



TONY BLAIR  
INSTITUTE  
FOR GLOBAL  
CHANGE

# 2019: CHALLENGES IN COUNTER-EXTREMISM

*Leading experts discuss policy solutions for  
the year's pressing CE issues*

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# 2019: CHALLENGES IN COUNTER-EXTREMISM

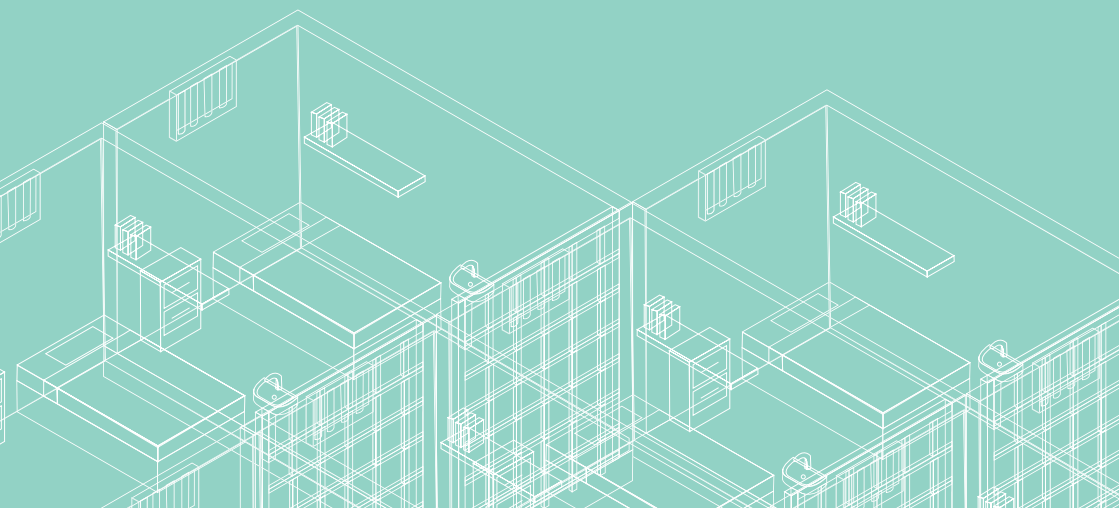
*Leading experts discuss policy  
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Guest edited by  
***Professor Bruce Hoffman***

Foreword by ***Tony Blair***

*The views of the authors do not  
necessarily represent the views  
of the Tony Blair Institute for  
Global Change*

Essays by  
*Sir John Jenkins*  
*Farah Pandith*  
*Dr Emman El-Badawy*  
*Jamie Bartlett*  
*Ian Acheson*  
*Professor Jytte Klausen*  
*Dr Kim Cragin*



# Table of Contents



6

Foreword

10

Contributors

12

Extremism in 2019:  
New Approaches to Facing  
the Threat

– *Professor Bruce Hoffman*

22

The State of the Ideology  
Debate

– *Sir John Jenkins*

40

Why 2019 Will Be the Year  
of the Online Extremist, and  
What to Do About It

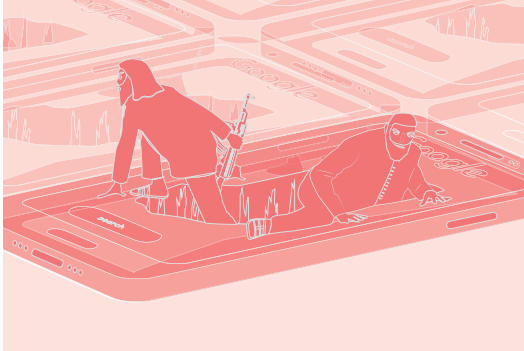
– *Jamie Bartlett*

46

Talking to Terrorists:  
The Key to Solving Prison  
Radicalisation

– *Ian Acheson*





28

National Security 'Readiness'  
Requires Cultural Listening  
– *Farah Pandith*

34

Integration, Identity and  
Extremism: Why We Need  
to Renew the Conversation  
– *Dr Emman El-Badawy*

52

How to Disrupt the Link  
Between Crime and Extremism  
– *Professor Jytte Klausen*

60

The Challenge of Failed  
Cities for Countering Violent  
Extremism  
– *Dr Kim Cragin*



# Foreword

Extremism based on a perversion of the religion of Islam—the turning of religious belief into a totalitarian political ideology—remains the most potent global security threat. As the Global Extremism Monitor we published in September last year shows, terrorism linked to this ideology affected more than 60 nations across the world in 2017, and 2018 and 2019 will be no different.

The central case of The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change is that we will not defeat the violence unless we also defeat the ideas behind it.

Security measures are of course necessary. They are also costly. Countries spend billions of dollars to protect themselves against terrorist acts. And governments are obliged to commit troops to military action against groups perpetrating such terror in virtually every continent of the world.

Such measures can only ever contain the problem. To eliminate it, we must eliminate the thinking that draws people to the misguided, dangerous mindset that in carrying out these horrific actions they are somehow carrying out the will of God.

Yet we spend vast sums on dealing with the consequence of the thinking and very little on changing it. Therefore, we need a much deeper and better understanding of the roots of the extremism, in order to effectively uproot it.

We need to trace how this poisonous ideology came about; how it is taught and disseminated, particularly in the Internet age; and the role of education systems in teaching an essentially closed-minded view of the world and the place of religion in it. We need also to promote the values of peaceful co-existence in an era of globalisation when inevitably people will mix more than ever before across boundaries of faith and culture.

These essays are the first of a series of publications from the Institute in 2019. In combination, we want our work to show how the roots of

the extremism go back not over centuries but over the past half century or more. This warping of Islam is not part of the traditional and historical nature of Islam; it is a comparatively recent phenomenon. However, though we in the West tend to see it through the prism of 9/11 and what followed from that, the reality is that it began many years before, in the 20th century.

We will explore the huge significance of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, whose 40th anniversary is this February; how it triggered a reaction in the Sunni world; and the importance of the development of organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood in creating a coherent narrative of how religion should dominate and determine political structure.

Post 9/11, in the military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, and then in the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and the subsequent turmoil in Syria, Libya and Yemen, these issues became recognised as an even greater challenge. But as events today in the Sahel and Southeast Asia show, the challenge is not confined to the Middle East.

Our guest editor, the world-renowned terrorism expert Professor Bruce Hoffman, lays out some of the core history of the development of the extremist ideology in his introductory essay.

Each of the other essays represents an attempt to reshape the conversation around extremism. We have brought together leading experts in the counter-extremism and security fields to present a clear diagnosis of the problem, as well as some areas where policymakers need to focus. This is not exhaustive. But we hope they can help spark governments—in both the Muslim and the non-Muslim world—to develop a coherent, global strategy that takes on, dismantles and provides an alternative to Islamist extremism.

As I have said before, security measures are vital but nowhere near sufficient. Professor Hoffman reiterates this. Much as in the Cold War, he argues that better ideas and better values will be the decisive factor for victory in the long term.

Part of our weakness stems from a failure to acknowledge the true nature of the ideology that underpins the violence, as Sir John Jenkins forcefully argues in his essay. He writes that this “triumphalist, totalitarian and apocalyptic” worldview presents a challenge to the international and state order.

Farah Pandith argues that governments need to understand the cultural trends in the communities affected by the ideas of extremism in order to combat them.

My Institute’s Head of Research Dr Emman El-Badawy argues that we need to renew the conversation on the tricky grey area between identity, social alienation and extremism. She says progressives should not shy away from policy that combines integration and counter-radicalisation measures.

For Jamie Bartlett, with the best will in the world, fighting back against the deluge of online extremism will not suffice. Policymakers must use every tool at their disposal to counteract this, including AI and new technologies.

Ian Acheson, who led the independent government review of Islamist extremism in UK prisons, shows that at a time of increasing pressures on the system, prisons have become incubators of extremism and more work needs to be done.

My Institute’s Global Extremism Monitor has shown that this violence is not confined to conflict zones. Sixty-four of the world’s Islamist extremist groups operate outside them. As Professor Jytte Klausen highlights, individual networks, offline and on, with Islamists traversing continents, are among the greatest problems policymakers face. Where they settle, they disrupt the stability of communities, including through their links with the criminal underworld.



And as Dr Kim Cragin argues, extremists are taking advantage not only of fragile states but also, specifically, of urban areas. Do we need new strategies to meet these challenges?

In small-p political terms, the essays are trying to find a way for those who espouse liberal democratic values to avoid two errors. The first—propagated by the far right—is to demonise the entire religion of Islam, to say the extremism shows the real nature of Muslims. This false and prejudiced thinking, especially when linked to the issue of immigration, fuels much of the dangerous populist rhetoric across the Western world.

But the second error is that unfortunately associated with parts of the left: that there is something progressive and benign about Islamists, that in their attack on Western policy and their use of issues of social justice, there is the possibility of an alliance with them. This is a profound mistake. The turning of any religious faith into a totalitarian political ideology necessarily leads to prejudice against those who do not share that faith. It is the opposite of progressive belief.

Instead we seek—through the Institute—to advocate an approach that values co-existence and acts decisively not simply against the violence but against the ideology that breeds it.

In this way, we can respect Islam while disagreeing with Islamism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tony Blair". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Tony Blair**

*Executive Chairman of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change  
Former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*

# Contributors

## PROFESSOR BRUCE HOFFMAN

Bruce Hoffman is a professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service and was the director of its Center for Security Studies. Bruce co-founded St Andrews University's Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, where he is also visiting professor of terrorism studies. He is currently a visiting senior fellow for counter-terrorism and homeland security at the Council on Foreign Relations.

