



Countering Radicalization in Europe

Lorenzo Vidino
James Brandon

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lorenzo Vidino is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich.

James Brandon is an Associate Fellow at the International Centre for the study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). He was the Director of Research and Communications at the Quilliam Foundation from 2008–2011. He writes in his own capacity.

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CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact:

ICSR
King's College London
138–142 Strand
London WC2R 1HH
United Kingdom
T. + 44 (0)20 7848 2065
F. + 44 (0)20 7848 2748
E. mail@icsr.info

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Executive Summary

Since the mid-2000s, several European countries have developed comprehensive counter-radicalization strategies seeking to de-radicalize or disengage committed militants and, with even greater intensity, prevent the radicalization of new ones. The report describes the genesis, main characteristics, aims, underlying philosophies, and challenges experienced by counter-radicalization strategies in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, the four European countries with the most extensive counter-radicalization initiatives. The report focuses exclusively on jihadist radicalization, although it should be noted that all these countries have at least some activities targeting other forms of extremism as well.

Each country's experience has been deeply shaped by political, cultural, and legal elements unique to that country. Moreover, the programs have been in place for just a few years, and it is therefore difficult to fully assess their impact. Nevertheless, the experience to date points to certain key characteristics and challenges common to all European counter-radicalization programs.

All four countries have conducted both disengagement/de-radicalization initiatives aimed at individual militants and preventive programs aimed at target groups or the population at large. With regard to the former, European countries have developed schemes that seek to identify individuals that have displayed clear signs of radicalization but have not yet committed a crime. Authorities assess each case and craft targeted interventions aimed at swaying the individual away from militancy and back to a normal life. There are important national variations in these programs, ranging from which authorities administer them to what kind of intervention is set up, but throughout Europe there is an understanding that these "soft" programs are a crucial component of a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy.

Authorities have also invested significant resources in the development of initiatives that target at-risk segments of society (mostly Muslim youth), seeking to make them resilient to radical ideas. These initiatives vary significantly in characteristics and underlying philosophies, some focusing on the reinforcement of democratic values, others on moderate Islamic theology or individual self-empowerment. Often blurring the line between counter-radicalization and the promotion of social cohesion and integration, these sets of initiatives have been downsized in most countries due mostly to overall budget cuts, declining threat levels and the difficulty in demonstrating their effectiveness.

The report seeks to highlight challenges common to the four countries examined. From the onset, European authorities have struggled to identify the target of their actions. Most recently, authorities throughout the continent seem to have shifted their focus from the broader phenomenon of extremism to the narrower subcategory of violent radicalization. This is not to say that authorities do not see a relation between non-violent forms of extremism and violent radicalization, or that they do not wish to

tackle the non-security-related challenges posed by extremism, but the lack of clear empirics on the radicalization process combined with budgetary constraints are leading authorities to increasingly concentrate on the more narrowly defined phenomenon of violent radicalization. Authorities are also increasingly isolating their efforts to counter violent radicalization from initiatives aimed at integration and social cohesion, as the relationship between the two is considered unclear.

Authorities have also struggled to establish clear metrics to assess the effectiveness of their programs. While methods of verifying the success of de-radicalization and disengagement measures are relatively easier to find, general preventive measures are extremely difficult to empirically assess.

Another challenge common to most European countries is their choice of partners, as authorities have frequently struggled to find cooperative, legitimate and reliable partners within local Muslim communities. Of particular interest are potential counter-radicalization partnerships with non-violent Islamists. While patterns vary significantly from country to country, there seems to be a consensus that such forces are necessary interlocutors but not yet partners, other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

Although circumstances and views still somewhat vary from country to country, the report highlights how authorities in the four European countries analyzed are converging on a variety of issues. From the importance of good training to the need for clearly defined goals, from increased focus on empirical effectiveness assessments to a growing role for targeted interventions, it is possible to observe some common trends across the continent. Based on extensive fieldwork and access to relevant experts, officials and community members, this report aims to condense the experiences of these countries, to outline key challenges and areas of convergence, while at the same time being a useful primer for policymakers throughout the West.

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1 Introduction

Although programs seeking to achieve similar goals have been implemented in various countries for decades, over the last ten years counter-radicalization programs mushroomed throughout the world. Over time, based on direct experience and academic studies, many governments have adopted increasingly nuanced counter-radicalization strategies, partly in response to a more sophisticated understanding of terrorism and radicalization. Few governments today believe that the majority of terrorists are deviants, sociopaths or psychopaths who were born terrorists or that “once a terrorist, always a terrorist.” On the contrary, it is now widely believed that, in perhaps a majority of cases, the radicalization process that leads people to carry out acts of politically motivated violence can be prevented or even reversed. Working from these revised assumptions, over the last few years several countries have created counter-radicalization programs that differ markedly in their extent and aims.

Certain Muslim-majority countries, having been the first targets of al Qaeda or of al Qaeda-inspired attacks, have been among the first to engineer counter-radicalization programs, focusing mostly on de-radicalization and disengagement. The programs implemented in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, for example, have attracted the attention of experts and policymakers for their innovative approaches. In addition, over the past few years, several Western, non-Muslim-majority countries have invested considerable human, financial, and political capital to counter al Qaeda-inspired radicalization.

The counter-radicalization programs implemented in Western countries differ greatly from one another, and from non-Western programs, in terms of aims, structure, budget, and underlying philosophy. Each experience is deeply shaped by the political, cultural, and legal elements unique to that country. The programs have often been in place for just a few years, making it therefore difficult to fully assess their impact. Nevertheless, their experience to date points to certain key characteristics and challenges common to all Western counter-radicalization programs. The aim of this report is therefore to outline some of the key features and challenges faced over the last few years by the four European countries that have been at the forefront in devising counter-radicalization initiatives: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway.

Before delving into the analysis, some preliminary clarifications are necessary. First, this report focuses exclusively on extremism of a jihadist nature. It goes without saying that other forms of extremism, such as right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist/separatist, animal rights and other forms of single-issue extremism, exist in most European countries. Over the last few years right-wing extremism has become an issue of particular concern for most European authorities; the terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011 only heightened the justified fears that were already widespread. However, while some European countries have programs to deal with other extremists threats, most of them presently focus on jihadist extremism, which is still considered the most severe threat. The report will therefore focus only on this issue.

Second, it should be noted that throughout Europe there exist several initiatives aimed at directly or indirectly countering radicalization that are carried out by civil society organizations. The enormous potential of civil society efforts is not lost on most European policymakers: they frequently partner with a wide array of organizations to counter radicalization and acknowledge that the grassroots reach and legitimacy of local communities constitute invaluable assets. While this report fully recognizes the importance of civil society efforts, it nevertheless focuses on strategies and programs conceived by governments and seeks to be a primer for policymakers in other countries.

Moreover, the authors are fully aware that several European countries, not just the four examined, have been active in countering radicalization. From Sweden to Germany, from Belgium to Spain, authorities in most European countries have implemented initiatives that could be defined, broadly, as countering radicalization. Yet, at the time of writing, only the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway possess what could be properly described as a comprehensive, nationwide counter-radicalization strategy enshrined in an official, publicly available document. It can also be argued that these four countries are the most advanced in the field, their initiatives predating and being more extensive than those of other European countries.

Based on extensive fieldwork and access to relevant experts, officials and community leaders, the report analyzes the experience of these four European countries in countering radicalization. Given the complexity and ever-evolving nature of these initiatives, it does not claim to be an exhaustive survey of the programs implemented in each country nor an assessment of their effectiveness. Rather, it seeks to outline key characteristics and challenges that, despite the obvious differences in context, could be useful to policymakers internationally. In order to do so, the following four chapters analyze the four examined countries individually, focusing on key aspects of their counter-radicalization strategies such as their main characteristics, aims, underlying philosophy, choice of partners and challenges experienced.

Some Terminological Clarifications

As with many social science terms, there is no consensus among scholars and policymakers regarding the definition of many of the terms employed throughout the report. The impossibility of finding universally accepted definitions forces us to settle for some that, albeit not perfect, arguably serve the purpose of clarifying some complex terms. The first is **radicalization**, a term whose use, let alone definition, is contested by many.¹ Arguably one of the most complete definitions is that coined by Charles E. Allen, as it encapsulates many elements used by most scholars. According to Allen, radicalization is “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.”²

¹ See, for example, Mark Sedgwick, “The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2010): 479–494.

² Charles E. Allen, “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland,” Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, March 14, 2007, p. 4.

Allen's definition focuses on violent radicalization, but scholars often distinguish between violent and cognitive radicalization. **Cognitive radicalization** is the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system. **Violent radicalization** occurs when an individual takes the additional step of employing violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism.³ The report will outline how authorities in the four examined countries view the relationship between the two phenomena and whether they seek to focus their counter-radicalization efforts solely on violent radicalization or also on cognitive radicalization.

The term **counter-radicalization** should also be clarified as, in reality, it is a sort of catch-all term that includes three types of initiatives, each with a distinctive objective: de-radicalization, disengagement, and radicalization prevention. **De-radicalization** measures seek to lead an already radicalized individual to abandon his or her militant views.⁴ **Disengagement** entails a less dramatic shift whereby an individual abandons involvement in a terrorist group or activities while perhaps retaining a radical worldview.⁵ As John Horgan points out, "just because someone has disengaged from a particular role in a terrorist movement, it does not necessarily follow that they are de-radicalized."⁶ **Radicalization prevention** measures seek to prevent the radicalization process from taking hold in the first place and generally target a segment of society rather than a specific individual. For the purpose of this report a **counter-radicalization strategy** is a set of policies and initiatives (whether seeking de-radicalization, disengagement or radicalization prevention), often enshrined in a centrally-issued document, which sets goals, describes methods and divides responsibilities among entities in order to elaborate a government's efforts to counter radicalization.

Finally, since the report focuses on Islamist radicalization, it is necessary to clarify the term Islamism. Borrowing Peter Mandaville's definition, **Islamism** can be defined as "forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions and legal system derive directly from the shari'ah."⁷ But it must be said that political Islam is a global and highly flexible movement, taking different manifestations in different environments. It therefore must be taken into consideration that the characteristics, agendas, dimensions and challenges of Islamist movements in Europe are significantly different from those of their counterparts in Muslim-majority areas.

It should also be noted that Islamist movements, in Europe and elsewhere, are extremely varied in their characteristics. Keeping in mind the unavoidable oversimplification of this categorization, one way of differentiating them is according to their *modus operandi*.

³ For further analysis of the difference between cognitive and behavioral radicalization, see, for example, *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neoradicalism in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: AIVD, 2007); and Froukje Demant, et al., *Decline and Disengagement: An Analysis of Processes of Deradicalisation* (Amsterdam: IMES Report Series, 2008): 12–14.

⁴ John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2010): 280.

⁵ Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, "Introduction," in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, eds., *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009): 3, 27–28.

⁶ John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009): 17.

⁷ Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007): 57.

This yields three subcategories: violent rejectionists, non-violent rejectionists and participationists. **Violent rejectionists**, often referred to as **jihadists**, are individuals and networks that, often linked to or inspired by al Qaeda, reject participation in the democratic system and use violence to advance their goals. Violent rejectionists generally are the main if not the only targets of European counter-radicalization programs. **Non-violent rejectionists** are individuals and groups (such as Hizb ut-Tahrir) that openly reject the legitimacy of any system of government not based on Islamic law, but do not, at least publicly and openly, advocate the use of violence to further their goals. Finally, participationists are individuals and groups that adhere to that strand of Islamism, currently embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood, that advocates interaction with society at large, both at the micro-level through grassroots activism, and at the macro-level through participation in public life and the democratic process. When not addressed separately the latter two groups will be referred to as **non-violent Islamists**, although the authors are fully aware of the inherent flaws of such term.

2 United Kingdom

Background

Of all European countries, the UK has faced the most serious and enduring threat from domestic jihadist terrorism. This can be explained by a combination of factors, such as a large influx of Islamists from the Arab world and South Asia during the 1970s and 1980s; a highly tolerant political, social and policing culture of “state multiculturalism” that, according to many, turned a blind eye to growing domestic Islamist extremism during the 1990s⁸; and a foreign policy that has been more closely aligned with that of the United States than many European countries leading to the UK being regarded as a key target by al Qaeda. Other factors that have facilitated a surge in UK-related terrorism include a large and young Pakistani-origin population that could relatively easily access terrorist training camps and militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a further influx of Arab jihadists in the mid-1990s who were directly linked to al Qaeda.

As a result, in the last decade there have been more than 150 convictions for Islamist-related terrorism in the UK. One major domestic bomb plot succeeded (the July 2005 London subway bombings) while several other major plots were disrupted by the police and security services or were attempted but failed in their execution (for example, the second multiple attacks of July 2005, the transatlantic airline plot of 2006, the Tiger Tiger London nightclub bombing in 2007). UK-based terrorists have also been linked to attacks across Europe, the Middle East and South Asia.

In 2003, after British authorities had become increasingly concerned about several cases of domestic radicalization, the counter-radicalization policy that would become known as Prevent was launched.⁹ Although no successful jihadist terrorist attacks at that point had taken place in the UK, authorities were disturbed by the fact that several major attacks, most of them hatched by British-based militants, had been only narrowly prevented. At the same time, the security services were becoming increasingly aware of significant numbers of British Muslims travelling to terrorist training camps in Pakistan. Simultaneously, al Qaeda was openly advocating attacks against the UK. In response to these emerging concerns, in 2003 the government launched a low-key project to push back against radicalization that could lead towards terrorism. This project made the British government the first in Europe to explicitly attempt to develop and implement a comprehensive domestic counter-radicalization strategy to tackle jihadist terrorism.

Later named Prevent, this counter-radicalization strategy was part of the government’s broader Contest counter-terrorism strategy. In addition to Prevent, which aims to prevent future radicalization, Contest also encompasses Pursue (i.e., intelligence and police-led

⁸ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and its Legacy* (Atlantic 2009)

⁹ ‘Project CONTEST: The Government’s Counter Terrorism Strategy – Ninth Report of Session 2008–09’. House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee, June 2009, p. 3. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/212/212.pdf>

counter-terrorism policy), Prepare (the development of contingency plans to deal with domestic terrorist incidents) and Protect (which focuses on protecting key infrastructures, such as nuclear power plants, from terrorist attack). Large, ambitious, expensive and high-profile, the Prevent section of Contest has been through various comprehensive re-workings throughout its lifespan. At present, it is in the process of being slimmed down, made more cost-effective and more tightly focused on preventing terrorism. Previously, however, it has also incorporated a much broader remit of tackling extremism both as a root cause of terrorism and as a societal problem in its own right. It should also be noted that, compared to other European countries, Prevent has often been highly controversial, and many of its methods and aims have been the subject of frequent high-profile criticism on a variety of grounds from across the political spectrum, from civil libertarians to Islamists and neo-conservatives.

Prevent's Work

The 2011 Prevent Review, a comprehensive 116 page re-assessment and re-evaluation of Prevent work that was undertaken by the Home Office (at the behest of the Conservative Party after it took power in 2010), breaks down counter-radicalization objectives as follows:¹⁰

- respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
- work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address.

In practice, this work can be better divided into two categories: 1) General preventative work to challenge extremist ideas and influence in society, promote tolerant, moderate and democratic principles, and address factors that can increase vulnerability to radicalization; 2) One-to-one targeted interventions with individuals at risk of adopting extremist ideologies, or who have already done so. The following sub-chapters will now explore each of these two categories further.

1 General Preventative measures: Challenging extremism and promoting cohesion

The 2011 Prevent Review states that “all terrorist groups have an ideology. Promoting that ideology, frequently on the internet, facilitates radicalization and recruitment.” It adds that “challenging ideology and disrupting the ability of terrorists to promote it is a fundamental part of Prevent.” In order to do so, British authorities have often, particularly in Prevent's early years, channeled money into regional governments and third-sector organizations so that they could run programs to achieve these goals. Sometimes such projects were explicitly “Islamic” and had a strong religious component. An example of this is the Radical Middle Way, a Muslim-run project that specialized in bringing traditionalist Muslim scholars to speak to mostly young British Muslim audiences. Other youth projects aimed to help young vulnerable Muslims to integrate into mainstream society

¹⁰ Prevent Strategy, HM Government, (The Stationary Office Ltd, London, June 2011), p. 7.

and to access employment/education. In Northwest London, for example, Prevent funding supported a local initiative called M-Power. This scheme reached out in particular to vulnerable young Somalis and provided them with “safe discussion spaces” in which they could take part in guided conversations and debates about issues such as radicalization, terrorism, democracy and foreign affairs, as well as other issues related to gangs, drugs, education and social exclusion.¹¹

Other local projects funded by Prevent included trust-building measures between police forces and local Muslim institutions, which aimed at increasing communications between the two and – not secondarily – making it more likely for communities to report potential terrorist plots. Authorities have reported various successes in these initiatives. In Bristol, for example, police outreach and confidence-building projects with local Muslim communities, including inviting local Muslims to awareness-raising sessions on Prevent, led directly in 2008 to a relatively conservative local Somali mosque reporting radical convert Andrew Ibrahim to police after mosque-goers noticed burn marks on his hands when he attended weekly prayers. Ibrahim was consequently arrested and an incomplete bomb was found in his flat along with evidence that he planned to target a local shopping center.¹² In this instance, such trust-building work between local government and mosques seems almost certain to have prevented a terrorist attack. Kalsoom Bashir, a Muslim woman who led Prevent work for the Bristol council during this period, said: “Police already had good relations with the local community [before the incident] and that made the community willing to report Ibrahim.”¹³

Further projects that are regarded as having produced successes include a range of police-led Prevent initiatives targeting schools, often aimed at creating an awareness of the risks of extremism among children and teachers and at breaking down negative attitudes towards the police. Some of these initiatives, such as the “From one extreme to the other” theater production, are regarded as highly effective tools for teaching children about the dangers of extremism, intolerance and terrorism.¹⁴ This play for children by the GW Theatre Company draws parallels between radicalism involving far-right and Islamist violence. It has so far reached over 50,000 school children, many of them living in highly segregated and often economically deprived communities in Northwest England – with performances in schools often funded out of local Prevent budgets.¹⁵

A similarly well-regarded project is “Getting on Together,” originally devised as a DVD-based lesson program for schools and Further Education colleges, developed by specialist Cardiff teachers, a local Imam and a scholar from the Muslim Council of Wales. It provides a robust critique of Islamist extremism and also aims to help teachers understand which children might be susceptible to extremism. Barrie Phillips, Project Director, says: “In one lesson based around the DVD a Muslim pupil stood up and delivered a long rant about how it was alright to kill British soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Teachers said that before he did this, they had no idea that he had these thoughts.

¹¹ Author interviews with Hugo Macpherson, Project Co-ordinator, M-Power, during 2010–11.

¹² “Terrorist Andrew Ibrahim was turned in by the Muslim community,” *Daily Telegraph*, July 18, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/5851168/Terrorist-Andrew-Ibrahim-was-turned-in-by-the-Muslim-community.html>

¹³ Interview, Kalsoom Bashir, former Prevent Co-ordinator, Bristol City Council, August 2011.

¹⁴ From May–November 2011, the co-author conducted a confidential in-depth study of Prevent work with schools for the UK’s Department for Education. At time of writing this is unpublished.

¹⁵ Interview with Dave Jones, Director, GW Theatre Company, August 2011.

He seemed just another quiet, well-behaved pupil. Once they became aware, they were able to provide additional support and appropriate guidance in order to address his issues.”¹⁶

This initial “Getting on Together” program for schools is now being expanded with Welsh government support to a broader “Challenging Extremism” program for 11 years to adulthood that is being offered to schools and colleges, education welfare officers, probation workers, youth and community workers, police school/community link officers, community groups and others who might come in contact with individuals vulnerable to radicalization, and covering not just Islamism but also far-right extremism.

