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# A Disruptive Influence? "Prevent-ing" Problems and Countering Violent Extremism Policy in Practice

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This article describes how disrupting the activities of suspected violent extremists has become an increasingly significant construct in the policy and practice of the Prevent strand of UK Counter-Terrorism. Informed by empirical data collected during semi-structured interviews with police officers involved in conducting disruptions and members of the communities where these occurred, blended with a limited amount of field observation, the analysis documents how and why a logic of disruption has assumed increasing prominence in counter terrorism work. In respect of police interventions in particular, implementing disruptions, rather than pursuing fully-fledged prosecutions, represents a pragmatic way of reconciling increasing demand with limited resources, as well as managing some of the difficulties of translating intelligence into legal evidence. Conceptualized in this way, the analysis positions disruption as a distinctive mode of crime prevention; one premised upon logics of near-event interdiction. As such, it is understood as rather different in its operations and functions to other forms of "early intervention" that are increasingly prominent in much contemporary crime prevention policy. By focusing upon *how* specific Prevent interventions are implemented and performed this analysis makes a particular contribution to our knowledge of counter terrorism work. This reflects the fact that most previous studies of Prevent and other countering violent extremism programs have provided analyses of community perceptions and reactions to policing and the policy frame, rather than the configuration of the interventions themselves.

On the evening of January 19, 2012, officers from the South Wales Police and the Wales Extremism and Counter-Terrorism Unit entered the Canton Community Centre in Cardiff with the intent of disrupting a meeting being hosted by Al Ghurabaa. This group, closely allied with the organization Muslims Against Crusades that had been proscribed by the Home Secretary two months previously as an affiliate of Al-Muhajiroun, had taken to

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holding private meetings in venues in the local area.[1] Their public and private activities were starting to generate considerable concern among members of the local Muslim community.

In part this reflected several recent events, including the arrest in December 2010 of five men from Cardiff for their part in an alleged plot to blow up the London Stock Exchange, and a second case where two local men had been traced to Kenya where they were trying to join a terrorist group. Set against this backdrop, the increasing public visibility of some of the key individuals involved with the Al Ghurabaa group and their seeming ability to act with impunity were proving troubling. These community concerns had been relayed to the police at a senior level through well established channels of engagement.

The police action was therefore designed to overtly disrupt the group with the aim of sending a message both to those allied to Al Ghurabaa and the wider community. The formal aims set out in the police operational order were to:

- Engage in overt disruption;
- Dismantle the Al Ghurabaa infrastructure;
- Divert individuals from radicalization;
- Respond to legitimate public concern.

It was, according to the Association of Chief Police Officer's Prevent Delivery Unit, who have a national view of such issues "…the first direct disruption of this kind to take place nationally."[2]

Operation Alton as the police intervention was labelled sought to combine "Pursue" and "Prevent" activities. These are strands of the United Kingdom's overarching cross-governmental CONTEST strategy. Pursue covers the traditional arena of counter terrorism work in that it is focused upon identifying and securing those known or suspected of engaging in terrorist activities (H.M. Government 2009). Prevent is more innovative and is, as its name implies, concerned with stopping people from acquiring the motivations to engage in violent activities. While the meeting was in progress officers interrupted proceedings and informed those present that the meeting was being stopped, and that any further meetings were prohibited from taking place on venues owned by Cardiff Council. One man was arrested at the scene for attacking an officer and threatening to "cut your head off and machine gun the lot of you." Several others who were known by police to be heavily involved in the group were given

[1] For more detail on the background of this group see Wiktorowicz (2005) and Kenney et al. (2016).

[2] ACPO Prevent Delivery Unit Update, 22 September 2012 p. 4.

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letters advising them formally that they were of interest to the police. Other attendees who, based upon intelligence, were not identified as being what police label "subjects of interest," were offered a Counter Terrorism Prevent leaflet.

The police infrastructure was also mobilized to monitor potential "displacement" activity. This second phase of operational activity had several strands. It included Prevent activities with individuals who, as a result of the meeting, were newly identified as subjects of interest to the authorities. Further disruption measures were instigated against a number of Dawah stalls in the Cardiff area, about which the local community had expressed concerns. Visits were also performed by "Prevent Engagement Officers"[3] across the country to individuals who had been identified, on the basis of intelligence, as having an influence upon Al Ghurabaa's activity in Wales.

