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**PLACING “LONE-ACTOR TERRORISM” IN CONTEXT.
WHO ARE WE DEALING WITH AND WHAT THREAT
DO THEY POSE? PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE FP7
PRIME PROJECT**

The following article¹ presents partial preliminary findings of the EC-funded FP7 project PRIME. Due to the sensitive nature of the problems in question and the confidential status of the PRIME Report that this publication is based on, only non-sensitive material is provided henceforth.

PRIME (Preventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremist Events) is the European Commission’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) research project pursued by the consortium of six Universities (University College London, King’s College London, University of Warsaw², University of Leiden, Aarhus University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem) collaborating closely with practitioners and subject matter experts representing governmental institutions, law-enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations from Europe, North America and Australasia. It is an on-going task (set to run between May 2014 and April 2017), aiming to progress and improve the current system of physical and social countermeasures and communication measures established against the threat of lone-actor terrorism and violent extremism.

One of the initial stages of the PRIME concept was to provide a contextual analysis of the “lone wolf” threat. We sought to identify a range of contextual elements that may affect the relevance and exploitation of the research, such as differences in legislation, technology, cultures, values and law-enforcement or security practices across Europe, above and beyond the countries represented within the PRIME Consortium. Our goal was also to refine the list of contextual factors, which would frame the formulation of counter-, and communication measures requirements, and to anticipate (with the assistance of a method known as crime

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² University of Warsaw PRIME team consists of Dr Kacper Gradoń, Dr Agnieszka Gutkowska and Mr Piotr Karasek representing the Faculty of Law and Administration.

scripting³) the impact of these factors on the implementation of counter-measures against the lone extremist threat.

At the very beginning of the research devoted to the phenomenon of lone actor extremism and terrorism, we had to face a key problem present in any scientific deliberations i.e. the need to define the phenomenon. While the PRIME Project has adopted its own operational terminology for the purpose of data collection, there is no widely accepted definition of terms such as “lone actor”, “terrorism” or “radicalization” in the academic or operational field.

In the literature, the term “lone wolf” most often refers to a person detached from the influence of any organization or other persons, who radicalizes him or herself and – as a result – decides to carry out a terrorist attack⁴. It needs to be stressed that true “lone actors” in a pure sense of the word do not really exist. Only a handful of individuals may be accurately referred to by such a term, with the most prominent example being Theodore Kaczynski – the so-called “Unabomber”. Even Anders Breivik (frequently referred to in various media outlets as a “lone wolf”) was not a solo-perpetrator operating “in a vacuum” – he used online sources both for gathering know-how and distributing propaganda⁵. We decided the main focus should be put on the wider scope of the existing problems, even if they are not fully consistent with strict definitions of a “lone wolf”. We recognized one such problem to be the phenomenon of solo terrorists, namely people who act out of the control of an organization (which does not imply that they have never had relations with one). Another critical problem that we noticed were the so-called sleeping terrorists (“sleepers”) who can start operating years after the date when their organization deployed them – i.e. sent them on a “mission”.

Ambiguity of the notion of a lone actor is indicated by the fact that in the literature and public discourse, this term can encompass various categories of people:

- persons completely detached from any external structures and organizations, radicalizing themselves on their own, building their beliefs and views without any clear input from people from the outside (namely not subject to indoctrination; not being under the influence of persuasion or suggestions from outside);
- persons detached from external structures (and not seeking to contact them) but who are under the influence of a radical ideology whose recommendations or instructions they can access e.g. via the Internet (readers of extremist websites,

³ See e.g.: H. Borrión, *Quality assurance in crime scripting*, “Crime Science – An Interdisciplinary Journal” 2013, Vol. 2, pp. 1–12; R. V. Clarke, J. E. Eck, *Crime Analysis For Problem Solvers In 60 Small Steps*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. Washington D.C., 2005, p. 35.

⁴ See e.g. Center for Terror Analysis, *The threat from solo terrorism and lone wolf terrorism*, April 5, 2011; E. Bakker, B. de Graaf, *Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: some CT Approaches Addressed*, “Perspective on Terrorism” 2011, Vol. 5, issues 5–6.

