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## **Forced Migration, Diaspora Politics and Extremism: Conceptual, Policy and Operational Implications with a Focus on the United Kingdom**

Chapter for inclusion in: Simeon, J. (ed) *Terrorism and Asylum*, Brill Nijhoff

Dr Christopher McDowell, Reader in International Politics, City, University of London, and the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), University of Lancaster

### **Introduction**

This chapter argues that the internationalisation of contemporary conflict, in particular, those aspects that relate to forced migration and the failures of refugee protection and integration, create spaces and opportunities for extremist networks to recruit and act among those forcibly displaced and seeking asylum. The chapter identifies four elements of the internationalisation of contemporary conflicts: large-scale population displacement, dispersal, encampment and the refugee journey; the process and experience of settlement and integration in a country of asylum; the diaspora politics that links the conflict to movement and settlement; and lastly, the growing involvement of organised crime in asylum migration. From within these dynamics of contemporary conflict has emerged the aggressive recruitment and radicalization of vulnerable persons, whether asylum seekers or nationals, of a target state to operationalize terrorist tactics and build further support to extremist causes. It is shown that while some areas of the UK Counter Terrorism (CT) policy and strategy articulate and respond to the international and domestic displacement dimensions of such security threats, there remain important gaps in both strategic thinking, and in every day operations. It is proposed that thinking differently about the displacement security threat nexus, and the current response to conflict displacement and asylum settlement, may: first, explain why individuals with an asylum or refugee profile are attracted to extremist narratives and are vulnerable to radicalisation; and second, assist in the development of strategies to avoid radicalisation towards violent extremism among displaced populations. The findings strengthen arguments to improve the legal and humanitarian protections available to people displaced by conflict, and the enhancement of integration strategies for asylum seekers and refugees to avoid marginalisation.

The chapter is based on research conducted in the UK, Europe and Canada by Christopher McDowell, Gemma Collantes Celador and Natasha De Silva between 2016 and 2018, funded by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), which examined diaspora refugee politics (McDowell *et al* (2018 a,b and c). It draws also on commissioned research by the author during the same period on Syrian refugee resettlement in the UK (UNHCR, 2017). The CREST project examined the internationalisation of the Sri Lankan conflict between 1983 and 2009, specifically, Tamil asylum diaspora politics and the strategies of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to further its political and military objectives through the mobilisation of Tamil asylum seekers and refugees in western states. The research found that the frequently coercive strategies deployed by the LTTE to build a political support base among overseas Tamils, and to raise funds for the organisation through direct involvement in the asylum journey and assistance in settlement, provided a model for international Jihadist and Salafi networks politically active among Europe-bound migrants and refugees fleeing recent conflicts in the Middle East. The research on Syrian refugee resettlement evaluated the UK Government's resettlement programme for vulnerable refugees identifying opportunities to improve settlement and integration through local authority and voluntary support in housing, education, employment, education and cultural adaptation.

To provide context to the arguments developed about the engagement of refugees in transnational politics, the chapter draws on the diaspora, migration, conflict and refugee studies literature linking that discussion to the literature on extremism and radicalisation. It sets out the main findings of the research in relation to the relationship between the migration experiences of those displaced by conflict and the risks of radicalisation. It then develops the policy implications of the findings for counter terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation in the UK context, and recommends additional research to address gaps in the current knowledge.

## **Diaspora Politics and Extremism**

The role of diasporas and diaspora organisations in transnational politics, particularly where politics includes support for violence in pursuit of political aims, tends to be portrayed in two ways. The conflict and economics literature, see for example Collier (2000), argues that diaspora political engagement is more likely to exacerbate conflict where diaspora members

see themselves as distanced from the consequences of their actions at home, and where diaspora organisations exploit a sense of social injustice linked to the ‘exile condition’. Stronger engagement in conflict is more likely where overseas communities have the resources to contribute, and where an exclusive common identity is sympathetic to demands for national separation and self-determination (Hall and Swain 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Demmers 2007). According to Collier and Hoeffler (2004:575) the risk of heightened conflict is directly linked to the size of the diaspora and the capacity to raise and donate resources that sustain military activity (Brinkerhoff 2008; Byman et al 2001; Roth 2015). Better funded and organised diaspora organisations are vital in maintaining the link between the conflict at home and overseas communities providing a platform for action and coalescing demands.

