

EVIDENCE-BASED COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY: EVALUATING THE 'BIG PICTURE'



José María Blanco

Head of the Centre for Analysis and Foresight — Guardia Civil
Spain

Jéssica Cohen

Intelligence Manager and International Security Analyst — private sector

Abstract: The core of evidence-based policy should be to evaluate if counterterrorism (CT) policies work and to fix the way we can measure them. For this purpose we propose a holistic approach, a model, in order to ensure that policing designers have the best knowledge and the best intelligence when they take decisions on CT. Evaluating public policies on CT is a continuous process that offers, at least, three key moments (the existence of prior knowledge and necessary intelligence, failures in decision-making and the measurement of the effects and impacts that the policies developed have had), a process led by different actors (universities, think tanks, intelligence analysts, government civil servants, lobbyists, citizens' desires and needs, etc.) and a process that aims not only to know the effectiveness of the policies, but also to improve future policymaking. The framework, and the six-step evaluation process we propose, try to face the 'big picture' of terrorism, to ensure that CT policies act against root causes, groups and individuals, terrorist objectives, actions and impacts and to confirm that these policies do not generate effects contrary to our goals or that collide with our values. Through this framework it is possible to select individual measurements, or packs of them, in order to apply evidence-based methodologies.

Keywords: evidence-based policing (EBP); terrorism; counterterrorism (CT); analysis; decision-making.

NO EVOLUTION WITHOUT EVALUATION

Evidence-based CT policy is widely understood as a historical search for usable and relevant knowledge generated through rational scientific methods to help address and solve terrorism-related problems, 'to produce knowledge required for fine-tuning programs and constructing guidelines and tool-kits for dealing with known problems' (Head, 2008:2).

Several questions, listed below, make it necessary to evaluate policies against terrorism.

- **Is it necessary?** In many cases we create new laws that overlap older ones. We change legislation without a study on whether the previous law could assess the same threat or without the required financial resources. Sometimes the solution could be to strengthen existing policies, for
- **Effectiveness.** The adapted measures must face the identified risks and threats, with the objectives and desired effects being defined in advance.
- **Efficiency.** In the last 14 years there has been a massive increase in government spending on CT interventions. After the attacks in 2001, many projects have been financed by states and supranational organisations to study the phenomenon of terrorism, the root causes and the policies to be developed.
- **Undesired effects.** Sometimes, the solution to a threat has other impacts or effects (secondary or collateral effects) that could be costly, harmful, illegal or negative. Several policies imply limits to civil rights. For example, security must ensure the free exercise of civil liberties, and we must be sure

example through the adaptation of the legal frameworks of the security and judicial forces and an improvement in their resources.



that the established measures are effective, especially if they limit our lifestyle. Adopting restrictive measures is a kind of victory for terrorist groups, which are conditioning our way of life and spreading fear in our societies. Our governments should not be indirect allies.

- **Other needs.** The utility of the large amount of research and the number of papers on terrorism. According to Schmid and Jongman (as cited in Horgan, 1997), 'perhaps as much as 80 per cent of the literature is not research based in any rigorous sense'. Evaluating CT is a way to discover what is being studied and the fields that need a greater effort, building bridges between the world of ideas and knowledge and the world of decision-making.

