agenda has been explicitly framed by the Chinese authorities as constituting a preventive approach to CT akin to that undertaken under the rubric of 'countering violent extremism' by a variety of other states to address the causes of terrorism.[38]

However, the content of some of this legislation demonstrates that for Beijing the root causes of terrorism are ultimately inherent in Uygur identity and that, therefore, a preventive approach requires the fundamental transformation of that identity.[39]

As George Washington University's Sean Roberts has noted, this demonstrates that the state has effectively securitised Uygur identity as an almost biological threat to the health of Chinese society. Statements of government officials confirm this; some describe Uygur 'terrorism' as a 'tumour' to be eradicated and Islamic observance as akin to drug addiction.[40]

The CCP's discourse on Uygur terrorism thus frames key elements of Uygur identity as pathologies to be 'cured'. As has now been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt, the party's 'cure' for such pathologies is a program of mass internment or 're-education' of Uygurs— perhaps up to 1 million people, according to some estimates[41]—in prison-like centres based in part on analysis of the data harvested through its system of surveillance known as the 'social credit' system.

The 'social credit system', as political scientist Samantha Hoffman notes, relies on 'the use of big data collection and analysis to monitor, shape and rate behaviour via economic and social processes'.[42] The effect is to either co-opt society's participation in its 'management', as 'the same technology is directly linked to conveniences that improve everyday life, for instance electronic payment', or coerce it into doing so by providing the state with the capacity to effectively monitor and punish individuals and 'their personal networks' for noncompliance.[43]

Human Rights Watch has noted that this system enables the state to engage in 'predictive policing' via monitoring of an individual's social interactions, use of social media and physical movement in order to monitor behaviour. In Xinjiang, receiving a phone call from a relative studying or travelling overseas, frequent attendance at a mosque or the use of social media can result in an almost immediate visit from local police and indefinite detention in a 're-education' centre.[44]

The goal of this system, according to a Xinjiang CCP Youth League official, is to 'treat and cleanse the virus [of 'extremism'] from their brain' and 'restore their normal mind' so that they may 'return to a healthy ideological state of mind'.[45]

Beijing has thus, in the name of 'counterterrorism', arguably embarked on a program of 'cultural cleansing' in Xinjiang 'to end ethnic conflict by eradicating all space to make claims in the name of a Uyghur nation'.[46]

CHINA AND COUNTERTERRORISM: GOING GLOBAL

China has recently defended the CT benefits of its 're-education' of Uygurs in Xinjiang. The Chairman of the XUAR government, Shohrat Zakir, asserted in a lengthy interview with *Xinhua* on 16 October 2018 that 'many countries have pursued approaches to countering terrorism and extremism according to their own conditions'.

On this basis, he continued:

> Xinjiang has given equal importance to fighting and preventing terrorism, and sought to combine the fight against violent terrorist crimes with the protection of human rights. On one hand, Xinjiang has put emphasis on strictly countering a small number of violent terrorist crimes according to law, and spared no efforts in protecting the basic human rights of the citizens from the harm of terrorism and extremism. On the other hand, Xinjiang has also stressed addressing the root cause of terrorism, and moved to bring around, educate and save the majority of those who committed petty crimes, through assistance and education, to prevent them from becoming victims of terrorism and extremism.[47]

It's clear, however, that China is both seeking to embed its Xinjiang-centric focus in CT cooperation with international partners and potentially export the methods and technologies that have underpinned its 'surveillance state' in Xinjiang.

With respect to the former, Beijing has embedded its CT agenda within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Central Asia since the SCO's founding in June 2001, focusing the organisation on combating the 'three evils' of 'separatism, terrorism and extremism'.[48] This has included regular 'anti-terror' exercises by SCO militaries, intelligence sharing and closer police and law enforcement cooperation between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.[49]

Law enforcement cooperation has included agreements for the 'guaranteed extradition' of individuals on shared 'blacklists' in violation of international law.[50] In the recent past this has resulted in extradition of Uyghurs from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.[51] The example of Huseyin Celil, a Uyghur political activist and Canadian citizen, is emblematic of many of these cases.[52] Celil was arrested and extradited to China by Uzbek authorities in March 2006, where he was subsequently trialled in a closed court in Urumqi and convicted to life imprisonment for allegedly joining a banned organization, the 'East Turkestan Liberation Organization', and providing funding of 80,000 yuan (US$10,250) for the establishment of a new 'terrorist group'. China refused to acknowledge Celil's Canadian citizenship, denying Canadian consular personnel access to him, as it asserted he had left Xinjiang 'illegally' in the early 1990s.[53]

Ultimately, however, the SCO isn't primarily constructed as a means of facilitating a truly regional and multilateral approach to transnational terrorism but rather as a means of providing cover for member states' domestic security imperatives. Two key aspects of the SCO's 'Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure', which is intended to coordinate the organisation's CT efforts, most readily illustrate this. First, the structure defines terrorism broadly and ambiguously as an 'ideology of violence' that seeks to 'exert influence on the decision making of governments'. Second, member states are bound by the principle of 'mutual recognition' of acts of terrorism regardless of the precise legal definition in force in individual states. As Institute for Defense Analyses researcher Tom Wallace notes, this means that not only are 'the three evils … whatever national governments say they are' but the principle of 'mutual recognition' entails that 'if China (or any other SCO state) labels an act as 'terrorist', all other SCO members are obliged to also recognize it as such, regardless of domestic laws.'[54]

While there's been some recent controversy in Kazakhstan stemming from the testimony of an ethnic Kazakh from Xinjiang about the 're-education' camps, Central Asia's SCO members have officially refrained from overt criticism of Beijing.[55] For example, the SCO Secretary General, Tajikistan's Rashid Alimov, recently asserted that Beijing isn't targeting Uygurs in Xinjiang as part of its 'anti-terrorism' policies and praised it for seeking to combat terrorism at 'its roots'.[56]

China has also attempted to replicate some of these practices beyond Central Asia—an objective assisted by Vice Minister of Public Security Meng Hongwei's November 2016 election as President of Interpol.[57] Here, China has issued Interpol 'red notices' against leading exiled Uygurs. For instance, prominent Uygur exile leader Dolkun Isa was detained by police in the US, Switzerland, South Korea and Turkey during speaking engagements in 2017 on the basis of such alerts.[58] One non-government organisation has not unduly labelled this as a form of 'extra-territorial harassment'.[59]

Beyond such cooperation, China is also seeking to target the Uygur diaspora beyond its borders with its system of surveillance[60] by 'creating a global registry of Uighurs who live outside of China, threatening to detain their relatives if they don't provide personal and identifying information to Chinese police'.[61]

However, potentially more far-reaching is the fact that President Xi Jinping's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative isn't intended to invest only in physical infrastructure, but also in the infrastructure and technology necessary to create a 'digital Silk Road'. Much of this investment is coming from China's major tech companies, such as Alibaba, Huawei and ZTE.[62] In addition, the manner in which those companies seem to be investing so heavily in emerging surveillance technology suggests that its gaze is broad: it wants to address Beijing's social management system at home and secure customers abroad.[63]

In 2016, the China National Electronics Import and Export Corporation assisted the Ecuadorian Government to establish an 'integrated security service system' comprising a 'nationwide network of 4,300 surveillance cameras, 16 regional response centres, and over 3,000 government employees diligently watching video footage'.[64] More recently, CloudWalk, a Guangzhou-based tech company, finalised a deal with Zimbabwe's government to provide a 'mass facial recognition program' with the alleged purpose of helping the company 'train racial biases out of its facial recognition systems' via access to people with ethnic and racial backgrounds more varied than those of people in China.[65]

A profit-driven desire to perfect such technologies so as to better compete with other suppliers for export markets is one possible driver of this. However, another is that China's Ministry of Public Security called in 2015 for 'the creation of an 'omnipresent, completely connected, always on and fully controllable nationwide video-surveillance network as a public-safety imperative'.[66] The perfection of 'facial comparison' technology was identified as crucial component in the success of such surveillance networks. Therefore, Chinese tech companies' efforts abroad could be seen as road-testing of technologies that may be implemented at home in the service of state security.

An additional issue here is that, while Chinese tech companies are undoubtedly focused on profit, it's also likely that the 'presence of Chinese engineers, managers, and diplomats will reinforce a tendency among developing countries, especially those with authoritarian governments', to adopt China's approach of ensuring that technology serves the interests of a homogeneous state'.[67] Beijing appears willing to nurture such tendencies: President Xi himself asserted at the August 2018 Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum that China should export its model of 'social stability' to the Arab world.[68]

CONCLUSION

China's approach to CT, as detailed here, should give potential international partners pause for thought. It's clear that China perceives the issue of CT almost solely through the prism of its security interests in Xinjiang and its ongoing efforts to culturally 'cleanse' the Uygur people of 'extremist' influences.

Significantly, there are clear indications that China intends its policies of 'de-extremification' to be in place for the foreseeable future. Most notably, there's clear evidence of China rapidly expanding the number and size of the 're-education' camps in Xinjiang.[69] Chinese officials have also explicitly noted the need for these measures to endure. The CCP Youth League official quoted above also stated pointedly in his speech that the party had to be 'cautious' in assessing the success of its 'de-extremification' efforts, as:

> … having gone through re-education and recovered from the ideological disease doesn't mean that one is permanently cured. We can only say that they are physically healthy, and there is no sign that the disease may return. After recovering from an illness, if one doesn't exercise to strengthen the body and the immune system against disease, it could return worse than before. So, after completing the re-education process in the hospital and returning home … they must remain vigilant, empower themselves with the correct knowledge, strengthen their ideological studies, and actively attend various public activities to bolster their immune system against the influence of religious extremism and violent terrorism, and safeguard themselves from being infected once again, to prevent later regrets.[70]

Chinese officials have also publicly defended and justified their approach in international forums. For instance, Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng strenuously defended China's approach in Xinjiang in his statement at the 'periodic review' hearing on China's human rights record before the UN Human Rights Council on 6 November 2018. Vice Minister Le pointedly noted that China 'will not accept politically driven accusations from a few countries fraught with bias' regarding its internment of Uygurs in 're-education' camps, before referring to detainees as 'students' who were in fact happy to learn how to 'inoculate' themselves against 'extremism'.

Additionally, he made the case that China's approach has been successful, pointing out that Xinjiang had not witnessed a terrorist attack in nearly two years.[71] As far as Beijing is concerned, then, its measures in Xinjiang are a justifiable form of 'preventive' CT.

Ultimately, the evolution of China's CT efforts detailed here amounts to a cautionary tale in the 'war on terror'. China has effectively instrumentalised the threat of Uygur 'terrorism' both within its domestic governance of Xinjiang and in its diplomacy to repress and control Uygur identity and autonomist aspirations. China has demonstrated that it's willing to go to extraordinary lengths to nullify what it perceives to be a threat to both its control of Xinjiang and a threat to its national security, regardless of the reputational costs it may suffer internationally in the process.

NOTES

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Bangladesh and India

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In 2018, Bangladesh and India both experienced a significant decline in terrorist attacks compared to the previous five years. Hard CT measures coupled with community-based 'soft' approaches have proven useful. However, new challenges, particularly the Rohingya refugee crisis, could jeopardise recent success, as terrorist groups could regain their strength by exploiting the grievances of the Muslim Rohingyas. A recent development provided support for that assumption when Bangladeshi law enforcers arrested a number of operatives of Ansar ul-Islam, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), in a Rohingya refugee camp. Law enforcers claimed that these operatives were active in the refugee camps under the guise of NGO workers.[1] According to an estimate by the International Organization for Migration in December 2017, 655,000 Rohingyas had arrived in Bangladesh in just four months,[2] bringing the number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh to 867,500. Both local and global terrorist outfits, such as al-Qaeda, Islamic State (IS), Jaish-e-Muhammad and New Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, have been trying to cash in on this humanitarian crisis and exploit the issue of 'Muslim oppression' for propaganda and recruitment.

With the advent and availability of new communication technologies, terrorist groups are increasingly changing their operational tactics and using social media and other online platforms. Although IS is losing its influence in this region after its losses in Syria, al-Qaeda could capitalise on local grievances and political instability and re-emerge as a threat. The long-term success of CT in these two countries will depend on how adroitly their CT programs address these new challenges.

BANGLADESH

The intensity of terrorism in Bangladesh, at least in terms of the number of fatalities, has decreased dramatically in past two years. In 2017, 80 people were killed due to terrorism-related activities, whereas in 2018 it was 17 (Table 2). This was a low death toll compared to 2013, when a staggering 404 people were killed. Between 2013 and 2017, at least 40 pro-secular writers and activists, foreigners and members of religious minorities were murdered by violent extremists.[3] In these brutal and increasingly brazen killings, some victims were self-proclaimed atheist bloggers and publishers. The killings generated debate in mainstream media, online and elsewhere in the public sphere about whether the bloggers' opinions were blasphemous, whether killing for blasphemy is justified, and whether there should be a limit on freedom of expression. The debates suggest a growing division within society on the issue of religious sensibilities. Several attacks have reportedly been carried out by followers of IS and AQIS. The attacks have included the murder of foreigners, shootings and bomb blasts at Shia gatherings, and attacks on shrines,

khankas (Sufi meeting places) and churches and on minority religious adherents. In 2016, IS-inspired terrorists attacked at the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, which resulted in the deaths of 20 hostages.

TABLE 2: Fatalities due to terrorism in Bangladesh, 2013 to 2018

Year	Civilians	Law enforcers	Terrorists	Total
2013	232	18	154	404
2014	29	9	38	76
2015	23	2	48	73
2016	43	4	92	139
2017	9	4	67	80
2018	3	–	14	17

Source: Compiled from South Asia Terrorism Portal, as of 12 October 2018, online.

In 2018, the Bangladesh Government took several important steps to curb terrorism in the country. The government has formed a new anti-terrorism unit and two special tribunals and established a new system to ensure more control over religious institutions.

Bangladesh's recent CT efforts have been initiated mainly in response to the Holey Artisan attack, after which security officials conducted several raids and arrested a large number of violent extremists. Two high-profile committees—the 17-member National Committee on Militancy, Resistance and Prevention and the eight-member National Committee for Intelligence Coordination—oversee CT measures and coordinate the country's law enforcement agencies.[4]

The Bangladesh Government also formed a new anti-terrorism unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in 2017. This specialised unit has a nationwide mandate and around 600 officials, headed by an additional Inspector General of Police.[5] Previously, in February 2016, Bangladesh established the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit, which has since been carrying out operations outside the capital, Dhaka, under special arrangements.[6] The government set up two anti-terrorism special tribunals on 5 April 2018 through a statutory regulatory order. The tribunals are stationed in Dhaka and Chittagong and are intended to speed up trials of militancy and terrorism offences.[7]

CT programs in Bangladesh are mainly based on hard power, which includes arresting, prosecuting or killing violent extremists. The Rapid Action Battalion and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit have played an important role in fighting terrorism, but they've been severely criticised by human rights organisations for their trigger-happy methods, illegal detentions and extrajudicial killings.

Recently, the government has introduced some 'soft' measures to create awareness and build social resilience against terrorism. One important measure includes the participation of religious leaders in CT programs. In 2017, around 100,000 clerics issued a fatwa condemning all types of terrorist attack, declaring that terrorist attacks are *haram* (forbidden) in Islam.[8]

The Bangladesh Government has taken steps to fight against extremist narratives by broadcasting anti-terror messages via posters, leaflets, television commercials, short films, documentaries, radio programs and newspaper advertisements. The main feature of the counter-narrative is that Islam promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence and doesn't allow terrorism. In an effort to regulate the curriculums of madrasahs, the government introduced a new education system called Darul Arqum in 2018. The Islamic Foundation will monitor this stream of religious education, in which a total of 1,010 madrasahs will be involved.[9] Currently, the government's education boards don't regulate the Qawmi madrasahs, their curriculums and their governing bodies. For years, some Qawmi madrasahs have been blamed for promoting radical and extremely conservative ideologies.

In recent years, Bangladeshi violent extremists have been using the cybersphere for psychological warfare, publicity, propaganda, data mining, recruitment, mobilisation, networking, information sharing, planning, coordination and training. To monitor terrorist activity in social media, the government established the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre. In 2016, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police launched an app called 'Hello CT' to seek information about violent extremists from the public. Similarly, the Bangladesh Police and Rapid Action Battalion launched two apps, BD Police Help Line and Report 2 RAB.[10] Most recently, the government passed the Digital Security Act in October 2018. Under the Act, anyone who commits any crime or assists anyone else in committing crimes through cyberspace or any other electronic medium will face a maximum of 14 years in jail, a fine of 2.5 million taka (US$30,000), or both.[11]

Violent extremism in Bangladesh is generally male-dominated,[12] but women are increasingly becoming both its victims and its perpetrators. A recent study of public awareness and attitudes to Islamist militancy in Bangladesh found that women indicated greater support for the goals of militant groups.[13] Female participation in extremism has increased since the Holey Artisan Bakery attack, and the role of female Bangladeshi terrorists has 'evolved from passive to active and from peripheral to central as suicide bombers and combatants'.[14] Extremist organisations are now targeting women in their recruitment drives, as women arouse less suspicion[15] and can engage in community outreach efforts with better access to families. However, no CT or deradicalisation program specifically targeting female extremists has not been undertaken in Bangladesh. Ignoring the gender aspect of violent extremism could be a fatal blow to CT initiatives because of the increasing number of cases of female radicalisation. Experts and law enforcement agencies often trivialise female participants as unwilling assistants to their male partners, but recent cases show that women have their own agency and have motivations similar to those of their male counterparts.

Another emerging threat is possible political violence before and after the upcoming election. Electoral violence is the most common form of political violence in Bangladesh,[16] and is worsened by the Bangladesh Government's heavy-handed approach to opposition leaders and activists. Begum Khaleda Zia (a former prime minister and the head of the main opposition group, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party) was recently convicted in two graft cases and imprisoned.[17] Her son and co-chairperson of BNP, Tareque Rahman, has also been charged for murder and graft cases. Opposition alliance leaders claim that those verdicts were politically motivated. Along with the party leader, thousands of Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami activists have been sued, arrested and convicted on various charges. Political instability and violence create favourable ground for violent extremists to regroup, reorganise, thrive and increase the number of terror attacks in Bangladesh. Thus, a more unstable political environment might facilitate the rise of violent extremist groups, especially AQIS and its affiliates, and their attacks on bloggers, writers, publishers and religious minorities.

INDIA

India struggles with three main types of violent extremism: Islamist terrorism, a Maoist insurgency and separatist movements. However, the three types overlap. For example, separatist groups in Kashmir are reportedly closely linked with Islamist extremist groups. In recent years, Hindu extremist groups have been growing as additional threats to the country.

The Islamist extremist groups can be broadly divided into two categories: homegrown, such as the Indian Mujahideen, the D-Company and the Student Islamic Movement of India, and international terrorist organisations, such as IS and al-Qaeda.[18] Reportedly, terrorist groups based in or supported by Pakistan have infiltrated

Kashmir and, exploiting local grievances; have made the already turbulent region a major battleground between violent Islamist extremism and the Indian state.[19] Organisations such as Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taibahave extended their operation beyond Kashmir and have allegedly been involved in several terrorist attacks in other regions of India. India has repeatedly blamed Pakistan for providing support, training and shelter to domestic terrorist groups inside Indian territory.[20]

In recent years, India has witnessed a downward trend in terrorism- and insurgency-related incidents, making 2018 the most peaceful year in the past five years (Table 3). In 2017, terrorism-related casualties totalled 797, declining to 691 in 2018. Yearly fatalities since 2013 have remained below the 'high-intensity conflict' threshold of a thousand deaths per year. According to estimates by the South Asian Terrorism Portal for the 1994–2018 period, 'fatalities remained above 2,000 for 18 of these 22 years; out of which they were above 3,000 for 11 years; above 4,000 for five years; and over 5,000 in 2001.'[21]

TABLE 3: Fatalities from terrorism in India, 2013 to 2018

Years	Civilians	Law enforcers	Terrorists	Total
2013	303	193	388	884
2014	407	161	408	976
2015	181	155	386	722
2016	202	180	516	898
2017	200	170	427	797
2018	156	145	390	691

Source: Compiled from South Asia Terrorism Portal, as of 12 October 2018, online.

Since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, India has taken several steps to transform its internal security architecture. It has established the National Intelligence Grid and the National Investigation Agency and reorganised the National Security Guard. At that time, the central government also planned to establish a single comprehensive CT platform, the National Counter Terrorism Centre. The plan was for the centre to be responsible for preventing, containing and responding to violent extremism. However, the Bill to establish the centre is yet to be approved, as several state governments oppose the proposal on the grounds that it goes against the principle of federalism.[22] An assurance from the central government, especially from the Prime Minister, to the state governments that the centre will operate in collaboration with the various state security agencies could lead to the passage of the Bill.

Indian CT efforts combine hard and soft measures. Various law enforcement agencies, including police, intelligence and military organisations, contribute to the CT program, which is based on 'a localized, defensive, and law-and-order approach to counterterrorism'.[23] Some paramilitary groups, such as the 165,000-strong Central Reserve Police Force, reportedly use excessive force, especially in Kashmir.[24] Although paramilitary and military forces are usually used as a last resort in CT operations in other regions, they're consistently deployed in Jammu and Kashmir because of anti-Indian sentiment among the populace, the presence of a large number of secessionist and violent extremist groups, and the overall volatility of the region.

In the past 12 months, the Indian Government has introduced several soft measures to counter terrorist activities. The Home Affairs Ministry has established two new divisions to curb cybercrime and radicalisation. The Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Radicalization Division is responsible for tracking and assessing the online reach of transnational terrorist outfits and devising strategies to counter their messages. The Cyber and Information Security Division monitors online threats and crimes.[25]

The state governments have also established CT initiatives. The Kerala and Maharashtra state governments' programs have deradicalised at least 500 people.[26] Law enforcement agencies identified individuals who had reportedly posted radical material in social media and counselled them with the help of their family members and local religious leaders. The success of deradicalisation programs in these two states shows what's possible in other states. Some Muslim groups and madrasahs have also helped to create awareness by condemning terrorist attacks and radical ideologies.[27]

India has bolstered its bilateral ties with various countries to strengthen its CT strategies. On 6 September 2018, India and the US held their inaugural 2+2 dialogue in Delhi and agreed to fight against terrorism. In another instance, the first US–India Counter Terrorism Designations Dialogue was initiated in January 2018 to disrupt and dismantle terrorist camps both regionally and globally.[28] India also signed bilateral agreements with the EU,[29] Australia[30] and the Gulf nations[31] in 2018 to fight against terrorism. The agreements cover logistic support, training for security agencies and transborder cooperation among government institutions. The agreement with the Gulf nations is particularly important, as India has been claiming for several years that some Indian terrorist operatives use the United Arab Emirates as a sanctuary. The agreement may open a way to reducing Gulf-based terrorism incidents in India.

CHALLENGES

India and Bangladesh face some common CT challenges. They share a 4,156-kilometre land border, and terrorist groups in the two nations have strong connections with one another. Local terrorist groups, such as the Bangladesh-based Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh, the Ansarullah Bangla Team and Harkat-ul-Jihad al Bangladesh, have allegedly found a safe haven in West Bengal.[32] Several India- and Pakistan-based terrorist groups' operatives are reportedly active in Bangladesh, especially among the Rohingya refugees. The exploitation of the Rohingya crisis by terrorist groups is one of the crucial challenges facing both Bangladesh and India. The oppression of the Rohingyas by the Myanmar military, which the UN has termed as a textbook example of genocide, could trigger increased terrorist recruitment and propagation of radical ideologies in the region.

Allegations of human rights violations have marred CT initiatives in both India and Bangladesh. Indian security agencies reportedly have a track record of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and targeting of ethnic and religious minorities.[33] Similarly, Bangladesh's law enforcers' heavy-handed and excessive use of force reportedly involves human rights violations, extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions.[34] Bangladesh's Digital Security Act 2018 includes several controversial provisions, including allowing police officials to search or arrest anyone without a warrant. It was passed despite concerns of journalists, media owners and human rights activists that it may restrict freethinking, freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Although the hard-power approach taken by the government has been effective at the operational and tactical levels in the short term, several reports suggest that a comprehensive counter-radicalisation policy using a combination of soft and hard power might ensure a sustainable long-term solution to radicalisation.[35]

The Bangladesh Government has also been criticised for the way it's been tackling the murders of bloggers and for its continuous appeasement of the extremely conservative Islamist group Hefajat-e-Islam ('Safeguard of Islam'). Bangladesh's controversial Information and Communications Technology Act makes it difficult for the bloggers, writers and publishers to write or publish anything critical of religion or the current government. According to the Act, people can face several years in jail for 'hurting religious sentiment' and 'publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form' or information that 'prejudices the image of the State or person'.[36] These controversial pieces of legislation reduce freedom of expression and create favourable ground for radicals to thrive and gain traction in society.

In 2014, Ayman al-Zawahiri announced that al-Qaeda was going to launch AQIS in an attempt to bolster the organisation's presence in South Asia. In June 2017, AQIS published a 'code of conduct' document that prioritised Kashmir as the primary target area, and security officers and leaders of right-wing Hindu organisations as individual targets. It has also endorsed a new terrorist group, Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind ('Supporters of Holy War in India'), in Kashmir.[37] AQIS has participated in several attacks on bloggers, writers, publishers and establishments of minority faiths in Bangladesh. This indicates that it's been quietly reorganising for a possible resurgence in this area while the global and local focus has been on defeating IS and dealing with IS returnees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most CT initiatives in Bangladesh are being carried out on an *ad hoc* basis, without a long-term national strategy that would ensure effective coordination and information sharing. The Home Ministry drafted a national strategy on CT in 2012 but did not release it for further refinement and the formation of a consensus among the security agencies. In addition, Bangladesh's CT measures are often centred in Dhaka, the capital city, without a proper focus on more vulnerable regions, such as the northern and southeastern districts. Despite the active presence of terrorists in cyberspace, online radicalisation is almost unexplored as a research area in Bangladesh. Lack of research, regulation and monitoring has made cyberspace an effective tool for extremists.[38] Areas vulnerable to radicalisation, such as prisons and educational institutions, should be taken into particular consideration in deradicalisation programs. Imprisoned violent extremists exploit the system to recruit and radicalise new operatives and strengthen the radical beliefs of fellow inmates. Without effective deradicalisation programs during and after prison time, in-prison radicalisation could turn into a major threat to the CT effort in Bangladesh. A crucial factor in ensuring long-term CT success will be the establishment of a consensus among Bangladeshi political parties to refrain from using CT efforts as a tool to oppress their political opposition.

In India, although terrorist incidents and militancy have decreased drastically, the conflict potential remains high. The situation could be exacerbated by partisan politics and state policies. The Indian Government should take appropriate measures to tackle the preconditions and triggering factors for radicalisation by minimising human rights violations and checking extreme right-wing Hindu nationalism. The government should also resolve the discord among the state governments and launch the National Counter Terrorism Centre soon to ensure effective coordination and information sharing among the agencies and state governments. The successful deradicalisation and rehabilitation initiatives of some state governments, such as Kerala and Maharashtra, could provide a guide for launching community-based deradicalisation programs in other, more vulnerable states.

The governments of both India and Bangladesh should explore and utilise communal resilience and mitigants to counter terrorism. Fortunately, this region has some factors that make it difficult for violent extremist groups to gain traction in the community. Islam came to the region with different variations and interpretations, most of which have a long history of tolerance and blending with local traditions. Most people in the Muslim community vehemently oppose terrorism and the radical ideology associated with it. The strong position of the major religious institutions and scholars against terrorism, the presence of a vibrant civil society and development NGOs, and the rigorous scrutiny of the law enforcement agencies have made it difficult for violent extremist groups, such as AQIS and IS, to build a strong foothold in the region.

Upholding the democratic political system and ensuring credible and fair national elections could mitigate political instability and in turn help to counter violent extremism, especially in Bangladesh. In India, the rise of extremely conservative Hindu right-wing nationalism should be reined in, as it could fuel religious tension and create fertile ground for Islamist radical ideologies to flourish and strengthen their position.

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Afghanistan and Pakistan

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The flurry of activities aiming to get the various Afghan Taliban groups to the negotiating table that began in 2017 continued in 2018. The US deputed a special envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, to speed up efforts to end the war in Afghanistan. Other countries, such as China and Russia, also initiated their own initiatives. Convincing the Taliban to negotiate and agree to a formula appears to be the current fad in efforts to bring an end to conflict in Afghanistan and, ultimately, peace in Pakistan as well. The peace talks offer a medium- to long-term solution, but violence is likely to continue unabated as the Taliban aims to maximise its territorial gains to improve its position at the negotiating table. In any case, talks aren't an easy option for negotiating with the Taliban, which has become less tightly knit and more parochial. Furthermore, other players, such as Islamic State (IS), complicate matters. IS challenges not only Kabul but the Taliban as well.

A lot also depends on the contributions of regional players such as Iran, Russia, Pakistan and China. While Pakistan has managed to contain violence in its own territory, it continues to be linked with segments of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The clampdown on media and civil liberties in the country is meant to ensure that the activities of various militant groups inside Pakistan don't get reported internationally. Pressure by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) may focus the attention of the Pakistani military on finding a permanent solution to the problem of the continued presence of violent non-state actors in the country, but much will depend upon how seriously FATF actions affect Pakistan's financial situation. Withdrawing support from militants will certainly go a long way in signalling a lack of tolerance for the violence and extremism that's rampant in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. There's very little evidence of any effort in either state to fight the deeper problem of religious xenophobia and extremism.

AFGHANISTAN

In 2018, violence and war in Afghanistan continued unabated. The security situation showed no sign of improvement, due to the poor capability of security and law enforcement agencies, the nature of the ongoing conflict and the complexity of the overall security environment, despite US President Donald Trump's announcement that the US would not withdraw from Afghanistan until conditions change in favour of the Kabul regime. To indicate its commitment to Afghanistan's security, the US also increased the number of its troops in the country by the end of 2017 to around 14,000,[1] thus reversing former president Barak Obama's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. (In December 2018, President Trump indicated that he will withdraw some US troops from Afghanistan, but by early 2019, it remains unclear how many and if he would follow up on his pledge).[2]

Trump's troops increase didn't have a visible impact, mainly because the numbers didn't offer a significant rise but was more of a signal from the US Government about the reversal of its earlier policy, rather than a commitment to ensuring that the Taliban views the American decision as a threat; that is, the additional forces aren't a force multiplier. Consequently, the Taliban continues to attack US forces. An October 2018 attack by 18 Taliban gunmen during a security meeting in Kandahar palace, in which senior American commander Brigadier General Jeffrey Smiley was wounded and the Kandahar police chief Abdul Razik Achakzai killed, indicates the meagre effects of the decision on the morale of the Taliban or the Kabul regime.[3] The Taliban attack indicated continued vulnerability of security forces in the face of violent non-state actors without any substantial improvement in capability to fight back.

