Blind spot? Security narratives and far-right violence

Arun Kundnani[1]

---

1   Arun Kundnani is a writer and researcher based in New York. This article is extracted from Blind Spot?
Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague,
June 2012.

On 22 July 2011, as news emerged of a major terrorist attack taking place in Norway, the *Wall Street Journal* went to press while the identity of the perpetrator was still unknown. On the presumption that only a Muslim could be responsible, the newspaper's editorial claimed that Norway had been targeted because it is 'a liberal nation committed to freedom of speech and conscience, equality between the sexes, representative democracy and every other freedom that still defines the West'.[2] The reflexes entrenched by nearly ten years of 'war on terror' rhetoric led the editorial writer to feel confident the attacker's motivation could already be known.

As it turned out, the car bomb in Oslo, followed by a shooting spree on the island of Utøya, leaving 77 dead - the worst terrorist attack in Europe since the Madrid bombings of 2004 - had been carried out in the name of a 'counter jihadist' rather than 'jihadist' ideology. Anders Behring Breivik, whose 1,500- page manifesto, *2083 - A European Declaration of Independence,* was published online on the day of the attacks, believed that European elites were pandering to multiculturalism and enabling an 'Islamic colonisation of Europe'. Like the *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer, he believed that Norway's liberal values were under threat from 'radical Islam'.

The newspaper's error was an extreme case of a much wider problem not only among journalists but also within the world of counter-terrorism policymaking and practice - that the ways in which counter-terrorism is narrated leads to a disproportionate security focus on Muslim populations, who are conceived as harbouring a generational problem of identitarian violence, while the issue of far-right violence is neglected or seen as involving only individual 'lone wolves'. For example, Europol's 2012 *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* declines to categorise Breivik's attacks as 'right-wing terrorism', suggesting instead that they were motivated by 'a personal mix of elements from different ideologies'.[3] While a number of scholars have begun to explore how the 'war on terror' narrative is itself appropriated by al-Qaeda and associated groups to win new recruits, there has been no exploration of similar effects in enabling far-right violence. Yet there is evidence that new far-right 'counter-jihadist' movements use the narrative of a global struggle against 'radical Islam' to legitimise themselves to their audiences.

In terms of the number of people who have lost their lives as a result of different kinds of political violence, it is incorrect to see al-Qaeda and related groups as representing a greater danger to European citizens than the far right. Since 1990, at least 249 persons have died in incidents of far-right violence in Europe, compared to 263 who have been killed by terrorists associated with 'radical Islamism', indicating that both threats are of the same order of magnitude.[4] That both these numbers are tiny relative to the population of Europe suggests that perceptions of the threat of 'radical Islamist' violence have been over-inflated.

Every perception has a blind spot, the area that cannot be seen because it is part of the mechanism of perception itself. This article considers whether, since 9/11, the far right has been the blind spot of counter-terrorism, the problem that could not be perceived clearly because it had begun to absorb

---

2   'Terror in Oslo', in Wall Street Journal, 22 July 2011.

3   Europol, TE-SAT 2012: EU terrorism situation and trend report, 2012, pp. 4, 9, 29, 43.

4   These numbers are based on counting incidents reported in mainstream newspapers and newswires, in which the perpetrator was clearly affiliated with far-right or 'radical Islamist' ideologies. For the purposes of this survey, Europe is defined to include the countries that are currently members of the European Economic Area. For more details, see A. Kundnani, Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, June 2012.

significant elements from official security narratives themselves.

Narratives and performativity

Recent scholarship in terrorism studies has addressed the question of how government communication enables or disables the narratives that terrorists advance to legitimise their causes.[5] Beatrice de Graaf argues that this communicative component to counter-terrorism is significant because the messages generated by counter-terrorism policies are themselves appropriated by terrorists who ·use them to fuel sentiments of oppression and injustice in a battle of legitimacy engaged against governments. From this perspective, terrorists and states are conducting 'influence warfare', a battle to convince and persuade different target audiences to rally behind them'.[6] In a historical survey of the communicative aspects of counter-terrorism, de Graaf defines the performative power of counter-terrorism as 'the extent to which the national government, by means of its official counterterrorism policy and corresponding discourse (in statements, enactments, measures and ministers' remarks) aims to mobilize public and political support and in the last instance, wittingly or unwittingly, assists the terrorists in creating social drama'. Performative power can be measured by considering terrorism's prominence in political debate and the levelof perceived crisis; whether the terrorist threat is considered temporary and limited or wide-ranging and ongoing; whether governments attempt to mobilise society in opposition to terrorism; whether social conventions are seen as needing modification to deal with terrorism; and whether there is dialogue and the potential for recognition of terrorists' demands or government intransigence.[7] Scholars have also recently introduced the concept of 'cumulative extremism' to refer to the ways in which right-wing extremism and 'radical Islamism' reinforce each other through a dynamic in which each one's activities encourages support for the opposing group.[8] For example, a key part of the English Defence League(EDL)'s far-right narrative is the need to oppose the threat of 'radical Islamist' groups. These groups, in turn, win support with the narrative that they need to exist to defend Muslims against the kind of Islamophobia represented by the EDL.

Combining the notion that counter-terrorism has a performative dimension with the concept of 'cumulative extremism' produces a triangle of mutual influences between the narratives of government security policy, 'radical Islamists' and far-right groups, as represented in figure 1, with arrows representing lines of influence from one actor's narrative to another actor.

---

5   National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Countering Violent Extremist Narratives. The Hague, 2010, p. 8.

6   B. de Graaf, Why Communication and Performance are Key in Countering Terrorism, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, February 2011, p. 7.