EVIDENCE-BASED COUNTERTERRORISM CHALLENGES

- We study terrorism in isolation, without considering the relationships with other related phenomena: organised crime, political violence, insurgencies or guerrilla actions, etc.
- Terrorist acts are random events. There is not one continuous set of data, as is the case with other criminal activities. Therefore, establishing patterns and coming to conclusions implies the existence of several limitations.
- It is difficult, dangerous and perhaps not correct to adopt a cost-benefit approach, because other parameters follow on from national security decision-making: it can increase social fear and it suffers from the subjective perception of security and zero social tolerance to terrorist events.
- Deterrence, a key factor in CT, is difficult to measure.
- EBP needs to measure the effects of concrete policies, but sometimes a mix of factors, variables or random circumstances causes the effects. It is therefore difficult to measure the direct and individual effects of most CT measures.
- In the same way, it is necessary to have an evaluation of each set of measures both individually and in general, taking into account the pull of measures that we are using in a given period of time.
- Sometimes, because of security concerns, it is impossible to develop randomised controlled experiments (Laycock, 2012) using a control group (for example diplomats in fortified embassies and diplomats in unprotected embassies).
- Political cycles (4-5 years) make it difficult to evaluate policies, and policymakers do not desire such evaluation due to electoral interests.
- Gaps between government and knowledge institutions.
 - Different objectives and cultures.
 - Gap between the world of ideas and research and the world of decisions and action.
 - Gap between static academia and research and dynamic decision-making actors.
 - Lack of skills and incentives in universities and in the system to do and to use applied research.
 - Law enforcement agencies and intelligence services have data; they can explain what is happening, but not the causes. Academia has the time and methodologies, but does not have access to data.
 - Time and personal-resource restrictions. Policymakers act quickly with limited staff resources that often have multiple tasks to attend to. Researchers have the time and the possibility of allocating researchers with exclusive dedication to each topic.
 - Lack of channels that allow the sharing of useful information between two institutions. Difficulties in generating and sharing knowledge; sometimes government priorities are not known.
- Gaps between strategic, tactic and operational visions in security activities.
- Secret information/data or limits on access to it, for reasons of national security.
- Lack of transparency in policymaking (in the process, hidden interests, final costs, other alternatives, etc.)



- A wrong culture of error and fear of being evaluated, because sometimes these systems are used to look for the guilty instead of looking to improve the effectiveness of the system. Increasing the chance of falling back into the same mistakes.
- The need to balance rigorous analysis with time restrictions.
- Consciousness about the inefficiency of evaluating CT policies if the principles, values, models or systems that lead them are wrong.

pieces about terrorism — books, articles, reports, dissertations and policy briefs)

- **The development of methodologies to do it.** It is not easy to apply a methodology and to know the effectiveness of a measure. Usually, several measures are implemented at the same time, and it is difficult to individualise the effects of each one.

DECIDE, BUT TAKE A GOOD DECISION!

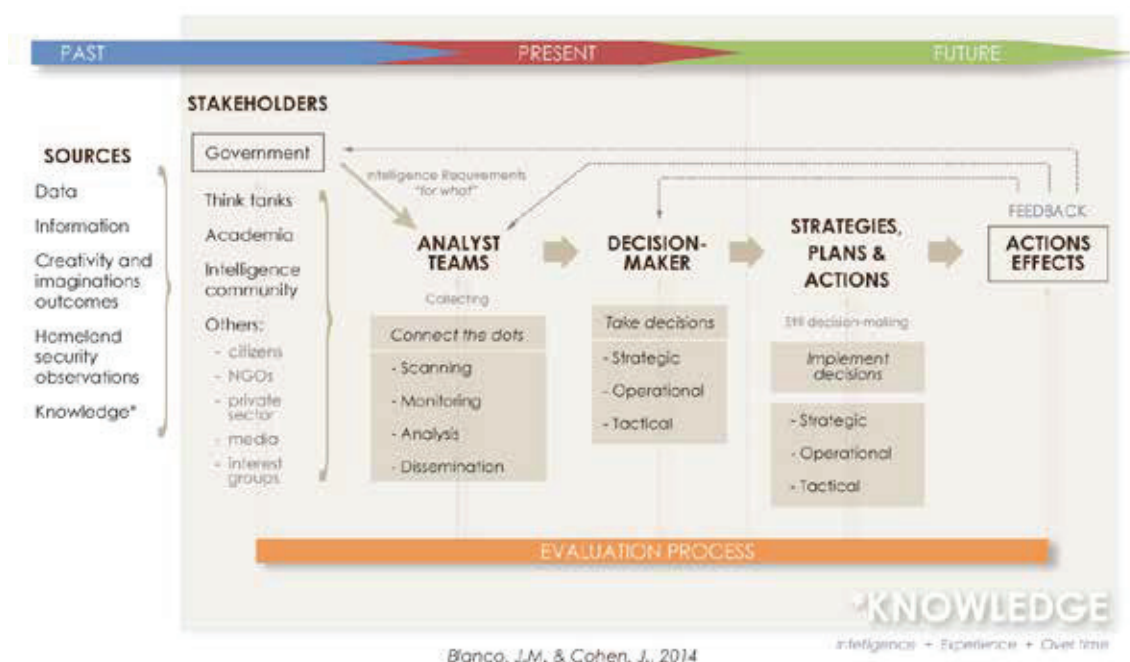
In our opinion, EBP has three requirements.