Despite these alleged successes, many voices have expressed doubts about several Prevent-funded initiatives. Parliamentary investigations expressed concerns that “much Prevent money has been wasted on unfocused or irrelevant projects, as a result either of misunderstanding of Prevent or of a lack of willingness and capacity of local organisations to deliver.”¹⁷ Similarly, in March 2010, the House of Commons Select Committee for Communities and Local Government report on Prevent concluded that “much Prevent money has been wasted on unfocused or irrelevant projects, as a result either of misunderstanding of Prevent or of a lack of willingness and capacity of local organisations to deliver.”¹⁸ Independent critics have additionally accused local councils of spending large sums of money with little discernible strategy or clear counter-terrorism impact. For instance, one prominent critic cited a number of instances of Prevent funding that, he argued, “were – at best – many steps away from dealing with what drives young Muslims into extremism”:

*Barking Mosque received more than £5,000 to provide rap “workshops” and lunches. Something called “Bedford: Faith in Queens Park” received £9,000 for its basketball club, another £10,000 for its cricket club and £11,000 for “fusion youth singing”. It received £1,350 for a talk on “prophetic medicine.” The Cherwell “Banbury Fair Trade Society” was paid by Prevent to deliver a “multicultural food festival.” Across the country Prevent money went to boxing, karate, judo and five-a-side football clubs, while the 1st Bristol Muslim Scout Group bafflingly received £3,180 of Prevent money for camping equipment.*¹⁹

Publicly available breakdowns of how funding was distributed for the early years of Prevent shows that a considerable number of Prevent projects indeed likely had a “diversionary” approach to counter-terrorism, at best. For instance, in 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government estimated that 2007/8 projects funded through its flagship “Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund” could be broken down as follows:

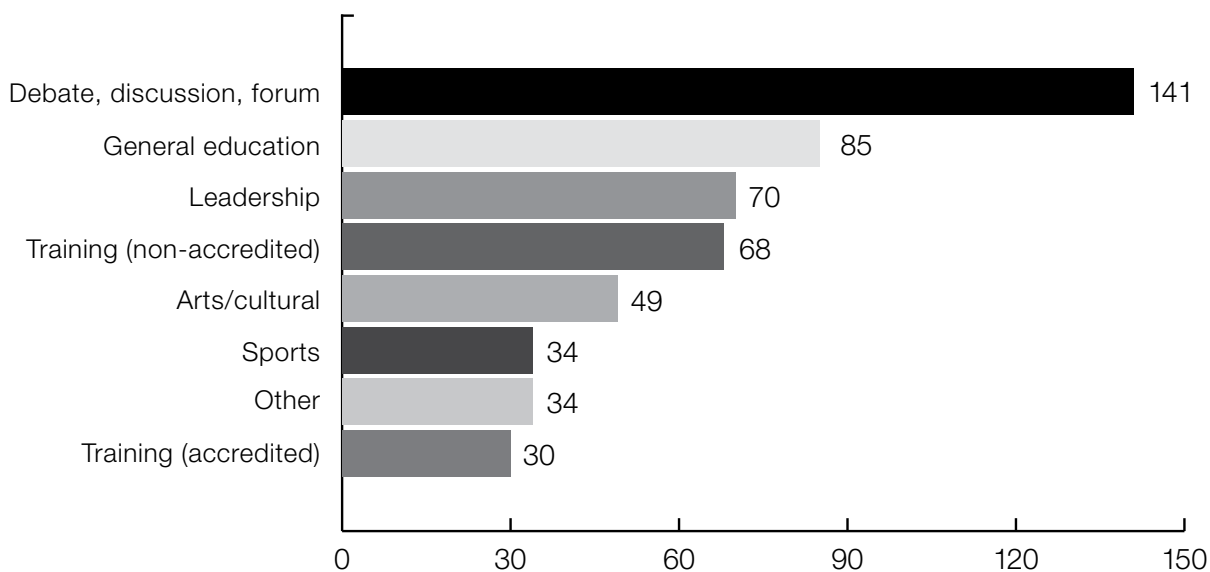
¹⁶ Interview with Barrie Phillips, “Getting On Together,” August 2011.

¹⁷ Communities and Local Government Committee, “Sixth Report: Preventing Violent Extremism,” March 2010. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/6509.htm>

¹⁸ House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2010), *Preventing Violent Extremism, Sixth Report of Session 2009–10*. London: The Stationery Office. p.61.

¹⁹ Douglas Murray, “The Prevent strategy: a textbook example of how to alienate just about everybody,” *The Daily Telegraph*, March 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/7540456/The-Prevent-strategy-a-textbook-example-of-how-to-alienate-just-about-everybody.html>

FIGURE 1 PROJECT ACTIVITIES (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)



Base: All projects returned (261)

Source: “Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund: Mapping of project activities 2007/2008,” Department for Communities and Local Government, London, 2008. p. 19

Approximate percentage of objects	Description and examples
MOST CT ↑ ↓ LEAST CT	20% Activity focused on terrorism and targeted at the most vulnerable people and sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activity which challenges the terrorist ideology for example, speakers challenging terrorist narratives; support for vulnerable people through identification, referral and intervention; and projects addressing grievances for example; ‘safe-space’ debates on issues related to terrorism.
	25% Cohesion and integration activity with reference to extremism and/or terrorism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> projects aimed more specifically at extremism and/or terrorism, but with no attempt to focus on vulnerable people or institutions.
	40% General cohesion and integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> broad interfaith, anti-racism and Islamic education projects, without reference to extremism aor terrorism; activity aimed at Muslim communities viewed as diversionary (for example, sports activity) but without any focus on the most vulnerable or with any reference to extremism or terrorism; and general Muslim forums, Muslim women’s groups, leadership and mentoring for young people.
	10% Governance, research, training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> internal local authority training, additional posts, research and evaluation.
	5% Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> general training of imams, faith capacity building.

Source: Prevent Review, Home Office, 2011, p. 29

Although the effects of Prevent funding for community projects are hard to quantify, some critics have argued that some projects may have made radicalization worse and increased social polarization and tensions. For example, the highly publicized Prevent funding of Muslim-focused sports clubs and youth groups seems to have aggravated tensions between Muslims and other ethnic and religious groups, particularly in economically deprived areas. Several Sikh and Hindu groups, for instance, have publicly raised concerns about Prevent's impact on inter-community relations. In 2009, the Sikh Community Action Network wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister describing Prevent as a "dedicated £80 million fund for the Muslim sector" while "the rest of the population remains ignored, excluded and forgotten." It further complained about perceived favorable treatment for Muslims, adding "there is neither recognition nor positive word from the government about the sustained input being provided by many hard-working, economically stable, educationally progressing, self-improving, self-sustaining communities in Britain."²⁰ The Network of Sikh Organisations, one of the largest UK Sikh organizations, likewise wrote to the British parliament, alleging that Prevent "initiatives, aimed at the Islamic community, rather than tackling underlying issues, are producing a sense of "victimisation among Muslims and a growing sense of resentment and marginalisation in other religious communities."²¹

In other instances, Prevent has been accused by high-level Conservative Party leaders (then in opposition) of funding Islamist groups which had a questionable commitment to the aspirations of government and of British society. For example, in probably the most high-profile incident, in 2007/8, the London borough of Tower Hamlets gave £38,000 to the Cordoba Foundation. With this money, the Cordoba Foundation held a public debate featuring alleged Muslim Brotherhood activists and sympathizers against pro-jihadist speakers from Hizb ut-Tahrir and other similar organizations. The Brotherhood speakers lost the debate to their harder-line opponents, who apparently convinced 78 percent of the mainly-Muslim audience to vote that "political participation had failed Muslims."²² This incident was raised by no less than the Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, who said that "public money that is meant to be used to combat extremism has ended up in the hands of extremists".²³

Criticisms that some Prevent money had gone to "extremists" or have been otherwise wasted have been largely accepted by the Home Office, with the Home Office Minister Theresa May writing in the 2011 Prevent Review that "funding sometimes even reached the very extremist organisations that Prevent should have been confronting."²⁴ Such problems likely result from Prevent's initially de-centralized approach, which gave untrained local council workers large amounts of money to spend while giving them inadequate guidance. Since the 2011 Prevent Review, however, funding has been focused solely on "priority" geographic areas and greater

²⁰ Jagdeesh Singh, "Are the British still Deceiving the Sikhs?," *World Sikh News*, May 13, 2009. <http://worldsikhnews.com/13%20May%202009/Are%20the%20British%20still%20deceiving%20the%20Sikhs.htm>

²¹ "Memorandum from Network of Sikh Organisations," September 2009, House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee, "Written Evidence: Preventing Violent Extremism." <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/65we04.htm>

²² "Muslim pressure group wins anti-democracy vote," *East London Advertiser*, February 29, 2008. <http://www.mykhilafah.com/hizb-worldwide/488-elondon-advertiser-hizb-ut-tahrir-britain-wins-anti-democracy-debate-muslim-pressure-group-wins-anti-democracy-vote->

²³ David Cameron, Speech to the Community Security Trust, March 4, 2008.

²⁴ Prevent Review, p. 1.

oversight over expenditure has been established. In addition, the 2011 Prevent review puts great emphasis on training Prevent staff, a possible indication that lack of training and excess decentralization were seen as the causes of many such problems.

How Prevent Is Rolled Out

Since its first incarnation in 2003, Prevent has been led by the British Home Office and since 2006 by its sub-department, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). In the 2005–10 period, Prevent money was distributed by the OSCT approximately according to the following formula:

1. To local government offices, which then largely decided for themselves how to spend this money according to their perceived local needs and requirements.
2. To other government branches such as the regional police forces, the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Foreign Office, to spend on their individual Prevent programs, including funding further third-party organizations
3. OSCT directly spent additional money itself on a few national or highly targeted local Prevent projects to address issues of particular concern, again often including the funding of third parties to work at community level

Thus a distinctively British model of Prevent work emerged in which money filtered down from central government to local government, which would then fund third parties, often from Muslim communities, to conduct Prevent work at a grassroots level. This strategy was based on a (often accurate) belief that in many Muslim communities, government was viewed with some suspicion and was not capable of engaging directly with those at risk of radicalization. This strategy was also based on a belief that the central government's understanding of Muslim communities was incomplete and that local councils working with members of those communities were more likely to appreciate local dynamics. The 2011 Prevent Review characterizes this as "an opportunity to use the knowledge, access and influence of people and communities to challenge extremist and terrorist ideology."²⁵

In the 2007–11 period, the central government broadly allocated money to almost all local government regions in the UK mainland, roughly according to which areas were believed most likely to produce future terrorists and also according to the size of each area's Muslim population. For instance, in the 2008–2011 period, the city of Birmingham (Muslim population in 2001 census = 140,000) received £2,413,000 of Prevent money from the Department of Communities and Local Governments (DCLG); Bradford (Muslim population in 2001 = 78,188) received £1,425,000, and so on.²⁶

According to the 2011 Prevent Review, during the first three years of Prevent, DCLG money funded over 1,000 different projects around

²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁶ For a full breakdown, see Arun Kundnani, "Spooked: How not to Prevent violent extremism," (Institute of Race Relations, 2009): 13. <http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/spooked.pdf>

the country.²⁷ Under the 2011 Prevent Review, focus has instead shifted to 25 key geographical areas which are seen as having the greatest radicalization problems, largely according to information provided by the intelligence services, meaning that “Prevent will be prioritised according to the risks we face and not (as has been the case in the past) on the basis of demographics.”²⁸ This represents a slightly more targeted approach, although in practice many of the targeted areas remain the same as under the previous model.

Snapshot of Prevent spending:

Prevent spending is notoriously difficult to quantify, with money being distributed widely from several central sources to a large range of departments which then re-distribute it further. However, the following figures help to indicate the size and distribution of this funding.

Home Office: Home Office Prevent funding (including funding to the police) was £47 million in 2009/10; and £37 million in 2010/11. In 2011/12, the Home Office has allocated approximately £36 million for Prevent activity (including funding to the police).²⁹

Local councils: In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government spent £6 million establishing the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund, which then allocated this money to 70 local councils to spend on local Prevent work. In 2008, this was augmented by a £45 million grant to local councils with additional money following. It has been estimated by independent researchers that by April 2011 a total of £61.7 million would have been provided to local councils for Prevent work.³⁰

Police: Police Prevent funding is often hard to unravel because it is often incorporated into other budgets. However, in 2010/11, the Home Office gave the police £24 million for Prevent work.³¹

Foreign and Commonwealth Office: FCO funding for Prevent activity overseas was approximately £19 million in 2009/10 and around £17 million in 2010/11. Funding commitments for 2011/12 were £10 million.

2 Targeted interventions: The Channel Programme

While the community-focused aspects of Prevent have often been the most high-profile, Prevent’s interventions component is also highly valued by the British government as a key part of its counter-terrorism work. The 2011 Prevent Review says that “radicalisation is usually a process not an event. During that process it is possible to intervene to prevent vulnerable people being drawn into terrorist-related activity.

There are some analogies between this work and other forms of crime prevention.”³² While Prevent’s success in challenging extremism and promoting more moderate concepts is generally mixed, the British government’s one-to-one intervention efforts, primarily conducted

²⁷ Prevent Review, p. 28–29.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁹ Prevent Review, p. 101–102.

³⁰ Kundnani, p. 12–13.

³¹ Prevent Review, p. 101–102.

³² Ibid., p. 8.

through the Channel Programme, seem to have been a much more clear-cut success. Key statistics provided in the 2011 Prevent Review about Channel include that since December 2010:

- 1120 people have been referred to the Channel programme;
- the majority of referrals were made by education partners, the police and youth offending services;
- the majority of referrals were aged between 13 and 25;
- there were 290 referrals aged under 16; and 55 referrals aged under 12.
- of the total number of referrals, over 90% were male;
- 88% were referred owing to concerns around international terrorism [NB: This almost always refers to jihadist terrorism];
- 8% were referred owing to concerns around right-wing violent extremism; and
- 4% were referred owing to concerns around other types of violent extremism.³³

A more significant and striking statistic comes from Sir Norman Bettison, who as Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Lead for Prevent Policing is the police's de facto overseer of national Prevent work. In late 2010, he stated: "Thus far not one of the 1,500 people that have been intervened with have been arrested for any terrorist-related offence."³⁴

Channel is essentially a highly flexible intervention program overseen by the police and a range of other governmental partners.³⁵ In institutional terms, it is structured around a Channel co-ordinator, who is appointed for each local government district, and who is usually from a police background. This person is then responsible for assessing individuals in the area who are reported to him as being "at risk of being drawn into violent extremism."³⁶ Referrals of individuals to the Channel co-ordinator can be made by a wide range of government employees and partners, including people from the police, schools, colleges and universities, Youth Offending Services, health services, social workers, housing officers, prisons and probation officers.³⁷ In practice, therefore, such initial tips can come from almost anyone working for the government. Once the person believed to be at risk of radicalizing has been identified, further meetings are held with police, local council workers, and specialists to assess if the risk of radicalization is genuine.

One of the main challenges has been identifying those at risk and then correctly assessing the level of risk that they might pose. In that regard Sir Norman has stated: "There are some things such as travel, particularly if it is out of the ordinary to exotic parts of the world, that

³³ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁴ Sir Norman Bettison, Oral Evidence taken before the Home Affairs Committee on the "Roots Of Violent Radicalisation," November 1, 2011. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/uc1446-iii/uc144601.htm>

³⁵ "Channel: Supporting individuals vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists – A guide for local partnerships," ACPO, March 2010.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

trigger a suspicion. Growing isolation from family and friends or a new-found group of friends who conduct their friendship in secret are all things that we talk about with Muslim communities around the country. We undertake some very successful tabletop exercises with communities in general, to get them to understand what to look for.”³⁸ Another problem is not just identifying people who are radicalizing but preventing over-referrals that can make it harder to spot genuine cases. One Channel co-ordinator in London says: “In the first days of Channel we had children referred for wearing ‘radical’ clothes. People were not sure what to look for and so they erred on the side of caution. But what this meant was we had to deal with a lot of cases where there was no radicalization happening.”³⁹

After an assessment by the Channel co-ordinator, if a person is judged to be not at risk no further action is taken; if they are judged to be at risk of becoming radicalized an intervention may be initiated; or, if they are judged to be already too deeply involved in violent extremism, the police and/or the security services will become involved directly without an intervention being made. If an intervention is carried out, this can be done by the police, by teachers, by Prevent leads, or by local religious or community leaders, according to the assessment of the Channel co-ordinator. This intervention, which often takes the form of a semi-formal conversation between the intervention provider and the young person, may address issues of identity, social exclusion, religious understanding and political outlook on a case-by-case basis.

Although there is neither a formal minimum nor a maximum age for participation in the Channel Programme, most are teenagers or in their early twenties. According to one well-informed source, a small number of interventions have been carried out with individuals under the age of ten.⁴⁰ Interventions are also now increasingly taking place in prisons, although not always through the formal Channel Programme. For instance, while in prison, Andrew Ibrahim, the radical convert who planned to carry out a suicide bomb attack in Bristol, admitted his mistakes in supporting terrorism and has even co-operated with police efforts to produce a video warning against the dangers of radicalization and jihadism.⁴¹

Compared to other European intervention programs, for instance in the Netherlands and Norway, the scale of Channel is much larger. It is also very de-centralized and local Channel co-ordinators are largely free to experiment with different forms of intervention as they see fit. One outcome of this is that some Channel co-ordinators used hard-line local Muslim groups, particularly Salafists, to conduct interventions. The 2011 Prevent Review has since identified this as a concern, noting that “some of the organizations funded to provide interventions to people of particular backgrounds and in some specific geographical areas have held views that are not consistent with mainstream British values.”⁴² Since the 2011 Prevent Review, the government has ceased funding such groups to conduct interventions.

³⁸ Sir Norman Bettison, Oral Evidence, November 1, 2011. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/uc1446-iii/uc144601.htm>

³⁹ Author interview with a Prevent co-ordinator, October 2011.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Andrew Ibrahim film aims to discourage extremism,” *BBC Online*, January 18, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-12218145>

⁴² Prevent Review, p. 58

Although Channel work has sometimes been controversial, both in Muslim communities where it is sometimes perceived as “spying” and among politicians who fear it has empowered extremists, in general it has the clearest successes of the UK’s Prevent strategy. Channel is also cheap. From April 2007 to March 2011, total funding for Channel was £4.7 million, which was provided by OSCT.⁴³ It is particularly cost-effective because much of its work is incorporated into the roles of existing government staff (e.g., police, local council workers, etc.) and hence relatively little new financial outlay is needed. Moreover results are fairly easy to measure. In January 2012, the police began to roll out Channel to every regional police force in the UK mainland.⁴⁴

Choice of Partners/Engagement with Islamists and Extremists

One persistent challenge identified by those working in Prevent has been choosing partners in the Muslim community. Until the publication of the 2011 Prevent Review, which prohibited the funding of “extremists,” the British government provided almost no guidance on which organizations Prevent workers should fund, work with or engage. Sometimes this lack of guidance allowed *Prevent* workers to judiciously interact with a wide range of Muslim actors in order to advance overall counter-radicalization goals. In other instances, this absence of guidance led to Prevent workers making decisions that some believed increased radicalization and the power and influence of Islamist groups. This problem was noted in the Prevent Review, which stated that it “found evidence that some Prevent funding from central Government and local authorities had reached a small number of organizations who had expressed (or employed people who had expressed) extremist views.”⁴⁵

This sometimes occurred because of what critics have described as deliberate “entryist” tactics by various Islamist groups.⁴⁶ In other instances, Prevent workers with little specialist knowledge of radicalization or of Muslim-related issues accidentally funded Islamist organizations.

