

STATE OF PLAY

Intelligence-sharing and coordination remain issues in threat reduction.

In the developed world, lone actors perpetrate most fatal attacks.

The information landscape within and between countries continues to polarise.

Worldviews and politics are increasingly exclusionary.

Coronavirus policies have posed challenges for CT budgets and securing physical space (No. 2).

In the long-term, these policies may contribute to various categories of ideological extremism, as well as raise the risks of violent political action and support for it.

THEMES FOR THE WEEK

Integrated topics chosen by the editors for biweekly reading, analysis, and discussion



RECENT ATTACKS: AUSTRIA ⁽¹⁾ & FRANCE ⁽³⁾

The 2nd November incident in Vienna involved a formerly imprisoned and radicalised individual, and a firearm purchased in Slovakia. 4 were killed and 23 injured. The magnitude, minutiae, and frankly art of intelligence-sharing and credibility (ICCT, 2020) for lone actor detection, surveillance, and incident prevention is an implementation and resource concern for the developed world. The ability to share intelligence across borders for a coordinated approach to the transnational threat is too: The UK is likely to continue their 'Special Relationship' with the USA. Russia has drafted the recently signed (17/11) Counter-terror strategy for the BRICs.

On 29th October in France, 3 were killed by bladed weapon. As a method of prevention, the French government has recommended measures that would drastically reduce the intelligence burden and complexity. Similar measures in Austria include criminalising 'political Islam', or some say sanctioning collective punishment for the sake of national values and security. One interview states:

"The government are taking these seeds of division planted by terrorists to erase any grey areas and create a completely polarised society ... it's a declaration against not only fundamentalists but against Muslims in general." – in Rosman for al-Jazeera, 2020

United Kingdom – Some as young as 14, were arrested on terrorism charges in the past 18 months

White, 2020

Increasing influence of anti-government, identity-based, or fringe political conspiracies, including QAnon, on motivating criminal or violent activity

Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020

“When our tribal leaders send us cues, the tribe tends to move in that direction,” Cook says. “Leadership matters.”

Gibbens, 2020

The combination of polarized politics and siloed media ecosystems has created dueling information bubbles

Singer, 2020

Allow extremist material on social media or censor it at the risk of violating [rights] and driving extremists further underground.

Hoffman & Ware, 2020

“Isolation may exacerbate grievances that make people more vulnerable to radicalization — such as social alienation . . .

The extremists know this”

Lane, 2020

INFODEMIC – BINARY WORLD-MAKING

A recent UN report (7/2020) cited an infodemic as coronavirus fallout, contributing to right-wing extremism and action potential. Eliminating the ‘grey area’ of communication cited in Theme 1 was in fact a strategic objective of Daesh. Crafting oppositional, binary worlds presents problems for peaceful dispute resolution as conflict arises on the basis of systemic knowledge (e.g. your news/science is ‘misinformation’) and morality. Choosing violence over communication to defeat a misunderstood but evil/tyrannical other is likelier.

The issue for online radicalisation is that presently: ‘Cyberia’ has no sovereign. Allegiances form along barbarian-like tribal patterns, intensified by familiarity, existing preference-biased services, and algorithms. People are largely able to create their own ‘information bubbles’ (Singer, 2020) or in radicalisation terminology, echo chambers. The European Union and tech companies themselves continue to push for monolithic censorship of content deemed ‘barbaric’, undesirable, or terroristic. It is conceivable that this will affect and aggrieve numerous legitimate political organisations. Obtaining international consensus on what constitutes ‘hate’ is furthermore deeply unlikely.

LOCKDOWNS & NESTLING RADICALS

Factors such as unemployment, frustration, and distrust of government have contributed to mass unrest in the form of protests and rioting. The disruption will have effects on reintegration, off-ramp opportunities, and youth engagement programmes e.g. sports.

Not only external links and activities have been disrupted (unless people join protest marches), but duration and intensity of exposure to online content has risen for most populations. Social media and video games are evolving to be the main pathways to extremist group membership, indoctrination, and coordination.

