Strategies for preventing crime: the case of terrorism

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Counter-terrorism as crime prevention

What does a counter-terrorism look like if we base it on a holistic crime prevention approach?

The goal of CT is primarily to prevent future acts of terrorism - in other words, crime prevention.

There is a need for a broader and more holistic approach to crime prevention and counter-terrorism, integrating both "soft" and repressive measures.

Goal: to show how different strategies and different preventive actors may complement and support rather than compete and undermine each other.

Apply preventive mechanism as the basic principle for developing a set of coherent strategies.
Some basic concepts

- Preventive mechanism = how a measure is reducing terrorism / crime
- Some mechanisms are mental, others are physical
- Measures - the specific means or methods implemented to activate a mechanism in order to achieve a specific outcome
- A measure may activate several different mechanisms, including unintended side-effects
- Different measures may activate the same mechanism
Starting point:
There are several competing models of crime prevention which (apparently) are incompatible, theoretically and practically.

- The criminal justice model of crime prevention (general and individual prevention)
- The social model of crime prevention
- The situational crime prevention model

Each of these models are too narrow and do not incorporate the other perspectives but tend to see them as competing strategies. Result: An ideological debate on which strategy is ”better”, ”more effective” or ”evidence-based”.

An alternative approach: Develop a more holistic model based on the principle of preventive mechanisms.
A general model for crime prevention

- Establishing and maintaining moral (normative) barriers against committing criminal acts
- **Reducing recruitment** to criminal social environments and activities by eliminating or reducing the social and individual root causes and processes that lead to criminality
- **Deterrence**: Getting potential perpetrators to refrain from criminal acts through the threat of punishment or other negative consequences
- **Disruption** by stopping criminal acts before they are carried out
- **Incapacitation** (or neutralisation) by denying perpetrators the ability (capacity) to carry out new criminal acts
- **Protecting vulnerable targets** against criminal acts, reduce opportunities
- **Reducing the harmful consequences** of criminal acts
- **Reducing the rewards** from criminal acts
- **Rehabilitation**: Helping people who have been involved in or punished for crime to settle back into a normal life

This general model needs to be specified for specific crime types to become a preventive strategy!
Analytical approach for specifying preventive strategies:

- Describing each of the preventive mechanisms: how does it reduce (future) acts of terrorism (or other forms of crime)?
- Measures used to activate these mechanisms
- Actors possessing the relevant measures
- Target group(s) to be influenced by the measures
- Strengths and benefits of the measures
- Limitations, costs and negative side-effects of the measures
Actors, interests and preferences

- Preventive actors tend to select their strategies and measures on the basis of their own capacities and political/cultural values.

- Some actors have a strong preference for a limited set of strategies and measures, e.g. military force. However, different (sub-)strategies may and should complement each other.

- Some strategies may also undermine other strategies, e.g. “kill or capture” vs. ”winning hearts and minds”.

- Different actors should see themselves as primary agents within some strategies and as supportive or peripheral actors in other strategies.
Who are the target groups for preventive measures?

- **Primary prevention** — targeting entire populations or everyone within a general category, e.g. screening hand luggage of all airplane passengers.

- **Secondary prevention** — targeting risk groups, those at risk of developing in a negative direction which may constitute a potential risk, e.g. young frustrated males flirting with militant Islam; or targeting behaviour at risk, e.g. suspicious bank transactions.

- **Tertiary prevention** — targeting problem groups, individuals or groups actually involved in problematic behaviour, e.g. participation in extremist groups or terrorist activities.

- **Preventing victimisation** - targeting victims to reduce harm and negative consequences of attacks or threats, e.g. bomb blast window film.
Main strategies for preventing terrorism

- Establishing and maintaining norms to delegitimize terrorism
- Reduce violent radicalisation and emergence of terrorism
- Deterring involvement in terrorism by threat of retaliation or punishment
- Pre-emptive disruption of planned terrorist attacks
- Incapacitation of (potential) terrorists by removing their capacities for carrying out violent action
- Protecting vulnerable targets by increasing difficulties, costs and risks for (potential) terrorists
- Reducing harmful consequences of terrorist attacks
- Reducing rewards for carrying out terrorist attacks
- Disengagement from terrorism by making individuals and groups discontinue their involvement in terrorism
Norm setting against terrorism

- **Mechanism:** Reinforce objections and moral barriers against the use of violence and terrorism. "Winning hearts and minds."