In the migration and refugee studies literature, however, the role of diasporas as peace-makers and agents promoting post-conflict rebuilding is more widely discussed (Baser and Swain, 2008: 11). The literature highlights diaspora members, often working through nongovernmental organisations, lobbying international institutions and host governments to seek political settlements to conflict, and directing aid towards humanitarian and reconstruction programmes (Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009; Hall and Swain 2007; Hess and Korf 2014; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). Overseas nationals, many college educated with liberal-cosmopolitan values (Werbner, 2002: 120), return to their countries of origin to take up political positions, or to advise on constitutional, development or transitional justice mechanisms (Hall and Swain 2007: 119; Brun and Van Hear 2012; Hess and Korf 2014; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010). The transfer of wealth from diasporas via remittances either directly to family, business investment, or through donations to NGOs and charities form a vital flow of funds to repair infrastructure and rebuild social conditions in the homeland (de Haas 2010, Brun and Van Hear 2012).

The oversimplified dichotomy between diasporas as warmongers or peace-makers does not provide a framework to explain why diaspora engagement takes the form it does in any given conflict, or why diaspora members may support violence to achieve ends. Brinkerhoff’s (2008) ‘identity-mobilisation framework’ seeks to understand how degrees of integration in countries of settlement shape political behaviour and suggests that exclusion, or the perception of exclusion among individuals, may lead to destructive rather than constructive contributions. Betts and Jones (2016: 22), drawing on social movement theory developed by

Sökefeld (2006) identify the importance of ‘animators’ either from within or outside diaspora communities who mobilise interests in pursuit of political purposes. This approach is useful in analysing the ways in which power relations can shape political engagement while arguably privileging the role of elites and underplaying the importance of lived migration experience in decision-making.

The CREST research on Sri Lankan diaspora politics that informs this chapter found Koinova’s (2010) approach particularly useful in analysing refugee diasporic action, and trends towards radicalism, in relation to the dynamic between events at home, in the place of settlement and the places in between where transnational relations are established and maintained. She rightly observes that periods of intense violence in a conflict at home are likely to be mirrored in the discourse and strategies of diaspora politics, while periods of relative calm allow for democratic reflection and greater consideration of post-conflict arrangements. Following Betts and Jones (2016), Koinova additionally drew on social movement theory to show how forms of mobilisation are shaped by opportunity structures in the homeland and through the relationships established by what she terms ‘entrepreneurs’ in the country of origin establishing transnational networks of influence, propaganda flow and resource channelling.

The reading of the literature suggests that extremism in the context of transnational diaspora political cannot be understood through a static, homogenous model of diasporas which are either essentially violent or peaceful. Rather it is necessary to analyse political action through the agency of those involved, identifying structural and contextual factors that include constraints and enablers on action that emerge out of conditions in the countries of settlement as well the stage of conflict.

Refugee studies has been slow to embrace the study of refugees as political agents or actors, however, as Van Hear has noted (2014:177) the implications of forced migration and the flows and exchanges between scattered populations for international politics is forcing itself on to the research agenda as states struggle to agree on policies to respond to refugee movements and their consequences. The concept of diasporas as ‘transnational network(s) of dispersed political subjects’ (Werbner 2002: 121) connected through socio-political relationships, provides an opportunity to examine the specific politics of ‘refugee diasporas’ and how the relationships that refugees establish towards their homeland, their place of

settlement and their fellow co-nationals shapes political engagement and refugee communities' sense of identity and purpose. It suggests that refugees, for whom the episode of traumatic dispersal and the search for protection is central to their experience, will develop a political orientation that is different to that developed by voluntary migrants. As Wahlbeck has observed, politics provides 'a sense of order, a purpose in the fragmented lives of the refugees' (2002: 226) and 'refugee research needs a conceptual framework in which refugees' specific transnational social relations can be described', and to an extent the concept of diaspora has served such a purpose (2002: 229).

The internationalisation of conflict, it will be argued in this chapter, creates the conditions that influence political mobilisation within diaspora populations, however, as Koinova (2010) has argued, the causality between 'mobilising conditions' and radicalisation or the pursuit of moderate politics is unclear. From their research among Bosnian and Eritrean refugees, Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) found that political action is shaped by both a desire to bring about change at home and the capability to do so, and that the agency of the individual is vital in this decision-making. To understand the shift from a desire for change to action it is necessary, as Sökefeld has observed, to focus on political opportunities, mobilising structures, and practices and framings within discourses as explanators for political action (2006:268). Diaspora associations and their elites are central to such mobilisation (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2014) because within any community only a small minority are likely to be sufficiently motivated to act, and it requires leaders or 'animators' who can seize specific events, define grievances and claims to legitimise political action through issue-framing (Sökefeld 2006: 270-278 ; Betts and Jones, 2016).

