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Summary of the book launch
"Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe"
Ashgate, 2008, 212 pages, £ 55

The book launch was held in the Egmont Palace, on Wednesday 13 February, 2008.
The book was introduced by Professor Rik Coolsaet, EGMONT Institute (editor).

Discussants were two of the contributors:
Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and
Mr. Glenn Audenaert, Judicial Director at the Belgian Federal Police

This event was chaired by Mr. Paul Rietjens, Director General of Legal Affairs at the
Belgian FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Professor Rik Coolsaet, Director of the Programme "Security and Global Governance" of EGMONT.

Professor Coolsaet presented the main findings of the book "Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe". This book is the result of five years of informal meetings, studies, discussions and combines different theoretical approaches with novel thinking from authors coming from different countries and with different expertise.

The book is articulated around two themes. First, it attempts to establish the state of jihadi terrorism today, and second, it asks what we know about radicalisation as the main root cause of jihadi terrorism in Europe. It comprises four parts: Part 1 provides an assessment of the jihadi threat and analyses the phenomenon from a bird's eye. Part 2 gives a country perspective on the state of terrorism, with a specific focus on South East Asia, North Africa, Europe and Belgium. Part 3 looks into radicalisation as one of the main root causes of terrorism in Europe. Part 4 proposes answers from different circles to de-escalate the radicalisation process.

The state of the threat

According to Professor Coolsaet – referring to Paul Pillar's opening chapter in the book – we now live in a "post-Al Qaeda" era. We are now essentially confronted with a patchwork of self-radicalising local groups who use an opportunistic international context and international contacts as the main face of jihadi terrorism. "*Terrorism today, compared to the situation before 9/11, is very much a bottom-up dynamic*", he said. The West is not the main target of terrorism, but the Muslim world is the major victim. Furthermore, Martha Crenshaw's book chapter analyses the different forms of terrorism- from the 19th century to now- and comes to the conclusion that terrorism today is not so new compared to yesterday's terrorism.

Jihadi terrorism around the world

Professor Coolsaet emphasised that the main characteristic and booster of jihadi terrorism is its local context. It is not ideology or religion, but frustration and a sense of humiliation – real or perceived – are the engine behind jihadi terrorism. Kinship and friendship play an essential role in the radicalisation process as the social context made up by small group of friends or family thrives an individual in the path of terrorism.

Furthermore, "a" terrorist does not exist! There is no standard profile for jihadi terrorists today which implies that profiling has limited value in preventing terrorism.

Radicalisation as main root cause in Europe

According to Professor Coolsaet, it is clear that people do not get radicalised out of the context they live in. What is the role of the "zeitgeist" or "the mood" in setting an enabling environment for radicalisation? On this topic, authors disagree on whether radicalisation is only occurring within Muslim communities or also in the rest of the world population. According to him however, this "zeitgeist" similarly boosts radicalisation in each segment of societies and is an old phenomenon which has occurred in different times. *"You'll always have radicals in each era"*, he added before pointing to the three characteristics shared in all historical periods of radicalisation shown by different authors:

- * a widely shared sense of deprivation
- * an intersection of personal history and environment plays a huge role (not everyone gets radicalised or becomes a terrorist)
- * violence is always a minority's path.

We further need to make a clear distinction between the political radicalisation, boosted by the feeling of inequity, and the religious one which has to do with individuals grasping for certainties in an uncertain society!

What are the answers to radicalisation in Europe?

Prof. Coolsaet concluded by giving a brief overview of strategies for deradicalisation. We need to absorb polarisation, resist stereotypes and depart from fixation on religion. Inclusiveness is the key factor, as well as delegitimising the messenger who is the radical extremist proposing violence. In this regard, there is an urgent need for a real debate with Muslim and immigrant communities.

Professor Coolsaet concluded by stating that *"when hopes and perspectives are offered, violent radicalisation and terrorism dry up"*.

Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

Mr de Kerchove gave his view on the book based upon the questions the EU faces when designing a European policy.

First, radicalisation is of recent concern for the EU. The European answer in 2001 was repressive, but after the attacks in 2004, "the wake-up call for the EU", an overall strategy was adopted by the Council. This strategy on radicalisation covers four pillars: prevent, protect, pursue and respond, and has for main merit to rebalance the repressive approach by creating specific strategy to prevent radicalisation.

Mr. de Kerchove observed that the radicalisation process is very difficult to explain, as shown by the large number of books and studies on this topic. He agreed with Professor Coolsaet that the feeling of belonging to a group is very important in the process of radicalisation and that standard profile exists. As the London and Glasgow terrorist plot show, intellectuals may become violent as anyone else. According to him, most of the terrorists are young people who are poorly skilled, only moderately religious and in 70% of the case, they have no previous criminal record. *"Indeed, there is a risk of mixing up terrorism and integration of migrants or terrorism and the Muslim religion, though there are some links"*, he said.

Mr. De Kerchove further stressed that the EU has limited capacities to tackle radicalisation. Most of the competences still remain in the hands of the Member States. The European Commission has set up an expert group and a Situation Center has been created within the Secretariat-General of the Council. This Situation Center collects strategic intelligence and provides Ministers with *"better and better assessment of the different aspects of terrorism, such as the role of converts, the role of woman, the role of internet, the impact of returning jihadis, etc"*.

Mr de Kerchove then explained the three factors that may contribute to radicalisation as they are mentioned in the EU "Strategy on radicalisation":

- the facilitation factors: f.ex. wahhabism, financing, books, internet, prison, television.;
- the motivating factors, such as the discourse trying to convince there is a clash of civilisation, the us against them;
- the structured factors comprise a sense of deprivation, a repressive government outside Europe violating human rights and democracy and, inside Europe, discrimination, racism and islamophobia.