Subsequent to the operation, the police Prevent Engagement Officers worked with 26 individuals who were judged suitable for a Prevent intervention, a number of whom were assessed as requiring long-term support. In the immediate aftermath of the raid, police undertook a concerted communications campaign involving meetings with all of the local Imams, reassurance uniformed patrols in the local neighborhoods, and media outputs. The purpose being to explain and justify the intervention that they had performed. This was because they anticipated that it was likely to be publicly contested by those subject to it. Operation Alton was a relatively unremarkable counter terrorism operation. As the police Commander for Cardiff, who was directly involved in the planning and design of what happened, described, "It was a relatively straight forward 35 minute policing operation."

This short case study illuminates the workings of the kinds of routine and mundane counter terrorism operation that are, reflecting the current geo political climate, happening with increasing regularity in towns and cities throughout the UK. Political and public attention tends to be captured by high-profile counter terrorism operations attempting to foil potentially spectacular plots, or responding to attacks that have succeeded. However, the more modest logic of disruption underpins an increasing number of counter terrorism interventions enacted under the auspices of the UK government's Prevent program.

The focus of this article is upon developing an account of how these disruptions are enacted and performed as part of the

[3] These are specialist counter terrorism police officers responsible for the delivery of much of the police involvement in the Prevent strategy. Unlike other counter terrorism officers though they are fairly overt in their role, and public-facing.

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UK's approach to countering terrorism. For while a number of scholarly articles and books have assessed aspects of Prevent, their principal focus has been with it as a policy construct and/or community attitudes or perceptions toward it (e.g., Heath-Kelly 2013; Kundani 2009; Singh 2016). Much less work has attended to Prevent as a set of practices, the ways in which it is being used to engage with a particularly challenging contemporary social problem, and "how" it is being delivered on the ground. Following Howard Becker's (2014) admonition of the social sciences to start its expositions with fine-grained descriptions of how social processes and organization happens, this is the focus herein. The analysis seeks to move beyond official policy statements about what should happen in respect of preventing violent extremism, to describe how this aspect of counter terrorism work is actually conducted. In so doing, the article also seeks to explicate the influences that account for why disruption, conceptualized as a mode of preventative behavior management, has become an increasingly important component of UK counter terrorism policy.

The data informing the analysis are derived from 41 semi-structured interviews with police practitioners engaged in prevent delivery and some limited field observations of their work, together with 53 interviews with community members who had engaged with Prevent interventions in some fashion. The latter group in the sample were involved in co-producing disruptions with the police, or had participated in informal social control disruptions, rather than being the subjects of such measures.[4] One constraint this imposes is that the analysis cannot assess the extent to which disruption may have unintended consequences such as, for example, acting as a radicalizing influence upon those already on the edges of extremism. But what the empirical materials do afford is detailed insight into the conduct of disruptions.

The police respondents were typically police constables and sergeants, with one or two more senior officers also interviewed across each of the four forces from across England and Wales participating in the study. In addition, two police interviewees were senior officers seconded to the Home Office Prevent Delivery Unit. The community respondents were drawn from several communities within these four police force areas. The majority of interviewees were male and over 25, many of them having been engaged with the police and Prevent in a range of capacities for

[4] Readers interested in the experiences of those subject to disruption are directed toward Sentas' (2016) study based upon a small sample of Kurdish respondents living in London who were the focus of interventions conducted by the Security Service.

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several years. All interviewees were assured their anonymity as a condition of their involvement with the research.

Typically, interviews lasted about an hour, although some were longer. The interview accounts were tape recorded and fully transcribed. The interview schedules utilized for both police and nonpolice respondents covered perceptions and attitudes toward Prevent as a strategy, but accented local experiences of implementation. These interview data were augmented with observational material from fieldwork at meetings where a range of Prevent related problems and issues were discussed, and a variety of tactical and strategic interventions considered and reported on.

The next section of the article outlines Prevent and its policy development, conceptually framed by ideas derived from the general crime and violence prevention literature. This sets up a more empirically led account of how Prevent is increasingly being delivered through interventions premised upon logics of disruption. It is concluded that these are markers of a distinct "disruptive turn" in the design and delivery of the preemptive Prevent strand of UK counter terrorism policy.

## "Prevent-ing" Problems

It is now over 10 years since four young men traveled from Leeds in the North of England to explode bombs on the London Underground and a bus, killing 52 people. Following on from the attacks of 9/11 and since these events in London in July 2005, there has been a steady stream of stories of terrorist threats and counter terrorist operations occurring in different towns and cities across the UK and Europe, and attacks where further loss of life has occurred.

The signature quality of terrorist violence is that it is designed to function as a signal crime—an act that sends a message to a public audience (Innes 2014). Although political rhetoric typically contends "we will not accede to terrorist demands," with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the sequence of attacks sketched in outline above have altered the stance and positions of many key social institutions across Europe. These processes of reaction have been afforded momentum by a "legislative reflex"—whereby policy makers respond to each new atrocity and innovation in terrorist methodology through introducing new legal instruments and "levers."

