



Home Office



OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

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Sara Skodbo
Director Prevent, RICU and JEXU
OSCT, Home Office

Chief Superintendent Nik Adams
National Coordinator for Prevent
Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters

Dear Police RPCs, Channel Panel Chairs, Local Authority Prevent Coordinators, Higher & Further Education Prevent Coordinators, Prevent Education Officers, and Health Prevent Coordinators,

We write to you to set out our joint position on managing individuals with unclear, mixed or unstable ideologies, as the National Coordinator of Prevent for CT Policing and Director of Prevent in OSCT.

The changing terrorist threat to the UK is well documented. The shift in scale has been accompanied by a diversification in the nature of the threat, with an increased threat of attacks using less complex methods by small groups or individuals. This has led to a number of stakeholders asking how they should manage individuals with unclear ideological motivations.

In some cases, the ideology is obvious, well embedded and appears to be the primary factor that is drawing an individual towards supporting or engaging in Terrorism Act (TACT) offences. In these circumstances identifying and challenging that ideology is likely to be an essential part of how you would seek to reduce that individual's vulnerability, and the risk posed to themselves and to the public.

However, for an increasing number of individuals being referred to Prevent, ideological drivers can appear mixed, unclear or unstable (from about 700 referrals in 2016-17 to almost 2,000 in 2017-18). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this group commonly present with multiple and complex vulnerabilities (such as criminality, substance misuse, social isolation and poor mental or emotional health, and so on). In such cases it often appears that people are being drawn towards an extremist ideology, group or cause because it seems to provide them with a 'solution' to the other problems in their lives, or an outlet to express problematic and dangerous behaviours that they may have developed.

We have seen many similar and often overlapping Prevent case examples, including individuals who:

- demonstrate an interest in multiple extremist ideologies in parallel, such as Salafist militant jihadism and “white supremacy”;
- switch from one ideology to another over time;
- target a ‘perceived other’ of some kind (perhaps based upon gender or another protected characteristic), but do not otherwise identify with one particular terrorist ideology or cause;
- are obsessed with massacre, or extreme or mass violence, without specifically targeting a particular group (e.g. ‘high school shootings’); and/or
- may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism out of a sense of duty, or a desire for belonging, rather than out of any strongly held beliefs.

It may be helpful to recap what differentiates terrorism from other forms of violence.

The Terrorism Act 2000 defines terrorism as:

(1) ... the use or threat of action where:

- (a) the action falls within subsection (2),*
- (b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government [or an international governmental organisation] or to intimidate the public or a section of the public and*
- (c) the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.*

(2) Action falls within this subsection if it:

- (a) involves serious violence against a person,*
- (b) involves serious damage to property,*
- (c) endangers a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action,*
- (d) creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public or*
- (e) is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.*

(3) The use or threat of action falling within subsection (2) which involves the use of firearms or explosives is terrorism whether or not subsection (1)(b) is satisfied.

Note that the Act does not define or limit what is meant by “political, religious, racial or ideological cause”, nor does it restrict “ideological cause” to being political, religious or racial, or to being solely those ideologies held or promoted by proscribed organisations. The Act certainly does not stipulate that a perpetrator has to have a

long-standing and deep-seated belief in the ideology or cause that he or she is ostensibly supporting by committing a TACT offence.

Also, it's worth noting that the “**threat**” of relevant “action” is technically enough to complete a TACT offence, and that where this “action” involves the “use or threat” of firearms or explosives, there need be no specific intention on the perpetrator’s part to “influence” (or intimidate) the government or public.

Some individuals seek to support or enact TACT offences without a clear understanding of the ideology or cause they are ostensibly supporting. Therefore individuals whose ideological motivations are unclear, mixed or unstable, but who demonstrate a connection to, or personal interest in, extremism, terrorism or massacre, **should be given the same consideration for support** as those whose concerning ideological motivations are more consistent and obvious.

This letter may raise the question of whether we are seeking to expand the remit of Prevent. We are not.

We are providing clarification of our responsibilities in relation to the Terrorism Act, and seeking to ensure that everyone who needs support receives it, and of course to protect the public from the risk of **all** vulnerable people who are being groomed, coerced or self-propelled towards TACT offences.

In 2017-18, 8% individuals referred to Prevent due to concerns around Islamist extremism or right-wing extremism ultimately received support via Channel. The corresponding figure for individuals referred due to concerns about ‘mixed, unstable or unclear’ ideologies was less than 1%. While there are likely to be many reasons for this, as we have seen in recent tragic attacks, the motivations of the terrorists responsible sometimes remain unclear even after the event, so we need to pay due regard to this complex issue in order to better protect the public.

We have received a number of questions from across the country about how to manage such individuals. Our guidance in response to these questions is to ensure that people receive the support they need if they are vulnerable to being drawn into any form of terrorism described within the Act.

When it comes to *preventing* people being drawn into terrorism, our responsibility is to offer interventions and support to *all* individuals who are at risk, irrespective of whether that risk is being driven by a true belief in an ideological cause or group, or whether an involvement to either of these is being driven by other vulnerabilities and complex needs.

The power of Prevent lies in tackling vulnerability early to prevent future harm. Oversimplifying the assessment of risk to offer support only to those with a very clear or embedded extremist ideology risks missing opportunities to support those with perhaps less obvious, but no less relevant or urgent, vulnerabilities.

Experience has demonstrated that preventing people being drawn into terrorism can be very challenging, often involving complex individual needs that have no simple or single-service answer. We therefore recommend that the content of this letter is discussed within your local Contest and/or Prevent Boards and within your Channel Panel meetings. We ask you to consider carefully the following:

- Draw on the professional judgement and experience of your colleagues, and ensure those making decisions understand their specialist area in the context of CT risk. This is to ensure individual interventions are considered in the context of their impact on the overall risk;
- do not restrict your preventative work only to individuals associated with the ideologies of formally proscribed organisations;
- consider those individuals who appear to have an interest in multiple, concurrent, and even contradictory extremist ideologies or causes, or who seem to shift from one extremist ideology / cause to another;
- do not necessarily rely on vulnerable individuals to be able to identify, understand or describe with coherence their own ideological motivations as a measure of the risk of being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism; and,
- consider the possibility of an individual's obsessive interest in public massacres of any kind as a possible signal of vulnerability.

Our teams within CTPHQ and OSCT are happy to discuss any cases where further guidance is required, and we thank you for your continued support and determination to protect vulnerable people and keep our communities safe from terrorism.

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Sara Skodbo, OSCT

Signature

Nik Adams, CTPHQ