THE VIOLENT TOLL OF KINETIC COUNTERTERRORISM: REVITALIZING NON-KINETIC COUNTERTERRORISM MODEL

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Abstract

The world has been witnessing various waves of terrorism and violent extremism for more than last 2000 years. The modern wave of terrorism has its roots in the post-Cold War era, with rigorous transformation since the incident of 9/11 in 2001. The consequent Global War on Terror, which manifested an unparalleled global kinetic response, has now again instigated a revitalized inquiry into how terrorism and violent extremism ends. This question is in fact twofold. On one hand, it asks the underlying causes to be explored, that result in individuals commencing terrorist activities. On the other hand, this has motivated and stimulated implantation of some innovative ‘soft’ and ‘non-kinetic’ counterterrorism approaches, largely by and in Muslim majority countries. These alternative approaches were then also imported by many Western societies to tackle the challenges left unanswered and even sometimes caused by the kinetic counterterrorism approaches. This paper discusses the violent toll of counterterrorism strategies under the kinetic approach of Global War on Terror and how it has negatively contributed in the management of terrorism and violent extremism. The paper further highlights the global shift from kinetic counterterrorism strategies to non-kinetic approaches while furthering the debate to suggest a successful strategy based on some common factors in the successful counterterrorism approaches around the world.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, Kinetic Counterterrorism, Non-Kinetic Counterterrorism, Violent Extremism, De-radicalization

Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the largest threats faced by various nations and communities around the world. Regardless of the fact that almost two decades have passed since the incident of 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror (GWoT) the signs of retreat of terrorism are still bleak. The recent development and a broader transformation of terrorism into violent extremism has only aggrieved the situation. The momentous question posed by General David Petraeus on the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq “How does this end?” is yet to be answered.’ Meanwhile, extremism and radicalization efforts have both increased and intensified. More than 120 violently inclined extremist

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groups are active throughout the world today. In view of resources, this means that about 230,000 fighters – almost four times the number on 11 September 2001 – are enmeshed in conflicts affecting some 70 countries. During 2019 alone, people perished as a result of this problem, according to the Global Terrorism Index.²

Nonetheless, since 2011, the total number of deaths from terrorism is on the fall, the impact and spillover of the terrorism has widened, globally. Since 2001, the number of countries affected by terrorism has increased from 51 to 103 in 2019.³ This shows that while the intensity of the terrorism has declined, the spread of terrorism around the globe has increased. There is also a surge in the far-right terrorism around the world. People are being radicalized and motivated towards violent extremism against Muslims and other minorities especially in the Western society, due to stigmatization of religion [Islam] as the primary evil in the Global War on Terror.

However, there has been a unity in the discussions among the political groups of all sectors agreeing to the fact of misuse and mismanagement of the war against violent extremism and terrorism; the two offshoots of radicalism. Since the last decade of twentieth century, criticism of the use of violent means of countering terrorism and extremism was on the rise by academic scholars and critics. This was before the deadly attack of 9/11 that the critics used to call for non-kinetic and non-violent means to handle terrorists and violent extremism overall. With the increase in the public, hue and cry about the use of kinetic approach to deal with terrorists has resulted in the new and alternate ways of introducing non kinetic ways to combat terrorism.⁴

This paper discusses the violent toll of counterterrorism strategies under the kinetic approach of Global War on Terror and how it has negatively contributed in the management of terrorism and violent extremism. The paper further outlines the global shift from kinetic counterterrorism strategies to non-kinetic approaches while furthering the debate to suggest some common factors in the successful counterterrorism approaches around the world.

The Toll of Counterterrorism

When the Global War on Terror (GWoT) was towed for a longer period of time than anticipated, people began to criticize the violent and kinetic means used to deal with terrorism more openly and loudly. These tactics not only failed to inspire citizens and their confidence in their governments but also did not curtail the citizen's favor for terrorists and radicals. The historic invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by using kinetic tactics like drone attacks and capturing of civilians and destruction of infrastructure under the Global War on Terror (GWoT), were considered to be against social values and cohesion by general public. The kinetic and violent tactics used for counter terrorism, weakened the
trust that the public put in its government. The public started to question the ability of government to tackle security threats and also their own safety. Unconventional methods and approaches were totally ignored to combat radicalization. Terrorism was treated as an incident while it was a whole process which was to be taken in account. This ignorance led to increase in the violent extremism and radicalization.