7   B. de Graaf, Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 12.

8   R. Eatwell and M. J. Goodwin (eds.), The New Extremism in 21st century Britain, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 243.
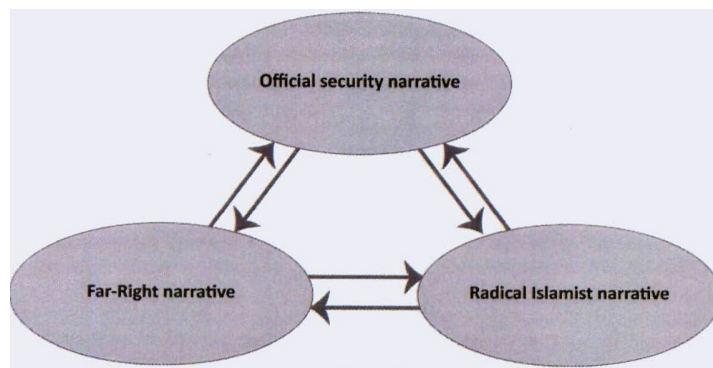
Figure 1

Existing research has explored two sides of the above triangle - that between official security narratives and 'radical Islamist' narratives, and that between 'radical Islamist' and far-right narratives. But the third side, between official security narratives and far-right narratives, has been neglected: consideration hasnot been given to whether the discursive frames of counter-terrorism policies are encouraging or discouraging far-right narratives. The implicit 'stories' that politicians and officials 'tell' about security policies directed at 'radical Islamism' have audiences not only among potential 'radical Islamist' supporters who are the target of the policy but also among far-right groups who appropriate these 'stories' to reinforce their own messages.

A precedent for such a triangular relationship between the state and opposed violent actors existed in Northern Ireland, at least during the 1970s and 1980s, when the narratives of the Provisional IRA, Ulster Unionist terrorists and the UK state were mutually reinforcing. While the UK government condemned the violence of both nationalists and unionists, its rhetoric until the early 1990s - that there could be no negotiation on the basic question of sovereignty - reinforced the unionist narrative of 'no surrender'; in addition, there was direct collusion between elements of the UK state and unionist terrorist groups. Another example is the 'strategy of tension' employed in the 1970s by elements of the Italian security apparatus, which involved sponsoring right-wing terrorist groups in an effort to discredit and undermine the left.

Official security narratives in Europe are multiple, complex and contested. How these narratives are received by different audiences is not a straightforward matter. Two audiences for official security narratives are discussed in this article.The first is those professionals working within the counter-terrorist systems themselves, which, since 2004, include not just police and intelligence officers investigating terrorism cases but teachers, youth workers, social workers,community activists, local authority managers and civil society groups who havebeen drawn into the counter-terrorist project as actors with a preventative role. For this group, recognition of the threat of far-right violence has often been hampered by its lack of fit with the prevailing official narrative of terrorism, which has disproportionately emphasised 'radical Islamism'. Unlike 'radical Islamist' terrorism, far-right violence is generally not seen by European security officials as a strategic threat, only as a public order problem. For example, in its 2011 *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report,* Europol states that right-wing extremist incidents 'raised public order concerns, but have not in any way endangered the political, constitutional, economic or social

structures of any of the Member States'.[9] In addition, there is the simple matter of resource allocation and prioritisation in counter-terrorism practice. Shortly after the Breivik terrorist attack in Norway, it emerged that a German neo-Nazi group - the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU, National Socialist Underground) - had operated for thirteen years without arrest, during which time eight people of Turkish origin, a Greek man, and a policewoman had been killed, despite federal and regional intelligence services reportedly having infiltrated the group. It remains unclear why the NSU was not intercepted earlier. However, it appears that part of the problem was that efforts to counter right-wing violence rested with regional states, which did not consider it a priority, in contrast to initiatives to counter the threat of 'radical Islamist' violence, which were well-resourced and centrally co-ordinated at the federal level.

The second audience for official security discourse is the far-right milieu itself. In some contexts, the circulation of official security narratives has had the unintended consequence of creating discursive opportunities for far-right actors who are able to blend official narratives into their own discourses, enabling them to creatively update their existing belief systems and win renewed legitimacy by bringing their ideologies into closer proximity to mainstream views.

Trends in far-right ideology

The content of far-right narratives has continually evolved since the end of the Second World War, while maintaining a consistent formal structure. The post war neo-fascism of groups such as Britain's National Front (NF) was never just a matter of hating minorities. It was also an ideology that sought to explain and exploit social dislocation felt by working classes, through a rival narrative to that of the left. To achieve this, it presented non-white immigration as corrupting the racial purity of the nation; but it paid equal attention to the ruling elite that had allowed this to happen, a betrayal which far-right ideology explained in terms of a Jewish conspiracy theory.[10] As David Edgar put it in his 1977 analysis of the politics of Britain's NF, the far-right 'blames the Jews for the blacks'.[11] Anti-semitism, though discredited among the wider European public after the holocaust, was a necessary ideological component for neo-Nazis because only Jews could play the role of the secret source of economic and political power that had weakened and corrupted the nation.

However, from the 1980s, the French Front National (FN) began to achieve a higher level of support by downplaying its neo-Nazi legacy and speaking of the need to preserve cultural identity, defined as an unchanging national 'way of life', rather than in overtly racial terms. In this 'New Right' narrative, identity was seen to be under threat from a ruling elite that enabled excessive immigration of persons with different cultures and that promoted policies of multiculturalism, giving immigrants licence to maintain their own cultural identities.[12] Thus, instead of explicit talk of a Jewish conspiracy, there was the idea that those in power were too 'cosmopolitan' to have the real interests of the native people at heart. This message resonated effectively with many voters and soon other far-right parties in Europe began to

---

9   Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, 2011, p. 29.

