



Intelligence services as a crucial factor

PRIORITIES WITHIN THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERROR

The intelligence services continue to collect more information in the attempt to discover and discourage terrorists. A huge amount of information, however, does not necessarily make it easier to predict acts of terrorism as the processing of information is time-consuming. The intelligence services should therefore prioritise the processing of information higher than they do today.

There seems to be a global consensus among policy makers that a strengthening of the intelligence services will automatically make it easier to prevent and fight terrorism. In the US, China and Pakistan as well as in Denmark the intelligence services are

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The cooperation between the intelligence services and other authorities should be strengthened in order to combine information and provide better insight into the root causes of terror.
- Intelligence should be divided into categories of plausible acts of terrorism that the authorities should prevent immediately and with tough means, and other issues that can be resolved with more gentle and long-term efforts.
- The intelligence services should prioritise tactical analysis to prevent imminent acts of terrorism and generally prevent terrorism from happening.

Information will often either be lacking or ambiguous which means that analysis capacity at the tactical level is especially important

At the tactical level, the need to prevent a terror action coincides with the need to address the basic reasons for the terrorists' motives. The intelligence services must therefore analyse possible terror actions and assess which ones are plausible and must be prevented with physical means right now.

expanding to gather more information in order to locate and counter terrorists. However, there is no evidence that more information will necessarily lead to better intelligence. The experience from China and Pakistan shows that a strengthening of the intelligence retrieval capacity will primarily lead to a harder approach to the fight against terrorism and to less focus on the cause of terrorism and how to prevent it with a more gentle approach. Neither the Chinese nor Pakistani intelligence services have come up with any actual suggestion as to how the society can stop terrorism from evolving.

The US experience from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, shows that the intelligence services had sufficient information but the cooperation between the services was not good

enough. The information was not collected and shared, so the intelligence services could not make any assessments on or counter plausible acts of terrorism.

The experience from the US, China and Pakistan shows that the identification of an opponent is absolutely essential for the intelligence services to function. Only then can the combined effort of the authorities be strengthened and coordinated. The intelligence services should be able to assess who the enemy is, and not least why this is the enemy. Is it possible to counter terrorism locally, or is it based on an international conflict which requires a wider approach? If the identification is not correct, the state may end up countering the wrong opponent or use the wrong tools.

Strategic level

The top level where the intelligence services advise and inform the politicians in order for them to make decisions on strategy, including overall priorities and allocation of resources.

Operational level

The medium level where the intelligence services advise and inform the ministries in order for them to establish targets and framework, as well as allocate resources for the executive branch.

Tactical level

The lowest level where the intelligence services supply government agencies with information about possible terrorists and their plausible targets. This makes it possible to solve specific tasks to prevent or counter terrorism.

Strategic level

The politicians should have enough information about the opponent in order to assess the need to prepare the society for an act of terrorism. The intelligence services will make assessments on the need for changes in society's preparedness by recommending changes in accordance with the threat levels. This will happen based on an overall decision about a strategy to fight the threat of terrorism, including the allocation and prioritising of tools. This may be in the form of increased border control, restrictions on the freedom of movement or establishment of cooperation forums between different authorities to strengthen the civil effort. The goal for the intelligence services is to take the temperature of possible threats and assess whether they are about to escalate into acts of terrorism. The intelligence services should evaluate the overall purpose of the terror organisations in order to recommend the protection measures against the effect of future acts of terrorism, even if the physical

evidence may not yet be available. Details and time are therefore of less importance at the strategic level.

Operative level

The intelligence services have many tasks to perform. The authorities involved in the fight against terrorism need extensive knowledge on why the terror organisations have emerged, and what their target is. The information is necessary in order to 'cut the head of the snake' – to target actions towards the leaders of the organisations before they can carry out the acts of terrorism – but also to counter the root causes of terrorism, including efforts to counter the marginalisation of potential terrorists, the lack of education as well as unemployment and lack of career opportunities. The information may come from many different sources, and the process will not end until the cause of the emergence of terrorism has been neutralised. Even though time is not a crucial factor, the understanding of the terror organisation and its background is vital to predict possible acts of terrorism and for the authorities to use the right tools,

also the more long-term tools.

Tactical level

The intelligence services should provide information in order to prevent current plans of terrorism, including organisation tables, lists of connections between potential terrorists, their financing and information about their location. Furthermore, the intelligence services should provide physical evidence of future acts of terrorism – as a rule evidence that is appropriate for the justice system and which may thus legitimise the preventive steps that the authorities take. The actions are often targeted against identified persons and may involve restrictions of the freedom of movement or limited access to various commercial articles for security reasons.

At the tactical level, the need to prevent an act of terrorism will meet the need to physically address the root causes of the terrorists' motives. Therefore, the intelligence services should analyse possible acts of



In order for the intelligence services and authorities not to use the wrong means, intelligence about for example radicalization of young people must be evaluated and prioritized. Photo: Stine Bidstrup © Polfoto

terrorism and evaluate whether they are plausible and should be prevented immediately with physical means. Intelligence which does not indicate a plausible act of terrorism but a potential intention should be used by the authorities in connection with a long-term effort against the root causes of the emergence of terrorism.

One of the challenges is to provide enough information to counter acts of terrorism before they are carried out. The experience from abroad shows that this is done by thorough, time-consuming and shared analyses by the intelligence services and a thorough cooperation with other authorities who have knowledge about the social conditions within their area of responsibility. This applies in particular to police and social authorities who are in daily contact with its citizens and are therefore able to provide information about any changes to the normal situation and about whether the different tools are functioning as planned.

Prioritizing the tactical level

In order to assess whether intelligence is a crucial factor in the war on terror, the different levels of the

intelligence services' organisation should be addressed. At the strategic level, intelligence is important but not time critical. At the operative level, intelligence is one of the most important factors in an ongoing process of establishing a clear picture of the situation. At the tactical level, intelligence is a crucial factor and very important in order to locate potential terrorists before they carry out their acts, as well as to carry out long-term approaches to prevent terrorism from evolving.

In general, the intelligence services should provide high quality analyses about plausible acts of terrorism. However, information will often be missing or be ambiguous and therefore, more analytical capacity at the tactical level is very important for two reasons: First, it may provide physical evidence of a potential act of terrorism so that the authorities may intervene and prevent it. Second, it may provide the authorities with a reason for the emergence of terrorism so that they can address the root causes. In fact, the long-term perspective is the most important one in order to beat the terrorists.

This policy brief is based on analyses of the Chinese, Pakistani and American war on terror and is part of DIIS research.

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Cover photo: Bomb cordon after the hotel bomb at Hotel Jørgensen in september 2010. Foto: Astrid Dalum © Polfoto

