

DECISION OF ACTION

Going beyond ideology: an innovative way to analysing
terrorism

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INTRODUCTION

GOING BEYOND IDEOLOGY

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, Europe has been the victim of several waves of terrorism from a wide range of extremist ideologies both right and left wing, political and religious.

Until today, a large amount of research has studied the phenomena of terrorism and violent radicalisation through the spectrum of ideology. However, by focusing too much of what individuals think, there is a risk of missing out on what they do or are capable of doing. In particular, information about means in the hands of terrorists is crucial to combat the threat of terrorism - such as capabilities, methods, general structure, financial resources etc.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS APPROACH?

An approach focused on operational rather than on ideological factors can not only help in the observation and analysis of terrorism through a different lens, but it can also help in preparing interesting conclusions at a strategic level. By strategic level, we identify policy makers, at a national or European level, who develop policies from which operational counter-terrorism actions are then derived.

METHOD

FOCUSING ON OPERATIONAL FACTORS

One of the approaches in the framework of the SAFIRE project was to focus on operational aspects of terrorism, while putting aside factors linked to the ideology of a group or of an individual. Therefore, we focused on groups and individuals which actually engaged in terrorism. The latter being a criminal act, we

decided to try and get a better understanding of what led to such terrorist acts through the “*Motives, Means and Opportunity*” approach.

The factors “Means, Motives and Opportunity” are generally referred to as the three elements of a crime required to prove the guilt of a suspected criminal on trial (US Criminal law).

This approach was instrumental in the design of the grids of variables used to analyse groups and individuals. 41 terrorist groups who have perpetrated attacks on the European soil and 83 individuals linked to these groups were then studied through these grids.

STATISTICS IN SUPPORT OF THE ANALYSIS

The information stemming from the analysis grids was then used to conduct a statistical analysis. Statistical analysis can contribute to identifying trends and to a better understanding of the mechanisms behind the actions of terrorist groups and individuals. This is key in facing future terrorist threats.

The statistical analysis revealed clusters of groups and clusters of individuals, who share similar motivations and means of actions despite having different allegiances.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

APPREHENDING TERRORISM BY GOING BEYOND IDEOLOGY

Focusing on operational factors is a way to go beyond the usual classifications of terrorist groups according to ideologies or political claims, without calling the usual classification into question. Thus, all groups were analysed without any preconception with a focus on tangible operational factors, in order to identify new and accurate factors, and to better understand the phenomenon of terrorism.

UPDATING GROUPS’ AND INDIVIDUALS’ TYPOLOGIES

The analysis itself of the clusters enables the comparison of groups, by the characteristics they share, and to identify patterns in their behaviours.

DEVELOPING TAILORED POLITICAL SOLUTIONS

There is no single terrorism, nor one way of combatting it. There is not a single type of Islamist or nationalist terrorism. There are terrorisms, which evolve and become more and more complex with time and in different contexts. In order to find accurate answers to the complexity of terrorism, "tailored" solutions are required. The identification of trends and patterns in behaviours is certainly one of the possible solutions.

IDENTIFYING THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF INTERVENTION FOR A GIVEN THREAT

Each type of cluster of terrorist group will be weakened or defeated at different levels: indeed solutions can be found at a political, law enforcement or even at the extra-judicial level. A thorough analysis of the clusters of groups and individuals revealed action levers that are the most efficient for one cluster of groups or the other.

This can enable policy-makers to draft strategies tailored to the identified typologies of groups and individuals, and thus tailor a State or the European Union's answer to the threat of terrorism.