But the dynamics have been very different in certain areas. In the East London borough of Newham, for instance, local Prevent workers seem to have been able to block Islamist attempts to access Prevent funding. The council did this partly through appointing to lead Prevent work a well-informed Muslim who was well versed in Islamist ideology and tactics, and partly through a policy of not supporting, funding or promoting “single faith groups.” The local Prevent co-ordinator said: “Our policy of not funding single faith groups is a strength of our Prevent work. Not only does it ensure that extremist groups are not funded, but it also ensures that groups and activities that are

⁴³ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁴ Sir Norman Bettison, Oral Evidence, November 1, 2011. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/uc1446-iii/uc144601.htm>

⁴⁵ Prevent Review, p. 35. It elaborated further: “under the previous strategy a small number of Muslim organisations had been funded from the Home Office to deliver programmes to support people at risk of radicalisation [...] on the basis that, unlike other organisations, they were able to relate to and therefore work with the people concerned. We are concerned that insufficient attention has been paid to whether these organisations comprehensively subscribe to what we would consider to be mainstream British values: democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind,” (p. 34)

⁴⁶ Andrew Gilligan, “Inextricably link to controversial mosque: The secret world of IFE,” *The Daily Telegraph*, February 28, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/7333487/Inextricably-linked-to-controversial-mosque-the-secret-world-of-IFE.html>

not committed to bringing Newham's diverse communities together are not either."⁴⁷ In addition, the Prevent co-ordinator says he has been largely able to "block these groups from using council premises as well as advising private premises in a similar way," an important achievement in the UK where extremists regularly hold meetings in corporate, charity and council-funded premises, largely due to no longer being welcome in most British mosques.

At the same time, while reducing and hampering extremist activity in the borough, Newham's Prevent team also build strong links with local schools and residents, partly through providing clear information about why and how the government was seeking to tackle radicalization. Although this did not involve interacting with any extremist groups, other Prevent workers elsewhere have admitted to meeting with individuals who hold relatively radical views. One said: "If I am going to do my job properly I have to sit down people who are really quite hard-line."⁴⁸ However, he added: "you don't do that in a way that makes them stronger." This engagement did not involve giving them funds, granting them recognition or in any other way empowering them in local communities. It was, he says, "critical engagement" and was done with a full knowledge of the risks and with a clear overall strategic aim.

Other Prevent teams have enjoyed similar challenges. For example, in one London borough the local Prevent lead also engaged tactically with a wide range of extremists and non-extremist Muslim groups as part of her work.⁴⁹ These came from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, including Afghan, Kurdish, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali. The local Prevent lead stated that she needed to speak to relatively radical individuals and groups while simultaneously taking steps to promote moderate alternatives. In particular, she stated that her preferred method was to fund moderate groups while taking a "big tent" approach to speaking to more hard-line groups that kept them included in conversations surrounding Prevent without empowering them financially or morally in local communities. She stated:

You have to strike a balance between engaging with people who don't support mainstream British values and turning your back on them. If you don't talk to them at all you are shutting a door into the community – and you are losing touch with the people who can help reach those one or two young people who might be going to do something [i.e., commit a terrorist act]. We've worked with people we dislike but for the greater good of getting the message across and getting links into these communities. As soon as you stop talking to people, they don't go away. The anger and frustration can actually increase and they can try and turn the fact that you've excluded them to their own advantage.

At the same time as talking to radicals, however, she sought out more moderate voices whom she could fund or in other ways assist, so that they would ultimately be able to undermine the support base for extremists, even as she was talking to them. She argued that "the people you want to fund might not be filling in your application forms. You have to go and find them." Such Prevent work has, however, often been carried out despite rather than because of any guidance

⁴⁷ Interview with Newham Prevent lead. London, September 2011.

⁴⁸ Interview with a Prevent lead. Fall 2011.

⁴⁹ Interview with former Prevent lead, borough in London, August 2011.

from the Home Office or other government bodies. She stated: “We had very little guidance from central government. Even when we were left out of the Prevent priority areas this year [2011], we weren’t even told about it. We had to find out for ourselves.” She added that Prevent workers often had to make difficult decisions about engagement which have no clear answer: “We have to make tough decisions all the time. For example, if there’s one problematic guy in an organisation, does that rule out the whole organisation or does it mean that you just don’t work with that one guy?”

The Prevent Review noted the recurrent challenges Prevent workers have faced in selecting partners and engaging with Muslim groups, and chose to err on the side of caution, stating that in the future “neither Government Departments nor the police will rely on extremists to address the risk of radicalisation.” It also said that “neither Prevent funding nor support will be given to organisations that hold extremist views or support terrorist-related activity of any kind, in this country or overseas.” While this clarifies the issue of funding, it does not however provide much guidance on the issue of non-financial engagement. Indeed, it could be argued such criteria will lead to excessive disengagement. The police, for instance, have argued that they should be allowed to maintain contacts with extreme Islamists and Salafists if this can prevent acts of terrorism. In late 2011, Sir Norman told a parliamentary committee:

I quite understand that it is unacceptable to spend taxpayers’ money on organisations or on people who have expressed views that seem to be at odds with the values of the general populace. However, I need to say that we will work sometimes – not funding – with people who might have unpalatable and unacceptable views, so long as they are not criminal views, as a credible route to connecting with younger people.⁵⁰

It seems likely therefore that the UK Prevent strategy is moving towards a compromise whereby the government does not fund or empower extremists while still being free to engage tactically with them to prevent acts of terrorism, to gain improved understanding of Muslim communities or at access individuals at risk of turning to terrorism.

Prevent Assessment

One of the major challenges for the Prevent strategy has been to assess its various strands of work. The Prevent Review notes that “evaluating preventative programmes is inherently challenging.”⁵¹

However it also adds that the “evaluation of Prevent activity to date has been poor. Money has been wasted”⁵²; that evaluation of programs to help vulnerable individuals had “not been fully effective”⁵³; that evaluation of Prevent work overseas was “mixed”⁵⁴; and that evaluation of Prevent referrals in the health sector was “incomplete.”⁵⁵ The review also states that auditing and recording

⁵⁰ Sir Norman Bettison, Oral Evidence, November 1, 2011. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhaff/uc1446-iii/uc144601.htm>

⁵¹ Prevent Review, p. 36.

⁵² Ibid., p. 6.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

had been so poor that the Home Office was even unable to assess how much Prevent money was given to extremists. It notes: "Records and audit trails for Prevent funding have not always been comprehensive. It is therefore possible that Prevent funding has reached extremist groups of which we are not yet aware."⁵⁶ To rectify such problems, the Prevent Review promised that:

*In future, before funding is granted, any proposed Prevent project will be more rigorously assessed against its ability and likelihood to deliver against Prevent objectives. That assessment must generally take into account the extent to which the project can reach the people who are vulnerable to radicalisation: they are a small minority. We will expect clear agreement on what is to be delivered. To better ensure value-for-money we will no longer be contributing to the operating costs of any organisation.*⁵⁷

It added that:

*For Prevent, we anticipate indicators around our efforts to challenge ideology and disrupt propagandists for terrorism; the effectiveness of interventions to support vulnerable individuals and work in and with sectors to deal with radicalisation. We will consider "input" (such as number of individuals within interventions programmes or total expenditure on Prevent in a sector) and "impact" (such as the number of individuals no longer assessed as being vulnerable or a reduction of risk within a particular geographical area or sector). As in criminology, we will commission regular follow-up studies following preliminary evaluation of projects against specific indicators. We will commission research into issues arising from performance assessment.*⁵⁸

Conclusion

The overall impression of the UK's Prevent strategy is that it was well-intentioned and well-funded but that putting it into practice was often challenging. Indeed, it is clear that Prevent has had far less effect proportionate to the time and resources that were invested in it than it should have, especially in comparison with the less advertised work done by some other European countries such as the Netherlands. For this reason, the 2011 Prevent Review aimed to drastically reduce the program's original ambitions to re-focus it on a few core geographic areas, to more tightly focus on tackling "violent extremism", and improve value for money.

The root causes of Prevent problems are several. Following the 2005 terrorist attacks, Prevent was rolled out far too quickly under enormous political and public pressure without enough time being given to thinking out what radicalization was, how it occurred and what needed to be done to address it. In addition, Prevent initially over-reached both through trying to cover too many geographical areas and trying to achieve too much. Prevent also often suffered from a lack of internal assessment, a lack of any clear tactical and strategic vision, and overly high expectations of often untrained local government workers. This is particularly evident in the range of approaches to difficult issues, such as how to engage with extremists

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

and which projects to fund. Some of these problems are still not rectified. Well-informed experts on Prevent today point out that, nine years after its launch, Prevent has yet to produce even basic guidelines on how different branches of government should engage in different ways with different types of groups and individuals in order to avoid empowering extremists.⁵⁹

Balancing such problems, however, are important successes. Some projects, such as the Channel Programme, have been genuinely innovative and have achieved quantifiable results. Some grassroots counter-radicalization work is also said to have achieved clear results – as in the case of Andrew Ibrahim in Bristol. Work in prisons is also starting to show results, as is work with schools. In many communities too, low-key funding for debating initiatives and some judicious financial help for moderate Muslim groups has kick-started difficult debates about extremism, about the relationship between secularism and British Islam, and about being Muslim in a mainly non-Muslim society. This has enabled a push-back against extremist voices.

Moreover, many of Prevent's early problems are now being rectified. In particular, financial support for extremists has been halted, more rigorous assessment methods are being established, and there is a more targeted, intelligence-led focus on known vulnerable areas such as prisons, universities and schools, and certain geographic locations. While the UK's Prevent strategy can therefore be seen in many ways as a warning of the dangers of rushing into overly ambitious and extensive counter-radicalization programs, it may yet become an example of how focused, effective and value-for-money counter-radicalization work can be conducted in challenging circumstances in order to tangibly and quantifiably increase national security.

Key lessons

Value of a comprehensive strategy. In its present incarnation, Prevent recognizes the scope for multiple government departments to engage in counter-radicalization work. Involving schools, prisons, police forces, and universities, Prevent shows that a wide range of government employees can contribute (e.g., through identifying those at risk of radicalization).

Importance of assessment. The revised version of Prevent now puts a greater emphasis on assessing effectiveness and value for money, even while recognizing that such assessment often remains inherently challenging.

Training of Prevent staff. Prevent initially suffered from a lack of adequately trained staff. Work is now taking place to train key Prevent workers not only in understanding radicalization but also on key intra-Islamic trends and in how to engage in different ways with different Muslim groups.

Need for central government oversight and guidance. Early incarnations of Prevent clearly suffered from a lack of central guidance or supervision at local levels. Prevent is now seeking to establish

⁵⁹ DCLG recently produced a draft version of such guidance. It was rejected by Conservative Party specialists as "too weak." Source: Senior Conservative Party member, January 2012.

closer relations between local and central Prevent workers, in order to better advance Prevent's overall goals.

Lack of intellectual clarity. Early Prevent work was hampered by an unclear understanding of the relationship between cognitive and violent extremism – along with a reluctance to clearly identify problematic ideologies by name.

Defenses against “entryism.” The UK experience illustrates that Islamists may attempt to take advantage of and monopolise counter-radicalization programs. Such programs need to be aware of this risk in order to prevent such “entryism” (e.g., through enacting measures to identify such attempts and remove extremists who have penetrated the counter-radicalization work).

Rejection of funding or empowering extremists. Prevent now recognizes the need to ensure that Prevent work does not fund or empower Islamist or excessively conservative Muslim groups, while at the same time ensuring there is still scope for Prevent workers to conduct non-empowering engagement with such groups in order to prevent terrorist attacks or to critically challenge these groups' ideologies.

Benefits of imaginative thinking. For all the shortcomings of the UK Prevent strategy, much of its work nonetheless illustrates the benefits of imaginative thinking. From Channel interventions to the use of counter-extremism theater programs in schools, the UK approach has been characterized by its attempts to expand the understanding of what is possible in a counter-terrorism context.

3 The Netherlands

Background

The Netherlands has not experienced a terrorist threat of a magnitude even remotely comparable to that faced by the United Kingdom over the last ten years. Yet it is fair to say that the country has implemented a counter-radicalization strategy that rivals Prevent in complexity and ambition. This chapter describes the main features and challenges faced by the Netherlands' counter-radicalization strategy since its first implementation.

Although they have always targeted additional forms of extremism, the focus of Dutch counter-radicalization initiatives has traditionally been various forms of jihadist-inspired behaviors present within a small cross-section of the country's 1 million Muslims. Islamist networks have been active in the Netherlands since the early 1990s, although Dutch security services at the time estimated their presence and the threat they posed to the country to be extremely limited.⁶⁰ Authorities began devoting increasing attention to Islamist and jihadist networks in 2001. The shift was caused not only by the September 11 attacks in the United States but also by the death of two young Dutch citizens of Moroccan descent in Kashmir, apparently while trying to join a local jihadist group. The fact that the two youngsters were associated with the al Furqaan mosque in Eindhoven, one of the country's main Salafist centers, raised concerns over the possibility that second-generation Dutch Muslims could become radicalized in the Netherlands and eventually involved in acts of violence, whether abroad or in the country.

In response, the AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst), Holland's domestic intelligence agency, intensified its monitoring of several informal networks of militants operating throughout the country. Even though numbers of suspects were not particularly high (in 2004 the AIVD estimated that between 100 and 200 potential militants operated in the country) and most of them were little more than wannabes with no operational connection to al Qaeda or other groups outside of the Netherlands, the Dutch government remained concerned about militants planning attacks within the country.

Fears about homegrown terrorism of jihadist inspiration came true on the morning of November 2, 2004, when Amsterdam-born Mohammed Bouyeri killed prominent Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh on a busy Amsterdam thoroughfare, first shooting him at close range and then brutally and ritualistically stabbing him. After executing what he later claimed was his religious duty, Bouyeri engaged the police in a shootout and was arrested. Van Gogh had directed a movie critical of Islamic attitudes to women that had been heavily discussed in radical chat rooms frequented by members of the Hofstad group, the informal network of Dutch-based militants to which Bouyeri belonged. The men had agreed that the Islamic punishment for the film's director (and its writer, the Somali-born Dutch Member of Parliament Ayaan

⁶⁰ Tinka Veldhuis and Edwin Bakker, *Muslims in the Netherlands: Tensions and Violent Conflict*, MICROCON Policy Working Paper 6 (2009): 10–11.

Hirsi Ali) was death, although there is no evidence that any other member of the cluster was operationally involved in Bouyeri's action.

In the following months Dutch authorities arrested several members of the Hofstad group and dismantled other jihadist networks in various parts of the country.⁶¹ Most of them had similar characteristics: informal, unconnected to established groups operating outside of the Netherlands, quite amateurish in their modus operandi, and largely composed of second-generation Dutch Muslims (mostly of Moroccan descent with a few converts).

The assassination of Theo van Gogh had a profound political, social and cultural impact in the Netherlands. Prosecutors in the Bouyeri trial declared that his aim was to “drive a wedge between different segments of Dutch society,” and some events indicate that he achieved partial success.⁶² Forty percent of Dutch interviewed in the immediate aftermath of the murder said they hoped that Muslims “no longer felt at home” in the Netherlands.⁶³ A number of mosques and Islamic schools across the country were vandalized or firebombed; in response, churches were also damaged, triggering a rise in vandalisms and reprisals that shocked what had traditionally been considered one of Europe's most tolerant societies.

Only by putting the event into this larger social perspective can one understand why a prominent Dutch politician described the assassination of Theo van Gogh as “Holland's 9/11.”⁶⁴ The event took place as the whole country was engaged in a very intense debate over integration, multiculturalism and the place of Muslims in Dutch society. The fact that some Dutch Muslims were actively involved in acts of terrorism and even killed one of the country's best known public intellectuals was just one incident involving the Dutch Muslim community at a time when the community was under heavy scrutiny from politicians and the media. Statistics reporting the overrepresentation of youths of Moroccan descent in criminal activities or occasional incidents involving Muslim religious leaders—for example, the case of a Rotterdam-based imam who described homosexuality as a disease during a television show, or that of a prominent Tilburg imam who refused to shake hands with the minister of immigration and integration because he believed his religion prohibits physical contact with women other than his wife—typically shaped this often tense debate.⁶⁵

Although dissenting voices did exist, by early 2005 the general consensus in the Netherlands was that large cross-sections of the Muslim population were not integrated into mainstream Dutch society and that violent radicalization was just one of the byproducts of this broader problem. Pressured by an intense public debate, policymakers began devising measures to address the situation. As in the UK, therefore, counter-terrorism policy was also reflective of wider concerns about Muslim integration.

⁶¹ For a general profile of jihadist networks in the Netherlands, see: C.J. de Poot and A. Sonnenschein, *Jihadi Terrorism in the Netherlands* (WODC, 2011).

⁶² Notes taken by the author at the trial of Mohammed Bouyeri, Amsterdam, July 2005.

⁶³ Justin Sparks, “Muslim Mole Panics Dutch Secret Service,” *Times* (London), November 14, 2004.

⁶⁴ Andrew Anthony, “When Theo van Gogh Was Slaughtered in the Street for His Attacks on Islamic Fundamentalism, It Was Also a Knife to the Heart of the Dutch Liberal Dream,” *Observer Magazine*, December 5, 2004.

⁶⁵ Froukje Demant and Beatrice de Graaf, “How to Counter Radical Narratives: Dutch Deradicalization Policy in the Case of Moluccan and Islamic Radicals,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33:408-428, 2010.

As a result, while the country's counter-terrorism capacities were significantly improved by introducing new legislation and significantly expanding the role and personnel size of the AIVD, Dutch policymakers also sought to introduce measures that would improve integration and consequently prevent radicalization among young Dutch Muslims. The lead in this effort was initially taken not by the central government but by the country's largest municipalities, which had encountered such problems for years.⁶⁶ Already by early 2005, therefore, local authorities in Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague were devising their own counter-radicalization strategies ahead of the national government, seeking to address issues of both integration and radicalization within their cities' Muslim communities. As some of the officials behind these initial efforts candidly admit, these initiatives were quite unsophisticated, venturing into uncharted territory with enthusiasm and good will but little experience and empirical knowledge on radicalization dynamics.⁶⁷

Despite the inevitable difficulties, these first local experiences yielded some good results and constituted remarkably useful examples for policymakers at the national level.⁶⁸ In August 2007, then Minister of Interior Guusje ter Horst rolled out a national plan titled *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007–2011* (henceforth Action Plan).⁶⁹ The Action Plan was conceived as a national strategy outlining goals, actions and responsibilities for countering polarization and radicalization for the 2007–2011 quinquennium. It basically sought to distill the experience of the few municipalities that had pioneered counter-radicalization activities, rationalize them, and extend them to other municipalities throughout the country.

The goals of the Action Plan were threefold. First, it sought to prevent the “processes of isolation, polarization and radicalization by the (re-) inclusion of people who are at risk of slipping away from Dutch society and the democratic legal order.” That was to be achieved through various preventive measures, from macro-level initiatives seeking to reduce tensions within society to more targeted actions such as education, traineeships and personal development programs aimed at “binding” at-risk individuals to mainstream society.⁷⁰

If the first goal was to be achieved through radicalization prevention measures focusing on large segments of society, the second goal of the Action Plan was targeted de-radicalization/disengagement. Its first step was to create an early signaling system for radicalization processes. Under it, frontline workers would receive adequate training to be able to spot signs of radicalization among young people they had contact with and report them to authorities. In turn, authorities would devise adequate solutions (such as tailored mentoring programs) to attempt to prevent the individual from further radicalizing. The third and final goal of the Action Plan focused on repression, as authorities believed that various counter-radicalization initiatives would work only if accompanied by tougher law enforcement measures to disrupt radical networks and limit the influence of radicalizing agents.

⁶⁶ Interview with Rob Bogaard, Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Justice, The Hague, August 2011.

⁶⁷ Interview with Marco Zannoni, Senior Researcher at COT (Instituut voor Veiligheids- en Crisismanagement) and former official at Amsterdam's IHH, The Hague, August 2011; Interview with NCTb official I, Amsterdam and The Hague, August 2011.

