

Security Policies and Community Relationships

November 4 – 5, 2013
Minto Suite Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario

For Speaker Profiles please see the TSAS website.
For Abstracts of presentations please see the TSAS website.

Day 1 / November 4

Setting the Context: The Society/Security Dynamic

Policy perspective: Brett Kubicek, Manager, Research and Academic Relations, Public Safety Canada

- Heidi Ellis, Children's Hospital Center for Refugee Trauma and Resilience.
- Alia Hogben, Canadian Council of Muslim Women.
- Tufyal Choudhury, Durham University.
- Michelle LeBaron, University of British Columbia.

The presentations in this panel opened the workshop by exploring the societal context of minority communities, with case studies drawn from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. One of the primary concerns of the panel was to understand why some youth become open to embracing violent extremism, the circumstances that lead to this orientation, and the ways that communities can participate in the prevention of violent extremism and in counter-terrorism efforts made by governments.

Several research projects addressing these themes were presented, along with some practical applications. Special emphasis was placed on methodology and collaborative work, which included partnerships among youth, communities, academics, practitioners, policy makers, law-enforcement and security agents, and civil society at large. In terms of methodology, discussions covered the following aspects:

- Research conducted by using semi-structured and/or non-structured methods and tools (e.g. interviewing, focus groups), involving both minority and mainstream youth, eliciting *their* understanding of the societal context and their experiences with security agents and structures;
- Research as a reflexive process that incorporates material, relational, and symbolic dimensions; that is: what is being researched and evaluated; how communities/youth perceive their interaction with security/safety agents and structures; how people doing research filter information; and the differential interpretations of policies that are implemented, depending on the societal context and on the perceptions of those affected;
- Participant observation as a method that helps those involved in carrying out the research project build relationships with communities. Presenters also emphasized employing techniques such as snowball recruitment strategies, listening more, and striving to understand issues in nuanced ways, which can contribute to preventing perceptions that specific minority groups are being targeted for security reasons.

Speakers, and members of the audience, also discussed issues related to:

i) Minority communities feeling targeted / suspected / profiled in relation to police and security forces. Generally, these perceptions were revealed to stem largely from experiences of trauma (especially in the case of refugees) and discrimination, which inflicted a sense of alienation (identification as a target; feeling stereotyped as a threat).

ii) Perceptions and their determinants, including:

- Identity struggles rooted in alienation, racism, marginalization, and/or violence (e.g. the refugees' resettlement experiences marked by trauma, discrimination, and negative encounters with the police);
- Cultural competency and essentialization processes in state and other service agencies (e.g. homogenizing Muslim identities or experiences);
- Diversity within communities (age, ethnicity, gender, social-economic position, geographic location), and the ways that these dimensions shape encounters and experiences;
- Threat, in particular the disconnect between how state actors and communities perceive threat, which is damaging for building trust and partnerships (i.e., the state seeing extremism as the most potent threat vs. communities understanding threat based on unemployment, educational underachievement, drug dealing, domestic violence, etc.);
- Trust and foreign policy issues (i.e., youth believing that the country is 'governed by old white men' and the general concern about pro-Israeli policies among Muslim minority populations).

iii) The importance of dialogue between minorities and those in the mainstream group (e.g. in areas with large Muslim populations, non-Muslim residents frequently fail to notice the profiling and enhanced surveillance taking place in the neighborhood), as well as among youth, communities, and the security agents/authorities. In this respect, the presentations indicated the following fruitful approaches:

- Offering a space for greater self-expression and the formation of positive identities in minority youth, including through exchanges/interaction across cultural groups;
- Communities can play a role in nurturing dialogue that can support positive experiences, affording a platform/space for understanding, peaceful questioning, and democratic civic engagement to solve real or perceived political issues. This is particularly relevant given the findings of one project, which showed that youth tend to identify with local communities, rather than with Canada as a whole;
- Positive identity contributes to resilience against radicalization toward violence. Outreach work with communities is essential, but the engagement technique needs to be positive, around building resilience, for example, rather than a direct approach that emphasizes radicalization or conflict. This can productively involve advocacy and the use of more positive media, like the arts, for example, which has proven to be a technique with potential for engaging youth, parents, and security professionals, and which also helps cultivate a diversity-accepting environment;
- Community-based participatory research represents a good balance of research and action that enables communities to help themselves (i.e., capacity building by commitment to long-term relationships);
- Transparency, information, and accountability on the part of security and safety agents contribute to minority communities' support for efforts to prevent violent extremism.