In the aftermaths of recent terrorist attacks there have been public remonstrations from senior figures within the security agencies for governments to enhance their legal powers to tackle a "morphing" and adapting threat. This siren call is potent for

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politicians who perceive they need to be seen to be "doing something," and almost automatically reach for the formulation and introduction of new laws as their principal response. Since 9/11 in the UK this legislative reflex has been manifested in: the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which allowed for detention without trial (later overturned by the courts); the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, introducing the "control order" (also overturned); the Terrorism Act 2006, that extended the detention of suspects without charge from 14 to 28 days; the Terrorism Order 2006, enabling the Treasury to freeze the assets of suspects; the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, under which police were permitted to continue questioning suspects after charge; the Terrorist Asset-Freezing Act 2010; and the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill. New legislation has become an almost ritualized part of the societal response to major terrorist attacks.

These new legal instruments have had an important framing influence upon the progressive development of and adjustments to the cross-government CONTEST strategy, introduced to provide a comprehensive UK response to the changing international terrorist threat post-2005 (Omand 2010). Subtly echoing approaches originally implemented to manage volume crime problems, it pivots around four key pillars: Prepare, Protect, Prevent, and Pursue. The first two focus upon planning for potential attacks and target hardening measures to mitigate their effects. The "pursue" strand covers traditional counter terrorist activity targeting known suspects (H.M Government 2009).

However, it is the more public-facing Prevent strategy that has been most politically contentious, attracting considerable opprobrium and criticism. This has included accusations that it institutionalizes state-sanctioned domestic spying (Kundani 2009), casting all Muslims as a "suspect community" (Pantazis & Pemberton 2009; Singh 2016). Several of the officers interviewed for the current study were alert to such critiques and had sought to respond by developing a more overt counter terrorism role in their interactions with communities:

> Because with Prevent there were rumours that we were spies, but you can't spy when you're actually going up to somebody and saying 'Hi, I'm from the counter-terrorism unit.' (Police 2659-12)

However, it was not clear from the empirical data generated by this study how successful any such attempts were proving to be in offsetting community concerns.

A key theme highlighted within more scholarly treatments of Prevent is its pre-emptive orientations (Mythen et al. 2013;

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Walker & Mckay 2015). Ashworth and Zedner (2014) for instance, cast Prevent as an inflection of a more general contemporary policy trend to criminalize conduct in anticipation of harm being caused. Similarly, Heath-Kelly (2013) suggests that Prevent is a particular manifestation of the prevalent risk governance discourse. Garland (2001) and Simon (2007) both document how risk based logics have become a defining marker of contemporary crime management strategies. Although similarly positioned upstream of and in an anticipatory relationship to defined kinds of risky behavior, the formal influence of more general crime prevention theory and practices on Prevent's policy development has been more tacit than explicit. This notwithstanding, there are several clear trace echoes of how the former has influenced the latter that can be surfaced.

**Prevent and Crime Prevention**

Crime prevention as a broad set of activities and interventions has been disaggregated through several conceptual frameworks. In an early and influential treatment, ideas from public health were imported to delineate primary, secondary, and tertiary modes of crime prevention (Brantingham & Faust 1976). The former was defined as involving modifying criminogenic conditions in the physical and/or social environment. Contrasted with which, "secondary crime prevention" focuses upon early identification and intervention with individuals or groups exposed to criminogenic circumstances. Tertiary crime prevention is the most targeted configuration, inhibiting recidivism among those who have previously offended.

These ideas were refined by van Dijk and de Waard's (1991) differentiation between preventative activities engaging with offenders, situations, and victims. Tonry and Farrington (1995) also separated out "social" from more "situational" tendencies in crime prevention work, but they nuanced three specific "social" strategies, namely: "developmental prevention"—inhibiting the acquisition of criminal potential in individuals, "community prevention"—influencing group and peer behaviors, often through steering social norms, and "criminal justice prevention"—leveraging formal social control capacities and capabilities.

Albeit in general crime prevention practice there is frequently a greater overlap than implied by these conceptual reifications, applied to the conduct of Prevent and CONTEST, it can be observed that all of these modalities of preventative activity have been utilized at one time or another. This reflects both how Prevent is a multi-dimensional policy construct, but also one that has been adapted as the perceived risks posed by violent extremist

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radicalization have shifted. For example, in recent years the Channel Program has featured increasingly prominently in governmental led discussions of Prevent, as the more explicit grassroots "community" base to most interventions that was prevalent in the late-2000s has ceded ground (Lakhani 2012).