⁶⁸ Interview with Rob Bogaard, August 2011.

⁶⁹ *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007–2011*, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006.

⁷⁰ Interview with Saskia Tempelman, senior official at the Ministry of Justice, The Hague, August 2011.

The strategy outlined in the Action Plan is modeled on the theory of supply and demand of radicalization, which has shaped the way the Dutch counter-terrorism community sees the problem.⁷¹ The model argues that there is a potential demand for ideology among young Dutch Muslims concerned about their identity, as they seek answers and guidance over “the meaning of what it is to be Muslim in today’s world.” At the same time, there is a supply of jihadist ideology coming from preachers, mosques and the internet “which intends to appeal to these young people as they search for answers relating to their identity.”

Demand and supply do not necessarily meet, but when they do their encounter does not take place in a vacuum.⁷² Rather, the encounter is often favored by what Dutch authorities refer to as the “breeding ground,” that is the various frustrations many young Dutch Muslims might experience and which might lead them in the direction of a radical ideology. These frustrations could be the actual discrimination they face in Dutch society or simply the perception of it, lack of perspectives, a public discourse hostile to Islam, and several other factors.

The 2007 Action Plan and the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy make the point that the Dutch government should act on all three aspects. More specifically, when it comes to the demand, Dutch authorities hope to make individuals more resilient to radical messages and have parents, imams, community leaders and local key figures provide those crucial answers on issues of identity and religion that young people so desperately seek, encouraging critical thinking and pointing out the flaws of extremist narratives. In the words of the 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy, “specific measures are taken to reinforce the resilience of those groups which are the target of jihadist recruitment and propaganda, and groups which are or may be sensitive to the extremist supply. Examples of such measures are creating social networks, setting up programmes to increase the capacity for critical judgment, reinforcing democratic awareness, providing resilience training, and cooperating with role models and leaders.”

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

71 Colin Mellis, “Amsterdam and Radicalisation: The Municipal Approach,” in *Radicalisation in Broader Perspective*, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (October 2007): 40-8; *National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011–2015* (June 2011): 70–4.

72 Froukje Demant and Beatrice de Graaf, “How to Counter Radical Narratives: Dutch Deradicalization Policy in the Case of Moluccan and Islamic Radicals,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33 (2010): 408–428.

target group at which the message is directed (individual, group, etc.).”⁷³

Finally, Dutch authorities have sought to operate on the breeding ground by seeking to reduce factors that can cause frustration in youth. Actions such as improving access to the job market or ameliorating living conditions in poor neighborhoods are seen as not only diminishing the societal context that is conducive to radicalization but also helping to achieve larger integration goals.

The implementation of the Action Plan, which was widely supported across the political spectrum, involved eight ministries, ranging from the Ministry of Interior (BZK) and the Ministry of Justice (WWI) to the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the Ministry of Youth and Family, Education, Culture and Science (OCW). Yet the Action Plan made it clear that “tackling polarization and radicalization is primarily a matter for the local government and the municipalities.”⁷⁴ The Action Plan, in fact, envisioned the role of the central government as one of support and facilitation of the activities of individual municipalities. Those, in fact, are best positioned to identify the dynamics taking place within their communities and craft solutions that are better tailored to them.

In order to develop the competencies of the municipalities, a significant portion of the Action Plan’s €28 million budget was initially spent to fund studies on the status of polarization and radicalization in various Dutch cities.⁷⁵ While, as seen, a few major municipalities had already done so independently, the government and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) identified areas of concern and then encouraged individual municipalities to produce their own assessments of the situation on their territory. Those assessments formed the basis for more or less sophisticated specific action plans drafted by individual municipalities.

Under the Action Plan, therefore, the role of the central government was limited to providing funds and disseminating knowledge. Some 140 of the country’s more than 400 municipalities used some of the Action Plan’s funds to conduct research or implement programs.⁷⁶ At the same time, the central government spent a substantial amount of resources reaching out to individual municipalities in order to build up their awareness and knowledge of radicalization processes, conducting training seminars, building networks and disseminating best practices.

Underlying Philosophy

The Action Plan and other initiatives crafted around the time of its release were shaped by two beliefs. The first was, as seen, that radicalization was the byproduct of a lack of integration into mainstream society. The second was that the state should concern itself not just with violent radicalization but also with its cognitive manifestations – that is, cases in which an individual embraces extremist views but has not violently acted upon them. Working definitions of radicalization adopted by Dutch authorities therefore

⁷³ *National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011–2015* (June 2011): 71.

⁷⁴ *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007–2011*, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2006): 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11, 29.

⁷⁶ Interview with Rob Bogaard, August 2011.

explicitly omitted violence as a necessary factor. For example, a 2005 memorandum to Parliament from the Ministry of Immigration and Integration defined radicalization as “an attitude and a way of thinking that is aimed at the fundamental reformation or overthrowing of the social and/or political system,”⁷⁷ while the 2007 Action Plan defined it as “the growing preparedness to wish to or to support fundamental changes in the city or society that do not fit within our democratic system of law and whereby undemocratic means are used.”⁷⁸

Whether these sentiments are accompanied by the use of violence determines how Dutch authorities will intervene, but both violent and cognitive radicalization were considered phenomena the government should tackle. The reasoning behind adopting a broad definition of radicalization is twofold. Firstly, cognitive radicalism was widely understood to be the logical antecedent to behavioral radicalism. Because all terrorists have undergone a radicalization process and hence, before becoming violent radicals, were cognitive radicals, it is argued that state and society should intervene as early as possible in the process to prevent the spread of radical ideas. Moreover, irrespective of whether they might lead to violence, extremist ideas can have a devastating impact on the social cohesion of the Netherlands’ extremely diverse society.

Reflecting this broad definition of radicalization that linked the phenomenon to lack of integration, many of the activities implemented throughout the Netherlands under the 2007 Action Plan focused on the promotion of shared democratic values, integration, and social cohesion as a means of fighting radicalization. They included interventions in areas ranging from employment to education, from health care to housing. The underlying idea was that these activities seeking the general enhancement of social cohesion and integration “may have an indirect effect on countering the breeding grounds of radicalisation by reinforcing the awareness of the value of the democratic legal order, and by enhancing the mutual involvement of citizens.”⁷⁹ Improving the material integration and the sense of belonging of young Dutch Muslims, argued the Action Plan, would reduce the breeding ground for radicalization.

Some academics criticized this approach from the very beginning, arguing that it was too broad and did not rely on empirical evidence.⁸⁰ Indeed, more and more research conducted in the Netherlands and in other European countries began to make Dutch authorities question some of their assumptions. First, it became evident from an analysis of the background of those involved in terrorist activities in the Netherlands and in most Western countries that most of them were quite well integrated into mainstream society, according to most standards commonly used to assess integration (e.g. language fluency, levels of education, levels of contact with non-Muslim society etc).⁸¹ Moreover, the link between polarization and radicalization began to also be doubted. Many observers argue that Dutch society

⁷⁷ *Memorandum on Society's Resilience and Integration Policy: Prevention of Radicalisation in the Context of Integration Policy*, Ministry of Immigration and Integration (August 2005): 3.

⁷⁸ *Action Plan against Polarisation and Radicalisation*, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2007): 1.

⁷⁹ *Memorandum on Society's Resilience and Integration Policy: Prevention of Radicalisation in the Context of Integration Policy*, Ministry of Immigration and Integration (August 2005): 10.

⁸⁰ Bob de Graaf, “The Risk of the (Overly?) Broad-Based Approach in Dutch counterterrorism Policy,” in *Radicalisation in Broader Perspective*, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (October 2007): 53.

⁸¹ Statement of Lidewijde Ongerling before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, June 27, 2007.

has never been as polarized as it has been over the last five years and that the popularity of anti-Islamic politician Geert Wilders has increased the sense of alienation of many Dutch Muslims. Yet, almost counterintuitively, this increased polarization has been met with a steady decrease in violent radicalization, as Dutch authorities over the last five years have consistently monitored a decline in the cases of individuals involved in violent activities.⁸²

These observations have led Dutch authorities to rethink their assumptions on the links between radicalization, integration and polarization.⁸³ Radicalization is increasingly interpreted in a narrow sense, its meaning closely linked to violence. The 2011 National Counterterrorism Strategy, in fact, clearly defines radicalization as “the process that can lead to violent extremism and eventually even to terrorism.” “Violent extremism,” in turn, “is defined as ‘the willingness to use or legitimise violence as the extreme consequence of an extremist way of thinking.’”⁸⁴ The 2011 Strategy also clearly stated that “one difference with previous years is that orthodoxy and radicalism are no longer the subject of CT policy.”

That is not to say that Dutch authorities now refute the possibility of a link between lack of integration and polarization on one hand and radicalization on the other. Dutch authorities are still very much concerned about phenomena that can be broadly considered as manifestations of extremism, even if they are not linked to violence, and they do believe that occasionally those feelings might lead to further radicalization and violence. But in light of a lack of solid empirical evidence proving such links, they have decided to increasingly separate the two efforts – an approach that is also increasingly followed in the UK. A consensus on the subject seems to have been reached by Dutch authorities and it is outlined in the 2011 Counterterrorism Strategy. Counter-radicalization measures will focus strictly on situations that are closely linked to the commission of violent acts. Initiatives to improve integration and reduce polarization will still be carried out, both because they are part of a broader policy aim of the Dutch government and because they might also have an indirect positive effect on preventing radicalization. But those initiatives will be carried out separately from counter-radicalization efforts and by authorities other than those directly involved in combating terrorism.

Other concurrent phenomena have influenced this shift in Dutch counter-radicalization thinking. Chief among them is the steady decline in radicalization. If the 2007 Action Plan stated that “polarization and radicalization appear to be increasing in scope, speed and intensity in the Netherlands,” since then Dutch authorities have consistently stated that radicalization of jihadist inspiration has become a marginal phenomenon affecting a few dozen, poorly organized and allegedly well monitored individuals.⁸⁵

Authorities have several explanations for this phenomenon, which is somewhat in countertendency with most other European countries. The application of various repressive measures, ranging from the deportation of key radicalizing agents to the arrest of important

⁸² Interview with Saskia Tempelman, senior official at the Ministry of Justice, The Hague, August 2011; Interview with NCTb official II, The Hague, August 2011.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011–2015* (June 2011): 69.

⁸⁵ *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007–2011*, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2006): 4.

militants, has unquestionably played a substantial role. It is arguable that internal dynamics within Dutch Muslim communities are also important, as jihadist ideology no longer seems to possess the same appeal it had in the mid-2000s. It must also be noted that the Netherlands has never had a massive jihadist presence so it is not incorrect to see the spike in plots and activities that took place around 2004 as an exception to an otherwise quite relatively calm scene. And it is also fair to assume that, although it is very difficult to assess, some of the counter-radicalization measures implemented by the government might have contributed to the phenomenon.

Two additional factors have made jihadist radicalization less of a priority. The first is the realization that other forms of extremism (left-wing, right-wing, and animal rights) need attention as well. While jihadist radicalization remains the most important threat to the Netherlands, there is a consensus that more attention should be paid to the other forms. Finally, the Netherlands, like all other Western countries, is undergoing a severe financial crisis and budget cuts have been imposed across the board. In light of the security services' assessment of declining radicalization and significantly decreased public pressure, the government has not renewed the Action Plan and its generous spending and has thereby significantly reduced the budget for counter-radicalization programs.

The 2007 Action Plan expired at the end of 2011. While at the time of writing it cannot be confirmed, the government will soon launch a much narrower strategy that will clearly differentiate between counter-radicalization and pro-integration work. Due to budget cuts the central government will no longer dole out large amounts to municipalities. Rather it will provide a sort of toolbox with resources, training and experts that individual municipalities can utilize if they need to. But, after five years of Action Plan, each municipality is expected to have built a solid knowledge base and be able to carry out its own strategy with only minimal and more selective support from the central government.

The narrowing of the focus on violent extremism is likely to manifest itself also in a narrowing of the approach. While the Action Plan aimed at getting virtually all Dutch municipalities to devise a counter-radicalization plan, authorities are increasingly aiming for what they refer to as the "hotspots approach."⁸⁶ Under this new approach the focus of attention and funding will be prioritized, based on threat analysis, and directed at specific sectors, clusters or geographic areas rather than at all municipalities who think they may have an issue or at whole communities. As one official argues, "Communities do not radicalize, individuals do."⁸⁷ Given the increasing paucity of resources and new insights, a more targeted approach is deemed necessary.

Types of Activities

The counter-radicalization programs implemented by Dutch authorities fall under two general categories. The first are general preventive initiatives aimed at the population at large, a large cross-section of it (generally the young Muslim population), or smaller

⁸⁶ Interview with Rob Bogaard, August 2011; Interview with NCTb official I, Amsterdam and The Hague, August 2011.

⁸⁷ Interview with NCTb official I, Amsterdam and The Hague, August 2011.

groups that are considered potentially at risk of radicalizing. The second category is constituted by targeted interventions aimed at preventing the further radicalization of specific individuals who already display signs of radicalism. It must be said that all these programs are devised and implemented by individual municipalities, albeit often with the financial and technical support of the central government. Initiatives therefore differ quite significantly from city to city, as they reflect the different problems, sophistication and philosophical approaches of each municipality.

General preventive activities

General preventive initiatives have absorbed the lion's share of the funding for counter-radicalization. Some programs are very broad initiatives aimed at reducing tensions within society and favoring positive contacts among groups that do not normally interact with one another. They include publicly-sponsored initiatives like the annual "Day of Dialogue" and the series of "Islamic Debates" in Rotterdam, interfaith meetings, and *iftaar* (breaking of the fast during Ramadan) dinners held in public squares.⁸⁸

Some of the most common initiatives are courses held or sponsored by the municipalities. The topics and the target audiences of these courses differ significantly, but most are designed to attract young Muslims and strengthen their assertiveness and interpersonal capacities. The underlying idea is that individuals who are proud of their identity and comfortable with other groups are likely to be more resilient to extremist messages that distort Islam and demonize non-Muslims.⁸⁹ For example, the municipality of Slotervaart, a sub-district of Amsterdam with a large Muslim population, has introduced psychological/cultural programs with the telling titles of "Deal with disappointment," "Deal with dissent" and "Learning to deal with criticism of their own faith," all designed to promote self-control and self-criticism.⁹⁰

Other courses encourage critical thinking, the ability to listen to and objectively evaluate opposing views, and the capacity to express thoughts in a non-confrontational way. Some programs are designed to allow youngsters to safely vent frustrations, as in the case of an essay contest in Utrecht where high school students were asked to write about what made them angry and what their ideal society looked like. These exercises were followed by discussions led by experts who commented on the essays.⁹¹

Other courses focus on having youngsters debate about democracy, multicultural society and Dutch foreign policies. The underlying philosophy of most of these courses is to present basic facts to the participants and stimulate a constructive discussion that seeks to undermine stereotypes and misconceptions. Many experts agree that the best way to do so is not to be confrontational but rather stimulate fact-based critical thinking without challenging the participants too directly. The most common participants are Muslim students who,

⁸⁸ Sara Grunenberg and Rita Schriemer, "Respons op Extremisme in de Regio Rotterdam," in Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, eds., *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme, Achtste Rapportage* (Anne Frank Stichting/Amsterdam University Press, 2008): 141–65.

⁸⁹ Interview with Halim El Madkouri, Head of the Rule of Law, Religion and Society Department at FORUM, Utrecht, August 2011.

⁹⁰ *Actieplan Slotervaart: Het Tegengaan van Radicalisering*, Municipality of Slotervaart (February 2007): 10.

⁹¹ Interview with Halim El Madkouri, Head of the Rule of Law, Religion and Society Department at FORUM, Utrecht, August 2011.

despite their good education, are frustrated with their place in society. The courses' aim is to challenge their ideas and misperception in a non-confrontational way by simply triggering inner doubt.

While youngsters are the main targets of these courses, others seek to engage parents. Municipalities have understood the importance of explaining the dangers of radicalization to parents and have devised specific courses to do so in culturally sensitive ways. Other courses seek to teach parents how to educate Muslim children in a Western society or how to dialogue with them on issues that are commonly considered taboo (such as sex, drugs and crime). Women and mothers are also considered a particularly important group to reach out to, given their potential influence. Not only have municipalities organized courses specifically for them but they have also fostered the growth of grassroots Muslim women organizations. These organizations serve multiple purposes, from helping otherwise marginalized women familiarize themselves with Dutch society and culture to providing a support network to women in distress, including female relatives of convicted radicals.⁹² In many cases these organizations teach women how to spot signs of radicalization in their children and relatives and explain the dangers related to the process. In many cases these organizations liaise directly with the municipalities, providing an important window on an otherwise difficult-to-penetrate world.

Several programs also seek to promote role models and mentors for youngsters.⁹³ Amsterdam, for example, has organized seminars and other targeted forms of support for a small group of potential future leaders within the city's Muslim community, youths between the ages of 19 and 26 who have been active in society and could be potential positive role models. In other municipalities authorities have asked human resources managers at large companies to meet with and possibly provide internships to local Muslim students. The idea is that such outreach would dispel the widely held notion that Muslims face discrimination in the job search.

Targeted interventions

The second macro-type of programs implemented by Dutch authorities are individualized interventions. Rather than targeting the general population or large cross-sections of it with preventive actions, these interventions aim at "recuperating" identified individuals who seem to be on the path to radicalization. In substance, municipalities seek to identify youngsters who display signs of radicalization but have not committed any criminal action, assess their situation based on a balanced and informed analysis, and then put in place measures to seek to prevent the individual from further radicalizing.

The first step in this complex and delicate process is signaling. Local police officers, teachers, guidance counselors, social and youth workers, and other individuals operating in regular contact with young people are believed to be those most likely to be in a position to notice if a young person is becoming radicalized. The Action Plan

⁹² That is the case, for example, of Steunpunt Sabr, a women-run organization headquartered in an immigrant-heavy area of The Hague.

⁹³ K.A. Buurman, *Voorbeeld doet volgen? Rolmodellen van (radicaliserende) moslimjongeren in Nederland*, report by Centrum voor Terrorisme en Contraterrorismestudies of Leiden University (Campus Den Haag).

therefore states that those individuals should be the “eyes and ears” of the local government, willing and capable to report those cases to the municipality, which will then take appropriate measures.⁹⁴

From the very beginning Dutch authorities understood that frontline workers could serve this controversial role only if they were a) convinced of the importance of spotting and reporting signs of radicalization, and b) properly trained to do so. Indeed, getting frontline workers to be the “eyes and ears” of the government in a counterterrorism policy aimed at identifying individuals who might have radical views but are not engaged in actual violence was, at the beginning, a challenging prospect for Dutch authorities. The Dutch Association of Teachers (AOB), for example, initially opposed the idea, arguing that it was not a teacher’s job to spy on students. Many social workers were equally reluctant and strongly disliked the idea of acting as the *longa manus* of the police or the secret service, a problem also often faced in the UK, particularly in a university context.⁹⁵

Dutch authorities, both at the national and local level, soon understood that they needed to better explain their intentions and build trust with frontline workers. Several meetings were held to explain that the interventions triggered by the information that would come from frontline workers were not carried out by the police or the secret service. Unlike the police-led Channel Programme in the United Kingdom, in fact, targeted interventions in the Netherlands are conducted by the municipality and “are distinctively differentiated from activities concerned with pursuing terrorists.”⁹⁶ The fact that they were supposed to report cases to fellow social workers rather than to the police or intelligence agencies made many frontline workers significantly more comfortable.