## JAMIE BARTLETT

Jamie Bartlett is the director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at the think tank Demos, where he specialises in online social movements and the impact of technology on society. He is the author of three books: *The People Vs Tech* (2018), about data and democracies; *Radicals* (2017), about political outsiders; and the best-selling *The Dark Net* (2014), about Internet subcultures.

## SIR JOHN JENKINS

Sir John Jenkins is an associate of Policy Exchange and board member of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics. Until 2015 he was British ambassador to Saudi Arabia. In a 35-year diplomatic career Sir John held a number of other ambassadorial posts in the Middle East and elsewhere. He was executive director for IISS (Middle East) from 2015 to 2018 and in 2017 taught at Yale. He was lead author of the British government's Muslim Brotherhood Review in 2014.

## IAN ACHESON

Ian Acheson is a senior adviser at the US-based Counter Extremism Project. He has extensive involvement in operational command of serious prison incidents, hostage negotiation, and counter-terrorism policy and practice. Ian has advised governments in Europe, Asia, North Africa and the Middle East on countering violent extremism. He led the British government's review into Islamist extremism in prisons, probation and youth justice in 2015.

**FARAH PANDITH**

Farah Pandith is the author of *How We Win: How Cutting-Edge Entrepreneurs, Political Visionaries, Enlightened Business Leaders and Social Media Mavens Can Defeat the Extremist Threat*. She is affiliated with Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. She served as a political appointee for three US presidents, most recently as the first ever special representative to Muslim communities.

**DR EMMAN EL-BADAWY**

Dr Emman El-Badawy is the head of research in the Co-Existence team at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. She shapes and oversees the Institute's research agenda on extremism. Emman is also a fellow of the British Academy and of the Department of War Studies at King's College London. Her current three-year research project is a comparative study of violent and nonviolent Islamist propaganda.

**PROFESSOR JYTTE KLAUSEN**

Jytte Klausen is the Lawrence A. Wien professor of international cooperation at Brandeis University and an affiliate at Harvard's Center for European Studies. Her background is in comparative historical research with a focus on Western Europe and North America. Jytte's books include *The Cartoons that Shook the World* and *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe*. She is working on a book about home-grown Islamist terrorism.

**DR KIM CRAGIN**

Dr Kim Cragin is the senior research fellow for counter-terrorism at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the US National Defense University (NDU). Before joining NDU, she was a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation. Kim has also taught as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and the University of Maryland. She served as senior staff to the 9/11 FBI Review Commission.

# Extremism in 2019:

## New Approaches to Facing the Threat

*Professor Bruce Hoffman*

**Policymakers need to better understand, engage and counter the ideology that animates extremist violence, because purely military approaches achieve only minimal results.**

Nearly two decades on, the war on terrorism continues without respite or resolution. The momentous question posed by General David Petraeus on the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq—“How does this end?”—has yet to be answered. Meanwhile, violent extremism and radicalisation efforts have both increased and intensified. More than 120 violently inclined Islamist extremist groups are active throughout the world today. In manpower terms, this means that about 230,000 fighters—almost four times the number on 11 September 2001—are enmeshed in conflicts affecting some 70 countries. During 2017 alone, 84,000 people perished as a result of this problem, according to the Global Extremism Monitor.

Clearly, government policies and initiatives have failed to address the extremism and sectarianism that fuels this violence. We have therefore convened a group of leading experts and practitioners to think about how to tackle the urgent policy problem of countering extremism. Their contributions address the most critical, yet still poorly understood, dimensions of this issue: the ideological and historical foundations of contemporary extremism; the rise and pervasive use of online propaganda and recruitment; the crucial links between culture, youth and extremism; the proliferation of fragile states and increasing extremist safe havens; the challenge of countering radicalisation in prisons; and the offline networks between jihadi hubs in the West and conflict zones.

## The Centrality of Ideology

A common thread that emerges across these essays is the limited utility of military force in fighting ideology. Over a decade ago, when the war on terrorism was in its infancy, Professor Sir Michael Howard, a preeminent military historian and strategist, warned about this singularly misplaced preoccupation. “We are not faced with a finite adversary who can be appeased by political concessions or destroyed by military victories,” he observed. “We are dealing with a *state of mind* that has to be transformed; a task demanding skill, sagacity, determination, empathy, and above all *patience*.” Indeed, the blood and treasure expended over the past 17 years has demonstrated the inability of even the most technologically advanced militaries to suppress, much less defeat, the fervent beliefs underpinning this violence.

The inescapable conclusion is that violence driven by ideology can be effectively countered only by more powerful ideological arguments. Yet, the counter-terrorism spending priorities of governments throughout the world continue to reflect an overwhelming reliance on kinetic efforts rather than ideological ones. Britain, to cite one example, devotes just 1 per cent of its counter-terrorism budget to countering the ideology that drives Islamist extremism and violence.

The essays in this series thus attempt to answer General Petraeus’s question, providing the essentials to reconceptualise one of the most pressing policy issues of our time. This contribution to the debate

aims to shed new light on one of the key dimensions of domestic and international security that will continue to capture the attention of policymakers in 2019. To do so, the series provides a much-needed ideological and historical context to these formidable challenges.

*“Violence driven by ideology can be effectively countered only by more powerful ideological arguments.”*

Three signal events that occurred 40 years ago within months of one another still exert a commanding influence in regions on the fault lines of today’s most consequential ideological and sectarian conflicts. The Iranian Revolution, the siege of Mecca’s Grand Mosque, and the Soviet Union’s invasion and occupation of Afghanistan have each affected contemporary Shia and Sunni militancy. As 2019 marks the 40th anniversary of these watersheds in the evolution of Islamist extremism, it is an opportune moment to reflect on their legacy and implications, to reinvigorate the search for new policies and approaches through a better understanding of their historical antecedents and ideological foundations.

## **A Shia Theocracy Flexes Its Muscles**

The revolution that established the Islamic Republic of Iran, and brought to power a theocracy of Shia clerics led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, heralded a new, more muscular and expansive interpretation of this faith. In a landmark speech in 1980 celebrating the revolutionary government’s first year in power, Khomeini explained,

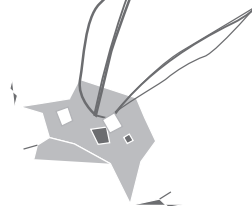
*We must strive to export our Revolution throughout the world and abandon all idea of not doing so, for not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of all oppressed people . . . We must make plain our stance toward all powers and superpowers and demonstrate to them that despite the arduous problems that burden us . . . our attitude to the world is dictated by our beliefs.*

The Ayatollah's bold proclamation left no doubt about the ideological foundation of the regime's policies. The revolution, he decreed, would serve as a clarion call to Muslims throughout the world to declare their fidelity to Islam and actively resist Western intervention. The need for continuous and intensive struggle was thus embraced as one of the central objectives of Iran's foreign policy.

Iraq's invasion of Iran later that year, coupled with the sanctions imposed by the United States over the hostage crisis involving American diplomats in the US Embassy in Tehran, heightened the Shia perception of a persecuted and besieged people. The Iranian-backed terrorist campaign that began with the 1981 suicide bombing of the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut, followed by many similar attacks and kidnappings, was a manifestation of escalating sectarian conflicts that have destabilised the Levant, the Gulf, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula ever since.

## Sunni Ideologues on the Rise

Meanwhile, the same heady currents of uncompromising religious militancy based on an austere and extremist interpretation of scripture had



a similar impact on Sunni Islam. On 20 November 1979, approximately 500 religious fanatics seized Mecca's Grand Mosque. For two weeks, the rebels defied attempts by Saudi military and security forces to dislodge them until, with the help of foreign commandos, the uprising was suppressed.

Confronted by determined, internal dissidents, whose piety challenged the authority of the country's ruling al-Saud dynasty, the regime decided to redirect this fervour outwards. In exchange for the rebels ceasing their efforts to undermine the monarchy, the kingdom agreed to bankroll the export of Wahhabi ideology to the rest of the Muslim world. Saudi largesse thereafter enabled the construction of mosques, creation of madrasas and deployment of clerics to spread this extremist interpretation of Islam globally. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the following month and the harsh military occupation it entailed provided an additional compelling focus for these activities.

Among the foremost exponents of this ideology was a charismatic preacher named Abdullah Azzam. While a student at Egypt's al-Azhar University, one of the most renowned Islamic institutions of higher education, Azzam became acquainted with the family of Sayyid Qutb. Executed in 1966, allegedly for plotting to assassinate Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Qutb was a leading advocate of modern, radical Islam. He argued that jihad was a personal, individual responsibility, and it was therefore incumbent on all Muslims to establish true Islamic rule in their own countries—with violence, if necessary.

Qutb decried Western concepts of secularism and democracy as anathema to Islam and branded the US



and the West as the religion's enemies. Azzam adopted many of Qutb's views as his own and, in the wake of the Red Army's brutal repression of the Afghan people, declared that it was an obligation of Muslims everywhere to defend their brethren wherever they were threatened. Among the faithful who heeded his call was a feckless young Saudi from a prominent family: Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden, the son of one of the wealthiest men in Saudi Arabia, established himself as a patron of jihad and, with Azzam, founded the Office of Services to raise funds and recruit foreign fighters. After nearly a decade of unrelenting guerrilla warfare, in 1989 the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan. Bin Laden became convinced that this defeat had set in motion the chain of events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism. He concluded that confronting the world's remaining superpower, the United States, would produce a similar result and thus end America's support of Israel and the corrupt, pro-Western, apostate regimes in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere.

In 1996 and 1998, Bin Laden declared war on the US. His bellicose statements attracted little notice until the terrorist movement he had created a decade earlier, al-Qaeda, simultaneously bombed the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. From the start, Bin Laden emphasised the ideological foundations and theological justifications behind this terrorist campaign, which culminated in the attacks on 11 September 2001. "There is no way to forget the hostility between us and the infidels," he explained a few weeks later. "It is ideological, so Muslims have to ally themselves with Muslims."