David Miliband, a high ranking British official, publically criticized the “wrong” use of violent and kinetic means of counterterrorism. He also negated the concept of “War on Terror” as it postponed the war against radicalization and also caused more damage than yielding fruitful results. Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai has also very persistently criticized and called out USA for its repeated use of drone attack to target thousands of “innocent citizens and children” in Afghanistan.

The use of drones as a tactic for countering terrorism has been condemned by several states throughout the years. Hamid Karzai also called upon the use of torture as a tactic against Afghani prisoners and called upon America “to put in Afghan control...the Bagram Jail, 50 kilometers north of Kabul...within days.” Moreover, Yemen has been heavily damaged by these drone attacks and has resulted in the killing of thousands of innocent citizens and children. These drone attacks have also destroyed all the possible efforts of non-kinetic measures taken by the government of Yemen to counter violent terrorism. These efforts included primarily on the dialogue and arbitration tactics between officials and their associated family members in the terrorist groups to persuade the terrorists to repatriate.

A de-radicalization process was started by the military of Pakistan in the Swat region under its non-kinetic counterterrorism strategy after it was liberated from the shackles of extremists in 2007. The de-radicalization process consisted of involvement of the tribal elders and leaders to communicate and spread awareness to counter the violent beliefs of people. It also included census of population and availability of health and education facilities to the people of Swat valley. A large number of young boys who were brain washed and traumatized by the Taliban were captured by the Pakistan Army in the operations against Taliban and entered into rehabilitation centers built for radicalized youth. However, the program failed to achieve optimal output owing to American drone attacks, which shattered the confidence built by the government of Pakistan, who started to think of the state as a co-conspirant with Americans against them.

For all these reasons, the global war on terrorism has been termed as more damaging, unfruitful and wrong. The people mostly affected by the terrorism and war on terrorism are the most exposed to radicalization, therefore it is
necessary to treat the hearts and minds of these people to do a deep analysis in order to prevent them from going back to extremism.

**Countering Terrorism: Global Shift to Non-Kinetic Approaches**

The widely acknowledged failure of GWoT to address the menace of terrorism, which manifested an unparalleled global kinetic response, has now again initiated a “renewed interest in how and why terrorism ends.” This question is in fact twofold. On one hand it asks the underlying causes to be explored which result in individuals to commence terrorist activities. On the other hand, this has motivated and stimulated implantation of some innovative ‘soft’ counterterrorism approaches, largely by and in Muslim majority countries. These alternative approaches were first introduced in Muslim states like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Egypt and Yemen and then they were transferred to states like Singapore and Malaysia.

In recent times, western states like Australia, Belgium, Norway, Germany, United Kingdom and Netherlands have also tried to take up the new and innovative ways of countering terrorism to apply on their terrorists. Officials from the western states gathered in Jakarta, Yemen, Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh to inspect and study these newly found alternatives of non-kinetic approach and their usefulness. Many officials from these states were invited to study the program and learn more about de-radicalization processes. All of this was done to test the capability of states to adapt to these counter terrorism tactics. According to Brandon and Vidino, “Since the mid-2000s, several European countries have developed comprehensive counter-radicalization strategies seeking to de-radicalize or disengage committed militants and, with even greater intensity, prevent the radicalization of new ones.” Among all the states, Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom and Netherlands have adapted wide range of these counter terrorism plans.

These approaches and programs of counterterrorism have different terminologies and names in the literature on counterterrorism. However, they are regarded in the West mostly as “counter de-radicalization programs” (Counter-de-Rad) due to lack of literature on terrorism related terminologies.

According to International Peace Institute’s research in 2010, “de-radicalization programs... have been deemed more successful than military approaches and less likely to foment a new generation of violent extremists.” Christopher Bouceck has also drawn similar inferences while studying Saudi Arabia in 2008. Golose worked on Indonesia’s counterterrorism program and argues in 2009 that “de-radicalization programs are the best measures to eradicate terrorism and radicalism, as these programs will touch the issues to their deepest roots.” This shows that the counterterrorism programs based on
'soft' and non-kinetic approaches have resulted in success more than those programs having only kinetic approach to countering terrorism.

This has also forced many Western states in Europe and North America to follow a similar approach to countering terrorism and implement non-kinetic counterterrorism policies in their respective countries. These Western countries comprise the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, Denmark and Norway. The United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands have implemented “the most extensive counter radicalization initiatives.”