10   N. Cohn, Warrant for Genocide: the myth of the Jewish world conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

11   D. Edgar, 'Racism, fascism and the politics of the National Front', in Race & Class, 1977, vol. 19, no. 2.

12   Front National, 300 Mesures pour la renaissance de la France: programme de gouvernement, Paris, Editions Nationales, 1993.

emulate the FN strategy.[13]

Following 9/11, a new version of this identitarian narrative began to circulate, often promoted by new political actors without the usual neo-Nazi baggage. In this 'counter-jihadist' narrative, the identity that needs to be defended is no longer a conservative notion of national identity but an idea of liberal values, seen as a civilisational inheritance. Islam becomes the new threat to this identity, regarded as both an alien culture and an extremist political ideology. Multiculturalism is seen as enabling not just the weakening of national identity but 'Islamification'. a process of colonisation leading to the rule of sharia law. European governments are regarded as weak and complicit in the face of this totalitarian threat. Old-style racism, anti-Semitism and authoritarianism are rejected; right-wing Zionism is taken to be a potential ally. Unlike the traditional far-right, these new movements rhetorically embrace what they regard as Enlightenment values of individual liberty, freedom of speech, gender equality and gay rights. In moving from neo-Nazism to 'counter-jihadism', the underlying structure of the narrative remains the same, but the protagonists have changed: the identity of Western liberal values has been substituted for white racial identity; Muslims have taken the place of blacks and multiculturalist elites are the new Jews.

This far-right 'counter-jihadist' narrative has been advanced by a transatlantic movement, including think-tanks, bloggers, street-based movements and political parties. At the heart of the movement are websites such as *Gates ofVienna, Politically Incorrect* and *The Brussels Journal,* and think-tanks, such as the International Free Press Society and the us-based David Horowitz Freedom Center, which fund and facilitate international linkages for the movement. In both the Netherlands and Denmark, political parties with a 'counter-jihadist' ideology have entered the political mainstream; until recently in both countries, their support was necessary for governments to secure a working parliamentary majority. In Belgium, the *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) has sought to move away from an older tradition of far-right politics with roots in neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism to embrace 'counter-jihadist' rhetoric. In Germany, the *Burgerbewegung Pax Europa* (Pax Europa Citizens' Movement) is a 'counterjihadist' social movement and think-tank.

Just as the older far-right narrative had a structural need for a Jewish conspiracy theory to explain the purported complicity of national governments with their enemies, so too the 'counter-jihadist' movement tends towards conspiracy theory. After all, one might ask, why the need for popular mobilisation for the 'counter-jihadist' cause when European governments already take a tough stance on fighting 'radical Islam'? The answer must be that government rhetoric about fighting 'Islamist extremism' is mere appearance; behind the scenes, ruling elites are secretly in league with the Islamic enemy. Hence the indispensability of the Eurabia conspiracy theory, outlined in Bat Ye'or's 2005 book *Eurabia: the Euro-Arab axis.* Her claim is that the Euro-Arab Dialogue - a programme initiated by the European Community's political establishment following the 1973 oil crisis, to forge closer links with Arab nations - was actually a secret plot by European politicians and civil servants to facilitate Muslim immigration, to subjugate Europe and to transform the continent into an Arab colony, Eurabia.[14]

Breivik's manifesto repeats many of the themes of 'counter-jihadist' ideology. It describes his hope that his violence would 'penetrate the strict censorship regime' of 'cosmopolitan' elites, so that European

---

13   J. Kaplan and T. Bjørgo, Nation and Race: the developing Euro-American racist subculture, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1998, p. 10.

14   M. Carr, 'You are now entering Eurabia', in Race & Class, 2006, vol. 48, no. 1.

citizens would see the need to defend their liberal values against multiculturalism and Islamification.[15] Claiming to be a member of a secret group of new 'crusaders' founded in London in 2002 by representatives from eight European countries, he says his aim is to 'free indigenous peoples of Europe and to fight against the ongoing European Jihad'.[16] The bulk of the document constitutes a compilation of texts mainly copied from US far-right websites. Its opening chapters are plagiarised from *Political Correctness: a short history of an ideology,* a book published online in 2004 by the Free Congress Foundation - a Washington based lobby group founded by Paul Weyrich, one of the most influential activists of the US Christian Right. In this section, Breivik has replaced references to 'America' in the original text with 'Western Europe'. Apart from this, the writers Breivik cites most often are prominent 'counter-jihadists': Robert Spencer, the American Islamophobic blogger whose *Jihad Watch* website, a subsidiary of theDavid Horowitz Freedom Center, receives close to a million dollars of funding from wealthy backers;[17] Ba'et Yor; and 'Fjordman', a Norwegian, who blogs for the US-based *Gates of Vienna* and *Jihad Watch* websites.

The multiculturalist elite, says Breivik, has prevented the possibility of democratic opposition and the clock is ticking: 'We have only a few decades to consolidate a sufficient level of resistance before our major cities are completely demographically overwhelmed by Muslims.'[18] Hence, he justifies his violence as 'a pre-emptive war'.[19] In a 2007 blog post by Fjordman, entitled 'A European Declaration of Independence', which Breivik reproduces and whose title he borrows, Fjordman writes: 'We are being subject to a foreign invasion, and aiding and abetting a foreign invasion in any way constitutes treason. If non Europeans have the right to resist colonisation and desire self-determination then Europeans have that right, too. And we intend to exercise it.'[20]