⁵ A. Seierstad, *One of Us. The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacre in Norway*, New York 2013.

discussion forums, community websites; audience members of online preaching, identifying with an ideology or a programme of an organization or terrorist group);

– “solo terrorists” (persons looking for contact with terrorist organizations, which often give them training support, on their own initiative, who at the same time are not members, but only supporters);

– perpetrators-emissaries, associated with a terrorist organization and “delegated” to conduct a lone attack;

– returning fighters (persons returning from war zones e.g. from Syria or Iraq), who after contact with real frontline situations return to their home countries and undertake independent attempts to extend the conflict zone;

– “sleeper” terrorists (persons connected with terrorist organizations, deployed to a target country and living within the local society, awaiting the right moment to attack);

– perpetrators who are defined in criminological and criminal literature as “mass murderers” – e.g. perpetrators of school shootings or persons deciding to commit a so-called “extended suicide”; they may connect their behaviour with some ideology, beliefs or a specific philosophy, however it is difficult to find more features in their motivation which would be typical of the above categories of terrorists and extremists. It needs to be stressed, however, that some of the prominent examples of these perpetrators who (at the time of their crime) were labelled “mass murderers” would most probably be named “lone actor terrorists” nowadays, due to the fact that their ideology and target selection would immediately draw attention not to the sheer fact of the crime, but to the motivation and ideology behind it (a perfect example being James Oliver Huberty⁶, the perpetrator of the 1984 San Ysidro shooting (with death toll of 21), whose neo-Nazi statements and targeting of Mexican victims would most likely result in naming him a “lone wolf extremist” if his heinous crime were to happen today). The opposite situation is equally likely, as run-over attacks (frequent problem in Israel, according to our interlocutors from Israel Defence Forces) that are clearly terrorist in nature (such as the July 14, 2016 attack in Nice, France) were labelled as “mass murders” up to late 1990s.

It is worth noting that perpetrators located in the above categories do in fact have some (larger or smaller) connections to terrorist organizations. It is a kind of a paradox, since, as indicated above, the essence of this phenomenon lies in the absence of such connections. Yet it appears from the literature and our discussions with practitioners that the most significant problem is not the lone actors in the strict sense of that word, but persons acting “like lone actors”.

The acts of terrorism of lone actors have to be examined also as a strategy knowingly used by leading terrorist organizations. Using such “strategy” is

⁶ K. Gradoń, *Zabójstwo wielokrotne. Profilowanie kryminalne*, Warszawa 2010, p. 27.

openly advocated and encouraged by both Al-Qaeda – in this context the widely propagated “haemorrhage operation”⁷ is worth mentioning – and ISIS⁸. Declarations of the so-called “Islamic State” leaders point, for example, to plans to send terrorists to Europe among groups of immigrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea; the *modus operandi* of such terrorists in Europe assumes using the tactics of individually operating agents. This strategy would seem to capitalise on the fact that, though they are sent by an organization, their relation with the organization ends in the country that they leave; in Europe, they start functioning as persons without any connections and then they attack at an appropriate moment.

Some specialists share the view that a lone actor terrorist in the strict sense of the word does not exist, because in almost all cases there is some organization operating in the background of their actions. In Jean-Pierre Filiu’s opinion, the goal of jihadists is to convince the community, which is the target of potential attacks, that lone actors threaten them, since this arouses greater fear, and in turn this fear causes more emotional and, as a consequence, less professional actions aimed at preventing and countering this phenomenon⁹.

Therefore, considering the above reservations, we decided that the phenomenon of terrorism of lone actors shall be examined both in the context of lone actors in the strict sense and lone actors in the wider sense (and as such also solo terrorists, terrorists-emissaries, returning fighters and “sleepers”). We have left out the phenomenon of mass homicides from our considerations, as we aimed to focus on the problems that are univocally considered “terrorist” in nature both by the academic and law-enforcement communities. The literature devoted to the issue of lone actor extremists draws attention to potential obstacles to the implementation of prevention and countermeasures against this kind of terrorism. For instance, they include the attackers’ ease of mobility afforded by modern transport, communications, security, democratic legal systems, access to arms and vulnerability of targets¹⁰. Some of these appeared also in the comments of the interlocutors (practitioners) that we interviewed; they also mentioned other aspects hitherto omitted in the literature or mentioned in a slightly different context, as for example so-called weaknesses of the democratic system permitting the perpetrators to promote their ideas widely during court pro-

⁷ Broadly propagated for instance in the “Inspire” magazine published by Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula.