- **The absence of a framework.** Freese (2014) takes an interesting approach in her 'Evidence-based counterterrorism framework', pointing out two stages: the first is scientific research, trying to answer questions (what, how and why); the second stage entails evaluative research, with the focus on resources, processes and outcomes. But EBP could have a broader framework.
- **The lack of applied research.** Lum, Kennedy and Shirley (2006) concluded that only seven studies were scientific evaluations of a CT programme, after selecting 354 studies that seemed to evaluate CT programmes or interventions (after locating 20 000 written

But, as we have noted at the beginning of the paper, although it is difficult, it is worth doing it. Policies must be evaluated. It is a duty for transparency and for our citizens.

The main objective of evidence-based policy should be to evaluate if CT policies work and to set out a way to measure it. But our aim would be broader. It would be, in the end, to design a holistic approach — a model — in order to ensure that policing designers have the best knowledge and the best intelligence when they take decisions on CT.

Figure 1. Holistic process of counterterrorism decision-making. Blanco and Cohen, 2014





For this purpose we distinguish three phases, but each one of them is itself formed of too many distinct stages. It is not only a decision cycle, or an intelligence cycle, but also a complete set of incremental cycles, made up of different actors that are continually adding new interests and new knowledge. There are many cycles and processes led by too many different influential actors.

- **Before policymaking.** The decision-maker must have access to the best possible information. Knowledge about terrorism is fragmented and drafted by different actors, thus we must gather it. And we need to create protocols and creative means of contact. Universities, analysts and governments must research and work together. We must evaluate this process in order to know if it works and in order to propose an integral framework of knowledge and intelligence for policymakers.
- **Making decisions or policymaking.** We must know how a decision-maker acts. There is much research about this that we could apply to the process: studies about individual factors, cognitive biases, group factors, public policy theories and intelligence-led policing. We must evaluate this process in order to know the causes of a bad decision (for example, when the decision-maker does not follow the analysts' advice). It is important to go beyond classical models, as Simon's model of rational decision-making does. Policymakers are not absolutely rational, so we must consider the use of incremental models (Lindblom, 1959) or less rational models like the multiple stream approach (Kingdon, 1984).
- **After policymaking.** Policies generate effects that must be measured, but not only with rational indicators (arrests, number and cost of attacks, time between attacks). If causing terror is the main objective of terrorism, we should measure fear and terror, and other social impacts of CT measures (i.e. loss of civil liberties). Statisticians deal with terrorist attacks as random events. Nevertheless, their effects are continuous, as are the policies designed to prevent or to pursue this phenomenon. For this purpose we should have a complete taxonomy of CT actions in order to evaluate whether they attain the aims for which they are implemented. The evaluation process would produce a new input for future public CT policies.

A key question in our model is the time factor. We must learn from the past and create the future from our present time. Policymakers take CT measures without objective analysis systems, mainly responding to opportunity or social alarm triggered by some event, without designing future scenarios, that will never take place during their term of office.

Bakker (2012) developed important research analysing the references to the future evolution of this phenomenon in 60 surveys conducted by well-known institutions and experts. This survey reached a conclusion: most of them lack a methodological basis; in general, they do not even mention possible dynamics of change that would allow the establishment of indicators to monitor the evolution of the phenomenon. In the best-case scenario, these surveys are a goodwill gesture based on personal opinions; intuition based on experience or trend forecasting. This opinion about the study of the future in academic papers is no different if we analyse official documents, strategies, plans or actions. Foresight is a field of study that should be applied in CT policy evaluation in order to prevent the future effects and impacts of the measures we plan to adopt.