"Channel" as it is referred to by Prevent practitioners, is a voluntary mentoring program for individuals judged to be at risk of radicalization. In constructing these judgements, a multi-agency group of staff from local agencies, utilize a structured risk assessment matrix to determine who should be offered "safeguarding" support. Channel's multi-agency dimension, which has become increasingly explicit in recent UK government discourse around Prevent,[5] clearly parallels the work of Community Safety Partnerships and Public Service Boards that have strived to institutionalize information sharing and decisionmaking between relevant public service agencies involved in general crime prevention (Crawford 1997).

There are affinities too with the role of "focused deterrence" strategies in leveraging preventative effects upon violent crime. Kennedy (2008) assembles a compelling argument that communicative action is a critical component of successful prevention, inasmuch as it is signals about risks that shape the decisionmaking of both potential offenders and victims. Consistent with this insight, attention has been paid to how messages and narratives associated with countering radicalization risks should be communicated to the public to best influence their behavior (Braddock & Horgan 2015).

The efficacy of any preventative measure is predicated upon an ability to know what risks and threats are presenting that should be interdicted or interfered with through some mechanism.

Consequently, how both offline and online surveillance is conducted and intelligence derived from it are important considerations for Prevent. There is considerable concern in the contemporary academic literature about the prevalence and proliferation of state surveillance, in particular, reflecting how new platforms for electronic communication significantly extend the capacity and capability of state agencies to monitor and "know" about individuals' thoughts and actions that would, in former times, have probably remained private (Harcourt 2015). As Marx (2016) describes it, there is a fear that such technologies afford

[5] For instance, as part of the aforementioned 2015 legislation, the UK government introduced a statutory "Prevent Duty" requiring specific public services to formally have "due regard" for their roles and responsibilities to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

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"windows into the soul," providing opportunities for the direct policing of thoughts and feelings—a matter of trepidation for those holding "radical" or "extreme" views of many ideological persuasions.

Surveillance is an intrinsic component of counter terrorism work. Deploying human agents as covert intelligence sources has been a long-standing feature of how liberal democratic polities have sought to protect themselves from a range of perceived threats (Marx 1988). Innes (2006) casts such measures as part of the "dirty work" of defending democracy. Based upon extensive ethnographic observation of officers involved in undercover policing, Loftus et al. (2016) provide a number of new insights into the moral and social organization of this work. They document a range of external regulatory influences, interacting with cultural norms and expectations, to shape operational decision-making about which specific undercover tactics and strategies are selected for use, when and against whom.

One effect of intensive and intrusive police surveillance documented by researchers working in some high crime communities is the inducement of a profound "legal cynicism" among citizens, that leads them to withdraw from active engagement with the police, on the grounds that they fail to afford them adequate levels of protection (Clampet-Lundquist et al. 2015; Kirk & Papachristos 2011; Sampson & Bartusch 1998). The development of the literature around legal cynicism is a correlate of a wider movement concerned with police legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler 2003; Tyler & Fagan 2008).

Focusing specifically upon the police role in delivering Prevent, there are important ethical questions about how far "upstream" of actual risks of criminal activity and violence it is legitimate for police to bring intrusive forms of human and digital surveillance. For while there is an understandable allure for the police in seeking to engage "early interventions" that interdict known risk factors for radicalization at a formative stage, any such tendency needs to be tempered by a recognition that, as McCord's (2003) analysis concluded, some "cures" harm. Likewise, Grabosky (1996) reviewing "what works" in crime prevention stresses that what proves effective in one situation, does not necessarily translate to others.

Having reviewed several general crime prevention programs, McCord identified how narrowly selected success criteria can neglect the potential for wider and longer deleterious consequences being induced. This is especially apposite for countering violent extremism programs that are seeking to engage with complex social problems, via multiple modes of intervention. It is a warning that interventions conducted under the auspices of such

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programs may deliver some benefits, while concurrently generating other more negative consequences. Indeed, such a recognition may help to explain how and why police have come to pragmatically position disruption so centrally in their Prevent delivery mechanisms. For it is not a mode of preventative action that intervenes very far upstream of any issue of concern.

Consistent with this analysis have been recurring concerns about just how effective many Prevent interventions actually are. For instance, analysis by the Royal United Services Institute of police arrest statistics for 2014 reported that only 35 percent of those arrested for terrorism-related offences were actually charged (considerably lower than the charge rate of 58 percent for all criminal offences). These figures were used by journalists to draw negative inferences about the quality and precision of police counter terrorism investigations.[6] However, this overlooks several important differences between general crime investigations and counter terrorism ones. Most significantly, counter-terrorism investigations routinely invoke arrests pre-emptively to disrupt a potential harm from occurring.