⁸ See <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/isis-calls-lone-wolf-attacks-uk-iraq-intervention-1469694> (visited June 6, 2015).

⁹ J. Kapiszewski, *Europę czeka zamach. A dżihadysty chcą, abyśmy uwierzyli w “samotne wilki”*, at <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/489664,arabista-jean-pierre-filiu-o-grozbie-zamachow-w-europie-islamie-dzihadzie-i-wojnie-w-syrii.html> (visited June 6, 2015).

¹⁰ J.-L. Striegher, *Early detection of the lone wolf: advancement of counter-terrorism investigations with an absence or abundance of information and intelligence*, “Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism” 2013, Vol. 8, issue 1, pp. 5–35.

ceedings. Our interlocutors mentioned this in relation to what they perceive as “excessive antidiscrimination policies”.

Bearing in mind the need to define the object of our studies, it is also important to point out that the context analysis and the constraints inventoried relate to the terrorism of lone actors, regardless of whether they represent views that are extremely left- or right-wing or promote the idea of “jihad”. However, bearing in mind that many of our interlocutors indicated the threat of “jihad”-inspired lone actors as the most urgent problem, in our reports we have paid most attention to “jihad”-inspired lone actors. In the face of increasing activity of the self-styled “Islamic State”, the view that “Islamic terrorism considered as a major political threat [with] far-reaching consequences”¹¹ is likely to remain prominent.

The methodology of our lone-actor context analysis consisted of literature review, open source data collection, legal queries, consultations and interviews with practitioners and subject matter experts, as well as the use of surveys (questionnaires) concerning the subject of the PRIME Project. As indicated in the first paragraph of this article, the full Reports of the PRIME Project are classified (due to confidentiality clauses and the delicate nature of the topic of research), and for the purpose of this publication it is only possible to present selected outcomes of our study. Hereinafter, the original results of the pilot part of the context analysis are presented – namely the outcomes of the surveys/questionnaires.

While selecting the study population, we focused on practitioners (representatives of law-enforcement agencies and security services). The first survey included a group of fifty persons and was conducted in Warsaw. The second survey for the purpose of comparison of opinions on threats connected with the phenomena of lone actor extremism, radicalization and attacks, was conducted in India, where questionnaires were handed over to eighty top-ranking officers with at least 20 years of professional experience, representing all 29 states of India (response rate was 54 persons). We also sent the same questions to 25 police and intelligence officers in Europe and North America, but received a very low response rate; therefore, we decided to exclude them from further analysis. We decided to use only (in the form of quotes) several qualitative remarks included in them, of particular relevance from the point of view of the PRIME Project. Due to the specificity of the target groups, every set of studies had been consulted earlier with representatives of the tested environments and the questionnaires were adjusted for a given group. The questionnaire conducted in India was shortened because we were informed that the tested persons were not able to devote sufficient time to completing the questionnaires.

Due to the specific nature of the audience that we approached, it was not possible to prepare neither a quantitative nor qualitative study in accordance with

¹¹ R. Haverkamp, *The prognosis of terrorist attacks – limits of scientific findings*, “Crime Law Soc Change” 2014, Vol. 62, pp. 257–268.

the rules governing sociological research. Since we could not get permission from the authorities governing the law-enforcement agencies and security services to perform personal interviews with their officers (only 2 agencies out of 8 agreed to that), we understood that proper qualitative research was not possible to achieve. Similarly, we were not able to draw a representative sample, because it was not possible to enforce the completion of the questionnaire by the drawn respondents, due to the lack of explicit permission of the agencies to question the specific individuals. Taking into account the specific audience, we were only able to choose between an estimated study (that is: the general questionnaire) or terminating the empirical part of our contextual analysis.

