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PReventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremists events: Defending against lone actor extremism

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Executive Summary

Preventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremist events (PRIME) is a collaborative research project funded under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The main purpose of PRIME is to improve understanding of lone actor terrorism and to deliver a knowledge-base that can inform the design of counter-measures and communication measures for the prevention, interdiction and mitigation of lone actor extremist events (LAEEs). This report summarises the findings of Task 8.1 of PRIME Work Package 8: Communication Measures Requirements (WP8). WP8 encompasses all activities involved in the formulation of requirements for communication measures aimed at preventing, interdicting or mitigating lone actor extremist events. This work is being conducted in the UK and Denmark, countries with comparable counter violent radicalisation programmes, but quite different experiences of lone actor extremism. The similarities in policies and differences in experiences make these countries ideal for assessing how counterterrorism communication measures and their effects might depend on national CVR discourses and experiences.

The objective of this review was to analyse good practice and identify gaps in communication measures intended to defend against lone actor extremist events. This objective was met using four data sets: i) an academic literature review, ii) a review of public facing reports and documents (grey literature), iii) a media analysis and, iv) interviews with stakeholders. A framework and definitions for analysis were developed to support systematic analysis of communication materials and guidance. This framework identified 15 communication categories of interest for outward facing communication materials, according to two dimensions of interest; message type and audience type. To capture communication measures across all stages of LAEEs, messages were identified and analysed according to whether they were aimed at (1) preventing radicalisation, (2) detecting, disrupting or stopping terrorist activity, or (3) responding to – or preparing for response to – terrorist activity in order to minimise impact and facilitate return to normal following an attack. The second dimension of interest – audience type – maximised the range of communication measures included in this analysis. Five broad categories of audience were identified for this purpose: the general public, business/private sector, educational sector, affected communities and the potentially vulnerable or already radicalised.

Clear across these sources, particularly the interviews and grey literature, was that stakeholders view LAEEs as a prominent concern and recognise the importance of communications within wider counter-terrorism activity. Several practitioners indicated that additional communications, greater coordination or focus on communications is required. Despite this, data sources in both countries indicate that there has been little focus to date on communication measures designed to address LAEEs. Very few communications specifically focused on LAEEs having been developed although some

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specific communications, that it could generate disproportionate fear and that it is difficult to know how to target communications to potential lone actors.

Although very little academic research has been conducted concerning communicating about LAEEs, the literature does identify effective communication as an integral component in the prevention, interdiction and mitigation of terrorism more broadly. The main insight for communication from the academic literature that focused specifically on lone actor events was in relation to the importance of information leakage in the interdiction of LAEEs and the need, therefore, for communication measures that encourage reporting behaviour. However, very little guidance was provided either in the lone actor literature reviewed or the wider terrorism literature regarding good practice for communicating to encourage this behaviour. As such, despite insights from neighbouring areas, this appears to be an important gap to be addressed.

Analysis of UK and Danish media coverage of 'lone wolf terrorism' found that in both countries reporting has been largely event driven and that more attention has been afforded to Islamist than Far-Right LAEEs (in large part because there have been more Islamist LAEEs). Few official counter-terrorism campaigns featured in articles that focused on 'lone wolf' terrorism in either country although a small number of specific pieces of advice were provided. Following LAEEs UK messages primarily focused on the need to be vigilant and report suspicious behaviour, whereas Danish articles tended to focus on reassuring the public. The typical Danish framing of lone actors characterised them as mentally ill, violent, criminal and isolated and did not particularly differentiate between Islamist and Far Right actors. The UK media used similar framings, b(s)JTJ E7h()inishla6d1.6(d)-314.6(o)1.6.(g)-9.2(s)10.8(,)-374.2(b(s)JTJ

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1. Introduction

PREventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremist events (PRIME) is a collaborative research project funded under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The main purpose of PRIME is to improve understanding of lone actor terrorism and to deliver a knowledge-base that can inform the design of counter-measures and communication measures for the prevention, interdiction and mitigation of lone actor extremist events (LAEs)

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interest – audience type – maximised the range of communication measures included in this analysis. Initially five broad categories of audience were identified for this purpose: (1) the general public, (2) business/private sector, (3) educational sector, (4) affected communities (communities that may be particularly affected by terrorism in a range of ways, such as becoming the targets of hate crime following a terrorist event)

and to encourage the reporting of any suspicious behaviour. The literature reviewed provided no guidance regarding the most effective way to deliver these messages.