Nevertheless, some question rise around these topics. What about the role of the security agencies, police and social workers? Who is doing what? How to deal with the issue of freedom of speech? The EU is divided on the scope of it which implies internet and television. Furthermore, there is a different approach used by the police and by the intelligence community.

Finally, Mr. de Kerchove asked how to develop a counter-narrative, which is not perceived as a stigmatisation of one group or religion? Concerning the structural factors, he asked how to deal with islamist political actors in Muslim countries? In these regards, he stressed the importance for the EU not to use double standards.

Concluding, Mr de Kerchove stated that he agrees with Professor Coolsaet's statements that Muslims are the main victims of jihadi terrorism, that the group and the local context play an important role and that there is no standard profile of a jihadi terrorist. However, according to him, we are not only threatened by a patchwork of autonomous cells inspired by Al-Qaeda, but also by active cells directed by Al-Qaeda, entering in Europe and ready to act. So, in fact, *"we are not yet in the post-Al Qaeda era, but only entering it"*, he concluded.

Mr. Glenn Audenaert, Judicial Director at the Belgian Federal Police

Mr Audenaert assessed the state of the threat in Belgium.

According to the law enforcement community, *"radicalisation has been present in Belgium since the mid 1980s and presented a danger with regard to an evolution to terrorism"*. Different jihadi cells have been found and dismantled (8 terrorist organisations and more than 60 individuals have been convicted for terrorism and terrorism-related crimes), but the jihadi terrorist threat is still present today.

Mr. Audenaert agreed with Mr de Kerchove on the fact that *"we're not living after the Al Qaeda era. Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan are countries that are still out of control. For the moment, the Al Qaeda ideology is strong present worldwide"*. He however underlined differences in terrorism as we knew it in the '80s, the '90s and today. There are indeed different ideologies who want to change the society. Now, jihadi terrorists want to destroy our civilisation and they present a real enemy. So, *"in the foreseeable future, it will be us versus them"*, according to Mr Audenaert.

What are the answers to terrorism?

For Mr Audenaert, we cannot live in fear nor give up the 'acquis' of twenty centuries of civilisation. *"We need to assess this in a more democratic way. From a law enforcement point of view, knowledge-led policing approach is the answer"*. Key players are informants. If a group is radicalising, it will be known by informants, not by technology. Our information position is linked with partnerships: with law enforcement agencies, security services, international policy cooperation, but also other partnerships are needed. Furthermore, the "mastering of technology" is equally important, as terrorists also use high-technology.

Mr Audenaert then presented and addressed one of the biggest challenges in Belgium.

Within our population, the Muslim community is the fastest growing community with the highest degree of frustration, difficulties to have access to labour, education... *"It deserves the same opportunities as the other parts of our society, so we need to protect the Muslim community"*, he said. In order to do so, it is urgent to *"set up a real dialogue between each other. The law enforcement community can create a new initiative in order to build a partnership that could contribute to de-radicalisation"*.

In this regard, Mr. Audenaert first stressed the necessity to clearly state that the police forces and the law enforcement community have no problem with the free exercise of Islam or of any other religion, and that they are further aware that only a small minority of Muslim communities is ceased by Islamist extremism.

We acknowledge that the social-economic situation of large parts of migrant groups with a Muslim background can be a source of frustration. It is clear that there cannot be a compromise between the law enforcement and Muslim communities with regard to the acquis of the European Treaty of Human Rights.

On the other hand, *"our partners need also to accept a number of assumptions"*, he said, such as the fact that law enforcement officers are obliged to seek info with regard to criminal organisations and that these officers remain only one of the players to stimulate the emancipation and integration of the diasporic communities.

Mr Audenaert concluded by stressing that *"if we succeed to establish and uphold a trilateral structured dialogue between the academic world, the Muslim and law enforcement community, then we have already made progress"*.

Q & A session

Questioned about the stronghold of Al Qaeda in Pakistan, Afghanistan and in Iraq, Professor Coolsaet answered that to understand terrorism, one needs to look at the local context and the role of bottom-up dynamics. There is, according to him, no direct link with Al Qaeda in Europe, even if links between individuals living in Europe and the Afghan-Pakistan border clearly exist.

In Iraq there is a mixture of Sunni tribes, freedom fighters against the USA occupation and foreign jihadis. Now, the Sunni tribes are fighting against the foreign jihadis. Their threat is much less than three years ago. He also repeated that a clear distinction must be made between political and religious radicalisation, because the root causes are different.

Mr de Kerchove addressed the question of the EU aligning itself to the USA. To a certain extent, this is correct, but *"our approach is much more balanced"*, he said. *"It is important to balance the need to get as much information as possible and the right on privacy"*. Currently, the EU has a

regular dialogue with the United States, notably expressing disagreement on the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo. For instance, the 27 EU legal counsellors meet on a two monthly basis with USA legal advisors of the State Department to tackle those questions.

He advocated furthering cooperation with the USA, because the recent terrorist plots in Denmark and Germany were discovered thanks to intense cooperation of European security agencies and mainly thanks to the USA information. He said that the EU has to share more information with the USA. Therefore, the EU needs to have a level playing field concerning data protection. For the EU, the focus is put on prevention.

Mr Audenaert agreed with a statement of a participant that there is a link between poverty and criminality. The question of economic emancipation plays here a role. But, to help integrating Muslims in Europe, the focus should also be on education, language skills, access to knowledge, etc. The strategic objective is further to seek key players in Muslim communities to talk with them and to establish a real dialogue.