

Top Counter Terrorism Expert Says UK Counter Terrorism Strategy was Based on Luck All the Time

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Opinion

The United Kingdom has arguably the top counter-terrorism practitioners in the world. The U.S. Army Special Forces' Delta Force was modeled from the British Special Air Services, MI-6 is the top partner to the US Intelligence Community and MI5's camera surveillance platform is the most comprehensive imagery collection platform in any city in the world. The Metropolitan Police are well trained, with a long history of deep penetration in the community. There is little question that the UK has world-class counter terrorism capacity and capability, both theoretical and operational, but recent attacks indicate that their anti-terrorism strategy needs reform.

They've had a bad year

After the Manchester bombing at the concert hall, response arrests were quick and far-reaching - perpetrators, planners, collaborators, financiers and others were swooped up and brought to book if enough evidence was gathered. In the election cycle happening in the UK today, politicians promised to redouble their efforts (redoubling implies you have already doubled, and even the doubling was inadequate to stop the attack in question). More armed and unarmed police were deployed in the streets. Military units were dispatched to supplement the police to create a deterrent tactic in support of a protect strategy. Counter-terrorism resources were immediately deployed where needed.

2 weeks later, a coordinated double attack in 2 disparate areas against different targets using different tactics took the country by surprise. These attacks suggested that future operations have the potential to be more complex, far-reaching and lethal. Improving the counter-terrorism strategy did not address the root cause, however, it did result in increased reaction time and decreased potential lethality - good news, but not for those who were already dead or wounded.

There must be something broken or missing. There is: an Anti-Terrorism Strategy that works in concert with the Counter-Terrorism Strategy, where the contributing factors to radicalize individuals can be identified, surveilled and actioned when

necessary. David Otto, a Master Anti-Terrorism Specialist designed the "Triangle Terror Model" to illustrate the three components of any terrorist attack:

David Otto, who is also the Senior Counter Terrorism Advisor for UK based Global Risk International, stated, "For any successful attack to happen, the three elements of the "Terror Triangle" must be in concert with each other to radicalize and action the actors involved. Anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies should be effectively coordinated to reduce or eliminate these three elements. The combination of an effective anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism strategy combines to create a condition where attacks simply cannot take place."

Otto continued, "The "Terror Triangle," which shows the three necessary elements for a terrorist attack, clearly delineates the relationship between anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism. The two strategies have their own areas of responsibility, and areas where they overlap." The distinction illustrates clearly where the UK strategy, where it was implemented properly, was successful. It also shows where it failed (Figure 1)."

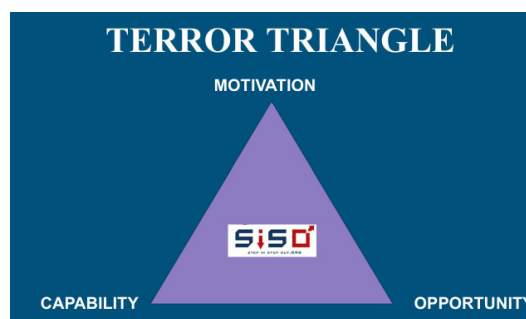


Figure 1: The Terror Triangle.

Looking at the three areas of David Otto's model, we can see where the UK successes and failures happened:

a) Motivation: Online and offline platform recruitment strategies connected at-risk individuals with an extremist ideology

that boosted their susceptibility to embrace radicalization which leads to extremism (failure of anti-terrorism or prevent).

b) Capability: The organization (in these cases directly or indirectly provides logistical support through an existing network to plan, equip and execute attacks to a valuable target (A combined failure of anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism).

c) Opportunity: Timely surveillance and choice of hard or soft target based on symbols. The targets in the past 3 UK attacks were considered “soft targets.” These are less-protected, more populated areas or events that are lower visibility (than a government building, police headquarters, military installation, etc.). This suggests that the general population is the target rather than a governmental policy (success in the protection of hard targets and rapid response (successful counterterrorism) but failure to recognize and protect the soft targets that were randomly determined, surveilled and

ultimately attacked, to varying degrees of success is a failure of anti-terrorism - Protect).

Mr. Otto completed his analysis of the recent UK terror attacks with a simple statement, “A comprehensive coordination between Anti-Terrorism strategy and Counter-Terrorism strategy driven by a cohesion of trust between the affected communities and the UK government is paramount for a successful overall strategy to provide security and stability. Quick response is a damage limitation tactic and it often comes too late for many unfortunate innocent civilians. The party that wins the June 2017 election must recognise that the UK counter terrorism strategy cannot be waged heavily on luck and quick response alone” Otto concluded.

- William Metts, written with analysis from Counter Terrorism & Organized Crime Expert David Otto, MATS, June 6, 2017.



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