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NOTE

from: EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator
to: delegations
Subject: Preventing lone actor terrorism - Food for thought

The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator would like to offer the following preliminary ideas as background for the discussion in TWG/COTER on 25 April.

Following two recent high profile cases of lone actor attacks (Anders Breivik in Norway and Mohammed Merah in France) the time is ripe to think again about how to address this type of terrorism. Although **lone actor terrorists** only account for a small percentage of the total number of terrorist attacks, it is worth noting that such attacks are continuing at a time when attempts by organised terrorist networks have been less and less frequent. This shows that our prevention methods, which have been increasingly successful against terrorist groups, may not have had the same degree of success against lone actors. Indeed in recent years we have seen a greater concentration by Al Qaeda on encouraging lone actors, and providing them with encouragement and inspiration. This is in part a strategy of desperation in response to the growing pressure on AQ core, which makes such low cost attacks without the need for organised support an increasingly attractive option. The growing interest of AQ in English language internet based propaganda material, like the "Inspire" magazine is part of this trend. Lone actor attacks are not only inspired by such propaganda, but are propaganda in themselves, providing models for others to copy.

The fact that there are - fortunately - relatively few cases we can learn from does not make the task of countering lone actor terrorism easier. Moreover, the limited number of cases of lone actor terrorists have shown huge variations in targeting and modus operandi, as well as a variety of political and ideological backgrounds of the perpetrators. Nonetheless, subject to further research, a number of commonalities seen to be apparent.

- Lone actor attacks are premeditated, often carefully planned (some take years to meticulously prepare their attacks) and self-financed.
- Lone actors decide, plan and perform their acts on their own, but this does not mean that their radicalisation process takes place in a vacuum. Lone actors almost always display a degree of commitment to, and identification with, extremist movements or ideologies.
- Lone actors will often explore extremist media, be it books, videos or Internet web pages and derive inspiration from what they find and read (both during the radicalisation process and in preparation of an attack). Some of them also publish their own manifestos.
- Many lone actors have demonstrated a level of social alienation, social ineptitude or mental problems.
- Firearms and explosives are the main weapons of choice for lone actor terrorists and in many cases, the perpetrators even have a licenses to possess firearms.
- Lone actors believe that they must correct an 'injustice'. By taking action with force they hope to correct this injustice and become a hero for their cause. They see violence as the only solution.

The challenge of preventing lone actor terrorism is enormous, and - just as much as with other forms of terrorism - it will never be possible to reach 100 percent security. Even the best policy response will do no more than reduce the threat or limit the impact of lone actor attacks.

The challenge of lone actor terrorism for security and law enforcement agencies

- Lone actors are an enormous challenge for the security and law enforcement agencies as they are not only difficult to detect, but also extremely hard to defend against. The case of Mohammed Merah has demonstrated the difficulties.
- Lone actors have a critical advantage in avoiding identification and detection before and after their attacks, since they hardly communicate with others with regard to their intentions. Most of them are well aware of this advantage. In his manifesto, Breivik warned other potential terrorists that they increase their chance of being apprehended by 100% for every other person they involve in their plans.
- This is, however, not to say that lone actors have no connections to organisations or networks. In fact, most of them do display a degree of commitment to, sympathy and identification with extremist movements.
- Mohammed Merah's case has once again shown that individuals considered as 'peripheral figures' or more fragmentary elements of a network can act on their own.
- Successful identification of potential lone actors will need a far more sensitive detection system, attuned to those signals, as minimal as they might be, that can point at the preparation of an attack. Existing parameters used to help identifying radicalised individuals may need to be revised because they are often based on individuals as part of a network, and not on those who exist on the periphery or as sympathisers of a certain ideology.
- This would be helped by enhanced cooperation between fusion centres on this topic.¹
- Given that some lone actor terrorists have travelled abroad (AF/PAK, Somalia, Yemen) to receive training, more should be done to monitor such travels and identify travel patterns . A multilateral focus (EU members states + relevant EU agencies + US) on different aspects of terrorist travel and an exchange of information regarding foreign fighters with a common threat perspective could have a significant added value (see also below on foreign fighters).

¹ 8571/10

- It could also be useful to look again at what could be done to make it more difficult for lone actor terrorists to obtain weapons and explosives. The sale of firearms within the EU is currently regulated by Directive Directive 91/477/EEC. In addition to this, the Council adopted the European Action Plan to combat illegal trafficking in so called “heavy” firearms which could be used or are used in criminal activities on 2-3 December 2010.
- As a follow-up to the EU Action Plan on Enhancing the Security of Explosives, it is important to further continue and finalise the discussion on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the marketing and use of explosives precursors.

Reflections on how to deal with lone actor terrorism through 'prevention'

1. How applicable are the current strategies for tackling violent radicalisation and extremism applicable to the case of lone actors?