The Warsaw survey (performed in January and February 2015) involved 50 participants. All tested persons represented the broad sector of the law-enforcement, security and criminal justice system. Among them, 30 persons were officers of the following services: the Polish National Police, the Internal Security Agency and the Polish Border Guard. The remaining participants were law practitioners (judges, prosecutors and attorneys) as well as scientists specializing in the issues of evidence law and forensic and investigative sciences (i.e. subject matter experts). Due to the nature of the work of the surveyed individuals, who are officers of the law-enforcement and security services, the surveys were developed in such a way as to make it impossible to identify respondents (especially subject matter experts). Therefore, the surveys did not include demographic questions nor questions about the institution in which a given person was employed. Questions included in the survey were prepared during a workshop conducted earlier at the University of Warsaw, in which some of the respondents took part. Our respondents did not answer all the questions included in the questionnaires. Mostly, they avoided answering open-ended questions. Therefore, we analysed only the representative questions i.e. the questions answered by all of the surveyed persons and which were of essential value for the purpose of this context analysis.

The first question was: “How serious in your opinion is the threat from ‘lone wolf’ terrorists in Europe?”. The range of possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, was as follows:

1. No danger. 0% (0 persons),
2. Low danger. 4% (2 persons),
3. Average danger. 8% (4 persons),
4. High danger. 88% (44 persons),
5. Extreme danger. 0% (0 persons).

The second question was: “How serious in your opinion is the threat from ‘lone wolf’ terrorists in Poland?”. The range of possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, was as follows:

1. No danger. 4% (2 persons),
2. Low danger. 34% (17 persons),
3. Average danger. 40% (20 persons),

4. High danger. 22% (11 persons),
5. Extreme danger. 0% (0 persons).

The third question was: “How serious a danger in your opinion does terrorism of lone actors pose in relation to any other type of terrorist threats?” The range of possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, we as follows:

1. Lower danger. 22% (11 persons),
2. Comparable danger. 38% (19 persons),
3. Higher danger. 40% (20 persons).

The fourth question was: “From among the following categories who poses the most serious threat in your opinion at this moment?” During the analysis of the results, we ranked the respondents’ answers according to the significance assigned by the participants (together with the percentage of respondents who chose each option):

- Perpetrators acting within terrorist organizations. 32% (16 persons),
- Returning foreign fighters (e.g. persons returning from conflict zones in Syria or Iraq). 20% (10 persons),
- Perpetrators – emissaries “delegated” to singlehandedly perform an attack. 18% (9 persons),
- Perpetrators acting alone, but identifying with an ideology or programme of organizations or terrorist groups. 10% (5 persons),
- “ Sleeper ” terrorists (those associated with terrorist organizations, embedded in Western society, waiting for the right moment to attack). 8% (4 persons),
- “ Solo terrorists ” (persons on their own initiative seeking contact with terrorist organizations, which often give them training support, but these persons are not their members but sympathizers only). 8% (4 persons),
- Perpetrators completely detached from any external structures. 4% (2 persons).

The fifth question was: “Please rate the ability to undertake effective counter-terrorism activities at each of the following stages”. The table below presents the answers given by respondents:

	Relatively easy	Difficult	Very difficult	Impossible
Radicalization	22% (11 persons)	36% (18 persons)	34% (17 persons)	8% (4 persons)
Attack Preparation	8% (4 persons)	60% (30 persons)	32% (16 persons)	0% (0 persons)
Attack	8% (4 persons)	22% (11 persons)	62% (31 persons)	8% (4 persons)

The sixth question was: “Please compare the ability of undertaking effective counter-terrorism activities at each of the following stages, providing numbers from 1 to 3 (where 1 is the most difficult operation, and 3 is the easiest operation)”. The table below presents the answers given by respondents:

	1 (the most difficult)	2	3 (the easiest)
Radicalization	16% (8 persons)	20% (10 persons)	64% (32 persons)
Attack Preparation	16% (8 persons)	68% (34 persons)	16% (8 persons)
Attack	72% (36 persons)	12% (6 persons)	16% (8 persons)

The answers provided in the questionnaires were generally in agreement with the results received during the discussion workshop conducted at the University of Warsaw. In the opinion of Polish respondents, the threat from “lone-actor” perpetrators is above average within the territory of Europe. The risk of occurrence of such events as terrorist attacks by lone actors is rated as low or average for Poland. When comparing the seriousness of the threat of attacks by “lone actors” to other forms of terrorism, a majority of respondents recognized it as comparable or higher.