### *The 'Refugee Experience' and Radicalisation*

The involvement of individuals from a refugee or asylum background in terrorist attacks in Europe since 2005, and particularly since 2016, has raised questions about what, if anything, is specific about refugee diaspora politics, asylum seeking and integration that increases the risk of radicalisation towards violent politics (Abdi 2015; Sude, Stebbins, and Weilant 2015; McDowell et al 2018c). The terrorism literature lacks generalised theories of radicalisation (Dawson, 2017) but emphasises it as a multifaceted phenomenon with a wide range of contingent factors that are sociological, psychological as well as ideological (Rahimi and Graumans, 2015; Dawson, 2017; Lemon and Heathershaw, 2017; Klausen et al., 2016).

Functional models, largely designed by government security agencies, that set out to explain and predict the radicalisation process (Borum 2003; Moghaddam 2005; Silber and Bhatt 2007) identify triggers for radicalisation. Among migrants and refugees, frequently identified triggers include identity crises, social alienation, discrimination or social exclusion, racism, and poverty (Yusoufzai and Emmerling, 2017). As Rahimi and Graumans have observed, ‘regardless of the diversity of causes, academic literature as well as governmental strategies have shown a consistent interest in the basic formula that a lack of cultural integration equals an increased threat of radicalisation’ (2015: 28), and most of those who have been prosecuted for terrorism, at least in Canada, UK, and US, tend to be citizens, members of the community who were born in those states or who were naturalized over a long period of time. Individuals appear to be “culturally integrated”, but, nevertheless, are prone to radicalization.

Within refugee populations it is argued that radicalisation is more likely to occur among friends and relatives where, what Thompson and Bucerius (2017) describe as, ‘sentiment pools’ exist within those communities and function to mobilise support for the political projects advanced by terrorist networks, or conversely to oppose those projects. Abdi’s (2015) research among Somali youth in Minnesota found that programmes to counter isolation and marginalisation may have served to further ‘other’ the community thus intensifying the ‘potential double burden of the lure of gangs and extremist groups as well as contact with institutions and policies that discriminate on the bases of race, religion and class’ (2015:575).

A limited but growing literature is examining the radicalisation process at various stages in the refugee journey considering the location of refugees and their physical proximity to a conflict, the pre-existence of militant groups in refugee areas, and the policies and actions of host countries and the international community (Sude, Stebbins and Weilant 2015: 1, 3). Dawson (2017) calls for a similar approach to shift the onus of analysis from the ‘why’ to the ‘how’, suggesting the need to consider ‘situations’, ‘contexts’ and ‘life experiences’.

To this end, research has focused on the ‘camp’ as a space of exception (Agamben 1998) and one where refugees become political actors, recalling Rygiel’s (2011) discussion of the camp as a political space, whereby subjectivities and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated and exercised, and where radicalisation processes might emerge in response to those processes. Milton, Spencer and Findley (2013: 637) find that that the conditions of the

camp and the ways in which host states treat refugees ‘can lead to transnational terrorism as some smaller subset of the refugee population responds against the host state’. Martin-Ray (2011) highlights conditions within camps that might facilitate radicalisation processes, such as poor education, lack of freedom of movement and work; factors that have also been considered by several policy papers that refer to refugee camps as fertile grounds for recruitment and radicalisation (Koser and Cunningham 2017; Sude, Stebbins and Weilant 2015). Sude, Stebbins and Weilant (2015) imply that lessening the risk of radicalisation goes beyond providing immediate humanitarian assistance, and rather requires a multi-level and long-term approach that provides refugees with viable choices for the future. As Koser and Cunningham (2017) argue, providing psychological and security needs is particularly important because refugees might experience abuse or powerlessness in their place of refuge, and militant groups might exploit the situation to radicalise vulnerable groups (especially youth) ‘with narratives of empowerment through violence’ (2017: 215). These ideas strongly resonate with Rygel’s (2011) understanding of subjectivities, and the extent to which a negative perception of one’s own subjectivity within a camp (due to abuse, humiliation or powerlessness) could give way to radicalising processes.

### **Research Findings: Sri Lankan Asylum Diaspora and Syrian Refugee Resettlement**

The author’s research on Sri Lankan asylum diaspora politics, and refugee flight to Europe from the Middle East in the previous two years, builds on the literature reviewed above and extends our understanding of the nexus between conflict-generated forced migration and radicalisation processes.

As previously stated, this chapter argues that the internationalisation of contemporary conflict, which has four main elements:

- the large-scale population displacement, dispersal, encampment and the refugee journey;
- the process and experience of settlement and integration in a country of asylum;
- diaspora politics that links the conflict to movement and settlement and enables interactions between those on the move and political actors;

- and finally, the growing involvement of organised crime in asylum migration in human trafficking, arranging and financing through exploitative loans, passage across borders, travel documentation and coerced employment in places of settlement;

ensures that the terrain of conflict extends far beyond a single national territory, and provides new opportunities for extremist actors to politically and economically exploit population movement, encampment and settlement, in order to further strategic and other interests.