But equally important in gaining the trust of frontline workers was framing their actions not as “spotting a terrorist” but rather as care-based interventions operated in the best interest of the young person being reported.⁹⁷ Dutch authorities made an effort to have frontline workers appreciate the nature of the risk radicalization poses not just to the state, society and the community, but also to the specific individual that undergoes the radicalization process. Just as they would signal whether a youth they are in contact with has problems with drugs or child abuse, young people who radicalize are in equal need of help from frontline workers, as undergoing the process ultimately harms them. Trainers, for example, occasionally cited the case of Nick Reilly, the British convert to Islam who suffered from Asperger’s syndrome and who was convinced by recruiters to blow himself up in an Exeter restaurant in 2008.⁹⁸ Alternatively, referring to the Dutch context, trainers have often used the story of the Walters brothers, two Dutch-born converts to Islam whose radicalization tore their and their families’ lives apart.

Dutch authorities also understood that using the appropriate language was crucial in getting frontline workers and the Muslim community to participate in their efforts. Potentially off-putting words like “terrorism”

⁹⁴ *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007–2011*, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006. Page 5.

⁹⁵ Interview with Rob Bogaard, policy advisor at the Ministry of Justice, The Hague, August 2011; Nuansa

⁹⁶ *Recognising and Responding to Radicalisation: Considerations for Policy and Practice through the Eyes of Street Level Workers*, RecoRa Project, authored by Yousiff Meah and Colin Mellis. Page 7.

⁹⁷ Interview with Saadia Ait-Taleb, official at Amsterdam’s IHH, Amsterdam, August 2011.

⁹⁸ Interview with Steven Lenos, Senior Advisor at Nuansa, Schiphol, August 2011.

and “radicalization” were soon replaced by a softer language more in line with the idea of care-based interventions aimed at helping young people in distress. Similarly, authorities sought to dispel the idea that these programs targeted only Muslims and stressed that all forms of extremism were of concern.

These efforts seemed to have worked and there is little evidence of much resistance on the part of frontline workers to be the first link in the chain of individualized interventions. Once accomplished, authorities proceeded to train frontline workers about what radicalization is and how it can outwardly manifest itself. Directly or through private or semi-private companies like FORUM, COT or Nuansa, Dutch authorities organized countless seminars and sessions to introduce as many frontline workers as possible to the issue of radicalization, so as to make them culturally competent to spot and assess it. These training sessions have been conducted for years and, aside from providing frontline workers with valuable skills, allow them to interact with one another, create networks and share experiences.

While the system of signaling is common to virtually all Dutch municipalities that practice targeted interventions, the way in which the actual intervention is practiced differs from city to city. While several municipalities have developed more or less sophisticated intervention models, this report will analyze the approach adopted in Amsterdam, as it is arguably the most extensive and the model for many others.

Amsterdam’s Information House

The city of Amsterdam is one of the Netherlands’ most diverse and has large non-Western and Muslim communities. By the early 2000s, the municipality decided to implement various programs to enhance social cohesion and common identity in the city and in 2004 – coincidentally two weeks after the van Gogh assassination – it launched a large-scale program called *Wij Amsterdammers* (We, the people of Amsterdam).⁹⁹ The tension following the van Gogh assassination—an act carried out by a native Amsterdammer – led city authorities to concern themselves in particular with the problem of radicalization and commission a study on the subject from the University of Amsterdam’s Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), a research outfit with a long experience on the subject of minority and multiculturalism studies. IMES’ October 2006 report *Radicalisation processes: Why Muslim youth in Amsterdam radicalise*, formed the basis for the city’s own action plan, entitled *Amsterdam against radicalisation*.¹⁰⁰

The plan outlined the city’s multifaceted approach to tackling radicalization. The first approach is repressive, as the local police, in cooperation with the judiciary, the national police and the secret service, have a duty to prevent the actions of “doers” who are involved in actual preparation for violence, through criminal investigations and prosecutions. A different approach is reserved for “searchers,” that is, individuals who “wrestle with their identity and can have difficulty with their place in society.”¹⁰¹ For these individuals,

⁹⁹ *Wij Amsterdammers II: Investeren in Mensen en Grenzen een vervolg op Wij Amsterdammers*, Municipality of Amsterdam, February 28, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ *Amsterdam against Radicalisation*, Municipality of Amsterdam, November 15, 2007.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

the municipality put in place a wide array of general and more targeted preventive measures, as described above. Amsterdam has been one of the country's most active municipalities in "reducing the breeding ground," organizing events that range from self-development courses to initiatives to tackle discrimination, from apprenticeship schemes to interfaith events.

But Amsterdam has also been at the forefront of devising individualized interventions for "thinkers," that is individuals that the city action plan describes as persons who "do not or not yet wish to use violence or to commit other penal offences, but who are radicalising in the sense that they increasingly support radical ideas." The distinction between "doers" and "thinkers" characterizes the division of responsibilities between the city and law enforcement/intelligence agencies. "The moment there are indications of preparatory action(s), even those that are not illegal," states Amsterdam's action plan, "the case becomes the responsibility of the police, who represent the repressive measures. Until that point, when it is merely a question of ideological radicalization, the municipality is responsible." Thinkers are targeted with what the municipality calls "the curative approach," which seeks to deradicalize the individual by "binding" him to society.

In charge of these delicate interventions is a small unit called *Gemeentelijke Informatiehuishouding Radicalisering* (Municipal Information House on Radicalization, henceforth IHH), which was created within the municipality's department of Public Order, Safety and Security. In essence the IHH is a "case-level, municipal early warning system."¹⁰² Its main task is to receive information from frontline workers about specific individuals that are displaying signs of radicalization, assess the case based on its expertise, and, in case it deems it necessary, devise a form of intervention aimed at de-radicalizing the individual.

Created in the wake of the van Gogh assassination, the IHH's first goal was to assess the problem of radicalization within Amsterdam. Its four initial members began by conducting research and interfacing with officials and frontline workers throughout the city to understand the size and nature of the problem. These initial meetings were also instrumental in creating a network of contacts citywide.¹⁰³ Establishing trust-based relationships with key individuals and organizations such as frontline workers, schools, community leaders, mosques and Muslim organizations was a quintessentially important task for the IHH in its early days, particularly as it faced the daunting task of explaining its new and potentially controversial mission. Clearly explaining what the IHH's mandate was and displaying knowledge and cultural sensitivity (in that regard it did arguably help that some of IHH's employees are Muslim) were crucial factors in this initial phase.¹⁰⁴

Once it managed to liaise with a wide array of potential partners throughout the city, the IHH began offering training to them. As a center of knowledge, the IHH is a go-to resource for frontline workers who rely on its expertise whenever a radicalization-related issue arises. Whether it is a one-time consultation on a specific case or

¹⁰² Colin Mellis, "Amsterdam and Radicalisation: The Municipal Approach," in *Radicalisation in Broader Perspective*, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (October 2007): 45.

¹⁰³ Interview with Marco Zannoni, August 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Saadia Ait-Taleb, official at Amsterdam's IHH, Amsterdam, August 2011.

more general courses on trends in radicalization, the IHH interacts with frontline workers in order to make them as competent as possible on the subject. As of the summer of 2011, in fact, some 800 frontline workers have received the IHH's basic training. The IHH has also organized more specific training seminars for schools, tailoring them to individual schools' demographics and problems.¹⁰⁵

This massive effort at training frontline workers has the goal of making them capable of recognizing when radicalization is occurring and, conversely, recognizing when it is simply a case of newly found religious orthodoxy that should not be confused with radicalization. Properly trained frontline workers and other individuals with whom the IHH has built relationships are supposed to contact the unit when they come across individuals who are deemed to display signs of radicalization. The IHH collects all available information on that specific individual and determines whether there are indeed reasons to be concerned. If that is positively assessed, the IHH brings the case to a Case Management Team (CMT) composed of IHH experts and other municipality officials from a variety of backgrounds.

After thoroughly evaluating the case the CMT decides on some form of intervention. These interventions, which are tailored to the individual and can take various forms, "seek to increase the resilience to radical ideas of the individual and focus on bringing him or her back into society."¹⁰⁶ The goal is not to arrest and prosecute the identified individuals, who have not committed any criminal act. Rather, it is to anchor them to society, act on those weak points that have apparently made them embrace radical views and provide them with alternatives so that they will eventually abandon them or, at least, not act upon them in any violent way.

In most cases the most immediate kind of intervention is material. Most radicalizing individuals have precarious lives and the IHH understands that providing them with guidance and concrete assistance in their professional lives, education, or housing options can help bind them to society. The IHH therefore supervises youth workers who are assigned to the specific case to provide various forms of material support to the individual.

Yet experience has shown that in many cases acting solely on material factors cannot stop the radicalization process. In many cases, in fact, intervening on the ideological component of the radicalization process is as, if not more, important.¹⁰⁷ The IHH therefore intervenes also in this field, which is obviously significantly more delicate and challenging. In most cases the ideological intervention is assigned to a mentor, who is chosen based on an evaluation of the specific case. The mentor's goal is to instill doubt in the mind of the radicalizing individual, bringing grey and nuance to an often black-or-white understanding of reality.

The mentor's personality is fundamental, as he needs to engage what is generally a very skeptical and unreceptive individual. He needs to be able to establish a personal rapport with his "target," engage him and challenge his views without confronting and alienating him. Individuals with excellent interpersonal skills,

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Mounir Dadi, advisor to Amsterdam's IHH, Amsterdam, August 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Colin Mellis, "Amsterdam and Radicalisation: The Municipal Approach," in *Radicalisation in Broader Perspective*, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (October 2007): 47.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with NCTb official I, Amsterdam and The Hague, August 2011; Interview with Saadia Ait-Taleb, official at Amsterdam's IHH, Amsterdam, August 2011.

charisma and, in many cases, good grounding in theology appear to be the most effective mentors in these sorts of interventions. Mentors are chosen by IHH experts based on an assessment of the targeted individual and his weak points. Mentors' backgrounds range from relatives of the targeted individuals – who have the obvious advantage of already possessing a relationship with him – to Muslim religious scholars (in some rare cases even some with a Salafist background). The important factor is that they are deemed to be able to break the radicalizing individual's inevitable initial diffidence, gain his trust and shake his belief in radical ideology.

The entire process is supervised by the IHH, which directs the actions of the social workers and the mentors who engage the radicalizing individuals. The unit monitors the progress of a delicate process that can last for years and that requires a substantial financial and manpower investment. Ideally the targeted individual would change his views and become a fully integrated member of society. In other cases the aim is less ambitious, simply seeking to have the individual disengage from actively participating in radical milieus while accepting he might still retain extremist views.

Amsterdam authorities claim that their interventions have been, generally speaking, quite successful, although they are honest in admitting that the numbers are too small and the timeframe too short to be able to empirically verify the program's real effectiveness in full. They do nevertheless mention one specific case as a clear example of success.¹⁰⁸ X was a member of the Hofstad network who, after serving some time in the special terrorism wing of the Vught high security penitentiary, was released and relocated to Amsterdam. As part of a national after-prison rehabilitation scheme, X was assigned a social worker. Amsterdam authorities chose a worker who came originally from the same Moroccan town where X's parents were from, a fact that contributed to the formation of a bond between the two. The social worker helped X obtain an apartment and took care of other material needs he had.

The two established a trust-based relationship that was closely monitored by the IHH, which paid for the extra time the social worker spent with X. Yet soon the social worker realized that his conversations with X, a smart and inquisitive young man, were increasingly shifting to subjects related to Islam, society and politics. Feeling that he lacked the religious knowledge to constructively discuss these issues, the social worker asked the IHH to contact an Islamic scholar who could do so. A first meeting was set up where the social worker introduced X to the scholar in order to create trust between the two. Soon the scholar, whose time was paid by the IHH, and X began to meet on a regular basis. The choice was controversial, as the fact that public funds were given to a religious figure could potentially conflict with constitutional norms over the separation of religion and state. In order not to infringe such prohibitions the IHH instructed the scholar not to teach a certain interpretation of Islam to X, but rather to point him toward a variety of sources and opinions that would allow him to make up his mind independently about the meaning of certain Islamic concepts and Quranic verses.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Saadia Ait-Taleb, official at Amsterdam's IHH, Amsterdam, August 2011; Interview with NCTb official I, Amsterdam and The Hague, August 2011.

The scholar's engagement with X lasted for almost three years. Their relationship and the depth of their conversations increased with time, in a way resembling the rapport between a patient and a psychologist. The regular conversations were as important as some breakthrough moments X seemed to have had. One took place in Mecca, where X and the scholar went on pilgrimage (not paid by the IHH). X, who had harbored strong anti-Shia sentiments, was shocked to see that the only fellow pilgrim who rushed to help him when he fell down a flight of stairs was a Shia. This incident and countless less remarkable conversations and episodes contributed to a radical change in X's religious perspective and worldview. X is now happily married, furthering his studies and, most importantly, has significantly changed his views. He regularly works with the IHH in telling his personal story in professional training seminars and other events. Although it is difficult to say that such change would not have happened had IHH not intervened, officials do see X's case as a success story and an example of what such programs can achieve.

The Choice of Partners

Like any initiative aimed at countering radicalization of jihadist inspiration, Dutch programs have relied on the support of local Muslim communities. Referring to the demand/supply model, Dutch authorities have been consistent in stating that the production of an alternative supply of ideas is obtained by supporting mainstream, moderate mosques, which are best positioned to challenge the narrative coming from radical elements. It is for this reason that, despite some challenges posed by the separation of religion and state, municipalities have reached out to mosques and Muslim community leaders. Authorities have sought to overcome diffidence and misconceptions, explaining that they were not targeting Muslims and that, to the contrary, it was in the community's best interest to work with authorities in order to shield its youth from the dangers of radicalization.

According to most accounts, the Dutch Muslim community has been for the most part receptive to the authorities' engagement, particularly if compared to the situation in the United Kingdom. Authorities have conducted training seminars in mosques and Islamic centers explaining what radicalization is, why it is dangerous and how the Muslim community can counteract it. Other courses have focused on integration or teaching imams, who often have limited knowledge of Dutch society, how to address important social themes in their sermons.

Authorities have also tried to make mainstream mosques more attractive to young people. Reflecting a problem common throughout Europe, most Dutch mosques are run by first-generation immigrants or foreign imams with little knowledge about the lives, interests, problems, and even the language of the younger generations. Younger individuals, therefore, tend to look for religious answers in other places and, in some cases, they find them in radical sources. Authorities have sought to address this situation by teaching mainstream mosques how to make their activities more appealing to younger generations. In Amsterdam this has even led to the creation of the so-called Poldermoskee, the first mosque where all activities were conducted in Dutch. Despite widespread praises the attempt failed as the government could not legally fund the mosque

and its leadership did not manage to generate a steady stream of funds to sustain its activities. It has been in fact a policy of the Dutch counter-radicalization strategy, due in part to legal limitations but also to political and strategic considerations, not to fund religious organizations.

Particularly sensitive has been the issue of engagement of the most conservative and politicized cross-sections of the country's Muslim community. Unlike the United Kingdom, the Netherlands has, for various historical reasons, a very limited presence of Muslim Brotherhood-derived networks and organizations. On the other hand, it has a quite well rooted and developed Salafist scene which has been widely debated within the AIVD, government circles and in the media. Since the late 1990s, in fact, Dutch authorities warned about the four major centers of Salafism in the country (El Tawheed in Amsterdam, Al Furkaan in Eindhoven, As Soennah in The Hague and Islamic Foundation for Education and the Propagation of Knowledge in Tilburg) and some of their smaller offshoots.

By law the AIVD has a very broad institutional mandate that allows it to monitor not only activities that are against the security of the state but also broadly defined threats to the democratic order and social cohesion, even if they manifest themselves in ways that are entirely non-violent. Throughout the early 2000s therefore the AIVD paid close attention to Salafist activities in the Netherlands, highlighting in briefings to policymakers and several public reports the significant threat posed by the spread of Salafism in the country. Authorities consistently argued not only that Salafist ideology produces a fertile intellectual environment for those who engage in violent activities but also that its ideas pose a threat to the country's social cohesion and to its citizens' individual rights.¹⁰⁹

The approach of Dutch policymakers, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization practitioners, has been shaped by the AIVD's views. After 2004, when Islamic extremism in its various manifestations became a priority for the government, authorities adopted a zero tolerance approach towards Salafists. Many Salafist leaders who were not Dutch citizens were deported and those who stayed were put under severe pressure. The public debate also put Salafist leaders under the spotlight, as media and government officials routinely highlighted and criticized many of their controversial views.

At the same time that they were under unprecedented pressure from various quarters, Salafist leaders also became engaged in a behind-the-scenes dialogue with authorities. The process began in 2007, when Dutch politician Geert Wilders announced the release of *Fitna*, a movie that he heralded as extremely critical of Islam. Fearing a situation similar to the backlash suffered worldwide by Denmark after the publication by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed in 2005, the AIVD reportedly approached leaders of the Dutch Salafist community in private dialogues. The agency explained to them that, although it strongly disagreed with Wilders' depiction of Islam, the government could not do anything about it as his views were protected by freedom of speech. It nevertheless asked Salafist leaders not to replicate the actions of some Danish imams who incited actions against Denmark during the cartoons controversy. Whether some promise was made

¹⁰⁹ *Radical Dawa in Transition*, AIVD, 2007.

by the AIVD in exchange is unclear, but Dutch Salafist leaders did not exploit the release of *Fitna*. To the contrary, they were proactive in keeping things quiet in the Netherlands and arguably also abroad.

Extensive public pressure and a new uneasy yet somewhat functioning relationship with the government have led Salafist centers to significantly moderate their public stance over the last few years. In 2009, the AIVD described the evolution of Dutch Salafist networks with these words:

*Today, the Salafist centres call upon believers to use democratic means and they discourage the use of violence. In this way, the Salafist imams hope to ensure broad acceptance in society for non-violent ultra-orthodox Islam. They are aware that subversive statements and calls to violence can damage the likelihood of broad social acceptance. For that reason, persons advocating a violent ideology are no longer tolerated at the Salafist centres and there is a degree of 'self-policing'. This means that fewer and fewer violent statements are being heard from the Salafist mosques. Persons and networks that follow a violent ideology are no longer finding the confirmation and inspiration they seek in the Salafist centres.*¹¹⁰

These developments have been touted as a great success by Dutch security services, who believe they are partially due to internal developments within the Salafist movement but also largely to their own carrot-and-stick approach towards it. And indeed an example of how this rapprochement between the AIVD and Salafists has yielded important results came in 2008, when the As Soennah mosque in The Hague contacted the AIVD, reportedly through a middleman, regarding the presence of a small cluster of extremists who were attending the mosque. As Soennah's leadership, which four years earlier had been under the spotlight for allegedly condoning the assassination of Theo van Gogh, kicked the young men out of the mosque, pronounced a sermon denouncing al Qaeda-inspired violence during Friday prayers, and reportedly exchanged information with the secret service. Four men belonging to the group of extremists were subsequently arrested in Kenya, allegedly attempting to make their way to Somalia to join the local al Qaeda affiliate, al Shabaab.¹¹¹

Dutch authorities are not naïve and understand that As Soennah's behavior was likely self-serving, as its leadership probably calculated that the backlash against it had these four men done anything violent would have been enormous. It nevertheless constituted a major shift from only a few years prior and unquestionably helped the authorities' efforts on several levels. Dutch authorities maintain that, despite these changes on the surface, it is quite likely that behind closed doors Salafist leaders still espouse very radical views. Tellingly, the 2009 AIVD report on the evolution of Salafism stated that "Salafist centres are still communicating an anti-integrative and intolerant isolationist message that is incompatible with democratic principles and can have a disruptive influence on society."¹¹² But the agency nevertheless acknowledged that there is room to maneuver and find mutually benefiting agreements with some of the movement's leaders.

¹¹⁰ *Resilience and Resistance: Current Trends and Developments in Salafism in the Netherlands*, AIVD, 2009.

¹¹¹ Janny Groen and Annieke Kranenberg, "Niemand Had nog vat op 'Jihadisten'," *Volkskrant*, July 30, 2009.