Violence is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The war front is riddled with too many stakeholders with diverse interests. Continued support for the Taliban from multiple external sources (including Iran, Pakistan and Russia),[4] the limited capacity of Afghan security forces to establish control and internal political instability are some of the causes of protracted warfare in Afghanistan. And yet, the Taliban is suffering from internal divisions, and the emergence and relative strengthening of Islamic State (IS) in Afghanistan and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant—Khorasan Province poses a huge challenge to Kabul but also to the Taliban. Reportedly, Afghan civil society is also divided on how far to accommodate the Taliban. Many among the urban middle class, which has benefited from the war on the Taliban, are concerned about the impact of any accommodation on civil liberties, women's rights and democracy in general. Thus, an all-inclusive formula for peace building raises more questions then it hopes to answer.

AFGHANISTAN'S SECURITY SITUATION

Security in Afghanistan doesn't seem to have improved, despite the increase in US air strikes that has resulted in greater Taliban casualties, improvement in training of Afghan troops, the provision of additional resources (such as helicopters) to Afghan forces, increased training for Afghanistan's security forces and an increase in the number of special services groups.[5] Additional firepower and fighting capability were initially viewed as improving the Afghan Government's ability to negotiate with the Taliban, but those measures haven't changed the situation noticeably. This is perhaps because the numbers added by the Americans haven't been sufficient and the deployment is mainly in an advisory role, the capability of Afghan forces has been extremely limited in comparison to that of non-state actors.

The continued support of terrorists from regional players and political dissension within the top Afghan leadership has not helped translate the military input into positive and concrete results. Despite that the Afghan Army is over 170, 000 strong and has been well trained, analysts in Afghanistan talk about defection from Afghan police and forces that indicates morale problems.[6] In any case, greater air strikes has drawn criticism due to the collateral damage to human life caused by the action thus making it unpopular amongst people. The Taliban continues to remain in a dominant position, as it controls more than 14 districts (that is, about 4% of the territory) and is present in another 263 districts (about 66% of the country). This means that half of the Afghan population continues to live in areas under Taliban influence.[7] Moreover, the Taliban seems to have pushed its way into the east of the country, which was previously not its stronghold, indicating its growing influence and ability to neutralise the writ of the Kabul government.

Currently, Afghanistan can be roughly divided into three zones: government-controlled areas (roughly 30%); spaces under Taliban influence; and areas with an IS presence. The Taliban remains a dominant actor in the conflict, as indicated by figures for violence in the country. From January to September 2018, of the 5,243 civilian casualties caused by anti-government elements, the various Taliban groups together were responsible for 35%, followed by IS (25%).[8]

Government control appears to be concentrated mainly in the centre of the country,[9] but such areas are hedged around by areas of Taliban influence.

And government control doesn't necessarily mean the absence of violence in such areas, which also come under random Taliban attack. While security is a key issue, political infighting, differences between the various political factions and the unpopularity of President Ashraf Ghani are some of the many factors that weaken Kabul.

OVERVIEW OF ATTACKS

Civilian casualties in 2018, including deaths and injuries, match the numbers in the preceding three years (Figure 1). According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the number of civilian deaths and injuries has remained high since it began to grow during 2009. In fact, casualties in the first nine months of 2018 were more than those during the same period in 2017.[10] Overall casualties in 2018 were higher than in preceding years. The total number of killings recorded by the end of 2018[11] was 14,143, which included 1,016 civilians and 1,451 security forces.[12]

The poor security conditions do not give confidence to the general public regarding Afghan government's ability to deliver. Continued problems of corruption and poor governance compounded with security issues generate conditions in which Taliban acquire space to manoeuvre. In any case, NATO personnel operating in the field talk about Ashraf Ghani's inability to govern and engage with other players for the sake of improving conditions.[13]

FIGURE 1: Civilian casualties in Afghanistan, January to September, 2009 to 2018
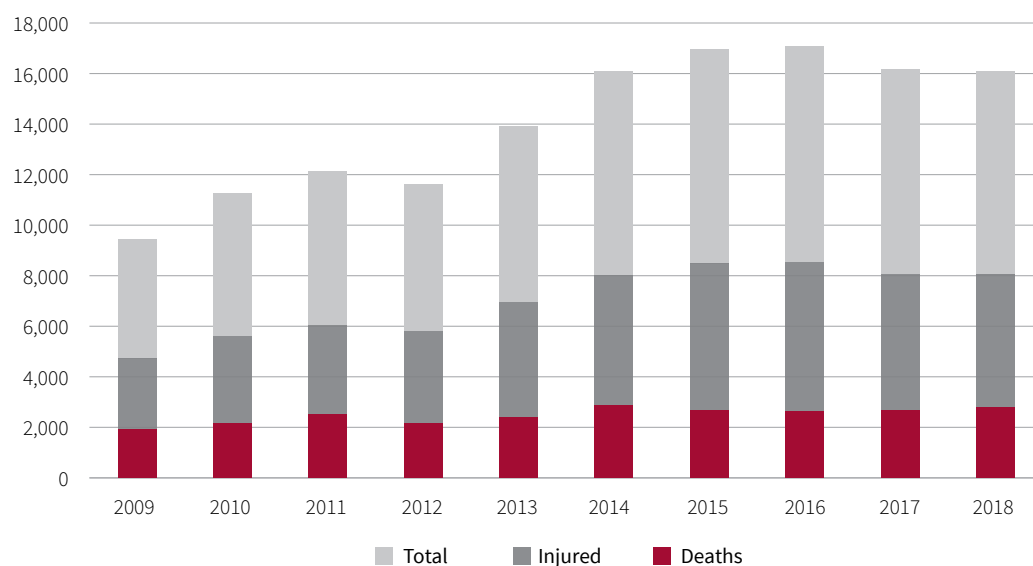
Source: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Human Rights Services, *Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018*, 10 October 2018, p.1, online.

The bulk of the casualties occurred due to major attacks by Taliban and IS in the form of suicide attacks or through the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The second main cause of deaths was ground engagements between pro-government and anti-government forces (up by 9% from 2017). This means that the comparative increase in the firepower of pro-government forces (both Afghan Government forces and allied foreign forces) resulted in the deaths of militants but also increased collateral damage. The latter factor has increased the unpopularity of the government and American forces. The most affected areas were Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Faryab and Kandahar. There was also an increase in aerial bombing, which accounted for 8% of total civilian casualties, an increase of 39% from 2017. Search operations by government forces involving Afghan and international forces also doubled in 2018, indicating their better tactical capacity to carry out such operations.[14]

Although women and children were the most affected by the increase in conflict, conditions weren't good for security forces either. While data on law enforcement and security force casualties is confidential, Afghan sources claimed that their losses were more than 30 per day.[15] In October 2018, the Taliban managed to kill Afghan police chief General Abdul Razik and Kandahar's intelligence chief, Abdul Mohmin.[16] The attack was not only shocking, especially right before general elections on 20 October, but it also indicated Kabul government's fragility versus the Taliban in face of such security lapses.

IS, which has influence in eastern Afghanistan (particularly in Nangarhar and Kunnar), also launched massive attacks that caused huge casualties. The organisation, which is spread across 30 districts of the country, poses challenges not only to the state but also to the Taliban, as fighters tend to drift from various Taliban and other militant groups into IS.[17] The desertion of militant foot soldiers poses a threat to the Taliban leadership, as the younger cadre, which in so many years has seen nothing but war and is more ideological in its mindset, would resist any settlement with the government and may join IS. In any case, there are links between Taliban groups such as the Haqqani Network and IS.[18] The linkage between the two terrorist outfits gives strength to the Haqqani Network which lost its leader, Jalaludin Haqqani, in September 2018. Despite this being an emotional loss to the group, the death of the leader will not have an impact on overall capacity of the outfit that in reality has been controlled by Jalaludin Haqqani's son Sirajudin Haqqani for a long time.

COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS

The capability of IS has made negotiations with the Taliban, which the Afghan government and the US hope to have, a difficult task. It's claimed that many of the warlords who joined the government, such as Gulbuddin Hikmatyar of Hizb-e-Islami, face the problem of their followers deserting to join IS. According to Hikmatullah Azami even if Taliban leaders promised to deliver, their ability to retain their foot soldiers remains doubtful, especially in the short-term which means a prolonged low intensity civil conflict. Unlike the integrated Taliban under the leadership of its former leader Mullah Omar, the modern-day Taliban is a parochial group that shares common goals and religious ideology but not a leadership. Effectively, this means that Taliban leaders now have less ability to dictate orders top-down as compared to the past to the group's ideologically poised young fighters, who aren't inclined towards peace with the US.

This makes the task of Zalmay Khalilzad, who was appointed by Donald Trump as his Special Advisor to Afghanistan to negotiate with the Taliban, arduous.[19] Khalilzad has managed to meet with various Taliban leaders in Qatar including those that were released from Guantanamo in 2014, but the process of getting all groups on the same table is not easy. Regional players like Pakistan that do not approve of Khalilzad are likely to influence thinking of Taliban elements that its military tends to support. While the Taliban and the US Government held talks in July 2018,[20] the ultimate outcome remains unpredictable due to lack of unity among the Taliban. The Haqqani Network and segments of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan continue to attack government forces and have even partnered with IS.[21]

There's also a lack of consensus among regional power players about Afghanistan, which is viewed as a venue for the 'Great Game' being fought between global powers such as the US, China and Russia.[22] Reportedly, Iran and Russia have developed links with the Taliban primarily to forestall IS.[23] Any supply or support from regional players, especially Iran and Pakistan, tends to jeopardise the possibility of further peace talks. The ability of some of the Taliban groups, such as the Haqqani Network, to melt away in the face of attacks against them by government forces or to get support in form of manpower tends to strengthen the insurgency.

Thus far, Washington's pressure on Pakistan, which is suspected of supporting the Taliban covertly, hasn't borne any fruit. Though FATF's proceedings are observed with caution and cosmetic changes such as engaging terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba in political and social activities are afoot, there is no demonstration of a total clamp down on these various groups. This year in November, Donald Trump and Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, Imran Khan engaged in a twitter spat regarding Pakistan not doing enough. Khan seemed to echo the perspective that his country had suffered due to American war and must not be pressured more. His views mimicked the army chief, General Qamar Bajwa's approach popularly termed as the 'Bajwa doctrine' according to which the world must stop forcing Pakistan to do more and should do more on cleaning up Afghanistan instead.[24]

The strategic bond between China and Pakistan, in which the latter also views Russia as a partner, continues to protect Islamabad from major confrontation with Washington beyond limited sanctions. Pakistan's main objection is to India's involvement in Afghanistan. The fact that India has four consulates in different parts of the country is seen as a hostile move to feed the Baluch insurgency and attack the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Moreover, Delhi's contribution in development works inside Afghanistan is viewed as challenging and ultimately undermining Pakistan's traditional influence in the country. Pakistan remains invested in the Taliban, which is seen as representing the bulk of the dominant Pashto ethnic group among the Afghan population.

President Trump's encouragement of India to train Afghan military and contribute forces in the conflict (although India hasn't committed troops on the ground) is seen as adding to the threat posed by Delhi to Pakistan.

While Pakistan's military presents its communication with some of the Taliban group as an advantage for its allies like China, especially in the face of threat from IS, the military is not friendly to the idea of talks with Taliban managed by the US. There were also bilateral exchanges in the form of high-level visits between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but with little effect on the outcome. In any case, the Afghan–US counterterrorism efforts failed to dry up the Taliban's resources.[25] There's also the issue of resentment among people due to aerial bombardment resulting in the loss of innocent lives. The militants continue to fight to boost their leverage. Under the circumstances, the one positive thing during 2018 was the successful completion of parliamentary elections, which were held after a delay of three years.[26] Although electoral politics in itself tends to create divisions, this indicates the commitment of the urban middle class and people in Afghanistan to the fragile democratic system.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan's security seemed to improve in 2017 and 2018, mainly due to the efforts of the security forces. Various military operations reduced the number of groups challenging the state. However, there hasn't been a major policy shift in allowing various militant groups to remain in the country, as some, such as the Haqqani Network, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa / Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) network, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat are viewed as assets of the security establishment, dedicated to its goal of fighting

India. The situation continues to fan extremism in the country. This means that violence could return at some future point if there's any external provocation, such as an increase in Shia–Sunni sectarian conflict due to rising tensions between the US and Iran.

Ultimately, peace in Pakistan will depend on the government eliminating the various militant groups by taking control of their ideological basis, and that depends on the newly elected government of Imran Khan establishing its position vis-à-vis Pakistan's powerful military. That might not happen, because the new prime minister is partly beholden to the military for his success in the 2018 elections. The possibility of Imran Khan strengthening his position and exercising control of the armed forces seems limited. Although a military coup isn't a possibility, the political system remains weak, and the politicians are in no position to challenge the power of the generals. Furthermore, the clampdown on the media and an increase in the number of forced disappearances have weakened the capacity of civil society to assert itself versus the armed forces.

Having conducted successful military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the government took the major step of announcing the integration of the FATA into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province.[27] However, there's been only a very limited move towards further integration of tribal areas that were earlier controlled through the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) dating back to colonial times with settled area of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and a lack of security, administrative and judicial infrastructure to translate the move into a meaningful change. In the absence of a stable civilian infrastructure to implement writ of the state in the tribal agencies, the military continues to play the lead role. Intriguingly, despite claims that the tribal areas are cleaned up of terrorists, there is still security lapses taking place such as the kidnap of a senior police official from the capital city Islamabad to Afghanistan through the tribal border where he was tortured and killed.[28]

While Pakistan witnessed a steady reduction in terror incidents over the past three years (Table 4), it remained one of the prime locations for terrorist activities in the South Asian region. A reduction in deaths due to terror attacks compared with 2017 that can be attributed to the efforts of the security forces to eliminate violence and bring down the number of casualties. Since 2014, Pakistan has conducted two major military operations to eliminate militant groups hostile to the state: Zarbe Azab in 2014 in North Waziristan and Radd-ul-Fasaad in 2017.

TABLE 4: Casualties in Pakistan, 2016 to 2018

	Civilians	Security forces	Terrorists	Not specified	Total
2016	612	293	898	–	1803
2017	460	189	458	–	1107
2018	299	139	150	14	602

Source: Australian Strategic Policy Institute Counter-terrorism Yearbook 2018. see also South Asia Terrorism Portal, online.

However, the areas where there has been terrorism activities are Baluchistan and KP, the two provinces that border on Afghanistan and are also infested with various militant groups (Table 5). Incidents such as attacks on girls' schools in the Gilgit-Baltistan administrative area, which had no parallel in 2017, also took place. The only area that experienced a reduction in attacks was Punjab, a province considered as Pakistan's heartland and central to the country's power elite. Almost half of the casualties were caused by suicide attacks carried out mostly in the two provinces of KP and Baluchistan.

TABLE 5: Terrorism incidents of terrorism in Pakistan, 2017 and 2018

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Total
Baluchistan											
2017	5	1	–	–	4	4	3	1	1	4	23
2018	7	4	3	6	3	1	7	1	3	1	36
Subtotal	**12**	**5**	**3**	**6**	**7**	**5**	**10**	**2**	**4**	**5**	**59**
Gilgit-Baltistan											
2017	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2018	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	2
Subtotal	**–**	**–**	**–**	**–**	**–**	**–**	**–**	**2**	**–**	**–**	**2**
Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa											
2017	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	–	–	–	12
2018	1	6	3	–	9	3	4	1	5	2	34
Subtotal	**4**	**10**	**4**	**1**	**10**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**5**	**2**	**46**
Punjab											
2017	1	1	–	2	–	–	1	–	–	–	5
2018	–	–	1	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	2
Subtotal	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**–**	**1**	**–**	**–**	**–**	**7**
Sindh											
2017	1	1	–	1	–	1	1	–	1	–	6
2018	1	1	1	–	–	1	1	–	–	1	6
Subtotal	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**–**	**2**	**2**	**–**	**1**	**1**	**12**
Total	**19**	**18**	**9**	**10**	**18**	**11**	**18**	**5**	**10**	**8**	**126**

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan mounted the highest number of attacks, followed by IS, but IS caused the most casualties (its deadliest attack, in July, claimed more than 149 lives).[29]

IS seems to be pursuing its hardline *Salafi* ideology, which condones the targeted killing of Shia civilians.

The presence of IS in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a critical issue, but Pakistan's security forces seem to focus more on countering the narrative of nationalist forces in Baluchistan and Sindh, which have limited capacity to attack. While Sindhi nationalist groups have hardly any military capability to speak of, the Baluch insurgency has demonstrable capacity to attack soft targets and gas pipelines. The state's pushback, in the form of torture and killing Baluchis or anyone else suspected of supporting Baluch nationalism, has weakened this militancy. Out of the total number of terror incidents in 2018, only five have been attributed to various nationalist forces. Comparatively little action was taken against Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups that share ideology similar to that of the Salafist IS and al-Qaeda.

One reason for the continued presence of IS and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in Baluchistan and KP is their links with several other militant organisations that are based in Pakistan. The ideology of Lashkar-e-Taiba is close to that of IS. Similarly, groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad that are considered close to the state follow the same religious school as the Taliban. Despite carrying out major military operations against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which are all considered hostile to the state, Pakistan seems reluctant to eliminate groups that have been part of its struggle against India, especially in Kashmir. Islamabad has resisted pressure from the international community to clean the country of groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, arguing that it should be allowed to mainstream those organisations by allowing them to play a role in society and politics.[30]

That plan is dangerous, as the main reason behind the mainstreaming exercise is to protect the groups, which in any case have managed to spread their message in the country. The fact that the leader of the proscribed Lashkar-e-Taiba group openly makes speeches and that his face appeared on posters of candidates contesting the 2018 elections has made the party appear to be untouched by the security forces. This situation isn't acceptable to the US or the member states of the FATF, which once again put Pakistan on its grey list in March 2018.[31] The task force could put Pakistan on a black list if Islamabad doesn't take action against all terrorist organisations.

Even if support to militants is withdrawn, there's a bigger issue of extremism in the country. Over the past three decades and more, the national security institutions encouraged the growth of militant groups to fight Pakistan's external wars. In the process, those groups developed independent constituencies in society. Overcoming this will require a robust counter-extremism and deradicalisation program, not just in Pakistan but in Afghanistan as well. Islamabad made a tiny effort by getting 1,800 clerics to issue a religious opinion (*fatwa*) against suicide attacks.[32] However, the opinion has its limitations, such as that it did not extend to attacks inside Afghanistan; nor did it become popular inside Pakistan. Although the effort was aimed at stopping suicide attacks, the *fatwa* might not be the cause of the reduction in the numbers of attacks. The other objective was to bridge the Shia–Sunni sectarian divide, which remains wide and may widen further in case of increased hostility between the US and Iran. The various militant religious groups operating in Baluchistan, some of which are financed by Saudi Arabia, could increase attacks on Iran, resulting in a reaction within Pakistan.

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The Middle East

AND COUNTERTERRORISM

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The Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda continue to pose a serious security threat in and to the Middle East.

The fact that neither entity controls territory doesn't mean that their power and influence have weakened.[1] Anecdotal evidence suggests that they and their affiliates, supporters, sympathisers and wannabes continue to destabilise regimes, feed off general disenchantment with ruling elites, engage in local conflicts in places such as Yemen and Libya, and exploit the Sunni–Shia / Saudi–Iran fissure. Additionally, the region is awash with foreign fighters: individuals who received training and learned their trade in Iraq and in the Syrian civil war and have either returned to their countries of origin or have found new spheres to operate in.

The Middle East stretches from Morocco across North Africa, including parts of the Sahel, through to the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan. For the purposes of this chapter, I include the Eastern Mediterranean, which means Turkey, Greece and possibly the Balkans.[2] The area includes hotspots such as Syria, Jordan, Sinai, Iraq, Libya and Yemen where *Salafi-jihadi* activity has been present for years or decades. Places such as Libya and Mali have also become safe havens for terrorist training camps, and it seems that local, regional or international action is doing little to prevent *jihadi* groups establishing a presence.[3]

The relationship between local entities such as the Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province, or the Islamic State in the Sinai) and the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) and their IS or al-Qaeda patrons isn't always easy to gauge, as how much command and control the patrons have over them is unclear.[4] This is why many of them should be seen as franchises, which means that they have more operational autonomy.[5] There are also many al-Qaeda branches, such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and affiliates such as Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria (Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria), along with countless supporters and sympathisers who mightn't wish to participate in the fighting but who give the *jihadis* financial support. Concomitantly, groups metastasize and metamorphose; some adopt new names, others become enmeshed in more established entities and others split from their patrons.[6] All this makes it difficult to track groups and operations, particularly because some areas are closed to reporters and scholars due to security concerns.

Although much attention is focused on IS and al-Qaeda, the region is affected by other terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK), Bahraini Shia militant groups, other groups, and lone actors.[7] These entities cause as much instability as IS and al-Qaeda but due to space constraints it isn't possible in this chapter to assess their impact on the region and what's being done to curtail their operations.

The chapter begins with a general assessment of the Middle East – North Africa region before shifting to Syria, which has shaped much of the *Salafi-jihadi* architecture, as the country and the conflict attracted countless young men and women who went to join IS out of a belief that it's either helping fellow Muslims or fulfilling some eschatological prophecy. The third section focuses on Egypt, which is contending with vicious IS terrorist activity directed mostly against its Coptic and Sufi population. The fourth section is on Libya, which is a de facto fragile if not failed state. Libya and Libyans seem to play an important role as hubs for IS and al-Qaeda entities that seek to exploit the country's vast ungoverned spaces for their activities.[8] The fifth case study is Israel, which seems to have mounted an aggressive military and cyber campaign to counter what could be described as the 'knife intifada'. The fifth section looks at Turkey and its role in Syria noting that for the Turks what is of principal concern is ensuring that the Kurds in Syria don't get any autonomy or independence, as Ankara fears that such a thing would encourage the Kurds in Turkey to demand the same thing. The chapter concludes by noting that, across the Middle East, CT is very much centred on hard, military power as governments eschew a soft, long-term approach aimed at addressing the root causes of terrorism, which therefore means that violence is unlikely to stop any time soon.

A GENERAL THREAT ASSESSMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST – NORTH AFRICA REGION

Prima facie, great strides were made in CT in the Middle East and North Africa in 2018.

The University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database indicates that major improvements in security, coupled with the military success of Operation Inherent Resolve, have meant that terror attacks dropped from over 6,100 in 2017 to under 3,800 in 2018; notably, the number of deaths caused by suicide attacks was also down by almost 50% from the previous year.[9] The decline is part of a global trend, in that terrorist attacks have been declining since 2014, when there were around 17,000 (in 2017, there were around 11,000 attacks globally).[10] The decline has been most noticeable in Iraq, Turkey, Libya and Yemen, in the last of which the violence has taken on aspects of an increasingly inter-state conflict as well as a civil war.

Explanations for the waning in violence vary. One can point to the demise of IS and the end of the Caliphate. The 'global coalition against Daesh,' which included countries that sent special forces into Iraq to 'detain or kill their own citizens fighting alongside Islamic State',[11] has successfully challenged IS, leading it to lose territory, manpower and wealth. This was after all once a terrorist group that controlled a territory the size of Britain and had around 12 million people living within its territory. It could also command a vast treasury, estimated at around US$6 billion.[12] Nevertheless, there are indications that IS is transitioning to become a more insurgent-type entity, aimed at inspiring others to commit acts of violence, which may lead to more violence in the region and beyond. This is why, despite the reduction in terrorist attacks, there are several worrying signs for the future:

- IS may encourage more lone-actor activities. In August 2018, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi released a 54-minute audio message titled 'Give glad tidings to the patient', in which he called for patience, perseverance and continued jihad, while also mentioning the value of vehicle attacks.[13]

- Al-Qaeda remains a threat to and in the Middle East, as the group has many ties in the region and many followers.[14]

- Inter-state competition in the region is increasing, which may encourage states to turn to proxies that have a *Salafi-jihadi* agenda and that may be willing to work with some state actors. For example, there are reports of IS fighters joining Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces; the fighters want to live, and the Iraqi forces want to expand their influence into Sunni areas.[15]

- A dichotomous situation is emerging across the region in that at some places clear lines of demarcation between *Salafi-jihadi* groups are dissipating, and there's some evidence that, at least in parts of the Sahel, al-Qaeda is seeking to recruit or absorb IS fighters into its ranks.[16] And yet, the two are also engaged in a vicious battle for supremacy, which had begun soon after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria and has continued.[17]

- Foreign fighters pose challenges for regional security as a whole.[18]

SYRIA

The situation in Syria, even though the civil war is largely over, remains particularly grim and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The Assad regime is likely to seek to re-establish its authority over the whole country, which means that it must not only contend with American and Turkish forces and their local proxies but also continue to battle the Salafist-jihadists, many of whom have gone underground or to the desert. Hassan Hassan, a senior fellow at the Tahrir Institute, has correctly pointed out that IS knows eastern Syria and northeastern Iraq well and has 'established an insurgency infrastructure in the deserts, river valleys and rural areas stretching from Kirkuk and Diyala in Iraq to the Qalamoun region near Damascus in Syria'.[19] This is all part of IS's new strategy, which is composed of three parts: the first part known as *sahraa*, or desert refers to taking the battle to the deserts of Syria/Iraq. In these areas, IS and its members have a substantial advantage on regular militaries. The second part is the *sahwat*, or Sunni opponents. The roots of this strategy lie with the tribal Awakening Councils established in Iraq in 2007 to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq. Thus, as IS is forced into the desert, it relies more on a policy of terrorising local communities into doing its biding. The third pillar is *sawlat*, or hit-and-run operations, where IS uses small units to attack its enemies.[20] These units are composed of battle-hardened, experienced fighters many of whom are also technologically savvy, using multidomain platforms.[21] Included in its toolkit is a preponderance to engage in criminal activity, as the group is conscious of the need to ensure a stead supply of funds. Thus, in places such as Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salahuddin, there has been an increase in kidnapping (in June 2018, there were 83 reported cases of kidnapping, in May, the number stood at 30, whereas in March there were only seven).[22]

The Assad regime is in control of around a third of the country, but a large swathe of territory is either under the influence and protection of the Turks or the Americans or is managed by local groups whose loyalty is to themselves. This reality is unlikely to change anytime soon mainly because the Assad regime doesn't have the capability to win control over the whole of Syria. Additionally, several of the *Salafi-jihadi* groups, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which evolved out of al-Nusrah Front, have indicated that they won't support the Sochi agreement, as they see their situation as one of 'do or die'[23] as the conflict has become existential: all sides know that defeat means death, and they don't have anywhere to go (no country is likely to accept Assad, nor is he likely to go anywhere as it means trusting his fate to whoever is willing to host him

and his inner circle). In other words, Syria is likely to see a continued stalemate between the Assad regime and its opponents. Consequently, Syria is likely to continue to 'pull' *jihadis* and would-be *jihadis* primarily to the Syrian desert where they can easily meld into local communities and engage in hit-and-run operations.

One of the main CT issues affecting Syria is whether the Americans will continue to support the anti-Assad forces. As things stand, the Americans have a light footprint in the Syria, opting to operate through proxies in part because Congress hasn't authorised military action. The American presence is run through the Joint Special Operations Command, which means that basic information about the role played by the US remains classified. The Americans are supporting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia, which is serving as the principal opponent to IS (besides the Assad regime) and which the Turks are worried about, as they see the Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units, YPG), which is part of the SDF, as a proxy of the PKK.[24]

The American commitment to the SDF has been invaluable in eroding IS's power and influence (in 2018, there were around 2,000 US troops in Syria, providing support to those battling IS) and in limiting the Assad regime (President Trump has authorised limited strikes against military assets of the regime).[25]

An American withdrawal from Syria, which has been touted and even announced by Trump, is likely to embolden the Assad regime, which is committed to its own survival and the restoration of its sovereign power over the whole of Syria. Nevertheless, an American withdrawal, would also encourage the Turks to continue their policy of eroding the power and fighting abilities of the Syrian–Kurdish forces, which is the main concern of Ankara (and not the Assad regime or even al-Qaeda).[26] These issues are likely to empower IS, which will benefit from a weakened SDF. In December 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that the Turkish military will target the YPG in the eastern Euphrates. In the past, the Turks were unable to carry out military activities in the area because the Americans were patrolling it,[27] but with President Trump's recent decision to withdraw American troops from Syria, the Turks will have more flexibility.

There are also likely to be challenges with the various Iranian-backed militias, which have been vital in propping up the regime—such as Hezbollah, the Zeynabiyoun Brigade (a Pakistani-based Shia militia composed of men between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are paid around US$800 a month) and the Fatimayoun Brigade (a force composed of Afghan refugees who have fled to Iran).[28]

Southern Syria, particularly the Daraa area, which borders Israel and Jordan, is likely to remain a major issue of concern for the foreseeable future specifically from a terrorism perspective. Even though the Assad regime has managed to reconquer the area from IS and al-Nusra Front, cells are likely to have remained.

Reportedly, when the battle for Daraa raged in July 2018, the Israelis privately consented to Russian requests to let Iranian forces into the area to support the Assad regime's onslaught, as long as it was understood that the Iranians couldn't stay in the area once the *Salafi-jihadis* were defeated.[29] Jihadists may wish to exploit the situation, as they know that the Assad regime can't defeat them without Iranian help, but they also know that the Israelis are unlikely to permit a prolonged Iranian presence in the region. Thus, jihadists, who tend to play a long game, could seek sanctuary in the area. They know that, if they don't attack Israel or challenge the regime too much, the Israelis are likely to let them stay because otherwise the Iranians will seek to enter the area.

The Daraa negotiations illustrate the complexity of the Syrian situation. Arch-rivals such as Israel and Iran are willing to pause in their differences to defeat IS. What it also shows is that Israel and Iran will work through proxies if it's to their benefit (both have a history of doing so, as they tend to focus on the present or near future, as opposed to the long term). This means that the security situation in Syria is likely to remain challenging, especially as the Turks are likely to also want to make sure that the SDF doesn't become too powerful, as that could embolden the YPG and the PKK. Ultimately, by all indications, the conflict in Syria will continue to affect regional security.

IS decision to take a more of an insurgency-type approach are likely to have several consequences. First, it would be very difficult to root out IS from the region, as its fighters are digging in, developing relationships with local communities and establishing themselves (which is exactly what al-Qaeda has been doing for decades). Second, because the group is becoming more entrenched, there needs to be a long-term commitment of the international community to address the root causes that allow, facilitate and permit groups and fighters of IS and al-Qaeda to establish themselves.