It is also pertinent to mention here that in 1990s two terrorist organizations, i.e., al-Jihad Organization (JO) and Islamic Jihad (IJ), based in Egypt, called for ceasefire and subsequently disengaged from participating in any terrorist activities. This went a way ahead and contributed to further counterterrorism by writing almost 25 books on the significance of non-violence. In 1997, Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Army (ISA) are followed their footsteps and declared ceasefire, unilaterally.

**Counterterrorism: A Non-Kinetic Model**

The aforementioned examples are few success stories of non-kinetic counterterrorism or Counter-de-Rad programs which led to the transformation of terrorists and stopped the pathways which led individuals towards violent extremism and terrorism. There are also various other counterterrorism models around the world and existing scholarship, for example CT models of Mauritania, Turkey and Sudan. In this regard, it is imperative to study the conditions and factors which led these programs to be successful in order to devise a better policy response towards the issue of terrorism. Following sections discuss in detail both macro and micro factors than are common in these successful non-kinetic counterterrorism programs around the world.

**Macro Factors: Politico-Economic Development**

The relationship of economics and terrorism is much debated in the theoretical literature. “There is no consensus except beyond the agreement that absolute poverty does not drive terrorism.” Kruger and Maleckova have thoroughly studied the issue. In a study conducted by them in 2003, they argued, “although our results are tentative and exploratory, they suggest that neither poverty nor education has a direct, causal impact on terrorism.”

However, there are also numerous other research studies which argue that there exist somewhat relationships between both phenomena. As there are many statistical inferences in the literature which provide evidence that individuals belonging to well-off families have also joined the ranks of terrorists yet there exist also individual which take up arms against state or other group in the society due to being economically disadvantaged. This gap in socio-
economic development and sometimes lack of education in Muslim minority communities due to dearth of economic resources, has been one of a major factors that have contributed to the increase of terrorism, thus hindering counterterrorism efforts.

**Inside and Post-Prison Environment**

Scholars and practitioners alike, are faced with the challenge of “prison radicalization” which is considered as one of the major hindrances in non-kinetic counterterrorism efforts. There is an internationally shared concern among state official that prisons act as breeding schools for radicalization and recruitments of inmates into terrorist networks.22 This concern is also supported by the literature on terrorism stemming from the studies conducted on European nationalists like Basque Euskad Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Former had fought in the past to gain autonomy for Basque from France while the latter struggled against England to gain independence for Ireland. The commonality between both organizations was their well-integrated networks which were mainly functioning through command structures from within prisons. These prison networks were used by them as “means of recruiting new members into terrorist organizations while providing advanced training for existing ones.”23

Acknowledging that prisons are vulnerable spots for getting radicalized, resorting to the claim that radical Muslim terrorists have been using prisons as breeding schools of radicals is “based on untested assumptions about inmate behaviour and the dynamics of prison radicalization.”24 Nevertheless, one must also acclaim the fact much of the literature supports the idea that there is a link between prisons and radicalization and that “prisons matter” as “they are places of vulnerability in which radicalisation takes place.”25

It is highlighted here that the post-prison rehabilitation of radicals and terrorists in their respective societies is also critical in order to attain effective and sustainable results. Therefore, it is not enough to merely put radicals behind prison bars and often in isolation in an effort to keep them (and others from them) aloof of recruitment and further radicalization. The post-release rehabilitation of former terrorists is also necessary because of their families and friends.

As per Angell and Gunaratna, “there are over 100,000 convicted and suspected terrorists languishing in penitentiary and detention centers from Europe to the Middle East and Asia. Although there are vocational and educational programs to rehabilitate criminals, there are very few initiatives to rehabilitate terrorists.”26 A well programmed de-radicalization program thus incorporates practice of preparing, teaching and training de-radicalized persons before sending them back to their societies.
Winning the hearts and minds of both individuals being de-radicalized and their families in key to success. Maltreatment of detainees, failing to gain trust of their families, delays in their fair trials and hindering visits of friends and families may prove counterproductive by fueling resentments and grievances among families and relatives against the state.27

Role of Civil Society

The state cannot possibly acquire all resources to counter violent extremism and terrorism in the society. When it comes to religious ideologies, state specially is the most ill-equipped actor, especially the Western countries which uphold secular and liberal values. Such Western states face the challenge of intervening in religious affairs or commenting on personal beliefs of individuals.