McDowell et al (2018a,b,c) have shown that the direct engagement in displacement and the onward refugee journey by extremist networks creates opportunities to keep a conflict ‘alive’ among overseas populations. It enables groups to move fighters, recruit among disaffected migrants who are seeking solutions for themselves and their wider families, and importantly, engagement provides a means to raise funds through different forms of smuggling or trafficking and other criminal endeavours. The exploitation of asylum migration and settlement includes the building of networks and dependent relationships with the displaced that may at some later point be ‘mobilised’ for benign (building a positive sense of community) or malign purposes. Extremist networks, are culturally successful in casting displacement and refugee movements as both humanitarian and political crises that in themselves are framed as outcomes and evidence of western crimes, and therefore an exploitable source of grievance.

Refugee diaspora politics through the displacement cycle - in initial flight, periods in camps, onward movement to countries of asylum and during the settlement and integration phase – plays a critical role in extremism and the process of radicalisation and recruitment. As discussed above, the literature on diaspora politics has tended to employ simplified and limiting framings of diasporas as either violence-prone, ‘peace-wrecking actors’ or as ‘peacemakers’ and remittance generating post-conflict rebuilders. Here it is argued that neither of these models are particularly helpful in understanding how diaspora politics, against the backdrop of conflict and extremism when the majority of the members of the diaspora are refugees or asylum seekers, can evolve and shape diaspora political activism. Rather, it is necessary, as Sheffer (2003:45) has argued to identify ‘political projects’ pursued by transnational actors within diasporas, and the focus on the ‘practice’ of diasporas and the forms of action that seek to mobilise energies and appeal to loyalties is central to an understanding of the role of diasporas in political mobilisation. Refugee diaspora politics, the

research has shown, where the aim is to build support and active engagement in a conflict at home can effectively appeal to nationalist longings, political and religious grievances and the desire to contribute to a cause among those who are removed and geographically distanced from the immediate consequences of conflict. As we can see in the case of overseas Tamil communities, the ‘exile-like’ condition of refugees in a diaspora, a sense of victimhood coupled with feelings of social injustice elevates support for radical agendas.

The research (McDowell *et al* 2018b) has found that between the outbreak of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 1983 and the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, the LTTE established an international network of supporting organisations in those countries, such as the UK, Canada, France, Switzerland and Norway, where large populations of Tamil asylum seekers became established eventually securing citizenship. National, regional and locally based organisations and committees were linked to the LTTE’s Central Committee in Jaffna via its International Secretariat and structures that included the World Tamil Coordinating Committee (WTCC), the International Federation of Tamils (IFT) and the United Tamil Organisation (UTO). The transnational network coordinated the flow of information and propaganda, organised events and rallies ensuring attendance, created commercial interests through People’s Shops and newspapers, and oversaw the collection of financial ‘donations’ given either voluntarily or involuntarily which were vital to the continuation of the ‘struggle’ for an independent Tamil homeland.

The LTTE realised soon after the outbreak of the conflict the potential of refugee flight and asylum seeking for the furtherance of their cause. The organisation used the asylum route out of Sri Lanka to pension off fighters who could no longer serve on the front line, it sent abroad political and military figures to establish overseas networks, placing them in key capital cities, and it financed for some the asylum journey. In countries of settlement, the LTTE provided a support network for recently arrived asylum seekers, assisting in asylum claims, housing and finding employment thus building dependent relationships with Tamils abroad that readily translated in to a strong support base that was able to neutralise groups who opposed the Tigers methods towards securing Eelam. The strategy played successfully on overseas Tamils deep concerns for relatives and friends who remained behind in Sri Lanka; in particular the sense of guilt about their safety in the west having escaped the island. The LTTE understood that many overseas Tamils navigating the asylum process and struggling to

become established in their new countries needed the kind of social support that the LTTE was able to provide.

