

Importance of Security Agencies' Efforts and Collaboration in Effectively Preventing Radicalization and Extremism conducive to Terrorism

***Remarks from the Marrakech Platform:
Second High-Level Event of Heads of Counter-
Terrorism and Security Agencies***

Colonel (Res.) Miri Eisin
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Importance of Security Agencies' Efforts and Collaboration in Effectively Preventing Radicalization and Extremism conducive to Terrorism

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Abstract

Between 2-3 June 2023, Colonel (Res.) Miri Eisin, a fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at Reichman University attended and participated in the Marrakech Platform: Second High-Level Event of Heads of Counter-Terrorism and Security Agencies in Tangier, Morocco. The event, co-hosted by the Kingdom of Morocco and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) brought together 38 high-level delegations of intelligence and security services, and select non-governmental speakers to discuss various strategies and approaches for consolidating regional cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, assessing the terrorist threat and building capacity to foster the long-term resilience in the region.

During a keynote session on Colonel (Res.) Eisin discussed the importance of security agencies' efforts and collaboration in effectively preventing radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, collaboration, conference

Presented: 03 June 2023

Good afternoon to you all. Salaam Aleikum. I am deeply honored to be invited to speak to this distinguished forum. I want to personally thank the Director General, HE Mr. Mansouri, and HE Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Voronkov, for inviting Reichman University and the International Institute for Counter-terrorism to participate in this distinguished professional meeting. Morocco, our host, has provided an amazing venue to present and discuss our top challenges and priorities. It was not a simple decision asking me to speak to this group, yet I hope to offer some practical ideas to address the in-depth challenges you have all raised over the last two days. In this room are representatives from at least 37 different countries. We differ in location, borders, language, culture, and ethnicity. We differ in religion and religiosity. Yet many, if not all, of the agencies in the room face similar challenges in CT, especially in youth radicalization.



ICT Invited to Contribute Expertise to the Marrakech Platform: Second High-Level Event of Heads of Counter-Terrorism and Security Agencies on 3 June 2023

Each representative here has a different intelligence structure. The domestic and cross-border challenges are different, yet, as we have heard, they impact each other. I will present ideas and lessons learned within the Israeli security agencies that can be relevant and implemented in each country. My focus is on where we can cooperate domestically (we all know we cannot cooperate on everything) and where, in the domestic arena, we need to create a common language, terminology, and understanding.

Let me start with the challenge of structure. There is not one agency in Israel solely responsible for CT, let alone for preventing radicalization and extremism. In Israel, one primary agency is responsible for dealing with domestic terror threats. However, when you get to radical ideas and extremism (not the same thing), you add in most governmental and civil society agencies. Each agency has a different aim, a different work culture, and a different emphasis.

Israel's central domestic CT agency, the Shabak, is fully responsible for preventing and pre-empting terror. The Shabak's activities to pre-empt and prevent attacks can negatively impact the mindset of those we want to deradicalize. The fear of the preventive and pre-emptive actions of the Shabak and of the differing additional security forces who assist them – most definitely add fuel to the local youth resentment, which can be some of the seeds for radicalizing youth. So the immediate actions of the agency instead fuel the radicals in the long run.

Let me be clear. There are no silver bullets. There is no solution I can give you that will resolve how to completely avoid the development of radical ideas of extremism that view the world in "either/or" patterns. I do not know any way to eradicate it and solve it. There are, however, ways to face this and to do better.

How do the Shabak, and the IDF, both with a differing primary language (Hebrew), a different culture (Israeli), and a different religion (mainly Jewish), prevent the radicalization

of the youth: As a concept, what we do is implement a model ranging from radicals to violent extremists, ultimately trying to avoid pushing the radicals into the extremist group. Let me explain: We detect 1% as violent activists. This 1% is on the prevent and pre-empt list. We need to take action to prevent this group from using violence.

The second group is the close affiliated group. This group is around 10% of radicals; they are not taking violent action but are enabling the 1% who are. These people can be family members, friends, classmates, or neighbors. We follow them closely and detect any change that may indicate they are becoming more radical and moving into the violent extremist/terrorist group.

The third group is the focus of the model: the bulk of radicalized youth who are supportive but uninvolved. 90% live their daily lives without actively supporting the violent extreme 1%. It is essential to keep them in this group inactive. As such, we try to refrain from giving reasons for these radical youth to become more radicalized, active supporters. We try to strengthen the nonparticipants, which does not mean we change their views but rather keep them inactive.

So, we focus on them, and we speak in their language to try to bridge some of the gaps: learning to speak in their language, understanding their culture, their nuances, and their desires. If you fail to recognize these different levels of involvement and participation by categorizing all the potential radical focus groups as extremists, we may be creating the problem we intended to avoid.

You need to understand the underlying cultural references of each subculture. Is the youth who joins and adheres to the Islamic Jihad the same as the one who joined Daesh? Is the young person who established new groups, specifically not joining the other organizations, teaching me something about their culture? Hebron (el Khalil) is not the same as al Quds (JLM), which is different from Nablus, which is different from Jenin. We, of course, should look for the commonalities—a critical step in preventing terror acts; However, we also need to look for the differences. The nuances are an excellent barometer to influence differing arenas.

Hand in hand with the need of the agencies to categorize - be aware that the different domestic agencies that are trying to deal with the issue of radicalization also each have their unique language and subculture. This means that even when domestic agencies are cooperating – the agencies may not understand each other. The gaps are both in looking at the potential target groups and within the system between the agencies.

This brings me to domestic cooperation: Israeli agencies use local agency cooperation.