In Syria, the CT challenges in 2019 will be threefold: the survival of the Assad regime (and, conversely, the *Salafi-jihadi* groups' attempts to survive); controlling and limiting the influence of foreign actors (Iran, Russia, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) and non-state actors such as Hezbollah; and reconstruction. Because of the first two issues, reconstruction is unlikely to occur on a large scale while US sanctions on Syria continue. Without reconstruction, human insecurity is likely to remain, which emboldens local powerbrokers and tribal leaders, as people need to rely on them for basic security. In other words, violence in Syria will continue, albeit on a lower-scale as the various actors, fight out for a mutually hurting stalemate, with no 'ripeness' insight.[30]

EGYPT

Whether Egypt can deal with the continuous threat posed by Salafist-jihadism remains one of the big questions for the foreseeable future, as there are cells operating Cairo and Giza and not just Sinai. The Egyptian state is also facing threats from al-Qaeda-linked militants across its western border.[31]

The Sinai has been under a de facto state of emergency since 2014, when a suicide car bombing killed at least 31 soldiers.[32] By 2018, the Egyptian Government is clearly facing a sophisticated and vicious insurgency (since 2014, the military has lost over 2,000 men in the campaign against *salafi-jihadis*).

Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province or Islamic State in the Sinai), formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem), poses a major security threat to Egypt and the region because of the instability that it causes Egypt and because it serves as a conduit between the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa/Horn of Africa and Sahel. In many ways the future of Egypt hangs on a knife's edge because in addition to terrorism, Egyptians are facing a dire economic outlook as Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seeks to reform the economy; the reform package was an integral part of the agreement that he had signed with the IMF to get US$12-billion loans. The reforms seem to work in that el-Sisi has cut government debt from 103.5% of GDP in fiscal 2017 to 86% and the country has seen some economic growth (GDP growth for 2017–2018 was at 5%), however, ordinary Egyptians are hurting.[33]

The link between Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and IS was forged in 2011, although the group pledged its allegiance to IS only in 2014. Wilayat Sinai has given IS the ability to use the Sinai to launch terror attacks in the province but also in mainland Egypt, mainly against the Copts, whose churches in Tanta and Alexandria as well as buses carrying their pilgrims to various monasteries in southern Sinai have been attacked.

Wilayat Sinai seems to have two goals. The first is to highlight the inability of the Egyptian security forces to provide security to their own people, which it does by carrying out terror attacks, and to undermine the tourism industry (which explains why, for example, it has targeted a Russian plane carrying tourists, leading to a decline in Russian tourism[34]), which is a major earner for the country. The second goal is to get the government to apply hard military power to fight the group. Such tactics have caused tremendous suffering to those living in the North Sinai Governate, who now struggle to move across the region or who have been forced to leave their homes by the Egyptian military for 'security purposes'. This is a tried and tested approach of *Salafi-jihadis*.[35]

In 2013, el-Sisi toppled Mohamed Morsi, who had appointed him Defence Minister, and later won the 2014 presidential election with 96.9% of the vote (in March 2018, he won the presidency again with 97% of the vote). Since his rise to power, el-Sisi has cemented his authority over the Egyptian state (in his two election campaigns, he justified his authoritarian actions which includes locking up political opponents and closing down media outlets, by referring to the need for security and touting his credentials as a strongman who can deal with the terrorism threat). However, the country continues to be rocked by terrorist attacks, most of which are carried out by *Wilayat Sinai*.

President el-Sisi first encountered the *Salafi-jihadi* threat in the early 2010s when he served as chief of staff of the northern military zone and then as the Defence Minister. He has opted to take a hardline approach to the threat posed by Wilayat Sinai, especially following the November 2017 assault at the Sufi el-Rawda mosque 45 kilometres west of North Sinai Governorate capital, El Arish, in which more than 230 people lost their lives and 120 were injured in an attack by the group.[36]

On 9 February 2018, the government launched Operation Sinai 2018, which was aimed at rooting out jihadists from the Sinai Governate. The military instituted a lockdown of the region, closing down the main roads and highways, shutting down all gas stations and schools, and limiting people's movements into and out of the region (for which special security permits were needed). The policy led to a food crisis for the 400,000 residents, as trucks couldn't enter the province, leading the government to lift the ban on the trucks in April.[37] There are also reports that the Egyptian military has destroyed homes, commercial buildings and farms as a security measure with the army demolishing homes around the al-Arish airport as it constructed a new security buffer zone.[38]

Since 2017, as a CT measure, the Egyptian Government has sought to work with northern Sinai Bedouin tribes, providing them with weapons and resources to fight and to gather information on Wilayat Sinai. It remains unclear how effective this policy has been, beyond further dividing the tribes that live in the area, as some work with the government and others do not. In 2017, the government also established the National Council to Confront Terrorism and Extremism, the role of which is to devise a counterinsurgency strategy that includes an economic and education component.[39] But at this stage it is unclear how successful this policy has been, as information is hard to come by.

The actions of the Egyptian Government to curtail the violence are unlikely to bear any fruit, partly because they rely on military power to deal with the terrorists. There are three main reasons for this. First, by focusing on the use of force to pacify the Sinai area, Wilayat Sinai can capitalise on the fact that the Bedouins are marginalised and angry at the Egyptian state, which has ignored them for years, doing little to address their problems.[40] In other words, the Bedouins are already angry at the hard tactics used by the government against them, so using more force as oppose to soft power is likely to galvanise them even more against the state.

Second, the terrain favours the insurgents, who know the area and can conduct effective hit-and-run operations and then melt away. The lack of roads makes it hard for the Egyptian military to patrol the area and thus impose their writ. By continuing to securitise the problem and take actions that create or further resentment (such as forced evictions and resettlements, which Egypt imposed as it sought to create a *cordon sanitaire* along its border with Gaza) and by not addressing Egypt's structural problems, el-Sisi is effectively fuelling the insurgency.[41]

Third, since his re-election in March 2018, el-Sisi has used the Wilayat Sinai problem to clamp down on dissent, especially in the media, which has come under enormous pressure from the government, leading to a European Parliament resolution condemning 'continuous restrictions on fundamental democratic rights',[42] which could impact the ability or willingness of European companies to invest in Egypt and thus help in reforming the Egyptian economy.

Such measures don't indicate a well thought out counterinsurgency strategy, but rather a desire to maintain a strong hold on power, which seems to be el-Sisi's first and perhaps only priority.

LIBYA

The implosion of Libya following the death of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 has meant that many *Salafi-jihadis* are able to operate in the desert areas in the south of the country, where it shares borders with Chad and Niger, both of which have had to deal with jihadist activities for several years.

Libyans' affinity with Salafist-jihadism predates the death of Gaddafi. Many *jihadis*, such as the members of the Libyan Islamist Fighting Group (known locally as al-Jamaa al-Libiya al-Muqatila), trace their roots to the anti-Soviet war and the Taliban period in Afghanistan. Gaddafi had imprisoned many leading jihadists, but many were released during the uprising against him. Once released, many of them hoped to use the political vacuum to promote Islamism in Libya.[43]

A second reason behind the expansion of Salafist-jihadism in Libya is that in 2013 the Tunisian Government banned Ansar al-Sharia (Supporters of Islamic Law), which has loose ties to al-Qaeda.[44] The ban encouraged Tunisian jihadists to set up camp in Libya, which had no effective government during its civil war. From there, many of them headed to Syria, where they joined Jabhat al-Nusra or Katibat al-Battar al-Libi, an IS affiliate set up by Libyan jihadists, which pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2014 and went on to establish the Libyan IS *wilayat* in Derna (Barqa) and several training camps across Syria, which were to be launching pads for a series of terrorist attacks in Europe and North Africa.[45] It was therefore unsurprising that IS established a firm foothold in Libya in 2015 and 2016, controlling Sabratha, Derna and Sirte with between 3,000 to 5,000 fighters who imposed strict Salafist rule: religious education was mandatory, religious police implemented gender segregation, women were forced to wear the hijab, alcohol was banned and savage punishments such as amputations and beheadings were administered.[46]

By mid-2016, the battle for Libya between the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) and the *Salafi-jihadis* reached its pinnacle. Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj sought support from the US, which officially joined the battle for Sirte on 1 August 2016. By relying on US air superiority, Libyan forces were able to dislodge IS, which also lost senior leaders such as Waleed al-Farjani and Abu Omar al-Muhajir, securing the city and capturing around 1,700 fighters by December 2016.[47] However, many jihadists fled to the western and southern deserts or to neighbouring urban centres, where they established cells. The lesson from Sirte was that hard military power which included local and international forces had ended IS's military control of key centres in Libya, indicating that using military power to defeat insurgents works (at least in Libya).

The principal IS group in Libya is Wilayat Libya-Barqah (IS-Libya). The group was formed in Dernah by locals who had fought in Syria with the IS-affiliated Battar Brigade. Reportedly, IS-Libya has between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters, most of whom are foreign (including a large contingent of Tunisians and Sudanese).[48]

With the support of the Americans, the GNA is engaged in a military campaign to eradicate around 500 IS cells in Libya, which are organised into a 'Desert Brigade' and an 'Office of Borders and Immigration'. These IS entities are responsible for external operations, logistics and recruitment. The IS operatives are based in Sirte. The carry out an insurgency-type campaign against oil installations, as reducing oil production in Libya prevents the country from earning much-needed foreign currency.[49]

Over the past few months, IS-Libya has been launching more attacks as it recognises that none of the major actors in Libya are willing to explore a peaceful future as such actions would mean a demise in their power.[50]

In an attack on the headquarters of Libya's national oil company, armed men stormed the site and fought a gun battle with guards that left several people dead (four months earlier, a suicide bomber struck at the National Elections Commission building in Tripoli, killing 14 people).[51] In October 2018, IS-Libya launched what's been described as a sophisticated attack on the desert town of al-Fuqaha in Jufra district, which is more than 800 kilometres (490 miles) south of the capital, Tripoli. IS fighters used 25 vehicles to attack the town, beheaded five civilians and set fire to buildings owned by the local government, the security forces, the police and some local people. The fighters emphasised that they were burning the homes of those whom they deemed to be cooperating with the authorities, but they ensured that women and children were removed from the homes first, indicating that IS recognises that it must abide by a moral code if it's to attract fighters.[52]

There's evidence that al-Qaeda is also present in Libya. Through its affiliate, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, it's challenging General Khalifa Haftar and his 'Libyan National Army'.[53] Al-Qaeda's approach to Libya and the region is different from that of IS. Whereas IS seeks to engage with opponents, al-Qaeda has sought to establish links with locals, which is often done by marrying into local communities, providing funds or access to funds (mainly through criminal enterprises) and absorbing IS fighters. It's flexible in its operations and its narrative, which are tailored to local needs and wants and don't impose a rigid foreign ideology on the population.[54]

Many of the factors affecting the Egyptians in their campaign to pacify the Sinai, such as an alienated local population and rough terrain, local leaders wielding enormous power, tribal differences, apply in Libya, except that in Libya there's no effective government in Tripoli. The UN supports the GNA, but the GNA is, at best, the government of Tripoli, not the government of Libya. It exercises little control over the rest of the country, which has very porous borders that no one controls. Large swathes of territory are controlled by local leaders, many of whom engage in criminal activities, as the country has become a major launching pad for irregular African migrants seeking to travel to Europe. Consequently, if security is lacking and the government is unable to ensure a steady flow of revenue that could be used to develop the country and ensure that people have a stake in the state as a whole, *Salafi-jihadis* will be able to operate in the country, spreading fear and destruction.

ISRAEL

Israel's has a strong reputation for CT. It has had to deal with terrorism since its establishment in 1948, and its approach to CT is a holistic one in which the government is able to adjust to new waves and challenges.[55] The country has faced an array of terror tactics, from traditional insurgency-type operations to aircraft hijackings, suicide attacks and, more recently, vehicle and knife attacks carried out by lone actors.

What's been called the 'Intifada of Knives' began in 2015. Lone actors, many of whom are Arab-Israeli teenagers, use knives and vehicles in acts of terrorism, apparently because they're angry about the right-wing policies of the Netanyahu government.[56] These attacks pose a unique challenge for Israel. According to an officer in the Israel Defense Forces, during the Second Intifada (2000 to 2005):

> … there was a clear chain from those directing and funding the attacks, and the dispatcher and perpetrator … You could pinpoint a terror cell and take them out. Now you have to look at every Palestinian as a potential suspect, which is a bad situation. You need to be able to differentiate the perpetrators from the wider Palestinian public.[57]

Early on, Israel recognised that the internet is an integral part of the contemporary battlefield. It's a space where one can incite, organise, prepare for and promote violence. Israel has committed resources to engage in predictive analytics to prevent terror attacks, and the collection of information from social media is at the centre of that engagement. That is, historically Israel focused on its military to engage in preventative measures, which included special operation strikes against terrorist camps beyond Israel's borders. An integral element in the Israeli CT arsenal is a heavy reliance on deterrence.[58]

Israel is constantly adapting its approach to CT which relies heavily on information gathering as a way to anticipate what's coming next. The 2006 Lebanon War was a timely reminder to Israeli policymakers of the dangers of being complacent when it comes to intelligence gathering. Consequently, the Israeli CT structure is designed to be flexible, able to change depending on what information about real, emerging and potential threats. Increasingly, the system is designed around cyber space and specifically social media. The country has invested heavily in studying and assessing social media profiles to allow the security service to identify likely attackers (predictive analytics has become a major tool of the Israeli CT architecture).

One important tool used by Israel to counter the latest wave of attacks by Palestinians and Arab-Israelis has been legislation prohibiting 'incitement to violence' through online activity or social media posts. Specialist units within the Israel Defense Forces and the security services (primarily the Israeli Security Agency, or Shin Bet) monitor and even censor what's published on the internet. Israel has defended this action, claiming that 'Tracking potential incidents on social media is by far the most effective way to deal with the terrorist threat.'[59] Israeli officials claim that through such operations it stopped '2,200 Palestinians at various stages of planning and preparing for attacks, mostly stabbings and car-rammings'.[60] Shin Bet combines information gathered from open-source intelligence, primarily from social media, with its own databases, which hold information on more than 2.5 million inhabitants of the West Bank.[61]

TURKEY

In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has used the Syrian conflict, the presence of more than a million Syrian refugees and tensions with the Kurds to erode democratic institutions and strengthen his hold. In relation to IS, Turkey is seen as employing a 'double standard' under which it either uses certain *Salafi-jihadis* to promote its national interests or simply ignores some groups.[62] One example of Turkey's double game is its relationship with the Free Syrian Army, which emerged in 2011 and of which Turkey was a patron. By 2018, it had become unclear who or what the group was and there were concerns that *Salafi-jihadi* groups were operating under its banner, which explains why the Americans have opted to cease supporting it.[63] A second example is Turkey's involvement with the Uygur contingent in Syria. It's alleged that Turkish intelligence has facilitated the movement of Uygur militants, possibly members of the Turkistan Islamic Party, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda, to Jisr al-Shaghour in rural Idlib Province. The Uygurs are a Turkic ethnic group, and the suggestion is that the Turks are promoting some kind of pan-Turkism.[64]

Terrorism in Turkey isn't a new phenomenon, as the country has battled Kurdish separatists for decades. In many ways, Turkey's approach to terrorism is very much structured on its experience with the PKK and its perpetual concern over Kurdish separatism. And yet, in 2017, Turkey was rocked by the Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul, when a single IS gunman walked into a nightclub and killed 39 and wounded 71 before escaping.[65]

On 20 January 2018, Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch, a military offensive directed at YPG, which was operating in northwestern Syria. The operation focused initially on Afrin, where Turkey declared that it wanted to establish a 30-kilometre 'secure zone'. The spark for the operation was the American decision to support the formation of a 30,000-member border force including Kurdish fighters to secure northern Syria.[66] Turkey's long-term goals remain unclear.

Ankara sees the YPG as an offshoot of the SDF, which it describes as terrorists, with ties to the PKK. From Turkey's perspective, the YPG poses a direct threat to its sovereignty because the group wants to establish a Kurdish state in Syria, along the border with Turkey and specifically in Anatolia, where autonomous and secessionist movements are apparently strong.[67] For its part, the YPG asserts that all it wants is to carve out a self-governing region for the Syrian Kurds in the post-conflict era.[68]

In July 2018, the Turkish National Assembly ratified a tough anti-terrorism bill proposed by Erdogan's Justice and Development Party. The law ended the two-year-long state of emergency introduced by the government after the attempted coup in July 2016. Under the new measures, the authorities can determine who can enter or leave any province (people can be barred for 15 days, as long as the bar is for security purposes). Suspects can be held without charge for 48 hours or for up to four days if there are multiple offences. Another key measure is the prohibition on protests and marches continuing after sunset.[69] The law also allows the government to dismiss members of the armed forces, the police and civil service at any time if they're found to have links to terror groups. It's notable that the outlawed Gulen Movement is deemed to be a terrorist organisation in Turkey, so the government can not only sack but arrest people for association with or membership of the group.[70]

Turkey's CT agenda in 2018 and for the immediate future is based on three key goals:

- Make sure that the PKK and its allies, such as the YPG, aren't empowered. If Syria's Kurdish population were to achieve self-government in a post-conflict Syria, that would embolden the PKK and its supporters. This is why the Turks are determined to resist Syrian Kurdish demands, even if it means accepting the presence of *Salafi-jihadis*. It also means that Ankara will work with Moscow, Tehran and the Assad regime to resolve the conflict.

- Make sure that Erdogan isn't dislodged from power. The new CT law seems to be directed more at quashing dissent than dealing with the many jihadist cells in Turkey.

- Ensure that IS, al-Qaeda and others don't engage in a large-scale terrorism campaign in Turkey. This may explain the reluctance of the Turks to shut down the networks within the country.

CONCLUSIONS

There's a desperate need for the international community to recognise that fragmentation in the Middle East and inter-state and inter-religious conflicts are fuelling Salafist-jihadism. Talk of the defeat of IS is premature and dangerous, as IS, like countless other *Salafi-jihadi* groups, has shown an uncanny ability to survive.[71]

CT in the Middle East faces three main challenges, all of which are likely to fuel terrorism in the region.

First, the preference of states to take hard, military-based CT action means that they aren't addressing the root causes of radicalisation. History has shown that such an approach is counterproductive, as it's simply impossible to kill or arrest all the *jihadis*. The military effort must work in tandem with a soft approach based on addressing issues such as poverty, political oppression and social marginalisation. There's also a dire need to address chronic corruption and political abuse, which feed the Salafist claim that non-Islamic systems are decadent.

Second, the region is affected by the Sunni–Shia divide. Iran and Saudi Arabia are on a collision course; the two are engaged in proxy campaigns that are poisoning the region and creating deep-seated hatred that facilitates brutality against civilian populations. Yemen is becoming the new Syria, and the conflict there will be a pull factor for many who view the international community as indifferent to the violence (Yemen's historical ties to South and Southeast Asia make the conflict hugely important to Australia). The difference between Yemen and Syria is that the conflict in Yemen is seen as more important to Saudi Arabia because it shares a border with Yemen and because Saudi involvement is closely linked to Mohammad bin Salman, who has shown himself to be reckless. Thus, the longer the conflict continues, the more likely we are to see increased Salafist-jihadism, as the principal actor would be likely to turn to proxies to help promote its interests.

The third issue is probably the most complex, as it involves post-conflict reconstruction, including the physical rebuilding of destroyed areas, post-conflict justice to address all the wrongdoing that's taken place, and the refoulment of refugees. Large parts of the Middle East have been decimated by years of brutal, bloody conflict. For example, in the battle to retake Mosul from IS, which lasted over nine months, more than 50,000 houses were destroyed. People wanting to rebuild have to turn to private donations rather than public money. In February 2018, countries and international organisations met in Kuwait and pledged US$30 billion to help rebuild Iraq, mainly through credit facilities and investment, as opposed to real money (in part because Iraq is one of the world's most corrupt countries).[72] Beyond the need for physical reconstruction, there's a desperate need for post-conflict justice, whether it's retributory, reconciliatory or transformative.[73]

The Middle East CT landscape is gloomy. States across the region have chosen to take a hard military approach. They believe that only through military engagement can they defeat terrorism— something that history has shown is difficult to do, especially when they face ideologically driven groups. Negotiations, social–economic development or even the softening of CT tactics are unlikely, which means that the cycle of violence will continue.

The UN Development Programme's *Journey to extremism in Africa* report, which was based in part on interviews with around 60 *Salafi-jihadis*, came to the conclusion that ideology wasn't the main driver in the radicalisation process, but rather state violence, weak governance and corruption.[74] This is a lesson for many of the governments in the region.

NOTES

1   In its heyday, IS controlled a territory the size of Britain, with a population of around 10 million people, comprising 35 *wilayats* (provinces). By the end of 2018, it controlled possibly six *wilayats*, mostly located outside Iraq and Syria.

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East Africa

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Somalia was the epicentre of instability in East Africa during 2018 and is expected to remain so for the foreseeable future. Instability in Somalia also continued to negatively influence security in neighbouring countries and beyond, as evidenced by increased instability as a result of the spread of Islamist extremism in northern Mozambique.

Understanding al-Shabaab's foothold in Kenya, in comparison to other regional countries contributing to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), requires recognition of the following points. Although Ethiopia is historically considered to be the primary enemy of Somalis (due to claims over the Ogaden), al-Shabaab has been unable to launch devastating attacks in Ethiopia. Sending a clear signal to al-Shabaab, Ethiopian forces have been quick to respond to attacks in Beledweyne in Somalia (close to the border with Ethiopia). Instead, marginalisation of the Muslim community in Kenya facilitated the radicalisation and recruitment of Kenyan Muslims into al-Shabaab—especially in Kenya's coastal region and Nairobi. This explains the large contingent of Kenyan nationals in the ranks of al-Shabaab in Somalia. Other Kenyan al-Shabaab members stayed in and operate from Kenya. In contrast, in Ethiopia there's less tension between the state and the local Muslim community than in Kenya. It's also for this reason that al-Shabaab managed to get support from jihadists in Uganda (where the so-called Allied Democratic Forces are active) and Tanzania; both countries were targeted by Islamist extremists in the past. Within the framework of preventing violent extremism, the reality is that an extremist ideology needs local acceptance and support to gain a foothold and function.

During 2018, Kenya continued to be a target of al-Shabaab, although the organisation couldn't execute a major attack similar to those at Westgate in 2011 and Garissa University in 2015. Despite being largely contained as a result of successes on the part of Kenyan security forces in Kenya, al-Shabaab managed to execute a number of attacks directed against police patrols and civilians, most notably the Christian community. In the most recent attack, on 14 September, two Christians were killed after the bus they were travelling on to Garissa was forced to stop. Attackers ordered passengers to produce their identity cards, separated Muslim and non-Muslim passengers and asked the latter group to recite verses from the Qur'an and say the *shahada* (Islamic creed). Recitation of the *shahada* is considered to be conversion to Islam. After refusing to recite the *shahada*, two passengers were killed.[1] Although al-Shabaab seldom claims responsibility for these 'smaller' attacks (in comparison to the Westgate and Garissa University attacks), the organisation's track record and continued involvement in the region indicate its involvement.

In Somalia, up to the time of writing, al-Shabaab and Islamic State in Somalia were implicated in 103 attacks reported in the media, of which 22 were suicide attacks. Suicide attacks were directed specifically at security forces (10), civilians (8) and Somali government institutions (4). Although most of the attacks were against security forces (including those of AMISOM-contributing countries) and government officials (most notably in targeted assassinations), humanitarian agencies were targeted in five attacks that involved the International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent and the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition to a shooting incident that claimed the life a Somali WHO employee, Maryan Abdullahi, in Mogadishu's Bakara market,[2] kidnapping was the preferred *modus operandi*. Despite these challenges, a decline in al-Shabaab attacks against citizens allowed the reopening of the Mogadishu Stadium for sporting events after AMISOM troops who used the stadium as a base handed it over to the Somali Government on 28 August 2018.[3] In response, the US increased drone operations in Somalia (discussed below).

OPENING OF A NEW FRONT OF EXTREMISM

From October 2017, attacks attributed to Ansar al-Sunna in Cabo Delgado (in northern Mozambique close to the border with Tanzania) escalated. Although the group's members referred to themselves as Ansar al-Sunna, locals refer to them as al-Shabaab. According to Sunguta West,[4] Ansar al-Sunna started as a religious organisation in Cabo Delgado in 2015, influenced by the teachings (spread through recordings) of Aboud Rogo Mohammed (a radical Kenyan cleric who was shot dead in 2012). Continuing Rogo's work, founding members of Ansar al-Sunna settled first in Kibiti, in southern Tanzania, before moving to Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. This region has a history of marginalisation, high youth unemployment and limited economic development and has a large Muslim population. Ansar al-Sunnah capitalised on these vulnerabilities.

After the initial attack on 5 October 2017, in which three police stations (including the district police command, a police post and a natural resources and environment police patrol station) were targeted,[5] subsequent attacks were directed at the non-Muslim civilian population living in small villages in an isolated part of the country and forgotten by government, till now. Being so distant from the capital, Maputo, Cabo Delgado had been marginalised by government, which provided only limited development initiatives that could form the foundation of a relationship of trust between the government, its agencies and the broader public. By the end of July 2018, Ansar al-Sunnah was implicated in 40 attacks in which more than 100 people were killed. The group appears to be poorly armed, as almost all the attacks involved machetes and only a few involved firearms,[6] but the alleged involvement of foreigners—possibly from Somalia and Tanzania—is an area of concern.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN COUNTERTERRORISM

Eighteen months into the presidency of President Mohammed Farmajo, Somalia has developed a comprehensive transition plan for its security that also includes reforms of the Somali National Army. UN Security Council Resolution 2372 of 30 August 2017 set in motion a phased reduction to withdraw AMISOM troops by 2020 from the maximum deployment of 22,126 uniformed personnel. This is setting AMISOM's strategic objectives to enable the gradual handover of its security responsibility to Somali security forces in order to reduce the threat posed by al-Shabaab and other armed opposition groups as well as to assist Somali security forces in providing security for the country's political process and peacebuilding efforts.[7] A fear among international practitioners, especially in neighbouring countries, is that the Somali security forces won't be able to manage this increasing responsibility and that al-Shabaab will retake territory as AMISOM forces withdraw. That fear is valid, as al-Shabaab managed to retake towns in the Puntland and Bay regions after AMISOM forces withdrew from those areas.

The normalisation of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea following the July Ethiopian–Eritrean peace agreement, brokered by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, is expected to have a positive impact on efforts to prevent illegal arms trafficking to al-Shabaab and other violent extremist organisations. The normalisation of relations between the two countries became more evident when Ethiopian Airlines set out plans to introduce flights to Asmara. It's also expected that Saudi and Emirati relations with Ethiopia may compel Qatar and Turkey to deepen their involvement in the Horn of Africa, producing a spillover of geopolitical competition between those countries in the Middle East.[8]

During 2018, concern about Djibouti becoming a transit location for weapons trafficking between Yemen and northern Somalia grew. Djibouti is only 32 kilometres away from Yemen, making it strategically an ideal hub for illegal activities (as well as for efforts to counter piracy and as a launch pad for US military operations into Somalia). While there's no evidence that Djibouti is directly or officially involved in arming al-Shabaab, senior Djiboutian military officials, government officials and managers in state-owned enterprises have ties with companies involved in the funding and facilitation of arms trafficking into the Horn of Africa. [9]

Although both the US and France have large military bases in Djibouti, a campaign against arms traffickers launched by either one might place relations with Djibouti in jeopardy, especially when we consider which country is leading the weapon import trade. According to a report by Exx Africa Business Intelligence, that's China. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has found that China's arms exports to Africa increased by 55% from 2013 to 2017, compared to the previous five-year period from 2008 to 2012. China's share in African arms supplies increased from 8.6% to 17% over the same period. Djibouti's ports can't be disregarded as a means to distribute arms to government and anti-government factions in and around the Horn of Africa, particularly in Sudan, South Sudan and the Awdal region of northern Somalia.[10] With this in mind, and because Djibouti has given China prime real estate to build its largest military base in the country and beyond, both the US and France will seriously consider the geostrategic implications of endangering their lease agreements with Djibouti and allow China to enhance its role in the country, but also the broader region.

Reacting to continuous instability in Somalia, US President Donald Trump introduced new 'principles, standards, and procedures' for US operations in the country. Under these guidelines, US special operations forces were given greater autonomy to conduct drone strikes in Somalia. Under former president Obama, drone strikes were carried out in self-defence. After the Trump administration came into office, drone strikes increased dramatically to at least 33 in 2017 and 21 between January and September 2018, compared to 13 in 2016 and five in 2015. This had an immediate impact on al-Shabaab command and control and further contributed to fear among the group's leaders that manifested in harsher treatment of locals and more executions for alleged spying for foreign security forces. In fear of being tracked by their mobile phones, many now communicate using handwritten notes carried by motorcycle-riding couriers, which slows communication. Furthermore, leaders seldom meet in person, which has encouraged a decentralisation of operations.[11]

CHALLENGES ARISING FROM THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT AND COUNTERTERRORISM DEVELOPMENTS

Disappearances and extrajudicial killings remain a valid concern among human rights actors and civil society groups working specifically with families in Kenya. The alarming rate at which individuals associated with cases in which the state couldn't produce sufficient evidence to secure a conviction disappear indicates either ineffective investigation skills within the police or a lack of cooperation between prosecution authorities, intelligence agencies and the police. The result is an inability to turn intelligence into evidence. Although the first response is to suggest additional training and support for law enforcement, the police already receive considerable assistance and training based on bilateral agreements, as well as through intergovernmental agencies (such as the Eastern African Police Chiefs' Cooperation Organization). A major concern is that enforced disappearances may become an unofficial 'policy', replacing the time and effort needed to build a watertight case within rules established under the rule of law and due process. The implications of a harsh counterterrorism strategy can be severe, leading to further radicalisation and pushing those already being radicalised towards violent extremist organisations such as al-Shabaab. Despite Kenya's strategy for countering and preventing violent extremism, research has shown that killings and disappearances of suspects and arrests without evidence are the primary catalysts leading to recruitment. Policymakers and counterterrorism practitioners should thwart such developments by introducing a clear policy and standard operating procedures to prevent extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Countries in the region should be encouraged to ratify and implement the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. To become parties to the convention, member states must implement measures to prevent and outlaw this practice. Dedicated measures to prevent the abuse of power and greater respect for human rights on the part of security agencies will directly address the main catalyst facilitating recruitment into violent extremist organisations. Law enforcement officials deployed in communities at risk of being radicalised into violent extremist organisations should be trained to understand the role that extrajudicial measures play in the radicalisation process. Instead of merely offering additional training, countries providing assistance should consider establishing mentorship programs to work directly with officials at the grassroots level to ensure that those initiatives address practical challenges. By working directly with officers, international experts will get a better understanding of the challenges that those officers face. Through these experiences, those providing assistance will be in a better position to identify and address equipment and training needs. Such mentorship programs also facilitate continuous training based on different real-life scenarios.