360° COUNTERTERRORISM EVALUATION

Evaluating public policies on CT is a continuous process that offers, at least, three key moments (the existence of prior knowledge and necessary intelligence, failures in decision-making and the measurement of the effects and impacts that the policies developed have had), a process led by different actors (universities, think tanks, intelligence analysts, government civil servants, lobbyists, citizens' desires and needs, etc.) and a process that aims not only to know the effectiveness of the policies, but also to improve future policymaking.

The core of our system is based on the strategic action of terrorist actors (states, groups or individuals) and counterterrorist actors, expressed in two horizontal lines in Figure 2. All actors have goals, develop actions and produce impacts. The two lines allow comparisons to be made between each of these elements and CT policies to be designed that act on them.

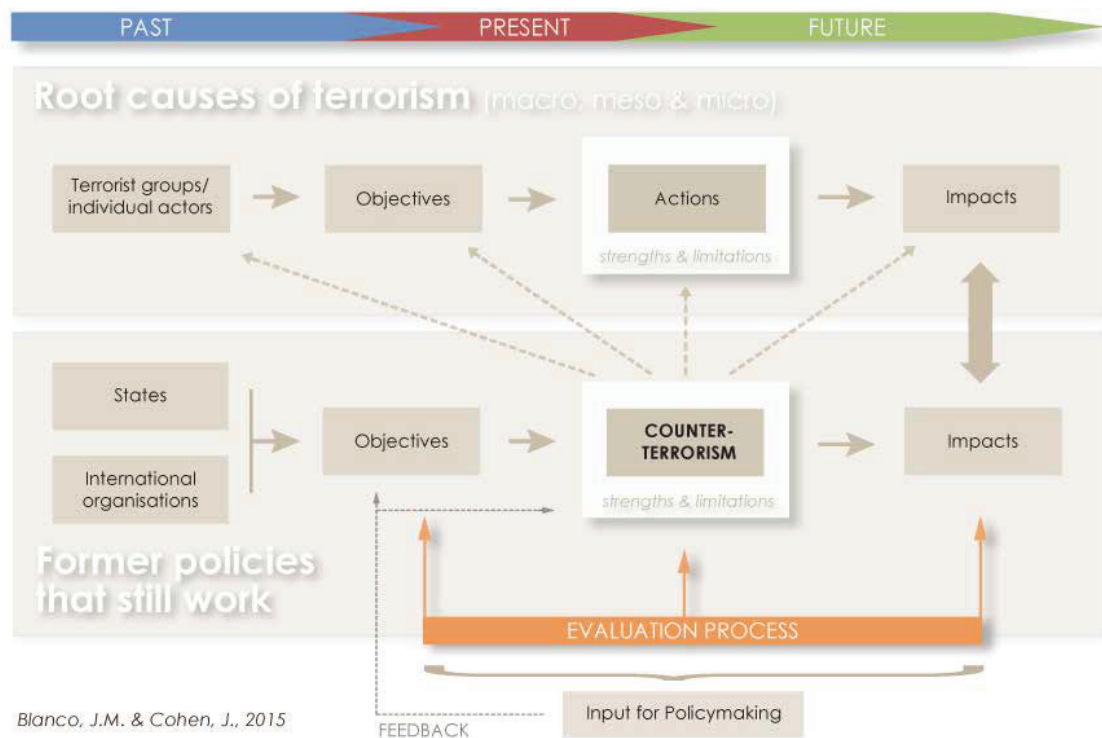


Figure 2. Counterterrorism decision-making evaluation. Blanco and Cohen

CT policies should deal with terrorism's root causes. There is no clear consensus about the root causes of terrorism, in the same way there is no consensus about what terrorism is. Macro (political, economic, social and technological factors), meso (society and groups) and micro (individual, psychology) theories are developed by researchers, but there is no common pattern. Perhaps it is more interesting to talk about facilitators.

CT policies must take into consideration the characteristics of terrorist groups (or states or individuals). A clear analysis of these provides us with key knowledge about their ideology, leadership, hierarchies, membership, financing, area of action, weapons used, relations with other criminal groups or states, modus operandi, financing, supporters, sympathisers communities, gateway organisations, ties with other types of crime and safe havens.