¹¹² *Resilience and Resistance: Current Trends and Developments in Salafism in the Netherlands*, AIVD, 2009.

Dutch authorities' policy towards working with non-violent Islamists (which, as said, in the Netherlands means almost exclusively Salafists) seems to be inspired by a case-by-case evaluation of costs and benefits and by a general openness to engage them while seeking to avoid empowering them. There is a realization, as some Dutch academics had suggested in the past, that occasionally Salafists can be very useful for authorities to achieve their goals, whether that is in emergency situations like before the release of *Fitna* or to serve as mentors in individual interventions, as some radicalizing individuals will refuse to be mentored by anybody else.¹¹³ The issue is widely debated within the practitioner community, but there is a general understanding that Salafists still adopt views that run counter to basic Dutch values and integration aims sought by the government. Authorities believe that occasional tactical partnerships should not translate into stable relationships that would unduly legitimize the movement. In that regard it must be said that Dutch authorities seek to keep their engagement with Salafists very low-profile, as otherwise they fear they might give the impression that they see Salafist leaders as legitimate representatives of the Muslim community and therefore indirectly augmenting their standing in it.

This approach is controversial and achieving the right balance between engaging to obtain some results while simultaneously avoiding increasing legitimacy is not easy. Some critics have stated that the Salafi movement's purported new moderation is just a façade, and different municipalities adopt slightly different approaches on the subject.

Overall Assessment

The positive features of the Dutch counter-radicalization strategy seem, overall, plentiful. Its decision to focus from the very beginning on the local level — a decision favored by the long-standing tradition of large powers reserved to the municipalities — seems well thought-out. The central government's role of providing constant training on radicalization dynamics to an ever-increasing number of local authorities and frontline workers seems equally sound. Most initiatives, whether on the preventive or the de-radicalization side, seem to be based on relatively solid research and have a clear goal in mind. And it appears that Dutch authorities have adopted a more cautious and nuanced approach to some delicate issues that have been particularly problematic in the United Kingdom, such as funding of religious organizations and partnerships with non-violent Islamists.

It must be said that several factors have advantaged Dutch counter-radicalization officials over their British counterparts. Firstly, the Netherlands has not been subjected to a terrorist threat or a radicalization problem of a size even remotely comparable to the United Kingdom's. This has allowed Dutch authorities to make certain choices with significant more ease. The small size of the Netherlands and, consequently, its bureaucratic apparatus, is an additional advantage, as Dutch officials involved in radicalization matters are a small number, tend to know each other quite well, and for the most part operate in a small geographical area (the Rotterdam/Amsterdam/Utrecht/The Hague square). Moreover, Dutch authorities have been able to operate on a long-established base of community policing,

¹¹³ See, for example, the influential work of the late Frank Buijs: F.J. Buijs, F. Demant & A. Hamdi, *Strijders van eigen bodem: Radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2006).

municipal contacts with minority organizations, deeply entrenched social work, and well-developed migration and social science research community.

It goes without saying that a complete assessment of such a new and sweeping strategy is impossible and that some flaws seem to exist. Some argue that the training provided to frontline workers is not as extensive or of good quality as it should be.¹¹⁴ There are also indications that over the last couple of years most of the smaller municipalities have lost interest in the issue, due to the fact that radicalization is on the decline and that the central government is no longer providing funds under the Action Plan.¹¹⁵ And many do point out that while indeed violent radicalization is on the decline, alienation, polarization, and extremism are still very much plaguing significant cross-sections of the Muslim community, possibly more than ever.

Continuing the comparison with the United Kingdom, there is another difference that is particularly striking. As seen, the British debate over Prevent has been incessant and at times vitriolic, with criticisms coming from virtually all parts of society and the political spectrum. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, despite a very intense debate over multiculturalism and the role of Islam in Dutch society, often spearheaded by the words of Geert Wilders, there has been virtually no public debate, let alone controversy, over the country's counter-radicalization strategy. None of the front-page stories about the mishandling of public funds or the alleged stigmatization of Muslims that have characterized the implementation of the UK's Prevent have been seen in the Netherlands, where programs have been carried out without virtually any controversy.

The reasons for this important difference are arguably many. It could well be that the Dutch strategy is better thought-out and balanced than the British, particularly Prevent's first incarnation. But some argue that this has to do with the fact that many of those who might be in a position to criticize the strategy have little interest to do so. Most of the evaluations of Dutch programs—admittedly a challenging task for any counter-radicalization strategy—are conducted by institutions and academics who have very close personal and financial ties to the government and the very entities that implement the programs. Some of the few outspoken critics of the Dutch approach, like Prof. Frank Bovenkerk of the University of Amsterdam, argue that this “good ole boys network” has little interest in going beyond some mild criticism and has good reasons not to “bite the hand that feeds them.”¹¹⁶ Dutch authorities themselves admit that, while there are good reasons to believe that many of the initiatives carried out have had a positive impact, indeed an empiric assessment of the strategy is lacking and should be improved.¹¹⁷

Key lessons

Comprehensive approach. Dutch authorities understand that radicalization is a highly complex process influenced by a combination of interrelated factors. They therefore seek to intervene as much as possible on all of them, from “supply” to “demand” and “breeding

¹¹⁴ Interview with Frank Bovenkerk, professor at IMES/University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, August 2011.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Amy Jane Gielen, Amsterdam, August 2011.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Frank Bovenkerk, Professor at IMES/University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, August 2011; Janny Groen and Annieke Kranenberg, “Van bang naar nog banger,” *Volkskrant*, October 31, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Rob Bogaard, August 2011.

ground," as well as intervening in identified individual processes of radicalization.

Definition of radicalization. Dutch authorities initially decided to adopt a very broad working definition of radicalization, seeking to target also non-violent forms of extremism. While still believing that non-violent extremism poses a challenge to social cohesion and could be the antecedent to violent radicalization, Dutch authorities have recently narrowed their focus to forms of radicalization more directly linked to violence.

Emphasis on local efforts. The Dutch government has limited its role to providing guidelines, expertise and funds, but the lead in counter-radicalization programs has been taken by individual municipalities, which are believed to be best situated to spot and address issues at the local level. Most large municipalities have been quite proactive and drafted their own strategies, while several smaller towns have been less responsive.

Interventions are led by municipalities. Unlike the UK, where the police have largely taken the lead in the Channel Programme, interventions are led by municipalities independently from the police and the secret service.

Focus on training. From the onset, Dutch authorities have made major efforts to provide training on radicalization to a wide array of individuals who might come into contact with radicalizing youth, from teachers to mosque officials, from police officials to social workers.

Limited focus on theology. While not completely disregarding the potentially positive role of moderate Islamic teachings, particularly in de-radicalization, most Dutch counter-radicalization initiatives focus on individual vulnerabilities, self-empowerment, and dialogue.

Engagement without empowerment of Salafists. Dutch authorities seem to have found a balance in their relationship with Salafist leaders, as the latter are informally engaged in a dialogue that occasionally develops into tactical cooperation but are still negatively perceived and therefore never intentionally legitimized and empowered.

4 Denmark

Background

Like most European countries, the small Scandinavian kingdom of Denmark has seen the presence of Islamist and jihadist networks within its borders since the early 1990s, mostly due to a small influx of North African and Middle Eastern militants who received asylum. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were indications that some Danish-born or Danish-raised individuals were embracing jihadist ideology, and in October 2005 a small cell of mostly Danish-based militants was dismantled for plotting an attack in Bosnia.¹¹⁸ Yet Denmark at that time could hardly be seen as a hotbed or a major target of Islamic radicalism.

The country was plunged into what was arguably its biggest political crisis since World War II in the first months of 2006, however, when the previous year's publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed by Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* triggered widespread protests among Muslims in Denmark and throughout the world. Not only did some of the protests around the world turn violent, but several jihadist groups issued threats against the Scandinavian country. Since then, Denmark has acquired an exceptionally high position on the list of targets of al Qaeda and like-minded groups, which have occasionally targeted Danish interests abroad and sought to carry out attacks within Denmark.

In light of these developments, Danish authorities have consistently stated that the terrorist threat against Denmark is "significant."¹¹⁹ An important component of this threat is purely external, embodied by clusters and groups operating in other European countries or outside of Europe who seek to attack Denmark as punishment for the cartoons and, to a lesser degree, for its military involvement in Afghanistan. But there are also clusters of radicalization within the country's estimated 250,000 Muslims. In fact, over the last five years Danish authorities have witnessed an increase in the number of Danish-based "networks, groups and individuals who adhere to a militant Islamist ideology."¹²⁰ In two major cases (dubbed Vollsmose and Glasvej, in 2007 and 2008 respectively) authorities arrested clusters of Danish militants planning attacks within the country. Danish authorities also believe that some individuals residing in Denmark have traveled to Somalia and Pakistan in order to receive terrorist training or to take part in hostilities.¹²¹ One such individual, Somali-born and long-time Danish resident Mohammed Gelle, attempted to kill Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard in the city of Aarhus in 2010.

Authorities have sought to take various measures to tackle the phenomenon. While traditional law enforcement and intelligence tools have been enhanced to deal with the threat, in 2009 the Danish government also launched an ambitious counter-radicalization

¹¹⁸ Morten Skjoldager, *Truslen Indfra: De Danske Terrorister* (Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2009).

¹¹⁹ Assessment of the Terror Threat against Denmark, PET, November 23, 2010. http://www.pet.dk/upload/vtd_-_ukl_-_nov_2010_gb.pdf

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

strategy. The development of this strategy began in January 2008, when the then center-right coalition government set up a working group of officials tasked with developing a proposal for an action plan to prevent extremism and radicalization.¹²² The working group comprised officials from the Ministries of Integration, Justice, Education, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Social Welfare and Culture, and met six times in the following months. It also carried out several consultations with foreign authorities, research institutions, civil society organizations and municipal actors throughout Denmark. In June 2008, the working group submitted to the government a draft proposal. The draft caused some tensions within the government and it was therefore decided to condition its approval on a public consultation, through which the views of 74 selected entities from a wide spectrum of backgrounds were solicited.

In January 2009, after these extensive consultations, the Danish government released its official strategy, entitled *“A common and safe future: An action plan to prevent extremist views and radicalisation among young people.”* The plan had two overarching goals. The first declared goal was to “identify and address specific problems related to extremism in a timely manner” through direct and preventive efforts. This, argued the Action Plan, entailed countering extremist propaganda and preventing individuals from being recruited by extremist groups. “At the same time,” argued the Action Plan, pointing at larger policy goals, “the Government wishes to use this and many other initiatives to maintain and further develop Denmark as a democratic society with freedom, responsibility, equality and opportunities for all. Primarily, because it holds an independent value for society as well as for the individual, but also in order to weaken the growth basis for radicalisation of young people.”¹²³

The Action Plan is a detailed document that outlines the philosophy, aims and types of activities adopted by the Danish government to counter extremism and radicalization. It divides its work into seven focus areas, which will be here examined in two separate sections: general preventive activities and targeted interventions.

General Preventive Activities

While the first focus area of the Action Plan entails targeted interventions (which will be examined later), the remaining six outline broader preventive initiatives. The second, entitled “Inclusion based on rights and obligations,” stated that “the balance between freedom and responsibility and between rights and obligations is essential if we are to enjoy a sustainable community.” It argues that “partly by countering discrimination and partly by focusing on the responsibility of the young people and the role of their parents as active citizens and positive role models, the ties between the individual and society should be strengthened.” Initiatives designed to implement this goal include courses, brochures and counseling sessions to strengthen parent responsibility, as parents are seen as crucial figures in shaping a young person’s views and preventing him from embracing extremist positions. Other initiatives under this area of action include various efforts to tackle discrimination, from better information on access to justice to better allocation of vocational traineeships. Particular attention has been paid to discriminatory practices in access to bars

¹²² *A Common and Safe Future*, Government of Denmark (January 2009): 6–7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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and clubs, an issue about which minority youths are particularly sensitive.

The third focus area centers on “dialogue and information” and seeks to open a dialogue with young people on a variety of topics, from the nature and opportunities of Danish society to “the way various extremist groups exploit ideologies and religion and tell one-sided stories about, e.g., immigration, Islam, Judaism, racial differences, Holocaust, relations between the Western and the Muslim World, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict or other issues.” Practical activities include a “Celebration of democratic cohesion,” which the Action Plan described as “celebrating democratic cohesion, diversity as well as the common and mutual responsibility for a good society with opportunities for all and respect for the individual.” A particularly important initiative has been the discussions on Danish foreign policy in high schools, universities, youth clubs and other venues frequented mostly by young people. Under this program, officials from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government officials meet with young people, explain Denmark’s positions on various foreign policy issues, and seek to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding them.

The fourth focus area also emphasizes democratic cohesion, with the Action Plan arguing that “a strong, vibrant and inclusive, democratic culture carried forward, in part, by education and association participation is an independent objective for all of Danish society, and may also contribute to strengthening the resilience of young people towards the group belonging and explanations offered by extremism.” Activities implemented in this area include the distribution of inspirational material on democracy and civic education in Danish public schools, the establishment of “civic centers,” and the creation of an internet forum for young people on democracy and radicalization.

The fifth focus area seeks to address the formation of ethnic/cultural ghettos in various Danish cities, fearing that “extremist forces may have a solid growth basis in subcultures and parallel societies where behavioural norms and values are isolated from those of the surrounding society.” Since “isolated residential areas with large concentrations of residents with little contact with the surrounding society pose a risk in terms of developing such subcultures,” the Danish government allocated substantial funding to various schemes to prevent the formation of ghettos and has stepped up cooperation with various organizations in so-called vulnerable residential areas.

The sixth focus area acts on a similarly delicate area which could potentially be a hotbed of radicalization: prisons. Initiatives in prisons include social reabsorption measures and coaching for prison inmates, and approval schemes for chaplains to ensure they possess the right qualifications.

The seventh and final focus area is organizational and emphasizes the importance of knowledge and partnerships in the implementation of the Action Plan. The Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration (moved under the new Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration after the reshuffling that followed the September 2011 national elections) is in charge of the Plan’s implementation. It does so in cooperation with various entities but chiefly with the help of the Centre for Prevention within the Danish

Security and Intelligence Service's (Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, PET) Preventive Security Department, which was established in September 2007.¹²⁴ The two small units are staffed with experienced individuals with an extensive background in the field and have worked in close cooperation with one another from the onset. They also cooperate on a regular basis with a variety of actors throughout the country and internationally to increase the government's understanding of the issue.¹²⁵

Targeted Interventions

The first focus area of the Action Plan is titled "direct contact with the young people" and refers to targeted interventions similar to those implemented in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Danish authorities have decided to invest significant resources in these types of activities and, in recognition of that, in 2008 Denmark was asked by EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove to act as a lead country in Europe on de-radicalization.¹²⁶ One of the main tasks related to this role has been the collection of information from all EU member states about their de-radicalization efforts and the dissemination of that knowledge through conferences and publications. In 2010 the Ministry of Integration published a booklet titled *The Challenge of Extremism: Examples of deradicalisation and disengagement programmes in the EU*, which summarized its findings.

In 2009 the Danish Ministry of Integration was also awarded a three-year grant from the EU to start a pilot de-radicalization project. The Ministry proceeded to implement it in cooperation with PET, the municipalities of Copenhagen and Aarhus, and the East Jutland Police District (which covers the Aarhus area). The project, called "De-radicalisation: Targeted Intervention," aims at developing various mentoring schemes for individuals who are displaying signs of radicalization or are seeking to leave extremist groups.¹²⁷ The goal of the program is to have various Danish municipalities "develop tools which can be adapted to the individual needs of such youths and give the individual young person the long-term support and advice that is needed in order to break with and stay out of extremist circles."¹²⁸ The role of the entity in charge of the implementation of the Action Plan, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration's Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation, is limited to supporting the municipalities at various stages, as they do not execute the interventions themselves. The central government has reserved for itself the role of contacting relevant actors within Danish municipalities, instructing them about the nature and dangers of radicalization, and providing them with expertise and possible tools when an intervention is decided. But the guiding idea is that "most often, local actors are the first to identify signs of extremist views among young people, and the possibility for early preventive efforts also lies within the local communities."¹²⁹

This dynamic has been experimented in Denmark's three largest cities, Copenhagen, Aarhus and, to a lesser degree, Odense. In

¹²⁴ PET Annual Report 2006–2007, pp. 66–70.

¹²⁵ Interview with officials at the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration, Copenhagen, October 2011.

¹²⁶ *Denmark's Deradicalisation Efforts*, Fact Sheet by the Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, May 2010.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *A Common and Safe Future*, Government of Denmark (January 2009): 13.

these three cities the central government has encouraged the local authorities to set up an early warning system, a mechanism through which frontline workers would have the willingness and competencies to detect signs of radicalization and report them to an appropriate office within the municipality. Although the system has been in place for just a couple of years and the cases are too few to draw definitive conclusions, Danish authorities express relative satisfaction with the experiment.¹³⁰

One of the reasons why the system seems to work is that it builds on a preexisting mechanism known as SSP (Skole, Socialforvaltning og Politi, or Schools, Social Services and Police).¹³¹ In most Danish municipalities these three entities sit on a committee that meets on a regular basis to discuss issues related to crime prevention in their jurisdiction. The Action Plan simply incorporated counter-radicalization into this well-established local crime prevention cooperation mechanism, apparently encountering little resistance from its members.

As in the Netherlands and the UK, Danish authorities conducted extensive training on radicalization for SSP members and other actors that could potentially come into contact with radicalizing youth throughout the country. In most cases the central government invited attendees to a two-day seminar in which officials from the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation, PET's Centre for Prevention, and external experts provided basic knowledge about the issue and instructed them on how to act upon it.¹³² These seminars also proved extremely important in forming networks of individuals working on similar issues who might not have otherwise interacted with one another.

Once the instruction to frontline workers was provided, the central government left autonomy to the individual municipalities as to how to structure the actual interventions that take place after radicalizing youth are detected. Two divergent models seem to have developed.¹³³ The municipality of Aarhus has decided to establish an Information House-like office that directly provides the mentors who conduct the intervention. Similar to Amsterdam's efforts, Aarhus' Information House employs mentors who have received professional training and are assigned to a radicalizing youth identified by the SSP based on an assessment of the potential effectiveness of the specific mentor in that case. Given its relatively large jihadist and right-wing scene, the city has invested substantial resources in counter-radicalization and its efforts also include close cooperation with the families of radicalizing youths, substantial efforts at training frontline workers, and contact with local educational institutions and volunteer organizations.¹³⁴

The model used by the city of Copenhagen is slightly different, as it entails a more indirect approach to mentoring. In June 2009 the municipality of Copenhagen launched the program VINK (Viden

130 Interview with officials at the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration, Copenhagen, October 2011.

131 <http://www.politi.dk/da/ompolitiet/sspsamarbejde/>

132 Interview with officials at the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration, Copenhagen, October 2011.

133 *Afradikalisering: Malrettet Intervention*, brochure by the Kontoret for Demokratisk Fællesskab og Forebyggelse af Radikalisering, 2011.

134 *Unge på Afveje: Forebyggelse af Ekstremisme og Radikalisering*, brochure by the PET, undated. Available at: <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/C43014FE-8A28-4F0D-B654-25E5A306979D/0/Ungep%C3%A5afvejeA4final.pdf>

Inklusion København, or Knowledge Inclusion Copenhagen). At the core of VINK is a small unit within the municipality whose main goal is to provide Copenhagen's SSP and as many other relevant individuals within the city as possible with resources to deal with the issue of radicalization. VINK employs some ten individuals with a variety of skill sets that include a theologian, a psychologist, a historian, and two individuals with direct personal experience in radical groups.