The growing threat of Ansar al-Sunnah in Mozambique to the booming gas and oil industry in and around the Pemba region requires dedicated steps to prevent the region from becoming another hotspot for violent extremists and terrorists. Learning from experiences in other African countries, Mozambique and Tanzania need to develop a detailed counterstrategy that's proportional to the threat and the tactics applied by al-Shabaab. Because heavy-handed approaches have the opposite effect from that intended, this strategy and plan of action need to consider all eventualities and first and foremost secure the support of local communities. For example, following the attack in October 2017 in Mozambique, authorities responded by closing seven mosques and detaining more than 300 people without charge, including religious leaders and foreigners suspected of having links to the armed attacks. However, that type of response plays into the hands of extremists and facilitates radicalisation and recruitment.[12] If this growing problem of extremism is not addressed, or is exacerbated, it isn't only local communities that will be at risk, but also companies operating in these areas, now and in the future. Consequently, instead of leading to development in this remote part of Mozambique, the discovery of natural resources will again be a curse instead of a blessing, as witnessed in other parts of the continent throughout history.

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West Africa and the Sahel

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West Africa and the Sahel contain a diverse range of countries experiencing varying degrees of instability, fragility and economic development, and in which democratic institutions have reached varying stages of maturity. Characterised by porous borders and home to hundreds of ethnic groups following various denominations of Islam, Christianity, animism and indigenous beliefs, the western part of the African continent experiences a wide range of security problems, from criminality to violent extremism, insurgency and conflict, which often overlap. From a terrorism and CT perspective, there are two epicentres of instability. The first is in Mali and its immediate neighbours, Burkina Faso and Niger, in the western Sahel, which are home to multiple affiliates of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, some of which have in recent years switched allegiance to Islamic State (IS). The second is the Lake Chad Basin comprising Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, which is battling what was initially a Nigeria-specific problem—Boko Haram, which sympathises with al-Qaeda, although it's never been a member of the franchise—but that has now spilled over into neighbouring countries. Today, it also includes a splinter group aligned with IS.

Besides their geographical and sometimes ideological overlap, these two jihadist realities have as their common denominator that fact that they're rooted in local historical, social and economic grievances, such as the political marginalisation of certain regions, economic underdevelopment and isolation. In all cases, jihadist leaders have been able to exploit discontent and poverty to attract followers. Additionally, despite local jihadist groups' links to foreign or more internationalised groups and notwithstanding attempts by leaders, such as Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau, to elevate the groups' standing by overplaying international connections, their agendas remain broadly localised and hence fail to catalyse support from overseas wanna-be jihadists. The West African groups' lack of recruits from beyond the region sets them apart from other al-Qaeda groups, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia, and IS provinces and affiliates in other parts of the word, such as those in Syria, where foreign fighters are a common feature.

THE SAHEL

SECURITY CONTEXT

Regional insecurity in the Sahel intensified during 2018, and the humanitarian situation deteriorated as a result. Some 5.2 million people required protection and lifesaving assistance (a nearly 40% increase from 2017).[1] In June, the UN reported a 200% rise in the number of security incidents in Mali during the preceding year.[2] Specifically, 2018 saw a long list of suicide, mine and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks,

alongside traditional gunfights, involving primarily *jihadi* groups targeting political institutions, civilians and local and international security personnel. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) remains the world's most dangerous UN mission.[3] Of great concern were attacks against the headquarters of the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force (FC-G5S) in Sevare (Mali) in June[4] and against the French embassy and Joint Chiefs of Staff headquarters in the Burkinabe capital, Ouagadougou, in March.[5]

Although Mali has been the worst affected country, its neighbours, principally Burkina Faso and Niger, have seen their share of violence as a result of spillover from Mali and from homegrown movements such as Ansarul Islam in northern Burkina Faso. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)—a group that resulted from the merger of key al-Qaeda affiliates in March 2017—was the main culprit across the region. JNIM claimed responsibility for the attacks against the French embassy in retaliation for the killing of some of its own operatives in Mali the previous month. The US designated JNIM as a foreign terrorist organisation in September 2018.[6] The decision to proscribe the group wasn't dictated by any perceived direct threat against the US but, rather, was in response JNIM's threat to America's allies in West Africa. Notably, in the second half of 2018 JNIM appeared to coordinate strongly with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara—also designated as a foreign terrorist organisation by the US in 2018—to conduct attacks along the borders between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. According to French authorities, the IS group has been using border areas as safe havens, and its leadership has called on jihadists across the Sahel to unite to fight FC-G5S troops.[7]

This security scenario unfolded against a tense political backdrop. Mali's presidential election on 29 July resulted in the victory of incumbent President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The campaign and vote were marred by violence and extensive allegations of electoral fraud. In his first visit to Kidal in five years, Keita was reminded of his unfulfilled promises (for example, to restore some basic services), and it was clear the central government had limited control over the northern part of the country.[8] The growing capacity of jihadist groups also undermined the chances for sustainable peace (the UN has repeatedly lamented the very limited progress made towards the implementation of the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord). Political representation in the troubled northern regions remained patchy; given how the disconnect between the frustrated northern population and the central government was exploited by jihadists in the early days of the Malian crisis (2012 and 2013), this is an enduring source of concern.[9]

COUNTERTERRORISM DEVELOPMENTS

The French-led regional CT operation (Barkhane) and the newly deployed FC-G5S registered some success in capturing or killing jihadists across the region, including through air strikes.[10] Following its first major operation in 2017, FC-G5S launched Operation Pagnali in February 2018 on the border between Mali and Burkina Faso, where each country deployed a battalion.[11] FC-G5S faces several challenges and limitations, and the attack against its HQ in June not only resulted in the replacement of the force commander but also raised questions about the FC-G5S's effectiveness and the limited security that it's capable of maintaining, even at its own premises (in addition to the Sevare HQ, the force has regional command centres in Mauritania, Chad and Niger). The attack is likely to have undermined foreign donors' faith in the force, which is likely to affect its funding and, in turn, its operability. It was expected to reach full operability in mid-2018, but there have been significant delays in the disbursement of millions of dollars that had been pledged by international donors in 2017 and at a fundraising conference in February, as recipient countries had to meet certain financial requirements, including requirements related to transparency and anticorruption measures. In February, some €414 million was pledged.

These challenges, coupled with logistical and coordination weaknesses and, often, mutual suspicion among G5 partners, have fuelled reports that France—which envisions many CT responsibilities ultimately being transferred from Operation Barkhane to FC-G5S and playing a backup role rather than a more active one—could be planning the redeployment of some Barkhane troops to FC-G5S in order to fill existing capacity gaps.[12] This might become even more likely following a November announcement by the US Government of plans to reduce the number of troops deployed to the US Africa Command by 10% over three years. This drawdown, which follows the Trump administration's decision to devote greater resources to facing threats emanating from Russia and China (and hence to deprioritise other regions), would result the withdrawal of around 700 troops currently deployed in CT roles in, it's believed, Mali, Cameroon and Kenya.[13] This move is also a reflection of Washington's belief that local troops such as the Cameroonian Special Forces have been sufficiently well trained by the US and are capable of operating independently and effectively. Nevertheless, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has renewed the US military commitment to supporting French-led CT operations.[14]

Burkina Faso is deemed to be particularly vulnerable. In October, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, visiting the country for the second time in the year, announced a US$34 million three-border aid package to help ease the situation and address fragility underpinning radicalisation. Neighbouring Togo and Benin had begun deploying troops to border areas for fear that instability would spill into their own territory, and the Burkinabe government, which for years had refused to seek external help, has begun calling on Barkhane for security assistance, including air strikes. Some 220 schools in the north have been closed amid security threats.[15]

The EU Capacity and Assistance Programme (EUCAP) Sahel Niger was extended until September 2020, as was the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali).[16] In October, an Emirati-funded military academy in Mauritania started a nine-month anti-terror training course for Sahelian officers with 15 or more years of experience.[17] MINUSMA operations were also extended until June 2019. A number of international partners deployed or promised to send troops in support of regional missions, ranging from Canada (in Ottawa's first peacekeeping deployment in over a decade) to Estonia, and from Cote d'Ivoire to Italy. Others have increased their hardware contributions, such as British Chinook helicopters deployed in support of Operation Barkhane.[18] Interestingly, the UK is expanding its footprint across the region by opening new embassies in Chad and Niger and by enlarging its presence at the embassy in Bamako as part of an effort to tackle drivers of instability and conflict in this fragile region.[19] The US, which led the annual region-wide CT exercise Flintlock (Niger, April 2018)[20] and began deploying armed drones out of Niamey during the year, is currently building a second drone base in Agadez that's expected to be operational in 2019.[21]

In addition to military developments, in Mali the Prime Minister promised the creation of specialist anti-terrorism prosecutors during his visit to the north in March. The International Criminal Court detained a Malian jihadist (and alleged member of Ansar Dine) on charges of sexual slavery and the destruction of the UNESCO World Heritage site in Timbuktu. He was only the second person to be arrested for the destruction of the ancient site and, unlike in the first case, prosecutors were able to gather sufficient evidence to issue an arrest warrant that included charges of crimes against humanity.[22]

A proposal for dialogue with jihadist groups that was first discussed at a conference in Bamako in 2017 came to the fore again with the purpose of understating what the jihadists truly wanted. Individuals such as former Malian Foreign Minister Tiébilé Dramé, Ali Nouhoum Diallo (a former President of the National Assembly) and Mahmoud Dicko (the President of the High Islamic Council of Mali) have been advocates of this approach. However, the government opposes it, and a 2018 opinion poll indicated that only a small majority of Malians were in favour of such a dialogue. The likelihood of negotiations was also reduced by the fact that, first, international donors, France in particular, had been very vocal in their opposition to negotiations and, second, owing to the highly fragmented jihadist scene, it would be extremely difficult to identify interlocutors who could speak on behalf of all groups and ensure that agreements would be respected by all actors on the ground.[23]

LAKE CHAD BASIN

SECURITY CONTEXT

Despite Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's encouraging, but perhaps premature, New Year broadcast announcing the defeat of Boko Haram and subsequent statements issued by the armed forces reinforcing that message, 2018 remained a violent year in the Lake Chad Basin, and particularly in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. In February, Chad witnessed its first attack since May 2017, and Niger was also occasionally targeted. Boko Haram's two main factions, one led by Abubakar Shekau and the other by the possibly fatally injured Mamman Nur (which are at odds with each other), and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) under Abu Musab al-Barnawi were responsible for multiple attacks against military and civilians, lootings, raids, abductions and killings. Static and vehicle-borne IEDs were widely used. Suicide attacks, especially attacks perpetrated by young females, remained a trademark of the insurgency that has been engulfing this region since 2009–10. Girls are four times more likely to be deployed in such missions than boys.[24] Indeed, in March the UN Deputy Secretary-General reported an increase in the use of female suicide bombers.[25]
The use of women is explained by the fact that they can more easily conceal explosives under their clothes and are less likely to be searched by (usually male) security personnel. They're also seen as expendable and more easily coerced or brainwashed into suicide missions. Importantly, the group has understood that their use has generated international media attention, raising its profile among jihadist outfits.

The abduction of 111 girls from a school in Dapchi, Yobe State (Nigeria), in February indicated that Boko Haram remained capable of large-scale attacks and holding onto victims for weeks without government forces being able to locate them (most of the girls were released a month later, following negotiations about a possible amnesty in return for a ceasefire).[26] In addition, the group had attempted to hold territorial control following attacks in Adamawa State, where militants raised its flags. Similar episodes were reported in Chad in July. The US military estimated that Shekau's factions counted 1,500 fighters, whereas ISWAP (which, according to the US, posed the greatest threat) had approximately 3,500, notwithstanding the many defections that have been reported. ISWAP, like other IS branches or affiliates around the world, was designated as a foreign terrorist organisation by American authorities in 2018.[27] Mamman Nur was also designated as a 'specially designated global terrorist' during the year.[28] Although the group is regionally focused and unable to conduct attacks against the US (and possibly uninterested in doing so), it's a threat to US interests in the region as well as to US allies.

Boko Haram's leaders were very vocal throughout 2018, issuing several videos for propaganda purposes, to claim responsibility for attacks, to prove that they were still alive, to display abducted civilians and to mock the military effort to counter the group. Al-Barnawi even released a book on the history of his jihadist movement, in which he criticised Shekau. This confirmed analysis indicating that Shekau's ideas—such as his understating of the concept of *takfir* (declaring who is a disbeliever)—were deemed to be too extreme by IS.[29] Shekau published something similar a year earlier, in which he elucidated the meaning of Islam (in his own view) and, interestingly, failed to mention his 2015 pledge of allegiance to IS, which seems to imply that he believes that the IS leadership has no authority over him. These texts reinforce the idea that ISWAP and Boko Haram are likely to continue to oppose one another, although Boko Haram factions are known for splintering and reintegrating, so a future rapprochement shouldn't be discounted. Additionally, they highlighted the fact that although many members join for economic or other non- ideological reasons and that leaders such as Shekau have proved to be quite opportunistic over time, ideology plays an important part in defining Boko Haram and ISWAP and indeed it propels the rivalry between the two. The alleged killing of Mamman Nur at the hands of his own commanders (August) is believed to have been motivated by discontent with Nur's more moderate views, in addition to his decision to release most of the girls kidnapped in Dapchi, and his willingness to engage in negotiation with the Nigerian government.[30] The upsurge in attacks in the later part of 2018 is believed to be a reflection of this change of leadership which does not bode well for prospects of negotiations.

In addition, Nigeria is also contending with ever-growing violence between farmers and herders and heightening political tensions as candidates for the February 2019 presidential election come forward. They include well-known #BringBackOurGirls campaigner Obiageli Ezekwesili for the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria and former vice president Atiku Abubakar for the People's Democratic Party Although the latter is seen as Buhari's main opponent, both candidates have become increasingly outspoken in criticising the current approach to Boko Haram/ISWAP. The militants are likely to, once again, try and disrupt the election campaign and polls as democracy is one of the Western-imported values that they found to be incompatible with Islam. For instance, the same day Buhari's launched is re-election campaign (18 November) Boko Haram assaulted an army battalion killing over 100 soldiers.[31]

Similarly, Cameroon is facing a challenge from anglophone rebels seeking independence. The October presidential elections, in which President Paul Biya sought and won his seventh term, have further ignited tensions and are pushing the country to the verge of a political crisis.

COUNTERTERRORISM DEVELOPMENTS

Nigerian troops operating under Operation Lafiya Dole and the Multinational Joint Task Force of Lake Chad Basin troops advanced their counterinsurgency and CT operations during 2018, killing or arresting hundreds of militants, destroying camps, disrupting raids, recovering large caches of weaponry (including a tank) and rescuing hundreds of abducted civilians. Among the notable arrests were some of those responsible for the 2014 mass abduction of girls in Chibok, two alleged ISWAP commanders in Abuja, and bomb-making experts. In July, the Nigerian military released 183 children (mainly boys, the youngest of whom was only seven) who had been detained on suspicion of having ties to Boko Haram. They were handed over to UNICEF in Maiduguri to receive psychological and medical care.[32]

High-profile attacks by Boko Haram undermined the credibility of the military leadership, especially in Nigeria, and prompted the firing of, among other military figures, the commander of Operation Lafiya Dole.[33] A leaked memo also shed light on recurrent episodes of 'cowardly behaviour' in which soldiers had abandoned their positions when fighting Boko Haram.[34] This wasn't a new or isolated instance. Throughout Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign, soldiers have, on multiple occasions, refused to fight because they lacked sufficient weapons or ammunition, because of the perceived superiority of Boko Haram's manpower (in certain instances), and because of delays in salary payments.

A number of terror-related trials took place in Nigeria, Niger and even in Senegal, where in July 13 people were sentenced to up to 20 years in prison for attempts to create a violent armed network inspired by Boko Haram. Those charged, including three women, had been arrested in April. One of them claimed to have received US$17,000 from Shekau to set up a cell.[35] However, there were no convictions of Boko Haram members for sexual violence as an international crime, which according to the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict was an 'outrage', given the widespread trend, and can be attributed to the fact that mass rape is met with mass impunity.[36] A May report by Amnesty International also reported rapes and other abuses committed by Nigerian troops against female internally displaced persons.[37]

To strengthen the military's ability to fight terrorism and criminality, the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff approved the establishment of a Cyber Warfare Command, which will consist of about 150 ICT specialists trained internationally.[38] Notably, the arrest of a Boko Haram commander in August led to the identification of recruitment platforms on Whatsapp, SnapChat, Instagram and YouTube and the accounts of more than 2,000 followers.

International partners reaffirmed their commitment to support the effort against Boko Haram. The British Army announced a new training unit to assist African forces, specifically on how to deal with female suicide attackers, and Prime Minister Theresa May signed a defence and security agreement with President Buhari involving the provision of training and equipment and support on strategic communications. Together, the UK and Nigeria committed to providing education for 100,000 children who have been victims of the conflict. French President Macron, visiting Abuja, pledged support for Nigerian CT endeavours.

The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development announced that a new National CT Strategy (NACTEST) desk would be established in each state. The role of women in the conflict has gained increased recognition over the years both because women have been widely and specifically targeted by jihadists (for example, in mass abductions of girls) and as a result of the now well-established practice of using women for suicide missions. Furthermore, there's growing recognition of the important role that women can play within communities to identify signs of, and prevent, radicalisation.

Some steps were taken on the deradicalisation and reintegration front. In December 2017, the Nigerian Government, with the support of the International Organization for Migration, adopted an initial Action Plan for Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation for Boko Haram members. [39] During 2018, plans for the recruitment of deradicalised Boko Haram members into the army or police were discussed and, unsurprisingly, where met with some stark opposition, including from the Christian Association of Nigeria.

Scores of former Boko Haram fighters graduated from deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programs under Operation Safe Corridor. This is an intergovernmental initiative launched in 2016 aimed at low-risk 'repentant' fighters.[40] In October, the federal government announced the reintegration, under Operation Safe Corridor, of some 254 former Boko Haram fighters following their successful completion of a deradicalisation program.

The Nigerian Army has continued to take steps towards absorbing former Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) members into its ranks. Additionally, in October some 833 children working for the CJTF, among them 11-year-olds, were formally released from work, and the civilian militia organisation made a fresh commitment to safeguard children's rights.[41] The status and future prospects of current and former CJTF members has long been a sensitive issue. Concerns have been raised over how to reintegrate young men who had experienced the trauma of combat but who had also been suddenly empowered by being in the CJTF and would now lose that power and status.

Nigeria also announced that it would set up a regional stabilisation centre in cooperation with the UN and the African Union to facilitate the reintegration of victims.

Elsewhere, Cameroon announced that it would establish a vocational training centre for ex-militants in the its Far North region.

The CVE Resource Centre was commissioned in June at the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, to counter Boko Haram narratives. The centre is the first of its kind in Nigeria and was made possible by a donation from the international aid agency, North-East Region Initiative. It aims to promote collaboration with other universities across the Lake Chad Basin.[42]

CONCLUSIONS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outlook for the Sahel and broader West African region is not very promising. The coming year is likely to see continued fighting and the targeting of both security forces and civilians by jihadists. The latter, who already have a propensity for infighting, splinting and mergers, will continue to contribute to a very fluid security scene featuring terrorism, insurgency, conflict and criminality, including human trafficking and smuggling. The announcement of a six-month extension of Mali's state of emergency in October and the heightened tempo of attacks in Nigeria in the latter part of the year are all indicators that more violence is to be expected. The looming Nigerian presidential elections in February are also likely to become a catalyst for increased Boko Haram/ISWAP violence although a military offensive could contain it.[43]

The region as a whole has undergone a process of securitisation in recent years. This trend became even more apparent in 2018, as evidenced by the multitude of forces and stakeholders now involved on the ground.

The coexistence of multiple missions and the presence of many international partners, each with its own priorities, translate into coordination challenges. The experience in the Sahel, in particular, speaks to the lack of consolidation among EU missions and the need to better integrate *ad hoc* programs into a broader strategy under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.[44]

The ever-growing focus on CT, underscored by significant international (Western) efforts, took attention away from the implementation of the Algiers Peace Accord in Mali. Similarly, the influx of foreign support and resources to address security challenges such as terrorism and human trafficking appeared to fail to address much-needed reforms in state behaviour, governance and justice, which are significant factors in driving violence and radicalisation.[45] Furthermore, tackling these security challenges without providing viable employment alternatives for local civilians fuels likely resentment towards the foreign presence. International partners ought to be sensitive to these dynamics. Similarly, they should be careful not to fall prey to local authorities using the CT or migration discourse to position themselves as essential partners in need of ever-growing support while using expanded security mandates to harass domestic political opponents, as seen in Niger, or to curb civil liberties and freedom of the press, as seen in Nigeria.

This climate fosters mistrust in the authorities and undermines CT efforts. There have been frequent reports of human rights abuses by Malian and Burkinabe troops. G5 troops have also been accused of arbitrary executions. The Nigerian military has been contending with this issue for a long time, too: according to the International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law, 22,000 extrajudicial killings have taken place since Nigerian President Buhari took office in 2015.[46] In July, a video showing Cameroonian soldiers killing women and children made the rounds on social media. The president launched an investigation, but the government also dismissed the video as 'fake news'. Amnesty International and the UN believe the video to be reliable. Unfortunately, these are unlikely to have been isolated incidents and call for rigorous investigations and prosecutions and greater pressure and scrutiny from international donors. In the immediate term, this behaviour further alienates the population and therefore makes the collection of human intelligence, which is essential in the CT context, very difficult.

Also undermining success is discontent among troops. Gendarmes were arrested in Mali for refusing to take part in operations where jihadists are active, and Nigerian soldiers have been known for abandoning their posts. Insufficient training and lack of ammunition, together with militants' prowess, contribute to low morale. Despite the fact that this is hardly a new issue, no significant improvement can be expected in the short and medium terms, partly as a result of the delays in funding for the FC-G5S discussed above.

Finally, partners shouldn't lose track of the humanitarian situation while attending to security priorities. Numbers of displaced civilians across the entire region remain high, and new military operations, such as Pagnali, have been displacing refugees to areas already affected by communal tensions, food insecurity and criminality.[47] Additionally, past evidence indicates that internally displaced persons and refugees are at risk of falling prey to exploitative criminals and human traffickers and even of being radicalised.

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Western Europe

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In 2018, jihadism remained the major security concern across Western Europe. The estimated threat potential rose to well over 50,000 individuals in the EU, since at least 10,800 people in Germany and around 20,000 both in France and in the UK were considered radical or potentially dangerous.[1]

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Fewer mass-casualty attacks occurred in 2018, but threat levels across Europe remained elevated. According to Europol, there was 'an increase in the frequency of jihadist attacks, but a decrease in the sophistication of their preparation and execution'.[2] Until December 2018, four deadly attacks treated as terrorist incidents took place in Trèbes, Paris and Strasbourg (France) and Liège (Belgium). In addition, security forces foiled several plots, including in Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark.[3] In Cologne (Germany), for example, a Tunisian was arrested in June and accused of having planned an attack using the biological weapon ricin.[4]

Geographically, France, Belgium and Germany remained key targets of jihadist terrorism. As in 2017, attacks were often indiscriminate killings (of pedestrians, for example), attacks on symbols of authority or attacks on symbols of Western lifestyle (on Strasbourg's famous Christmas market for example). Most attackers used weapons, such as knives or firearms, that are easy to use and don't require much preparation, funding or skills.[5] While most of the attackers sympathised with jihadist ideology, they didn't necessarily have direct links to the so-called Islamic State (IS) or other jihadist groups.[6] These 'home grown terrorist fighters'—having radicalised in Europe and not having travelled to Syria or Iraq—remain one of the major security concerns in European countries, according to EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove.[7]

Another pressing challenge in countering jihadist terrorism is posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).[8] More than 5,900 Europeans have joined IS in Syria and Iraq in the past few years. French and German citizens make up the largest group of FTFs, followed by Britons and Belgians. Around one-third of them have returned to Europe.[9] Apart from those reported dead or detained in Iraq or northern Syria, a significant number of FTFs can't be located. Those prevented from travelling—'frustrated foreign fighters'—are also a major security concern.[10]

Most importantly, IS isn't entirely defeated: after the demise of the so-called caliphate in 2017, experts warned that the organisation would survive and remain active in both Iraq and Syria.[11] Europol warned that 'disaffected IS members and sympathizers—including those residing in EU Member States—will likely continue to adhere to jihadist beliefs and might be drawn to join other groups, such as al-Qaeda.'[12] In general, the jihadist scene remains fragmented, making it difficult for IS affiliates to plan large attacks.[13] In this sense, it is also important to note that, while military operations in recent years have led to a significant decline in IS propaganda, it remains an important resource for recruitment, radicalisation and fundraising.

Other security concerns include the large number of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offences or considered radicalised who will be released within the next few years.

While this chapter will focus on the jihadist threat, it is worth mentioning that there is also an increasing concern about the threat posed by far-right extremist groups evolving into terrorist groups in Western Europe.[14]

DEVELOPMENTS IN COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES

In response to these developments, several countries in Western Europe adapted their CT policies in 2018.

After several deadly attacks, the UK launched a reviewed version of its CT strategy, CONTEST, piloting a more multiagency, bottom-up approach and providing CT policing with a £50 million increase in funding.[15] A major development has been the announcement that the British domestic intelligence agency MI5 will start sharing intelligence with local actors, such as non-government organisations, to help keep track of individuals who might move from having 'extremist thoughts' to 'extremist action'.[16] In addition, the controversial Prevent program (one of CONTEST's strands aimed at preventing radicalisation) has also received an update: 'Desistance and Disengagement Programmes' is the major new element within Prevent, focusing on disengaging radicalised individuals and on their reintegration into society. Given the controversies around Prevent (for example, those related to the stigmatisation of Muslim communities) and the difficulty in measuring the 'success' of such initiatives, the outcome of Desistance and Disengagement Programmes remains to be seen.[17] In this context, a major concern for Britain is the high number of radicalised prisoners convicted of terrorism-related offences who will be released in the next few years. British security services warn of a lack of financial and personnel resources to supervise them. Among them, al-Muhajiroun co-founder Anjem Choudary, sentenced for inspiring others to join IS and released in October 2018, figures most prominently.[18]

France presented new action plans for the prevention of radicalisation and against terrorism (PNPR and PACT).[19] The French domestic intelligence service (DGSI) has become increasingly important and will be responsible for operational control, the coordination

of security services and investigations, but will remain under a judge's authority. In order to concentrate more effort on ongoing investigations, a national public prosecutor's office of counterterrorism will be installed and supported by other legal areas if needed. A new profiling unit will analyse attackers' profiles. In response to the important role of prisons in radicalisation and the high number of to-be-released terrorist convicts, a monitoring unit will be keeping an eye on released prisoners. Other key areas for France include the fight against terrorist financing. France continues to follow a securitising rather than a preventive approach and takes a severe stance in the fight against terrorism: the 2018 budget of the internal security forces was set to €12.8 billion.[20]

In Germany, the new National Program for the Prevention of Islamist Extremism is building on the federal government's 2016 Strategy for the Prevention of Extremism and the Promotion of Democracy.[21] Since Germany understands Islamist extremism as a challenge related to society as a whole, the program aims to further strengthen cooperation among stakeholders. The program covers the government's efforts to install local prevention councils, increase consultation offers, and support integration and measures to prevent radicalisation online, for example by monitoring extremist content and providing guidelines for alternative narratives. Other elements include the improvement of existing measures related to prevention and deradicalisation in the penal system. Germany also aims to increase the effectiveness of these measures by including accompanying scientific evaluation. The 2018 budget for the National Program for the Prevention of Islamist Extremism is an additional €100 million to existing programs.[22] In the past few years, Germany has made important advances in developing a comprehensive and multiagency approach to preventing violent extremism (PVE) and has also shifted responsibility for PVE from the interior ministry to the social ministry.[23]

Besides these national programs, there are a number of security issues related to jihadism that demonstrate the differences and similarities in approaches of Western European countries.

Regarding the threat posed by returning FTFs, European states face several legal, ethical and practical challenges.[24] There's still a lack of coherent strategies and common approaches, for example, prosecution in absentia; pre-charge and pre-trial detentions; deprivation of citizenship in cases of dual citizenship; and the age of criminal liability. Countries often decide these matters on a case-by-case basis, depending on the evidence available. Not all returnees pose a direct threat (between 10% and 25% of returnees

have committed attacks in the past[25]), but those who do tend to mount lethal attacks and play 'a critical role in creating and strengthening terrorist groups, and radicalizing and recruiting terrorist networks'.[26]

In Germany, a recent article notes that 'there is no thought-through system of how to deal with returnees', despite their high number.[27] This is one consequence of Germany's federal system: apart from the federal government, each of the 16 *Bundesländer* has its own strong local governmental structures. *Bundesländer* have different approaches when it comes to returning FTFs and the relationship between civil-society actors and security agencies. In many cases, there's also not enough evidence to arrest a returning FTF.[28] However, a new project set to start in 2019 aims to install so-called 'returnee-coordinators' in each of the German *Länder* departments to facilitate a coordinated response.[29] The federal system also contributed to more local approaches to PVE, which experts often consider more effective.[30]

Another major concern is how to deal with returning women and minors, who make up around 44% of European IS affiliates; at least 730 infants have been born to foreigners inside the 'caliphate'.[31] European states here face a number of legal, ethical and security challenges: they have to balance child welfare concerns, such as those involving traumas, with security concerns, such as possible indoctrination with jihadist ideology.[32] A common feature in Europe is that children are foremost considered victims, but could also be 'ticking time bombs'.[33] Some European countries thus take a tougher stance than others. For example, children can be classified as FTFs in Belgium from the age of 12 years, and in the Netherlands from 9 years.[34] In response, countries have developed individual psychological assessments and risk analyses. France established relatively detailed protocols in 2017, and Belgium published a 'road map' in early 2018.[35] The Netherlands and France don't actively support the return of women and children from the Middle East. This is in line with past statements of Dutch and French politicians indicating that their respective FTF should rather die or be tried in Syria and Iraq.[36] Germany has been making efforts to repatriate infants for humanitarian reasons, at least from Iraqi prisons. In February 2018, a 14-month-old was allowed to return to Germany with his grandfather while his mother remained in prison in Iraq. In contrast to other countries, in Germany very few women have been convicted for involvement with IS so far, but that's currently changing.[37] In the Netherlands, female returnees automatically face a prison sentence upon return, and their children are sent to relatives or foster homes.[38]

Officially, most European countries still refuse to repatriate their citizens and prosecute them in Europe. The German Government, for example, hasn't issued an official statement so far but offers consular assistance to German citizens in Iraqi prisons, with the objective of repatriation. Several death sentences for Germans have so far been prevented and transformed into long detention sentences.[39] Meanwhile, the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria have already threatened to release detained European IS affiliates, saying that they don't have the capacity to keep them indefinitely.[40] This scenario would lead to an increased security risk for European and Middle Eastern countries.