In this regard, trying to evaluate and assess the actual efficacy of Prevent, within a continual swirl of critique and concern, is bedeviled by similar challenges that afflict all crime prevention programs—how can you determine whether any intervention has worked or not, given if it has, the harm won't occur (Hughes 1998)? Overall, the available evidence is mixed, with some successes in preventing plausible terrorist attacks, but equally some failures in policy formulation and its delivery on the ground, and in securing public legitimacy (Innes 2006; Lakhani 2012; Mythen et al. 2013).

## Prevent's Policy Development

Some of these issues can be understood as legacies of the response to Islamist extremism prior to the implementation of the CONTEST strategy. Both Foley (2014) and Nesser (2014) identify that initially the policy stance toward many extremists in the United Kingdom was relatively tolerant, especially when compared with countries such as France. An important operational distinction being drawn between those individuals directly engaged in violence and others advocating support for them. Although this disposition has changed over the last decade, Foley contends that the deep legacy of these norms and the judicial

[6] http://news.sky.com/story/1603052/police-terror-tactics-radicalising-muslims (accessed 10/12/15).

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culture in the UK may continue to resonate subtly in the turn toward disruption mapped by this article.

Such concerns notwithstanding, Prevent and the CONTEST strategy framework have been influential internationally. The latter has been largely adopted by the European Union. Prevent is widely acknowledged as having been *the* principal influence upon the Obama administration's National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) issued in 2011 (McCants & Watts 2012; White House 2011). In a recent assessment of the police delivery of CVE, Schanzer et al. (2016) identify that in its North American incarnation, similar challenges and constraints are being encountered, as have been identified with Prevent. While carefully cataloguing the limitations, the authors also identify more promising practices, such as separating the "outreach" and engagement functions of local policing from intelligence gathering, and ensuring that any such work is not just targeted at one specific community. In sum though, and replicating much of the extant research literature, much of what is described is concerned with establishing platforms for building community trust, as opposed to interventions designed to directly interfere with the activities of suspected violent extremists. It is the latter aspect that is the principal focus of the analysis reported below.

In practical delivery terms, Prevent encompasses a range of activities, including: community engagement to develop community intelligence; the aforementioned pre-criminal Channel de-radicalization program; as well as the varieties of disruption described herein. Broadly speaking, these diverse practices gravitate around three principal challenges: the "counter-radicalization" strand of Prevent focuses upon reducing exposure to extremist ideas, narratives and contacts, especially where individuals and groups are adjudged to be vulnerable to being influenced by these; de-radicalization activities seek to neutralize the impact of extremist ideas and social contacts where individuals and groups have been exposed to them, and encourage them to disengage with those that function as ideological "hosts"; managing community cohesion/tensions was initially a key focus for Prevent, although following an official review in 2011, issues of integration and cohesion were formally separated out and assigned to the Department for Communities and Local Government (H.M. Government 2011). That said, local Prevent practitioners have retained an interest in managing community tensions and allied problems such as Islamaphobic hate crime.

Over time, the balance between these activities and interventions shifted, as the Prevent strategy underwent four main revisions. In its original iteration, Prevent was pretty much, what the head of the Prevent Delivery Unit described as an "empty box,"

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lacking a defined methodology and objectives. A number of police interviewees were candid about the challenges of implementing Prevent in the early days. In their view, little thought appeared to have been given by the policy designers to how it would translate into practical actions on the ground. As a consequence, much initial delivery of Prevent was improvised, devoid of any defined template. As one Prevent officer recalled of his introduction to his new role:

> …we were then tasked to deal with people who fell out of that operation and that has been problematic in that we have had no specific training for carrying out that intervention. How do you go to somebody who's believed to be involved in a group…and say to them 'what grievance have you got, what are your worries, talk to us' when they already possibly, are well down the path of radicalisation? So how do we get trained into that? How do we manage that process and how do we deal with that? (Police 2611-12)

This is consistent with O'Toole et al.'s (2016) interviews with policy actors from this period, who likewise acknowledged a lack of practical definition. Significantly, the authors note that Prevent has routinely experienced a "loose-coupling" between central government policy intent, and practical delivery in communities. This has manifested in the marked divergences in approach between government departments toward Prevent measures (especially the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government), and the varied local approaches to implementing key processes and systems seen in different areas.