Terrorist groups, states or individuals act in order to achieve their terrorist objectives. The main objective of terrorists is to terrorise populations, to generate fear. Terrorist groups establish their own objectives: terror, fear, political change, social polarisation and overreaction in Western

countries. Fighting against these objectives should be part of CT efforts, and there is a lack of measures answering these questions.

States and international organisations have their own objectives. They must guarantee safety and security in order to allow the exercise of civil rights. Following the content of several CT strategies, states and international organisations must detect, prevent, deter and reduce. Focused on terrorism, states must detect, prevent, deter and reduce it. Resilience, the capability to react after an attack, securing public services, is a key factor, considered in every national security strategy. For these purposes they develop CT strategies, plans and actions that also produce severe impacts.

There is a clear asymmetry if we compare these objectives. Terrorists do not have to obey a legal framework, they have direct incomes, they do not pay taxes, they do not have ethical considerations and they are not pressed and controlled by mass media and citizens.

Terrorist groups try to achieve these objectives through various actions: attacks, kidnappings, illegal trafficking, communication, diffusion



of videos and images, narratives, recruitment, financing and radicalisation of communities or individuals. Perhaps this is the main area of CT action, but it should not be the only one.

The impacts of terrorism are not only the number of attacks, deaths or injuries, or the number of people arrested or condemned. There are other

effects that are not usually considered: social and economic outcomes, the level of social terror (the main objective of terrorist actions), the way that attacks affect governments' actions or the way they make us modify our system, values and way of living. Although it is not a comprehensive classification, the following figure shows the impacts of terrorism on the society that suffers it.

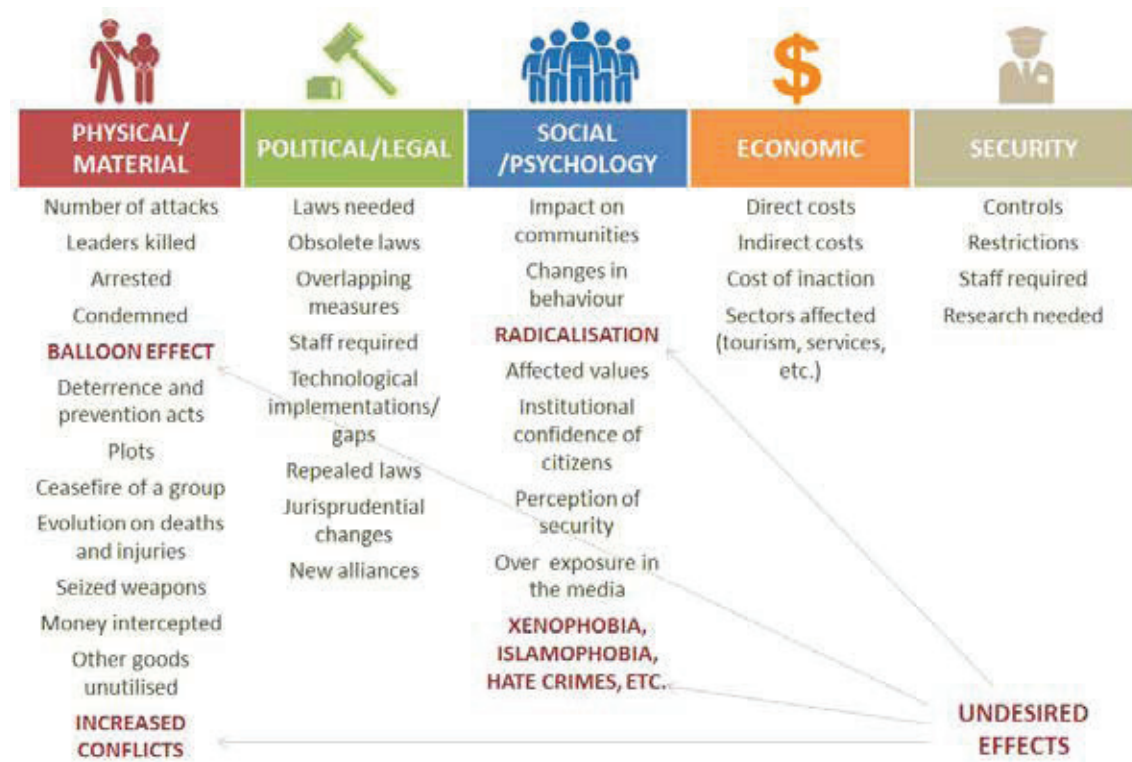


Figure 3. Terrorism impacts. Blanco and Cohen

We define CT as 'policies, operations and programmes that governments implement to combat terrorism' (Spencer, 2006, p. 180). In a similar way, the evaluation of CT requires a clear definition of CT; knowledge about different Western models and the factors that condition them (sometimes as limiting factors); a classification of CT measures, methodologies and techniques to evaluate CT policies; and research about the

