

## **Book Reviews**

Tore Bjorgo, *Strategies for preventing terrorism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xi + 116 pp., 201

Edwin Bakker

Research fellow, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague Director, Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism, Leiden University

DOI: [10.1163/18750230-02402001](https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02402001)

## Comprehensive Counterterrorism Strategies

Tore Bjorgo's *Strategies for preventing terrorism* offers a valuable contribution to both the academic and professional debate on developing counterterrorism strategies. In his book, the author – one of the leading authors in the field of terrorism & counterterrorism studies – stresses the need for a comprehensive approach to fighting terrorism. Such an approach, according to the author, should not necessarily be very different from fighting other types of crime, which means that a lot can be learned from criminology and existing models of crime prevention. He acknowledges that many of the models in this academic field are still far from being comprehensive. Therefore, Bjorgo sets out to construct an integrated and generic model for crime prevention which he then applies to terrorism.

The author builds on the widespread belief that policy makers need to integrate the various 'soft' and repressive measures to deal with crime in general and terrorism in particular. His goal is to show how different strategies and different preventive actors may complement and support rather than duplicate and undermine each other. He also advocates the application of this preventive mechanism as a set of coherent strategies. This would be very useful in the fight against terrorism that is still very much dominated by a limited set of measures that are implemented by actors that often do not know what influence their strategy or concrete measures have on the counterterrorism efforts of others.

The starting point for this model is the several competing models of crime prevention and counterterrorism which at first glance seem incompatible, both theoretically and practically. The four main existing models are the criminal justice model of crime prevention; the social model of crime prevention; the situational crime prevention model; and repressive counterterrorism, also known as "the War on Terror". Combining them, Bjorgo produces a general model comprised of the following nine mechanisms divided into two categories.

The long-term preventive strategies include:

1. Reducing harm from terrorist attacks
2. Reducing the rewards from terrorism
3. Establishing and maintaining moral (normative) barriers to delegitimize terrorism
4. Social and political prevention by reducing the root causes and motivations for violent radicalization and recruitment
5. Disengagement from terrorism – making individuals and groups discontinue their involvement in terrorism

The short-term preventive strategies are:

1. Deterrence by threat or retaliation or punishment
2. Pre-emptive disruption of planned terrorist attacks
3. Incapacitation; removing the capacity of violent actors to carry out attacks


#### 4. Protecting vulnerable targets to terrorist attacks

The author stresses the need to specify each of these elements for the fight against terrorism and to always keep in mind the limitations, costs and negative side-effects of the various preventive measures. The main challenge, however, is to make sure that the short-term and long-term strategies support rather than undermine each other.

This is indeed a challenge. Many governments and international organizations have pointed at the need for a well-coordinated holistic or comprehensive approach to fighting terrorism. The British CONTEST (COunterTErroristSTrategy), despite a number of shortcomings, at least aims to be one and has been revised to put more focus on ways of prevention and how to best alert the public of terrorist threats. This strategy is based on the pillars Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Pursue. Also the Dutch have come up with a National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011-2015 which is based on the idea that a comprehensive and strategic vision of counterterrorism is necessary, in order to give direction to all parties involved in counterterrorism and to maintain the strength of all the links in the security chain. This particular strategy is based on five pillars that are quite similar to the ones in the UK strategy: Procure, Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Prosecute. The basic elements are also comparable to those of the EU counterterrorism strategy with its four strands: Prevent, Protect, Pursuit, Response, which can be regarded as a direct product of the British strategy, adopted just after the London bombings while the UK was President of the Council of the European Union in 2005. The OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism that was adopted by the Ministerial Council in Porto as early as 2002 was perhaps one of the first international documents that recognized that terrorism requires a coordinated and comprehensive response and that acts of international terrorism constitute a threat to international and regional peace and security.

These pleas for and examples of a comprehensive approach to the fight against terrorism make sense, but how can one implement and govern it? Which actors should take the lead or coordinate the various mechanisms and instruments that fall within these strategies? This is difficult at the local level, very difficult at the national level, and perhaps impossible at the international level. This might also explain why relatively few countries and international organizations have dared to come up with comprehensive counterterrorism policies and even fewer that have specified them beyond a list of bullet points of politically correct statements that are not backed up by concrete structures and mechanisms. Nonetheless, governments and international organizations should continue with trying to develop a more holistic approach in the fight against terrorism.

Tore Bjorgo's model could be of great help to international organizations, national governments and counterterrorism agencies that still need to develop a truly comprehensive approach as it provides both a valuable conceptual framework and a concrete list of various tools. With this model they might add strategic analyses to their summaries of measures and develop counterterrorism into a real strategy, i.e. a truly comprehensive one.



This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

Netherlands Helsinki Committee  
Het Nutshuis  
Riviermarkt 4  
2513 AM The Hague  
The Netherlands

© Netherlands Helsinki Committee. All rights reserved.

[www.nhc.nl](http://www.nhc.nl)