Our long-standing failure to fully engage al-Qaeda in ideological terms arguably laid the groundwork for the emergence of an even more extreme variant, ISIS, in 2014. Its short-lived caliphate represented ISIS's bid to resurrect an Islamic empire, governed by a strictly literal interpretation of Islamic law. This rigid, uncompromising ideology justified the unmitigated violence visited on Shias, various minority sects of Islam, Christians, Westerners and others derided as non-believers. ISIS proved particularly adept at exploiting the Internet and social media to speak to a global audience, attracting at least 40,000 fighters from some 120 countries.

In this critical respect, any terrorist movement's survival depends on its ability to recruit new members and appeal to an expanding pool of active supporters and passive sympathisers. The role of effective communication in this process is pivotal: ensuring the continued flow of fighters into the movement, binding supporters more tightly to it and drawing sympathisers more deeply into its orbit. ISIS's innovative use of social media has enabled this process in previously unimaginable ways and ensures the movement's ideological vitality and longevity—despite the loss of its physical caliphate.

## Breaking the Stasis

The war on terrorism has now lasted longer than last century's two world wars. Islamist extremists have succeeded in locking the West into a militarily enervating war of attrition—the preferred strategy of terrorists and guerrillas since time immemorial. They seek to undermine national political will, corrode internal popular support and demoralise the societies

they have targeted through a prolonged, spasmodic and diffuse campaign of terrorism and violence. Most dangerously, they pursue a deliberate strategy of provocation: seeking to push Western, liberal democracies to embrace increasingly illiberal security solutions that compromise civil liberties, demonise immigrants, threaten our core liberal values and thus validate the extremists' self-fulfilling narrative of a clash of civilisations.

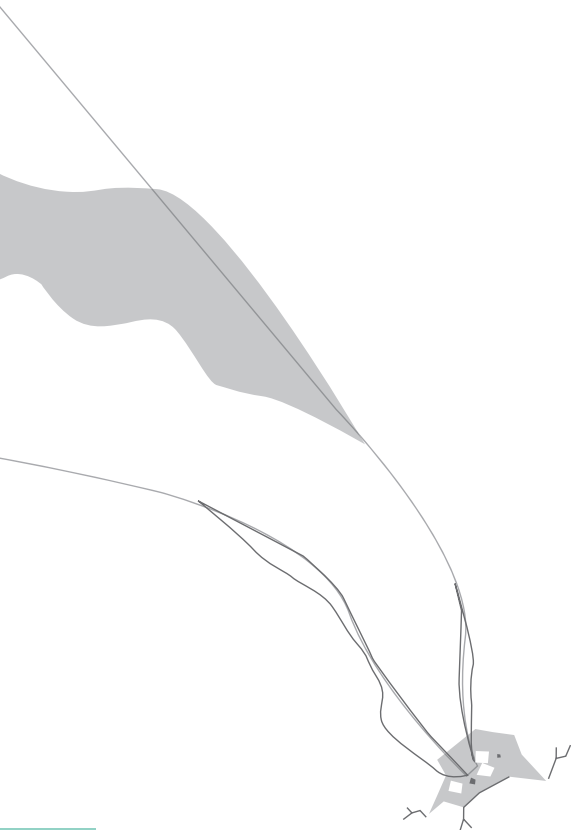
In his last publicly released video statement, Bin Laden revealed precisely this strategy on the eve of the 2004 US presidential election:

*So we are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Allah willing, and nothing is too great for Allah. . . . This is in addition to our having experience in using guerrilla warfare and the war of attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the mujahidin, bled Russia for 10 years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat.*

Decisively breaking this stasis by better understanding, engaging and countering the ideology that has animated extremist violence must always be among policymakers' highest priorities. Simply killing or detaining terrorists and other violent militants, whose ranks in any event seem to be continually replenished, will not end the threats posed by highly dynamic, PR-savvy and technologically adept movements.

*"The war on terrorism has now lasted longer than last century's two world wars."*

The nugatory results of current approaches are proof of a failure to get to grips with viscerally powerful forces that challenge domestic and international security, the tenets of Western liberalism and global stability. This collection of essays provides a starting point for a fresh discussion of new directions and novel approaches to countering ideological bases of contemporary violent extremism.





# The State of the Ideology Debate

*Sir John Jenkins*

**We have become fixated on violence as a key counter-extremism policy determinant, but it is not the only thing that matters.**

Ideology is politically purposeful. When I was asked by then UK Prime Minister David Cameron in early 2014 to undertake what became known as the Muslim Brotherhood Review, I made it clear that I would approach the matter as a history not simply of events but of an ideology. That was at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its affiliates elsewhere were particular objects of concern because of the Arab Spring and its discontents.

Yet this concern never produced policy coherence: governments are bad at dealing with complexity. They have since been faced with the more urgent challenge of mutating and often violent exclusionary Salafisms, which have adopted decontextualised and dehistoricised versions of *jihad*, *takfir* and *al-wala wal bara* that support claims to absolute jurisprudential and—in the case of ISIS—legitimately prophetic caliphal authority over Muslims everywhere. This authority is supported by a selective, restrictive, literalist bricolage of Islam's foundational texts, particularly the Quran and certain Hadith, but also the works of canonical scholars.

This has been matched by a change in the way such issues are studied in the policy community—a shift towards the measurable. The role of social media, complex individual paths to radicalisation and the socio-economic discontents at the roots of the attraction of such movements for ordinary people in Syria, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere have become major objects of study. Such data-driven work has helped define the policy challenges for governments.

## The Dangers of Ignoring Ideology

This is valuable. But a focus on micro-level distinctions has tended to divert attention from the underlying challenge that the basic ideology of Islamism—common to all its forms—poses to the international and domestic state order. It has also given an opening to those who claim that socio-economic oppression is the root of all radicalisation and that the ideological threat comes instead from Western and other attempts to combat it.

In parallel, policymakers have become fixated on violence as a key policy determinant. The violence is real and undoubtedly needs a robust and proportionate response, which incorporates effective legal, intelligence, policing, societal and, in some cases, military activity. But violence is not the only thing that matters. All forms of Islamism, from the Muslim Brotherhood onwards, have had a theory of physical force and have applied violence in pursuit of their aims. The important point is whether this violence is tactical—designed to be deployed at times of maximum political opportunity against defined targets—or integral to the performance of a movement, as it has seemed to be with ISIS. Even when it is performative, however, violence still serves an ideological purpose.

This ideology is triumphalist, totalitarian and apocalyptic. It is founded in revelation, not reason. And however much its proponents may claim to exercise forms of reasoning in interpreting sacred texts, these texts are closed to the sort of foundational interrogation that lies at the heart of liberalism, derived inter alia from late Roman and Germanic secular law, Augustine's two cities, mediaeval Aristotelianism, Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution and



natural rights theory. This is the precise opposite of the Islamist conception of history as a cyclical process that leads a select few to salvation through the establishment of an exclusive community of the just.

And that seems to be a problem. Observers as different as Graeme Wood and David Thomson have drawn attention to this issue through their work on the ideational basis of what is loosely called Salafi-jihadism, and they have been roundly attacked for it. Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy have fought a fierce if highly entertaining war of words in the French press.

*“Islamist ideology is triumphalist, totalitarian and apocalyptic.”*

And it may be one of the reasons there is once again in the UK a move in central and local government, the police and the counter-terrorism community to reconsider the decisions by previous governments not to engage with organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Association of Britain and MEND. Associated with this is a push by some in the British parliament to sponsor a comprehensive definition of Islamophobia, supported by such groups. This would make critical debate about such matters far more difficult.

What has happened so far is essentially a replay of the old highly tactical debate about the utility of engaging with so-called moderate Islamists, who some still claim represent a firewall against violent Islamisms. This debate will characteristically draw attention to the dismissive attitude of many jihadis towards the Muslim Brotherhood. But jihadis fall out with each other



constantly over points of doctrine, illustrating their own regard for ideology. It also ignores the ideological commonalities—especially through Islamist thinker Sayyid Qutb—between the shared ultimate destination and the observable Muslim Brotherhood genealogies of many prominent theorists and practitioners of jihadi violence. That doesn't look like a firewall: it looks like an osmotic membrane.

There is a foreign policy dimension to this, too, which policymakers seem to need to relearn every decade or so, going back indeed to the 1930s. It is a mistake to think that hard and fast lines can be drawn between violent Islamist ideologues who aim to implement sharia and establish a caliphate through vanguardist brutality, on the one hand, and pragmatic Islamist ideologues who seek to implement sharia and establish a caliphate through a Gramscian war of manoeuvre, on the other. In doing so, policymakers risk misconstruing the positions that some in the region—including the UAE, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia since at least the 1990s—have taken against the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates. These positions are at least partly a response to the ideological challenge to governments' efforts to develop security-based and highly nationalist states. It is also a challenge to their efforts to grow their economies through a managed engagement with the global economy.

For their critics, they are simply unreconstructed authoritarians who suppress all dissent and call it Islamism. Yet they have the evidence of the disasters of Islamist rule on their doorsteps: in Egypt after 2011, in Sudan since the 1980s and, most particularly, in Iran since 1979. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei translated Qutb; and former Iraqi Prime

Minister Nouri al-Maliki reads Qutb, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (an epiphanic Shia analogue to the Brotherhood's founding father Hassan al-Banna and Qutb) and the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb al-Ummah ideologue, Abdullah al-Nafisi, for pleasure. Former Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was close to Fedaian-e Islam, a Shia version of the Muslim Brotherhood's Nizam Khaass. Hizb al-Dawa, which emerged from clerical circles in Najaf after 1958, was modelled on the Muslim Brotherhood and spread similarly. These show ideological continuities and the mechanisms of transmission in a different light.