impacts of these policies, which sometimes could be ineffective, have undesirable effects or act as a fuel.

There are several, non-comprehensive, lists of different CT measures, and specific studies about individual measures. After identifying more than 200 possible measures, they could be classified in the following way.



DIFFERENT COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES



Figure 4. Counterterrorism measures. Blanco and Cohen

For this evidence-based framework the most important issue is not to have a classification of CT measures but to point out several key questions. Lee Jarvis (2015) proposes a framework named 'The three Ws of counterterrorism'. The first ('Is it warranted?') involves the consideration of whether there is a need for any new CT policy, because perhaps there are enough mechanisms in place. The second ('Will it work?') manages our ability to identify the purpose of a CT tool, to predict its future functioning, to link cause and effect and to know the impact on its targets. The third ('Is it worth the consequences?') tries to measure the consequences, intended or not, of CT policies. Our model integrates two levels, as follows.

- For each measure we must answer several questions: for what, who, what, why, where, when, how. Each measure must have a clear context. Measures are not effective every time or everywhere or for all terrorist typologies. CT needs strategic decision-making: strategies, programmes, actions, resources and a temporal and geographic framework.
- Each measure that we could establish must consider the desired outcomes, possible indicators to be measured and results to evaluate the policy.



Firstly



Secondly

	Measure	Desired outcomes	Indicators	Effects/Results
Politic				
LEAs				
Military				
Legal				
Social				

Figure 5. Counterterrorism decision-making evaluation. Blanco and Cohen

CT policies produce a broad set of impacts that should be measured. In this way we could compare CT impacts and terrorist impacts and evaluate if these measures are dealing with root causes, groups, objectives and actions. It would

also allow evaluation of whether the impacts are against our own objectives and values, whether there are undesirable effects and whether they are the way or if there is a way to generate feedback to improve the system.