There is evidence that international Jihadist and Salafi groups are deploying similar methods to those deployed by the LTTE in the 1980s and 1990s aimed at extending their support base in Europe and to aid recruitment among refugees in transit and in countries of settlement (Clifford and Hughes, 2018). Recent intelligence backed reports from the German Government (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2018; see also Neumann, 2017:25-28), for example, argue that asylum and refugee movements to the west from the Middle East in 2015 and 2016 covertly included individuals who were members of jihadist groups, and others who were subsequently drawn into extremist networks by recruiters en route or in settlement (the so called *radicalised refugees*). Evidence presented suggests that international Jihadist and Salafist groups recruited among refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey exploiting the desperation (and destitution) among families seeking a solution beyond the camps or their very poor living conditions outside of camps in Lebanon. Islamic State (IS) and other groups were engaged in the radicalisation of refugees and, it is argued, concealed fighters among refugees to enter European states, and exerted control over individuals once in asylum centres in Europe. Research by McDowell among Syrian refugees in the UK conducted over the same period identified the conditions that create a heightened susceptibility to recruitment and radicalisation. It found that high risk groups for recruitment, among those on the move, were young men (aged 16-30 years) but in particular young people and teenagers who either travelled alone or with relatives. The risk of recruitment, or of simply being drawn to extremist narratives, increased where those accompanying young migrants were themselves previously engaged in extremist politics.

The research found also that, in both Third Country Resettlement Programmes and spontaneous asylum movements, engagement in extremist politics is more likely where there are *opportunities to engage*. Opportunities include the presence of an active, organised and well-resourced diaspora led by strong charismatic and influential leaders. Where diaspora agents operate with few restrictions on their political activities, and are adept at using communications technologies, their ability to mobilise extremist contacts is considerably enhanced. Radicalisation leading to active engagement in extremist politics and preparedness to use violence is more likely where there are low levels of integration and a weak sense of loyalty to and civic membership in their country of asylum settlement. Exclusion, or a

perception of exclusion, from the host society can be exacerbated by a poor command of the national language, social marginalisation and an inability to make friends, particularly among the opposite sex in the case of teenage boys, and the lack of qualifications or skills and therefore employment opportunities.

Isolation and disaffection among refugee and asylum-seeking populations may lead individuals to choose exclusive membership of closed groups of co-nationals or co-religionists. Those for whom the legal process is exhausted and asylum claims have been unsuccessful, with the likelihood of removal to their country of origin, going underground and evading the state is a rational option. In such cases, the risks of criminalisation are high where the interests of radical politics and criminal gangs are shared. Asylum seeking in western countries, characterised by a long drawn out legal process, involving restrictions on employment, and with uncertain outcomes engendering mistrust in state officials can create the conditions for a ‘drift in to extremism’. The conditions of asylum seekers, poor housing, unemployed or being illegally employed, a breadline existence, and frustrations that arise from the failure to realise the migration dream, shift individuals to the margins of society where extremists provide simple answers to complex problems and offer a sense of belonging and purpose.

### *Migration Histories and Engagement in Extremist Politics*

It is argued here, therefore, that the migration history and experience, and the life stage at which someone migrates, as well as their asylum seeking and integration experiences can make a difference to their engagement in extremist politics; and among asylum seekers and refugees the triggers or risks of pre-arrival-radicalisation, post-arrival-radicalisation, criminality and isolation are amplified. Whilst the evidence derived through media and court reports is quite sparse, it does suggest that the extremist population in the UK includes individuals who apparently integrated well into mainstream society but in to insular groups (co-ethnic /co-religion, closed to outsiders), but also people who never seemed to settle anywhere (geographically, through employment, or via friendship circles).

The main finding of the author’s research are that:

- First, for a small minority of migrants who seek asylum, the life stage at which someone migrates is likely to be a factor in their future political development. Recent

convictions for terrorist offences in Europe suggest that the extremist population includes people who migrated as children, with their families, and people who migrated as teenagers or young adults - often alone. This raises important questions about the asylum and migration experience for young people, their specific vulnerabilities and exposure to extremist narratives and controlling influences in the country of origin as well as in countries of asylum.

- Second, the extremist population includes people whose relatives (either with them or ‘back home’) were involved in violent or nonviolent politics; some were or may have been extremists when they arrived.
- Third, a particularly under-researched topic of asylum integration relates to the experiences of asylum seekers whose applications have been turned down but who remain in their country of asylum evading the attention of the authorities, or who are unreturnable. A minority in this population will likely become part of criminal groups and gang membership that may later evolve into or engage in activities that intersect with extremist networks.

The research has therefore identified radicalisation risks associated with the settlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in a country of final asylum. However, in the absence of systematic longitudinal studies, the evidence base on the integration trajectories of asylum seekers and resettled refugees in Western countries is weak. The conceptual and theoretical literature on refugee integration is limited to models that fail to address the risks of integration failure or consider the significance of political engagement as a factor in integration. Further research is required into the process of asylum seeking and the struggles of settlement, with a focus on forms of integration through which emerge sub-cultures of mainly young men who are likely to be disaffected with the state and their host society. Sub-cultures are likely to be marked, as previously observed, by the frequent isolation of individuals, or by the seeking of membership of closed identity groups. The following section considers the implications of these findings for counter terrorism and radicalisation prevention with a focus on the UK.