*"It is a mistake to think hard and fast lines can be drawn between violent and pragmatic Islamist ideologies."*

## Return to Realism

This is emphatically not an argument in favour of proscription or mass arrests. Nor is it in any way an excuse for assassinations or the persecution of academics. Proscription does not answer the arguments of Islamists, nor does it stop terrorism. Mass arrests criminalise dissent and undermine the rule of law. Assassinations are punishable crimes. Academic freedom underpins liberty. It is also not an argument that all these states are going about the task of constructing a form of secular resilience particularly well.

But the challenge is real. What policymakers need is realism about the ideological sources of the challenge posed by all forms of Islamism, a renewed effort to understand Islamism more fully than they seem to

at the moment, and a far more robust defence of the liberal ideas—rooted in the separation of church and state and the moral, ethical and legal autonomy of the individual within a secular not a sacralised community—that underpin Western socio-political systems.

*“Policymakers need realism about the ideological sources of the challenge posted by all forms of Islamism.”*

It is a profound ideational as well as a security challenge. Governments are better at policing and intelligence. Societies are resilient. Militaries are capable—though they are not the long-term answer. What is lacking is a structure for combining expertise across government into a collective policy resource to defend the liberal idea of the state. Instead policymakers operate on a day-to-day, reactive and often disaggregated basis. If we take ideology seriously, as we should, then that needs to change.

# National Security ‘Readiness’ Requires Cultural Listening

*Farah Pandith*

**To win the ideological battle against extremism, governments must combine cultural insights with traditional intelligence gathering.**

Since 9/11, the US government has spent nearly \$6 trillion trying to win against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State. A fundamental problem has been the narrowness of the approach. Emphasising physical, hard power, policymakers have paid little attention to the cultural landscape that shapes the lives of potential extremist recruits.

To evaluate and forecast the current threat landscape and eventually win the war, governments must develop better, more precise cultural intelligence (i.e., insights into the mindsets of youth, as reflected by trends in fashion, music, religious practice, and so on) to help inform traditional, hard-power military analyses. By creating a rigorous cultural-listening ‘machine’ that unites cultural data with other hard- and soft-power intelligence, governments can become far more alert and proactive on the ideological battlefield.

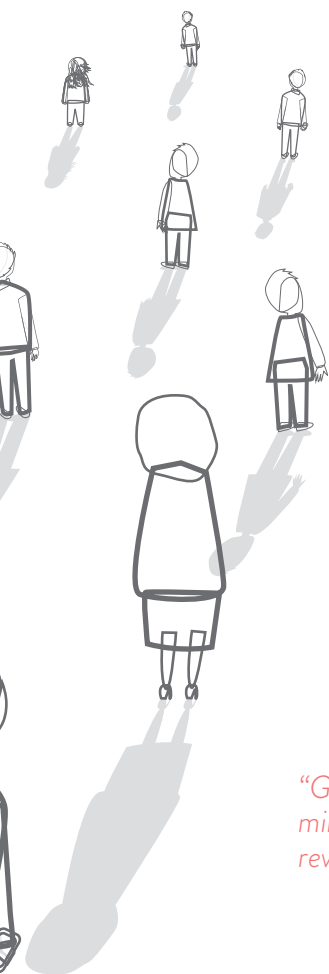
## Lagging Behind the Bad Guys

American policymakers, and their counterparts around the world, currently assign officials in their embassies to assess local changes in cultural practice. Counter-terrorism and public-diplomacy officials might sift through this type of data, developing one-off programmes or initiatives in response. But no government has teams dedicated to evaluating all the cultural data related to Muslim identity and uniting this grass-roots intelligence into a larger, hard- and

soft-power intelligence tapestry. Lacking a holistic picture of grass-roots microtrends, governments routinely fail to understand extremism's early stirrings in local communities. Policymakers end up reacting to extremism after the fact, once the bad guys have already exerted a hold on vulnerable youths.

Consider what happened in the Maldives. When I visited this island nation in 2010, I noticed seemingly small, outward changes to Muslim identity, as well as ruptures from traditions that had emerged over 800 years of local Islamic history. I heard how local authorities and parents were exerting subtle pressure on females to stay out of school; how conspiracy theories were flourishing, linking the island's climate crisis to incorrect Islamic practice; how youths were donning Arab dress, reading from Saudi-sponsored Qurans and listening to Arab music and sermons; and how locals who had once welcomed Western tourists were now shunning them.

At the time, such seemingly minor and independent changes were not unique to the Maldives. From Trinidad to Central Asia to the Maghreb, Muslim youths were creating new cultural norms and reconceiving Islamic identities. But governments didn't register these cultural shifts, understand their meaning or adjust their ideological responses to the extremist threat. Focused on hard counter-terrorism measures, the policy community failed to discern that an unyielding 'us vs. them' ideology was taking hold in Muslim communities the world over. Western media pundits and policymakers alike were subsequently flummoxed upon receiving 'surprising' reports of foreign fighters from the Maldives and elsewhere joining the so-called Islamic State.



Governments must pay attention to cultural minutiae, just as the military systematically reviews and assesses its adversaries, down to their last piece of military hardware. Throughout the US government, officials scrutinise the air, land and naval forces of Russia, China and North Korea, tracking their training, overall readiness and similar measures. Such a dedicated preparedness function is needed on the ideological side of the war, too. Instead of only quantifying how many satellites, troops and weapons their adversaries possess, governments must ask why youths throughout the globe are favouring a particular lifestyle brand, gravitating to halal-based food choices, reorienting their travel experiences or adopting religious paraphernalia foreign to their local communities.

*“Governments must pay attention to cultural minutiae, just as the military systematically reviews and assesses its adversaries.”*

Policymakers must also analyse these data, turning them into actionable insight. At present, policymakers might read reports about how the massive infusion of Saudi petrodollars is transforming local religious and cultural landscapes, replacing time-honoured expressions of Islam with hard-line Wahhabism. But policymakers don't integrate disparate cultural data into a comprehensive, global assessment of Muslim youth. It isn't enough to know that Wahhabi ideology has transformed local identities throughout the world, fuelling the rise of violent extremism. Policymakers must go further, identifying more precisely how lifestyle changes among youths contribute to their recruitment by terrorist organisations, and what specific actions governments can take to intercede.

## Governments Can Do Cultural Listening

When it comes to cultural listening, governments can take inspiration from the private sector, especially companies that sell into youth markets. Leading cultural lifestyle brands such as Microsoft, Hulu, Spotify, Sephora and KFC have dedicated staff who act as cultural curators. Observing trends in media, art, fashion, food, science and music, they decipher what consumers are thinking, what kinds of products they might want and how these brands might best market their goods and services.

Governments can develop this readiness capacity by undertaking the following action items:

First, they should collate cultural data. To the extent it's collected, on-the-ground knowledge of cultural changes like those under way in the Maldives circa 2010 is typically transmitted via one-off diplomatic cables and the like. Though these cables may prove illuminating to their immediate recipients, they disappear into an intelligence black hole. Governments must bring the same hard-power discipline of preparedness analysis to their soft-power initiatives, compiling all available data and weaving them into a larger cultural tapestry.

*“When it comes to cultural listening, governments can take inspiration from the private sector, especially companies that sell into youth markets.”*

Second, governments should build a global connected consciousness. Many diplomats, analysts and other policymakers speak passionately about the need to better coordinate intelligence sharing among

governments. But when it comes to behavioural norms, there is little precedent for sharing, much less for taking action. Governments must work together to unpack, analyse and act on cultural data: it's the only way to grasp broader, global developments unfolding across larger demographics of interest, like millennial and generation-Z Muslims.

Finally, policymakers should infuse relevant specialists into assessment teams. Government officials should partner with best-in-class cultural-listening experts in the private sector, utilising their real-world knowledge to understand developments on the ground. Companies possess the data, technology and cultural expertise needed to discern what extremism-related events occur in local contexts—and, more importantly, why.

Companies also make use of edge dwellers: cultural warriors, activists and behavioural scientists who inhabit the fringes of their cultural contexts and thus can predict trends before they unfold. Such individuals can alert policymakers to changes in demographics, cultural practices and local identities, helping them spot and thereby address emergent trends in extremism. Further, companies possess dynamic and timely megadata on global cultural movements that can help decision-makers understand the vulnerabilities of local youths to extremist messages.

For more examples of cultural listening best practices, governments need only look to their adversaries. When the so-called Islamic State began attracting recruits and expanding its territorial footprint in 2013, Western media outlets were convinced that such an appalling ideology would hold no appeal for women. The terrorists knew better and started targeting women,



keenly exploiting music, fashion and social practices in their messaging. Unlike Western policymakers, they had been paying close attention to how youths were experiencing their religion, and moved nimbly to exploit such cultural awareness.

As the world becomes increasingly fragmented, as the Muslim youth population continues to expand at an unprecedented rate and as generational change intensifies, cultural listening only becomes more imperative. Governments can outwit their adversaries, arresting extremism before it takes hold, but only if they monitor and capitalise on cultural trends. The ideological war is theirs to win—or lose.

*“Governments can arrest extremism before it takes hold, but only if they monitor and capitalise on cultural trends.”*

# Integration, Identity and Extremism: Why We Need to Renew the Conversation

*Dr Emman El-Badawy*

**Progressives should not shy away from policy that combines integration and counter-radicalisation measures. Both are the key for fighting terrorism and extremism.**

The tragic attacks on 9/11 were labelled a black swan event, something unpredictable, with severe and widespread consequences. True to all black swans, it has since been marked by tireless attempts to rationalise and explain its occurrence. In the counter-terrorism policy world, there is no doubt that much has been learned since 2001. Yet for more than a decade, we have circled around the same issues and debated the same elementary questions: What makes a terrorist? Is poverty and economic deprivation a driver, or is religious fundamentalism, mental health or alienation the cause?