There is more academic literature concerning communications to mitigate terrorism. This literature outlines the centrality of factoring in public perceptions of risk and the importance of communication in mitigating the social, psychological, health and economic impacts of terrorism. The information provided should be accurate and consistent to maintain trust, which is the biggest predictor of responses to messages. Timing is important; delays in the provision of information should be avoided where possible to avoid increasing fear levels and counter rumours. Balancing the need to provide strong enough messages for not particularly interested audiences to pay attention to without being seen as scaremongering is extremely challenging for prevent communications. Contextual and cultural differences need to be accounted for and communication should be tailored to meet the needs of the population at risk. Media portrayal of events can alter risk perceptions; trusted relationships with the media should be established in order to manage this. Traditional practices of crisis communication, based on the notion of a crisis as a consequence of a single cause and characterised by a clear beginning and end, may not be appropriate for terrorist attacks because of the potential multiple causes, different dynamics and involvement of various actors and environments that characterise terrorism. Although relationships between organisations and agencies may be complex, intra and inter-departmental co-operation is an essential part of any communication strategy and recent analysis has indicated that a lack of co-ordination of information flows is a severe problem during terrorism crisis situations.

3. Media analysis

A content analysis of UK and Danish national newspaper coverage of LAEEs between 1st January 2009 and 28th February 2015 was conducted in order to: (1) establish the extent to which the media acts as a conduit for counter-terrorism messages and guidance in the context of LAEEs, (2) review the content of counter-terrorism messages and guidance in the context of LAEEs, and (3) explore the ways that the media frames lone actor extremists in order to establish the communicative context in which counter-terrorism messages are likely to be received. Online databases were used to source articles that included synonyms of 'lone wolf' and 'terrorism'. Articles that were under 200 words long, that appeared in regional editions or that, on review, did not pertain to lone actor terrorism were excluded from the analysis. This produced a final sample of 219 UK articles and 97 Danish articles.

3.1 UK media coverage of LAEEs

UK media coverage of LAEEs increased during the period under focus, rising steadily from 2 articles in 2009 to 69 in 2014 (the last full year analysed). This reflects the fact that coverage of 'lone wolves' is primarily event driven, with clear spikes following incidents and there was a cluster of lone actor events towards the end of 2014. Media commentary often depicts lone actors as an increasing or significant problem. Of the 106 articles that discussed the likelihood or scale of the threat posed by LAEEs, 63.2% characterised lone actor terrorism as a frequent or large problem and 28.3% described it as an increasing problem. Only five articles framed lone actor terrorism as a rare phenomenon.

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interdiction and mitigation of LAEEs, and (2) identify potential gaps and opportunities to support existing work. The interview schedule was designed for use with government and security services stakeholders and then adapted for interviews with businesses, community groups and faith institutions that act both as an audience and a conduit for government and security services messages. Interviews lasted one hour and were conducted between May and October 2015 at times and locations that were convenient for participants. In total 22 UK stakeholders were interviewed; 9 from police and security services, 3 from central government, 4 from local authorities, 4 from community/faith organisations and 2 business representatives. A total of 8 stakeholders were interviewed in Denmark; 4 from police and security services and 4 from local prevention programme providers and community outreach programmes. Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

The grey literature review focused on: (1) reports and other official documents that describe or provide guidance for communication measures that have been used to prevent, interdict or mitigate terrorism, and (2) examples of written communication measures (e.g. leaflets, web-pages) that are currently used to prevent, interdict or mitigate terrorism. As such the grey literature review included all current communications designed to prevent, interdict or mitigate terrorism. The grey literature

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Message Category	Purpose	Example
Counter / Alternative Narrative	Undermine terrorist narratives and introduce doubt into minds of vulnerable individuals	
Topic-Specific Education	Increase knowledge of sensitive topics thus increasing resilience to extremist narratives	Details of UK aid and support to Syrian population
Inclusion and Identity	Promote idea of an inclusive British society and encourage integration	Information about how UK system works / opportunities available
Explaining Prevent and Channel	Widen stakeholder understanding of Prevent to bust myths and encourage support	Prevent is about safeguarding, not spying
Promoting Specific Actions	Increase number of actors contributing to work designed to prevent radicalisation	the an

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theological undermining of ISIS narratives, ii) explanations of how policing in the UK works and, iii) dissuasion of travel to Syria.

Communications targeted towards affected communities primarily fell within the message categories: 'Explaining Prevent and Channel' and 'Promoting Specific Actions'. Combined these categories can help to counter negative representations of radicalisation prevention programmes and encourage communities to support the work of the authorities. Specific communications within these categories included: i) an explanation of why Prevent is not about spying on Muslim communities, ii) encouraging mothers to discuss radicalisation with daughters and to dissuade their children from travelling to Syria and, iii) outlining the important role parents can play in keeping young people safe. The final audience, businesses, were a lower priority than the previous four audiences but were targeted by a small number of specific communications. The primary communication was to businesses that hire out facilities for meetings and conferences, encouraging them to perform due diligence checks on those hiring the facilities to ensure that they are not being leased to extremist speakers or groups.