Civil society can bridge this gap owing to its soft power in society and is generally seen as more neutral actor thus having credibility. Civil society also carries more resources which states traditionally lack and act as a conduit between state and citizens. Civil society also has better access to communities and community leaders, thus can help state comprehend societal issues that lead to terrorism and radicalization.

Global Political Environment

As contended by Critical theorists, global environment has been much understudied in the literature related to terrorism. The Western dominant states have ignored to study the root causes of terrorism considering the effort “politically incorrect, since it gives the impression of condoning terrorism as a legitimate tool for redressing grievances.”28 As a result, the research on conditions that result in individuals resorting to terrorism has not been able to flourish.29 More significantly, reasons the youth belonging to Muslim community to engaging in terrorist activities behind post 9/11 have largely been ignored. Sproat argues:

“It has been noted that the literature on state terrorism, like that on terrorism generally, suffers from a lack of work on the definition of the term ... it is difficult to think of any author who has methodically applied a definition to the actions of a particular actor in order to assess whether each constitutes an act of terrorism.”30

Scholars have argued that in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq generated a “moral outrage” among Muslims, who interpreted it as their religion being under some kind of attack of Western forces and led some “Muslim youth to become radicalized”.31
The drone strikes by the US in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Syria and other parts of the world have only worsened the situation and have thus started to be reported on in international media too.

**Micro-Factors**

An aerial view of the counter radicalization process components is already discussed but the micro level details of the process, which lead to the smart implementation of the process are still vague and not clearly defined. The counter-de-rad program is not a universal cure for all terrorism problems. In this program, a process or a component which is suitable and applicable to a certain social, political sect might not be applicable on the other. These processes might need to be modified and changed to be able to adapt into a certain area.

**Religious Rehabilitation**

One of the most crucial components of the counter radicalization process, as agreed by a majority, is the religious dialogue and rehabilitation program. As violent acts are committed by terrorists because they misinterpret and misunderstand the religious extracts in order to defend their acts, this component of religious rehabilitation is very essential to address. Having a lack of true knowledge about their religion, terrorists are manipulated by extremist preachers to be used in their favors. As a result, the component of religious rehabilitation is essential to disable the beliefs of these radicals and counter the religious false beliefs and theories. Religious and other debates and advices are encouraged by the Islamic culture. Muslims take inspiration from the essential original debate which took place between Allah and his Angels regarding the creation of mankind and humanity who will represent Him. In Surat Al-Baqarah, Aayah 30, Holy Quran states that:

“And [remember] when your Lord said to the angels: ‘verily, I am going to place [mankind] generations after generations on earth’. They said: ‘will you place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, – while we glorify you with praises and thanks and sanctify you’. He [Allah] said: ‘I know that which you do not know’.”

**Education and Vocational Training**

Along with debate and discussions, the importance of knowledge and education is also much emphasized in Islam and the Holy Quran. In Quran, the importance of reading and seeking education has been repeatedly stressed in various occasions. The Holy Quran has emphasized on learning how to read and gain knowledge in the first Surat namely Al-A’alaq:
“Recite in the name of your Lord who created – Created man from a clinging substance. Recite and your Lord is the most Generous – Who taught by the pen – Taught man that which he knew not.”

While the vocational training and educational rehabilitation is done very commonly for general criminals, it is very important to do such training of the terrorists in captivity. Saudi Arabia has done crucial efforts in this regard, whose policies are described by Boucek briefly as follows:

“In April 2007, the newspaper al-Jazirah reported that Prince Muhammad ordered the introduction of educational training outside prison for released detainees, repentant prisoners, and Guantánamo returnees. And recently, the Advisory Committee began working with local chambers of commerce and other certification organizations to establish training courses for program participants. Under this scheme, detainees would be able to learn skills and earn qualifications while in the rehabilitation program that would qualify them for better, more substantive, employment upon their release than they previously had. The government hopes that this training, when paired with government start-up funds, will empower released detainees to start their own businesses, such as travel agencies, automotive garages, and professional support offices.”

