CENS Distinguished Visitor Programme

Seminar Series by Dr Peter Neumann

Al Qaeda after Bin Laden: A Dying Phenomenon?
(18 February 2013)

Non-Violent and Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?
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Prison-based De-radicalisation Programmes: Lessons Learned
(22 February 2013)

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About Dr Peter Neumann

Dr Peter Neumann is Professor of Security Studies at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and serves as Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR, www.icsr.info), which he founded in early 2008.

Neumann has authored or co-authored five books, including *Old and New Terrorism*, published by Polity Press in 2009; and *The Strategy of Terrorism* (with MLR Smith), published by Routledge in 2008. He is the author of numerous peer-reviewed articles, dealing with different aspects of terrorism and radicalisation, especially 'homegrown' radicalisation in Western countries. Shorter articles and opinion pieces have appeared in, among others, the New York Times, Der Spiegel, Wall Street Journal and the International Herald Tribune. In addition, he has led research projects and written influential policy reports about issues such as online radicalisation, prison-based de-radicalisation programs, and terrorist recruitment in Europe. The most recent – *Preventing Violent Radicalization in America* – was published in June 2011 by the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington DC, where Neumann served as visiting scholar (www.bipartisanpolicy.org).

Neumann is a member of the editorial boards of two leading, peer-reviewed journals, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism and Democracy and Security*, and serves as investigator for the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. He is an Affiliate of the European Commission's European Network of Experts on Radicalisation, a member of the German Federal Criminal Office's (BKA) European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues, and sits on the advisory boards of numerous other think-tanks and institutions, including the Club de Madrid, the association of former Presidents and Prime Ministers. He has given evidence before committees of the US. House of Representatives and the UK House of Commons, and served as an expert witness for the UK's Crown Prosecution Service.

At the Department of War Studies, Neumann co-directs the MA programme in Terrorism, Security and Society, and supervises six research students. He has taught courses on terrorism, counterterrorism, intelligence, radicalisation and counter-radicalisation at King's College London and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, where he continues to serve as adjunct professor.

Neumann holds an MA in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin, and a PhD in War Studies from King's College London. Before becoming an academic, he worked as a radio journalist in Germany.

Al Qaeda after Bin Laden: A Dying Phenomenon?[1]

18 February 2013 (1000hrs-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

Peter Neumann started his seminar by posing a set of questions to the audience as to whether: (a) Al Qaeda is finished; (b) terrorism is over; and (c) radicalisation has stopped after the killing of Osama Bin Laden. He concluded that none of the above-mentioned three scenarios is true. He went on to argue that even though Al Qaeda (AQ) is still around and radicalisation continues, all these phenomenon are undergoing transformation and this bears important implication for future counterterrorism efforts. Neumann went on to examine each of the three scenarios.

Some scholars argued that with improved counterterrorism capabilities, AQ's presence has been on the decline with fewer organised plots. They also claimed that AQ's central leadership in Pakistan is facing enormous pressure and the Arab Spring proved that change could be brought about without violence, consequently threatening AQ's ideology. Neumann refuted these scholars by claiming that while the Arab Spring started out as a series of peaceful uprisings headed by English-speaking middle class people using modern technology, the situation is not that clear-cut at present.

Neumann quoted Anwar Al Awlaki, a terrorist who had great influence over the non-Arabic speaking world, saying "No one saw it coming from Tunisia and then when it came from Tunisia, no one saw it coming from Egypt" to show that AQ's leadership was surprised by the revolution. Although AQ was happy that the dictators were removed from Tunisia and Egypt, the revolution did not actually progress the way AQ had originally intended it to proceed. It was non-violent and non-Islamist. However Neumann noted that this happened only at the initial stage of the revolution. When the revolution went to Libya and back to Egypt and Tunisia, it became increasingly less secular after the election. In Syria, it became sectarian.