When it comes to (de)radicalisation in prison, a key concern is that a large number of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offences or considered radicalised will be released within the next two years.[41] Some countries favour the dispersal model (Germany) or mixed models (Belgium), in which detainees can be separated from the prison population in case they engage in proselytising or recruitment activities. Following the example of the Netherlands, France and the UK are expanding the so-called 'containment-oriented model'—keeping high-risk terrorism-related offenders in specialised units or separate prisons—due to ongoing concerns about prisons being breeding grounds of violent extremism.[42]

These examples demonstrate the difficulty to deal with these challenges. At the same time, the fields of CT and PVE suffer from a lack of definitional clarity on both the national and European levels. European countries understand different things as 'prevention' and 'radicalisation' and have historically different approaches to terrorism and extremism. The role of EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, and organisations such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network are important in dealing with these conflicting expectations.

Following the example of the Radicalisation Awareness Network, France and Germany initiated the High Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalization to advise the European Commission on how to improve cooperation and collaboration, propose concrete measures to ensure a stronger involvement of EU member states in the planning and steering of PVE strategies and activities, and further integrate researchers.[43] The European Commission is currently implementing several measures as proposed in the group's final report—such as a steering board for EU actions in the field of PVE—and thus complementing the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network.

In September 2018, the European Commission proposed new legislation forcing social media networks and websites to remove terrorist content within an hour of receiving an order to do so or face considerable fines.[44] The proposal has drawn criticism about its effectiveness and possible risks to freedom of expression and privacy.[45]

In general, the EU aims to further improve CT cooperation, including on improved border control and fighting terrorist financing and cybercrime.[46]

Finally, the tendency towards a more comprehensive CT approach continues. At the regional and state levels, CT and PVE actors include not only intelligence and security services, police and the judiciary but also social and healthcare professionals, teachers and community leaders. Challenges arise in information sharing among different actors and defining roles and responsibilities, and from a rising climate of suspicion and surveillance. This 'securitisation' also emphasises the early detection of extremism and terrorism: 'This notion of "pre-crime" refers to intervention *before* actual wrong-doing occurs and signifies a break with established doctrines of acting *after* a criminal offence has occurred.'[47] A key question will be how to monitor and assess the threat level and how to deradicalise and reintegrate radicalised individuals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IS isn't yet defeated: local grievances that contributed to its emergence are still present, a large proportion of FTFs have 'disappeared', and jihadist ideology remains influential. However, the relative absence of mass-casualty terrorist attacks in 2018 should be used as a window of opportunity to concentrate on further developing long-term responses to terrorism and radicalisation, including 'soft' measures.[48] Especially when it comes to returning FTFs, effective risk assessment and monitoring as well as deradicalisation and reintegration measures are vital.[49]

Experiences in recent years—and especially initiatives such as Radicalisation Awareness Network—have shown that a multiagency approach is the key to making the effort as effective as possible. Local, regional, national and international knowledge transfer is of high importance. National and regional differences have to be accounted for, as well as the different roles and interests of the stakeholders involved. This requires regular exchanges to define legal standards and responsibilities, manage knowledge and establish a solid trust base among the different actors. A structured transfer of knowledge between practitioners, the research community and policymakers is of equal importance in order to design and implement tailor-made soft CT approaches (including, for example, long-term communication strategies to prevent violent extremism).

This chapter has focused on the various challenges posed by jihadist extremism linked to IS, since it remains the main security concern for Western Europe. At the same time, it is important to stress that violent right-wing extremism has been on the rise.[50] Thus, an important task in the coming years will be to understand similarities and differences in the radicalisation process and address a worrying development in which Islamist and right-wing extremist narratives fuel each other.[51]

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After the caliphate:

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN RESPONSES TO FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

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The past year was marked by the continuing military defeat of the so-called Islamic State (IS) 'caliphate', which began with the fall of Mosul (June 2017) and Raqqa (October 2017). By mid-2018, IS possessed only 1% of its original territory in Syria and Iraq,[1] and many of its leaders, plus thousands of members, had been killed in military operations. The number of surviving IS fighters in Syria and Iraq is contested; at the time of writing, widely disparate estimates range from 1,000 to 30,000.[2] The number of *foreign* IS fighters is similarly contested, as it's been since the early days of the Syrian civil war.[3] What's clear is that tens of thousands of individuals had travelled to Syria and later Iraq as foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to fight alongside various warring factions, including terrorist groups such as IS.

Confronted with such an unprecedented wave of FTFs, states around the world started looking at various counter measures. In the initial response, governments focused on preventing would-be fighters from leaving their home countries and ensuring that legal frameworks were adequate to facilitate the prosecution of potential and returning FTFs. On the one hand, governments tested the applicability of existing CT laws to FTFs, and many people were convicted for joining or attempting to join IS or other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, legal CT frameworks were updated in many states to ensure that FTFs could be prosecuted. Legally binding UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) was instrumental, as it obliges governments to criminalise FTF travel, preparations for travel, and the financing, organising and facilitating of travel.[4]

However, following the military advances by allied forces in Syria, the FTF phenomenon took a new turn. In 2017 and 2018, instead of stemming the flow of fighters leaving their home countries to travel to Syria and Iraq (and other theatres, including Mali, Somalia, Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan), policy- and lawmakers turned to the question of what to do with those leaving the caliphate. Experts mapped out the various pathways by which FTFs might leave: being killed, travelling to other battlefields, relocating to non-conflict countries, or returning home.[5] The last of those pathways shaped authorities' responses in 2018.

Three important trends can be discerned in relation to legal frameworks for dealing with FTFs: preventing FTFs from returning, mitigating risks upon their return, and distinguishing between different risk groups.

PREVENTING RETURN

With the military defeat of IS in Iraq, thousands of people, including FTFs, were captured by Iraqi-aligned forces (there are around 19,000 in Iraqi prisons accused of ISIS-related terrorism charges, of whom around 1300 are foreigners[6]). In 2018, hundreds were prosecuted locally, mainly by courts in Baghdad and Mosul, for membership of IS. In trials criticised by human rights groups,[7] people were prosecuted individually or in mass proceedings during short hearings, often lasting less than 15 minutes.[8] The sentences handed down for mere membership of IS are severe (either lifetime imprisonment or the death penalty), while the evidentiary burden for crimes committed is often low. Any membership of IS is sufficient for conviction, and no distinction is made between FTFs who have actively fought for IS or committed terrorism or murder and those who were in supporting roles, including pregnant women and juveniles.[9] Sources claim that the courts treat FTFs more stringently than alleged local fighters. According to Human Rights Watch, 'In the minds of Iraqis and the judiciary and the government, by virtue of the fact that you are foreign and chose to live in IS territory there is a level of agency in what you did and more culpability.'[10] Those sentenced include FTFs from Central Asia, Russia and Turkey, but also from Germany, Belgium and France. By early September 2018, in Baghdad alone, 103 foreigners had been sentenced to death and 185 to life imprisonment.[11]

However, not all FTFs can be prosecuted. Around 600 foreigners from almost 50 countries are held by the Syrian Democratic Forces—a non-state actor without official legal authority to prosecute them.[12] Some countries, including the US, are trying out a range of means to deal with captured American citizens, including through domestic US prosecutions or their release back into Syria.[13] A small number of states, including Macedonia and Lebanon, have accepted FTFs back, but many don't agree to repatriate 'their' FTFs. Among other reasons, this is due to the difficulty they experience in prosecuting FTFs for crimes committed abroad, where the collection of physical evidence is challenging. Where evidence is available, authorities (for example, the French) are reluctant to reveal how information was collected, as that might jeopardise future intelligence gathering.[14] This creates a legal limbo for the captured foreigners. The alternatives include the much-criticised Iraqi trials or—as reportedly suggested by US officials—options such as detention at Guantanamo Bay.[15]

In addition to refuse to repatriate, some countries have taken even more active steps to prevent the return of FTFs. Several countries, including Australia, the Netherlands and the UK, have used legislation to withdraw the citizenship of dual-national FTFs, and without requiring a conviction for terrorism offences.[16] In other words, just by heading to a proscribe zone, one could be eligible to have their citizenship revoked. Most of that legislation has been passed since, and arguably in response to, the current FTF wave. While such measures may stop the immediate security threat posed by FTFs to their home countries, and save prosecutorial and security resources, those measures are highly counterproductive in the global fight against terrorism and the threat posed by FTFs. Instead of addressing a security risk, the risk is moved to another country, which may be less well equipped to deal with the FTFs, and may even cause further radicalisation among disenfranchised minority groups.[17]

MITIGATING RISK UPON RETURN

A second trend is to ensure that returning FTFs are detected and that appropriate action is taken to mitigate risks. To do so, states have expanded their risk-mitigation 'toolbox'. For example, governments have increasingly worked on legislation and policies, often in cooperation with other countries, to enable them to detect returnees and to share data. In this effort, UN Security Council Resolution 2396 of December 2017 has been an important but highly contested development.[18] It obliges states to collect biometric data and develop watchlists and databases of suspected FTFs, which may be used to screen travellers and conduct investigations, among other things. In this regard, the Netherlands has recently shared newly developed technology (Travel Information Portal, or TRIP) to enable states to share such data and deal with returnees.[19]

Countries have also developed their strategies for prosecuting FTFs. While initial prosecutions experienced significant challenges in obtaining admissible evidence against FTFs, states have since taken new steps to facilitate evidence gathering. The use of evidence gathered by the military on the battlefield has received much attention, as have other efforts to collect better evidence (digital, forensic, and so on) and to turn intelligence into evidence.[20] Simultaneously, states have also started prosecuting foreign fighters not 'only' in relation to terrorism- and FTF-related offences, but also for international crimes, including war crimes.[21] In Germany, Sweden and most recently the Netherlands, national prosecution services have charged FTFs with war crimes committed as part of their participation in foreign armed conflicts.[22] In the Dutch case, for example, the person in question had posted a photo of himself laughing next to a crucified person—an act in breach of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits the dishonouring of someone that had surrendered Interestingly, the individual in question had been convicted in Turkey of membership of a terrorist organization for which they were sentenced to six year imprisonment. However, because the person had entered Turkey illegally, they were deported to Holland, where they faced charged of war crimes.[23]

States have looked beyond traditional prosecutorial strategies to deal with potential and returning FTFs by increasingly legislating for the use of administrative measures, which includes monitoring FTFs.[24] Administrative measures are usually designed to be invoked by the executive rather than judicial authorities and may be taken on the basis of information, including intelligence, that isn't typically shared with the alleged FTF.[25] Such measures, which 'seem to fit somewhere in between prevention and repression, include travel bans (e.g. through passport revocation), expulsion orders, entry bans, control orders, assigned residence orders, area restrictions, social benefits stripping and citizenship revocation'.[26] For example, FTFs may be prevented from returning to their home countries for a number of years and, when they do return, have to comply with certain conditions, as is possible in the UK. Administrative measures are used by several countries; travel bans have been enacted by Austria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Tajikistan, Tunisia and the UK.[27] Preferences can also be discerned by region; for instance, in North African countries there seems to be a clearer focus on prosecutions over administrative measures, but with the notable exception of Tunisia, where house arrest and monitoring is reported as a much-used response in the country, which has several hundred returnees from Syria and Iraq.[28]

ADDRESSING DIFFERENT RISK GROUPS

A third trend in the treatment of FTFs has been to distinguish between different groups, most notably women and children, and people who were intercepted before reaching battle theatres. A significant number of families have departed for the 'caliphate' or returned as family units, and authorities have realised that different risks emanate from those groups. For example, while adult women were not accepted as fighters for IS and therefore don't necessarily have combat experience, they may still present a security threat due to their exposure to the violent conflict and their ideological commitment. There are two sides to this response. On the one hand, some governments in the Middle East and North Africa appear to think that the security risk from women is *lower* by default or by definition; others appear to perceive the risk to be *different*. In Tunisia, for example, responses to female FTFs don't include prosecution, but arrest, monitored release and counselling through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Family.[29] In Indonesia, special attention is also paid to so-called 'deportees', who are people who are deported back to their home countries after allegedly attempting to join terrorist groups. As part of a pilot project, such people are subjected to a one-month deradicalisation and disengagement program. Many deportees are women or juveniles.[30]

A further group comprises people who were convicted for FTF-related terrorism offences in the 2012–2014 period and who are to be released in the near future. This especially concerns Western European countries, where sentences are shorter than in North America or Australia, and in cases in which individuals were prosecuted for 'mere' membership of terrorist organisations rather than for violent crimes committed while abroad. In these cases, states are worried that prisons haven't worked as measures for deradicalisation and disengagement and that those released will continue on their extremist path. Therefore, governments are considering additional measures, including administrative and security measures, as part of probation and post-release activities.

Simultaneously, the important role of NGOs in facilitating the reintegration of released FTFs has been highlighted.[31] For example, in calling on member states to develop and implement rehabilitation and reintegration strategies in response to FTFs, UN Security Council Resolution 2396 (2017) specifically recognises the role that civil society organisations can play in this area; the Global Counterterrorism Forum's Marrakech memorandum similarly highlights the importance of NGOs alongside other partners, including the private sector, in facilitating reintegration efforts.[32]

CONCLUSION

Overall, the response to FTFs over the past year has changed from preventing travel to focusing on returning FTFs. This was based on the expectation that FTFs would return to their home countries or relocate to new countries after the fall of the IS caliphate. However, that prediction hasn't (yet) been fulfilled, as numbers of returnees have been much lower than expected. Experts had warned that the wave of FTFs could have disastrous consequences for the returnees' states of origin. To date, that threat hasn't materialised to the extent feared by many: FTFs were involved in 'just' five out of 51 attacks (< 10%) in Europe and North America since the proclamation of the caliphate,[33] and the number of terrorist attacks, at least in Europe and North America, dropped significantly in 2018 compared to the preceding two years.[34]

Several recommendations can be made based on the trends and analysis outlined in this short article.

First, using existing legal frameworks and measures may be sufficient to address the FTF phenomenon, including through international prosecutions (including for war crimes). The recent 'legislation fever' in response to the FTF phenomenon is understandable,

but there also needs to be a recognition that other challenges—including homegrown terrorism— equally need to be addressed, and that adapting legal frameworks to arising challenges is a tedious and lengthy approach. Rather, it's good that additional measures have been developed internationally to facilitate prosecutions through existing legal frameworks, including the expansion of techniques and capacities for collecting admissible evidence and the pursuit of prosecutions for international crimes.[35]

Second, sometimes difficult decisions need to be made when managing security risks stemming from FTFs. However, rather than enacting exceptional measures, which don't always allow for redress and can prevent justice being done, it's important to fight terrorism using an approach based on the rule of law. There's potential for some FTF measures, including some necessitated by UN Security Council resolutions 2178 and 3296, to interfere with human rights law. On the upside, a number of important documents and manuals were developed in 2018 to guide states in human rights-compliant responses to the threat posed by FTFs.[36] Most recently, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe published its *Guidelines for addressing the threats and challenges of 'foreign terrorist fighters' within a human rights framework*, which outlines not only the challenges involved but also practical recommendations to bring FTFs to justice in full compliance with human rights.[37]

Third, increased efforts to enhance international and regional cooperation, as well as multiagency interaction within countries (as in the latest review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy[38]), is recommended to counter global phenomena such as FTFs. Here, it's important to take into account that preventing FTFs' return may mitigate risk for one country in the short term, but won't be an effective long-term solution to a global problem.

The FTF phenomenon isn't new, and it isn't over yet, but it will continue to pose significant challenges. While fewer FTFs than expected have returned to their home countries, that may change in the future, as significant numbers of them are on the move. In addition, the release of many convicted FTFs, especially in Europe, requires states to look beyond prosecutions and consider whether and how FTFs (and their families) can be rehabilitated and reintegrated. Most importantly, however, the malicious ideology of IS continues to find traction, especially among young people, and is likely to continue to inspire homegrown terrorism.

NOTES

1   Rukmini Callimachi, 'Fight to retake last ISIS territory begins', *New York Times*, 11 September 2018, online.

2   See UN Security Council, *Seventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat*, S/2018/770, 16 August 2018, online; Greg Myre, 'Where did the Islamic State fighters go?', *National Public Radio*, 1 January 2018, online; 'The challenging math of Islamic State fighters', *Intel Brief*, The Soufan Group, 16 August 2018, online; Kim Sengupta, 'Amid a fractured political and military landscape, Isis are quietly regrouping in Syria', *The Independent*, 3 July 2018, online.

3   Van Ginkel, E Entenmann, *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 1 April 2016, 49, 64, online.

4   Under Resolution 2178 (2014) a foreign terrorist fighter is someone that has travelled 'to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict".' S/RES/2178 (2014), para. 6

5   Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 'Terrorism and beyond: exploring the fallout of the European foreign fighter phenomenon in Syria and Iraq,' *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 2016, 10(6), online.

6   Under the 2005 Counterterrorism law, terrorism is defined in Iraq as 'any criminal act carried out by one or more persons against the security and stability of the state and/or against persons or groups of persons deliberately or blindly.' The law permits the sentencing to death an individual convicted of terrorism. AFP, 'Iraq parliament adopts anti-terror law', *Al-Jazeera*, 5 October 2005, online. Margaret Coker, Falih Hassan, 'A 10-Minute Trial, a Death Sentence: Iraqi Justice for ISIS Suspects', *The New York Times*, 17 April 2018, online.

7   Amnesty International, 'Iraq: 38 hanged in abhorrent mass execution,' *News*, 14 December 2017, online; Qassim Abdul-Zahra, Susannah George, 'Iraq holding more than 19,000 because of IS, militant ties,' *AP News*, 22 March 2018, online.

8   Human Rights Watch, *Flawed justice: accountability for ISIS crimes in Iraq*, 5 December 2017, online.

9   Martin Chulov, '"They deserve no mercy": Iraq deals briskly with accused "women of Isis"', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2018, online.

10 Quoted in Chulov, '"They deserve no mercy"'.

11 Mina Aldroubi, 'Iraq sentences hundreds of ISIS fighters to death', *The National*, 18 April 2018, online.

12 Charlie Savage, 'As ISIS fighters fill prisons in Syria, their home nations look away', *New York Times*, 18 July 2018, online.

13 Jenna Consigli, 'Prosecuting the Islamic State fighters left behind', *Lawfare*, 1 August 2018, online.

14 Rikar Hussein, 'Western countries' dilemma: what to do with captured IS foreign fighters?', *VOA News*, 17 February 2018, online.

15 Courtney Kube, Dan de Luce, Josh Lederman, 'Trump admin may send captured ISIS fighters to Iraq prison, Guantanamo,' *NBC News*, 30 August 2018, online; Paul Sonne, Devlin Barrett, Ellen Nakashima, 'US and Britain are divided over what to do with captured ISIS fighters,' *Washington Post*, 14 February 2018, online.

16 David J Trimbach, Nicole Reiz, *Unmaking citizens: the expansion of citizenship revocation in response to terrorism*, Center for Migration Studies, 30 January 2018, online; Sangeetha Pillai, George Williams, 'The utility of citizenship stripping in the UK, Canada and Australia', *Melbourne University Law Review* (advance copy), 2017, 41(2), online; Sangita Jaghai, *Citizenship deprivation, (non)discrimination and statelessness: a case study of the Netherlands*, Statelessness Working Paper Series, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, no. 2017/07, 2017, online. Other countries, including the UK and Switzerland, are able to impose entry bans to bar foreigners, including FTFs, from entering those countries.

17 Christophe Paulussen, 'Countering terrorism through the stripping of citizenship: ineffective and counterproductive', *Perspectives*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2018, online; Bérénice Boutin, 'Administrative measures against foreign fighters: in search of limits and safeguards', ICCT research paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 16 December 2016, online; Jenna Consigli, 'Prosecuting the Islamic State fighters left behind'.

18 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, 'The UN Security Council, global watch lists, biometrics, and the threat to the rule of law', *Just Security*, 17 January 2018, online.

19 Government of the Netherlands, 'Dutch anti-terrorist technology goes to the UN', media release, 26 September 2018, online.

20 See UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Investigation, prosecution and adjudication of foreign terrorist fighter cases for South and South-East Asia*, June 2018, online; UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 'Battlefield and digital evidence crucial factor in successful prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters—CTED, UNODC, and IAP launch practical guide to help Member States', media release, UN, 27 September 2018, online.

21 One challenge is that as things stand, Iraq isn't a party to the Rome Statute and therefore if it is to prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, etc. it must do so under domestic legalisation.

22 Silvan Schoonhoven, 'Terug naar de vrijheid: "IS is niet wat ik er op internet over had gelezen"', *Haarlems Dagblad*, 19 April 2017, online.

23 Janene Pieters, 'Dutch Jihadist Charged With War Crime For Posing With Body', *NL Times*, 16 October 2018, online.

24 Peter Zimonjic, 'Justin Trudeau tells Hamilton town hall Canadians can feel safe despite returning ISIS fighters', *CBC*, 10 January 2018, online.

25 UNODC, *Investigation, prosecution and adjudication of foreign terrorist fighter cases for South and South-East Asia*; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Guidelines for addressing the threats and challenges of 'foreign terrorist fighters' within a human rights framework*, 2018, online.

26 Boutin, 'Administrative measures against foreign fighters: in search of limits and safeguards', 3.

27 Letta Tayler, *'Foreign terrorist fighter' laws: human rights rollbacks under UN Security Council Resolution 2178*, Human Rights Watch, 2 December 2016, online.

28 Lisa Watanabe, 'The next steps of North Africa's foreign fighters', *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 2018, no. 222, online.

29 Watanabe, 'The next steps of North Africa's foreign fighters'.

30 Chaula Rininta Anindya, *Deradicalising deportees: vacuum in coordination?*, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, 11 April 2018, online.

31 Christina Nemr, Lara Nonninger, Eva Entenmann, Fulco van Deventer, Bibi van Ginkel, *It takes a village: an action agenda on the role of civil society in the rehabilitation and reintegration of those associated with and affected by violent extremism*, Global Center on Cooperative Security and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, August 2018, online.

32 Global Counterterrorism Forum, *Marrakesh memorandum on good practices for a more effective response to the FTF phenomenon*, 2016, online.

33 Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, Eva Entenmann, *Fear thy neighbour: radicalization and jihadist attacks in the West*, George Washington University's Program on Extremism, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2017, 60. However, attacks involving FTFs were much more deadly than those carried out exclusively by non-FTFs.

34 Rukmini Callimachi, 'Why a "dramatic dip" in ISIS attacks in the West is scant comfort', *New York Times*, 12 September 2018, online.

35 Global Counterterrorism Forum, *Abuja recommendations on the collection, use and sharing of evidence for purposes of criminal prosecution of terrorist suspects*, September 2018, online; UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Collection, use, and sharing of evidence for the purposes of criminal prosecution in terrorism cases*, September 2018, online.

36 UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, *Guidance to states on human rights-compliant responses to the threat posed by foreign fighters*, New York 2018, online; UNODC, *Foreign terrorist fighters manual for judicial training institutes, south-eastern Europe*, Vienna 2017, online.

37 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Guidelines for addressing the threats and challenges of 'foreign terrorist fighters' within a human rights framework*.

38 UN, *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN, New York, 2006, online.

THE FUTURE OF COUNTERING

Violent extremism

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Over the past decade, international and national counterterrorism efforts have evolved to include what's been referred to as 'countering violent extremism' (CVE). Recently, since the release of the UN Secretary-General's *Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism* in January 2016, a debate over terminology has emerged, weighing the differences between 'preventing violent extremism' (PVE) and CVE.[1] In its official strategy, the Australian Government uses the term CVE to describe approaches related to general resilience-building of communities; direct, targeted interventions aimed at preventing individuals from radicalising; and disengagement and deradicalisation strategies for prisoners and former fighters.[2] However, informally and through non-official documents, the PVE terminology is also accepted. In this paper, the term 'CVE' is used to refer to the spectrum of activities listed in the Australian Government's official policies.

Newly emerging CVE methodologies and approaches should also be taken into consideration to better reflect the different manifestations of terrorism and the various concerns relating to radicalisation. Hedayah distinguishes between six potential categories of intervention in what it calls the 'CVE cycle': general prevention; specific prevention; early intervention and diversion; disengagement and/or deradicalisation; rehabilitation; and reintegration.[3] While a full explanation of the CVE cycle is outside the scope of this paper, a brief summary is as follows.[4]

Notably, the CVE cycle starts from the assumption that radicalisation is a non-linear process and that CVE efforts should consider the needs and risks of the community and the individual before designing an intervention to reduce radicalisation and recruitment or to build or restore resilience, depending on the specific target audience. In the first part of the CVE cycle, all the interventions seek to divert the individual away from violent extremism and terrorism and to end or prevent their radicalisation process. For example, *general prevention* looks to mitigate macro-level push factors at the community level or to build general community resilience against those factors. *Specific prevention*, in contrast, focuses on the individual who may be influenced by macro-level push factors in combination with individual-level push factors that contribute to their vulnerability. The aim of specific prevention, therefore, is to increase personal resilience. Note that, for specific prevention, the individual's trajectory might not necessarily be towards radicalisation (but perhaps instead towards other deviant behaviour), so the appropriate intervention should be based on a needs assessment. *Early-stage intervention* is necessary when a needs assessment of the individual reveals the presence of influential push factors as well as macro or micro pull factors that suggest vulnerability to terrorist recruitment. At this stage, a tailored program for the individual should also factor in any potential risk to society.

Once a person has already been radicalised, recruited, or both (such as when they've been convicted of a terrorism offence or they're a returning foreign terrorist fighter), their trajectory in the CVE cycle takes a different path. They must undergo the last three stages of disengagement/deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration to ensure their full 'recovery' and restoration to the desired state and to prevent recidivism. In the *disengagement/deradicalisation* phase, the person disconnects from a terrorist group. Their behavioural changes may include psychologically and physically disconnecting (usually called 'disengagement') from a terrorist group or violence.[5] Their attitudinal changes may include questioning and rejecting the terrorist group's ideology (usually called 'deradicalisation'). There's a vigorous debate about which of these methods is most effective, but that's outside the scope of this essay.

After disengagement/deradicalisation, the individual is prepared for a 'new' life outside violent extremism and terrorism through a process of *rehabilitation*, which includes educational activities as well as psychological rehabilitation. Finally, the person is transitioned back to the community and society through a process of *reintegration*, overcoming potential stigmas and strengthening valuable connections outside of the terrorist group.

Because we need more nuanced approaches and interventions, it's important to know what CVE approaches can and can't address. CVE efforts are nearly impossible when all aspects of society are under direct threat of violent conflict, from terrorism to insurgency to state-backed violence. However, in the aftermath of a violent conflict, there may be a role for CVE programs. For example, in the context of Iraq and Syria, it's in the best interests of the security of the region and the globe to ensure that sufficient funding and resources are dedicated to rebuilding communities. In addition, there's a need to prevent a situation in which propaganda, ideology and messages from the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) continue to resonate with communities, even after the group has been militarily eliminated. Thus, efforts to rebuild Iraq and Syria could be coupled with general prevention efforts (for communities not necessarily radicalised) and disengagement/deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts (for individuals convinced by IS ideology or who support IS violence). However, CVE approaches should be implemented only if they're complementary to efforts to rebuild communities and infrastructure; CVE isn't the only solution in post-IS communities, and it shouldn't be implemented in a vacuum.

CVE APPROACHES TODAY AND TOMORROW

With this in mind, here I seek to identify overarching trends and corresponding recommendations for CVE globally in the coming year. Because IS's loss of control over territory in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere is the most pressing topic, I first address the next steps in rebuilding those societies and CVE's role in those efforts. I also recommend ways in which CVE can play a role with returning foreign terrorist fighters within and outside the criminal justice system. Finally, I examine how CVE can undermine violent extremist narratives, particularly those that are polarising and dividing societies.

CONSIDER INDIVIDUAL NEEDS FOR DE-RADICALISATION, DISENGAGEMENT, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION IN POST-ISLAMIC STATE COMMUNITIES

IS's loss of territorial control in Raqqa, Mosul and Sirte doesn't mean the battle against it is over; more work is needed to rebuild infrastructure and entire communities that were previously under its control. While those populations might or might not be considered 'radicalised', the influence of the propaganda and ideology of IS has affected their way of life. It's here where lessons learned from CVE can complement rebuilding and restoration efforts. In general, it's important that societies' infrastructure, governance, economies and social customs are restored. From a CVE perspective, this is important because it reduces the potential push factors—or structural grievances—that are sometimes leveraged by violent extremists such as IS in their recruitment narratives. In particular, CVE programs in a post-IS context should take into consideration individual needs for deradicalisation, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Some CVE approaches are already underway in both Iraq and Syria. For example, several Syrian NGOs and government (or pseudo-government) organisations have been working to rehabilitate former IS members who have been captured and jailed.[6] According to some reports, the Syrian Democratic Forces are processing IS prisoners in makeshift 'rehabilitation camps'.[7] Similar efforts have been underway in Iraq, although there have been accusations by human rights groups that rehabilitation camps were being used for the 'collective punishment' of families of IS fighters, and the camps have since been closed.[8] Notably, these efforts aren't without challenges: scarce resources, the large number of prisoners, and a general lack of knowledge about disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration techniques on the part of those implementing the programs. Therefore, there's an opportunity to examine whether there could be better coordination of CVE implementation among the international community that's donating funds, expertise and experience to support efforts in Iraq and Syria.

It's important for efforts focusing on rebuilding communities formerly under IS control to make a nuanced distinction between people who participated in IS activities at different levels. Some were actively dedicated to the IS cause, others may have passively accepted IS customs and ideology, and others may have participated under duress or by force. Lessons learned from past efforts suggest that separating those who have rejected violence or expressed remorse for their actions from other prisoners can lead to better results. This also avoids any taint of 'collective punishment'. For example, in Spain, a reintegration program for former Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA)[9] prisoners separated the 'Nanclares', a group of approximately 30 prisoners who expressed remorse and rejected violence, from the main group of prisoners.[10] This group had overall shorter prison sentences and swifter rehabilitation and reintegration back into their communities.[11] In alignment with the distinction between the stages of disengagement/deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration in the CVE cycle, an approach in Iraq and Syria should take into consideration the nuances of personal and individual affiliation with IS ideology and violence.