Psychological Rehabilitation

There is no evidence which shows that the terrorists experience any kind of psychological disease but when we talk about counterterrorism program, this field can play an important role. First, because psychology helps us to understand the human behavior it monitors how someone’s personality, relationships, emotions and habits can affect the way they think or behave. Secondly, the environment or society is not the only contributing factors for individuals to get involved in terrorist activities. Mostly they have a well-built personal factor. As CoolSaet and Struye de Swielande argued, a “common characteristic of all forms of radicalization is that it takes place at the intersection of a personal history and that enabling environment”. The personal factor could be anything like not having a job or losing a loved one. This personal factor brings the environment into action because the enabling environment works best “when it resonates more with...personal experiences, which in turn gives strength to the [violent] ideology from indisputable biographical evidence.” The most known psychological programs are found in Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Australia.
Social Rehabilitation Program

The terrorists do not belong to the same economic or social backgrounds. Some of them have strong financial background while some lack even the basic necessities of life. Although the evidence suggests that there is no link between economic condition and terrorism, but still we can say that it can be one of the major contributing factors. In Australia, many Jihadists and their families especially the Sunni Muslims of Lebanese who account for 60 percent of neo-jihadists in the country can be mainly represented at the bottom of the employment level compared to the average Australians. They suffer due to financial problems.

Under these state of affairs, if the state is not capable and has a fragile developmental condition, it can itself cause violation and terrorism. In Saudi Arabia, there are various social programs that provide generous financial aid to the prisoners and their families. Singapore and Turkey promote charities, societal institutes or other public savings in order to help the prisoners and their families financially and economically. There is a community named The Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), specifically created to help the prisoners and their families financially through charities.

Family Rehabilitation Program

When the prisoners, especially if we talk about released terrorists inspired by wrong interpretation of Islam, are returning home, their families can play a major role in de-radicalization and counseling. When captives are released or detained, the first thing they do is go to their families; therefore families can play a very crucial role in becoming a medium for them to counter radicalism.

When nine Kuwaiti captives who returned from Guantanamo Bay were asked about the factors that helped them reintegrate in the society, the answer of most of them was the role of family. Family members can have a lot of say in convincing individuals to stop meeting terrorists or get influenced by them. A special training is needed to be given to families of the newly returned individuals so they can carefully mentor and deal with them. Family members need to ensure the availability of a healthy environment away from chances of re-radicalization.

Discretionary Program

This counter-de-Rad program is a very progressive program in nature. It is constantly developing and evolving with the passage of time. With each passing time, this program is recommended for monitoring and further evaluation. New alternatives should be considered in light of emerging necessities of both detainees and mentors/officers in charge. External and internal both environments should be checked for the better working of this program. For
instance, in Saudi Arabia, the officials were of the view that detainees should be
given proper historical lessons because most of them lacked the basic
knowledge of how the Holy Prophet (PBUH) spent his life. They considered
Islamic history as full of wars and battles. The officials also suggested the use of
art for expressing the detainee’s feelings as therapy. Therefore, art and history
were introduced as fresh programs. Sports and physical therapy was also made
mandatory in this program where the officers and scholars would join the
detainees in sports. This resulted in a number of healthy detainees who wanted
to live a healthy life from there. They were more cooperative, productive,
healthy and keen on receiving new knowledge.

Conclusion

A strategic and comprehensive plan is required to introduce effective
counter terrorism tactics which should be aligned with the comprehensive plans
carried out by terrorists to launch attacks. Terrorists take each step in a very
organized way by recruiting youth, gaining support and funds, acquisition of
arms and weapons, modes of transportation, hideouts and communication
channels. To counter such strategic planning, a more inclusive approach and
broad range policies are needed to be implemented.

Non-kinetic approach of counter terrorism consists of very comprehensive
and systematic objectives which are categorized as the following:

- To stop people from turning into terrorists,
- To counter terrorist attacks by implementing impartial steps to lessen
  the blow of terrorist attacks and aid victims,
- To pursue, arrest and convict terrorists,
- To block the material, financial and political support of terrorists so
  they have no way of organizing attacks,
- Giving opportunities, protection, support to persons who are
  implicated in the violent extremism and radicalization that lead to
  terrorism (VERLT),
- To take preventive measures against massive attacks to lessen the
  impact of the attacks on individuals and infrastructures.

There is a responsibility of the states to protect their citizens against the
heinous acts of terrorism and in order to do so; they need to adapt preventive
measures to counter terrorism. These measures are mirrored in the political
pledges internationally. Extremism and terrorism can only be defeated with
long term de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs. Developing an
indigenous and genuine model of counterterrorism based on comparative
learning of various counterterrorism and counter violent extremism models in
practice across the world is much needed, one that truly caters to the diverse
socio-political, ideological, regional and international factors behind terrorism and violent extremism.
Endnotes


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