## **Policy and Operational Challenges**

In 2017, there were five major terrorist attacks in the UK in which 35 people died (UK Parliament, 2018). The first attack came on the 22 March, when Khalid Masood drove a car over Westminster Bridge, mounted the pavement and hit pedestrians walking on the bridge. He then entered the grounds of the Palace of Westminster and fatally stabbed a police officer. Five individuals were killed in the attack with many more seriously injured. The second attack took place in the northwest of England on the 22 May, when Salman Abedi detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) in the foyer of Manchester Arena. Twenty-two people were killed, including a number of children and teenagers. Over 100 others were injured. On the 3 June, Khuram Butt, Rachid Redouane and Youssef Zaghba used a van to run over pedestrians on London Bridge, before continuing their attack on foot. Eight people were killed in the attack with many more injured. Later that month, Darren Osborne drove a vehicle into a group of people gathered near an Islamic Centre in Finsbury Park, north London. One person was killed and ten others sustained serious injuries. Lastly, on the 15 September, Ahmed Hassan left an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on a District line commuter train. The device partially exploded after the train arrived at Parsons Green station. Twenty-three people sustained burn injuries as a result of the partial explosion whilst 28 people suffered crush injuries as crowds surged to leave the train.

Two official reports (Anderson, 2017; UK Parliament, 2018) examined the circumstances of the attacks, reviewed the gathering and handling of intelligence, and provided information on the profiles of the attackers.

The Anderson (2017) Operational Improvement Review sought to draw lessons from nine internal reviews undertaken by the UK domestic intelligence agency, MI5, and Counter Terrorism Police of their responses to the first four of the above attacks (the report was concluded before the Parsons Green attack in September 2017). The Review outlined the migration and refugee histories of the attackers which were described as ‘lone actors’ or belonging to ‘small groups’. The following details were included. Abedi, was born in Libya and came to the UK with his parents who sought and were granted refugee status subsequently settling in Manchester where a small Libyan community had recently been established. Abedi’s brother was in detention in Libya and subject to an extradition request, Abedi was known to MI5 in the UK. Butt, was born in Pakistan and came to the UK as child asylum seeker with his family, he was granted leave to remain in 2005 and received citizenship in 2010, he was known to MI5 and previously investigated. Redouane, sought

asylum in the UK under the false identity of a Libyan national, his asylum request was refused and his appeal rights exhausted. Redouane was reported as an absconder, detained in 2011 but due to the ongoing conflict was released and could not be returned to Libya. Zagbha, had Moroccan and Italian dual citizenship.

The UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament Report (2018) examined the circumstances surrounding the Parsons Green attack in September 2017 and described Ahmed Hassan, at the time of the attack, as an 18 year old Iraqi asylum seeker who entered the UK at the age of 15. The teenager arrived in Britain as an 'orphan refugee', previously travelling across Europe and spending time in the so-called 'Jungle' camp at Calais. As an unaccompanied child he was allowed entry to the UK and after being processed through a migrant centre in Kent, was found a home with a foster family in Sunbury on Thames, west of London.

While migration histories, including asylum applications and international connections were included in the descriptions, neither report sought to analyse the significance of these histories or the commonalities between their profiles and the profiles of other attackers elsewhere in the UK and Europe during this period (see McDowell, 2018c, Annex 1).

#### *UK Counter Terrorist Strategy*

Informed by the events of 2017, and a number of reviews and investigations into the circumstances surrounding those attacks, the UK Government revised its national counter terrorism strategy releasing CONTEST in June 2018. The strategy includes a broad analysis of the process of radicalisation with a focus on 'local threats' in 'priority areas' although these areas and specific threats are not disclosed. The strategy reflects much of the terrorism studies literature in arguing that there is no single socio-demographic of a terrorist in the UK and no single pathway or 'conveyor belt' leading to involvement in terrorism. It states that extremists are likely to come from a broad range of backgrounds, becoming involved in different ways for different reasons, and in most cases, it is argued, several factors converge to create the conditions under which radicalisation can occur. The factors, are described as *background factors, personal circumstances* that make individuals vulnerable to radicalisation, *initial influences, ideas or experiences* that influence an individual towards

supporting a terrorist movement, and a *receptiveness* to an extreme ideology. Beyond broad headings, the strategy does not provide detail on these factors or how they interact.