One of the unintended consequences of the revolution in Libya has been the empowering of Islamists across North Africa. Due to Gaddafi's use of mercenaries to quash the uprising in the early stage of the revolution, light and heavy arms flowed into Mali after the fall of Gaddafi's regime. From AQ's point of view, the most promising situation for their movement is in Syria. Unlike in Egypt, situation in Syria has turned into a contracted civil war with a sectarian dimension. President Bashar al-Assad, unlike secular dictators such as Mubarak and Ben-Ali, has close links with the Alawis of the Shia sect of Islam which AQ regards as heretical. Looking at how AQ's influence thrives in Syrian sectarian environment, how Jihadist fighters are making enormous impacts in the Syrian conflict and how people across the Arab world are mobilised, Neumann predicted that Syria may turn out to be the next Afghanistan where foreign fighters from all around the world have gathered and have been radicalised.

[1] Do not quote without permission

Syrian conflict has also created opportunities for AQ affiliates. As far as the West is concerned, AQ's organised plots have decreased in numbers but there is a rise in lone wolf operations. AQ remains a complex organisation which is constantly re-grouping and reorganising itself. Neumann reminded the audience not to be overly alarmed yet not to underestimate the situation as AQ continues to be a threat to security.

After his analysis of the current situation and threat of AQ, Neumann said that in contrast to the past, terrorism today has emerged in a more diversified form. The West has always thought of terrorism as consisting only AQ operations but new threats such as far-right extremism have emerged. Neumann cited the example of Anders Behring Breivik, perpetrator of the 2011 Norway attacks, who did not represent the conventional construct of neo-Nazism but represent a new form of ideology – an online counterculture. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Breivik was also an example of how successful and sophisticated lone operators can be. Besides right wing extremism, there is also a revival of anarchism. Anarchic saboteurs had managed to shut off transport systems. There is also an aspect of international terrorism that is non-AQ related, for example, the confrontation between Israel and Iran. Terrorism in the form of Hezbollah attacks against American and Jewish targets has already taken place. Neumann re-emphasised that terrorism is not over and it does not emerge out of a vacuum. More often than not, it emerges from the cleavages and countercultures in societies which are grappling with globalisation and undergoing transition from being mono-cultural to multi-cultural.

With regard to the issue of radicalisation, Neumann said that radicalisation has increasingly been associated with aggressive, populist right wing street movements in Europe. One such example is the English Defence League in UK which is coercive and has always been instigating communal conflicts. Although these rising right wing movements have not launched any terrorist attacks, Neumann argues that they can still inflict serious damage to the fabrics of society and they may ultimately produce terrorism. He also reminded the audience that they should not simply limit the understanding of radicalisation to violence or terrorism and one should also not condone radicalisation just because it is non-violent.

Based on the main points he made in his presentation, Neumann suggested several implications for future counterterrorism movements. Counterterrorism efforts have been more effective than it used to be as illustrated by the decrease in number of serious plots. Major terrorist attack such as 9/11 is less likely to happen than before. However, he argued that methods of counterterrorism have to be modified in line with the rise and evolution of extremism. Modus operandi of AQ has changed as well. More and more AQ terrorist attacks in the West are inspired by extremist forums on the internet and the internet has become a community in which individuals socialise and become radicalised. The police have to engage the virtual community in order to thwart AQ operations effectively. Counterterrorism operatives also have to note that right wing extremism and traditional terrorism may actually be mutually reinforcing. In conclusion, Neumann emphasised that terrorism is not over and urged the audience to place more attention not only on movements that are likely to result in

terrorism, but generally on movements that are extremist and anti-democratic in their ideology and orientation.

Discussion

One participant asked two questions regarding the current situation of AQ: (a) whether AQ leadership wields any influence in their affiliates; and (b) whether AQ in Iraq is really trying to influence the events in Syria as stated by the American intelligence. In response to the first question, Neumann responded that AQ affiliates have become more prominent because the central leadership has been undermined. Hence, it could be argued that the affiliates' prominence had to arise out of necessity. However, some affiliates, for example, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, are ambitious and it is the only affiliate that has been constantly attacking American targets. These ambitious affiliates recognise that any affiliate which launches a successful attack on America will be regarded as the new leader of the movement. With regard to the AQ's influence in Syria, Neumann said that the situation is very complex. The Jihadist faction, Al-Nusra, in Syria is definitely drawing expertise from AQ in Iraq. However, some jihadist factions which are stronger than Al-Nusra are homegrown and they have no links to AQ in Iraq. The situation remains complex and more studies have to be done on this subject.

