CENS Distinguished Visitor Programme

Seminar Series by Dr. Quintan Wiktorowicz

A Hotspot Approach to Counter-Radicalisation: Lessons from the Field
(2 July 2013)

Forging an Effective Interagency Approach to Counter-Radicalisation
(4 July 2013)

Cross-Sector Partnerships for National Security
(9 July 2013)

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(12 July 2013)

About Dr. Quintan Wiktorowicz

Dr. Quintan Wiktorowicz is an internationally recognised author and expert on national security and counterterrorism and served in two senior positions at the White House, where he led efforts to advance national security partnerships and innovation at home and abroad. Prior to his government service, Dr. Wiktorowicz was one of America's leading academics on Muslim communities and countering violent extremism.

A Hotspot Approach to Counter-Radicalisation: Lessons from the Field[1]

2 July 2013 (1000hrs-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

In his presentation, Quintan Wiktorowicz discussed a "hotspot" approach to countering violent extremism. He explained how governments can increase the impact of their counter-radicalisation efforts by designing initiatives that are tailored to the needs and opportunities of neighbourhoods and locations of concern. Wiktorowicz noted that there are personal and emotional dimensions to the radicalisation process and such dimensions present a challenge for government responses as governments are generally not suited to address communities at such levels.

To illustrate the deeply personal and emotional aspects of radicalisation, Wiktorowicz shared his experiences studying and engaging with Muslim communities in Jordan and the UK. In 1996, he studied Islamic charities in Jordan, gaining exposure into their recruitment process. His research demonstrated that recruitment almost always took place through charismatic acquaintances. The observation was reinforced during a similar research conducted in the UK after the September 11 attacks. Radicalisation tended to take place through personal relationships and within networks rather than as a result of having been exposed to inspiring sermons of influential preachers. Among the known cases of radicalisation, the latter tended to be the exception rather than the norm. Wiktorowicz further noted that even with exposure to such sermons, there was still the need to take the preacher's speech and relate it to personal experiences. The radicalisation process thus necessitated the presence of a radicaliser who had the ability to relate to his target audience. Accordingly, counter-radicalisers with similar relatability are needed in counter-radicalisation efforts.

In light of that, Wiktorowicz advocate a hotspot approach to counter-radicalisation which is focused on the needs of a particular area or community rather than across the whole country. This approach emphasises the importance of what Wiktorowicz referred to as "key influencers" to engage the communities of interest. Key influencers, with whom many from the local community can relate to, should be identified and empowered to reach out to individuals who are on the radicalisation path. Governments should consider building programmes around the key influencers within a particular society. Contrary to expectations, he said there are already many people with relevant skills on the ground who can potentially become the key influencers in their respective communities. Further, they need not necessarily be religious figures. However, a considerable amount of time is needed to establish relevant social networks and foster authentic relationships, and it is something that most government bureaucracies are not programmed to do and that remains a challenge that has to be overcome.

In conclusion, Wiktorowicz said that the hotspot approach possesses many advantages for countering radicalisation. For one, the approach means resources can be targeted and

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prioritised for certain locations. Policymakers can customise their efforts according to context in order to increase their impact. The approach is also more sustainable because it builds up the capacities of key influencers, people who really know their respective neighbourhoods best. Finally, the qualitative impact of such an approach on a community can be measured.

Discussion

The audience was interested in hearing the speaker's opinion regarding whom he considered would be the best person to identify and approach the key influencers for counter-radicalisation initiatives. As community engagement should be an open and transparent process, intelligence officers are not the appropriate party to approach the key influencers. Furthermore, as the key influencers needed to keep their communications personal and relatable to the community, they should not base their engagement on some pre-determined agenda.

Also a subject of discussion was which types of key influencers to engage, and specifically, if those who are non-violent but nevertheless radical are a concern. The speaker noted that it is more important to engage with individuals rather than with categories of people. Such an approach, however, depend on what are considered key priorities in the network and the central counter-radicalisation objectives of the locales in question.

The audience was also interested in the application of the hotspot approach and the identification of the right interlocutor in the online community. The speaker said that it is indeed difficult to know who had relatability online, but noted that instances of radicalisation over the Internet are few and far between. He acknowledged that in the era of growing interconnection between online and offline communities, online space can provide the fodder for relationships that take place offline. Such causality, however, are difficult to ascertain.

It was also observed that the impact of key influencers often transcend spatial boundaries, particularly since their ability to pull in the crowd is more related to personality. A question was posed as to how the hotspot approach might be applied to places such as Indonesia where people would travel for many hours in order to meet someone in a faraway town. The speaker explained that the hotspot approach is less about where the key influencers are located but rather where the areas of concern are. Once identified, resources can be prioritised for those trouble spots and counter-radicalisation initiatives tailor-made according to context.

Forging an Effective Interagency Approach to Counter-Radicalisation[2]

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

In his presentation, Quintan Wiktorowicz discussed how the White House built its whole-of-government approach to counter violent extremism. He explained the challenges of developing a national counter-radicalisation strategy involving offices from outside the traditional national security space, partnering with communities across multiple agencies, and coordinating bureaucracies with distinct cultures, priorities, and missions.