The opinion of respondents asked to rank the threats from different forms of terrorism according to the criterion of their significance proved especially interesting. Based on the results of the discussion conducted during the workshops (when it was indicated that the term “lone actors” can be understood in various ways) we assumed detailed division of “lone actors” into subgroups, as suggested. While the control category of perpetrators acting within terrorist organizations received the highest individual percentage of votes (32%), all the remaining categories (each of them being a subtype of “lone actors”) received a total of 68% of votes. Thus, we can assume that almost 70% of respondents consider one of the forms of “lone-wolf terrorism” as more dangerous than the “traditional” form of group-based terrorism.

With regard to the possibility of undertaking an efficient intervention connected and aimed at prevention and counteraction against escalation of the behaviour of lone actors at one of the stages assumed in the PRIME Project (Radicalization, Attack Preparation, Attack), the vast majority of respondents decided that in relation to extremists radicalizing and moving on to the action phase, actual intervention at any stage is difficult, very difficult or simply impossible. The answers of respondents indicating the probability of undertaking effective intervention at the stage of Radicalization indicate some chances of success – this answer was provided by 22% of respondents.

A similar mechanism can be observed in the answers to the question in which respondents were asked to compare between the probabilities of undertaking efficient intervention. The surveyed persons were in a way “forced” to decide on some hierarchy of values of the chances of efficient intervention and when answering the question formulated in such a manner they decided that intervention seemed the easiest at the stage of Realization (64% of respondents). 68% of the respondents recognized the Attack Preparation phase as a stage of average difficulty with regard to undertaking an intervention. The Attack phase was clearly recognized as the most difficult in terms of prevention (72% of answers).

Taking advantage of the opportunity provided by my participation in a training visit to India (co-leading a course at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy in Hyderabad, India in May 2015), we conducted a survey concerning the issue of lone-actor terrorism there. The surveys were adjusted to the time possibilities of the group of training participants, all of whom were officers of the Indian Police of the highest rank (from Deputy Inspector General up) representing the 29 States of India. Questions and protocols were developed in such a way as to make it impossible to identify particular respondents. Therefore, the surveys did not include demographic questions nor questions concerning the institution in which the given person was employed. Questionnaires were given to 80 persons and responses were received from 54 persons. Before the start of the survey, the participants were informed about the purposes and tasks of the PRIME Project.

As in the case of the survey conducted in Warsaw, our respondents did not answer all the questions contained in the surveys, avoiding answering the open-ended questions, we analysed the representative questions, i.e. those questions answered by all respondents, which were of essential value for the purposes of this context analysis. The percentage of answers was rounded up to the nearest full value. In the case of answers to open-ended questions the selection of essential citations is given at the end.

The first closed-ended question was: “Does your job involve dealing with lone-actor [LA], extremism or terrorism threats?”. Possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Yes: 74% (40 persons),
2. No: 16% (14 persons).

The second closed-ended question was: “It’s commonplace to rank lone-actor terrorists as one of the main terrorist threats faced by the world today. Do you agree?”. The possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Yes: 92% (50 persons),
2. No: 8% (4 persons).

The third closed-ended question was: “In your opinion, is the lone-actor threat a serious risk for your country (India)?”. Possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Yes: 89% (48 persons),
2. No: 11% (6 persons).