In response to the question regarding the extent of coordination among affiliates in the absence of central leadership, Neumann said that there is very little coordination among affiliate organisations. The last indicator of any coordination was actually derived from the papers found in Bin Laden's compound which revealed that the affiliates followed Bin Laden's advice at their convenience. However, communication among affiliates is very weak without much coordination and the internet is becoming the marketplace for Jihadist movements.

Another participant asked whether there are any foundations pumping in money for terrorist organisations and what the trends are. Neumann responded that foundations providing money overtly to terrorist organisations do not exist anymore in post-9/11 era. He said that money flowed into Syria through informal channels such as private donors, the gulf monarchies and charitable foundations. There is not much funding for AQ affiliates in Europe and most of these organisations are encouraged to raise money themselves.

Non-Violent and Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?[2]

20 February 2013 (1000-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

Peter Neumann's speech summarised existing literatures about the dynamics of violent extremism and non-violent extremism, and explored the connections between the two. Neumann acknowledged that defining the term "extremism" was a difficult task, given the ambiguity of the term. Two factors – extreme ideas and extreme words – may be attributed to the term. Referring to Roger Scruton's definition, extremism may be defined as a political idea that opposed a society's core values and principles. It may also be used to describe the methods through which political actors attempt to realise their aims in a manner that shows disregard for life, liberty and human rights. The notion of extremism thus encompassed cognitive and violent extremism. Neumann noted that this was one of the most contentious yet least researched areas in the study of violent extremism, with policymakers and academics often taking black and white positions, such as "non-violent extremism is a conveyor belt into violent extremism" or "non-violent extremism is a safety valve against violent extremism". The first presumed that ideas were the preconditions to action. The latter posited that non-violent forms of extremism were not preconditions to terrorism. Rather, expression of ideas would act as a buffer which prevents actual violence from taking place.

Using the social movement theory, Neumann argued that the dynamics and relationships between violent and non-violent extremism were complex, introducing concepts like "counterculture" and "radical milieu" to show how fluid and multi-faceted the connections between violent and non-violent collective action can be. He stated that terrorism rarely emerged out of a vacuum; instead, 99 percent arose out of a counterculture which subscribes to a particular form of ideology. Quoting Max Weber, Neumann stated that milieus are social environments that comprised of people who share the same culture and ideas. Countercultures, on the other hand, as illustrated in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, were organised loosely; they did not necessarily comprise of organisations or hierarchies. They created solidarity and opportunity for action. The members were influenced by what the others did. Neumann saw countercultures as agents that helps ease the road to violence due to their ability to absorb certain forms of ideology, linking members to particular networks and de-sensitising them to illegal, coercive behaviours. He highlighted that countercultures were not monolithic, nor were all its members at the same stage of activity. They should also not be seen as doing only one thing at a time.

Neumann offered possible factors that might lead to the radicalisation of countercultures. Firstly, the failure of a particular movement may result in different outcomes: for instance, the counterculture may enter into the mainstream culture or counterculture may become the radicalised entity. Communal conflicts may also radicalise countercultures. External triggers, which policy makers have no control over, may affect countercultures which felt intimate connection with them even if these took place at a distant location. Repression or overly

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harsh clampdown on counterculture activities by the authorities may also result in radicalisation.

Neumann believed that some factors may be able to moderate countercultures. These include moderate voices that speak out against the extremism of the counterculture. Allowing counterculture a voice and opportunity for participation within the mainstream may also moderate their tones. In terms of policy, Neumann highlighted that there needed to be an avenue for participation in legitimate platforms for countercultures.

Neumann concluded by stating that countercultures are complex and there was therefore a need to understand them. They should not be treated similarly as some were more predisposed to violence than others. There was also a need to be wary of repressing countercultures while strengthening moderate voices, problematic as these terms might be. There was the need to provide countercultures with the opportunity for participation in playing the same rules while not overly privileging them.

Discussion

In the discussion that ensued, the role of leadership in terms of triggering countercultures was discussed. A question was posed as to whether the leaders of countercultures have an interpretive role in the movement and whether this would present obstacles to the role of the moderates. Neumann responded that there was still the need to find moderate voices in order to prevent countercultures from "going bad." There was however the problem of empowering them without de-legitimising them. Salafists were discussed in relation to this. The mistake of turning the so-called "moderate" Salafists into spokesperson for the Muslim community was that the mainstream community still saw them as extreme, although they were less so than the "violent" Salafists. Therefore, the terms were effective contextually and would only be useful in specific situations.