We have had theories identifying push and pull factors towards extremist violence, anecdotal records detailing journeys and pathways to terrorism, and toolkits to identify individual vulnerabilities to radicalisation. The above have come with caveats that there is no single factor that explains why someone resorts to terrorism, and no prototype jihadi from which to assess future threats.

There are no easy answers to tackle the issue of radicalisation. Myriad factors can create the conditions for radicalisation, and for every theory there is a case that defies the 'rules'. What is certain is that today's terrorists are more familiar and relatable to young British and European Muslims than ever before. The likes of Aqsa Mahmood, Mohammed Emwazi

(later known as Jihadi John), Thomas Evans and the Bradford Sisters were not living off the grid in a cave plotting attacks on ‘the Great Satan’. They were, until their decision to support jihadi causes overseas, average British citizens.

*“There is no single factor that explains why someone resorts to terrorism.”*

Decades of pontificating over whether Islamist radicalisation is the result of violently interpreted Islamic scripture, or whether government policies are to blame, have caused us to overlook what seems abundantly clear: the identities of these young jihadis were under contested from the day they were born. At some point in their lives, their British, national identities fell to the wayside in favour of a Muslim identity interpreted and advocated by people and groups with an agenda. This identity contained hostility to the country they may once have called home.

## Post-9/11 Reality

Before 2001, the average Joe would be forgiven for assuming Islamist terrorists were exclusively outsiders in foreign lands, interested only in protecting their humble safe havens from Western invaders. But after 9/11 the realities of home-grown terrorism piled pressure on governments in the UK and Western Europe to look closer to home for answers. Ever since, Islamist extremism in Europe has been a growing concern for US authorities. The worry is that Europe may prove to

be a recruiting ground for future attacks against the US and its interests abroad. Even before 9/11, in the mid-1990s, the UK's capital was dubbed "Londonistan" for the numbers of Islamists from abroad believed to be living there. By 2004, with the Madrid bombings, and 2005 with the London Underground and bus attacks, the risks of Islamist extremism among Western Muslims became a stark reality. While far from being the sole cause of radicalisation and terrorism, questions were raised about the failure of governments to integrate Muslims in European civic, political and economic life. Further, questions were raised about the extent to which this alienation impacted on the vulnerabilities of Western-raised Muslims to extremist ideologies. The numbers of European and British citizens who flocked to join Islamist insurgencies in Somalia, Libya and Syria have most recently confirmed long-held concerns.

There have been conversations about societal integration in the context of home-grown extremism and terrorism, but they have not been entirely popular—not least because the most vocal critics in these debates highlight the necessity to separate integration and counter-extremism work. Many argue that efforts to combine the two agendas to date have resulted in minority and Muslim populations being singled out disproportionately. In the UK, a 2011 review on *CONTEST*, the UK counter-terrorism strategy, brought about a conscious separation between counter-terrorism and integration. Prior to that, the Prevent aspect of the strategy sought to deal with community cohesion and integration as part of countering extremism.

## A Volatile Landscape

Elsewhere, in Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, integration measures, to varying degrees, have formed part of counter-radicalisation policies. Many of the integration plans in Western Europe predate 9/11, but a lot of new policies and strategies were introduced in response to fears of home-grown extremism in the early 2000s. However, despite various strategies to help integrate Muslim populations since the early 2000s—from new citizenship laws, extra language requirements and greater educational provisions to support for developing home-grown imams who are more familiar with the host culture than foreign imams—terrorist recruiters have still infiltrated key social gathering points. A revival of right-wing extremism has created an even more volatile landscape.

*“A revival of right-wing extremism has created an even more volatile landscape.”*

The problem with integration measures to date is that they have been so closely associated with some of the more controversial assimilationist policies. From not allowing women to wear full face veils to national bans on the construction of minarets, many policies in the first half of the 2000s have been counterproductive and inflammatory. They have alienated the most suspicious communities and signalled (probably without intention) messages that have galvanised the far right and Islamist voices. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the complacency and passivity associated with today’s multiculturalism

has stirred the cynics into a tantrum over the weakening of national identity and pride in the face of crippling political correctness.

For the UK at least, 2019 will be a year of a national conversation that has been wildly overdue. Last year, following a nationwide consultation and addressing a vacuum in integration policy, the government published its Integrated Communities Strategy green paper. While it came under significant attack by some for celebrating Britain as a “successful, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith society” and whitewashing problems, it was the first significant effort by government in over a decade to articulate a national strategy, and it recognised counter-extremism as integral to achieving its goals. The independent UK Commission for Countering Extremism will also be launching its first report in spring 2019 following a nationwide consultation, with integration an important line of enquiry. Elsewhere, rehabilitation of nations post-ISIS such as Iraq and Syria will continue into the year, with reintegration policies a necessary priority amid the steady return of internally displaced people (IDPs). The flow of migrants and refugees is not likely to slow for Western European governments in the coming year, piling on pressure to address integration concerns.

*“For the UK at least, 2019 will be a year of a national conversation that has been wildly overdue.”*

Facing the issue of identity, belonging and integration is admittedly difficult and contentious. But it is crucial. And while integration must be supported as beneficial in and of itself, strong integration measures are

essential to the success of counter-terrorism and the prevention of home-grown radicalisation. The counter-narratives and strategic communications tactics used for counter-extremism purposes to date will no doubt continue to be invaluable in battling some ideas that contribute to extremist radicalisation. Yet, where identities are contested, traction of counter-narratives is ultimately limited. Smart integration measures that help address feelings of alienation, shape a collective national identity and culture, and offer avenues for active participation of equal citizens can have a far more powerful impact than any counter-narrative.

For the post-9/11 generations, Muslim or otherwise, divisive narratives have long been the norm. Muslims of these generations entered a world where Islam has forever been under a microscope; their identity challenged and subject to global scrutiny. For many non-Muslims of these generations, Islam has been represented as little more than violence and mass bloodshed. Without a conscious recalibration and muscular leadership from progressives in all communities, future generations may grow too comfortable in a world where a return of visceral identity erodes decades of hard work for co-existence.

*“Strong intergration measures are essential to the success of counter-terrorism and the prevention of home-grown radicalisation.”*

# Why 2019 Will Be the Year of the Online Extremist, and What to Do About It

*Jamie Bartlett*

**Policymakers should invest in technology to curb the inevitable growth of illegal online content. But they must also accept that such tools will never be able to remove extremist material entirely.**

It is an iron law of technology that outsiders are early adopters. As long ago as the mid-1980s, Louis Beam of the Texas KKK spotted that networked computing would be a boon for the movement and set up a bulletin board system. For most of the 2000s, the far-right British National Party had the most active and best-designed website in UK politics. (Back in 2013 it was the first party to gamify its website, offering prizes for mentioning keywords in posts to drive up engagement.) The same is true of al-Qaeda and ISIS—whether it's producing slick propaganda magazines or hijacking Twitter hashtags, extremist movements are like start-ups: agile, fast and creative.

It's easy to understand why. In addition to being highly motivated, extremists see in every technology—from the radio to the smartphone to the dark net—new ways to circumnavigate the establishment, reach new audiences and avoid the authorities. The Internet is an especially valuable propaganda tool, because of a simple dynamic: it is still easier to upload something than knock it offline. No matter how many moderators Facebook employs, it will never match the number of extremists hoping and plotting to evade the platform's spam filters or content managers.

Whatever new technologies entrepreneurs dream up, extremists will pick them up quickly and use them in unpredictable ways to spread hate.



This dynamic won't change, because it's not about technology but about motivation, opportunity and incentive. Policymakers should respond smartly with large, strategic interventions in areas where counter-measures will have the greatest impact.

## A Difficult Year Abroad

Pressure will mount on platform companies in the next 12 months, even as they work to tackle the problem. Facebook and Twitter, in particular, have recently invested heavily in tackling both extremism and fake news, and both have enjoyed considerable success that has been mostly overlooked. Facebook, for example, “took action” on 1.9 million pieces of ISIS- or al-Qaeda-linked content in the first three months of 2018, mainly using technology-driven detection tools. Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg recently reported that the company’s beefed-up content-moderation teams now review 2 million pieces of content a day, using a mix of manual and automated systems. But even if they could achieve a 98 per cent success rate—which would be superhuman—that would still equate to 40,000 daily errors.

Some of that, invariably, will be extremist content that should be removed. Newspapers around the world increasingly see the big tech platforms as competitors for online advertising revenue and are therefore minded to feature stories that criticise them. The result will be more “Facebook/Google fails to tackle hate” stories throughout 2019. This will create extra political and commercial pressure.



Recent successes, however, mask some longer-term difficulties coming in 2019, which must inform policymakers' response. First, there will be a growth in the quality, quantity and usability of privacy-enhanced and hard-to-censor online tools. One of the side effects of growing public concern about data use and commercial web tracking will be a surge in software that protects user privacy. This software will be built for journalists, whistle-blowers and ordinary citizens, but it will also be picked up by extremist groups, which will use it to frustrate the authorities.

*“Whatever new technologies entrepreneurs dream up, extremists will use them in unpredictable ways to spread hate.”*

Observers can also expect to finally see commercial applications of blockchain technology—after several false starts and overblown promises. One use of this distributed ledger technology will be decentralised, hard-to-censor social-media and broadcast platforms. A blockchain social-media platform would be untouchable: no government would be able to edit or remove hate speech, illegal images or terrorist propaganda, unless the whole network were somehow vaporised. In 2019 the police will look back fondly on the big tech companies and how they followed the law. With decentralised blockchain networks, legislators might as well pass laws to change the orbit of the moon.