The fourth closed-ended question was: “How do you rank the lone-actor threat relative to other kinds of terrorist threats (like group-sponsored terrorism) – in terms of likelihood and potential for damage?”. The possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Very high: 22% (12 persons),
2. High: 48% (26 persons),

3. Average: 26% (14 persons),
4. Low: 4% (2 persons),
5. Very Low: 0% (0 persons).

The fifth close-ended question was: “The common perception is also that detecting the lone-actor threat early is a ‘needle in a haystack’ scenario. Either you get lucky or you can do little more than mitigate the damage. Do you agree?”. The possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Yes: 74% (40 persons),
2. No: 26% (14 persons).

The sixth and last closed-ended question was: “We divide the lone-actor terrorism process into three stages of: Radicalization, Attack Preparation, and Attack. When do you feel the threat stands the best chance of being countered?”. The possible answers, including the percentage of respondents who selected the relevant options, were as follows:

1. Radicalization: 44% (24 persons),
2. Attack Preparation: 56% (30 persons),
3. Attack: 0% (0 persons).

From the above answers to closed-ended questions it appears that there is high awareness of threats from lone-actor terrorism among our sample of senior officers of the Indian Police. A majority of the surveyed persons have contact with the problem of the threat connected with extremism and terrorism (including “lone-actor” type) in their work (74% of tested persons).

The Indian Police officers consider lone-wolf terrorism as a very serious danger in the current world (92% of respondents) and in India (89% of persons). Comparing the extremism of lone-actor terrorism to other forms of terrorism, the vast majority of the surveyed persons consider lone actor terrorism to be a more dangerous phenomenon (a total of 70% of indications). The pessimistic conclusion that profiling and detection of lone-actor threats is like “looking for a needle in a haystack”, has overall dominance.

With regard to the possibility of undertaking an efficient intervention connected with the prevention and counteraction against the escalation of the behaviour of the “lone-wolf” perpetrators at one of the stages assumed in the PRIME Project (Radicalization, Attack Preparation, Attack), 44% of the surveyed persons decided that effective intervention can be undertaken as early as at the Radicalization stage and as many as 56% of persons recognized that effective intervention actions are possible at the Attack Preparation stage.

Respondents were also asked about the obstacles that they are coming across when commissioning, designing or implementing interventions that address lone-actor terrorist or extremist threats. Unfortunately, not all of the respondents answered; the most common answers typed by almost all of the surveyed persons who decided to complete this part of the surveys were:

- Legal constraints,
- Lack of understanding of the threat,
- Lack of interagency co-operation,
- Lack of co-operation from communities.

Explanation of some of the above conclusions is sometimes detailed in (not many) answers to open-ended questions. Below we quote the answers recognized as essential and interesting from the point of view of the PRIME Project.

One of the open-ended questions was: “In your job, do you deal with the LA/terrorism/extremism threat in general, or do you deal with particular kinds of LAs (e.g. Jihadist terrorists, left/right wing extremists; returning foreign fighters, etc.)?”. Answers were very interesting and showed the specificity of threats, which the Indian Police have to deal with. The respondents who decided to answer often underlined that from a wide range of lone-actor perpetrators, those representing leftist extremism (acting under the influence of a form of communist ideology named Naxal Terrorism specific for India) are their most frequent enemies. Responses indicating Islamic terrorism and responses concerning foreign fighters returning from other conflict zones also appeared.

One open-ended question was the question in which respondents were asked to elaborate on their statements concerning the stage at which undertaking effective intervention (Radicalization, Attack Preparation, Attack) would be possible. Unfortunately, not many participants decided to do this.

Respondents who marked the Radicalization stage to be the one at which one can attempt to prevent further action of the perpetrator indicated for example that:

- “It is the time when one can start to maintain vigilance on potential lone actors. Cyber security experts and behavioural psychologists can (assess them) together with other security experts. At this stage, security forces get more time”;
- “It is (when it is) easy to legally/technically act and monitor. Chances of wearing away the prospective lone actor are high”;
- “Prevention is better than cure. It is possible with community policing”;
- “A radicalized lone actor is a potential time bomb and can operate any time. It is better to stop radicalization at its very base, at its initial stage”;
- “When source of radicalization is identified, we can introduce the proper intervention. Surveillance would be helpful”;
- “That’s when it’s easy to collect Intelligence”;
- “Since Radicalization completely changes the mindset of the individual and engages them to surpass the humanitarian virtues on the wrong pretext of religious ‘jihad’ which should not find place in a civilized society. After radicalization it is a matter of logic that attack preparation and attack is bound to follow. So, rip the bud so that the crop would not grow”;
- “Keeping an eye in religious preachers and the people being indoctrinated is an easy and effective way of preventing it”.