In the conventional neo-Nazi doctrine of 'race war', whites are called upon to rise up against governments seen as secretly controlled by Jews and whose aim is to dilute white racial purity by enabling black immigration. Breivik reframes this doctrine by substituting culture for race, Muslims for blacks, and multiculturalists for Jews. Rejecting the 'race war' concept, he calls instead for a 'cultural war' in which 'absolutely everyone will have the opportunity to show their loyalty to our cause, including nationalist European Jews, non-European Christians or Hindu/Buddhist Asians'.[21] Yet he also speaks of his 'opposition to race-mixing' and wants to prevent the 'extinction of the Nordic genotypes'.[22] Of Jews, he writes that 'we must embrace the remaining loyal Jews as brothers' and that there is no 'Jewish problem in Western Europe' as their numbers are small. But he goes on to say that the UK, France and the US do have a 'considerable Jewish problem'.[23] Casting Jews as both potential allies (if they join in fighting Islam) and a demographic threat (if there are too many), Breivik is simultaneously anti-Semitic and supportive of

---

15   A.B. Breivik, 2083 - A European Declaration of Independence, 2011, p. 822.

16   Ibid., p. 817.

17   W. Ali, E. Clifton, M. Duss, L. Fang, S. Keyes and F. Shakir, Fear, Inc.: the roots of the Islamophobia network in America, Center for American Progress, August 2011.

18   A.B. Breivik, 2083-A European Declaration of Independence, 2011, p. 9.

19   Ibid., p. 766.

20   Fjordman, 'Native revolt: a European declaration of independence', The Brussels Journal, 16 March 2007, http://www. brusselsjoumal.com/node/1980.

21   A.B. Breivik, 2083 - A European Declaration of Independence, 2011, p. 1259.

22   Ibid., pp. 1161, 1190.

23   Ibid., p. 1163.

right-wing Zionism.

The Breivik case demonstrates that the new 'counter-jihadist' far right is as compatible with terrorist violence as older forms of neo-Nazism. And, whereas neo-Nazism is a fringe phenomenon, many elements of the 'counter jihadist' ideology attract wide support, including among mainstream politicians, newspaper columnists and well-funded think-tanks. The major theme of Breivik's manifesto is the argument that multiculturalism has weakened national identity and encouraged 'Islamist extremism', bringing European nations to a crisis point. As Breivik himself correctly noted in the first week of his trial, this view is held by 'the three most powerful politicians in Europe' - Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel and David Cameron.[24] The uncomfortable truth is that the central plank of a terrorist's narrative is shared by heads of Western European governments.

Britain

In Britain, the government considers the most serious terrorist threat to be from 'Al Qa'ida, its affiliates and like-minded organisations' and resources are targeted accordingly, whether in terms of the institutional focus of policing and intelligence agencies, government funding of preventative measures or ministerial leadership.[25] This threat has been narrated in a series of ministerial speeches over the last six years. Speeches by Prime Minister Tony Blair (2006), Home Secretary Jacqui Smith (2008), Communities Minister Hazel Blears (2009) and Prime Minister David Cameron (2011) have been the major statements of government thinking on security matters since the 7/7 terrorist attacks on the London transport system in 2005. All these speeches present essentially the same story-line, despite a change in government in 2010 and some differences over policy details.[26] The key elements of this story-line are that:

• Our identity is based on liberal values of gender equality, freedom of speech, secularism, etc.;

• There are two kinds of Muslims: moderates who practise their religion in a peaceful way and share our values, and 'Islamist extremists' who interpret Islam as a political ideology, believe in rejecting our values and aim to impose sharia law on Muslims and non-Muslims;

• Political correctness and multicultural tolerance have weakened the defence of our values and thereby aided extremist Muslims;

• We have suffered terrorism because of 'Islamist extremism';

• We now need to put aside multicultural sensitivities, assertively defend our liberal values and be tougher in opposing 'Islamist extremism'.

The significance of this narrative is that it introduces three protagonists (us, moderate Muslims and extremist Muslims), whose identities are defined in specific ways (whether or not they share our

---

24   H. Pidd, 'Anders Behring Breivik claims victims were not innocent' in The Guardian, 17 April 2012.

25   HM Government, Prevent Strategy. London, June 2011, p. 5.

26   T. Blair, speech to the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles, 1 August 2006: .I. Smith. 'Our shared values - a shared responsibility'. speech to the International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence, 17 January 2008: H. Blears. 'Many voices: understanding the debate about preventing violent extremism·, speech to the London School of Economics, 25 February 2009; D. Cameron, speech at the Munich Security Conference, 5 February 2011.

values), a disturbance (terrorist violence), an explanation for the cause of the disturbance (extremism) and a suggested resolution (rejecting multiculturalism and asserting our values more forcefully). One consequence of the foregrounding of this narrative of terrorism is that questions of identity, values and multiculturalism have been strongly linked to the issue of national security. David Cameron's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011, given on the same day that the EDL marched through Luton, conveyed this strong sense that Britain was facing a generational problem of 'radical Islamist' violence because of a legacy of misguided 'multiculturalist' policies that had failed to 'integrate' young Muslims into mainstream society.[27] In this way, the terrorist problem was constructed not as consisting of a few individuals engaged in violence but as a symptom of a much deeper cultural malaise in the British Muslim population. This implied that the solution must involve not just a focus on a small number of Muslims but mobilisation of a broader population to embrace a stronger sense of national identity based on 'muscular liberalism'. Like previous ministerial statements, Cameron's speech also spelled out that existing conventions of 'multicultural tolerance' needed to be weakened to deal with the perceived community-wide crisis of identity and values. Similarly, the 'Prevent' counter-radicalisation policy adopted a very broad approach, directed at the entire Muslim community, not just specific individuals or a few neighbourhoods. In these ways, the official security narrative in the UK has a high degree of performativity: it presents the problem of terrorism as a major generational crisis in the Muslim community, as rooted in a wide-ranging problem of identity, and as needing to be fought by mobilising whole sections of society and dispensing with existing social conventions.