The timing of delivery was recognised as important and it was suggested that it should

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communicated the importance of: i) utilising existing relationships to talk about any concerns and having an open and empathetic approach, ii) speaking with colleagues about concerns and arranging a network meeting for any required intervention and, iii) accessing government support for a mentor and other resources. Communications with radicalised individuals occurred primarily through mentoring programmes which, through coaching techniques, were designed to generate a positive change in the mentee's life and lead the individual away from radicalisation and radical milieus. Messages to the individual varied on a case by case basis but the key messages at the onset were that: i) having a mentor is voluntary, ii) information shared will be confidential but will be shared with a 'mentor consultant' (a senior member of the

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particularly important: (1) the legal and organisational challenges of collaboration and partnership working between agencies, such as information sharing, (2) cultural differences between agencies that may prevent agreement on what intervention is required. For instance, teachers will usually focus on the student's general well-being, a social worker could prioritise the wider family situation whilst police officers may be more concerned with illegal activity, (3) the difficulty of communicating about objectives and success criteria, (4) communicating with audiences that have low levels of trust in the government, and (5) lack of experience or expertise amongst the many bodies contributing to the agenda can hinder effective communication, especially when radicalisation prevention efforts expand into new sectors and geographic places.

Danish stakeholder recommendations for prevent communications:

Develop and consolidate key messages in advance to avoid premature communication
Differentiate message and delivery models according to target groups
Communication delivery mode should ensure flexibility and scope to amend
Align communicator characteristics and messages, delivery mode and audience
Anchor communication in cross-sectional and cross-disciplinary collaboration
Prevent 'restricted code' communication and conduct pre-communications tests
Communicate clearly how sensitive data is handled among stakeholders
Manage mutual expectations by clearly stating expectations and success criteria
Develop standardised procedures for transfer of knowledge and expertise
Secure political support by keeping local politicians 'in the loop'
Be aware of the interaction between media and counter-radicalisation agendas
Specify that relationship building with affected communities takes time / resources

4.3 Communication to interdict LAEEs in the UK

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visible examples of their effectiveness (such as staff at the entrance) provide reassurance to the public but can also serve to deter potential attackers by conveying a message of likely failure.

The content of the communication and its intended audience meant that a range of different modes of delivery were used, with specific emphasis at different times. While face to face communications remained important, there was a greater emphasis on

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nothing but..." campaign. As such, the primary audiences for interdiction communications in Denmark have been private businesses and potentially radicalised individuals. No interdiction communications that focused on LAEEs specifically were identified. However, broader communications that could be relevant to LAEEs (e.g. a section in wider security workshop that covered a scenario of a shooting spree in a crowded place) were included in the analysis.

Private businesses were a high priority for Danish interdiction communications, with several campaigns, such as 'Project Aware', targeting businesses in crowded places (e.g. shopping malls and pedestrian shopping zones). The campaign aimed to increase the threat awareness of business and store managers. Its key messages were that: i) terrorism is a genuine threat, ii) there are a few rules businesses can follow to help interdict an attack, and iii) businesses need to be aware of and report suspicious activity. Other communications, delivered through workshops, posters and leaflets, focused on: i) the importance of developing a security culture in the workplace, ii) reporting and sharing knowledge about threats, and iii) providing information about target-hardening, such as systems for detecting and dealing with suspicious mail and avoiding the spread of destructive weapons and other forms of physical security. Direct communications with individuals deemed potentially radicalised centred on a series of 'preventative talks' where individuals identified as radicalised were asked to attend a meeting with the authorities. The key messages delivered at these meetings were that: i) pursuing a radical direction will have severe negative life consequences and, ii) that there are alternative avenues for communicating grievances and political claims. A tacit message of these meetings was to let the individual know that the authorities are aware of them.

The grey literature and interviews revealed relatively little on the timing of interdiction messages although the importance of early intervention was noted as well as the importance of communication following an incident to encourage vigilance. A range of delivery models were identified, with a heavy emphasis on face to face communication through workshops as well as detailed written guidance packs for businesses. One key challenge to interdiction communications was striking the appropriate balance between not scaring the public and providing enough information to enable the public to be able to assist interdiction efforts. This partly explains the lack of communications targeted at the general public. The communications that do exist focused on promoting concrete behaviours (such as not leaving luggage unattended) rather than mentioning the risk of terrorism directly. A related challenge was a conservative mind-set concerning the risk of communicating about terrorism, with public institutions fearful of making mistakes and leadership often preferring minimal public communication on the issue. Further challenges highlighted included budgetary constraints, and avoiding appearances of stigmatizing certain communities.