Other contexts can provide examples of successful models for rehabilitation and reintegration in post-conflict settings. Sri Lankan programs for ex-combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam began with a robust needs assessment, and a customised program was developed for each individual. The program consisted of a variety of activities based on six pillars: education; spiritual and religious culture; social/community/family; vocation/livelihood; sports/extracurricular; and psychological creative therapies.[12]

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE PROGRAMS IN PRISONS FOR RETURNING FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

The return home of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from conflict zones is a major concern of any country from which significant numbers of people have joined IS's 'caliphate', but FTFs from Central Asia, Southeast Asia, North Africa and the Middle East are of particular concern. The risk of returning FTFs mounting attacks in their home countries increases where historical terrorist networks might also facilitate the further spread

of IS ideology and methods. For example, in Tunisia, IS built on localised Ansar al-Sharia recruiting networks and capitalised on the turmoil following the Arab Spring to gain support;[13] in the Philippines, it leveraged existing Abu Sayyaf networks to gain footholds.[14] Western intelligence agencies are also concerned about returnees to Europe, North America and Australia, but the presence of those returnees are less of a threat in these regions in terms of numbers.[15] Still, a general trend towards more deaths from terrorist attacks in Western countries is related to the shift in the epicentre of IS activities from the Middle East to softer and civilian targets outside of Iraq and Syria.[16]

The criminal justice sector—particularly the prison system—is critical for developing programs for returning FTFs. The potential consequences of poorly designed programs for returnees in prisons are significant: prisoners may continue to support terrorism and be subject to recidivism after their sentences are completed, and they have the potential to radicalise or recruit other prisoners to their cause. Of course, this starts with the assumptions that the prison system as a whole is of high quality and allows for general prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration—which is not always the case in many countries receiving returning FTFs. The problem of prison radicalisation has been raised as a concern globally, and experts have indicated that the main reasons for it is that prisons are a concentrated source of troubled individuals who are cut off from family and other moderating influences, are subject to perceived unjust punishment, and are often looking for an identity or a cause.[17] A report by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence notes that prisons also provide a place where 'networking' and 'skills transfer' can take place between criminals and terrorists.[18] In managing terrorist prisoners, programs therefore need to undermine both the *ideology and support for violence* and the *networks* that could create an environment in which terrorism thrives in the prison system.

Some efforts have already been made to coordinate good practices and lessons learned in the management of terrorist prisoners and returning FTFs. For example, the *Rome memorandum on good practices for rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders* collates good practices in the prison context. Other good practices that specifically relate to returning FTFs include those in the *Marrakesh memorandum on good practices for a more effective response to the FTF phenomenon* and the *Malta principles for reintegrating returning foreign terrorist fighters*.[19] However, these guides don't always provide consistent advice on how to manage the ideologies and networks of terrorist prisoners.

In some circumstances, there's little evidence to suggest that deradicalisation programs that seek to only undermine the ideology of terrorist groups are effective. For example, a recent review of Spain's Framework Program for Intervention in Violent Radicalisation with Islamist Inmates revealed

that only 23 (of 252) terrorist inmates participated voluntarily in the program, and *none* of them had deviated from their ideological claims in the two years the program has been running.[20] In Indonesia, the Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (National Agency for Combating Terrorism) learned that direct counter-arguments refuting terrorist ideologies weren't effective (and in some circumstances were counter-productive).[21] However, other prison programs for terrorist inmates in Indonesia that focused on building empathy, tolerance and cooperation were more successful in diverting prisoners away from violence.[22]

Some models for prison management suggest that dispersing terrorist prisoners throughout the mainstream prison population is more effective than isolating or 'containing' them in one setting. There are advantages and risks in both approaches. For example, Australia mainly follows a model in which convicted terrorists are dispersed throughout the general prison population, with the exception of serious terrorist offenders who are separated into a high-security prison in Goulburn in rural New South Wales.[23] The justification for intermixing terrorist prisoners is that it potentially dilutes the ideology and doesn't 'glorify' those who may see themselves as 'martyrs' if they receive 'special' treatment of being separated. In contrast, in the Philippines, the New Bilibid Prison uses an integrated approach to terrorist prisoners, whereas the Metro Manila District Jail segregates them from the general population. In both cases in the Philippines, the decision was made based on the number of terrorist prisoners compared to the general prison population, the number of trained prison workers who can handle terrorist cases, and the general resources available to the prison.[24]

The main lesson here is that prison management approaches vary and should take into consideration the local needs of the prison and risks related to the make-up of the prison population. This becomes challenging for countries struggling to establish programs for returning FTFs. Countries need to be willing to try different approaches and tailor their programs accordingly.

ENSURE COMMUNITY BUY-IN FOR PROGRAMS RELATED TO RETURNING FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

Many FTFs returning from countries such as Iraq, Syria and Libya have served short or no prison sentences. For example, one 2017 study and subsequent report by the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate suggested that 46% of returning FTFs don't enter the criminal justice system.[25] There's therefore an imperative to ensure that there are appropriate programs for returnees that not only span the criminal justice sector but are also integrated with social services and community efforts. It's important to work on the community's expectations and needs, improve the community's understanding of how

successful reintegration can contribute to better rehabilitation, and also prepare the returnee or prisoner for the challenges and stigmas they may face.

The consequences of not ensuring that the community is prepared to receive returning FTFs are significant. Backlash against reintegration programs was seen, for example, in the Colombian public's rejection of the first peace deal with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in October 2016, citing claims that FARC members weren't being held accountable sufficiently for their crimes.[26] Critics of reintegration programs for former terrorists argue that the programs are too 'soft' and that the former terrorists are 'rewarded' for their crimes through their access to social services and economic opportunities. A similar circumstance occurred in Tunisia. When the National Counter-Terrorism Commission announced the development of its program for returning FTFs, and in the context of the Berlin Christmas market attacks conducted by Tunisian-born Anis Amri, the Tunisian public protested in front of the parliament with a message of 'no tolerance' towards foreign fighters returning from Iraq or Syria.[27]

Positive examples of reintegration programs working with the community also exist, and can be taken as models for future CVE efforts. For instance, the Socioeconomic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants and Youth at Risk Project in Somalia builds partnerships and cooperation between ex-militants and community members that are based on respect, mutual needs and an understanding that reintegrating these people ultimately supports the security and resilience of the community as a whole.[28] Each former terrorist is matched with a community member (often a family member or friend) who aids in the reintegration process, helping to prevent the former terrorist's stigmatisation for having previously been associated with al-Shabaab. The mentorship model also supports the continued rehabilitation process of the ex-combatant, and the community member can act as a liaison to express expectations and concerns between the community and the ex-combatant.

ADDRESS CHALLENGES RELATED TO POTENTIALLY RADICALISED YOUTH AND CHILDREN THROUGH EDUCATION THAT BUILDS RESILIENCE

In rehabilitating societies in the aftermath of IS, there's also a particular concern over children who have been exposed to IS ideology. As one report notes, children 'are "cheaper" and more ideologically malleable than adults'.[29]

The attempt to radicalise children by IS was primarily conducted through a formalised education system that was mandatory for all children aged six to 16 years in IS -controlled territory in Iraq and Syria. The system included a specific set of rules for curriculum and content and was strictly enforced by IS's Diwan al-Ta'aleem (Ministry of Education).[30] Moreover, the textbooks and curriculum focused on a specific version of 'history', culture and religion in what a Washington Institute report analysing the textbooks has called the 'ISization' of schools.[31]

We don't know how many children went through the IS education system, but it's concerning that they may have been heavily exposed to IS's ideology during the time that it controlled their families' homes and land, regardless of each family's support for or rejection of that ideology. There's therefore also a role for CVE to play in education in post-IS communities. This means providing access to not only high-quality education, but also to a type of education that builds the resilience of children against violence and violent extremism. At the basic level, this could be through reintroducing topics such as history and social studies into the classroom— particularly to counter the specific version of 'history' promoted by IS. However, education for CVE purposes also means enhancing skills and competencies that increase students' tolerance and acceptance of others and reduce feelings of mistrust towards others.

Education can also be a mechanism for building resilience through general prevention outside Iraq and Syria. For example, recent research on the Generation Global program suggests that competencies such as open-mindedness, which can be taught through classroom dialogue and facilitation, help to reduce negative attitudes and stereotypes that contribute to violent extremism.[32] 'Social and emotional learning' techniques have also been shown to reduce violence and violent extremism when implemented in the classroom. For example, a program in Colombia, RESPIRA, teaches mindfulness practices in schools and has been shown to increase students' attention, reduce anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and reduce aggressive and violent behaviours, particularly in cities near where FARC had strongholds.[33] A number of other organisations have focused on education as a tool to prevent violent extremism; for example, UNESCO has developed a guide for teachers and policymakers,[34] and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) has produced a framework document titled the *Abu Dhabi memorandum on good practices for education and CVE*.[35]

Therefore, in the areas of general prevention and, in some cases, specific prevention, the next few years of CVE effort should focus on building these resilience mechanisms for the next generation of students in regions where there are divisions in societies and communities that contribute to the macro- and micro-level push factors related to violent extremism.

SAFEGUARD COMMUNITIES FROM POLARISING NARRATIVES, AND PROVIDE COUNTER- AND ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

Partly because of the rapid global spread of information, the persistence of polarising political rhetoric, for example between 'host' and 'migrant' communities, has become a particular concern, and the influence of that rhetoric on the narratives of violent extremism is becoming more apparent. In Europe, the scepticism of migrants coming from the Middle East and North Africa has fuelled anti-migrant and anti-Islam rhetoric. In turn, far-right groups have perpetrated hate crimes, using that rhetoric to justify violent acts. For example, in Germany, eight members of the far-right group Freital were jailed in March 2018 for attempted murder and terrorist-related offences in attacks against refugees.[36] These narratives are present not only in the West; similar narratives exist in Russia against Central Asian migrant communities and in Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore against South Asian migrant communities.

The polarisation between 'us' and 'them' (in-group versus out-group) also affects the narratives of terrorist groups. Terrorists may exploit feelings of isolation that can result from this sort of polarised political rhetoric in their propaganda and recruitment. In a robust analysis of IS's online propaganda, Charlie Winter identifies 'belonging' as one of the core elements of the group's communications strategy.[37] In this sense, IS's offer of the 'caliphate'—a utopian society in which all Muslims are brothers or sisters—to European recruits capitalised on feelings of marginalisation and isolation that many young Muslims in Europe were feeling at the time.

CVE efforts, therefore, can focus on tackling some of the ideological roots of violent extremist and terrorist messaging, particularly those messages that separate the world into an in-group and an out-group. Tackling these narratives isn't easy; messages promoting 'peace' and 'tolerance' aren't likely to reach the individuals most susceptible to violent extremism, who may already feel marginalised or isolated by society and be looking for an 'enemy'. Instead, counter-narratives and alternative narratives should undermine that polarisation by providing constructive solutions to grievances (through non-violent means) or by engaging in respectful dialogue about divergent opinions. In this sense, the best mechanisms against polarising rhetoric create spaces in which different individuals feel a sense of community and belonging.

CONCLUSION

While this paper doesn't comprehensively cover all the relevant threats related to terrorism and violent extremism, or the solutions that CVE can provide, it does prioritise the most relevant ones for the coming year. The challenges faced by the global community are many, and of course CVE programs should always be adaptable and flexible in how we address terrorism as current threats change and new threats emerge. The shifting focus of IS's tactics and targets from the Middle East to elsewhere needs to be taken into account, but that isn't the only big challenge. CVE efforts should also consider the changing nature of technology and political rhetoric on the global scale, and in particular how those elements play out at the local level.

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Negotiating with terrorists

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As this yearbook illustrates, there are many approaches to CT. An often overlooked and underutilised CT tool is negotiation. For decades, CT policies have been predicated on the 'We don't negotiate with terrorists' rhetoric. Led by the US, the non-negotiation rhetoric's current prepotency was fuelled by then US President George W Bush's proclamation, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, that "[e]very nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[1]

Despite the non-negotiation rhetoric's dominance, negotiations have historically played a vital role in the countering terrorism toolkit. Negotiations were integral in bringing an end to 43% of terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006.[2] During that period, approximately 40% ended through policing, another 10% of groups succeeded in achieving their goals through violence, and only 7% ended due to military force. Since then, negotiations have continued to be an important CT contribution, playing a key role in ending or reducing terrorism-related violence around the world.

In the light of this, I argue that states need to reassess their non-negotiation policy. Negotiations are a viable and powerful CT tool and, as such, shouldn't be ruled out *a priori*. That isn't to say that negotiations are a silver bullet; indeed, there are instances when states should *not* negotiate with terrorists. Effective CT responses, however, require a holistic approach, and negotiations need to be considered equally among the plethora of CT avenues.

WHY NEGOTIATE?

Like moves to prevent and counter violent extremism, negotiation's primary purpose is to establish lines of communication and build relationships between conflict parties. The goal here is twofold. First, working relationships and trust are necessary to encourage lasting peace. Most terrorist groups evolve from legitimate economic, social and political grievances, including repression, marginalisation and political conflict.[3] Communication enables parties to ascertain and address those core interests and grievances. In contrast, military defeat brings only temporary peace to a region, as the persistent disaffection of the Sri Lankan Tamil population with the government shows.[4] Defeating the Tamil Tigers didn't end the anger, disillusionment that many Tamils feel towards the state and the government.

Second, communication and relationship building, socialise terrorists towards politically accepted norms and practices. As terrorists and their constituencies see gains being achieved through nonviolent means, they're less incentivised to continue pursuing violent avenues.[5] The Real IRA's attempt to derail peace talks by detonating a bomb in Omagh in 1998, in which 29 people died, backfired, garnering greater support for the peace process.[6] The bombing occurred less than

three months after 71% of the people in Northern Ireland voted in favour of the Good Friday Agreement, which indicated that there was a majority supporting an end to the violence.[7]

Through socialisation and addressing grievances, negotiations enable parties to understand each other's structural make-up and psychology.[8] Such information is invaluable intelligence, further strengthening CT efforts by increasing predictability.[9] Rather than being a one-off phenomenon, negotiating is a process made up of a series of negotiations or meetings. Therefore, the strength of the relationship between the conflict parties affects the likelihood of negotiations successfully ending terrorism.

MISGUIDED ASSUMPTIONS

Given negotiation's beneficial value, it's necessary to examine parties' reluctance to engage in it. Policymakers often tout negotiating as rewarding bad behaviour and granting the terrorists' cause legitimacy.[10] Underpinning those beliefs is the way states understand both negotiations and terrorists.

UNDERSTANDING NEGOTIATIONS

Both states and terrorists often apply an outdated interpretation of negotiations as *quid pro quo* or the making of concessions.[11] This approach envisages negotiations as negative- or zero-sum arrangements, in which the only way to achieve your position is to give in to your opponent. Conversely, Harvard Negotiation Project members Roger Fisher and William Ury contend that a principled or integrative negotiation framework, focusing on interests rather than positions, makes win–win outcomes achievable.[12] Although principled negotiation was initially devised within the context of business disputes, it has since been adopted as best practice across several disciplines, including law, policing and diplomacy—pillars of CT. Thus, negotiating isn't synonymous with conceding to demands.

A related misconception that policymakers cling to claims that terrorists don't want to negotiate. This manifests in the belief that terrorists would rather "shatter" or "destroy" the negotiation table than sit at it.[13] While this holds true for a small handful of terrorist groups, the vast majority of terrorists (both groups and individuals) resort to violence when they believe that they've been denied peaceful avenues of recourse.[14] In such instances, terrorists welcome the opportunity to negotiate, as it's often a path they desired or attempted unsuccessfully before employing violence. Indeed, this suggests that their resort to terrorism could be prevented if states were open to addressing such legitimate concerns through negotiations in a timely manner. The dearth of research in this area evidences only that extensive research hasn't yet been conducted, and in no way implies that a negotiated preventive

CT policy is implausible. As Freilich, Chermak and Gruenewald note, the lack of non-terrorism comparison groups "makes it impossible to produce causal explanations and undermines terrorism prevention efforts".[15] What is evident, however, is that for the most part the reluctance to negotiate initially lies with states, and not with terrorists.

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM TYPOLOGIES

Similarly, states' classification of terrorist groups is equally outdated and fails to reflect the complexities of each group. Much like definitions of terrorism, there are several competing typologies of terrorist groups. The most common typologies are aligned around ideology and geography.

Geographical typologies categorise terrorist groups as national, regional or transnational depending on their zone of operation. Geographical typologies are excellent shorthand for describing a terrorist group's network and reach. However, they're irrelevant when deciding whether to negotiate with terrorists. As I outline below, the way a terrorist group behaves is more important than its location or zone of operation.[16] Similarly, geography has minimal impact on how negotiations should be conducted. Although negotiations with regional and transnational groups may involve a larger number of stakeholders, a key determinant of a successfully negotiated outcome is negotiating with the correct people. This was illustrated in the 'grocer from Quetta' debacle, in which the high-ranking Taliban leader with whom Western and Afghan officials had spent months negotiating, and to whom they had made considerable payments, turned out to be an impostor grocery merchant from a small Pakistani town.[17] Negotiating with the wrong person won't progress peace, even when dealing with nationalist terrorist groups.

Ideological typologies classify terrorists according to their belief systems. Thus, a terrorist group might be separatist, Marxist, ethnocentric, political, nationalistic, religious, revolutionary, social or any label that encapsulates their reason for engaging in terrorism. Such classifications reduce terrorist groups to one-dimensional entities and fail to adequately recognise their complex nature. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were both ethno-nationalist groups pursuing separatist goals due to religious (and, in the LTTE's case, social) beliefs that diverged significantly from their state majority. A similar case could be made about Daesh, which was established in opposition to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. The group's primary goal is to achieve sovereignty for the Sunni-majority regions within

its 'caliphate'.[18] The 'caliphate' isn't geographically limitless—it has an identifiable constituency within clearly defined boundaries.[19] Moreover, the distinction between a religiously and a politically motivated terrorist group is easily blurred, as religious beliefs are often being superimposed over a political agenda to gain greater sympathy and support from constituents.[20] The IRA could just as easily have been labelled a Catholic terrorist group, and the LTTE's desire for self-determination is as much driven by being a Hindu minority in a Buddhist country as it is by being a Tamil minority in a Sinhalese population. Nevertheless, despite terrorists' legitimate grievances often embodying multiple motivations, their behaviour is rarely attributed to "a complex array of factors and events".[21]

This reluctance to recognise terrorists' complexity gives rise to the prevailing belief among policymakers that certain ideologies are held more strongly, and are thus harder to negotiate with, than others. Bruce Hoffman, one of the leading scholars on terrorism, argues that religious fanaticism, in particular, produces "radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and worldviews".[22] Therefore, Hoffman distinguishes religious terrorism as a 'new' terrorism and elaborates that religious ideology renders terrorists without a wider constituency and thus that they're "undeterred by political, moral, or practical constraints".[23] Policymakers consequently often position religious terrorists as irrational, unrepresentative and illegitimate and having unviable interests, making negotiations with them strategically unpreferable.[24]

Yet, the 'new' designation is a misnomer. Religion has been a frequent, at times the only, justification for terrorism-related violence since the 1st century, as evidenced by the Zealots, the Order of Assassins and countless others.[25] Similarly, terrorist groups are labelled as being 'unique' so frequently that it raises the question: how many similar *sui generis* instances does it take to set a precedent? The IRA, the LTTE, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and every terrorist group that has happened to be the flavour of the month have been deemed "too extreme, too absolutist to negotiate with" due to their indiscriminate or abhorrent use of violence.[26] And yet, states engaged in negotiations with almost every one of those groups, often, as in the case of the IRA, successfully. Hence, it's not so much that we're facing a new wave of terrorism but rather that terrorism has returned to its roots in an ever-evolving world. It stands to reason, then, that CT measures with a historical track record, such as negotiating, could continue to be viable today. Thus, the assumption that certain ideologies are harder to negotiate with is flawed.

It's also incorrect to assume that terrorists who negotiate don't fervently believe in their cause. All terrorists truly believe in their causes, which would never gain momentum and would simply implode if they didn't. Neither the Irish Nationalists' desire for a united Ireland nor the Unionists' desire to remain with the UK diminished during, or since, the Good Friday Agreement talks. Similarly, the agreement reached between Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) maintained both parties' core goals. Ideology is thus an inappropriate indicator of whether a terrorist group can or ought to be negotiated with.

Instead, parties need to create an environment in which they can still have and pursue their goals, but agree to do so through nonviolent means.[27] This is where principled negotiation comes into its strength, as it encourages conflict parties to identify and address each other's interests, rather than their positions. Parties entered into the Northern Ireland negotiations to end violence, not each other. In this way, principled negotiations offer both states and terrorists a pacific avenue that doesn't make them appear weak to their constituencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this, it's clear that the prevailing typologies are insufficient for determining whether to negotiate with a terrorist group. Instead, I posit that strategic versus tactical terrorism is a more appropriate typology. Strategic terrorism is the use of terrorism as an end in and of itself. Tactical terrorism uses terrorism as a means to an end.[28] This typology simplifies William Zartman's absolutist versus contingent terrorism categorisation, as it removes the third category of conditional absolutists—terrorists who use absolutist tactics, but are open to negotiations.[29]

So, how do we differentiate between strategic and tactical terrorism? The most distinguishing characteristic of tactical terrorism is a willingness to negotiate.[30] In contrast, strategic terrorists have no desire to negotiate. Another key characteristic is a terrorist group's use of violence. Tactical terrorists have a low utility of violence, as they know that disproportional violence can turn their constituency against them.[31] In using terrorism for terrorism's sake, strategic terrorists have a high utility of violence. It's important to note that these characteristics—utility of violence and willingness to negotiate—aren't static designations. Either or both may fluctuate depending on a group's interactions with the state and other stakeholders. For instance, the utility of violence may increase, and willingness to negotiate decrease, following a state offensive against a terrorist group's constituency or the breach of a ceasefire agreement. Therefore, it's important to look at a terrorist group's entire history, and not just recent behaviours.[32]

Similarly, policymakers need to reassess their understanding of, and approach to, negotiations. Taking a principled approach to negotiations isn't only reflective of best practice, but increases the likelihood of reaching a successfully negotiated outcome.[33]

Going one step further, states should consider investing in 'track' diplomacy for the purposes of socialising terrorists into principled negotiation skills and practices. Organisations such as Geneva Call, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Independent Diplomat educate and equip terrorists to negotiate. The ICRC, in particular, has been fundamental in teaching international humanitarian law to terrorists and getting them to comply with it.[34] Such measures ensure that conflict parties have similar expectations about the negotiation process. Given that negotiations about negotiating are a common stumbling point for peace talks, sharing the same understanding of negotiations can minimise negotiations' failure rate.

Despite negotiation's successful track record of ending terrorism, further research and development is needed to increase its optimisation as a CT tool. Negotiating with pre-terrorist groups (groups expressing grievances, but that haven't yet resorted to terrorism) provides scholars and policymakers with non-terrorism comparisons. Similarly, providing greater transparency about negotiation successes and failures facilitates further analysis. Although the need for secrecy while conducting negotiations is paramount, plausible deniability after the fact significantly hinders research and advances in terrorism negotiations. Sharing experiences of negotiations with terrorists improves communal understandings and approaches to negotiation as a CT tool, enabling leaders and policymakers to make better strategic decisions about negotiating with terrorists. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation's report on Norway's mediation efforts in Sri Lanka is a wonderful example of this.[35] Norway's 12-year engagement in Sri Lanka was premised on its strong history of mediation and peace activism. The report was commissioned 'for the purpose of informing international peace efforts'.[36] Norway displays great courage in describing its own role in the Sri Lankan peace process as 'largely a story of failure'.[37] The report identifies factors that contributed to those failures and doesn't shy away from Norway's shortcomings. In so doing, it suggests invaluable lessons for peacebuilding, not just for Norway, but for all actors.

Through re-evaluating negotiations and terrorism, states will be better equipped to include negotiations in their CT toolboxes.

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COUNTERTERRORISM IN
Cyberspace

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Cyberspace has extended the reach of extremist action, providing new avenues for spreading propaganda, recruitment and raising funds. Driven by increases in the adoption of and access to technology by extremist organisations, CT efforts in cyberspace continue to be a focal point for many nations. While the cyber domain has extended the reach of terrorist organisations, it also offers new avenues for initiatives to combat extremist activity online and opportunities for industry and governmental cooperation.

There were significant developments in CT operations in cyberspace during 2018. They were driven by the emergence of new funding methods, increasingly anonymous avenues of propaganda dissemination and the rising use of offensive cyberweapons by both law enforcers and extremist organisations.

The use of virtual currencies (VCs)[1] by terrorist organisations has been of particular interest and a focus for regulatory efforts by governments to minimise the risk of funds reaching extremist groups. While the use of VCs by criminal groups is well documented, the exact scope and size of their use by extremist groups remain to be seen. That said, the anonymous and verifiable transfer of funds makes their potential impact significant.

Alongside religious extremism, far-right extremist groups have also developed their use of cyberspace. This has been seen on alternative social networking platforms such as Gab[2] and Voat,[3] which are exploited to spread extremist rhetoric. The use of such platforms raises a further debate on the ability of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to moderate content and combat activities of extremist groups online and remains an area of significant concern.

While the online space continues to be exploited by terrorist organisations, primarily for propaganda and recruitment, it also presents new avenues for combating extremist activity. In particular, the use of cyber offensive capabilities[4] by nations to augment traditional CT operations increased over 2018, and several nations claimed to possess such capabilities.

COUNTERING EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA IN CYBERSPACE

Extremist organisations continue to leverage cyberspace to extend the reach of their propaganda. The proliferation of darknet access, social networking sites and encrypted messaging platforms has enabled them to efficiently disseminate influential propaganda, training materials and official communications with followers.

Larger social networking platforms such as Twitter, Google and Facebook have had some success in flagging and removing terrorist content through inter-industry collaborations such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism.[5] The forum has led to the establishment of a joint hash database that, once unacceptable extremist content has been identified on one platform, facilitates its efficient identification and removal across other platforms.[6] By June 2018, the database held more than 88,000 unique entries.[7] This highlights the increasing use of algorithmic solutions, machine learning and semantic analysis across social networks to flag content as it's uploaded to sites. However, AI and machine learning can't be treated as a complete solution to removing extremist content online due to the dynamic nature of extremist propaganda efforts.

Larger platforms have worked actively to remove radical propaganda, driving some extremist organisations onto smaller unmoderated platforms, such as Voat, Gab and 4chan, that market themselves as hubs of free speech. Those platforms continue to be of concern, as they provide an unregulated and decentralised forum for extremist discourse that has an echo chamber effect. This widespread diffusion of radical content in cyberspace highlights the difficulty in using isolated approaches for content moderation, as there's no centralised gatekeeper to cyberspace. It's therefore crucial for policymakers and law enforcement at all jurisdictional levels to partner with industry and not-for-profit networks to help combat the rapid dissemination of extremist content online. This need for widespread coordinated collaboration offers some unique opportunities for hybrid CT initiatives that leverage multiple levels of industry, from payment portals to website hosts. It also highlights the value in policymakers leveraging tech providers to crowdsource innovative CT methods. Successful examples of this include the Tech Against Terrorism knowledge-sharing platform, which 'startups and small tech companies can use to better protect themselves from the terrorist exploitation of their services'.[8] Platforms such as this seek to provide specialised training and access to a collaborative forum to technology companies that may have their services exploited by extremist organisations.

The supply of training material through the intermittent appearance of high-quality English-language webzines such as *Inspire* and *Dabiq* isn't new.[9] However, the greater mainstream adoption of end-to-end encrypted platforms such as Whatsapp, Telegram and Signal, alongside a wider use of darknet hosts, makes the total removal of training manuals and propaganda impossible. These encrypted platforms have facilitated a greater reach from extremist organisations to targets for communication, recruitment and training.[10]

In response to the use of encrypted communication by extremist organisations, many nations (including the US, Australia, Russia and the UK) have continued to debate possible legislative responses to the challenge that encryption poses to security.[11]

Examples of this include the recent Australian Access and Assistance Bill, which would compel tech companies to build capabilities to circumvent encryption on requested devices.[12]

While the rapid adoption of encrypted platforms has made the removal of propaganda challenging, intergovernmental efforts such as Europol's EU Internet Referral Unit have enhanced the ability to detect and remove extremist content by streamlining identification and reporting. This highlights the importance of continuing cross-jurisdictional collaboration on CT action in cyberspace.

COUNTERING TERRORIST ACTION ONLINE

Cyberspace has also facilitated the growth of decentralised terrorist organisations that use it to mount online attacks. Those groups include the Islamic State (IS) affiliate United Cyber Caliphate, which focuses its activities on targeting enemy networks as well as publishing 'kill lists'.[13] The group returned to operations in 2018 after a period of inactivity and is alleged to have defaced many websites hosted in Canada, Norway, Indonesia and Brazil.[14]

The attribution of attacks to terrorist hacking groups such as the United Cyber Caliphate is questionable, as many of the claimed attacks have later been attributed to nation-state actors.[15] Whether the hackers are states or terrorist groups, combating their efforts requires better cyber hygiene.[16] This includes simple measures, such as effective password management and regular software updates. The implementation of these basic cybersecurity standards, particularly for critical national infrastructure, effectively hardens targeted systems against cybercriminals, adversary states and terrorists.[17]

Nations have begun to openly state their offensive cyber capabilities. The US intelligence community has identified more than 30 states that are pursuing cyber offensive weapons,[18] and well over 100 countries are able to launch cyberattacks.[19] Offensive cyber capability has been used successfully in widespread campaigns to weaken extremist organisations' social media presence, command and operational control.[20] This method is also particularly effective with groups such as the United Cyber Caliphate that have geographically decentralised networks but a centralised online presence, as it provides a single point of contact for CT operations.

Offensive cyberweapons were effectively used by the US against IS in 2017, along with traditional CT efforts. In one documented instance:

> US forces used capabilities from space and cyber to augment traditional kinetic CT methods, denying the enemy's primary command post, forcing him to move and unveil his alternate command posts.[21]

This highlights the growing use of offensive cyber capabilities as a tool for multidomain operations. In the context of the US, the White House has 'authorized offensive cyber operations' against US adversaries; this is in line with a more lenient attitude on the use of digital weaponry.[22]

COUNTERING TERRORIST USE OF VIRTUAL CURRENCIES

VCs and other digital assets, such as bitcoin, have enabled the efficient digital transfer of funds between two parties, independently of any central bank, and have been touted as a replacement for traditional legal tender. Forming one of the largest unregulated markets in the world, VCs had a market valuation of $300 billion by July 2018.[23] This has opened new online markets and resulted in anonymous and verifiable transfers of funds, goods and financial services outside of traditional banking systems.

Although digital currencies provide benefits to individuals, just like other financial services they also present opportunities for abuse by criminals. This has driven discussion of whether VCs provide any additional benefits over more mainstream forms of funding and, if so, how CT initiatives should combat the use of digital assets in terrorist financing.