Another threat looms on the supply side. Late 2017 saw the rise of so-called deep fakes, such as the application of face-swapping algorithms that allow campaigners to put words into their opponents' mouths. A recent report on AI and security threats warned that in

the future AI-enabled high quality forgeries may challenge the ‘seeing is believing’ aspect of video and audio evidence. One likely use will be the automatic, machine generation of content. Certainly, large companies have already showed signs of researching automatic generation of advertisements. It is inevitable that extremist groups will look for ways to use these technologies to create large volumes of more emotive and believable content.

*“With decentralised blockchain networks, legislators might as well pass laws to change the orbit of the moon.”*

On balance, these tools—especially privacy-enhancing software—are good for citizens and the health of democracies. The authorities should therefore not attempt to ban or wreck them, citing national security concerns. But these tools will mean that illegal material may be easier to produce and tougher to remove, and the perpetrators harder to identify.

## A Three-Pronged Response

Faced with these trends, policymakers should adopt a response defined by three elements. The first is to work out what useful role technology can play. Using AI to automatically spot content will continue to be important, but it will never be enough to deal decisively with a problem as complex as extremist content. But technology will be valuable to spot these deep fakes by automatically identifying tell-tale signs of inauthentic video and audio files.

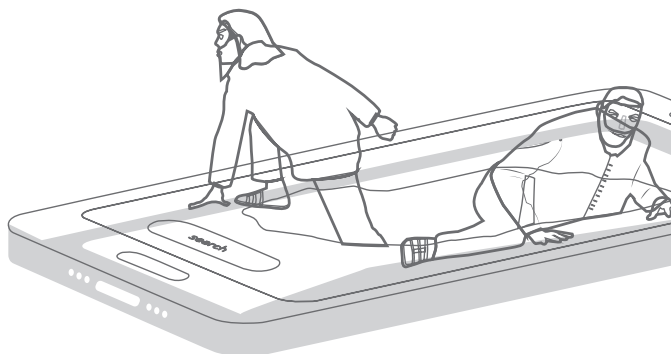
Investment in these counter-measures should therefore be scaled up now. Where possible, this should be a partnership between companies and governments, because the commercial sector will have both the data sets and capabilities to lead the way—not to mention an economic incentive, because deep-fakes on their platforms will be bad for business. Governments can then play a useful coordination role. One good example is the way PhotoDNA—developed in the private sector—is used to identify illegal images of children. This technology creates a database of ‘fingerprints’ of known images, which several companies use to automatically spot and remove any examples.

*“Using AI to spot content will continue to be important, but it will never be enough to deal decisively with extremist content.”*

Second, given the dynamics outlined above, governments must accept they will never be able to remove extremist content entirely. The approach therefore needs to be smart: making large strategic interventions rather than a constant whack-a-mole and demonisation of platforms. One example is the largely successful way the police has dealt with dark net markets. Rather than trying to remove these sites entirely, several police services around the world have collaborated to infiltrate them and, at carefully chosen intervals, make large-scale arrests and takedowns. This has sown doubt among the criminals operating on the dark net. And by watching closely how they respond to arrests, the authorities have learned more about their tactics, strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, it is vital to keep a tight and limited definition of extremism. It is already a contentious and contested term. Much of the current approach has been driven by confronting Islamist and far-right groups. But in this period of political turbulence, new forms of extreme politics will emerge: far left, anti-technology, direct-action environmentalist and extreme libertarian. It will be tempting, but mistaken, to immediately cast them all together as part of the same problem and attempt to censor or remove any troubling or radical ideas. There will be calls to ban or remove an ever-wider set of controversial ideas, but they should be resisted. In addition to being difficult, growing censorship would polarise politics further, drive radicalisation and increase the size of the problem.

Inadvertently making the job harder than it already is would, of course, make it more difficult to target extremism in a strategic way, leaving less time and resources to develop new technology to address emerging problems. Given the scale of the challenge, that is something we can ill afford.



# Talking to Terrorists: The Key to Solving Prison Radicalisation

*Ian Acheson*

**With more and more people behind bars for extremism-related offences, policymakers need new ways of dealing with extremists in the system, from ‘enlightened isolation’ to community reintegration.**

Why should we talk to bad people who want to kill us? I grew up in Northern Ireland in the border county of Fermanagh when the Troubles were running hot. In the 1980s, people in my minority unionist community suffered a murderous onslaught by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) designed to push Protestants away from isolated border settlements. The cruelty of republican violence made it impossible to see a face behind this mask of sectarian hatred. On the rare occasions when the state managed to take the fight to the terrorists and kill some, there was only a feeling of satisfaction.

Thirty-five years on from those grim times, countries face a threat of jihadi terrorism the scale of which makes the dirty work of Northern Ireland’s paramilitaries seem almost innocent by contrast. Yet that experience offers important lessons for today’s counter-extremist challenge.

## **A Prison Service Exposed to Radicalisation**

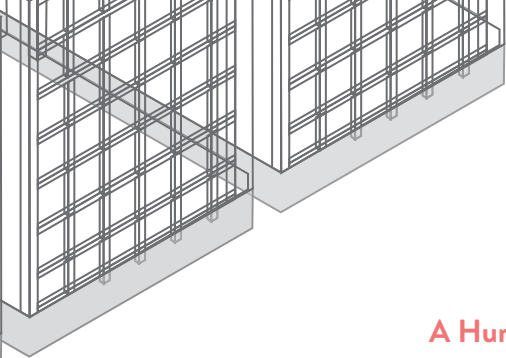
In 2016, I led an independent government review of Islamist extremism in the UK custody and probation system. Our extensive research involved dozens of prison visits and conversations with ex-offenders, staff and the officials responsible for responding to this threat. Our expert team revealed a picture of a prison system exposed to growing radicalisation with no effective tools to respond to it—or, indeed,

little awareness of its existence. Of the 201 prisoners detained for extremist-related offences, 93 per cent were inspired by Islamist ideology.

The diversity in age, gender and background of these people makes managing the risk they pose in custody a huge challenge. Hate preachers like Anjem Choudary join those mobilised by hatred to murder, like Michael Adebolajo and knife-attack plotter Safaa Boular. While the numbers of convicted terrorists remain relatively small in a prison population of around 83,000, the lethal risk radicalised prisoners represent to national security in and outside prisons means policymakers cannot be complacent.

At the time of our review, the corporate centre of the UK Prison Service was beset by a lethal and enduring combination of arrogance, complacency and ineptitude in response to these threats. The service was remote and disconnected from the spread of Islamist extremism in its establishments. Staff were woefully ill equipped to challenge hateful ideologies. In any case, they were fearful of being accused of racism for doing so. Some prison governors said they felt that raising concerns about Islamist extremism in their prisons would have career-limiting consequences.

Prison imams, who ought to have been on the front line of counter-radicalisation, were largely unable—and occasionally unwilling—to get stuck in. Extremist religious literature was freely available to vulnerable prisoners, and charismatic hate preachers had easy access to highly credulous and violent young recruits. Put bluntly, the Prison Service was more interested in protecting its own hide than robustly confronting a threat to national security.



## A Humanised Regime

I made many recommendations in my review. The service needed to dramatically improve the capability of staff through training and managerial support to detect and confront violent extremism. The recruitment, selection, deployment and supervision of prison imams needed to be completely overhauled and taken back into corporate control. Extremist religious literature with sectarian, misogynist or homophobic content that was readily accessible to vulnerable and suggestible prisoners had to be removed immediately. The combating of prison terrorist incidents, in particular hostage taking, required a significant tactical boost. The extremism capability at a headquarters level needed proper operational experience. The service required a director-level head of counter-terrorism.

*“The UK Prison Service was more interested in protecting its own hide than robustly confronting a threat to national security.”*

One of the most controversial recommendations was the complete separation of those few highly subversive Islamist extremists who posed a direct threat to national security by actively proselytising the ideology of ISIS and its ilk. Separation of extremist prisoners is a divisive issue, particularly in the case of Northern Ireland, where politically motivated prisoners lobbied for, and were provided with, separate accommodation. The potential for such prisoners to work together, feed off their pathologies and even deepen their extremist mindset is a real risk. Our review concluded that the threat posed by Islamist ideologues with relatively free access to radicalise the next generation of offenders was



so great that only incapacitating them would work. The state needed to send a clear message to those intent on spreading the ISIS message in custody: “We will stop you.”

What I envisaged, however, was a place where hate preachers could at least have the possibility to reconsider their worldview, with support from experts. In this respect, the regime and conditions most likely to engender this transformation would be humanised rather than punitive. While security of the unit and staff would be paramount, skilled and motivated prison officers would keep themselves safe by developing relationships with their charges. Positive relationships patiently built would be the lever for change.

Talking to terrorists is one of the best ways of learning about their motivation. Understanding this is key to deflecting people on the way to radicalised violence. Not nearly enough is known about the catalyst that converts extremist thought into action. There are currently 218 people in UK prisons who have made that literal leap of faith. There is a captive audience that policymakers can learn from, influence and potentially change. The UK faces an unknown number of returning combat-experienced Britons out of the estimated 800 who the security service said went to join ISIS.

*“Talking to terrorists is one of the best ways of learning about their motivation. Understanding this is key to deflecting people on the way to radicalised violence.”*

Creating an integration process that balances justice for crimes committed with the possibility of redemption

could avoid future victims and even allow the possibility of a new life for extremist offenders. The disruption caused by separating preachers and adherents in custody could create an opening for new and better ways of thinking and allow rehabilitation to flourish. The other prize, beyond this massive intelligence gain, is the possibility of disengagement from a hateful ideology.