The strategy includes brief references to the international context explaining that conflict affected and fragile states such as Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen present permissive environments that terrorist groups exploit. It further argues that in these environments terrorists can gain access to weapons and resources, control territory in which they recruit from and oppress local populations, establish training camps and media centres from where they plan for attacks.

### *Prevent and Channel*

The Prevent programme forms an important part of the UK Government's CONTEST and aims to 'safeguard (against) people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' whether 'inspired by Islamist or right wing ideologies' (Home Office, 2018b). The programme relies on members of the public, or those working with the public, reporting to the police or local authorities an individual they feel may be susceptible to radicalisation. A large number of referrals are typically made on the basis of observed behaviour including concerning conversations. Each year around one-third of referrals come through the police (although a majority of these are likely to be a result of reports from the public made to the police), one-third through educational institutions, and the remainder from a variety of sources. In 2017/2018, according to the Home Office (2018a), 7,318 individuals were referred, of these 7 percent of the cases were serious enough to be 'escalated' because of CT concerns. Referrals are screened by the police to check that the individual is not already part of, or should be part of, a terrorism investigation. In the largest number of cases (around three quarters of all referrals in 2017/2018), the outcome is that the case is found to not warrant further action, or that the person's vulnerability may be assessed as not linked to radicalisation. In such cases, an onward referral may be made for relevant health, mental health, educational or social support, and the process involves no criminal sanctions or police records.

In those cases, however, where it is deemed that the individual is at risk of radicalisation and would benefit from support to prevent them being drawn in to violent action, the case is referred to the Channel programme which assesses the degree of vulnerability and puts in place a support package in liaison with a range of agencies. Twenty-two per cent of referrals

in 2017/2018 were handled through the Channel programme, participation in which is ‘voluntary and confidential’, and the types of support available include what is termed ‘ideological mentoring’ as well as support for ‘educational, vocational, mental health, and other vulnerabilities’. A Channel panel monitors the progress of an individual in receipt of Channel support, and individuals leave the programme when they are deemed to have no ‘further terrorism-related concerns’. Individuals who leave but are deemed still to present a risk of terrorism may be ‘managed by the police’.

#### *CT Strategy: Conceptual and Operational Gaps*

We have seen that both the Anderson Review (2017) and the UK Parliament’s (2018) investigation into the handling of intelligence considered it relevant to include descriptions of the migration and asylum seeking histories of the perpetrators involved in the 2017 attacks in London and Manchester. However, while the CONTEST strategy identifies specific risk categories, namely prisoners, returning foreign fighters, and undefined ‘hard to reach groups’, the risks identified in this chapter - and discussed by other European governments in their security reports – which are linked to the internationalisation of conflict, forced migration, integration failure and diaspora politics, are not examined. The Strategy acknowledges that on the one hand conflicts overseas provide opportunities for terrorists and it identifies a need for anti-poverty programmes to address the drivers of terrorism in countries such as Nigeria or Somalia, and on the other that in the UK ‘a successful integration strategy is important to CT’. However, the strategy fails analytically to connect the international and the domestic domains. It presents a fractured picture of geographically discrete problems and solutions - conflict and terrorism in Syria, poverty and terrorism in Nigeria, integration and terrorism in the UK – but overlooks that these phenomena are dynamically connected through those dimensions of the internationalisation of conflict that together create a space for terrorists to recruit and act including in the development of plots, and in which vulnerabilities to radicalisation arise. A displacement background or asylum experience are not included in the list of factors CONTEST identifies that may be relevant to the risk of radicalisation, and the strategy does not set out how the UK’s international development, humanitarian and refugee strategies feed into the Prevent, Pursue and Protect activities.

The Prevent and Channel programmes are the most visible public-facing activities emerging out of CONTEST. They are voluntary for participants and, even though there is a statutory

obligation for public bodies to show awareness of radicalisation risks, the programmes rely on the engagement of those working in the public service, such as in education, social and healthcare, and relies also on the cooperation of the public. The UK police, following criticism that Prevent predominantly targets Muslim communities, has sought to gain the trust and confidence of all communities, in order to encourage engagement with the programme. To this end, public information campaigns emphasise the underpinning theory of Prevent that radicalisation is an ideological process, which can be identified and stopped in its tracks, thus, empowering local communities to work with the full range of agencies to provide appropriate support that changes the direction of people's lives away from extremism.