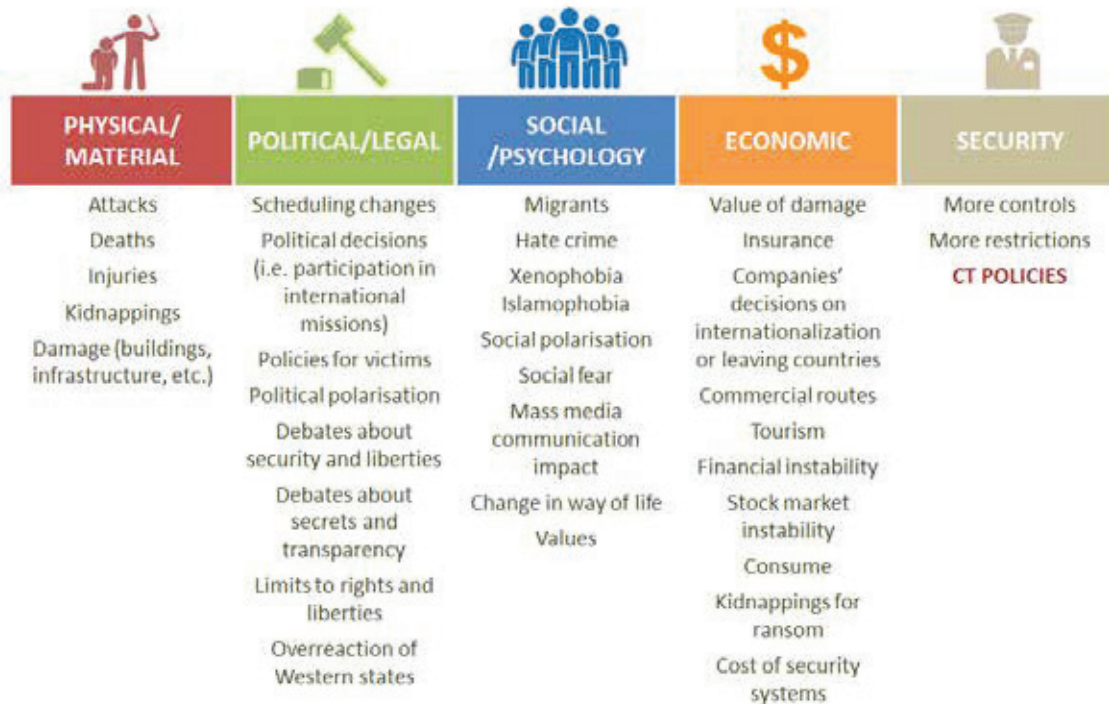


Figure 6. Counterterrorism impacts. Blanco and Cohen



It is impossible to measure all these impacts arithmetically (De Graaf, 2010), but there are several methodologies and models that could be applied. It supposes a multidisciplinary effort (criminology, law, psychology, sociology, economy, philosophy, anthropology, education, etc.). It is not possible to evaluate CT only by means of rationalist approaches (number of attacks, number of arrested people). They must be completed with constructivism (Spencer, 2006). We need to apply quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Or laypersons' discourse, analysing in different mass media, blogs, forums, tweets and the web the use of adverbs, adjectives and verbs that are building our vision of this world (Milliken, 1999, 2001). Or the 'performativity' model from Beatrice De Graaf (2010). Or introducing foresight into the model: each measure must be analysed with prospective methodology before its implementation, with the objectives pointed to by Jarvis, and with methodologies like factor analysis, game of actors, cross-impact matrix, what if, trend analysis, wildcards or scenarios (Blanco and Cohen, 2014) — or through the impact of perceptions (Perl, 2007). Finally, there is a creativity technique to generate ideas that propose to think in a negative/opposite way (perhaps easier for our human mind). If it is difficult to determine what we should do, perhaps we can begin pointing out what we should not do.

Following this model, and Figure 2, we propose a 'six-step evaluation process', with the following stages.

Make sure that CT policies are aimed at terrorist actors (groups, states or individuals), terrorist objectives, terrorist actions (including financing and communication) and terrorist impacts, but especially, although it is not usually taken into consideration, the root causes of terrorism, and the effects of previous CT policies. Sometimes CT policies are only oriented towards one of these factors, especially terrorist groups or individuals as a reaction to previous actions and attacks.

1. Establish criteria, methodologies and indicators to evaluate CT impacts.
2. Compare the impact of terrorist actions with the impact of CT policies.

3. Carry out a critical analysis of each CT measure, or at least sets of them, testing their needs, effectiveness, efficiency and possible unwanted effects.
4. Confirm that the policies do not generate effects contrary to our goals or go against our values.
5. Redefine CT policies, eliminating or changing former policies, and introducing a long-term vision before implementing new ones. Avoid overreaction and the bad decisions of the past.

AVOID BAD DECISIONS!

There are several lessons to be learned from the past that demonstrate that taking bad decisions could motivate a rise in violent radicalisation, present or future, and terrorist attacks, or could be used in the terrorist narrative for its objectives. Some policies could act in a positive way in the short term, but we do not know the effects in the future, generating serious doubts. The following is a list of these practices.

- Torture (Abu Ghraib).
- Advanced interrogation techniques.
- Convictions without judgment. Prisons like Guantanamo.
- Hidden prisons all over the world.
- Illegal flights for arrested people.
- Finding a balance between killing leaders and taking them to prison after being judged.
- Collateral civil victims (drones, bombs, etc.).
- International military operations without a stabilisation plan.
- Not considering lessons learned.
- Arrogance in international relations.
- Barriers between law enforcement agencies and intelligence services.
- War against terrorism, legitimisation of these groups, militarisation of holistic problems.



