

'Terrorism is out, democracy is the key' - A visit to the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism

By Pieter Rademakers - Thursday February 24 2011 JASON Institute visited the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague. Around thirty students from various Dutch universities attended three lectures on the work of the ICCT, the legal aspects of counter-terrorism and the radicalisation of individuals. During the visit there was a lot of interaction and the participants came up with some good questions and remarks.

The ICCT is a knowledge centre which was founded on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the T.M.C. Asser Institute, Institute Clingendael and Leiden University campus The Hague, and opened its doors in May 2010. The ICCT focuses on producing and spreading knowledge of countering terrorism and thereby has, as noted by the programme manager at the ICCT Eelco Kessels, 'special attention for the "why-side" of terrorism'.



Drs. Peter Knoope about the Middle-East

Quoting drs. Peter Knoope, director at the ICCT; 'Terrorism doesn't work, democracy does.' The current situation in the Arabic countries is an argument to underpin his statement; Thousands of normal citizens manage to make regimes fall by non-violent protests on city squares, whereas Al-Quida fails to do the same by using brutal violent power.

Knoope, former Deputy Director of the Policy and Strategy Department of the Dutch National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism (NCTb) and former diplomat in Afghanistan, describes the relation between respect for

human rights and the degree of support for terrorist and other anti-government acts. Good governance will at all times keep the level of support for such activities low. Referring to 'at all times', I also mean when reacting to protesting crowds, not cutting down the internet or bombing protesters as we have seen respectively in Egypt and Libya. Quite a logic reasoning'.

The exact meaning of terrorism is not defined. There are as many definitions for the word as there are people writing and speaking about it, but a certain degree of similarity appears in each definition: Political motive, violence, aims and especially the means of bringing fear. The single most important reason that there is no internationally agreed-upon definition of terrorism is the polarising nature of terrorism: according to some, Israel's behaviour towards Palestine also constitutes to a form of (state) terrorism. Thus we still have to deal with a pluralism of definitions.

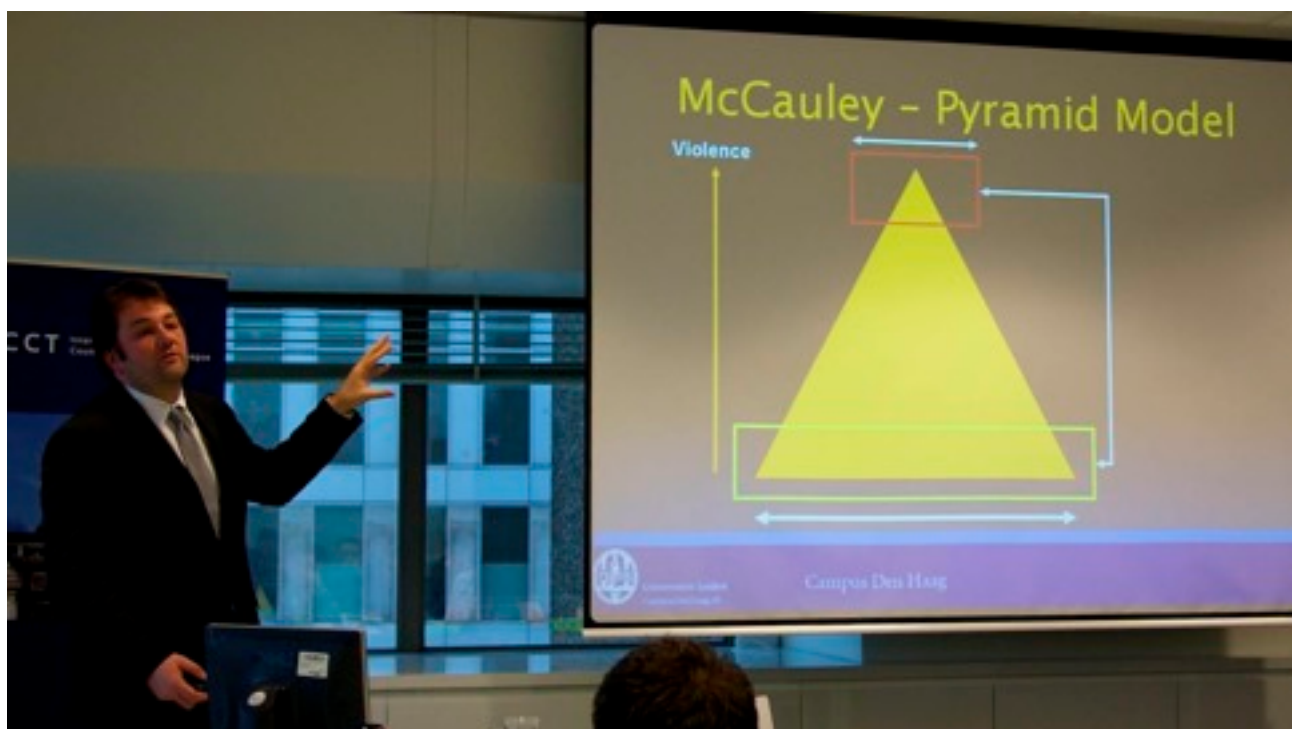
However, there seems to be consensus on the term counter-terrorism. Knoope refers in his lecture to a document which was provided to the participants. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, a 2006 General Assembly resolution that was adopted by every member-state, describes what can be done to prevent and combat terrorism. Thus, member-states do know now that hard-power measurements like target-killing in Pakistan and adopting special higher terrorist-penalties are not the only and best measures that have to be taken: The document foresees in broader manners like the - in the Netherlands well famous - integration of minorities and the 'everybody-needs-a-job'-policy.