Wiktorowicz explained that a whole-of-government approach to counter-radicalisation required collaboration and cooperation between and among different government agencies, some of which became involved in national security for the first time. Problems for coordination arose due to bureaucratic infighting and turf battles between the different agencies. Other challenges included resistance to change and confusion over different agencies' role in counter-radicalisation. These issues often underscored the importance of properly framing the counter-radicalisation strategy to suit the operational context and language understood by the respective agencies in order to obtain consensus from all parties. Another challenge in counter-radicalisation was faced by law enforcement agencies; they had to learn to strike a good balance between the ways they conducted their investigations into criminal activities and threats to national security whilst guaranteeing the constitutional protection of civil liberties.

Wiktorowicz emphasised how the process of radicalisation of individuals took place at a deeply personal and emotional level, a level that governments were simply not programmed to operate on. Accordingly, engaging and empowering communities at the local level proved to be vital, regardless if such an approach necessitated a cognitive and organisational shift on the part of the government.

In view of the challenges to address radicalisation, Wiktorowicz outlined the four pillars of the US counter-radicalisation strategy. The first pillar was engagement with the community through interagency resources. He also advocated transparency in counter-radicalisation initiatives instead of secretive operations that could be misinterpreted by conspiracy theorists. The key to counter-radicalisation involved equipping families and other local community networks to recognise signals and signs of radicalisation and empowering them to do something about it. Wiktorowicz asserted the importance of sharing information about the threat of radicalisation and cautioned that if communities did not have adequate opportunity or proper avenues to provide feedback to the government, they might become

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disillusioned by the process or begin to buy into conspiracy theories and be driven further away from the system.

In order to effectively engage with the community, Wiktorowicz explained that the second pillar of US counter-radicalisation strategy was training relevant parties to recognise signs of radicalisation and, subsequently, what they could do about it. Interagency training groups had been formed to train community leaders to detect radicalisation in their respective communities.

The third pillar of the counter-radicalisation strategy was counter-ideology. It was important to keep in mind that terminologies and the language used had to be deliberated and carefully crafted as the proper framing of issues was a central concern. Finally, Wiktorowicz observed that in the post-9/11 political climate, the dominant sentiments among American Muslims were feelings of disenfranchisement, and thus, the fourth pillar of the strategy was getting the community to have positive interaction with government officers.

Wiktorowicz then shared key challenges affecting interagency cooperation. Firstly, because of the way the US political system was structured, the federal government could not dictate what local governments did with their resources. He thus stressed the importance of getting local governments to understand and buy into the necessity of promoting community engagement and becoming part of a constructive coordinated solution. Whatever developments occurring in one jurisdiction like, for instance, excessive use of force by a local law enforcement agency, could have repercussions in another, with adverse impact for the federal government. Secondly, not every agency regarded counter-radicalisation as their priority. In fact, initiatives to engage with communities were often seen as an additional responsibility. In order to overcome such resistance, leadership was required from the highest national offices, the most effective being the US President himself. Thirdly, counter-radicalisation required the garnering of many different tools, for example, from the education and healthcare sectors, and it became particularly challenging when such sectors did not have a history in counter-radicalisation and were concerned that their traditional work could become subsumed under security. This was accordingly why framing counter-radicalisation efforts properly was important so that such sectors could see their respective relevance to the matter at hand. Fourthly, interagency cooperation was a challenge in light of differences in the forms and functions of different government agencies.

In conclusion, Wiktorowicz shared his views on the future of radicalisation in the US. He acknowledged that the intervention and disengagement aspect of counter-radicalisation needed to be improved. More work was needed to ensure better intervention methods targeting individuals like Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who had actually been identified as a person of interest by the FBI before he became involved in the Boston bombings. Further, it was necessary to keep in mind that although al Qaeda remained at the forefront of terrorist threats,

extremist groups in the country came from diverse backgrounds such as those from right-wing groups, the neo-Nazis, and violent sovereign citizens, among others. Wiktorowicz noted that the US needed to look into ways to handle these vastly different groups instead of having an approach that was single-mindedly focused on al Qaeda. Finally, as counter-radicalisation efforts had nevertheless resulted in many good initiatives, much more could thus be done to apply the lessons learned from the experience to other counter-violence programmes such as gang and rape prevention.

Discussion

Comparisons between the US and the UK models of counter-radicalisation formed the central topic of interest during the discussion. It was noted that in the UK, there were dual views about counter-radicalisation. The Labour Party, on one hand, was willing to work with different organisations, including some more hardlined Salafi ones, to prevent violent extremism, i.e., it was willing to accept a trade-off in "British values" in order to achieve counter-radicalisation results. On the other hand, the Conservatives believed that it could not work with groups that did not share similar national values. The different approaches had implications on the kinds and types of counter-radicalisation organisations the party incumbent in the UK government funded, as well as on the style of the projects and programmes that were deployed. A further question was asked regarding the intervention aspect of the US counter-radicalisation strategy and whether signs of mental disorders were present in the individuals who had been referred to the authorities by their local communities, as was the case for a large percentage of referrals in the UK.