While the use of VCs by criminal organisations is well established,[24] documented evidence of the use of VCs for funding terrorism is limited, and there's 'little evidence that they have been adopted on an institutional level'.[25] However, the promise of anonymity and decentralisation that VCs offer has driven some extremist organisations to promote their use as an option for the raising, moving and storing of finances.

In January 2018, a 'how to' guide to digital currency was published in the al-Qaeda-linked webzine *al-Haqiqa*.[26] The article outlined basic instructions for VC use in terrorism financing, including a detailed breakdown of the benefits and dangers. The method of terrorism financing described in the article was later observed in 2018 when a New York woman pleaded guilty to providing material support to IS after obtaining

US$62,000 in bitcoin and then wiring it to an IS-held account.[27] This illustrates how peer-to-peer exchanges of VCs could transform more traditional networks of money transfer, such as the *hawala* system,[28] and circumvent anti-money-laundering and counter terror financing (AML/CTF) legislation.[29]

It's evident that notionally anonymous funds transfer could be attractive for use in terrorism financing on a global scale, as it helps to further obscure the financing of terrorist organisations.[30] Despite this, there remain significant questions as to the exact size and scope of the risk. A 2018 report published by the European Parliament found that the use of VCs by extremist organisations encompasses:

- access to financial services and illicit products via the darknet
- crowdfunding campaigns conducted on social media and encrypted messaging platforms
- cross-border peer-to-peer transfers of funds.[31]

The report also identified several possible developments that could increase the size and scope of this risk:

- the proliferation of VCs with stronger privacy and anonymity protections
- the more widespread adoption and use of encryption, including on social media
- an increased convergence of terrorism with cybercrime through the crime–terror nexus
- the widespread lack of AML/CTF regulation in the VC market.[32]

The growth in the VC market over 2018, alongside the documented use of digital assets to avoid various regulations, has forced many states to consider their options for digital asset regulation (Table 6).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Terrorism remains a critical global threat that's rapidly adapting its operations to the increasing importance of cyberspace and the widespread availability of technology. It's therefore vital that future CT initiatives account for the dynamic role that cyberspace plays in funding, promoting and facilitating terrorism.

Methods of funding for extremist organisations have largely followed the same trends as for criminal networks, including the widespread adoption of VCs, driving law enforcers to review current digital asset regulations.

The widespread dissemination of propaganda is an ongoing issue, and there's been a growing use of encrypted platforms to host terrorist communications and training material.

Importantly, online CT initiatives will be successful only with greater collaboration by all players in this space, including industry, government and law enforcement.

In light of the increasing role of cyberspace in CT operations, I make the following recommendations.

REGULATE POINTS WHERE VCS ARE EXCHANGED

While VCs aren't one of the core methods of terrorist financing, their emergence in crowdfunding campaigns has highlighted the need to account for them in CT efforts. The ease with which they enable the anonymous transfer of funds between users highlights the growth potential of their use for financing terrorist organisations. Governments should therefore consider the regulation of points of entry and exit to digital currencies. This includes trading platforms and vendors accepting VCs.

TABLE 6: Regulations on virtual currencies, G20 countries, 2018

Measures currently applied	Countries
Prohibition of issue/use/dealing/settling of virtual currencies, cryptocurrencies, crypto-assets	China, India, Indonesia
Regulation of intermediaries/exchanges and others (using existing AML/CTF regulation)	Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, US
Suspicious transaction reporting only	Argentina, South Africa
Preparing laws or regulations	Brazil, Canada, EU, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, UK

Source: Financial Action Task Force, *FATF report to the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors*, July 2018, 3, online.

EXPAND COLLABORATION WITH INDUSTRY

Governments should consider increasing funding for the development of alternative technologies that focus on CT online. States should support forums for cross-industry collaboration, as such forums provide new avenues to combat the spread of violent extremism and augment pre-existing CT efforts.

Turning to companies for support rather than censoring content encourages the technology community to tackle terrorist exploitation of cyberspace. Providing multiple avenues of interaction between government and industry gives law enforcers alternatives in the supply chain when platforms are unwilling to cooperate in removing extremist content or assets.

INCREASE CYBER HYGIENE

Many of the same system and personnel weaknesses exploited by cybercriminals (such as unpatched software and phishing emails) could be used by terrorists in cyberattacks to gain access to computer networks. Therefore, governments should encourage basic cyber hygiene, including regular updates to software and appropriate password management. These standards should be implemented rigorously in critical infrastructure sectors to harden targets against attack.

BRIDGE THE CYBER TALENT GAP

The recruitment of technical professionals remains a major blockage to effective CT efforts in cyberspace. It's estimated that the cyber skills gap will grow to a global deficit of 1.5 million cybersecurity workers by 2020. To help combat this, states should consider greater investment in the training, recruitment and retention of cyber professionals in CT to create a pipeline of skilled specialists.

MAKE PROPORTIONATE USE OF OFFENSIVE CYBER CAPABILITIES IN CT

As more nations begin to openly state their intention to pursue offensive cyber capabilities, states should consider the targeted and proportionate use of such capabilities in combined cyber and kinetic CT operations. This greater integration of targeted offensive tactics online will support a broader multidomain approach to CT initiatives.

NOTES

1   The term 'virtual currency' (VC) is used in this chapter to refer to a solely digital currency asset. Cryptocurrencies are one form, in which encryption is used to regulate the generation of currency units and verify the transfer of funds independently of a central bank. Another form of VCs is in-game currencies, which have historically been used in some terrorist financing campaigns.

2   The platform was created by Andrew Torba in August 2016, who was 25 at the time. As of September 2018, around 630,000 people used the platform. Torba has claimed that he was driven to create the platform during the 2016 presidential election because he had read that social media platforms such as Facebook may unfairly promote liberal posts and messaging as oppose to conservative ones. He has added that he wanted a platform that had no censorship, although he claimed 'Every major communication outlet, every major social network, is run, owned, controlled and operated by progressive leaders, progressive workers in Silicon Valle.' Gab however came to the attention of well-known alt-right, extremist, and fringe figures, such as Richard Spencer, Milo Yiannopoulos and Alex Jones, who struggled to use mainstream social media platforms. Caitlin Dickson, Christopher Wilson, 'Who Is Gab Founder Andrew Torba?', *The Huff Post*, 30 October 2018, online; Stephen Smiley, Angela Lavoipierre, 'What's the story behind Gab, the favoured platform of the US alt-right?' *ABC News*, 30 October 2018, online.

3   Voat was launched following ne of Reddit's many crackdowns on offensive or illegal content. It was founded in 2014 by a part-time Swedish college student as part of a school project. It was run for a time by two students studying computer science and economics at University of Zurich in Switzerland. The site however claimed that its purpose was to promote free speech, which basically meant that members could engage in any form of speech including establishing such forums as /v/FatPeopleHate and /v/CoonTown (both re-creations of forums wiped from Reddit). In 2017, Voat ceased its operations as it could no longer sustain the US$6,000 that hosting the platform cost. Brian Feldman, 'The Death of Alt-Right Reddit Is a Good Reminder That the Market Does Not Like Nazi Internet', *The New York Magazine*, 18 May 2017, online. Ian Sherr, Max Taves, Brett Murphy, 'Meet Voat, the website that wants to be the anti-Reddit', *CNet.com*, 17 July 2015, online.

4   The term 'offensive cyber' refers to activities in cyberspace that manipulate, deny, disrupt, degrade or destroy targeted computers, information systems or networks.

5   R Katz, 'To curb terrorist propaganda online, look to Youtube. No, really', *Wired*, 20 October 2018, online.

6   Monika Bickert, 'Hard questions: what are we doing to stay ahead of terrorists?', *Facebook*, 2018, online.

7   Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), 'An update on our efforts to use technology, support smaller companies and fund research to fight terrorism online', GIFCT, 18 June 2018, online.

8   Tech Against Terrorism, *About Tech Against Terrorism*, 2018, online.

9   Marc Ambinder, 'Al Qaeda's first English language magazine is here', *The Atlantic*, 30 June 2010, online.

10 PE Nilsson, *Open source jihad: problematizing the academic discourse on Islamic terrorism in contemporary Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

11 Paul Karp, 'Asio says it urgently needs powers forcing telcos to help break phone encryption', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2018, online; Robert Merkel, 'The government's encryption laws finally passed despite concerns over security', *The Conversion*, 7 December 2018, online.

12 James Elton-Pym, 'A front door, not a back door: Dutton's decryption laws explained', *SBS News*, 26 November 2018, online.

13 Pierluigi Paganini, 'United Cyber Caliphate published a kill list of 8,786 targets in the US, UK', *Security Affairs*, 6 April 2017, online.

14 'Pro-ISIS hacker group "United Cyber Caliphate" defaces several websites', *Memri Cyber and Jihad Lab*, 4 June 2018, online.

15 John R Schindler, 'False flags: the Kremlin's hidden cyber hand', *Observer*, 18 June 2016, online.

16 The term 'cyber hygiene' refers to the basic practices that users of computers and other devices can take to maintain system health and improve online security.

17 Examples of applicable cybersecurity frameworks include the ISO 27001 and US NIST systems.

18 Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) (2018). *Worldwide threat assessment of the US intelligence community*, DNI, Washington DC, 13 February 2018, 5, online.

19 Quoted in Mike Levine, 'Russia tops list of 100 countries that could launch cyberattacks on the US', *ABC News*, 18 May 2017, online.

20 M Smeets, 'The strategic promise of offensive cyber operations', *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 2018, 12(3):90–113.

21 Ryan Duffy, 'The US military combined cyber and kinetic operations to hunt down ISIS last year, general says', *Cyberscoop*, 29 May 2018, online.

22 European Parliament, 'US counter-terrorism since 9/11: trends under the Trump administration', European Parliament, 2018, 10.

23 Sean Foley, Jonathan Karlsen, Talis J Putniņš, 'Sex, drugs, and bitcoin: how much illegal activity is financed through cryptocurrencies?', *SSRN*, 2018.

24 Usman Chohan, 'International law enforcement responses to cryptocurrency accountability: Interpol Working Group', *SSRN*, 25 April 2018, 1.

25 Nikita Malik, 'Is bitcoin a credible payment system for terrorists?', *Forbes*, 16 November 2018, online.

26 Michael S Smith II, 'Released yesterday, new issue of al-Qa'ida-linked ezine *al-Haqiqa* contains pieces re the importance of "media jihad" and ways jihadis can use bitcoin … Yes, al-Haqiqa publishers, spies are indeed everywhere', *Twitter*, 1 February 2018, online.

27 'Pakistan-born woman pleads guilty to providing material support to ISIS', *The Times of India*, 27 November 2018, online.

28 *Hawala* is a traditional system of money transfer in which an agent, who is provided funds in one location, instructs an associate in the final destination to pay funds to the final recipient.

29 Haid Haid, 'The evolving economic model of ISIS post-caliphate', *The Atlantic Council*, 13 July 2017, online.

30 VCs range in their level of anonymity depending on coin type and use, although the wider media largely describe all VCs as anonymous.

31 European Parliament, *Virtual currencies and terrorist financing: assessing the risks and evaluating responses*, Directorate General For Internal Policies, 2018, 9.

32 European Parliament, *Virtual currencies and terrorist financing: assessing the risks and evaluating responses*, 9.

Social media

AND COUNTERTERRORISM

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This chapter examines what social media platforms are doing to counter the spread of online extremist content.[1] Importantly, whereas in the 2000s and early 2010s, much of the online Salafi-jihadi content was found in specific forums, with the development of Twitter and other platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, Salafi-jihadis migrated to those new spaces to continue to promote their ideology.

To understand how the platforms are countering the dissemination of extremist, violent propaganda, it's necessary to first have an adequate understanding of the threat. Therefore, this chapter begins by outlining the problem and examining how terrorist groups make use of social media platforms to spread their extremist messages. The second section broadly examines how social media platforms have reacted to this trend over the past 12 months, focusing predominantly on their use of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) technology to remove content. The third section explores some of the future challenges in this space and the work that remains to be done by social media companies to keep pace with technological and social trends. It examines this issue from a global perspective, but with a primary focus on the Australian context. The chapter concludes by providing a series of policy recommendations, targeted towards practitioners in the fields of CT and countering violent extremism (CVE), to help counter the spread of online extremism.

Due to the scope of this chapter, it focuses on the online activities of Islamist extremist movements—predominantly Islamic State (IS) and, to a lesser extent, al-Qaeda. However, we're increasingly seeing the use of social media by far-right groups for recruitment and propaganda purposes.[2] As such groups continue to grow their presence online, an interesting area of future study will be some of the similarities in how the different groups—Islamist and far-right—use social media.[3]

SETTING THE SCENE: HOW ARE EXTREMIST GROUPS USING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

If groups such as al-Qaeda and IS have taught us anything, it's that modern terrorist movements have become extremely adept at making innovative use of emerging technology and platforms such as social media. The reason why social media is such a vital tool is because they are independent from mass media—they disseminate information, as oppose to controlling the information, which is what traditional media outlets do.[4]

These platforms are used for radicalisation, recruitment, including the provision of instruction on how to commit violent acts, giving rise to virtual planners.

These individuals use online communications and encryption to advice, promote, guide individuals in how to commit acts of terror. Under Islamic State, the virtual planner poses a major threat because unlike al-Qaeda, the Islamic State is uninterested as much in complex operation, as their focus is with sowing terror.[5]

Recent research from Tech Against Terrorism, an initiative led by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate that supports technology-industry efforts to counter terrorist exploitation of the internet, found that between July and December 2017 terrorist movements used more than 150 different platforms for dissemination purposes.[6]

By breaking down both geographical and economic barriers, such platforms connect people who would otherwise be unable to connect. Before, individuals would receive guidance and training from terrorist organisations in person. Now, those same groups simply inspire people to carry out attacks on their own, for which the group can claim credit if they're successful. The phenomenon of virtual terrorism,[7] aptly called 'crowdsourced' terrorism, is further evidence of the innovative ways groups such as IS use social media. According to Jeh Johnson, former US Secretary of Homeland Security, this represents an 'entirely new phase in the global terrorist threat'.[8]

While groups such as IS and AQ have long outsourced the conduct of attacks to followers, social media enabled the phenomenon of crowdsourced terrorism to become more widespread by allowing it to reach more people in a shorter time and by facilitating collaboration between individuals who are geographically distant. Thus, for example, despite being based in the US since 2010, the accused attacker in the October 2017 New York truck attack, Sayfullo Saipov, was inspired by IS videos that he watched on his mobile phone. Following the attack, which left eight people dead and 12 injured, a court-ordered search of two mobile phones found in Saipov's rented truck found 90 videos and 3,800 IS-related propaganda photos.[9] It was recently revealed that Neil Prakash was linked to an attempt to bomb the Statue of Liberty, which was foiled because one of the men involved, Munter Omar Saleh, was an FBI informant.[10]

Social media also allow terrorist groups to foster a virtual community and a sense of belonging, and research on radicalisation suggests that their methods involve taking advantage of individuals' feelings of loneliness and alienation.[11] Mia Bloom, Professor of Communication at Georgia State University, posits that, as well as targeting vulnerable people, social media are unique in their ability to appeal to 'well-adjusted, well-integrated individuals'.[12] For example, it remains puzzling to many how an individual such as Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—a self-confessed stoner who 'listened to Jay-Z and watched The Walking Dead'[13]—could orchestrate the Boston marathon terrorist attack that killed three people and wounded hundreds of others.

According to Bloom, groups such as IS use social media to present content using a 'schedule of positive reinforcement that modifies behavior, like gambling or playing slot machines'. By manipulating the user experience in this innovative way, groups can foster a type of addiction to the platform and to its content.

With the spread of globalisation came the spread of technology and the realisation that social media are very effective at spreading information rapidly to a broad audience. The relative ease of accessing a smartphone means that more people can engage with, and be inspired by, the harmful rhetoric that these groups propagate. Combine all of this—the ability of social media to transcend geographical and economic barriers, foster a virtual community and a sense of belonging, and rapidly spread information—and it's clear why social media has become an indispensable ally in the promotion and communication efforts of global terrorist movements.

Through incidents such as the 2015 San Bernardino shooting in California, Australia's own foiled Sydney airport terrorist plot, and, the 2018 Mako Brimob prison riots in Indonesia, extremist groups have demonstrated that they're able to use social media to outsource the conduct of attacks to their followers. To date, they haven't been very successful, but anecdotal evidence indicates that they are clearly trying.

Using encrypted message boards and chat rooms—all features of modern social media platforms—those attacks were all, to some extent, conceived and guided by operatives in areas controlled by IS whose only connection to the would-be attacker was the internet.[14] Extremist groups use social media not just to post propaganda, but to spread training manuals and advice on how to obtain and import weapons, how to make bombs and how to perform single

jihadi attacks on people using nothing more than a kitchen knife.[15] Following the foiled Sydney airport plot, for example, it was alleged that the two brothers involved, Khaled Khayat and Mahmoud Khayat, had been in contact with a senior IS controller in Syria, who instructed them on how to make sophisticated self-timed bombs using an improvised device inside a meat mincer.[16] According to Australian police, the plot was prevented when Israeli intelligence agencies intercepted communications between the brothers and the Syrian jihadist.[17] This has emphasised why some have highlighted the need for access to encrypted communication, with the director of ASIO, Duncan Lewis testifying before the parliamentary joint committee on intelligence and security that there are 'cases afoot at the moment where this legislation will directly assist,' because 90% of ASIO's priority cases are encrypted. Andrew Colvin, the Australian Federal Police commissioner, has also supported the need for better access to encrypted communication.[18]

IS's use of social media for marketing and communication has been credited not only with 'socialising terror'[19] through public opinion as previous terrorist groups did, but also with making terror popular, desirable and imitable.[20] At its peak, IS controlled more than 46,000 Twitter accounts, which it used to spread its messages directly to the smartphones of its audiences, avoiding the mediation of gatekeepers in traditional media.[21] While data from the BBC suggests a steady decline in IS's media output from November 2016 to November 2017—since the fall of Raqqa in October 2017, IS's daily media output decreased from 29 to just 10 items per day[22]—that decrease shouldn't be mistaken for a decline in the group's ability to influence disaffected people globally to act on its behalf. The most recent data from the BBC (Figure 2) indicates that the group maintains a robust online presence and has taken to using

FIGURE 2: IS media output, January 2017 to September 2018
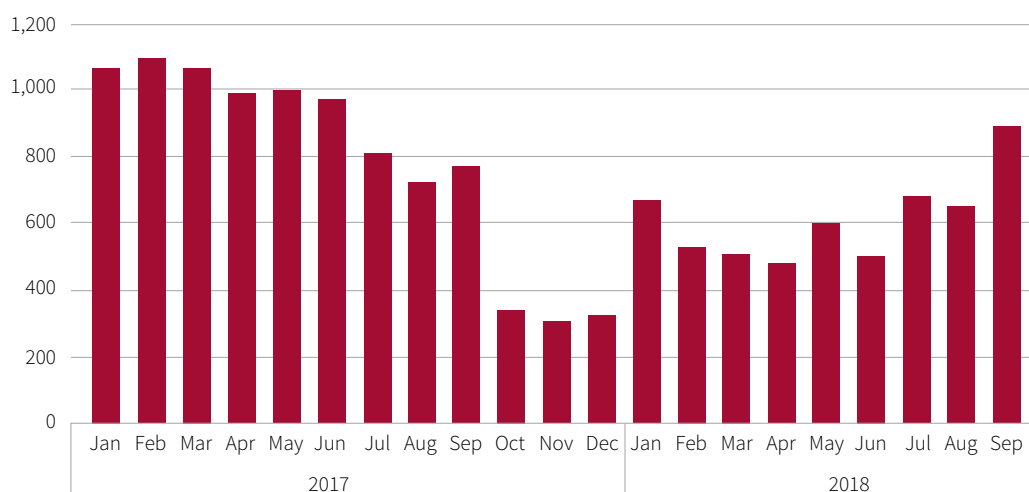
Source: BBC Monitoring, 'Analysis: Islamic State—one year on since loss of Raqqa, BBC, 17 October 2018, online.

encrypted platforms such as Telegram or smaller social media platforms. Smaller platforms' lack of resources and expertise mean that IS is able to maintain its recruitment efforts, despite the best efforts of the big social media platforms, and incite individuals to perpetrate terrorist acts in their countries of residence.

THE RESPONSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In seeking to understand the reaction of social media platforms, it should come as no surprise that the platforms have found it difficult to come up with adequate protections that keep pace with the online activities of terrorist groups. What's clear from the first part of this chapter, from examples such as the Boston bombing or the Sydney airport plot, is that groups such as IS are highly innovative in their use of social media technology and are able to quickly adapt to new trends in technology to diversify their propaganda operations so as to evade detection.[23]

Given the volume of content being uploaded on social media platforms—Facebook, for example, has approximately 1.49 billion active daily users, 2.27 billion active monthly users, and 100 million hours of video watched each day[24]—big tech companies are increasingly relying on AI to monitor and remove extremist content. In December 2017, YouTube announced that it was investing heavily in machine-learning technology, claiming that from June to December 2017, 98% of the videos that it removed for violent extremism were flagged by its machine-learning algorithms.[25] YouTube further claims that, since introducing those algorithms, the number of videos removed with fewer than 10 views increased from 8% to over 50%.[26]

Meanwhile, Facebook's use of AI includes image matching, which prevents users from uploading a photo or video that has already been identified as terrorist content, and language matching, which operates in a similar way but is used to identify text.[27] Using AI techniques, the platform has increased its ability to identify and remove clusters of online terrorist activity. This involves identifying a group or page that supports terrorist content and using algorithms to 'fan out' and identify groups with similar attributes that may also be supporting terrorism. Similar attributes include things such as sharing a similar friendship network or liking similar content.[28] Using machine-learning tools, Facebook has seen a decrease in the amount of time terrorist content reported by users remains on the platform, from 43 hours in the first quarter of 2018 to 18 hours in the third quarter of 2018.[29] While that decrease is certainly a step in the right direction, there are several limitations that arise from overreliance on AI technology, which are touched on below.

Recognising that terrorist groups are increasingly innovative and that removing extremist content from one platform doesn't stop groups from using other platforms, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) created a shared industry hash database.[30] Formalised in June 2017, the database collates all digital fingerprints (hashes) of previously flagged images or videos and allows GIFCT member companies to use those hashes to identify and remove matching content that violates the platforms' policies. With more than 10 platforms currently contributing to the shared database of flagged extremist content, GIFCT was on track to meet its target of 100,000 hashes by the end of 2018.[31]

Extremist groups aren't alone in their ability to be innovative in using modern technology. The 'redirect method' is one of the more innovative approaches to countering their online rhetoric. [32] First conceptualised in August 2015 by Google's parent company, Alphabet Inc., this project is an example of how social media companies can effectively counter extremist content by combining qualitative human input with automated tools. The method employs readily available online resources—existing online videos and targeted advertising tools—to counter online recruitment and propaganda. Applying first-hand insights from interviews with young girls who had once aspired to be so-called 'IS brides', or defecting former fighters, the method is able to directly target its messaging to those deemed 'most susceptible' to the online activities of IS. Once targeted, the method redirects those individuals towards curated YouTube videos debunking IS recruiting themes.

Injecting a human element into the project and conducting first-hand research taught the team that the most powerful way to combat radicalism online wasn't to remove content, but to help would-be terrorists get a sense of the reality of what they were signing up for. Throughout its eight-week pilot program, the campaign reached an estimated 320,900 unique users who devoured over 500,000 minutes of online video content.[33] Using data analytics tools, the method was then able to measure the impact of the campaign and substantially prove that its targeted videos had reached users who were sympathetic towards IS.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Future challenges in this space arise from the social media business model, the shift to encrypted platforms and smaller platforms, and reliance on AI technology.

REASSESSING THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUSINESS MODEL

Despite significant strides by social media platforms, more work remains to be done. Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook have come under increased scrutiny for their reliance on the use of algorithms to control the content that users see.[34] Unlike the internet, Facebook and YouTube aren't public spaces in which all content is equal. While anyone can join them, once a person has created an account, the content they have access to is largely controlled by the companies using machine-learning algorithms. These are private companies, the main goal of which is arguably to generate profit through advertising revenue. Therefore, they have every incentive to gather as much data as possible and feed that data into algorithms that are used to optimise the content that their users see. For example, if a user tends to search for videos on a particular topic, the algorithms will recognise that pattern of behaviour and begin feeding similar content to the user. Over time, the user will no longer have to search for content—it will simply be presented to them.

Research conducted by Zeynep Tufekci found that YouTube automatically guides viewers to more extreme versions of what they might be searching for: 'A search on vegetarianism might lead to veganism; jogging to ultra-marathons; Donald Trump's popularity to white supremacist rants; and Hillary Clinton to 9/11 trutherism.'[35] What may have started as a genuine curiosity to better understand the political situation in Syria is transformed into daily updates from IS's propaganda machine. This is further compounded by the fact that we know, from analysis conducted by Charlie Winter for *Quilliam*, that the conflict in Syria plays an important role in the strategic thinking behind IS's propaganda strategy: 'Graphic evidence of civilian casualties is Islamic State's lifeblood and the more graphic the evidence, the more powerful the propaganda.'[36] In other words, the group relies heavily upon the victimhood narrative to recruit people online. Because YouTube promotes, recommends and disseminates videos in a manner that appears to constantly up the stakes, an interest in the Syrian conflict can be transformed into something more sinister with just a few clicks. Given the billions of individuals who frequent the platform, YouTube is arguably 'one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century'.[37]

As in the YouTube business model, graphic content on platforms such as Facebook does not only benefit the propaganda efforts of extremist groups. According to one of Facebook's early investors, Roger McNamee, the decision to keep sensitive content on the platform is a deliberate part of the business model:

It's the really extreme, really dangerous form of content that attracts the most highly engaged people on the platform … Facebook has learned that the people on the extremes are the really valuable ones because one person on either extreme can often provoke 50 or 100 other people and so they want as much extreme content as they can get.[38]

Until we begin to more seriously question the business models that have emerged in the dominant social media platforms, this extremist rabbit hole will continue to be a problem long into the future.

THE SHIFT TO ENCRYPTED PLATFORMS

The speed of technological change means that social media companies and policymakers are often playing catch-up with the online activities of terrorist networks. For example, by the time Twitter stepped up efforts to police IS content, shutting down *Salafi-jihadi* accounts and removing extremist content within minutes of it being posted, the group had already moved most of its online activities to the encrypted messaging service, Telegram.[39] Salafi-jihadists have been drawn to Telegram because it provides a secret chat facility, which heavily encrypts messages between users with a unique key to avoid interception by hackers or government agencies. When the platform first appeared in 2013, its developers were so confident of its security that they twice offered a £122,000 reward to the first person who could crack its encryption.[40] Research from Australia's Department of Home Affairs suggests that, by as early as 2020, communications by terrorist and criminal networks are expected to be entirely encrypted.[41] Of the 'top priority' cases currently under review by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 90% are affected by encryption, and 90% of data intercepted by the Australian Federal Police is similarly affected.

Unlike the privacy and security settings of platforms that use an open-interface model (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), those of encrypted platforms are protected. This means that the platforms are harder to police and monitor, as authorities are unable to access and view the content without already being members of the chat room or channel.[42] While Australian security agencies can access encrypted data using specialist decryption techniques, that can take time, leaving them unable to keep pace with the activities of extremist groups. To speed things up, the Australian Government introduced the Assistance and Access Bill to parliament in October 2018 (adopted in 6 December 2018) to 'update existing search warrant powers to account for the growing complexity of encrypted

communications devices and their use by terrorist groups'. The law provides law enforcers with the 'tools to enable them to more effectively investigate criminal activity online.[43] Supporters of the Bill see it as a necessary measure for social media providers to take their responsibilities regarding illegal content more seriously, while critics view it as an immense threat to freedom of expression. This balancing act is unlikely to disappear and will remain an enduring challenge into the future. Indeed, as AI and machine learning advance, the very meaning (and indeed relevance) of concepts such as 'consent', 'privacy' and 'free speech' will change, and it will be harder for laws and regulators to keep up with both technological progress and the evolution of social norms applying to the technology.[44]

THE SHIFT TO SMALLER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The most recent Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate *Trends alert*, for November 2018, highlights another future challenge in this area, arguing that more support is needed for smaller technology platforms to counter terrorist content. According to the directorate's research, groups are making use of the more relaxed security controls and lack of financial resources on smaller platforms to continue to spread their messages. Data from the Counter Extremism Project suggests that, despite the significant strides being made by the big social media companies in reducing the availability of extremist material on their platforms, that material remains accessible on smaller social media platforms.[45] Moreover, due to their lack of resources, smaller platforms are unable to invest in many of the AI and machine-learning algorithms that the larger networks have used to monitor and remove content.[46]

Analysts who have studied the workings and operations of IS since its inception argue that, because of its significant loss of territory, it's likely to continue to invest heavily in its media efforts, partly to inflate its dwindling presence on the ground, to keep its fighters and supporters on board and to appeal to new recruits. As it becomes more and more difficult to do that via the big social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, the group will rely on smaller networks, encrypted networks, or both. Therefore, the move towards those platforms is an enduring challenge for both governments and social media companies and should be monitored closely.

RELIANCE ON AI TECHNOLOGY

Finally, social media companies continue to be defeated by extremists in part because they rely too heavily on technologists and technical detection to catch bad actors. AI and machine learning will greatly assist in cleaning up nefarious activity, but will, at least in the short term, fail to detect material that hasn't been seen before. Threat intelligence predicting how bad actors will use social media platforms to advance their causes must be used to generate behavioural indicators that inform technical detection. In other words, those who understand the intentions and actions of criminals and terrorists must work alongside technologists to sustain the integrity of social media platforms. Some social media companies have already moved in this direction, such as in the 'redirect method' project described above.

Because so much faith is being placed on AI it is worth noting a recent study by Amnesty International on the limitations of AI in online content moderation. In their *Troll Patrol* project, Amnesty used crowdsourcing, data science and machine learning to measure violence and abuse against women on Twitter.[47] In partnership with Element AI, an artificial intelligence company, Amnesty developed a machine-learning tool that used the data compiled in the study to try and automatically identify abusive tweets.[48] On completion of the project, the researchers found that this tool achieved a 50% accuracy level when compared with human experts. In other words, 'it identified two in every 14 tweets as abusive or problematic, whereas [the] experts identified one in every 14 tweets as abusive or problematic.'[49] That overcorrection points out the risks of censorship inherent in even the most state-of-the-art automated moderation. Although the study was focused on a different kind of content, it nonetheless highlights the risks of leaving it to algorithms to determine what constitutes extremist content online and demonstrates why social media platforms must use AI in combination with human review.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

It's more important than ever to analyse and understand the role of social media platforms in the radicalisation and recruitment of terrorists in order to come up with efficient ways to counter it. The success of groups such as IS on social media demonstrates how, in this digitally mediated world, it's crucial to consider not only what those groups are communicating but *how* they're communicating it.[50] This includes the channels that it's distributed on in order to engage effectively with target audiences. Digital communication is also a central CT strategy, and any future military, political or intelligence operation should take this into consideration.