This is not the solo moment where your agency has all the answers. Domestic agencies must acknowledge, be aware, and work with other agencies that can bridge some gaps.

Let's start with – how you teach domestic agencies to work together. In Israel, we have a built-in aspect that impacts cooperation. The bulk of personnel in the security agencies

completed military service. Military service is compulsory, diverse, intense, and at a very specific age, the same age as radicalization and extremism. With clear guidelines, we allow that youth enormous responsibility at a young age. They have unique ideas and are encouraged to pursue them; not even the sky is a limit; they repeatedly invent the wheel and then reinvent it better again. This common background in the agencies' personnel helps them understand networking and culture.

How else do you get the agencies to cooperate? The Shabak comprises workers in their 30s and 40s who study language, mainly Arabic. As mentioned, most have served in the IDF, so they have a common background. The IDF, with various units, is comprised of 18 to 22-year-olds. That is a different culture within the culture. Be aware of that! They do not use the exact terms of reference; they are not on the same social media platforms; they live in different cultural arenas. We use this aspect of same-age youth to understand better what radicalizes youth and leads them to violent extremism. How many of us here live in social media and understand the impact of TikTok? Language is one aspect. The understanding of trends in social media is another.

What other domestic agencies have an impact on discerning the radical voices and can help avoid or de-escalate them? Let us think of the radical leaders, those charismatic voices that bring in youth. These men are usually known, apprehended, and most likely in jail. Who can approach these leaders in jail and make an impact? The prison authority enormously impacts the conditions; the ministry responsible for the prison authority defines the policy they implement – but who engages in dialogue? Do you try to talk to those in jail? Do you try to impact their message as it is coming out of jail? The social worker or the prison warden may understand more about the narratives and ideas of imprisoned extremists than the CT interrogator. Prison life creates an entire subculture



Marrakech Platform: Second High-Level Event of Heads of Counter-Terrorism and Security Agencies on 3 June 2023

mimicking the outside world. It is an opportunity to view that subculture and learn lessons about the voices, the meaning, and the engine of radicalization. Prison personnel can more easily recognize this. Again, the prison authority has a different work culture, is not subordinate to the Shabak, and has a significant impact.

How do you get this information to be effective? In our experience through coordination and cooperation. We have several different venues. All came to be because of failures, not successes.

Since the mid-70s, Israel has had a joint top intel meeting group – the heads of the agencies. The same men who compete for the Prime Minister's (PM) time, budget, and responsibility, meet regularly to try to avoid clashes between agencies. Is it perfect? Never. Is it better because of it? Absolutely. Egos are in the room alongside action-minded people who all want to prevent CT and radicalization.

Since the mid-70s, there has also been a CT coordinator sitting in the Israeli PM's office to coordinate the different agencies and organizations so that they talk to each other about relevant issues. This person's role is critical as they serve as the "go-to" person who is not part of any one agency but can facilitate the meeting. This is a way to disarm the idea of stepping into other agencies' responsibilities. This CT coordinator is important because the individual has authority and access to the PM and is not seeking status (as they already have it); as such, this individual doesn't overpower anyone but can help facilitate.

The coordinator has an open door and understands the issues: diplomats (cross border issues), justice department (laws), police, prison authority, interior ministry (residency), welfare department (poverty), education ministry, health ministry, local municipalities, and civil society. All can come in when they do not have access to the security agency. Again does it solve all the coordination issues? No, but it solves some of them.

Since the mid-70s, we have had a joint intelligence course. On ad hoc subjects, this course brings all the elements together for a few weeks. All the agencies. IDF, Shabak, Mossad, MFA, PM's office, police, prison authority, and justice department. It promotes cross-agency terminology, a broad focus on a subject, and cooperation in addressing radicalization.

Facebook was not the invention of networking but built on the concept and created a new method of connectivity. While online networking is powerful, in our profession, meeting somebody in person makes a difference in our capability to work together. Just look at the impact of the last two days of exchanging ideas. This joint intelligence course offers that. The commander of this course rotates between the agencies, and I had the pleasure of commanding this course in the intel community. This built-in network offers a way to overcome the cultural and domestic gaps that enhance our ability to achieve better joint results.

The heads of the agencies change, are appointed, and move on. By enabling built-

in cross-agency meetings, we allow ourselves to be exposed to different ideas. We understand each other even when we come from differing cultural and professional environments. How does all this assist in preventing radicalization and extremism? Every bit counts. I do not believe there is only one way to prevent it.

I would like to finish with a few points:

- Talk to each other within the community. Understand each other in your CT community.
- Understand the different and various languages and subcultures of the youth and their potential for change. – it's about carrots for the 90% and the stick for the 1%.
- Be aware of the terms and framing that we each have. The dominant agency will try to impose its culture on others, and that will not help in preventing radicalization.
- Look outside the usual agencies: I briefly mentioned the justice department. Let's not forget the education department. Who are the teachers? Family background. Tribal background. Religious background. All civil society leaders are relevant for cooperation to prevent the spread of radical content.
- Lastly, as I speak in English to this vast group, I am very aware that many are listening to me through translators. I greatly respect the translators and yet always wonder - Does the translator understand the nuance? Is there a cultural underlying factor that does not come through?

We frame the CT situation through the terror threat. To prevent radicalization and extremism, we need to use more nuanced lenses. I recommend everyone here to have their agency dive into the framing, terminology, and language of the radicals to prevent them from becoming extremists. This means using all the domestic agencies that deal with the potential audiences. This takes domestic cooperation and collaboration. Shukran, thank you all for your attention.