

Preface

Over the last months, Daesh has lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria. Many of its fighters have been killed in combat or fled the conflict zone. Although this might affect its capabilities in the short run, it certainly does not mean the demise of violent extremism and terrorism nor Daesh as an organisation. Daesh was, rather, forced to change its modus operandi and strategy. It could no longer rely on the strong message and glorious narrative which drew fighters into the theatre in the Middle East. Instead, the group had to find new messages and ways to continue its fight. This has direct implications on the threat landscape as well as the preventive and reactive measures taken by states. Additionally, the threat posed by Daesh- and Al Qaeda-centric groups has neither declined nor plateaued but is actually growing. In this context it is important to note that some Al Qaeda-centric groups have been supplanted by Daesh-centric groups, which adds another level of complexity.

The result of the developments in Syria and Iraq is a more diverse, heterogeneous and less predictable threat. Fighters have dispersed to ongoing conflict zones in other parts of the world – not only the immediate region –, travelled to third countries to cover their tracks, returned home or stayed in Syria and Iraq but kept a low profile and blended in with the normal citizens. In addition to this geographic spread of the current and former fighters as well as worldwide expansion of Daesh to Asia, Europe and Africa, we can constitute a second diversification with regard to the characteristics of the perpetrators countries are faced with. Some have left the conflict theatre disillusioned, regretting their initial decision to join Daesh. Others are even more motivated to continue the struggle and want to build upon the momentum created and skills acquired. The latter group is far from being homogeneous as it includes different kinds of perpetrators – individuals, small cells, fighters returning home and fighters moving to new locations. The threat group is further diversified by homegrown violent extremists who have never left the country.

One element that has not changed in this context though, but has even increased in importance, is the connectivity among the groups. Most

of the potential perpetrators are not lone actors since they have some form of connection to other extremists – be it in real life, online or mentally through shared schools of extremist thoughts. Even newly recruited members can establish connections to networks formed in Syria and Iraq, local networks in their respective area or insurgent movements which have in some cases existed since the colonial times.

The evolvement of the threat itself, the *modus operandi* and the networks call for greater efforts at all levels if countries want to prevent and counter violent extremism successfully and sustainably. To counter the terrorist threat both in the physical and virtual worlds, governments and their partners should move from counter-terrorism cooperation to collaboration. Such collaboration has to happen domestically and internationally, horizontally and vertically. It has to be done among different security and law enforcement agencies, with non-state stakeholders from civil society, the business sector and citizens alike. This is often easier said than done, as distrust, unclear divisions of tasks and responsibilities, different working cultures as well as a preference to not share sensitive information hinder the implementation. Yet, political dialogue, exchange of experiences, joint training, establishment of common databases, and holistic programmes addressing all relevant fields of violent extremism can help to facilitate smoother collaboration. Increasingly, the partnership between government and civil society organisations in the rehabilitation of terrorist inmates and detainees is vital. For instance, the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) has been working with the Religious Rehabilitation Group in Singapore and shared their comprehensive rehabilitation model comprising of six modes – religious, social, vocational, educational, creative arts and psychological – with governments in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

With this book, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) provide insights into various fields of collaboration in Asia and Europe. The experts discuss recent developments in both regions with regard to the threat perception and how resilience as well as prevention can be increased by understanding the lone actor concept, narratives, the role of educational institutions as recruitment grounds and the need for human rights to prevail. The final chapter takes a closer look at the improvement of collaboration in the fields of law en-

forcement, border management, detection of radicalisation, promotion of disengagement, de-radicalisation and rehabilitation.

This book is part of the joint “Asia-Europe Counter-Terrorism Dialogue” project of the KAS Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia and ICPVTR at RSIS through which the institutes promote exchange and understanding among leading experts and practitioners in the field of counter-terrorism and violent extremism.



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