Social isolation pre-Covid was already a risk factor for radicalisation. The absence of physical contact, economic crisis, uncertainty, and anti-authority attitudes are likely to tilt more demographics towards intense ideological affiliations and violent action. Youth are likely to continue to be disproportionately affected on account of their media consumption patterns, psychology, and search for justice, meaning, and status.

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- **Intelligence sharing amidst political tensions and across the ungoverned internet**
- **Efficacy of a censorship-based approach**
- **Even lower age of new recruits and kinetic participants – remove youth as a ‘mitigating circumstance’ in sentencing?**



STATE OF PLAY NEWSLETTER

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SELECT READINGS (APPROX. 45 MINS.)

THEME 1

Hoffman, B. & Ware, J. (2020, June 21). Foreign Policy Essay: The Challenges of Effective Counterterrorism Intelligence in the 2020s. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/challenges-effective-counterterrorism-intelligence-2020s>

Mehra, T. & Coleman, J. (2020, November 16). Vienna Attack: the Path of a Prospective (Foreign) Terrorist Fighter. *International Centre for Counter-terrorism – The Hague*. <https://icct.nl/publication/vienna-attack-the-path-of-a-prospective-foreign-terrorist-fighter/>

Rosman, R. (2020, October 22). After teacher's killing, French Muslims fear rising Islamophobia. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/22/teacher-killing-islamophobia>

Von Hein, M. (2020, November 4). Islamist terrorism: Germany is home to more than 600 agitators. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/islamist-terrorism-germany/a-55499856>

THEME 2

(2020, November 2). Europol's Counter-Terrorism Centre helps Spain bust cell recruiting minors into Islamic State. *Eureporter*. <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2020/11/02/europols-counter-terrorism-centre-helps-spain-bust-cell-recruiting-minors-into-islamic-state/>

(2020, November 18). Extortion, bio-warfare and terrorism: Extremists are exploiting the pandemic, says UN report. *UN News*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1077932>

THEME 3

Basit, A. (2020). COVID-19: a challenge or opportunity for terrorist groups? *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 15(3), pp. 263-275, DOI: 10.1080/18335330.2020.1828603

Wang, Q. (2020, September 18). Experts warn of anti-terrorism challenges amid COVID-19, calling for cooperation. *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1201328.shtml>

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES

Amarasingam, A. & Argentino, M. (2020). The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making? *CTC Sentinel*, 13 (7). <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>

BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy. View at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33204/BRICS+CounterTerrorism+Strategy>
This document 'rejects double standards' and using groups for political ends, while upholding values of noninterference and sovereignty.

Council of the EU. (2020, November 13). Joint statement by the EU home affairs ministers on the recent terrorist attacks in Europe. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/13/joint-statement-by-the-eu-home-affairs-ministers-on-the-recent-terrorist-attacks-in-europe/>

Gibbens, S. (2020, October 22). A guide to overcoming COVID-19 misinformation. *National Geographic*. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/10/guide-to-overcoming-coronavirus-misinformation-infodemic/>

Lane, A. (2020, July 12). UK: Fears of resurgent terrorism as COVID-19 lockdown ends. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/uk-fears-of-resurgent-terrorism-as-covid-19-lockdown-ends/a-54124486>

Scarlett, J. (2020, November 3). US and UK Intelligence and Security Relationship: The Way Forward – Together. *RUSI: Commentary*. <https://rusi.org/commentary/us-and-uk-intelligence-and-security-relationship-way-forward-%E2%80%93-together>

Singer, P. W. (2020, November 5). Misinformation 2020: What the Data Tells Us About Election-Related Falsehoods. *Defense One*. <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2020/11/misinformation-2020-what-data-tells-us-about-election-related-falsehoods/169820/> [Caution: Bias]

United Nations Publications:

<https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%93The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism_JULY.pdf

White, M. (2020, November 18). Right-wing extremism is UK's fastest growing threat, says top counter-terror cop. *Sky News*. <https://news.sky.com/story/right-wing-extremism-fastest-growing-threat-says-uks-top-cop-in-counter-terrorism-12135071>