In turn, persons who marked the Attack Preparation stage to be the one in which one can attempt to restrain further action of the perpetrator indicated for example that:

- “Not everybody who radicalizes turns into a lone actor terrorist. Focusing too much on radicalization would further alienation and secrecy. It would create more ‘us vs. them’ situations, causing more problems”;

- “Incidences of radicalization are so high that it is near to an impossible task to fix liability. At attack preparation stage, we may look for suspicious behaviour through a vigilant public”;

- “Getting signals through neighbourhood watch alerts. Website visit patterns in certain areas”;

- “During attack preparation they contact with others who are on suspects lists (friends, contacts, relatives who share the ideology), they get hardware either online or from physical market. They change behaviour during preparation phase which can raise suspicion”;

- “During the attack preparation there may be activity beyond personal sphere, which may be picked up”;

- “The preparation stage involves physical movements and collection of materials, which may leave some clues”;

- “Radicalization may not be illegal everywhere. Stopping the attack is a very difficult action. Our best chance is to catch them in the act of preparation for the attack, based on their behaviour and actions”.

Apart from the Polish and Indian questionnaires described above, we sent our surveys to 25 officers of police and intelligence agencies (in Europe and North America); unfortunately, the response rate was exceptionally low (2) and the received results were negligible from the point of view of the statistics. However, below we would like to present the opinions of those two persons, whose biographies include both long-term work in police services and subsequent academic careers (in areas related to crime and criminal justice administration). First of the respondents is a British citizen and the second is a citizen of the United States.

While the British respondent answered both questions: “It’s commonplace to rank lone-actor terrorists as one of the main terrorist threats faced by the world today. Do you agree?” and “In your opinion, is the lone-actor threat a serious risk for your country?” saying that he did not agree with such an approach, the American answered quite to the contrary, agreeing that these dangers are more serious both for the world and for the United States.

In the answer to the question: “How do you rank the lone-actor threat relative to other kinds of terrorist threats (like group-sponsored terrorism) – in terms of likelihood and potential for damage?”, the British rated the threat as “average”, whereas the American as “very high”.

As the answer to the question: “We divide lone-actor terrorism process into the three stages of: Radicalization, Attack Preparation, and Attack. When do you feel the threat stands the best chance of being countered?”, the British respondent marked the “Attack Preparation”, commenting: “There are too many false positives in identifying radicalized individuals (although this must still be attempted. Immediately before there are often a number of clues (in hindsight) that aren’t acted upon”. In turn, the American selected the answer: “Radicalization”, commenting “Once the attack preparations start it is only a matter of luck if we are successful in disrupting them”.

Of course, these two sets of opinions cannot lead to any conclusions, however they suggest that it is worth conducting a broad comparative analysis concerning the issue of “lone-actor extremist events” in the United States and in Great Britain and to diagnose the approach of practitioners in both of these countries to these types of threats.

As mentioned earlier, due to confidentiality issues and the classified status of our work, this article cannot provide a full account of our analysis concerning operational constraints affecting prevention, interdiction and mitigation of the lone actor extremism and terrorism. The aforementioned questionnaires are presented as an exception, but in order to provide Readers with more thorough findings of our preliminary research, the final part of the paper summarises the PRIME Context Analysis findings drawn from interviews with practitioners, workshops, surveys and questionnaires. The following conclusions can be considered as a list of the difficulties faced by law enforcement agencies and security services when tackling lone actor terrorism:

1. Absence of a commonly adopted and accepted, uniform definition of lone-actor terrorism;
2. Risk posed by overstating or over-focusing upon any given threat (e.g. Islamic terrorism) at any given time, with regards to neglecting other threats;
3. Nature of lone-actor extremists and terrorists’ population, who tend to constitute an offender population which is “off the radar”, in comparison to group actors, meaning that many existing tools, procedures, policies and practices already in place to combat terrorism are not adapted to this aspect of the problem;
4. Continuing shortcomings of the existing knowledge base on radicalisation generally and lone actors specifically;
5. Continuing shortcomings of the knowledge base on effective prevention messaging;
6. Data-sharing and broader restrictions to collaboration between security agencies and academia;
7. Increasing complexity introduced by new technologies, with regards to the radicalisation and offence behaviour of lone actors, presenting challenges to law enforcement and other practitioners in terms of keeping up with developments

(in terms of technological proficiency, academic research results, training, resources, and so on);

8. Lack of specialist training calibrated for threats caused by attacks by “lone actors”;

9. So-called “legislative chaos”, which impacts the operational context, making the standardization of regulations and improvement of procedures governing combating terrorist threats difficult;

10. Barriers to inter-agency cooperation and dominance of law enforcement agencies in the criminal justice system’s dealings in the domains of extremism and terrorism control;

11. Lack of legal provisions that would make the long-term (multiannual) and strategic use of operational work tools (such as the operational control) possible. The use of these instruments is, according to security practitioners, hampered by restrictive legal provisions;

12. Possible impact of the influx of refugees and migrants, as well as “foreign fighters”, arriving or returning from conflict zones (which ties in to the cultural issues regarding the law-enforcement agencies and security services familiarity and understanding (or lack thereof) of communities from which lone actors might emerge;

13. Absence of what our interlocutors thought of as a sound immigration policy addressing what they perceive as real dangers, notably in the context of an unprecedented influx of refugees to Europe;

14. Under-financing of special services that are necessary to keep up with the increased expenses of operational activity (especially including the operational control) associated with a significant influx of refugees, and the lack of recourses and means for the tasks associated with that phenomenon;

15. Lack of familiarity and trust among certain communities as against refugees and migrants, which law-enforcement agencies and security services worry could become “nurseries” for lone actors;

16. Barriers to communication and cooperation between security agencies and communities more generally;

17. Problems related to so-called “political correctness”, which, as perceived by some of our interlocutors, hinders the effective design and implementation of measures to counter terrorist threats;

18. Regulations concerning personal data protections, which are, per the assessment of many of our interlocutors, maladapted to current threats;

19. Insufficiencies of supra-national operational databases used for preventing and combating terrorism and enabling information exchange (including digital and biometric data) between countries;

20. Incompatibility of existing databases;

21. Noticeable problems in the tele-information structure (especially in terms of providing data transmission security) in some European countries;

22. Unrealistically short period, as assessed by participants, of operational data retention, which does not allow for strategic (long-term) planning of law-enforcement actions;

23. Excessive bureaucracy and political interference hindering operational police work;

24. Challenges presented by the availability of unregistered pre-paid SIM-cards and insufficient legal and technical provisions to address this challenge;

25. Insufficient attention paid to the potential of financial analysis in relation to the phenomena of an extremist and terrorist nature, with implications for training and resources available to undertake this kind of work.

Summary

The author presents the de-classified preliminary findings of the European Commission funded FP7 research project PRIME, dealing with extremism, radicalization and lone-actor terrorism (also known as “lone wolf terrorism”). The article provides partial results of the research consisting of a context analysis of the lone actor threat, that is a description of a range of identified contextual elements which may affect the relevance, adoption, implementation or exploitation of the PRIME Project’s final deliverables (counter- and communication measures requirements portfolios), including differences in culture and legislation across Europe, as well as operational (law-enforcement-related and stakeholder-identified) constraints. The article presents a host of definitional issues related to “lone wolf terrorism”, provides results of the surveys/questionnaires performed in Poland and India and ends with a summary of the problems, constraints and obstacles to the successful and efficient use of operational procedures available for the law-enforcement and security agencies and institutions, based on data gathered through engagement activities with security practitioners.

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Ekstremizm, radykalizacja, terroryzm, samotni sprawcy, terroryzm samotnych wilków, PRIME, zwalczanie terroryzmu, policja, wywiad, służby specjalne