Unlike Aarhus' Information House, Copenhagen's VINK does not carry out direct interventions and does not assign specific mentors to a specific case. Rather, VINK provides a variety of resources to frontline workers, from courses on issues such as intercultural communication, conflict resolution and extreme groups, to access to its resource personnel, whom teachers, street-level youth workers, social workers, librarians and other frontline workers would ideally consult when dealing with "vulnerable and/or marginalized youth who may be attracted to extreme religious or political groups or ideas."¹³⁵

VINK's underlying philosophy is to create knowledge among frontline workers, who would eventually be empowered and able to intervene themselves.¹³⁶ Rather than assigning an external mentor that the radicalizing youth might not know and trust, VINK believes that those that are best positioned to influence radicalizing individuals are those frontline workers who already know them. All VINK has to do is make such individuals more knowledgeable and therefore capable of carrying out the intervention themselves. VINK would assign an outside mentor only if no "inside intervention" is possible.¹³⁷

PET's Role

Particular mention should be made of the role of PET and, in particular, its Centre for Prevention in Denmark's counter-radicalization strategy. While the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration has a leading role in many of the country's activities, PET plays a slightly less visible yet equally important role. Its activities could be broadly divided into three areas: training, outreach and interventions.

Given its knowledge on the subject, PET has engaged in extensive competence development of key actors within Denmark. Specific training programs have been implemented for the Danish Prison and Probation Service, the Danish Police College and police districts throughout the country. PET offers various forms of support to municipalities, SSPs and other entities, providing them with individualized training and role-playing exercises, mapping of local challenges, and occasional funding for start-up projects.

In the realm of its counter-radicalization efforts, PET has also been very active in reaching out to the Danish Muslim community. Since 2004 the agency has established a regular dialogue with imams and an ever-widening group of influential members of the Muslim community.¹³⁸ PET and the community leaders meet twice a year as a group, but PET also conducts more frequent and informal contacts on an individual basis.

¹³⁵ VINK brochure, provided to the author by VINK officials, Copenhagen, October 2011.

¹³⁶ Interview with Mohammed Hee, official at VINK, Copenhagen, October 2011.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Interview with Hans Jørgen Bonnichsen, former PET head of operations, Copenhagen, November 2008.

The underlying idea is that meeting on a regular basis with a diverse group of individuals from the country's Muslim community, be it established religious leaders or other individuals who "enjoy social status and who are in a position to exert influence in the relevant local communities," can be extremely useful for various reasons.¹³⁹ First, it can provide a venue where community leaders express their views to PET officials over issues of concern. At the same time PET has an opportunity to explain its actions and positions, better understand certain dynamics taking place within the Muslim community, and potentially gain the trust of its community leaders.

This network is particularly useful when potentially tense situations arise, such as when terrorism-related arrests are carried out.¹⁴⁰ In such cases, PET contacts members of its dialogue network to provide them with information and an explanation of what triggered the events and, at the same time, obtain important feedback about sentiments within the Muslim community. PET officials also believe that an arguably unintended positive consequence of this outreach is not only the relatively high degree of trust PET enjoys within Denmark's Muslim community, but also the proactive role some of its dialogue partners have taken in condemning radicalization and terrorism.¹⁴¹ For example, one of the dialogue participants reacted to unfounded rumors spreading in the Arabic-language media about the burning of Qurans in Denmark by publicly speaking about the positive reality of living as a Muslim in Denmark on several Middle Eastern media outlets.¹⁴²

PET has made the decision not to reveal who its dialogue partners are and letting them decide whether they want to publicly announce their involvement. The reasoning behind this decision is twofold. First, some of its dialogue partners might not want to disclose that information as it might have negative repercussions on their standing in the community. Conversely, PET is also aware that some dialogue partners might use their relationship with the agency as a way to increase their position in the community. Fully understanding the implication of this dynamic – as it played out in the United Kingdom – PET strives to avoid providing a platform or any form of endorsement to any individual or organization and therefore seeks to keep its outreach efforts very low-profile.

The issue of who the government should talk to and, more specifically, whether it should engage non-violent Islamists has been particularly controversial in the Danish political and public debate, particularly when the Action Plan was launched. PET seems to have opted for a policy of engagement of any group or individual that does not support violence in Denmark, even if it embraces objectively extremist views and supports violence abroad. PET refers to outreach with individuals "who represent controversial views" as "disagreeing dialogue," and argues that it serves the agency's goals. "Often," it is stated in the Action Plan, "it is precisely these individuals who have the best chance of influencing the attitudes of the young people who are in a process of radicalisation, in a non-violent direction."¹⁴³ At the same time the Action Plan is clear in stating that "some of the activities of the extremist groups [aimed at the] spreading of

¹³⁹ PET Annual Report 2006–2007, p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Anja Dalgaard Nielsen, Director of PET's Preventive Security Department, Copenhagen, October 2011.

¹⁴¹ *At Home in Europe: Muslims in Copenhagen*, Open Society Foundations, p. 179.

¹⁴² Interview with Anja Dalgaard Nielsen, October 2011.

¹⁴³ *A Common and Safe Future*, Government of Denmark (January 2009): 17.

hatred against democracy, Danish society or certain groups can and should be renounced and actively countered. We can and should give young people positive alternatives to the sense of fellowship offered by the extremists and their ideologies.”¹⁴⁴ The Danish position on engagement of non-violent Islamists seems very similar to that adopted by the Dutch government over the last few years. On one hand, it recognizes that the rhetoric coming from this milieu is dangerous for radicalization and social cohesion. At the same time it acknowledges that the security services can gain some positive results from interacting with it, just as in the UK and the Netherlands. A policy of engagement without empowerment – typified by PET’s low-key and reserved dialogue – seems to capture how Danish authorities seek to achieve that delicate balance.

PET’s third activity in the counter-radicalization field consists of its own interventions. While it is not involved, except in the training stages, in the interventions carried out by the municipalities, PET does carry out its own “individual preventive talks.” PET has developed a concept for “exit talks” aimed at encouraging individuals who move in militant circles to leave them. Unlike the municipalities’ interventions, the targets of PET’s exit talks are individuals who not only espouse extremist views but that, while not yet having committed a crime, have triggered serious concerns about their operational capabilities and involvement in violent actions. Individuals who are identified by PET based on all available information as particularly worrisome (but not yet requiring arrest) are approached by trained PET officials who use particular questioning and interviewing techniques combined with an extensive knowledge of the target’s background and psychological traits.

The goal of PET’s exit talks is to convince the target to change his behavior; make him understand that he is being watched and also aware of the full range of implications of his actions for himself and his family; and encourage the target to seek out alternative and more constructive ways of expressing political dissent. This approach has been used only in a few cases and for obvious reasons no public information about it exist. PET officials are nevertheless confident that it has given relatively good results.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

The implementation of the Action Plan was technically stopped in the wake of the September 2011 elections, which saw a left-wing government replace the center-right coalition that had conceived the strategy. In reality the activities of the Action Plan have continued during the transition from one government to the other and, although it is difficult at the time of writing to predict what the new government will do, there are few indications that a major shift in strategy will take place. The new government has declared that increased dialogue with the Muslim community is fundamental but has praised the Action Plan and is unlikely to make substantial revisions to it. It is likely, rather, that it will put its footprint on it by focusing less on Islamism and more on right-wing extremism; increasing dialogue with the Muslim community; and, in line with the new Dutch approach, separate social cohesion from strictly counter-radicalization efforts.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: 9.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Anja Dalgaard Nielsen, October 2011.

The likelihood that the Action Plan will survive the change in government is increased by the fact that the Danish government's counter-radicalization efforts have received very little negative attention. Unlike Britain's Prevent and like the Dutch strategy, the Danish strategy has received some criticism from some right-wing politicians and commentators and, to a lesser degree, some voices in the Muslim community. But, aside from these isolated cases, there has been little debate and virtually no controversy about the strategy and its implementation.

That is not to say that the Danish strategy is perfect and does not face challenges, something Danish authorities do not deny. For example, there was some initial resistance from frontline workers in participating in initiatives that could be seen as stigmatizing Muslims or making their work part of an intelligence-gathering drive. As in the Netherlands, this initial reluctance was overcome by an effort to convince frontline workers that these fears were unjustified. Moreover, while the competencies and awareness of radicalization on the part of officials in large cities has unquestionably improved, there are indications that smaller towns lag behind significantly. Some 100 police officers and SSP consultants/coordinators have participated in the courses organized by PET and the Ministry of Integration, but many more need to receive training.¹⁴⁶

These inevitable problems are acknowledged by the Danish government, which from the onset has tasked an external reviewer with assessing the implementation and effectiveness of all parts of its counter-radicalization strategy. COWI, the private company tasked with reviewing it, has released various reports indicating that while it is very difficult to assess both the cost-effectiveness and the long-term effects of all these initiatives at such an early stage, there are various reasons to believe the strategy is being implemented soundly, on schedule, and is providing encouraging results.¹⁴⁷

Indeed, the Danish counter-radicalization strategy seems, overall, well thought-out. The small size of the country, a relatively contained radicalization problem, and the pre-existence of a deeply entrenched and effective system of preventive criminal intervention (the SSP) constitute enormous advantages for Danish policymakers. But the idea of focusing on training, large-scale initiatives to diffuse social tensions and targeted interventions seems sound and there are no indications of major flaws in the implementation of this strategy.

Key Lessons

Wide array of preventive programs. Danish authorities have introduced a wide range of preventive programs, which are implemented at both the national and local levels.

Focus on targeted intervention/de-radicalization. Denmark has been at the forefront of devising individualized de-radicalization programs, the characteristics of which differ from city to city.

Important role of the security and intelligence service. PET plays a prominent role in counter-radicalization by providing training,

¹⁴⁶ Interview with officials at the Division for Cohesion and Prevention of Radicalisation at the Ministry of Integration, October 2011.

¹⁴⁷ *Mid-Term Evaluation of the Action Plan "A Common and Safe Future,"* COWI (June 2011): 2.

conducting its own preventive talks with radicalizing individuals, and having created a permanent dialogue with the Danish Muslim community.

Continuous evaluation. Unlike other countries, Danish authorities have tasked an external evaluator to independently assess the progress of their measures from the onset.

5 Norway

Background

Norway is one of the smallest European countries by population, with around 5 million residents. It also has a long-established system of community policing along with a highly liberal criminal justice system, both of which have a strong emphasis on reform rather than punishment. In addition, until the July 2011 terrorist attack conducted by right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik, there had been no substantial modern tradition of extreme political violence or terrorism in Norway, barring a minor upsurge in neo-Nazism in the 1980s and 1990s. One result of this lack of domestic extremist or terrorist threat is that Norway has never developed an autonomous internal security service. The Norwegian domestic intelligence service, the Police Security Service (PST), is a branch of the police service rather than an independent organization. At the same time, when Norway has sought to conduct counter-radicalization work, whether against the far right since the 1980s or more recently against Islamist extremists, its long tradition of community policing provided strong foundations on which to build. That said, Norwegian state security organizations are comparatively small and have a very finite capacity.¹⁴⁸ This, along with the low threat level in Norway, may help to explain the relatively small scale of Norwegian counter-radicalization work to date.

Norway and Islamist Extremism

Norway's Muslim community is estimated to number around 150,000, grossly 3 percent of the country's total population.¹⁴⁹ Most Norwegian Muslims belong to three main ethnic groups: Pakistani, Somali and Arab, with smaller numbers of Bosnians, Turks and Kurds.¹⁵⁰ Most Muslims in Norway live in a few urban areas, mainly in the large cities of Oslo and Drammen, where Muslims make up relatively high percentages of the total population. In Oslo, for example, around 8 percent of the total population is estimated to be Muslim. Norwegian authorities believe that the levels of extremism and radicalization among Norwegian Muslims are extremely low. There has been no jihadist-inspired terrorist attack in Norway and the first convictions of Islamists in Norway for terrorism occurred only in 2012, when two Muslim men were convicted of planning to attack the Danish newspaper that had printed the cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad.¹⁵¹ In further contrast with their counterparts in several European countries, Norwegian Muslims have also not been involved in any terrorist attack in any other Western state.

¹⁴⁸ An October 2009 cable from the US Embassy in Oslo, released by Wikileaks, revealed that Norway only had 60 surveillance officers to cover threats from terrorism and espionage. The cable related that the outgoing PST head Jorn Holmehad told the embassy that, in the words of the embassy, "Norway does not have the physical or technical resources to provide surveillance even for the needs already identified by the Protective Security Service, or PST." See US Embassy cable: "Analysis Of FM Stoere's Public Comments Defending Norway's Decision Not To Take Gitmo Detainees," October 28, 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09OSLO652.html>

¹⁴⁹ "The future of the Global Muslim Population," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, January 2011. <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population/>

¹⁵⁰ "Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents from countries where Islam is the main religion, by country of origin: 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2008," Statistics Norway, 2009. <http://www.ssb.no/samfunns-speilet/utg/200903/03/tab-2009-06-15-02.html>

¹⁵¹ "Two convicted in Norway of plotting terror attack," Associated Press, January 30, 2012.

Norway has, however, experienced a range of lower-level extremism issues. These include: attempts to fundraise for the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, an Algerian terrorist group, in the mid-2000s¹⁵²; small-scale but tense protests against the Danish cartoons and the war in Afghanistan¹⁵³; and instances of young Somalis with Norwegian citizenship travelling to Somalia to fight for the al Qaeda-aligned militant group, al Shabaab.¹⁵⁴ In addition, since 1991, Norway has been home to Najmuddin Faraj Ahmad (also known as Mullah Krekar), the founder of the Iraqi-Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al Islam. Although Krekar has not been linked to any terrorist attack in Europe, in 2012 he was jailed for making death threats against Norwegian officials.¹⁵⁵ Despite these incidents and the presence of some websites espousing radical views, overall there is relatively little evidence of widespread radicalization in Norway.¹⁵⁶

One often-adduced reason for the low level of jihadist terrorism or extremism in Norway is that its lavish social welfare system means that it is harder for grievances to take root. Norway has also been a low-key member of the “War of Terror” alliance and thus features low on jihadists’ global target lists. Moreover, Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami and Hizb-ut-Tahrir have never significantly established themselves in Norway. As a result most Norwegian Muslims have never been exposed to typical Islamist ideologies and anti-Western conspiracy theories that are seen by many as the seedbed for terrorism.

Where problems arise between mainstream Norwegian society and Muslims in Norway, they have usually been related to a clash between modern secular values and traditional religious values (e.g., over the position and rights of women, tolerance of homosexuality and depictions of the prophet Muhammad) rather than due to radical Islamist ideology per se. This also has important consequences for Norwegian counter-radicalization work. Not only has this left the Norwegian government free to concentrate on tackling terrorism rather than Islamism in general, it has also meant that, like the Netherlands, Norway’s government has not had to contest with Islamists attempting to depict counter-radicalization work as an attack on Muslims and their religion. Rather, Muslim communities in Norway have been broadly welcoming of government counter-radicalization efforts and in particular of Norway’s “Action Plan against radicalization,” the cornerstone of these efforts.

Counter-radicalisation in Norway: “Action Plan against radicalization”

The threat to Norway from Islamist terrorism has largely been theoretical rather than actual. Despite this, Norway has developed a small-scale counter-radicalization program guided by the country’s

¹⁵² The best write-up is in the US Embassy cable, “Growing Awareness Of Terrorism Threat,” March 14, 2008 (Wikileaks id no: 145931) <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/03/08OSLO154.html#>

¹⁵³ The most recent of these occurred on January 20, 2012. No more than 30 demonstrators took part. “Islamic Demonstration faced boycott,” *News in English*, January 20, 2012. <http://www.newsinenglish.no/2012/01/20/islamic-demonstration-faces-boycott/>

¹⁵⁴ A prominent recent example was a 27-year-old Somali brought up in Norway who was killed fighting for al-Shabaab in 2011. He had previously served in Norway’s prestigious Kings Guard battalion. “Watched the King, died as a terrorist,” Associated Press, November 9, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ “Mullah Krekar jailed for five years in Norway,” BBC, March 26, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17515202>

¹⁵⁶ See www.islamnet.no

experience of far-right violence and agitation during the 1990s.¹⁵⁷ During this period, Norway developed a wide range of measures to tackle neo-Nazi groups, principally aiming to undermine their recruitment abilities and encourage existing members to leave the groups. Further pre-emptive work was carried out across society to reduce grassroots susceptibility to neo-Nazi and racist messages. This work was led by the police and had a strong emphasis on local community policing. This program is generally regarded as highly successful, leading to the virtual collapse of organized neo-Nazism by 2010 and the dramatic decline of neo-Nazi and related racist violence – with the obvious exception of Anders Breivik (who, to be sure, was not part of a neo-Nazi organization and embraced a different kind of right wing ideology).

Norway's counter-radicalization strategy, the "Action Plan to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism," was first presented at a press conference in December 2010 by the Norwegian Prime Minister, after nearly two years of gestation. As well as borrowing heavily from Norway's work against neo-Nazi and far-right groups, it was also based partly on Norwegian studies of existing counter-radicalization work in the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The Action Plan is therefore a distillation of European and Norwegian counter-radicalization experiences, adapted to the Norwegian environment and to the perceived Islamist threat in Norway. The Action Plan is overseen by Norway's Ministry of Justice and the Police. The Action Plan's high-profile launch by the Prime Minister was interpreted in Norwegian government circles as evidence of an intention to send a clear message to Norwegians and to foreign governments that Norway was taking the issue of Islamist terrorism seriously.

The Action Plan lists a number of steps that are to be taken by different ministries. The Ministry of Justice and the Police has been allocated a range of tasks, including to "set up a knowledge research group made up of researchers in the field," to "establish an inter-sectoral co-ordination group to follow-up the action plan" and "to continue to develop police preventative talks."¹⁵⁸ The Ministry for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion is tasked with running a "course in Norwegian social conditions for religious leaders with immigrant backgrounds" and also a course "in Norwegian social studies and understanding democracy for newly arrived immigrants." The Ministry of Education and Research is asked "to ensure that more young people complete their secondary school education" as "a general preventative measure."¹⁵⁹ The Action Plan therefore aims to achieve a number of different goals, including increasing institutional understanding of the radicalization problem, promoting better and faster integration and also improving inter-departmental co-ordination. The Action Plan was generally well-received across Norwegian society. One reason for this was that the plan expressly focused on all extremisms rather than just on Islamism. The document discusses the range of "left-wing and right-wing extremist groups, separatist movements and extreme animal rights activists who have resorted to violent methods to achieve their political goals" throughout the post-war period, before going on to discuss the current threat from "extreme Islamist terrorism" and stating that this "new challenge"

¹⁵⁷ A good overview of Norwegian thinking on counter-terrorism can be found in Tore Bjørgo (ed.) *Preventing terrorism and other kinds of crime*, Research Council of Norway, Oslo 2011.

¹⁵⁸ *Collective security – a shared responsibility*. Action Plan to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, p. 26.

¹⁵⁹ Action Plan, p. 34.

represents the most pressing current danger.¹⁶⁰ Astrid Solhaug, an adviser on the Action Plan at the Ministry of Justice, said: “The plan was presented to tackle ‘violent extremism’ and it was not focused on any particular group.”¹⁶¹ In addition, during the drafting of the plan, various minority organizations – including Muslim ones – were consulted and were allowed to see the final version a few days before its publication. As a result, Solhaug says, when the Action Plan was launched, minority organizations “didn’t have a lot to say” although “some actually came forward and said they wanted to help.” In our view, this response is partly a result of the lack of participationist Islamist (and particularly Muslim Brotherhood) influence in Norway, partly a result of the way the plan was presented, and also because the Norwegian government had already established a good working relationship with Muslim and other minority groups over many years.