What of the far right's own narratives? The EDL presents a particularly interesting example. Formed in Luton, Bedfordshire, in 2009, ostensibly to combat 'Islamist extremism', the EDL has become Europe's most significant 'counter-jihadist' street movement. Since its formation, there have been Nazi salutes, racist chants, incitement to violence and incidents of racial violence at EDL demonstrations.[28] There are multiple strands of opinion within the EDL but the narrative it seeks to present in its mission statement has the following structure:

- The West is at war against Islamic extremism;

- Unlike other groups in society, among Muslims, there is a problem of those who reject modern Western liberal and democratic values;

- It is wrong to assume that this is true of all Muslims. Rather, there is a conflict going on within Muslim communities between reformists who oppose orthodoxy and radicals who believe in a fundamentalist form of Islam;

- These radicals dominate Muslim organisations, remain key figures in British mosques, and are steadily increasing their influence;

- Cultural diversity is to be welcomed but parts of other cultures that conflict with liberal values cannot be tolerated in the name of multiculturalism;

---

27   A Kundnani, 'Integrationism: the politics of anti-Muslim racism', in Race & Class, 2007, vol. 48, no. 4.

28   R. Erfani-Ghettani, ·From portrayal to reality: examining the record of the EDL, in IRR News, 8 December 2011, http://www.irr.org.uk/news/ rrom-portrayal-to-reality-examining -the-record-of-the-EDL/.

- People of all races, religions and lifestyles should unite to oppose the growing power of radical Islam;

- The government has systematically failed to oppose Islamic extremism in Britain.

This narrative constructs subject positions of who 'we' are (those who share liberal values) and who 'they' are (those Muslims who reject them) and attempts to unite a diverse range of groups against 'Islamic extremism'. It sets out a relationship of conflict between 'us' and 'them'. And it sets out the obstacles to victory in that conflict, such as failed government policies. And with this, the street activism of the EDL is legitimised: demonstrations against mosques, marches through Muslim communities, demands for tougher action against 'Islamic extremism'.

The EDL narrative differs from that of the traditional far right (for whom the 'we' is members of the 'white race') and even recognises a distinction between 'moderate' Muslims and 'extremist' Muslims. 'Race war' has been swapped for the idea of a global conflict between Western liberal civilisation and 'radical Islam'. With its focus on whether Muslims share 'our values', the EDL's definition of the ·problem' is strikingly similar to Britain's official security narrative. The EDL takes literally government statements that there is a conflict between 'our values' and 'Islamic extremism'. From counter-terrorism programmes, it absorbs the notion that the enemy in this conflict is not a few individuals engaged in violence but an ideology embedded in Muslim communities. Likewise, the notion that Muslims can be categorised as extremist or moderate, according to their allegiance to Western values, has been taken from the official narrative. And from ministerial speeches, the EDL borrows the belief that 'state multiculturalism' is holding back the fight against Muslim 'extremism'. The main difference between the EDL narrative and the official narrative is that the EDL holds that the politicians running the domestic 'war on terror' are too soft and cowardly, still too caught up in multicultural platitudes to fight it properly; this is where a new far-right street movement will fill the gap with its own form of militancy. It is this last element - government failure - that justifies the need for a social movement willing to fight the enemy on the streets, and gives the EDL its militancy and distance from the liberal state.

This suggests that Britain's official security narrative has provided discursive opportunities for new far-right actors whose ideologies significantly overlap with government discourse, and which are therefore harder to counter. Through its leadership role in public discourse on terrorism, the government has been able to entrench a values and identity narrative as the prevalent way in which terrorism is understood in society; this narrative - amplified by popular newspapers - has been ripe for appropriation by the far right.

In post-7/7 Britain, there has been a consistent problem of 'fitting' the threat of far-right violence into official security narratives. For most of its existence, Prevent policy has completely neglected the far right as an issue. Practitioners interviewed in the first half of 2009 were unable to cite any examples of work specifically aimed at tackling the far right.[29] As of the end of 2010, less than 10 per cent of individual interventions designed to prevent radicalisation, as part of Prevent's Channel programme, were directed at the far right; over 90 per cent of the programme's focus was on Muslims.[30] The June 2011 Prevent policy review publicly recognised the existence of a far-right threat but it was strongly downplayed: there was only a 'small number of relevant cases' and there were no 'extreme right-wing terrorist organisations and formal groups'.[31] Above all, the far-

---

29   A. Kundnani, Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism, London, Institute of Race Relations, 2009.

30   Home Office, 'Channel data 2007-2010', document released under the Freedom of Information Act', London, May 2011.

31   HM Government, Prevent Strategy, London, June 2011, p. 20.

right threat was not conceived to be part of a wider social drama, whereas 'radical Islamist' terrorism was seen as symptomatic of a generational conflict over values, multiculturalism and identity; far-right violence was seen as involving no more than a few isolated 'lone wolves'.

With regard to the EDL, there is a reluctance by many officials and advisors to recognise the group as a significant threat. For example, in April 2011, Adrian Tudway, the police's National Co-ordinator for Domestic Extremism, wrote in an email to Muslim groups that the EDL is 'not extreme right wing as a group'.[32] Similarly, in January 2011, Douglas Murray, the associate director of the Henry Jackson Society, which influences the government on national security policy, stated that, in relation to the EDL: 'If you were ever going to have a grassroots response from non-Muslims to Islamism, that would be how you'd want it, surely.'[33] Both these statements suggest that counter jihadist' ideologies, through reworking far-right ideology and appropriating official discourse, are able to evade categorisation as a source of far-right violence.