<u>Cross-Sector-Partnerships for National Security</u>[3]

9 July 2013 (1000-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

Quintan Wiktorowicz spoke on the importance of building cross-sector partnerships in meeting today's complex national security challenges. While the Obama Administration has highlighted the importance of working across different sectors, this does not necessarily sit well with national security professionals wary of ceding control and responsibility to non-government partners. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that many of the current national security objectives can be accomplish by forging partnerships with civil society and private sectors. Such partnerships would enable governments to leverage collective action in solving complex security problems. Cross-sector partnerships open up possibilities of tapping into specific expertise and encourage innovative solutions, allowing governments to do more with less which is an important consideration in today's financial environment. Finally, community and private sector partnerships involve the very stakeholders that are executing the project in their communities thus increasing legitimacy and buy-in.

Wiktorowicz however noted that cross-sector partnerships brings with it considerable challenges. One of the main obstacles is the legal and policy ambiguity that would allow government departments to form such partnerships. A related consideration involves the grey area of ethics and impropriety surrounding perceptions of undue influence from partnering with non-government organisations. Due to the scarcity of such partnership projects, few government officials are thus trained to manage public-private partnerships and there are limited institutional structures supporting such a move. Accordingly, government agencies do not perceive the benefits of building public-private partnerships to outweigh the risks involved.

In conclusion, Wiktorowicz outlined four key lessons for cross-sector partnerships. He noted that national security agencies are not all that different from other agencies. There are lessons which can be drawn from the efforts of other non-security agencies in managing public-private partnerships. Building partnerships involves more than mechanics and structural considerations but is ultimately about relationships and trust. This is underscored by the fact that some of the best partnerships were formed on the basis of the relationships and not due to monetary considerations. Finally, while there is much excitement at the conceptual stage of any cross-partnership project, the toughest part remains the execution and the day-to-day work in maintaining the partnership.

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Discussions

A question was raised regarding government efforts in reaching out to think-tanks and academia. Wiktorowicz explained that relationships between the US government and both think-tanks and academia are generally episodic in nature, arising when there is a need for expertise and information. He noted however that the efforts at collaboration between these sectors suffer from a lack of understanding of the motivation and tempo of the work on both sides. To forge better partnerships, there is a need for think-tanks and academia to recognise how government agencies function and consume information and analysis. There should be more effort made to foster a new model of analytic production which focuses on just-in-time information that would prove useful for critical decision-making. In response to a question on what steps should be taken to maintain control over public-private partnerships, Wiktorowicz explained that a robust due diligence process is vital in knowing who the partners are and how they operate.

National Security Innovation[4]

12 July 2013 (1000-1130hrs)
Vanda 4, Level 6, Marina Mandarin

Quintan Wiktorowicz presented on the opportunities provided by private sector innovation principles and tools in changing the way governments manage national security. In today's environment, the increasing uncertainties and fast pace of change has made certain solutions and ways of doing business obsolete. Private sector innovation and practices may present new ways of dealing with an increasingly complex operating environment. However, the pathway towards embracing new innovative principles presents certain paradoxes for government agencies. While on one hand encouraged to embrace innovation, government agencies are also de-incentivized from pursuing such solutions. Government employees are told to innovate but run the risk of shouldering the blame should anything go wrong. Government agencies are also encouraged to remain on the cutting edge and do more with less. Hence, while there is a call to innovate, there is less of a willingness to put resources into such initiatives. Further, while there are calls for agencies to be agile, flexible and fast, such agencies are expected to still go through the existing governmental processes. Lastly, while there is a push for government agencies to design and create innovative services to the public that has real value, the agencies are discouraged from communicating and consulting with the public and end-users for fear of negative public perception. This hampers the ability to obtain valuable feedback that could prove to be immensely useful for new innovative practices.

Wiktorowicz noted that there has nevertheless been some progress in applying open innovation concepts to provide national security solutions. To improve implementation in this area, he recommends that the government workforce be trained to manage such projects within clear policy structures. The thrust of building on open innovation and crowd-sourcing solutions should be encouraged. This would further promote cross-discipline perspectives.

Wiktorowicz also reiterated the need for the government workforce to be trained in ways to promote innovation and provide for risk management. Innovative projects should be viewed as building strategies to reduce, not enhance, risks. Innovation does not happen naturally and there is a need to make investments in this area. At the leadership level, innovation should be seen as a priority and resources should be earmarked to support it. Investments should be made in people, training and setting up processes for promoting innovation. New policies for innovation without excessive bureaucracy are another necessity to create an innovation culture. Finally, government agencies should take advantage of open

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innovation for creative solutions. Change is constant and there is a need for the national security sector to keep up with innovative practices to keep ahead of their adversaries.

Discussion

A question was raised concerning the role of strategic forecasting in influencing the innovation process. Wiktorowicz was of the opinion that innovative processes have been key in influencing strategic forecasting and instrumental to creating a broader array of scenarios. To help improve forecasting, for example, story-tellers, story-boarding and journey-mapping – methods already used in private sector innovation – can be further explored.