A humanised regime reflects the reality of increasing numbers of arrests and convictions for terrorist offences. In 2018, 41 per cent of convictions for terrorism-related offences were of sentences of four years or less. In particular, these lower-tariff prisoners enter a penal system severely disordered by overcrowding, squalor and insufficient staff. The prospect of them receiving treatment for their offending behaviour in this environment pales beside the pragmatic attraction of safety in religious or ideological groups that provide security, kudos and structure.

In this respect, prisons in the UK, in particular in England and Wales, have become incubators of extremism. Policymakers can and must at least remove those most able to capitalise on this chaos by spreading the message of violent extremism. Individuals who pose a threat must not be allowed to weaponise the grievances of those in search of meaning and excitement.

## The Centrality of Communities

The paucity of effective prison deradicalisation programmes makes it all the more important to fundamentally change how terrorist offenders are

reintegrated after custody. This would go some way to repairing some of this damage and preventing released extremists from engaging in more violence.

What is missing is a genuine partnership between the state and local communities to give each a complementary stake in managing the risk. Trusted local people could be used to provide a safety net and support those whose ability to find somewhere decent to live and something positive to do is severely curtailed. Enlisting communities in this way is risky and fraught with difficulty. However, the state alone cannot defeat a terrorist threat. Host communities have the biggest impact on desistance and disengagement.

*“The state alone cannot defeat a terrorist threat. Host communities have the biggest impact on desistance and disengagement.”*

Enlightened separation of extremist ideologues in prison and community-based reintegration of offenders on release are new, more agile ways of dealing with this threat. We cannot speak to dead terrorists. We can speak for dead victims. They demand that policymakers take risks to ensure that the people who wish to harm us through a corrupt ideology are engaged, not shunned. This should happen not because states are weak, but because they are confident the strength of their values will ultimately prevail.

# How to Disrupt the Link Between Crime and Extremism

*Professor Jytte Klausen*

**The line between jihadi and criminal underworlds has grown increasingly blurred. This presents policymakers with a fresh set of problems.**

The extremist threat picture for the next few years promises more of the same plus difficult new problems. Many recent developments have been positive. In 2018, fatalities from jihadi terrorism were down for the third year in a row. ISIS's pseudo-state is gone. Hundreds if not thousands of European foreign fighters have died in Syria and Iraq. Hundreds more are trapped in Iraqi and Kurdish detention centres. Many fighters will die in the war still raging in parts of Syria.

Occasionally, extremists seeking to go to Syria to join the diminished ISIS fighter force there are caught at Turkey's borders, but travel now is mostly in the other direction. Jihadi fighters who return are sent for trial and sentenced to prison in growing numbers. Europe has not been exposed to more commando-style attacks like the one in Paris in November 2015. Overall, the number of successful attacks is down, and those that do succeed have been more amateurish and less lethal.

Some of the worst fears—weaponised drones, for example—have not materialised. A plot to attack 10 Downing Street with a drone was foiled. Jihadis' cyber-attack capabilities have turned out to be limited to website defacement. This is all good news, but the shooting at a Strasbourg Christmas market in December 2018 was a reminder that the threat is not over.

ISIS remains intent on fomenting attacks in Europe and continues to attract new followers there. There is also evidence that new and possibly more violent networks

are forming. The growing nexus of intersecting violent criminal and jihadi networks presents a fresh set of problems. Increasingly, new recruits have criminal pasts or have been radicalised in prison. Many are members of street gangs.

The vast majority of jihadi incidents in Europe originate abroad or are linked to operatives overseas. A major challenge is how to disrupt the networks that connect extremists in Europe to jihadi enclaves in the Middle East and North Africa, and to each other within Europe. However, another novel and immediate challenge is that the lines between terrorist and criminal networks are increasingly becoming blurred.

*“Increasingly, new recruits have criminal pasts or have been radicalised in prison. Many are members of street gangs.”*

## The ‘New Normal’

The great hidden danger is that the pool of experienced jihadis has grown exponentially over the past five years. This poses new tests for counter-terrorism. A decade ago, only a handful of Western European countries had been affected. Now the problem is Europe-wide. Fifteen countries experienced a terrorist incident in 2017. Between 2013 and 2017, the number of jihadi arrests across Europe tripled. Arrests and prosecutions have remained at a high for three years.

Tens of thousands jihadis have been added to government watch lists. Jihadism-related convictions represent the vast majority of terrorism cases even as

Europe deals with more far-right extremists. In December 2018, the UK Home Office reported there were 224 people in prison for terrorism-related offences, the highest number since the government started to keep a record. Of these, 80 per cent were Islamist extremists, and 13 per cent were far-right extremists (29 people, up from nine the previous year).

*“The great hidden danger is that the pool of experienced jihadis has grown exponentially over the past five years.”*

The links between jihadi hubs are complex, as are their links with criminal networks. Contemporary jihadi movements are at once global and local. Yet, recruitment and radicalisation are the work of clandestine, localised real-world networks. Available data show that the next generation of jihadis is being fostered through links between friends and former fighters in predominantly immigrant neighbourhoods. The result is localised clusters or hubs of extremists. If you live in Molenbeek in Brussels, Angered in Gothenburg or in one of four wards in Birmingham, your contact with a migratory jihadi network might be a friend or cousin.

## Gangster Jihadis

‘Gangster jihadism’ is one such phenomenon. The term refers to the intersection between people who inhabit both worlds: criminals who become terrorists, and terrorists who engage in regular crime. A recent study of European jihadis who were arrested or died in 2015 found that in some places, nearly 30 percent

had criminal histories. In a few neighbourhoods, the estimate was as high as 50 per cent. The crimes committed before radicalisation ranged in severity from petty theft, drug offences and fraud to assault, trafficking in illicit goods and people, and murder.

Some gang members go from gangs to prisons, and move onto jihadism. Others have returned from fighting for ISIS to rejoin gangs. Big A, a Danish gang leader whose rarely used actual name is Abderrozak Benarabe, put his gang on hold while he went to Syria to join a jihadi group—accompanied by a filmmaker. Allegedly, his aim was to enhance his status in Copenhagen's internecine gang milieu.

Molenbeek, home to the ringleaders of the Paris and Brussels attacks in 2015 and 2016, typifies the problem. My research identified 144 jihadis from Brussels who died or were arrested between 2012 and 2017. Twenty-two per cent were known to have a criminal history before becoming radicalised. In Molenbeek, the figure was 33 per cent. Members of the Franco-Belgian ISIS network responsible for the Paris and Brussels attacks and other incidents belonged to a local jihadi gang of petty criminals who specialised in robbing tourists and selling drugs. ISIS promotes such criminal activity as legitimate 'spoils of war' (*ghanimah*) against the enemy.

The criminal gains were used to fund the militant recruits' travel to Syria. Police investigations in Molenbeek after the 2015 and 2016 attacks uncovered 51 organisations and 72 individuals with suspected ties to terrorism, as well as 102 organisations suspected of criminal offences. The numbers indicate the depth of the intertwined criminal and terrorist networks.

Molenbeek is an extreme but not exceptional example. A UK police report in 2013 noted for the first time that some of Birmingham's numerous organised crime gangs had been funding terrorism with the proceeds from criminal activities.

The old networks, such as those of Hizbullah and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda, were top down and their criminality professionally managed to separate organised from political crime. Today's jihadi crime-terror nexus is both localised and transnational: the boundaries are blurred locally while the top terrorist cadre makes deals with the mafia and international smuggling networks trafficking in drugs, money, weapons and people.

## New Approaches Needed

In or out of the European Union, the UK will need to find ways to participate in European collaborations to disrupt and degrade transborder networks. Thousands of displaced foreign fighters are on the move. They will continue to seek to surreptitiously settle in Europe. Multilateral data-sharing and a coordinated legal response across Europe have vastly improved since the November 2015 Paris attacks. However, much needs still to be done.

Foreign fighters should be prosecuted for crimes abroad. Incarceration will take them off the streets—for a while. But the key point is these men and women have committed crimes against humanity directed at other Muslims. Investigating and highlighting such atrocious crimes may help turn young people against the narrative of terrorist groups as defenders of Islam.



Although jihadi offenders do not as a rule come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, they do generally come from disadvantaged cities and neighbourhoods. They also tend to come from economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Europe's metropolitan and medium-sized cities. Radicalisation to violent extremism may take place in front of a computer, but it is nearly always facilitated by recruiters and peer groups. Prevention should be tailored to affected localities.

*“Available data show that the next generation of jihadis is being fostered through links between friends and former fighters in predominantly immigrant neighbourhoods.”*

The gangster-jihadi nexus is a new problem requiring new approaches. The terrorist networks encourage gang mentalities and extreme group loyalty. Jihadi groups use gang-like methods to control the neighbourhoods in which they are based and to recruit. More needs to be done to control jihadi gangs in prison and the networks linking radicalised members inside and outside prisons.

Policymakers and law enforcement should target the hubs. Interventions based on a community policing model that focus on particular locations may be effective. ‘Al Capone’ policing tactics—using any charges that may apply—can be employed to take out gang leaders. They can also target recruiters and jihadi evangelists. Extortion, trafficking in guns and drugs, identity fraud and other forms of fraud are used to finance jihadi activities. Statutes used to prosecute organised crime and racketeering can be used in terrorism cases to neutralise leaders who direct

and inspire others to engage in criminality but do not commit the crimes themselves.

There is room here for social policy and countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives. Parents want to know they can turn to law enforcement or social workers for help when a son or a daughter may be about to 'do something'. Local communities and families need assistance to fight recruiters.