The Netherlands

Like in Britain, counter-terrorism discourse in the Netherlands has strongly focused on 'radical Islamist' terrorism, understood largely through a values and identity narrative, in which 'lack of integration' with purported 'Dutch liberal values· such as gender equality, freedom of speech and secularism is seen as causing a generational problem of 'extremism' among young Muslims. A mainstream public debate has taken place on whether terrorism is the product of particular extremist interpretations of Islam or of Islam itself, as politicians Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali have stated. But both sides in this public and political debate have held a common set of assumptions:

- Our Dutch identity is based on liberal values of gender equality, freedom of speech, secularism, etc.;

- Either all followers or some minority of followers interpret Islam as a political ideology (Islamism), believe in rejecting our liberal values and aim to impose sharia law on Muslims and non-Muslims;

- Political correctness and multicultural tolerance have weakened the defence of our values and thereby aided the polarisation that leads to 'Islamist extremism';

- We have suffered terrorism because of 'Islamist extremism';

- We now need to put aside multicultural sensitivities, assertively defend our liberal values and be tougher in opposing 'Islamist extremism'.

This narrative defines the identities of its protagonists on the basis of whether or not they share 'our values', gives an explanation for the cause of the terrorism 'disturbance' (it is a product of 'Islamist extremism' bred in a context of 'polarisation') and suggests a resolution (rejecting multiculturalism and asserting'our values' more forcefully).

While this narrative became especially important following the murder of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004, the groundwork had already been laid some years earlier. Indeed, the Netherlands was a pioneer

---

32   V. Dodd and M. Taylor, 'Muslims criticise Scotland Yard for telling them to engage withEDL', in Guardian, 2 September 2011.

33   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 1wgAliHwrNo.

in advancing this kind of narrative in Europe.[34] In 1991, a speech by Frits Bolkestein, the leader of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD, Liberal Party), on the need for minorities to integrate to the values of Dutch liberalism, prompted a national debate on cultural integration.[35] The *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA, Labour Party)also began to quietly move towards a more restrictive immigration policy and away from multiculturalism while it was in government in the 1990s. In 1997, Pim Fortuyn published his book, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur* (Against the Islamisation of our Culture), which provided the clearest statement yet of the values-identity narrative.[36] His subsequent electoral success in municipal elections in Rotterdam, before his murder in 2002, demonstrated its potential appeal to a section of voters. Geert Wilders ploughed the same furrow after he left the VVD in 2004 to establish his own party. Other parties responded to the emergence of this new 'radical right' with a good measure of emulation, following Wilders in stating that 'multiculturalism' is in crisis because of the failure of Muslim immigrant groups to 'integrate', thus placing a values-identity narrative firmly in the mainstream. Over the last decade, a series of new 'integration' measures directed at Dutch Muslims have been proposed, culminating in the recently drafted niqab and burka ban, new barriers to immigration have been brought in, for example through tighter rules on family reunion, and multiculturalism has been officially pronounced a failure.[37] Though not specifically focused on counter-terrorism, these developments have further entrenched a values-identity narrative in relation to Dutch Muslims.

Like in Britain after 7/7, the Van Gogh murder was interpreted as both anindividual act of terrorism and a symptom of a wider problem - the failure of significant numbers of Muslims to integrate and adopt Dutch values. For example, *From Dawa to Jihad: the various threats from radical Islam to the democratic legal order,* a major policy study published in 2004 by the *Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst* (AJVD, General Intelligence and Security Service), argued that Dutch democratic values are under threat from Muslim 'extremists' and that Muslim 'moderates' who share these values need to be assisted by wider society to defend them.[38] In response, counter-radicalisation policies were implemented by municipal authorities in an attempt to mobilise a wide range of 'partners' to address Muslim 'extremism' at the community level. Thousands of 'front-line' workers, such as teachers, police officers and youth workers, were given training on spotting the 'warning signs' that a young person was rejecting Dutch values and embracing an 'extremist' Islamic identity.

These counter-radicalisation initiatives appear to have focused 90 per centof their resources on Muslim extremism.[39] At least initially, there was often insufficient interest in seeing the far right as a problem. For example, Rotterdamcity council did not initially believe it had a problem of right-wing extremism, even though it is known to be home to a strong far-right movement.[40] Efforts by at least one civil society

---

34   B. Prins, Voorbij de onschuld: het debat over integratie in Nederland, Amsterdam, van Gennep, 2004, pp. 34-6.

35   R. Witte, 'The Dutch Far Right: from 'classical outsiders' to 'modern insiders'', paper presented at CSTPV Workshop, 16-17 May 2011.

36   P. Fortuyn, Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament, Utrecht, Bruna, 1997.

37   Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 'Aanbieding visie op integratie',The Hague, June 2011.

38   Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, From Dawa to Jihad: the various threatsfrom radical Islam to the democratic legal order, The Hague, 2004.

39   Interview with counter-radicalisation practitioner, the Netherlands, 9 May 2012.

40   J. van Donselaar and P.R. Rodrigues (eds.), Racism and Extremism Monitor Eighth Report, Anne Frank Stichting/Leiden University, 2008, p. 12

counter-radicalisation partner to persuade civil servantsthat the far right also needed to be addressed were rebuffed because such concerns did not fit with the prevailing focus on 'Islamist extremism'. Accordingto some observers, there was also a tendency to downplay the problem of far right violence because of a fear of a town acquiring a negative association with right-wing extremism. Instead, far-right violence was labelled as a 'youth problem' of delinquency and public order.[41]

The office of the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security has a small programme of work on far-right extremism but it is marginal to the organisation as a whole, which continues to focus predominantly on 'Islamist extremism'. To the extent that there has been attention directed towards the far right, it has largely been couched in terms of the 'lone wolves' model, which emphasises individuals with mental health problems, rather than addressing the wider social and political context. Whereas officials have investigated how 'radical Islamist' narratives might be publicly countered in various ways, there have been no attempts to pursue counter-narrative initiatives in relation to far right violence.