- **Actors:** Political, ideological or religious leaders, opinion-makers, media, education, family members, peers, victims.

- **Measures:** Law-making, public statements and debate, public diplomacy and campaigns to influence public opinion, demonstrations, etc.

- **Target groups:** Entire populations and risk groups

- **Advantages:** Measures are non-repressive and not controversial. Low costs in economic and human terms.

- **Limitations and side effects:** Norms are weak barriers; easily overcome by strong leaders and group processes, or by shocking ‘trigger events’. Hard core activists are difficult to reach and influence; easier to win over their constituencies.
Social and political prevention to reduce emergence of terrorism and violent radicalisation

**Mechanism:** Reduce motivation for terrorism by removing root causes, grievances and frustrations leading to violent radicalisation.

**Actors:** Governments, political activists, NGOs, youth workers, etc.

**Measures:** Conflict resolution, political processes, social development, non-discrimination, rule of law, etc.

**Target groups:** Entire populations and/or specific groups at risk for radicalising into violence

**Advantages:**
- Addresses the “roots” of the problem, not merely the symptoms
- May have long-term effects if successful
- May have positive effects other social and political problems than terrorism alone.

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- There is no single root cause of terrorism; but many and complex
- Many root causes are difficult to solve or remove
- Measures will often take a long time before they make an impact
- Effects are difficult to measure
- Terrorism is frequently sustained by other reasons than those which gave rise to the terrorist campaign initially
Deterrence

**Mechanism:** Increasing the costs of terrorism by (threat of) punishment / retaliation to reduce motivation

**Actors:** Police, criminal justice system, military force

**Target groups:** Individuals, groups or states involved in terrorism or considering it

**Measures:** Repression, violent force, punishment, media attention, economic and diplomatic sanctions

**Advantages:**
- May be particularly effective towards state sponsors of terrorism
- Popular! May increase support public support of the government

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Deterrence is generally not effective against terrorists
- Limited effects towards highly motivated (e.g. suicide) terrorists and fragmented or decentralised groups
- Difficult to impact actors who can not be located
- May easily hit innocent third parties (“collateral damage”),
- May turn the state into a mirror image of the terrorists
- May reinforce the spiral of violence without addressing root causes
- May play into the hands of terrorists, making governments respond in ways where they weaken and undermine themselves
Disruption of terrorist attacks

- **Mechanism:** Preventing terrorists from carrying through prepared attacks by disclosing and stopping them in advance
- **Actors:** Intelligence and security agencies, police, security guards, the public, news media
- **Target groups:** individuals and groups already radicalised and involved in militant activities
- **Measures:**
  - Intelligence, surveillance, security controls
  - Intercepting and apprehending terrorist before they attack
  - Early intervention with warnings, dialogue with radicalised youths
  - Information sharing between agencies and to the public
- **Advantages:**
  - Targeted and concrete, saving lives, reducing suffering
  - High legitimacy, reinforcing confidence in the police and government
  - May break a potential cycle and escalation of violence
- **Limitations and negative side effects:**
  - Innocent people may become targets of surveillance and arrests
  - Danger of stigmatising ethnic and religious minorities
  - Risk of striking too early for conviction or too late to prevent disaster
  - Requires highly competent personnel to interpret intelligence correctly
  - Some prepared actions may slip through
Incapacitation

