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## Delft University of Technology

## The Drivers of Counter-terrorism

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# The Drivers of Counter-terrorism

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- Amsterdam Security Professor Genserik Reniers

**- Blog of Prof. dr. Genserik Reniers -**

**Freedom of thought and democracy are not straightforward, due to the destructive force of terrorism. Since the beginning of mankind, terrorism has been around in different forms and shapes and ever since, it has been a struggle to overcome terrorist actions. In the era where we currently live in, 'counter-terrorism' is a true verb beyond praise in the sense that it requires a lot of hard work, courage, and flexibility.**

Although counter-terrorism is not a new profession, it has entered a new stage, with respect to its scope and intensity. Nowadays, the scope has widened from merely physical threats to also cyber threats, and the past years terrorist actions have been much more deadly and random than before. The challenges have thus changed dramatically, and counter-terrorism has changed as well, but albeit not so substantially as it should have. Looking at the future of the domain, many profound changes are therefore still to expect. The further innovative solutions (technical and otherwise) that counter-terrorism will undergo, will be driven by mentality changes of professionals, politicians and industrialists, and by cooperation intensity between many stakeholders, at different levels and within different settings. Furthermore, people will better understand the relativism of terrorism in the near future.

## Mentality changes

The first driver, mentality changes, is currently in full progress. Many terrorist actions, some successful and many more that failed, and the resulting public reactions, feed mentality changes of politicians and public. New legislation is being developed and put into force. Professionals such as law enforcers, fire brigades and private security firms have developed similarly. Nonetheless, the mental acknowledgement by politicians that counter-terrorism security measures deliver high (hypothetical) financial and social benefits can still be much improved. A lot of attention goes to the costs of taking the

counter-terrorism measures, however, by making the world a more secured place, many attacks will not occur and a lot of losses are avoided, going hand in hand with huge hypothetical benefits (difficult, if not impossible, to calculate).

In case of industrialists, the counter-terrorism hypothetical benefits are even more difficult for them to acknowledge since no large-scale successful terrorist attack with many hundreds of fatalities and the accompanying economic repercussions for the industry, has yet occurred. For instance in case of the chemical industry, despite being considered critical infrastructure in the Netherlands, counter-terrorism management and -measures are at their infancy (or puberty in the best cases), and it is very difficult to convince many practitioners and managers of the need and benefits of large counter-terrorism investments.

One of the gradual changes expressing mentality changes of the politicians and the public at large, concerns the 'privacy' debate. Considering big data and communication possibilities amongst others, we are evolving towards a "trapped privacy" approach going from absolute privacy (for citizens that never came into contact with law enforcers) over partial privacy to no privacy (for citizens with a certain type of criminal history).


## Cooperation intensity

The second driver for counter-terrorism to improve, cooperation intensity, can be demonstrated by currently emerging and evolving initiatives such as the Hague Security Delta or the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Centre for Safety and Security where three universities (Leiden University, TUDelft, and Erasmus university) collaborate in a variety of initiatives to develop innovative solutions for safety and security.


## The relativism of terrorism

Since the number of terrorist attack attempts will probably not decrease substantially for the years to come, the public will have to learn to live with small-scale terrorist attacks and their (relatively small) consequences. Despite the fear-causing nature of terrorism risks, people will probably get accustomed to them to a certain degree, and understand that the likelihood to be a victim of a terrorist attack is extremely low. We should be aware however that this is no reason to lower counter-terrorism actions, since after all, they are the reason why many attacks are prevented and many potential consequences are mitigated.

Finally, to put it in perspective, the probability to be killed in a terrorist attack in the Netherlands boils down to throwing 25 coins in the air, all coming up heads (or tails) at the same time…thanks to counter-terrorism. We would definitely like to keep it that low.

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