In general, the political influence of the *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) hasbeen a strong barrier to focusing more official attention on the question of farright violence. Unlike in Britain, a 'counter-jihadist' narrative is strongly articulated in the mainstream of the Dutch political process by the PVV. Wilders' strong support for the Israeli right-wing has helped to demarcate a clear distinction between himself and the older, fringe far-right tradition; since the end of the Second World War, anti-Semitism had been considered the key test in the Netherlands of whether far-right politics had crossed the line into public unacceptability.

By 2010, the normalisation of the new far right was completed with the establishment of a government that depended on the support of the PVV for a parliamentary majority. Though not a member of the cabinet, Wilders was able to strongly influence policy on security, integration, migration and asylum. In this new climate, attempts to label the PVV a far-right party became increasingly difficult in the public sphere. An annual academic speech due to be given by the historian Thomas von der Dunk was cancelled when it emerged that he intended to draw an analogy between the PVV and pre-war pro-Nazi parties in the Netherlands. Similarly, the punk band *Jos en de Tosti 's,* scheduled to play at the annual festival commemorating Dutch liberation from Nazi occupation, was reportedly asked not to perform its song *'Mussolini van de Lage Landen',* which placed Wilders within the history of fascism.[42] Meanwhile, with stunts such as his call for banning the Quran and his video *Fitna,* Wilders became an international icon of the 'counter-jihadist' movement. He declared himself an admirer of Ba'et Yor's 'Eurabia' conspiracy theory and received support from Islamophobic movements in Europe, Israel and the US. According to Dutch newspaper reports, Wilders is funded by the US-based David Horowitz Freedom Center, which, with an annual budget of around $5 million, is a major financier of the 'counter-jihadist' movement, including websites such as Robert Spencer's *Jihad Watch.*[43]

One consequence of Wilders' presence at the centre of Dutch politics is that young Muslims are withdrawing from political engagement, leading to a generation of Muslim citizens who are alienated from public life, constantly talked about but never talking back. A 2010 survey of young Muslims in Amsterdam found that

---

41   Interviews with counter-radicalisation practitioners, the Netherlands, 4 April 2012, 1 May 2012, 9 May 2012.

42   R. Witte, 'The Dutch Far Right: from 'classical outsiders' to 'modern insiders'' paper presented at CSTPV Workshop, 16-17 May 2011.

43   T.-J. Meeus, 'Grote geld voor Wilders ligt in VS', in NRC Handelsblad, 25 January 2012.

the 'increasing anti-Islam climate' and 'public insults' associated with Wilders 'have led to fear, frustration and anger'; almost all of the participants had 'at some point in their lives experienced feelings of injustice, stigmatization and discrimination'.[44] There is a lack of Dutch Muslim voices in the public sphere able to articulate the community's experiences and advocate on its behalf.

At the same time, the problem of racist and Islamophobic harassment and violence continues.[45] The sociologist Ineke van der Valk documented 117 attacks on Dutch mosques from 2005 to 2010.[46] Halim el Madkouri, a programme director of Forum, the Institute for Multicultural Affairs, estimates the actual number to be much higher - perhaps five attacks on mosques each month in the Netherlands - and says that verbal abuse against women wearing headscarves is common, particularly in smaller towns. He is clear that Islamophobic violence is fuelled by the rhetoric of mainstream politicians: 'I have never seen Islam on the street - I see only Muslims. So if you say you want to get Islam out of Europe, it means getting rid of Muslims.'[47]

The official security narrative in the Netherlands has had a high degree of performativity: like in the UK, the problem of terrorism has been presented as a major generational crisis, rooted in a wide-ranging problem of identity, and as needing to be fought by mobilising whole sections of society and dispensing with existing social conventions of tolerance. The salience of this 'story-line' in policy-making discourse has been sustained both by the PVV and other political parties that have absorbed a values-identity narrative. One consequence has been counter-terrorism policy neglecting the threat of far-right violence, which does not 'fit' the official narrative.

Conclusions and recommendations

Britain and the Netherlands have narrated their counter-terrorism efforts according to a framework of values, identity, Muslim generational crisis and high social drama. In each case, security has been largely understood through a lens in which 'Islamist' terrorism is the primary threat, its cause has been taken to be a culture of extremism within Muslim communities, facilitated by multicultural policies that have undermined European values; in response, a stronger assertion of liberal values against extremism has been called for, brushing aside what are perceived to be conventions of political correctness and naïve tolerance of cultural difference.

The communication of this narrative of the 'Islamist' terrorist threat has had two consequences. First, security practitioners have tended to neglect the danger of far-right violence, failing to take the threat seriously in their analyses and not allocating sufficient resources to countering it. While the 'radical Islamist' threat is seen as 'strategic', the far-right threat is regarded more as a public order problem, a problem of 'lone wolves' or disturbed individuals; governments have thus absolved themselves of a broader reflection on the social and political contexts from which far-right violence draws its sustenance. Whereas the murder of Theo Van Gogh, for example, was taken to be symbolic of a wider problem with young Dutch Muslims, murders carried out by the far right have been seen as one-offs that are not indicative of social issues.

---

44   M.S. Visser, 'Consequences of the PVV: an immigrant perspective', Re-public: reimagining democracy, 16 January 2012, http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=5l94.

45   R. Witte, Racist Violence in the Netherlands, European Network Against Racism, Brussels,2011.

46   'Ruim 100 geweldsincidenten bij moskeeën', in De Telegraaf, 30 December 2011.