- **Mechanism**: Removing the capacity of violent actors to carry out (more) attacks and cause harm
- **Actors**: Police, courts, prison services, control regimes, military
- **Target groups**: Individuals or groups involved in terrorism
- **Measures**: Detention, ”kill or capture”, (violent) force, but also reducing access to economic funding, weapons or bomb precursors
- **Advantages**:
  - Effective when taking key activists and groups with limited membership out of action
  - Governments usually possess relevant capacities
- **Limitations and negative side effects**:  
  - May have limited effects on groups with a high recruitment and a strong social basis
  - May reinforce recruitment and extremism
  - Repression may undermine human rights and the moral legitimacy of the government
Protecting vulnerable targets

Mechanisms:
- Identify and remove opportunities for specific types of terrorist action, making it more difficult to carry through attacks.
- Increase the efforts needed to carry through a specific attack
- Increase the risks for detection

Measures: Large spectre of possible means

Actors: Many! (Security guards, control agencies, various authorities, place owners, the public, etc.)

Target groups: in principle active and potential terrorists, but measures tend to impact everyone

Advantages: Often immediate and measurable effects on specific problems. Targeted, but may also impact other types of crime.

Limitations and side effects:
- May displace terrorist attacks from hardened targets to “softer” targets
- Increased security measures may create a ‘Big Brother’ society
Reducing harmful consequences of attacks

**Mechanism:** Reducing harmful consequence through interventions which are planned, prepared and trained *before* an attack takes place

**Actors:** Police, fire brigade, medical emergency units, various authorities, NGOs, place owners, citizens

**Target group:** Victims of terrorism - individuals, groups, institutions and society in general

**Measures:** Crisis management, immediate relief, psychological assistance, restoring critical infrastructure, communication, impact reduction.

**Advantages:** Reducing suffering, restoring a sense of safety and confidence in authorities

**Limitations and side effects:** Expensive, resource intensive; deficient crisis management will undermine confidence and perceived security
Reducing rewards for carrying out acts of terrorism

- **Mechanism:** Make use of violence less attractive by reducing rewards; thereby reducing motivation.  
  *Basic question:* ‘What do the terrorists try to achieve?’

- **Actors:** Political authorities, business, news media, hostage negotiators etc.

- **Target group:** Terrorist actors and those considering to make use of terrorist means

- **Means:** Not acting as terrorists wish

- **Advantages:** May reduce future acts of terrorism and reinforce governmental legitimacy

- **Limitations and side effects:** Difficult dilemmas, hostages might be killed, ”patriotic journalism”
Disengagement from terrorism

**Mechanisms:** Make active terrorists quit their participation in terrorism, individually or collectively, voluntarily or involuntarily.

**Actors:** Governments, criminal justice system, NGOs

**Target groups:** Those involved in terrorism

**Measures:** ‘Stick and carrot’, amnesty and witness (protection) programmes, resocialisation and deradicalisation programmes, negotiations, political processes, alternatives to violence.

**Advantages:**
- May bring an end to terrorist campaigns
- May reduce violence and suffering
- May reduce the size of terrorist groups and prevent recruitment
- May provide vital intelligence and witnesses in court cases

**Limitations and negative side effects:**
- Amnesty programmes may easily be abused; risk of recidivism
- Amnesty may be difficult to accept by the victims of terrorism
- May undermine principles of the rule of law and sense of justice
Main strategies for preventing terrorism:

- **Short-term preventive strategies**
  - Deterrence by threat of retaliation or punishment
  - Pre-emptive disruption of planned terrorist attacks
  - Incapacitation
  - Protecting vulnerable targets

- **Long-term preventive strategies**
  - Reducing harm from terrorist attacks
  - Reducing rewards from terrorism
  - Norm setting to delegitimize terrorism
  - Social and political prevention by reducing root causes and motivations for violent radicalisation and recruitment
  - Disengagement from terrorism - making individuals and groups discontinue their involvement in terrorism

**Main challenge:** To make short-term and long-term strategies support rather than undermine each other
You have seen the movie... now read the book!

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Applying a holistic model of crime prevention to five very different forms of crime:
- Domestic burglary
- Criminal youth gangs
- Driving under the influence
- Organized crime based on outlaw MC gangs
- Terrorism