Practical Issues and Examples: Preventing Radicalization, Deradicalization, and Building Social Cohesion

Policy perspective: Shirley Cuillierier, Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

- Shiraz Maher, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.
- Julia Berczyk, University of Amsterdam.
- Imam Yusuf Badat, Islamic Foundation.
- Bob Young, CSIS
- Tiejia Thomas, Concordia University.

The policy perspective that launched this panel introduced the audiences to one of the main security and safety policy concerns; that is, the relation between the security community and civil society, in particular minority communities (e.g. activities that build trust). The focus was on how to effectively identify and intervene in the pre-criminal space by building relations with the communities that the security community feel are at risk. Examples included: i) working with multiple civil society stakeholders (community leaders, researchers, social workers, teachers) in order for them to pay attention to, and signal, 'non-traditional' indicators that put youth at risk (e.g. cyber bullying, disengagement, etc.), following to get involved with, and support, the RCMP for intervention in a timely fashion; ii) clarifying communications between central offices and officers across territory, with particular emphasis on disengaged youth; iii) training initiatives for police workers (working with Chiefs of Police).

The presentations dealt with processes of radicalization toward violence, and triggered discussions on determinants of violent extremism and approaches to prevent it. One of the issues that catalyzed attention was the threat coming from an increasing number of nationals who engage in armed conflicts abroad (mainly in Syria). There were highlighted some of the challenges faced when trying to tackle this phenomenon: the dynamics of the radicalization process in this respect (i.e., it can take place 'at home' or abroad, it presents non-standard enablers); the difficulty to strategize identification of returnees who will engage in threat activities, as well as the potential dangers of domestic containment; and/or lack of a clear legal framework to guide action. Also, it was suggested that the dynamics of this relatively recent phenomenon need to be further studied and understood, including its relation to, and support from, Al-Qaeda (i.e., the role of more 'introvert' narratives of violence, shifting techniques to appeal to, and recruit, male youth, new contexts for the legitimization of Al-Qaeda, etc.).

Among the strategies to diminish the foreign-fighters problem, the presenters and audiences discussed the following:

- Counter-narratives. It was noted that there is a lack of counter-narratives promoted by communities and the political levels (e.g. awareness of democratic alternatives of civic engagement, legal ramifications associated with fighting abroad);
- Community engagement and consultation. This was reinforced as necessary in order to grapple with some of the tangential social determinants of radicalization in general: anger (over issues like foreign policy), lack of religious literacy and education, isolation, etc.;
- International cooperation, keeping in mind differences of contexts with an impact on the profile of youth engaged in violent extremism abroad;
- More research on returnee threat.

Regarding international cooperation and sharing of best practices on ways to engage with communities for the prevention of violent extremism, participants in the workshop had the opportunity to learn about

the approach in Germany, where extremism is generally understood as a broad social phenomenon, for which all parts of society are responsible; that is, there is much focus on the societal and pedagogic dimensions in the efforts to prevent it, with a policy framework aimed at avoiding to create 'suspect communities'. Practical examples of private-public partnerships with such a broad community approach were offered.

A view which showed affinities with the more diffused, socially-oriented counter-terrorism measures in place in Germany was the suggestion made by another presenter that social media literacy, critical thinking, and digital citizenship be cultivated as pedagogical approaches in both formal and informal education. This, was argued, would contribute to an informed rejection of narratives of violence commonly circulated in social media.

Day 2 / November 5

Emerging Research and Framing a Future Research Agenda

- Sebastien Feve, Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
- Wesley Wark and Patti Lenard, University of Ottawa
- Anila Asghar, McGill University.
- The second day of workshops started with a panel that underpinned the need for interdisciplinary, collaborative, and comparative research. Connections among a whole range of social, political, and cultural issues, agents, and structures were made, with particular attention to the constantly changing security environment and policy responses.