- Lone actors are not part of an organisation, but lone actor terrorism does not take place in a vacuum. It is essential to identify and detect processes of radicalisation and to continue the prevention efforts many EU member states have started. An effective counter radicalisation strategy depends on effective ground level engagement, and it is essential to continue to cooperate with those that are the closest to vulnerable individuals. Awareness programs for frontline workers, parents, schools, etc. are equally valid in the context of lone actor terrorism.
- As an extension of ground level engagement, it is important to empower local communities in building and promoting resilience. Lone actor attacks, as much as other terrorist attacks, can have implications long after the perpetrators have been sentenced (cf. Breivik case) not only for people directly involved, but also for society at large. In fact, a key element of almost all acts of terrorism is that the ultimate target is not the immediate victim, but a wider audience. The goal of individuals such as Breivik and Merah was to create fear and polarisation (thus fueling radicalisation). For governments, the real challenge is both to manage the fear of an attack within society and to empower those affected to communicate after an attack has happened.

Hence, it is important to provide local opinion formers with tools and insights from crisis management and crisis communication. Effective crisis communication, as seen following the Breivik and Merah attacks can minimise the impact of an attack and help the nation in surpassing the trauma.

- Many lone actors made use of the Internet in the preparation of their attacks. The Internet provided them with training manuals and videos, ideological motivation, encouragement, justification, and all this within an anonymous environment. It also provided some of them with direct access to a community of like-minded individuals around the world with whom they could connect. As mentioned above many lone actors have demonstrated some level of social alienation or even social ineptitude and mental problems. The community provided by the Internet can act as a replacement social environment. It thus remains imperative to continue our efforts in tracking violent propaganda on the Internet since the easy availability of extremist material online will further foster the growth of the autodidact lone actor terrorist. The EU and some of its Member States are working hard to provide appropriate policy responses and tools we can use to disrupt and deter (e.g. Clean IT). It would also be useful to further examine the role of social media: to examine possible tools (and their limits) for police to detect violent extremism in social networks and to discuss if an enhancement of the scope of “Check The Web” in this respect is advisable.
- Although operating alone, lone actors draw inspiration from other extremists or ideologues. Hence, disseminating counter narratives needs to remain an important element of an effective counter-radicalisation strategy. A crucial ingredient of any counter narrative is the de-legitimisation of perpetrators and their acts and the falsification of their ideologies. In this field also the EU and some of its Member States have built up a solid experience.

2. What new aspects need to be added to our current strategies to make them more effective in countering lone actor terrorism?

- Given that many lone actors seem to suffer from some kind of psychological disturbance (anxiety disorder, personality disorder, depression: Mohammed Merah spent 15 days in a psychiatric hospital in 2008 after he tried to commit suicide) it would seem to be useful to include relevant health care workers and medical professionals in awareness raising activity among frontline workers involved in the prevention of counter-radicalisation. They can help identify patients who have gone off the rails and who might be a danger for the wider public safety. This is a very sensitive issue and there remains a challenge to ensure that the crucial relationship of trust and confidence between patient and the health worker remains balanced. The UK has done excellent work in trying to address this challenge in the context of the new Prevent strategy.
- There is already a lot being done on community policing and the role of local police in preventing radicalisation (e.g. COPPRA). While many of the tools that have been developed so far are also extremely relevant in the prevention of lone actor terrorism, regular police officers need more training in identifying a lone actor and recognising pre-operational attack indicators. UK work in this area in relation to right-wing extremism was described in the TWG/COTER meeting last year which discussed the Breivik attacks.
- More research on the radicalisation process of lone actors is needed. The problem for both counter-terrorism practitioners and academics is the relatively low number of lone actor terrorists. Therefore, sharing experiences, data and ideas regarding this particular terrorist threat between practitioners, policy makers and the academic world is essential to be able to develop some viable responses.

- In several lone actor terrorist cases, the perpetrator had spent time in prison before conducting the attack and reportedly became radicalised during that period. According to the lawyer of Mohammed Merah, the latter's radicalisation took root when he was jailed for 21 months after stealing a purse. Radicalisation and recruitment among prison inmates is indeed a cause of concern. Many recruits are 'ordinary' inmates doing time for minor crimes like fraud, petty crime or theft. Some EU Member States have already taken successful steps regarding individual de-radicalisation and disengagement of terrorist convicts, now may be the time for new measures and a re-evaluation of the existing ones regarding the detection of signs of radicalisation among 'ordinary' prisoners. These could be particularly useful in the context of detecting likely lone actor radicalisation. Some suggestions which could be included in an update of the 2008 manual of practical recommendations on countering radicalisation in prisons:
 - Develop closer ties between prison administration and relevant agencies in order to eliminate the promotion of violence by known extremists and detect signs of radicalisation.
 - Staff training and greater awareness among prison officers: detecting signs of radicalisation among 'ordinary' prisoners requires a sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon. It is important that prison staff have the right tools and tactics to disrupt potential cases of radicalisation.
 - Ensuring proper psychological and religious support to inmates. Prisoners are often vulnerable, and looking for spiritual support. Religious conversion is not the same as radicalisation. Ensuring that there are enough qualified religious leaders to address prisoners' needs will help sideline radical voices.
 - Prison services should be more ambitious in promoting positive influences inside prison, and develop more innovative approaches to facilitate extremists' transition back into mainstream society.
 - Enhancing cooperation between the prison and education sector by exploring the possibilities to offer academic education to improve the prisoner's critical thinking and by providing vocational training in order to increase the inmates' possibilities on the labour market after release.