- Propaganda of terrorist actions. Mass media and Daesh.
- Imperialism.
- 'Westernism' or 'Occidentalism'.
- Values that are not demonstrated (democracy, justice, empire of the law, etc.).
- Collective punishment.
- Bad use of language, for example with minorities, communities.
- Criminalising communities.
- Attacking human rights.

CONCLUSION

Evaluating CT policies is not an easy task, but we need to do it in order to know if our policies are effective or not. We usually evaluate direct impacts or actions against terrorist groups, terrorist states or terrorist individuals, but we should not forget that terrorism generates a great many impacts, not only a number of deaths and injuries, and that the main goal is to terrorise populations, therefore fear should be a key element in an evidence-based CT framework. CT policies generate great social, political or economic impacts too. Their evaluation is key in order to know if we are being effective facing threats, and especially to confirm that what we do does not go against our core values.

REFERENCES

- Baker, E. (2012), 'Forecasting terrorism: the need for a more systematic approach', *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 5, No 4, pp. 69-84. Retrieved 20 September 2015 from <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1209&context=jss>
- Blanco, J. M. & Cohen, J. (2014), 'The future of counter-terrorism in Europe. The need to be lost in the correct direction', *European Journal of Futures Research*, Vol. 2, No 1, Springer. Retrieved 15 April 2015 from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs40309-014-0050-9>
- Blanco, J. M. (2014), 'Holistic approach to the analysis and study of terrorism', *European Police Science and Research Bulletin*, Issue 10, CEPOL. Retrieved 15 April 2015 from <https://www.cepola.eu/sites/default/files/science-research-bulletin-10.pdf>
- Cohen, J. & Blanco, J. M. (2015), 'Knowledge, the great challenge to deal with terrorism. UACES policing in times of uncertainty: challenges of integrated security'. Accepted for publication in *European Journal of Policing Studies*.
- De Graff, B. & De Graff, B. (2010), 'Bringing politics back in: the introduction of the "performative power" of counterterrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 3, Issue 2.
- Freese, R. (2014), 'Evidence-based counterterrorism or flying blind? How to understand and achieve what works', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, pp. 37-54. Retrieved 16 September 2015 from <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/324>
- Head, B. (2009), 'Three lenses of evidence-based policy', *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 67, No 1, pp. 1-11. Retrieved 16 September 2015 from <http://www.cebma.org/wp-content/uploads/head-the-three-lenses-of-evidence-based-policy.pdf>
- Horgan, J. (1997), 'Issues in terrorism research' *The Police Journal*, Vol. 70, p. 193.
- Jarvis, L. (2014), 'How might we evaluate counterterrorism policy: the three W's of counterterrorism', Eastminster. Retrieved 16 September 2015 from <http://www.ueapolitics.org/2014/12/17/evaluate-counterterrorism-policy>
- Kingdom, J. W. (1984), *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*, Little Brown, Boston.
- Laycock, G. (2012), 'In support of evidence-based approaches: a response to Lum and Kennedy', *Policing*, Vol. 6, No 4, pp. 324-326.
- Limdbloom, C. E. (1959), 'The science of muddling through', *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 19, pp. 78-88.





Lum, C., Kennedy, L. W. & Sherley, A. (2006), *The effectiveness of counter-terrorism strategies: A Campbell systematic review*, Crime and Justice Coordinating Group, The Campbell Collaboration, Washington DC.

Lum, C. & Kennedy, L. W (eds) (2012), *Evidence-based counterterrorism policy*, Springer.

Milliken, J. (1999), 'The study of discourse in international relations: a critique of research and methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5, No 2, pp. 225-254.

Milliken, J. (2001), 'Discourse study: bringing rigor to critical theory', in: Fierke, K. M. & Jorgensen, K. E. (eds), *Constructing international relations: The next generation*, M. E. Sharp, London, pp. 136-159.

Perl, R. (2007), *Combating terrorism: the challenge of measuring effectiveness — CRS report for Congress*, RL33160, Congressional Research Service. Retrieved 12 September 2015 from <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL33160.pdf>

Spencer, A. (2006), 'The problems of evaluating counter-terrorism', *UNISCI discussion papers*, No 12, UNISCI, pp. 179-201. Retrieved 16 August 2015 from <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/UNIS/article/view/UNIS0606330179B/28069>