Considering the very limited results of the security approaches related to social media (i.e. to monitor internet content in order to stop the spread of extremist messages and narratives, or to reduce the demand for it), as well as the lack of common legal framework across countries in this respect, a new collaborative research project is launched to address such gaps in the fight against violent extremism. That is, counter-narrative educational resources will be produced, bringing wider expertise to the table for the first time (massmedia giants, marketing industries, academia). This project will be coordinated by The Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

A research team from the University of Ottawa will carry out a project that explores the joint impacts of the security and counter-terrorism policy and the related policies of immigration, integration, and citizenship on minority Canadians, factoring in the attitudes/perceptions produced in the mainstream population vis-a-vis minorities through the shared effects of these policies. An integral dimension of this project will be the analysis of: i) the key developments in Canadian counter-terrorism and national security policy and pronouncements since 9/11; ii) the public views on national security in Canada; iii) massmedia coverage (i.e. major Canadian and U.S. print sources) of main Canadian events and policy in regards to national security.

Another collaborative project, led by a team from McGill University, York University, and the North American Spiritual Revival, will critically look at Muslim diaspora's identity construction processes in Canada in post 9/11 context, against a social cohesion analytical framework. More specifically, it will explore Muslims' perceptions of themselves in relation to the national security and counter-terrorism environment, not excluding non-Muslim outreach. Views of identity (religious, ethnic, political), citizenship and civic engagement, gender relations (both in the public and in the private spheres) will be elicited from youth and other community participants through a mix of research methods and tools.

Moving Forward: New Issues, New Concepts, New Tools – PART 1

Policy perspective: Anna Gray-Henschel, Public Safety Canada

- Susan Benesch, American University.
- Amar Amarasingham, University of Waterloo.

From a policy perspective, Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups and individuals remains the largest threat to national security; domestic radicalization continues to be a critical component, one that poses particular prevention challenges, given that there is no single profile and pathway to this process. The problem of foreign fighters was reinforced as a growing concern, with emphasis on whether domestic containment is a viable approach. Working with communities was highlighted as essential in the efforts to prevent violent extremism, but the question of whether communities have been equipped with the right tools to be able to face this challenge was raised for further consideration. Equally important in preventing violent extremism is the collaboration across local, provincial, federal, and international levels. Among the research gaps to be addressed for better coordination within the security and civil communities, identifying threats, agents of radicalization (radicalizers, charismatic leaders), and the role of social media figured prominently. Participants also highlighted the roles and limitations of the Criminal Code and the Legislative, as well as the attention that needs to be paid to the differential gender impacts of the security policy and programs.

Closely connected to the limitations of the Criminal Code, to the use of social media as a platform for spreading messages of violence, as well as to the importance of research on agents of radicalization, was the presentation on dangerous speech. This concept was employed to refer to the inflammatory speech that has the capacity to catalyze violence; it was argued that the lack of consensus on what hate speech means makes this alternative concept not only relevant, but also necessary, in the efforts to prevent violent extremism. The research project carried out to define this category as clearly as possible and to find ways of interfering with its impact, without curbing freedom of speech, also found that Facebook is the main platform through which dangerous speech is circulated.

The presentation on the situation in post-war Sri-Lanka was pertinent for showcasing the role dangerous speech can play in inflaming interethnic conflict (e.g. Islamophobic upsurge), via the Facebook platform. The presentation expanded on the specific historical social context that has the potential to lead to violence. Tamil diaspora dynamics (e.g. intra-community tensions/factions) were discussed, in regards to their importance for the relations with the federal government, as well as with the Sri-Lankan government, notwithstanding implications for foreign policy and the way Tamil ethnics are perceived within Canada by the public at large in terms of security considerations.

Moving Forward: New Issues, New Concepts, New Tools – PART 2

- Hussein Hamdani, Simpson Wigle Law LLP.
- Shahed Amanullah, US State Department

The panel opened with a presentation from a community perspective, emphasizing the significance of the policy framework within which interaction between government and communities happens. Specific examples of Canadian counter-terrorism policy statements were analyzed in comparative perspective, revealing the risks policy language carries to further alienate Muslim communities. That there is no single path to radicalization leading to violence was reinforced by participants on various occasions; nevertheless, it was also agreed that one of the common threads in radicalization is a sense of alienation, disenfranchisement, and/or victimization, which is likely to be heightened by policy language that

unduly targets one group. Cultivating inclusive policy language in consultation with communities came out as one of the main practical recommendations for the government, alongside with funding support for moderate and moderating voices in the Muslim communities and civic engagement programming for Muslim youth.