Foreign fighters and returnees

As noted above, a number of lone actors have travelled to conflict areas or attended terrorist training camps before returning to Europe. The EU CTC has made a number of recommendations in his past discussion papers about how to tackle this phenomenon. ¹

- The flow of EU residents seeking training or to fight in countries like Somalia, Afghanistan / Pakistan, Yemen or possibly the Sahel-region continues. On return, these people may use their newly-acquired experience and skills for terrorist actions and spread their radical ideas or give guidance to others to follow them on their path of violence. The majority of plots detected over the last few years have involved such "foreign fighters".
- The Mohammed Merah case is the latest example of a lone actor terrorist who travelled to a number of conflict regions. It shows the need to detect and follow people who travel to conflict zones and then return to Europe. Visa and PNR information can offer a means of detecting their travel patterns. A whole range of other measures could be considered as well, such as the improvement of documents checks and documents security, an enhanced exchange of information and a better international cooperation (see possible actions below).
- One of the most obvious gaps in current counter-terrorism legislation is the fact that travel to, and participation in, terrorist training camps is not considered as a criminal offence as such in the majority of Member States as long as there is no evidence of a direct link with a planned attack or a terrorist organisation. There is a clear need to overcome this gap.

Possible action:

- Amend the Framework decision on terrorism to make it a crime to attend a terrorist training camp in the EU or abroad.
- Establish an EU PNR and make increased use of existing PNR to monitor and disrupt terrorist travel.

¹ 9685/10 and 15894/1/10

- Support ideas to counter the narrative - showing that the "armed struggle" is not as exciting as possible recruits might think. Support and increase the spread of information on the reality of life in training camps and in the terrorist theatre of operations.
- Learn from Prevent work stream projects and the Radicalisation Awareness Network how to spot the early indicators that individuals might become lone actor terrorists.
- Address both the internal and external aspects of countering radicalisation: intensify our collaboration with individuals and civil society groups that have particular connections to regions of concern, not only by making them more resilient against terrorist propaganda, but also by relying on them to develop our expertise when it comes to the external dimension of prevention. Lessons learned can be drawn from the EU-US seminars on Somali and Pakistani Diaspora respectively held in 2011 and 2012.
- Establish an EU-US working group on terrorist travel (East African region + Yemen) to analyse and detect patterns of travel.
- Develop closer operational cooperation with the relevant authorities of third States (target or transit countries) with a view to disrupting travel by terrorists or would be terrorists (cf: Step up technical assistance to third countries in the areas of document security and identity management and to make more use of the Interpol Lost and Stolen Passports data base).
- Intensify law enforcement and judicial cooperation with countries of transit (cf: Turkey) and destination (cf: Pakistan, Yemen). This could also be a productive subject to discuss with GCC countries, which have themselves seen their nationals travel to conflict zones, and are hosts to aviation hubs and airline companies of growing international importance.
- Disrupt terrorist travel by continuing to make effective use of the Visa Consultation Procedure according to Art. 22 Visa Codex (prior consultation) - and to ensure that future steps towards visa liberalisation fulfil the same high level security standards as the current process.
- Follow up the French Presidency Council conclusions of Nov. 2008 "to consider putting in place an early-warning mechanism for suspects linked to terrorism and organised crime, in order to facilitate the early detection of persons subject to an alert in the SIS for activities linked to terrorism or organised crime by consulting the SIS via the national authorities at central level."

- Examine how we can more effectively cross check relevant data bases when someone enters the EU - making full use of SIS for the purpose of unveiling terrorist travel activities.
- The Madrid Group and Europol could consider multilateral exchanges regarding suspected individuals and foreign fighters with a common threat perspective. A multilateral focus (EU members states + relevant EU agencies + US) on different aspects of terrorist travel could enable the identification of trends and patterns that bilateral cooperation alone could not necessarily identify.
- Arrangements need to exist to bring together the media and influential figures in the communities affected in the aftermath of lone actor attacks in order to ensure that ill judged reactions do not risk provoking further violence.