The discussion also pondered over the definition of the term "mainstream". A question was posed as to how policy makers can identify who is in the majority and whether countercultures are always necessarily in the minority. Neumann replied that the terms "extremism" and "mainstream" are positional, but historical evidences showed that when countercultures became the majority, the country tended to fall in trouble. He cited the case of Germany in the 1920s, when the communists and fascists became the majority.

It was highlighted during the discussion that, in Southeast Asia, Islamist parties, especially those with strong cadre systems, tended to serve as a valve for inoculation against more radical ideas. Neumann acknowledged that the Islamist parties in general were not actually dangerous in terms of terrorism *per se*; therefore there was the need to understand countercultures in their own terms.

Another participant asked whether there is a tipping point when a behaviour should be considered terrorist in nature. Neumann acknowledged the difficulties abound in defining the

term, noting that these differ greatly from country to country and even within the same jurisdiction, it may not be applied consistently.

Prison-based De-radicalisation Programmes: Lessons Learned[3]

20 February 2013 (1000-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

Throughout his presentation, Peter Neumann, by drawing on different de-radicalisation programmes in prisons in different countries, discussed the similarities and differences, as well as limitations and conditions for the success of such programmes. He identified key underlying drivers and principles, for example, the mix of programming, the role of credible interlocutors, arrangements for re-integration into society, the importance of post-release commitments, and material inducements.

Based on a research project for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) titled *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries*, published in 2010, Neumann went into great detail during his presentation into the role prisons can play in not only radicalising people, but also reforming them. He began the presentation by highlighting the key connection between prisons and terrorism, as well as the significant role prisons have played in the narratives of key terrorists. He then continued to outline the potential danger prisons pose as they are fundamentally places of vulnerability where those convicted with terrorist crimes can both use their time in prison to mobilise outside support as well as to radicalise other criminals inside prison. Indeed, in cases where terrorists and regular criminals are kept separate inside the prison, a focal point can be created where there is the potential for terrorists to interact, become further radicalised, as well as create an operational command structure. As a result, many prisons practice dispersal where convicted terrorists are spread out amongst a number of high security prisons, normally separated from the rest of the prison population. Neumann also spoke of the importance of treating all prisoners, including convicted terrorists, with respect and dignity. He commented that if they are mistreated within prison, often their outside constituency will use the event as proof that these particular prisoners are unfairly discriminated against.

Neumann also discussed the opportunity prisons present for reform of terrorists. This is made possible, he said, by the fact that a lot of people in prison have a change of attitude towards life whilst serving their sentence; they are deprived of their traditional social network and are thus socially isolated. To minimise the space in which radical, often religiously-framed, ideologies can flourish, Neumann suggested dealing with the over-crowding and under-staffing of prisons, as well as providing moderate religious services. At the same time, individual disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes are very significant. He commented that for successful rehabilitation, there must be a focus on after-care. Moreover, there must be not only religious training in prison, but also vocational training to provide prisoners with a skill and purpose to their life when they are released back to the society. Neumann also suggested there must be credible interlocutors who demand authority from the prisoners and highlighted the importance of the released prisoners having commitments and material inducements to discourage re-engagement with terrorism and radicalisation.

[3] Do not quote without permission

In closing, Neumann said that de-radicalisation programmes can serve as incubators for positive changes and have an important role in dealing with political violence, but that it remains difficult to compare these programmes and measure their success in an objective manner.

Discussion

One participant asked Neumann whether there was any concerted effort of de-radicalising terrorist leaders in prisons. Neumann responded in saying that he was unaware of any such programmes. He added that often terrorist leaders have become too radicalised to change their ideologies. One of the best ideas is to deprive these leaders of their hard core extremist support, that is, of their supporters that are less entrenched in the terrorist ideology.

Another participant asked the difference between male and female radicals in prisons. Neumann responded that during the research into 15 countries for the report *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries*, he came across only one female radical. He added that the internet, however, is now playing a key role in allowing women to become engaged in extremism. Women in the past, he stated, had found it difficult to be a part of the Jihadi movement. Today, however, YouTube channels and online forums allowed women to become involved in the movement without having to come face to face with the opposite gender.