If developing counter-narratives to violent extremist ideologies was widely advanced as a means to increase community resilience (thus indirectly addressing the risk of radicalization toward violence), it was also acknowledged that, from an American standpoint, their role may be rather limited; inspirational, inclusive narratives were suggested to work better (e.g. raising money to rebuild a mosque, with participation from non-Muslim populations). Also, while trying to monitor internet content to detect narratives of extremism and ways in which they appeal to youth is a somewhat useful technique and can have its benefits (i.e. being aware of trends, tools, etc.), it was reinforced that it is ultimately impossible to remove dangerous content. Given the above, prevention of violent extremism and terrorism needs to be supplemented with strategies that leverage the unique strength of social networks (i.e. Terms of Service accountability for the kind of language that is employed) and that equip youth with the kind of skills necessary to navigate them and to take back the social space (i.e. social media literacy).

As an overall conclusion to the two days of workshops, fostering partnerships with communities in general, and with communities at risk in particular, came up as the most efficient strategy to prevent violent extremism and to counter terrorism. Attention was drawn to the risk of getting the communities at risk to own the security issue without having the necessary resources to engage with such issues, and to the danger of securitizing relations between the government and the communities in question, as well as between the latter and civil society at large.

Collaborative Research Design

- Dan Hiebert, University of British Columbia and Brett Kubicek, Public Safety Canada, Presentation and Discussion.

The purpose of this final session was to elicit feedback from participants on ways in which research on security matters can involve multiple stakeholders not only at the delivery stage, but also in the research design process; commentary on past, current, and future directions of TSAS research and workshops was also solicited in an informal, interactive setting. A point was made that Kanishka funding initiative will end in 2015, which also limits the number of projects on the same theme that can be funded -- this underpins the necessity that different stakeholders would collaborate in a more sustained way. The network established through this funding initiative can serve as a support structure for continuing collaborative research.

It was brought to the participants' attention that involving different stakeholders (academics, policy makers, NGOs, etc.) in a collaborative research process, in particular at the research design stage, supposes consideration of the following aspects: connecting the affected constituent sectors; agreeing on what represents useful knowledge; figuring out points of intersection and then enlarging that intersection (build an interactive system); locating funding sources, etc. The main challenge in the collaborative research design process is to approach an issue that would simultaneously excite the imagination of academic researchers and be considered necessary from the practitioners' perspectives; also, the issue in question would need to allow for viable research questions. Two main areas were identified by participants as fields that could further be explored through collaborative research:

i) *Evaluation*. One of the main concern of policy makers is measuring the effectiveness of current strategies aimed at preventing violent extremism and at countering terrorism. Much discussion was held

on whether and how evaluation could be done (e.g. evaluation of the counter-narratives strategy) -- perspectives ranged from the position that a considerable period of time needs to pass in order for changes in behaviour to be quantified, to the view that small-scale controlled models can be developed based on principles applicable to a wide range of social contexts, to the outlook that commercial techniques could be employed for communication/messaging testing purposes.

ii) *Community Partnerships & Resilience*. Engaging communities to build up resilience is a strategy largely embraced at policy levels, and consequently an area of much focus in research and programming, but the main question raised in the final discussions was how to do engagement from a practical point of view. The case of Denmark and Germany was noted, where community engagement is carried as a social process, involving different stakeholders (social workers, therapists, NGOs, academics, etc.) to build up support networks -- this is a model that RCMP would like to facilitate within Canada in relation to different security matters (e.g. opening up the conversation about foreign fighters). Besides ethical considerations, from an NGO perspective, partnerships for research purposes may pose the challenge of too much time for the process completion, in the circumstances in which there is a sense of urgency in terms of results; however, it was suggested that these concerns could be reconciled through participatory applied research. Another concern brought into discussion was the potential frustration of communities with the fact that their engagement on security matters is little likely, if at all, to result in policy changes. Participants also underlined the necessity for collective resilience, that is, carrying out projects and programs that equally engage mainstream communities (e.g. cross-cultural/diversity education on security issues).

At the end of the two days of presentations and conversations, participants were asked to brainstorm on the content and format of the TSAS series of workshops. The following themes were proposed for future sessions: social media for academics; law, justice, and order issues; communities' historical resilience processes; evaluation strategies. In regards to the format of these workshops, the interactive nature and the possibility to directly engage with policy makers was well appreciated. Chatham house conversations (demand-driven approach) were put forward as an alternative to formal presentations for future consideration.