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Danish stakeholder recommendations for interdiction communications:

Speak to the target group's immediate concerns (e.g. service, business continuity) when delivering messages
Communicate realistic goals and parameters of interaction / intervention (e.g. sharing of sensitive data)
Adapt delivery mode to the target group and create relevance through simplicity, examples and role models
Consider carefully the physical place of message delivery
The communicator matters –through face-to-face interaction calls for good relational and personal skills.
Communicating about best practices is important in order to store and transfer knowledge and experiences.
Communicate in a timely manner that relationship-building takes time, is costly and is not easily evaluated
Cross-disciplinary/multi-agency communication, risk assessment and collaboration are essential to the timing of interdiction
Not scaring people unnecessarily and raising awareness requires carefully designed communication
Stakeholders must overcome the fear of making mistakes when communicating about interdiction
Be aware that the media may serve as a vehicle for interdict messaging but may also complicate communication
Be aware of the interaction between the media agenda and political agenda in interdiction communication.

4.5 Communication to mitigate LAEEs in the UK

Government policy documents describe communicating with the public as crucial in the context of mitigating the impacts of terrorism. As with the other types of communication measures outlined above, no communications were identified specifically to address LAEEs. However, communication campaigns such as 'Run, Hide, Tell' focus on the type of terrorist incident that could be consistent with an LAEE. For wider mitigation communications four broad categories of communication were identified. Across these four categories examples were identified during three specific time periods: i) pre-event messaging to increase preparedness, ii) event messaging to mitigate the immediate negative impacts of an event, and iii) post-event messages to encourage a swift return to 'normal'.

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Message Category	Purpose	Example
Pre-event messages		
Information / General Guidance	Support individual, community and business resilience	Information about emergency preparedness planning
Promoting Specific Actions	Reduce injury and loss of life during an event	Guidance on how to behave during a terrorist attack (e.g. "run, hide, tell")
Reassurance	Reassure the public they are being protected	You are unlikely to be a victim of a terrorist attack
Reputation Management	Encourage businesses to develop business continuity plans	You need to be able to swiftly respond if a terrorist incident were to happen
Event messages		
Information / General Guidance	Provide information about the event, counter misinformation, prevent 'panic' and support community cohesion	Correct inaccurate information about perpetrators circulating on social media
Promoting Specific Actions	Reduce injury and loss of life	Provision of evacuation instructions if event takes place in a public place
Reassurance	Reduce fear/courage	

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evacuation information during an event. Post-event communications seek to create conditions for the 'return to normality'.

The second key audience was affected communities. In this case affected communities were communities that may have been affected by the event more acutely or distinctly than the wider public, such as friends of people directly involved in the attack, communities within the geographic area of an attack, or communities that may be perceived by the wider public as being associated with perpetrators of the crime and could therefore be vulnerable to hate crime or revenge attacks. Pre-event messages primarily focused on information provision, such as explaining ahead of emergency exercises about what they might expect to see and raising awareness of why these activities are important. Post-event messages primarily fell under Information Provision and Reassurance. Examples included provision of information about the judicial process for the families of individuals arrested on terrorist charges, admitting any errors to address community criticism of police responses and providing reassurance messages about hate crime being punished, providing information regarding the support that is available and encouraging the reporting of hate crime through agencies such as Tell MAMA, which coordinates reporting of anti-Muslim attacks.

For the wider interested public, most communications were designed to provide information and to reassure. Reassurance messages were conveyed directly, such as through posters outlining the protection that is in place, as well as indirectly by the provision of uniformed security staff and initiatives like 'Project Servator', in which

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businesses to give serious consideration to the issue. This concern about reputation was also reflected in the fact that one key message was that businesses should embed communications about terrorism in the context of wider-resilience planning. Training products such as 'Project Griffin' and 'Project Argus' provided practical advice on dealing with challenges during a major event and recovering from attack, such as ensuring floor plans can be made available quickly to police. The final key audience

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UK stakeholder recommendations for mitigation communications:

Have a communication strategy in place in advance of an incident to ensure effective response

Communicate early with the public so that they can better respond to advice if an incident occurs

Communication measures should be exercised in advance of an event - including with the public

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Appendix A: Communication review framework (with examples)

COMMUNICATION CATEGORISATIONS	Prevent	Interdict	Mitigate
General Public	Promotion of the Channel Programme on UK local authority websites	"It's probably nothing but..." UK anti-terror hotline leaflets	"Run, hide and tell" leaflets on UK transport / stations
Business / Private Sector			