As Dudenhoefer (2017) notes, 'the Prevent strategy is inextricably tied to the notion of vulnerability'. There is a strong presumption within Prevent, and this reflects much of the campaigning literature and imagery produced by refugee support groups, UN agencies and indeed parts of the refugee studies literature, that asylum-seekers and refugees are *a priori* vulnerable. CT policing understands this particular form of vulnerability as one that increases a susceptibility to radicalisation when other conditions are in place. The author has written elsewhere (McDowell, 2013) that it is misguided to ascribe vulnerability to an entire population of people in a blanket way simply on the basis of their legal status as asylum seekers, or based on presumptions about their prior experiences. By doing so, as Dudenhoefer notes, risks stripping people of their agency, portraying them as passive subjects, and may lead to a misunderstanding of the complexities of forced migration and the role of agency, control and choice, as well as to inappropriate or ineffective policy interventions.

The Prevent focus on safeguarding and vulnerability, however, has the positive impact of focusing attention on the conditions of forced displacement, refugee movements, criminality and the challenges of integration that may create an enabling environment for radicalisation to take place. As the UK Parliament's investigation found, in the case of the Parsons Green attack, Ahmed Hassan's vulnerability- as an unaccompanied child asylum seeker from Iraq, who had spent time in camps in the Middle East and many months traveling across Europe with the aim of entering the UK - was identified, and it became the basis of his Prevent referral and a Channel support programme which included 'diversionary activities'. Hassan disclosed in his asylum interview that he had been approached, recruited and trained by Da'esh, however, the Parliamentary Committee investigation found that information was not shared between different parts of the system even within the same government department,

and the significance of intelligence supplied did not trigger an investigation. The findings suggest that a safeguarding approach, where the focus is on the individual rather than the context, may preclude attention to security threats that are directly linked to traumatising events, and public safety may not be adequately protected. It further suggests that where extremist groups targeting these same types of people in their efforts to radicalize and use those persons for their terrorist cause, there is a need to develop more proactive programs to protect those vulnerable persons from being recruited and radicalized.

## **Conclusion**

This final section of the chapter focuses mainly on gaps in the current knowledge on the risks of radicalisation that leads to terrorism arising out of the internationalisation conflict. The research presented identifies policy and strategic opportunities relating to the drivers and enablers of the terrorism threat in the context of the internationalisation of conflict. In relation to population displacement, encampment and the asylum journey, further research is required to understand the processes through which recruiters and political agents interact with the displaced at different points in the refugee cycle including in countries of first asylum. It is necessary to investigate how extremist attitudes take root and develop in refugee settings (in and out of camps, and in response to the politicisation of humanitarian crises), and to understand the conditions in which they take root (fear and uncertainty, indebtedness, lack of opportunity, unemployment, poor housing conditions, and the lack of legal routes to safety). Research would need to consider the economics of refugee flight, for example, the funding of passage across borders and the securing of travel documents, and to what extent extremist actors are involved in such complex transactions, and in what ways the involvement of organised crime intersects with mobilisation and radicalisation in such transactions?

Staying in touch is vital for people on the move, and access to information and networks is indispensable when identifying options to cross borders and find a place of safety. Connection to mobile networks and the internet are essential but communication takes place in the same spaces where terrorist propaganda and narratives flourish, and in situations where resilience against recruitment is arguably weakest. Research should consider opportunities for preventing such dissemination, or for increasing the resilience of those on the move to radical messages. Such interventions could be part of wider international Prevent type strategies that work with those voluntary, UN and national organisations that assist people on the move, increasing their awareness of the risks of radicalisation. The research that informs this chapter

agrees with a recent study which concludes that ‘extremist groups … represent transnational movements, and that the role of diaspora networks, migration, and digital connectivity can shape networks of Jihadi recruitment’ (Clifford and Hughes, 2018). The organisational structure of extremist networks and their communications, command and recruitment practices, however, are poorly understood, and further research is required to grasp the complexity of these networks.

In relation to asylum and refugee settlement and integration there is a need to think about how integration failure can play out in relation to counter extremism, and to ensure that authorities understand and are alive to signs of failure, particularly among higher risk groups. This requires change in official thinking on refugee and asylum integration, and signals a need for longitudinal studies of the integration trajectories of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe drawing on all available data. It requires also the development of indicators that help build new models of integration that include political engagement and risks of failure. The understanding of integration cannot be geographically bound to a single country. Economic relations and networks that extend across Europe, and elsewhere, among diaspora communities and in the country of conflict are at the heart of refugees’ livelihood strategies.

In relation to CT policies the research presented in this chapter has questioned whether current strategies are sufficiently proactive in relation to the situation of asylum seekers and refugees which can often be one of precariousness, with risks of integration failure that have security implications. It is noted that strategies do not sufficiently, analytically or conceptually, link up the international and local context when analysing the sources of threats, and operationally border and entry practices, including asylum interviews, are isolated from the assessment of vulnerability risk.

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