Yet not all those involved in the Plan are impressed by its published version. Some regard the Action Plan mainly as a public relations exercise. Tore Bjørgo, Norway’s most prominent expert on far-right extremism and one of the key thinkers behind the Action Plan, says “the strategy is just taking what everyone is already doing, putting it together and calling it a strategy.”¹⁶² However, he adds that one benefit of the Action Plan is that “it has drawn attention to the issues,” brought together a large number of disparate ministries and that “it has also made visible the problem and also the possible solutions.” In this, the Action Plan is clearly borrowing from the UK’s Prevent strategy, which showed the potential benefits of bringing together a disparate range of work conducted by different ministries in order to try to ensure a disciplined and co-ordinated approach across government. In defense of the program, however, one prominent Norwegian government expert, Brynjar Lia, said: “There were questions whether the Action Plan was just a PR move to say ‘look we’re doing something,’ and while this may have been one of the aims, there were actually new measures in it as well.” As one of those closely involved in Norway’s counter-radicalization work said: “An important aim of the Action Plan was to send out the message that the police cannot solve this problem by themselves.”¹⁶³

“Empowerment Conversations”

The centerpiece of Norway’s Action Plan are its “Empowerment Conversations,” intervention programs which are run by local police forces. Since 1998, Norwegian police have run Empowerment Conversations in order to help young people who are starting to become involved in political extremism, anti-social behavior, criminality and violence and guide them back towards the mainstream. Starting in 2006, the remit of these Empowerment Conversations has been expanded to encompass the challenge of Islamist radicalization. The Conversations are therefore approximate to the UK’s Channel Programme, as they are conducted and led by trained local police officers, who may also co-ordinate their work with other local bodies (e.g., local housing authorities) as needed.

The guiding logic behind the programs is early intervention to tackle potential problems before they become more serious, an approach

¹⁶⁰ Action Plan, p. 9

¹⁶¹ Interview with Astrid Solhaug, Adviser, Ministry of Justice and Police, Oslo, November 2011.

¹⁶² Interview with Dr Tore Bjørgo, Professor at Norwegian Police University College, Oslo, November 2011.

¹⁶³ Elin Solberg, Senior Adviser, The Police Department, Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police.

in tune with Norway's liberal attitude to policing. Oslo Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum explains that "Our message to the young people is: 'We could arrest you – but we really would prefer to help you.'"¹⁶⁴ According to Norwegian terrorism expert Thomas Hegghammer, "to put it very simply, in the US, anyone dabbling in extremist ideology is seen as evil; in Norway they are seen as fundamentally good but temporarily misguided. The police could go in hard but they chose not to. It's a different philosophy."¹⁶⁵ The aim of the conversations therefore is to guide young people away from extremism and back into the Norwegian mainstream, and to give them the chance to reform as an alternative to punishing them through the judicial process.

Potential candidates for the Empowerment Conversations can be identified by teachers, police officers, council workers, youth clubs, religious leaders or even by concerned local citizens. As one Norwegian government official said, Norway's small and highly interconnected society makes it easy to identify individuals who are at odds with mainstream society. Yngve Carlsson, Special Advisor at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, stated:

*Because we are a transparent society, with a lot of eyes, it is easy to see people who are grouping together in a bad way or causing problems. It is then easy for us to speak to them or to exert control or put pressure on them.*¹⁶⁶

This approach is additionally made possible because Norwegians are generally happy to report others to the police for anti-social, but sub-criminal, behavior.¹⁶⁷ Once a young person is identified, he and his parents are approached by the police and are invited to come informally to the local police station to voluntarily take part in an Empowerment Conversation. Alternatively, the young person may be caught engaged in illegal acts and then invited to take part in the Empowerment Conversation as an alternative to being prosecuted. However, the emphasis is on early intervention because "once they are deeply involved in a group they will not listen to anyone from outside the group."¹⁶⁸

In an Empowerment Conversation, a police officer describes some of the likely consequences of the person's actions and the potential outcomes of their current trajectory – which is shown to include jail sentences, a loss of respect from society, poverty, unemployment, drink or drug addiction. The things that will be lost to a person if they continue down this path are also explained: health, social status, money, happiness and a stable loving family. The young person is then invited to identify by name which of their friends exercise either positive or negative influences over them. They are then encouraged to become closer to those in their lives who hold a positive influence and to promise to distance themselves from those who are a negative

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, Crime Prevention Coordinator, Oslo Police District, Oslo, November 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Dr. Thomas Hegghammer, Senior Research Fellow and Director of Terrorism Studies at the Norwegian Defence Establishment, Oslo, November 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Yngve Carlsson, Special Advisor at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, November 30, 2011

¹⁶⁷ The failure of Norwegian society to detect Breivik prior to his attack has naturally raised some questions about this system. On the other hand, as one senior Norwegian government official said: "If Breivik had been from an ethnic background, there is no question that we would have identified him several months before he carried out his attack. The problem was not the system. The problem was that we were complacent and we thought that no Norwegian would want to do something like this."

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, Crime Prevention Coordinator, Oslo Police District, Oslo, November 2011.

influence. They are also encouraged to identify and state positive goals that they will work towards, for instance, spending more time studying, stopping drinking or taking drugs. According to Bjørn Øvrum, “the aim is to help them understand that there are legal ways of achieving their goals, whether these are having ‘respect’, ‘honour’, or having a good social network.”¹⁶⁹

The young person is then made to promise to follow this program and his parents also promise to help him, before being allowed to go home. Subsequently the police will aim to develop a relationship with him, as well as checking up on him at school, and on the street, to check that he is progressing towards his goals. Further meetings in the police station may also take place over the following weeks and months. In an ideal scenario, the young person will come to regard the policeman as a friend and mentor as he gradually re-integrates into mainstream society. The person may also receive additional help from the state regarding education, housing and employment in order to reduce his susceptibility to anti-social or extremist behavior, and to break his links with his former lifestyle and friends. The concept, both in theory and practice, relies heavily on the nature of Norway’s small and tight-knit society. As the Action Plan itself states: “Trust in public authorities is important in order to be able to prevent violent extremism effectively.”¹⁷⁰

At present, only a few Muslim individuals have been through the Empowerment Conversations program (fewer than ten in the Oslo area during the last year, according to the Oslo police). Most of these were identified as being potentially susceptible to a range of negative influences, of which Islamist extremism was just one, with involvement in crime, drugs and gangs also being issues of concern. Despite these low numbers, all of these interventions are believed to have successfully guided these individuals back into the mainstream.

Some Norwegian experts have identified potential limitations to the program, however. For instance, the Empowerment Conversations are primarily aimed at school-age individuals with only limited ability to reach over-18s, partly due to the program’s use of parents and teachers to gain leverage over vulnerable young people.¹⁷¹ Others say that more can be done. Tore Bjørgo says:

*There should be means to disengage people from radical groups and to re-engage these people back into society. This has been done previously with right-wing extremists, youth gangs and criminal gangs. I’d like to see this also become part of the action plan against Islamist extremism ... Dialogues with the police and early-stage radicals should also be just one part of the strategy. These are just about preventing people who are on the way into radical groups. We also need mechanisms to help people who are on the way out.*¹⁷²

Indeed, Norway’s Action Plan has only adopted certain aspects of Norway’s work against far-right extremism. For instance, a key part of the work against the far-right and neo-Nazi groups included “Exit” programs seeking to help radicalized individuals leave extreme groups. In 2003, the Norwegian police carried out a six-week

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Action Plan, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, November 2011.

¹⁷² Interview with Dr Tore Bjørgo, November 2011.

“offensive” against the far-right Vigrind network. This comprised a series of police-led talks and engagement with radicalized members that, according to a government summary, directly led to “a very positive result. More than half of the young people left Vigrind completely and several took a more peripheral affiliation with the organization and considered exiting it completely.”¹⁷³ Such offensives, however, have not been fully replicated in Norway’s programs against Islamism. This may be due to a lack of suitable targets or because Norwegian authorities currently lack adequate knowledge of how to argue against Islamism.¹⁷⁴ This underlines one of the most distinct aspects of Norwegian de-radicalization: it is conducted by ordinary Norwegian police officers through pragmatic discussions about quality of life, rather than through theological arguments about what is religiously “correct.” This is a striking difference from the de-radicalization work carried out in the Netherlands and the UK.

Another criticism that Norwegian experts make of the Action Plan is that it attempts to use the Empowerment Conversations as a tool to tackle all potential problems. Tore Bjørgo says: “They think they’ve found a successful method and now they want to use it for everything.”¹⁷⁵ Although it outlines a range of other methods to counter radicalization and to accelerate Muslim integration, it is indeed clear that Norway’s Action Plan depends heavily on identifying potential radicals at a young age and then reforming them through the Empowerment Conversations before they can go on to join radical groups. While this can be a weakness, this concept is defended – with provisos – by other government officials who argue that if counter-radicalization and integration work with the under-18s is effective, the chances of radicalization significantly taking root among those over 18 is dramatically reduced. Ove Kristofersen, the head of the SaLTo crime prevention program in Oslo,¹⁷⁶ says that “Many people think that if we do good preventative work with children, then we can avoid most of the problem altogether. But at the same time we accept that no system is perfect. We do a lot of preventative work against crime but there are still criminals in society.”¹⁷⁷ As can be seen, therefore, Norway’s Action Plan aims to *reduce* risk, rather than eliminate it altogether.

Other Counter-radicalization Work

Although the Empowerment Conversations with individuals are the cornerstone of Norwegian counter-radicalization efforts, the Norwegian government also carries out a wide range of preventative, trust-building work with Muslim communities and religious organizations. This aims to reduce the potential for local grievances to develop, to push back against extremist currents within these communities, and to build relationships with Muslim groups that can make it easier for potential radicals to be identified and then put through the Empowerment Conversations program.

Local police, for instance, routinely liaise with mosques on a range of issues including drugs, crime and anti-social behavior – as indeed they have done for many years preceding the development of the

¹⁷³ Action Plan, p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, November 2011.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Dr Tore Bjørgo, November 2011.

¹⁷⁶ SaLTO is the Norwegian government’s primary preventative strategy against crime, drug abuse and other anti-social acts (including terrorism).

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Ove Kristofersen, Secretary, SaLTo, Oslo, November 2011.

Action Plan. Counter-radicalization work is largely wrapped into this existing work and is carried out by ordinary police officers. Police officers advocate taking a low-key approach when addressing extremism. Bjørn Øvrum states: “I don’t find it useful to talk about radicalization in the first meeting [with local Muslim groups] because they can feel that we are accusing them.” In addition, there is a long-standing tradition of police and local councils fostering dialogue between different groups. Yngve Carlsson, Special Advisor at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, argues that “the government regularly creates dialogue between churches, atheists and immigrant groups. People talk easily across religious boundaries and so conflicts are few.”¹⁷⁸ One prominent example of successful police use of preventative talks with members of Norwegian Muslim communities occurred in winter 2008/9, when the police held a series of meetings in order to defuse tensions related to Israeli-Palestinian violence in Gaza following a violent pro-Palestinian demonstration in central Oslo. These talks prevented a repeat of the violence.

Despite this widespread tradition of dialogue with a range of groups and individuals, the government has not proactively or deliberately sought the help of Salafis or Islamists to tackle violent radicalization. Brynjar Lia, states that “no-one has even proposed working with these guys. The scope of the problem in Norway is not so large that it necessitates working with these groups. That said, there is dialogue with people from across the Muslim community. But the government speaks to them because they are Muslims who are living in Norway, not because they are Salafists or Islamists.”¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, the Norwegian government does fund some moderate Muslim religious organizations to advance counter-radicalization goals, either through supporting their running costs or by sponsoring particular events or programs. For instance, Norway’s Ministry of Justice recently funded an event run by Minhaj-ul-Quran, a global Pakistan-based Sufi organization.¹⁸⁰

In addition to this work, many Norwegians involved in the government’s counter-radicalization efforts point to the government’s use of public messaging around the Action Plan as a significant strategic success, and in particular the government’s balance between highlighting radicalization issues and over-exaggerating the problem. Thomas Hegghammer argues that “Terrorism is seen, and also portrayed, as a social problem and a youth problem. It is associated with crime, delinquency, etc. – things that people are used to hearing about and which they understand. The idea is not to make this something scary that people are then afraid to deal with.”¹⁸¹ Similarly, Elin Solberg argues that “the messaging was very clear: that terrorism is a criminal issue and that police should work against it as part of their overall work against crime ... we also say clearly that we have been fighting right-wing extremism for years and now we are going to fight this other form of extremism as well. We don’t make the subject more dramatic than it has to be.”¹⁸² This is echoed too at the local level. Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum: “When talking

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Yngve Carlsson, Special Advisor at the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, November 30, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Dr. Brynjar Lia, November 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Dr Thomas Hegghammer, November 2011.

¹⁸² Interview with Elin Solberg, Senior Adviser, Police Department, Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, Oslo, November 2011.

to communities, our message is that all communities are at risk of radicalization.”¹⁸³

This messaging seems to have allowed Norway to overcome even potentially serious problems. For instance, in 2009 Norwegian courts indicted a prominent Norway-based Somali community leader on charges that he was funding al Shabaab. Some Norwegian Somalis objected that the man could not have possibly been funding al Shabaab and the case threatened to disturb relations between Somalis and the government. However, when a court case revealed that the man had in fact been funding the group, this verdict was apparently accepted by Norwegian Somali communities.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, after the Breivik attack on July 22, 2011, the government did not publicly make assumptions about the identity of the attacker, even amid much media and internet-led speculation that the attack was carried out by Islamists. Likewise, when the house of Mullah Krekar, Norway’s most notorious extremist, was the target of a drive-by shooting in January 2010, Krekar thanked the Norwegian police for their professional response and for helping him and his family.¹⁸⁵ Thomas Hegghammer sums it up: “Although there is a deep popular reservoir of skepticism in Norway towards Muslims, Norway is a difficult country to dislike – even if you are a jihadist.”¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

In many ways, Norway is an unusual case. It has one of the smallest populations of any European country while also being oil-rich. Even during this current recession, Norway enjoys something close to full employment, its state housing stock is of high quality, and Norwegian quality of life remains among the highest in the world. In addition, Norway also offers immigrants genuine opportunities for self-advancement. Thomas Hegghammer explains: “In Norway, you have genuine social mobility. It matters what choices you make. If you want to get out of trouble, there are people ready to help you and if you work hard, you have a real chance of changing your position in society.”¹⁸⁷ Importantly too, for counter-radicalization work, there is a high degree of trust between the populace and the police, which makes it much easier for programs like the Empowerment Conversations to function relatively free of controversy.

There are aspects of Norway’s Action Plan that are worth examination. Norway’s work shows in particular that counter-radicalization efforts can be included in ordinary policing work, for little or no extra financial cost; that sober public messaging on terrorism and radicalization can win over Muslim communities and make them active partners in counter-radicalization; and that interventions such as the Empowerment Conversations can head off problems at an early stage. It also shows that long-term police work with Muslim communities – over a wide range of subjects such as crime, delinquency and drugs – can also produce benefits in terms of countering extremism and radicalization.

¹⁸³ Interview with Police Superintendent Bjørn Øvrum, November 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Abdi was however acquitted of the charge of funding terrorism as Al-Shabaab was not a listed terrorist organization at the time. US State Department, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2012”. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170256.htm>. Information on the Somalia community response comes from Dr. Brynjar Lia, author interview.

¹⁸⁵ “Krekar ville ikke flytte,” *Aftenposten*, February 5, 2010. <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article3503809.ece>

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Dr Thomas Hegghammer, November 2011.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Key lessons

Strong emphasis on reform rather than punishment. The central theme of Norwegian counter-radicalization work is to help guide young people away from radicalization and potentially negative influences, and to inspire them to achieve their goals through mainstream processes. Judicial solutions are seen as a last resort. Indeed, prosecutions against individuals may even be deferred in return for accepting help and support.

Non-theological approach. Norway's counter-radicalization work has almost no role for Muslim organizations or religious figures. The vast majority of its work is done by ordinary Norwegian civil servants, often with support from schools and housing associations, and particularly by ordinary policemen. This highly secular approach puts an emphasis on finding pragmatic solutions to problems of identity, under-achievement and social exclusion.

Strong emphasis on adopting Norwegian values. In keeping with its non-religious approach, Norway's counter-radicalization work revolves heavily around helping potentially vulnerable individuals find pragmatic "Norwegian" solutions to political or social problems. For instance, solutions to radicalization are seen as working hard, fitting into Norwegian society, and becoming involved in the democratic process, rather than through adopting new "moderate" forms of religious practice or belief.

Counter-radicalization is police-led. Even more than other European counter-radicalization programs, Norwegian counter-radicalization work is led and carried out by the police, although with considerable additional support from other ministries and departments. It also puts a strong emphasis on community policing.

Emphasis on winning community trust. Norwegian counter-radicalization work is highly dependent on the government, and particularly the police, winning and maintaining the trust of Norwegian Muslims and Norwegian Muslim organizations. Great emphasis is put on communicating effectively with Muslims (for instance, emphasizing that Norway is concerned by all forms of extremism). Importantly, however, this has not been done at the expense of watering down Norwegian values or principles.

6 Conclusion

The counter-radicalization experiences of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway clearly show that each country's strategy is shaped by its own culture, political environment, legal framework and threat assessment. Each country possesses peculiarities that could potentially make the implementation of certain counter-radicalization aspects or measures particularly successful or, conversely, significantly challenging if not outright impossible. No counter-radicalization initiative, let alone comprehensive strategy, can be imported to another country (or, for that matter, another city) if it is not adapted to the local reality.

Notwithstanding these fundamental caveats, it is possible to identify common trends in the four European counter-radicalization experiences analyzed in this report. There are indeed some evolving lines of thinking that, to some degree, can be observed among counter-radicalization practitioners and policymakers in the four countries examined and also in other European countries. These trends are derived from the years European officials have spent implementing counter-radicalization measures and making inevitable mistakes in doing so. Observing them can be particularly useful for other countries that are now in the process of conceiving more elaborate counter-radicalization initiatives to be implemented in the United States.¹⁸⁸

In terms of general lines of thinking, several overarching trends can be observed:

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

Separation of social cohesion and counter-radicalization work.

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

¹⁸⁸ *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, Executive Office of the President of the United States, December 2011.

Decreasing focus on general preventive initiatives. Budgetary constraints, the narrowing of the definition of radicalization and the increasing separation of social cohesion and counter-radicalization work have caused authorities to scale back large preventive initiatives aimed at the general public or large cross-sections of it. Authorities still believe that public ceremonies, civics courses and interfaith meetings might have a role in promoting integration and social cohesion and, consequently, in indirectly creating a climate less favorable to radicalization. But these efforts, whose impact is difficult to measure, are increasingly kept separate from “pure” counter-radicalization initiatives.

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

From a more organizational perspective, there are four observable overarching trends:

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

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

Mainstreaming and normalizing counter-radicalization. A clear trend across all countries is to see counter-radicalization work, and even relatively complex intervention work, incorporated within the ordinary day-to-day responsibilities of police officers, teachers, housing officers and medical staff.

Emphasis on assessment. Most European programs now contain built-in measures to gauge the effectiveness of different projects. This helps ensure value-for-money for taxpayers and enables assessment of which programs should be kept, which need to be refined and which should be scrapped.

Finally, from the specific perspective of working with Muslim communities, three trends can be observed:

Shift away from a “theological” approach. Having initially experimented with funding Muslim groups to conduct counter-radicalization and with Islamic theological interventions, most counter-radicalization work has now shifted towards broader secular approaches that are generally aimed at addressing background vulnerabilities rather than theological opinions. Nonetheless, most programs, in particular de-radicalization interventions, may still use theological approaches and funding of moderate Muslim groups in certain circumstances.

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

Dual focus on far-right and Islamist extremism. Most Prevent-style programs tend to describe the threat from far-right and Islamist extremism as being roughly comparable. While this may not always be empirically true, it is widely seen as a useful and effective means of winning the trust of Muslim communities, individuals and organizations. In most countries a portion of preventive work is additionally directed specifically towards far-right threats.

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