Similar variances and tensions can be observed among police and security practitioners. Many studies refer to *the* counter-terrorism apparatus of the state and *the* police when discussing counter terrorism work, and in so doing imply the presence of a tightly defined and agreed mission. In reality, the situation is frequently more complex. This was clearly illuminated by statements and press briefings issued following the conviction of Anjem Choudary, leader of Al-Muhajiroun, in July 2016. An unnamed police source suggested to journalists that the Security Service had preferred not to prosecute Choudary in order to surveil and collect intelligence on his acolytes and those being newly radicalized by his network. In tension with which, the police had been seeking to mount a criminal prosecution as a mechanism to disrupt Al-Muhajiroun's influence.[7] This is redolent of Steven and

[7] http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/702521/MI5-Scotland-Yard-Anjem-Choudary-ISIS-Islamic-State-terror-police-MI5-Scotland-Yard (accessed 24/08/16).

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Gunaratna's (2004) analysis that Western liberal counter-terrorism strategies typically blend intelligence-led, military, and criminal justice dimensions. Being attentive to these tensions and nuances, is vital to understanding how and why counter-terrorism work is organized and ordered in particular ways.

"Prevent 2" as it was sometimes labelled, blended "primary" and "secondary" crime prevention approaches, with significant amounts of money channeled via a plethora of civil society groups to deliver an array of interventions (Lakhani 2013). Unsurprisingly, this profligate approach, which remained poorly defined in terms of its theory of change and pathways to impacting upon the problem, attracted considerable public and political opprobrium. Some of the police interviewed who had been involved in Prevent delivery during this time recalled how:

> This became the opportunity to take all of your frustrations and your anger and the vitriol and the things that have been pent up for a long, long-time. That was undoubtedly challenging for the officers… (Police 2659-24)

It was this version of Prevent that acquired a taint from which it has never really recovered. For many in the UK's Muslim communities, Prevent had become a "toxic brand" (Innes et al. 2010). With a change in government, a third version of Prevent was introduced by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition administration in 2011. This shifted the policy accent from civil society and community group led delivery, to placing primacy upon public services, including local councils, schools, colleges and universities, and health providers. The fourth and most recent version of Prevent was introduced in 2015, instigating a controversial move toward countering extremism and not just violent extremism (H.M. Government 2015). A discourse of Prevent interventions being used to "safeguard" individuals at risk of radicalization has also become far more prominent.

These adaptations are, in part, a function of shifting political power. But they also signal that Prevent is perceived as struggling to adequately "grip" and establish traction upon the morphing litany of risks and threats it was designed to engage with. The pre-eminent threat has shifted from an Al-Qaeda inspired network of networks, to activities associated with and drawing ideological succor from the so called Islamic State (Burke 2015). Concomitantly, the threat profile has altered to include simultaneous risks of highly organized spectacular "set piece" attacks, alongside more "organic" lone actors inspired by, but only loosely connected to any formal group structures (Gill & Corner 2013;

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Nesser 2014). At the same time, the case of Anders Breivik in Norway served as a reminder that there is a political spectrum of terrorist threats, and what matters most is an extreme set of ideas and access to weapons. These processes of simultaneous diversification and simplification, have served to reframe key elements of the prevailing threat assessment and the challenges it presents to counter terrorism agencies. Possible assailants are less sophisticated in terms of their attack skills, but there are potentially more of them. After all, publicly beheading a victim is principally a problem of motivation and will, rather than planning and equipment.

Despite these developments and all the effort that has gone into this area of work, the performance metrics are difficult to interpret. In addition to the massive expansion of referrals into the Channel Program[8], official estimates suggest that around 700 people have traveled from the UK to Syria, many of whom were not "on the radar" of the police or security service. The UK Counter-Terrorism network estimates they are taking down around 1000 Web sites a week linked to jihadist propaganda, but these are rapidly replaced. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has stated that over the past year six credible plots were disrupted, where a few years ago they were dealing with one maybe two per annum. Since 2010, over 140 individuals have been convicted in the UK courts of terrorism related offences, and in 2014 there were 327 arrests, up 32 percent on the previous year. The Director General of the Security Service stated in the latter months of 2015 that in excess of 3000 individuals were subject to active monitoring, up from the figure of 1600 given by his predecessor in 2006.[9] As elaborated below, it is this scale and "pace" of activity that is a key factor in accounting for why disruption has come to play such an important role in the counter terrorism apparatus.

But while sharp criticisms of Prevent continue to be voiced, viable practical alternatives are rarely articulated. Although we are developing a better understanding of how some people can be induced and influenced to adopt a more extreme political position, the most effective means to inoculate them from these influences and interdict those who propagate them is proving far harder to establish (English 2014).

[8] See www.npcc.police.uk/FreedomofInformation/NationalChannelReferralFigures (accessed 06/12/15).

[9] Manningham-Buller, E. (2006) "The International Terrorist Threat to the UK", a speech to Queen Mary's College London (09/11/06) https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/the-international-terrorist-threat-to-the-uk (accessed 06/05/16).