Recognising that Islamist extremism is not a general public health hazard but a specific, marginal gang-like problem is a first step. Scaling back and ensuring CVE is targeted towards at-risk areas will help set more realistic expectations for what CVE can do.

A second step is to accept CVE is no panacea. Most violent extremists are ideologically motivated predators aroused by the status and control they acquire via a terrorist group. White supremacists and jihadis run on different action scripts, however. Prevention needs to match those scripts.



# The Challenge of Failed Cities for Countering Violent Extremism

*Dr Kim Cragin*

**Now that ISIS's caliphate has collapsed in Syria and Iraq, terrorism hotspots like the Sahel and Southeast Asia are capturing attention. But rather than focus on large swathes of ungoverned spaces, policymakers should emphasise countering violent extremism in urban areas.**

In May 2017, ISIS-aligned fighters captured the city of Marawi in the southern Philippines. Security forces fought a five-month battle to regain control of this city of over 200,000 residents. How did ISIS come to contest this urban area? No longer satisfied with hiding in remote areas, ISIS fighters in particular have begun to view cities as viable headquarters for directing domestic and international campaigns. Marawi represents only one of many cities to fall in recent years: Syria's Raqqa in 2013, Iraq's Mosul in 2014, Libya's Sirte in 2015, Yemen's Mukalla in April that year and Sheikh Zuweid in Egypt that July. Failed cities have become a major, and arguably neglected, vulnerability for countering extremism.

This trend emerged in mid-2014 when ISIS fighters chased Iraqi security forces out of Mosul. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stood at the lectern in Mosul's al-Nuri Mosque and claimed leadership over a "caliphate". At the time, most experts believed ISIS commanders would focus their efforts on solidifying control over territory in Syria and Iraq, and not attack the West. They were wrong. In November 2015, Abdelhamid Abaaoud and eight additional assailants conducted a series of suicide bombings and armed attacks in Paris on behalf of ISIS. One hundred and twenty-nine people were killed. These attacks demonstrated, beyond a doubt, that ISIS's ambitions were greater

than the borders of its so-called caliphate. ISIS leaders also viewed countries in the West as adversaries and developed a campaign to confront them.

*“Failed cities have become a major, and arguably neglected, vulnerability for countering extremism.”*

Over the next 24 months, from November 2015 until October 2017, other external operations—attacks conducted outside Syria, Iraq or other ISIS-controlled territories—followed. My research has found that the group’s commanders planned, financed or enabled 167 external operations from safe havens in Syria and Iraq. ISIS propagandists inspired an additional 85. Not all these plots succeeded, but security forces were stretched thin trying to disrupt the onslaught. Beyond external operations, militants in Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Yemen, the Philippines and six other countries declared areas under their control as ISIS ‘provinces’. The United States and its allies concluded they would need to eliminate ISIS safe havens in Syria and Iraq if they wanted to halt the group’s expansion and anti-Western attacks.

## Failed City, Failing State

Raqqa was the linchpin. The Syrian city fell to forces fighting the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in March 2013. A year later, ISIS leaders named Raqqa as the group’s capital. Additionally, many of ISIS’s external operations were traced back there. Yet Raqqa was a failed city in a failing or fragile state. As such, it presented myriad challenges for anti-ISIS operations: a dense population held hostage by militants, narrow

streets, concrete buildings, underground defensive tunnels and no credible military partner. Now, over a year after the Syrian Democratic Forces—a mix of Kurdish and Arab militias—cleared ISIS out of Raqqa, it is easy to forget these challenges. But they are likely to emerge again.

Much has been written about the challenges urban environments pose to military forces. The US and its allies encountered many of these during Operation Iraqi Freedom, including battles in Fallujah, Ramadi and Sadr City. Indeed, it is not unusual for terrorists or insurgents to control urban neighbourhoods. Think of Belfast's dividing walls. Until recently, similar no-go neighbourhoods existed in Bogotá, because they were controlled by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. In the April 2002 Battle of Jenin, Israeli forces fought street by street against Palestinian militants to reduce attacks from a nearby refugee camp. Yet the militant groups in these urban havens did not conduct external operations; their attacks were focused inwards, on the UK, Colombia and Israel, respectively. This simplified the response.

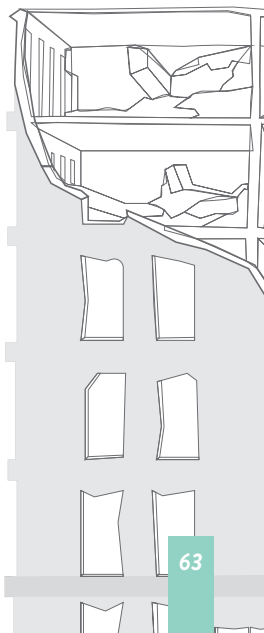
In contrast, ISIS orchestrated both local attacks and external operations from Raqqa, and this urban haven represented a direct threat to the West. Given the Assad regime's brutality, the US and its allies were not willing to partner with it against ISIS. More stand-off measures, such as drone strikes, also had proven insufficient for Raqqa. This created a strategic trilemma for the US and its allies: deploy large numbers of Western forces to clear ISIS fighters out of Raqqa; partner with local militias for the clearing operations; or accept the likelihood of more Paris-like attacks. The US and its allies have faced similar difficult choices

in recent years. Raqqa was not unique. In February 2015, ISIS fighters took control of the Libyan port city of Sirte, the birthplace of former strongman leader Muammar Qaddafi. ISIS leader Baghdadi sent his confidante Abu-Nabil al-Anbari from Syria to Libya to oversee this effort and boasted of a caliphate with three axes: Mosul, Raqqa, Sirte. This led many experts to view Sirte as a possible alternative headquarters for ISIS, including its external operations. US and British forces responded by supporting local militias with approximately 500 airstrikes in effort to remove ISIS fighters. Thus, although not all extremist groups have mimicked ISIS—Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb all continue to operate primarily in remote areas—enough have tried to make this trend worrisome.

*“ISIS orchestrated both local attacks and external operations from Raqqa.”*

## Safe Havens

Thus, looking forward, it is not difficult to imagine similar scenarios. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula could once again secure control over Yemen’s Mukalla and revitalise its campaign against the US homeland. Al-Qaeda or ISIS fighters could establish new headquarters in Idlib or other northeastern cities in Syria, attracting another wave of foreign fighters. ISIS militants could succeed in their efforts to push Egyptian security forces out of Sheikh Zuweid. ISIS-Philippines could regain control over Marawi. In each of these scenarios, the US and its allies would be presented with the same situation as in Raqqa: terrorists using an urban safe haven as a base of operations to threaten the West.



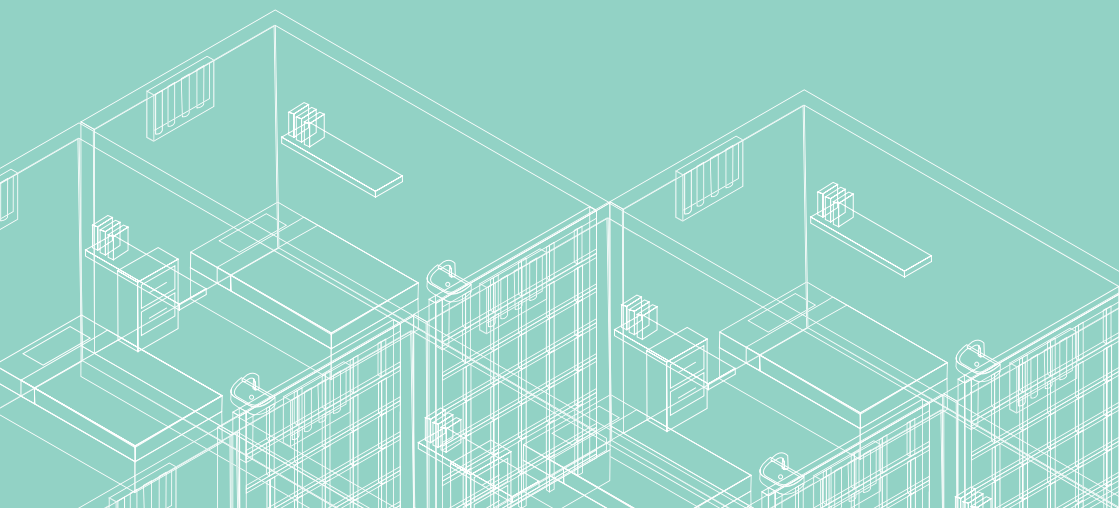
It is not all bad news. Just as a shift by terrorists towards cities poses challenges to military forces, it also presents opportunities, especially for civilian agencies and international aid programmes that support them in fragile states. Indeed, the international community is well placed to help inoculate cities in fragile states against terrorists. Preventive measures taken now could obviate the need for future military interventions in cities. Urban residents regularly access social media, for example, which provides more opportunities for counter-propaganda and other forms of counter-messaging.

*“Just as a shift by terrorists towards cities poses challenges to militaries, it also presents opportunities.”*

Beyond counter-messaging, ‘exit lanes’ in urban centres—for example, deradicalisation programmes for existing ISIS recruits or susceptible youths as an alternative to prison—can also lessen the potential burden on security forces. And when these more preventive measures fail, law enforcement functions as the most important counter-extremism instrument in cities. Training and other assistance programmes to judicial systems therefore represent an essential avenue for preventing the spread of violent extremism in fragile states. Notably, the Global Counterterrorism Forum has already begun to move in this direction, but much more could be done to bolster vulnerable cities. It simply requires a shift in mindset from viewing the threat of violent extremism as emerging from failed states in their entirety to focusing more on cities.



*Dr Kim Cragin is a senior research fellow at the US National Defense University. The opinions expressed here represent her own views and are not those of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the US government or the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.*







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