47   Interview, Utrecht, 9 May 2012.

With the Breivik case and movements like the EDL, we see a trend of groups and individuals who appropriate the official narrative of the 'war on terror' and choose to open a domestic 'front' against fellow citizens. The counter-terrorism system, with its own overlapping narrative, is in danger of becoming an unintentional ally of the new 'counter-jihadist' movements.[48] Whilethe propaganda of classic neo-Nazi groups is easily condemned by everyone, theemergence of the 'counter-jihadist' far right, overlapping with mainstream politics of all shades, is able to win some level of public acceptance.

The following recommendations are intended to address these problems:

• Security needs to be conceived from an objective and neutral standpoint. There is no reason to elevate the harm of 'radical Islamist' violence in Europe beyond that of far-right violence. Tactically, al-Qaeda and the far right have more in common than is usually assumed, as the Breivik case demonstrates. Nor does 'radical Islamist' terrorism warrant any special consideration because of its international dimension; the far right also thrives through multiple international connections across Europe, the United States and elsewhere. Ultimately, the decisive difference between the far right and 'radical Islamist' threats is not the harm they are each capable of inflicting on the people of Europe, or the geographical spread of their activities, but the fact that terrorists associated with 'radical Islamism' are using violence to oppose the foreign policies of European governments, whereas far-right groups are using violence to pressure for demographic and cultural changes to European societies. It is for this reason thatthe former is considered a 'strategic' threat whereas the latter is considered a 'public order' threat. Yet the distinction between 'strategic' and 'public order' threats is only valid if one holds foreign policies to be more sacrosanct than the rights of minority ethnic citizens. If one takes the preservation of the constitutional democratic order as the baseline for defining security threats, thenviolence aimed at removing the rights of minorities is at least as serious a threat to the fundamental well-being of European societies as violence aimed at opposing foreign policies.

• Minority ethnic communities victimised by far-right violence contend not only with occasional spectacular campaigns of violence directed at them, such as the David Copeland nail-bombing campaign in London in 1999, but also with ongoing low-level harassment which inflicts a different but no less powerful form of terror. There are strong arguments for considering all racially motivated violence as a kind of terrorism; it fits the standard definition of terrorism as violence aimed at instilling fear in a population to advance a political cause (in this case, the preservation of a racially unequal society or the creation of an ethnically homogenous society). Analyst Randy Blazak has written that terrorists and perpetrators of hate crimes work in the same way.[49] From this perspective, racial violence would appear to be a deep and perennial problem of terrorism in European societies that certainly matches in scale other categories of threat. Violence motivated by Islamophobia and other forms of racism should be combated forcefully. A first step is the compilation of robust data, if necessary by properly resourced independent monitoring groups.

• Official security narratives need to be reworked to break the triangle of mutual influences illustrated in figure 1. To achieve this, official narratives that talk of 'war' against 'Islamist extremism', that imply Muslims pass a test of their values before they are considered equal citizens, that see Muslims as

48   L. Vervaet, Le Making-Of D'Anders B. Breivik: Oslo-Utøya 2011: islamophobie et sionisme, les nouvelles guerres de l'extrême droite, Egalite Editions, 2012.

49   R. Blazak, 'Isn't every crime a hate crime?: The case for hate crime laws', in SociologyCompass, 2011, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 248.

presenting a kind of cultural threat to European societies need to be abandoned. The construction of three 'protagonists' in the prevailing security narrative - 'us', 'moderate Muslims' and 'extremist Muslims' - is unhelpful. First, it positions the 'we' that is leading the fight against terrorism as the non-Muslim majority, while Muslims themselves have to prove they are on the right side by demonstrating they share 'our' liberal values. Second, by introducing the conceptof national values, it unhelpfully confuses the question of violence with the question of cultural identity. Counter-terrorism is better narrated by avoiding the distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Islam and instead distinguishing between those who carry out or support acts of violence to advance their cause, and those who do not. The 'we' for this narrative is all those who oppose violence against fellow citizens. The counter to this violence is not an abstract setof 'values' associated with national, European or 'Western' identity but democratic participation and social solidarity. On this view, multiculturalism - as the principle that everyone has the right to full political participation irrespective of their perceived cultural values - is an asset in preventing violence rather than a barrier to be swept aside. An official security narrative onthese lines would do a better job of denying discursive opportunities to the far right and minimising the blind spot in Europe's optics of counter-terrorism. And it draws attention to the wider conditions in European societies which encourage support for far-right violence: the demonising rhetoric of the mainstream 'counter-jihadists' who deny Muslims the equal right to shape the societies of which they are a part, the longer legacies of institutional racism in Europe and the impact of ten years of 'war on terror' rhetoric.
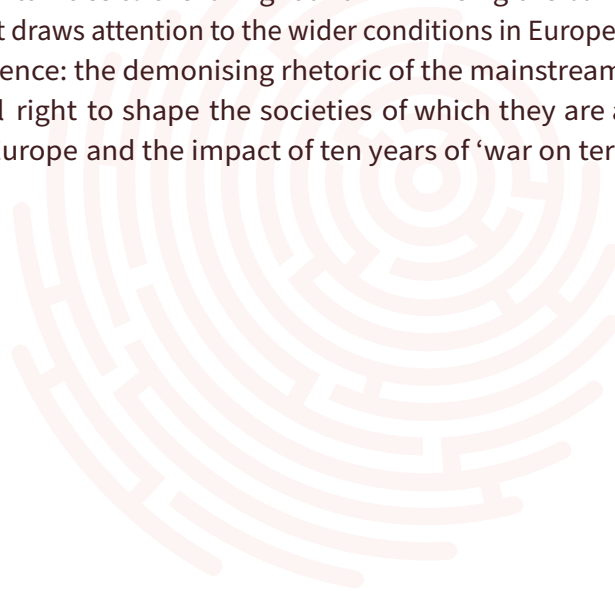
This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

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.

www.nhc.nl