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## Defining Disruption: Strategy or Tactic

The serial reconfigurations of Prevent outlined above have seen the notion of disrupting extremist and terrorist networks become increasingly prominent and salient. However, what has not been unpicked within these developments is how there are in fact two rather different concepts and understandings of disruption in play. One casts disruption as a strategic approach. The second defines it more as a specific set of tactical interventions. The former approach is exemplified by the UK Government's recently published "Counter-Extremism Strategy" where, in their respective forwards, both the former Prime Minister and Home Secretary accent the significance of disruption. The then Prime Minister asserting: "We will disrupt extremists, aggressively pursuing the key radical users who do so much damage" (H.M. Government 2015: 6). The crucial point here is how disruption is being centered as an over-arching strategy.

This rhetorical re-positioning was explicitly echoed by the Home Secretary: "We will disrupt all those who seek to spread hate and we will prosecute all those who break the law" (H.M. Government 2015: 7). Here disruption has been cast as an equal partner to the more orthodox criminal justice objective of prosecuting those who contravene the law. Reflecting this, the same policy document sets out how delivery of Counter-Extremism work will be organized around four key areas, one of which is wholly focused upon a logic of disruption: Countering extremist ideology; Building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism; Disrupting extremists; and Building more cohesive communities.

Understanding disruption as a strategic orientation to tackling extremism and terrorism is also the approach adopted by Bjorgo (2015). He identifies how the prevention of terrorist attacks is frequently predicated upon the implementation of a range of interventions intended to disrupt the operations of individuals, groups and networks. These can include the arrest of subjects of interest and the imposition of legal sanctions, through to extra-legal forms of overt surveillance and target hardening.

This "broad" conceptualization of disruption as a strategic endeavor contrasts with a second "narrower" position that understands it more as a defined tactic. This more operational construct has a long history in the policing of serious and organized crime, and is associated with the doctrine of intelligence-led policing. In his account of the art and craft of detective work, Hobbs (1989) discusses some of the creative and innovative ways that officers sought to subdue and circumscribe the activities of their

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criminal adversaries. This is consistent with Johnston's (2000: 61) definition that: "The rationale [of disruption] is to circumvent the formal justice system in order, more easily, to affect the speedy closure of a given problem." In their empirical exploration of disruption within intelligence-led policing systems, Innes and Sheptycki (2004) find two principal forms. There is a "legal entrepreneur" mode wherein innovative tactics are used to mount a prosecution against an individual or a network for offences other than those they were principally being investigated for. This is distinct from disruptions performed by police because they cannot secure evidence to legitimate a prosecution, and consequently seek to interfere with the operations of the criminal enterprise—what Innes and Sheptycki (2004) label "extra-legal disruptions." In both modes, disruption seeks behavioral influencing. It is implemented to try and modify and amend the conduct of particular individuals, to reduce some perceived risk.

While disruption has had a long-standing presence in the policing of organized crime, the effectiveness of the two principal formations identified above have not been robustly evaluated. One recent study picking up on the significance of disruption in counter terrorism work is Sentas' (2016) analysis of the Security Service's interactions with a small number of Kurdish residents living in London. The account provided is insightful in assessing the disruptive effects upon social identity flowing out of the interactions, but quite limited in other respects. Most notably, the focus is solely upon how the legal power of proscription is enlisted as a disruptive technology, to engage processes of criminalization in respect of legitimate political protest. However, as intimated in the preceding paragraph and developed below, proscription is not the only way in which disruptive effects upon extremist adversaries are sought by police. Accordingly, there is a danger of over-generalizing from Sentas' focused case study, and failing to appreciate how disruption involves an increasingly heterogeneous collection of behavior influencing and management practices.

This is especially pertinent for thinking about the relationship between short-term and longer-term impacts. For what the limited literature on the use of disruption to counter organized crime suggests is that police disrupt when they doubt a prosecution will be a viable investigative outcome. In the context of countering violent and nonviolent extremism, the intent is often not to dismantle any such networks, or to change peoples' fundamental motivations; that is seen as too difficult to do at any scale. Rather, the more prosaic aim is to keep individuals and groups of concern sufficiently "off balance" by disrupting them, that they cannot be effective, at least for the time being. What is not known

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because of the lack of long-term rigorous research, is whether, because these are ideologically motivated rather than more opportunist actors, disrupting them simply pushes the problem "downstream," where it will resurface again at a later date. This is because the individuals concerned retain a commitment to the ideas and motivations underpinning the acts that were disrupted. Kenney et al.'s (2016) analysis of how the Al-Muhajiroun network learned and adapted subsequent to being proscribed by the UK authorities certainly intimates that this may be the case.