The following policy recommendations are targeted towards practitioners in CT and CVE to help counter the spread of online extremism via social media platforms:

- Increase transparency and public participation in rule making for digital platforms, giving users a greater say on how their data is used and stored and, subsequently, how their daily news feeds are curated.

- Social media platforms must move away from their reliance on AI technology and machine-learning algorithms and work more closely with human intelligence, which can better account for context and cultural understandings. At best, automation should be part of a larger content moderation system characterised by human judgement and greater transparency.

- The big social media platforms must ensure that the lessons learned by members of the GIFCT are shared with and implemented by smaller companies. While Tech Against Terrorism's knowledge sharing platform is a step in the right direction, governments must continue to place greater pressure on the big social media companies, for example through the use of economic sanctions.

- Increased transparency by Facebook, YouTube and Twitter about the numbers of posts and other content taken down is a positive step, but we need more information about the *nature* of the content that's being removed. In order to predict future trends, it's crucial to understand the type of content that we're seeing. For example, what languages are being used? What groups operate on particular platforms? What main types of content (video, images, memes and so on) are we seeing disseminated, and to whom?

- As social media companies embrace the use of machine learning to flag content for moderation, it's more important than ever that they're transparent about the algorithms they use. Companies should publish information about training data, methodologies and moderation policies. We need greater transparency about the types of people who are doing the removing. What's the ratio of human to artificial intelligence? When individuals are in control, what's their background and what makes them qualified to judge whether online content is extreme or not?

- To be effective, online counter-narrative campaigns should be based on true stories of people who have experienced first hand the suffering caused by the extremist group. Moreover, those campaigns should be distributed through non-government channels in order to obtain more engagement and views. Again, this will only be effective when combining qualitative human input with automated tools.

Salafi-jihadi groups have changed the threat landscape through their use of social media. Their ability to represent both a physical and a virtual state has enabled them to create a global network of content and actors whose goal is to leverage the power of social media to recruit new adherents and perpetrate attacks. In seeking to counter those activities, Australia's approach must recognise the unpredictability of the online arena and implement countermeasures that take the potential of terrorism combined with social media into careful and serious consideration. The policy recommendations above will be a good first step and will help both governments and social media companies more effectively deal with future challenges in this space. What's clear is that terrorist groups remain highly innovative, so our response to this issue needs to be equally imaginative.

NOTES

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Countering terrorism financing:

AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY

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Australia's counter-terrorism financing (CTF) system seeks to detect, disrupt and deny funding to terrorists, which can lead to funding shortfalls that limit their capacity to mount attacks or the scale and severity of those attacks. While denying funds isn't a 'silver bullet', as in all aspects of life, people and organisations can do more with greater funds than with less.

As Australia's National Counter-Terrorism Plan notes, '(i)n the interest of public safety, early disruption of planned attacks will often be prioritised over waiting to gather further evidence for a successful prosecution'.[1] One way to disrupt terrorist plots is to arrest suspects on terrorism financing charges.

Of course, to disrupt and deny terrorism financing, attempts to provide funding to terrorists must first be detected. This requires intelligence work from organisations such as state and federal police forces, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and AUSTRAC, which is Australia's financial intelligence agency. It also requires the financial intelligence and reporting efforts of private-sector organisations such as banks and financial services companies.

So, how has Australia's CTF system performed? First, over the last year convictions of CTF charges have been hard to obtain, primarily because it's proved difficult to get sufficient evidence to prosecute under the Criminal Code.[2] It's difficult to obtain evidence that funds were made available to a terrorist organisation and to prove that an individual *knew* the funds would be used by a terrorist organisation or to commit a terrorist act.

Despite these challenges, 10 people have now been convicted for terrorism-financing offences in Australia, and a further three are currently before the courts.[3] The rate of arrests and convictions has increased since 2016 for two main reasons. First, investigations have become less complex because of suspects' limited or unsuccessful attempts to hide the money trail. Second, there have been a greater focus on terrorism financing as a crime and more effective collaboration between the various intelligence and law enforcement agencies that play a role in CTF: AUSTRAC, ASIO, the Australian Federal Police (particularly the Terrorism Financing Investigations Unit), state and territory police, and joint counterterrorism teams.

The most recent CTF arrest in Australia was that of federal public servant Linda Merhi in January 2018. Merhi is alleged to have transferred over A$30,000 to Islamic State (IS) though five transfers via Western Union between February and October 2015. The individual sums of the transfers were $1,982, $2,790, $9,810, $7,940 and $8,000.[4] Merhi's arrest stemmed from Operation Peqin, which had previously led to the arrest on financing charges of a 16-year-old Sydney schoolgirl in 2016.[5] The 2016 case followed a similar *modus operandi* to Merhi's: A$17,850 was transferred to an Australian IS fighter through several transfers via Western Union between 2015 and 2016.[6]

Also before the courts is a case in Victoria, where disability pensioner Isa Kocoglu is alleged to have transferred over $4,000 to an American IS fighter in Syria. Seven transfers of between $30 and $2,360 are alleged to have been made between December 2013 and September 2014, from Kocoglu's Commonwealth Bank account via PayPal.[7]

TRENDS

What lessons can we learn from these recent Australian cases? First, in most cases the amounts being transferred are relatively small. That's because most money raised to finance terrorism in Australia comes from self-funding from 'legitimate sources', such as personal income or credit cards.[8] That said, small amounts in Australia can have greater purchasing power in developing countries, and internationally there's a trend towards inexpensive attacks.[9] Second, financiers in Australia are continuing to favour the mainstream banking and financial services sector, rather than non-traditional means, such as cryptocurrencies.[10] Third, while Australia's CTF approach is one of detect, disrupt and deny, there's also evidence that CTF efforts are deterring some individuals from attempting to provide funds to terrorists due to their fear of being caught.[11]

Most Australian terrorism-financing cases have involved funding of foreign fighters travelling to and operating in Iraq or Syria. With the fall of the so-called 'caliphate' in those two countries, an important question arises: How will the terrorism-financing landscape change? This is still unclear. Many surviving foreign fighters haven't returned home. Their need for funds may be more urgent than ever, so the current trend of providing funds for foreign fighters may continue. The terrorist threat could also shift to different geographical regions, with funding patterns following.

There's a hint of that in recent terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia. After IS's defeat in the Middle East, greater attention was drawn to this region, especially after the siege of Marawi in 2017, in which IS-affiliated militants held the Philippines city for five months. That IS central provided over US$1.5 million (A$1.9 million) through Indonesia via Western Union to help finance the siege is a reminder that IS—despite losing a large number of revenue sources since its fall in Iraq and Syria—is still cashed up.[12] And it will continue to look for opportunities to support cells worldwide. Despite the militants' defeat in Marawi in October 2017, the IS threat in the Philippines remains ever present.[13]

COOPERATION

Enhanced cooperation will be even more vital in the 'post-caliphate' era. While Australia's domestic interagency cooperation has been effective, enhanced cooperation with international partners and domestic private-sector companies will also be important. That's because most terrorism financing affecting Australia involves the cross-border movement of funds, making international cooperation vital. And most terrorism financing in Australia is done via services and platforms provided by the private sector, so public–private CTF partnerships are essential. Fortunately, recent efforts have built strong foundations for such cooperation.

In 2015, Australia's financial intelligence unit, AUSTRAC, and its Indonesian counterpart, PPATK,[14] founded the Asia–Pacific Counter-Terrorism Financing Summit, which has been held each year since in a different regional location.[15] The summit has matured over that time, and the number of participants has grown, including participation from many countries outside the region.[16] Working groups formed under the summit framework have done some important work, most notably the world's first regional risk assessment on CTF.[17] That assessment was important because it provided evidence-based assessments of where the greatest terrorism-financing risk lies in each participant country. It also highlighted the fact that terrorism financing risks aren't uniform across all countries; rather, they vary from country to country depending on a range of factors, such as geography and the nature of a country's economic and financial system.[18]

At the 2017 summit, the establishment of the South East Asia Counter Terrorism Financing Working Group, co-led by AUSTRAC and the Philippines' Anti-Money Laundering Council, was announced. The group includes financial intelligence units from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand.[19] It seeks to prevent terrorists' use of the international financial system and to counter extortion and the exploitation of economic resources, with a particular focus on financial supporters of IS and funding from outside the region reaching Southeast Asian countries.[20]

The Australian Government has also provided extra funding for CTF, focusing mainly on Southeast Asia following IS's decline in the Middle East. In September 2017, A\$4.6 million over three years was provided for an AUSTRAC-led initiative to block funding to IS-aligned groups in the region.[21] More than A\$5.5 million in funding was announced in December 2017 to create a new international financial intelligence and regulatory program. This funding is intended to increase AUSTRAC's international presence beyond its current footprint in Indonesia and the Philippines by placing AUSTRAC staff in Malaysia, Singapore, China, the Middle East, London and Washington DC.[22]

Greater information sharing and collaboration between government and the private sector will also be needed. In developed Western countries, such as Australia, most terrorism financing is done using services or platforms provided by the private sector, especially the banking and financial services sector.[23] However, the private sector needs information from government on methodologies and trends in order to know what to look for. Again, AUSTRAC is leading the way in enhancing public–private partnerships through its Fintel Alliance initiative.[24] While that partnership has a broad focus on financial crime, it should help to develop better relationships and cooperation between government agencies and private-sector companies. Fintel Alliance also provides a mechanism for faster investigation of unfolding terrorist plots and attacks. For example, the alliance was used for the rapid investigation of intelligence on the ultimately unsuccessful IS plot to place explosives on an airliner at Sydney Airport.[25]

While terrorism financing in Australia has primarily been facilitated through mainstream banking and financial services, authorities will need to be vigilant about the increased use of non-traditional or emerging methods, such as cryptocurrencies and social media.[26] Shifting trends will need to be communicated to private-sector companies, and government will need to develop greater cooperation with non-traditional partners, such as digital currency exchanges and social media companies.

CONCLUSION

Australia has had a sustained focus on CTF in recent years. Its efforts have led to a number of arrests and convictions, the subsequent disruption of terrorist cells and the deterrence of would-be terrorism financers. Australian Government agencies have also built effective relationships, both with international partners, especially in the increasingly important Southeast Asia region, and with the private sector domestically. Further enhancement of those relationships will be crucial as the terrorist environment and terrorism financing trends evolve in the future.

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Assessing innovations and new trends

IN COUNTERTERRORISM

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The threat of terrorism is continuously evolving in new directions, such as the characteristics of the actors (especially whether they're centrally organised, loosely affiliated networks or lone actors), their motivations and their *modus operandi* (their tactics, recruitment, communications, weaponry and targeting). As the nature of the terrorism threat has evolved, so have counterterrorism response measures by the targeted governments.

The evolution in terrorism is particularly evident with regard to certain terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, Islamic State (IS), the Taliban, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, that conduct a new hybrid type of terrorism. This evolution has manifested in several developments.

First, al-Qaeda's centrally directed, meticulously planned, well-funded, tactically innovative and logistically executed simultaneous attacks on 9/11 resulted in theretofore unheard of catastrophic casualties and economic damage to the group's American adversary.

In a second innovation, the centralised organisational formation of the terrorist groups listed above has become further hybridised, in that their combat cells, which are carefully selected by their operational managers, are now complemented by larger paramilitary guerrilla formations; for example, the military forces of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and IS are organised not only into terrorist cells but also into paramilitary light infantry and rocket and missile units. In its military conflagrations with Israel in early November 2018, for example, Hamas and its allies launched more than 400 rockets and mortar shells into Israel. This type of warfare also includes the employment of weaponised unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones, in warfare by groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and IS, although this development is still in its nascent stage.

In a third hybrid type of warfare, such terrorist groups have expanded their areas of operations on the ground (such the Lebanese Hezbollah's deployment in Syria on behalf of its Iranian sponsor to fight anti-regime insurgents) and now also operate in cyberspace to conduct propaganda, radicalisation and recruitment and to launch cyberattacks (such as the Palestinian Hamas's continuous cyberwarfare against Israel).

In a fourth hybrid type, terrorist groups' funding operations have expanded to such an extent that some engage, like criminal cartels, in widespread extortion of financial institutions, such as banks, in the geographical regions under their control to exponentially increase their wealth (such as in IS's takeover of banks and oil fields in Iraq and Syria).

In a final hybrid type, some groups that started out as terrorists now also engage in their countries' political activities and governance to advance their extremist agendas (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, where it fields candidates in elections and administers government ministries, as well as Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip). IS also exercised governance functions in the areas that it controlled in Syria until it lost control over those territories.

In response, governmental CT services attempt to continuously adapt to and innovate in their responses to such evolving, multifaceted hybrid threats on the ground and in cyberspace, including measures to counter terrorism by groups that engage in governing a country or territory. As discussed in this chapter, governmental CT services are also adapting and innovating to counter innovations by terrorism's loosely affiliated networks and lone actors. These CT innovations involve a spectrum of measures, such as the use of advanced artificial intelligence (AI) based data-mining tools, as well as biometric identification verification and facial recognition tools, to monitor and aggregate the digital footprints of terrorist operatives' activities and travel patterns, including deploying watchlisting databases to identify individuals with a nexus to terrorism in order to prevent their entry into foreign countries or to arrest them in-country. A final CT technological innovation is the deployment of UAVs to surveil and target terrorist operatives in battle zones where it may not be possible to apprehend them using conventional military or law enforcement measures. An example is the Philippines military's use of Scan Eagle UAVs equipped with advanced infrared and high-resolution video cameras to remotely and covertly track the movement of Islamist terrorists in the southern island of Mindanao, where it's difficult for the government's military forces to track them with comparable agility on the ground.

In their own response to this cat-and-mouse game between terrorists and their CT adversaries, centrally organised terrorist groups have been forced to further adapt. In one of their primary adaptations, they have complemented their centrally directed organisational structures in foreign countries with a reliance on locally present, loosely networked cells and lone actor adherents to conduct attacks on their behalf to overcome hardened border controls instituted by the new CT technological innovations discussed above that make it difficult for their centrally directed operatives to enter and operate freely to carry out attacks, unlike in the period before 9/11, when simultaneous attacks by al-Qaeda's foreign cells were possible.

These issues are discussed in this article, which is divided into three sections:

- the evolution of the terrorist threat's organisational structures and its impact on warfare
- a comparison of 'old' and 'new' approaches to CT, including how the 'new' approach is used to counter new developments in the terrorists' organisational threats, particularly by employing cutting-edge technological innovations in tracking terrorists
- an assessment of how CT still needs to combine 'old' and 'new' approaches to efficiently counter terrorist threats in all their manifestations.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TERRORIST THREAT

In parallel to the evolution of the terrorist threat into new hybrid types of warfare, highly centralised terrorist groups, in particular, have been complemented by different types of organisational formations. Thus, the first type, consisting of *centralised organised groups*, have highly hierarchical and centralised command structures, with top and secondary leaders; have departments responsible for missions such as funding, recruitment, communications, propaganda, radicalisation, logistics, training, weapons acquisition, target selection and warfare by their operative cells, whether in their immediate areas of operations or in other countries; and are generally intent on conducting spectacular large-scale attacks on high-profile targets. Examples of such groups include al-Qaeda (and its affiliates), al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hamas, Hezbollah, IS and the Taliban. The most significant attacks conducted by such a group were the simultaneous aircraft suicide bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US on 9/11.

Several security vulnerabilities in the US made the 9/11 attacks possible, particularly lax border controls that enabled the al-Qaeda cell members to enter the US on business, tourist and student visas, to overstay those visas and, in some cases, to fraudulently obtain drivers licences (enabling them to operate freely once in-country) and to enrol in flight schools to train to take off but not land an aircraft without arousing suspicion. Due to the lack of effective information sharing to 'connect the dots' by the various US Government agencies that were supposed to track the movements of such suspicious foreign individuals, the government reconfigured its defensive anti-terrorism organisational structures, information-sharing mechanisms and legal instruments, supported by a campaign to develop new CT technologies. To centralise and coordinate government-wide response measures, especially to track the movement of individuals with a possible nexus to terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security and the National Counterterrorism Center were established and provided with the capability to centralise their response measures, including border control instruments such as watchlists. In addition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation upgraded its CT response measures, including by establishing regional joint counterterrorism strike forces throughout the country. New legal instruments were implemented, such as the

Patriot Act, which provides government law enforcement and intelligence agencies with greater authority in tracking and intercepting suspicious communications by individuals deemed to have a nexus to terrorism, as well as enhanced information sharing within the US Government and with the US's 'Five Eyes' allies (Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand). Finally, the US's CT capabilities were upgraded, especially through the deployment of Special Forces and intelligence teams to track, arrest or neutralise terrorist adversaries where they might operate globally.

As a result of these types of defensively focused anti-terrorism and offensively oriented CT response measures, centralised terrorist groups have been constrained in deploying their combat cells to travel to countries that have hardened their defensive postures to make it difficult for terrorists to conduct large-scale attacks comparable to 9/11. No such attacks have since occurred in a country such as the US.

In response, terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and IS have refocused their warfare to include other types of organisational formations to conduct attacks on their behalf in the countries where their own cells are constrained from operating. To reach and radicalise their extremist adherents in the countries they seek to attack, those groups began to escalate their use of social media and other internet platforms to broadcast their incitement propaganda to mobilise the two additional types of independent terrorist operatives who are already present in such countries to carry out warfare on their behalf.

This analysis isn't intended to suggest that the foreign-based centralised terrorist groups have given up on their ambition to deploy their combat cells to attack defensively hardened countries such as the US, since carrying out such attacks would generate worldwide publicity to reinforce their reputation as 'first order' destroyers, which is one of the 'oxygens' of terrorism. In fact, an al-Qaeda cell that was based in England did plan in August 2006 to detonate liquid explosives disguised as soft drinks on board airliners travelling from the UK to the US and Canada. The plot was uncovered by British police, who had placed the cell under surveillance. As demonstrated by this example, it's always possible for such centralised groups to wait until they decide that conditions are propitious for them to carry out catastrophic attacks against their 'far enemies', since at the time their adversaries might not have been prepared to thwart an attack with a liquid detonation device. Thus, a terrorist group's 'dormant' status in carrying out attacks abroad shouldn't be taken for granted as a long-term trend.

In the meantime, given the defensive hurdles for foreign-based centralised terrorist groups to overcome in carrying out attacks against their hardened country adversary, this has given rise to the second type of organisation: locally based *loosely affiliated networks*, which are also known simply as 'bunches of guys', who might be family members or friends in a local community. These local networks are radicalised via the internet's extremist social media sites into terrorist activity by the first type of organised groups, operating as 'franchisees', but are loosely affiliated with their parent groups and have to self-fund and acquire their own weapons for their operations.

In the third type, centralised terrorist groups also utilise *lone actors*, who have no direct operational ties to a group and operate as self-selected, single attackers. They're radicalised by a group's extremist ideology, usually via local extremist religious figures or the internet's social media sites, and 'self-recruit' themselves to carry out attacks on behalf of such groups. Their attacks are generally low-level type warfare, such as shootings, bombings, knifings or vehicle rammings at single locations, since they lack the resources to conduct more sophisticated operations, so they don't require a group's funding or an operational cell to work with, and their attacks are usually conducted on their own and in their chosen time frames.

GOVERNMENT COUNTERTERRORISM MEASURES

In general, governments facing new trends in terrorist warfare need to formulate effective response measures, which are defined as preventing or defeating three components in terrorist warfare: terrorists' motivations, their operational capabilities and their local presence. If a threatening terrorist adversary, whether a centrally organised group, a loosely affiliated network or a lone actor, is assessed to possess high motivation to attack its selected target, but its operational capability is considered low in terms of a combat cell and weaponry, and it has no or limited local presence, then its overall warfare threat would be considered low or non-existent. On the other hand, if such an adversary is known to possess high motivation, high operational capability and a high local presence, then its warfare threat potential would be assessed as high.

Within this framework of effective response measures, the innovations in governments' CT measures have required addressing the changes in the evolution of warfare by these three types of terrorist organisational formation. The evolution in governments' CT measures can be described as a transformation from 'old' to 'new' response paradigms.

THE 'OLD' CT PARADIGM

For CT services trying to defeat each of these three types of threat actor under the 'old' CT paradigm, they were constrained in tracking the actors' pre-incident activities. This was due to the fact that despite the terrorist groups' large size and multiple operatives, who had to interact and communicate with each other, CT agencies still had difficulty infiltrating the groups through the insertion of covert intelligence-gathering human agents (HUMINT), or in remotely surveilling them through signals intelligence (SIGINT) means, such as by intercepting their electronic communications to uncover their associations or plans for future attacks. In the case of the 9/11 attacks, for example, while al-Qaeda's large size made it possible for Western CT services to infiltrate some covert agents into the group—as was the case with Aimeen Dean (a pseudonym), who became a British double-agent within al-Qaeda prior to 9/11—and to monitor its operatives' communications. This made it possible to discover partial elements of al-Qaeda's attack plans, but was still insufficient to enable the CT agencies to connect the larger dots of such pre-incident early-warning indicators for effective pre-emption.

It was also difficult under the old CT paradigm, even after 9/11, to covertly infiltrate and monitor the pre-incident planning activities of loosely affiliated networks. This was due to their small size, their *ad hoc* structure, the infrequency of their contact with their larger group's operational planners, and the self-funding nature of their operations, all of which enabled them to leave few 'footprints' that could be picked up by CT services. Examples of unsuccessful pre-incident pre-emption of this type of group include the failures to prevent the attacks by such homegrown cells against the Madrid transportation system in March 2003, the attacks against the London transportation system in July 2005, the attacks against Paris in November 2015, and the attacks against the Brussels transportation system and airport in March 2016.

Similarly, under the old CT paradigm it was also difficult to pre-empt attacks by lone actors. CT agencies had limited capability to infiltrate and surveill lone actors' pre-incident activities because those actors didn't communicate with a group's 'headquarters' or other cells, so there were no preparation plans disclosed to others and therefore able to be intercepted. This was the case with:

- Major Nidal Hasan, who carried out a shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009, and who had communicated as part of his claimed Army medical school 'research paper' with Anwar al-Awlaki, al-Qaeda's Yemen-based ideologue

- Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the mastermind of the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013, who had communicated with extremists in the North Caucasus

- Omar Mateen, who carried out a shooting rampage at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in July 2016, and was linked to Moner Mohammad Abu Salha, a fellow Floridian, who had travelled to join the jihadist fight in Syria and who conducted a suicide bombing there in late May 2014.

In none of these cases were the lone actors' suspicious digital communications with their foreign-based extremist contacts (who were part of centrally organised groups) effectively aggregated via digital data-mining or the interception of electronic communications by CT services to warrant their arrest in successful pre-incident pre-emptions.

THE 'NEW' CT PARADIGM

The 'new' CT paradigm attempts to overcome the hurdles inherent in the old CT framework, particularly in connecting larger dots by aggregating disparate informational data points about potential terrorist attacks not only by centralised terrorist groups, but especially by loosely affiliated networks and lone actors, whose pre-incident activities are more difficult to penetrate. New technologies are utilised to complement the old CT framework's focus on HUMINT and SIGINT means to monitor and, if possible, penetrate the terrorist adversary, which are still regarded as essential components in a CT campaign. Thus, for example, the old CT paradigm's practice of entrapping members of loosely affiliated networks and lone actors who are suspected of thinking about plotting an attack, based on a tip that's provided to law enforcement authorities, is still a widely used practice in the 'new' CT era.

The three types of terrorist actor all make wide use of cyberspace, just like the rest of society, so they leave digital footprints of their pre-incident communications and activities, even when they attempt to hide them through encryption. CT agencies now attempt to uncover such digital footprints by implementing new methodological and technological advances, particularly machine-learning AI algorithms. When combined with the use of other software tools, such as social network analysis, such methods are now making it possible to harvest vast amounts of data in cyberspace to uncover suspicious information, such as an individual's association with other terrorists (for example, by identifying their contacts on the internet with other accounts that might point to larger networks), foreign travel for training purposes, or purchases of weapons.

Additional CT technological innovations include the deployment of biometric identification verification and biometric facial recognition tools, and UAVs. Biometric identification verification includes distinguishing physiological and biological characteristics such as fingerprints, hand geometry, handwriting, retina and iris patterns, and is used to authenticate an individual's access into a country or, if required, a secured facility or information

technology network. Biometric facial recognition technologies consist of video surveillance systems that can be deployed at airports or other border entry points and are used to flag a person's facial features to identify suspects in a crowd, to ensure that a person's photo in a document matches other identifying data, or to detect facial behavioural features that might indicate a person's intent to carry out an attack. In CT, UAVs are employed in two ways. In the first, they're used in aerial surveillance to surreptitiously gather information about a terrorist-related target from a high altitude. In the second, weaponised drones, generally combined with on-the-ground HUMINT sources, are used as precision weapons to target for assassination terrorism-related individuals in foreign conflict regions where their arrest through other means isn't possible.

Such innovative AI aggregating and tracking technologies are also being complemented by various types of prediction software tools that apply AI algorithms to correlate dozens of parameters, such as past incident data, suspicious activity reports and threats in social media, to predict the locations, tactics, types of weapons and time frames for future terrorist attacks.

In another use of AI-based data-mining, it's now possible for social network sites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, to mine their users' content to determine whether a posting might have an extremist or terrorist nexus, and to remove it, if necessary, thereby making it more difficult for terrorists and their extremist adherents to operate in cyberspace. Such an enhanced CT capability by government agencies now forces terrorist groups and their sympathisers to continually find new social media portals to exploit, thus straining their diminished resources for such activities.

Unlike under the old CT paradigm, which led to notable failures in connecting the dots, CT services can now use such new tools to aggregate vast amounts of information from disparate databases to reveal a potential terrorism nexus involving individuals who engage in suspicious activities that might indicate imminent pre-incident activities by the three types of terrorist actor. It's still unknown, however, how accurate these new technologies are in predicting what are usually perceived as unpredictable events, since terrorism, especially in Western countries, is still a rare event.

It should be pointed out that in all these CT technological innovations it's crucial for CT services to adhere to the rule of law and to maintain civil liberties to the extent possible in a democratic society.

CONCLUSION

In the continuously evolving cat-and-mouse game between terrorists and their CT services adversaries, CT campaign planners must continuously adapt and innovate in their response measures. The use of AI machine-learning and data-mining tools, as well as biometric identification and facial recognition tools, to identify, track and, in the best case scenario, predict potential terrorist actors and attacks is one innovation among many introduced by the new CT paradigm. This has significantly upgraded the capability of CT services to connect and aggregate larger 'dots' in terrorists' pre-incident activities than previously. This is especially significant in tracking the activities of loosely affiliated terror networks and lone actors.

Nevertheless, the use of sophisticated technologies is still insufficient to effectively counter the three types of terrorist actor because it has to be part of a comprehensive toolbox of response measures. Some of the old CT response measures will continue to be crucial. They include using local intelligence and policing methods, such as encouraging people in local communities to report matters to the appropriate authorities if they 'see something' suspicious with a potential terrorism nexus. Such awareness serves as a force multiplier in identifying potential terrorists. Also, defeating a group's extremist narrative with appealing moderate counter-narratives, promoting internal divisions within terrorist groups that would lead to defections by their members, promoting the disengagement of operatives from terrorism, and reintegrating the 'formers' into society are all part of the old CT paradigm's toolbox that continue to be crucial in countering terrorism.

Finally, CT services must always be prepared to counter new types of terrorist organisational formations, tactics, weapons and targeting and, above all, new types of terrorist actor. This includes developing new technologies and approaches to counter the warfare of hybrid terrorist organisations that are not only centrally organised but exercise political power in the countries in which they operate. New types of warfare by lone actors also need to be countered, such as attacks by radicalised insiders in one's workplace who might target fellow employees in a combination of workplace violence and terrorism. The terrorist threat, therefore, will continue to evolve and mutate in new directions, wso CT campaign planners need to continuously anticipate and plan for new contingencies and surprises in this seemingly never-ending conflict arena.

About the authors

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Madeleine is interested in the ways in which gendered *jihadi* narratives motivate and enfranchise and how they combine with everyday experiences of living and politics. Her Masters thesis was entitled 'If men were men, then women would be women: understanding the role of gender in the recruitment and appeal of ISIS within Muslim immigrant communities'. Her other research interests include CT, CVE, radicalisation, gender, masculinity, and women, peace and security.

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SARA ZEIGER

Sara Zeiger is the program manager for the Department of Research and Analysis at Hedayah and leads the portfolio on P/CVE and education at Hedayah. In addition to producing research reports and publications, Sara supports the director in managing the department's resources and programs, including the Counter-narrative Library, Hedayah's Non-resident Fellowship Program and Hedayah's annual International CVE Research Conference.

Sara focuses her research on a number of CVE topics, including the role of education in CVE; the role of women in CVE; counter-narratives and messaging; the private sector's role in CVE; and monitoring, measurement and evaluation of CVE projects and programs. She was also the lead content developer for Hedayah's 'MASAR' app, which provides practical guidance on monitoring, measurement and evaluation for CVE. In addition to her duties in the Department of Research and Analysis, Sara also initiated and developed a capacity-building program to train teachers on PVE and education in partnership with key institutions such as the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa in East Africa and the UN Development Programme in South and Southeast Asia.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AI	artificial intelligence
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AML/CTF	anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism-financing
AQIS	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army (Myanmar)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
Brimob	Korps Brigade Mobil (Mobile Brigade Corps) (Indonesia)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force (Nigeria)
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CTF	counter-terrorism financing
CVE	countering violent extremism
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)
FC-G5S	G5 Sahel Joint Task Force
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
GDP	gross domestic product
GIFCT	Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism
GNA	Government of National Accord (Libya)
HUMINT	human intelligence
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IED	improvised explosive device
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Syria and the Levant
IS-Libya	Wilayat Libya-Barqah

ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
JAD	Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (Indonesia)
JCCT	Joint Counter Terrorism Team
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Burkina Faso)
KP	Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan)
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba (Pakistan)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines)
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-government organisation
ONA	Office of National Assessments
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PRC	People's Republic of China
PVE	preventing violent extremism
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SIGINT	signals intelligence
TATP	triacetone triperoxide
TIP	Turkestan Islamic Party
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Armed Forces)
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
VC	virtual currency
WHO	World Health Organization
WMD	weapon of mass destruction
XUAR	Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (China)
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)