According to Knoope, those measures last mentioned distinguish the Dutch approach from states with a, as he calls it, 'put-them-in-jail' approach. Only the United Kingdom also experimented with these soft measurements, but there it was seen as a failure. Knoope explains that it is this package of prevention measures that the ICCT focuses on; 'This is our added value in the world as an institute', he says. 'We figure out how much of every soft-power ingredient has to be put in the mixer to get the right result'.

As mentioned before, the ICCT researches the why behind terrorism. Coupled with the why question goes the who question. During the lecture of Dr. Mark Dechesne, senior researcher at the Centre for Terrorism

and Counterterrorism at Leiden University, a slide comes up with pictures of several famous terrorists. We see the convicted 9/11 architect Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Ted 'Unabomber' Kaczynski, Jan Karl Raspe from the Rote Armee Fraktion and Saddam Hussein. The similarity can be found in their appearance: They all look uncivilised, wild and sad. Next question is why they used violence to express themselves.

Although according to Dechesne there is no such thing as terrorist psychopathology, nor as a terrorist personality, similarities can still be found in the motives for committing terrorist acts. According to him, five states of mind can be identified using the McCauley pyramid: Beginning at the bottom of the pyramid, the potential terrorist finds himself and creates his political awareness. Secondly he becomes active for the community, for example by joining a political party. After that stage he realises that his political aim can only be achieved through violent acts, to which he then turns. In stage four, the political motive disappears because other objectives become more important. One can state that the FARC is currently in this stage; They mostly care about making money through the drug trade, extortions and kidnapping. In the final 'terrorist motivational stage' it appears that the world outside the organisation has turned against the group. It is 'we against the world'. The higher the number, the higher the use of violence Dechesne says.



Dr. Mark Dechesne about the McCauley pyramid of radicalisation

At the end of the visit a remark was raised by one of the students about to what extent an organisation like the FARC, whose deeds are no longer supported by a political motive but only on behalf of making money, can still be described as a terrorist organisation; now that the FARC also is in a non-international armed conflict as described in the Geneva Conventions with the state Colombia. As the body of law for armed conflict is applicable, several rights and duties appear. For example, killing combatants by the parties involved in the conflict is lawful. No one clear answer could be given for this question.

The conclusion of the visit is that radicalisation is a dynamic process which could lead to terrorist acts. This process can be stopped or prevented by taking a combination of hard-power measurements - changing penal legislation, target killing - and soft-power measurements such as talking to minorities, the integration of minorities and making sure that people stay happy. When terrorist organisations arise they will lose the support from the people when they become violent against them. History shows that when support falls away and the acts of the terrorist do not fulfil the objective, the organisation collapses and ceases to exist. Most telling is the current indication that the Al-Qaeda ideology is close to the dustbin of irrelevancy.