## Doing Disruption

Teasing out these two distinctive conceptualizations of disruption, that are in tension with each other, helps to identify the trajectory of development associated with this idea and how, as it has been integrated into counter terrorism practice, it is in the process of being shifted from referring to a specific type of policing intervention, to become freighted with a more strategic load. That is, in terms of how counter terrorism policy is being designed, and its implementation conceived, disruption oriented actions are understood as performing more and more of the work of countering and mitigating key risks and threats. In the remainder of this article however, we prefer to use it in its original more "tactical" formulation to refer to specific forms of intervention.

During the interviews with police Prevent practitioners many accounts of using disruption were provided. For example, one respondent told how:

> Another Mosque rang up one of my sergeants and said we've got three guys coming here, and they were doing the proper radicalization thing. They were trying to draw kids in, they were trying to have little meetings, they were being quite radical. 'We'd appreciate your support if you could come and help us, and speak to these three individuals because we don't want them here but we're a little bit concerned.' So [Name]'s gone down, confronted the three individuals: 'The Mosque don't want you here, what are you about? Do you want to talk to me about it?' They didn't. They went. We know where they went.

The police Inspector recounted how his team undertook to raise awareness locally about the individuals concerned, in order that others might further disrupt the group's activities. As a result, there was a sequence of locally generated "extra-legal"

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disruptions enacted that inhibited them settling in any new premises:

> It's a disruption in a way…[Officer name] said we know who you are, we know what you're doing, we will not tolerate what you're doing, you'd better start thinking about it. Be clear, we are watching you. Now that is an intervention and that's a Prevent intervention. (2611-11)

In this sequence, police clearly indicated to their "persons of interest" that they were subject to police surveillance and possibly more assertive interventions if they continued with their activity. As evidenced by this example, disruption is a tactic favored by Prevent officers for managing behaviors that are "anti-social" and indirectly increase a threat, but do not involve an obvious infraction of law. At the same time, there is also a hint of the limitations of disrupting committed extremists. For with his comment "They went. We know where they went.", the Inspector acknowledges the problem was not really "solved." Rather, the individuals concerned moved on to another area. This is significant inasmuch as while disruptions might provide short-term and local "fixes" to countering particular extremist groups, we cannot yet evaluate whether displacing and disturbing extremist activities is effective over the longer term. Potentially however, this might also indicate that a desired police outcome of implementing disruptions is to impact upon the "efficiency" of their adversaries by creating a "hostile environment" where it is more difficult for them to operate, and increased effort has to be expended to undertake their desired activities.

Attending to such considerations is important both in terms of starting to lay out some of the complexities that inhere in these forms of counter terrorism work, but also in understanding why disruption is valued by police. According to officers spoken to during this research, many of the subjects of interest to the police are highly surveillance aware, managing their conduct carefully to avoid transgressing any laws that might expose them to a criminal prosecution. Indeed, in one interaction between Prevent engagement officers and a person of interest that was observed, the police started making enquiries of the individual and what he had been up to. The response to their questions was a detailed exposition about a specific point of law relating to the interaction, and the subject handing them a card providing details of their legal representative's name and contact details. At which point the interaction ended.

Being able to act relatively quickly, and to avoid the intricate, complex, time-consuming, and resource-intensive work associated with developing and converting intelligence into evidence to

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build a case and support a legal prosecution was clearly an important factor in the police's use of disruption. The key issues from a police perspective were summarized as follows by an officer involved in the delivery of Prevent, reflecting upon the 2005 London bombings:

> There was a three month window of opportunity before Sadiq Khan and his comrades committed the attack…The reason why the service said they weren't pursuing them was because they weren't high enough on the intel radar. However, why didn't we just send a couple of uniformed officers to knock on the door and say "Hi Mohammed, I'm from the counter-terrorism unit, we really need to have a chat."…They've no idea what level of detail we know, very, very powerful that. [Police 2659-24][10]

As this suggests, in practice there is frequently a tension between having intelligence-led suspicions about the involvement of particular individuals and securing sufficient evidence to warrant commencement of legal proceedings. Confronted by such challenges, recourse to disruption becomes an attractive and viable option for intervention from a police point of view. Accordingly, the majority of officers saw disruption as constituting an increasingly important aspect of their work.

**Community-Led Disruptions**

The preceding discussion has focused upon disruption as a tactic utilized by formal agents of social control. However, looking across the interview data, it was equally clear that there were a number of cases of "community led disruptions," which also appear to have been impactive in terms of inhibiting and undermining the activities of groups adjudged to be involved in extremist radicalization activities. The application of informal community social control capacities to disrupt extremist groups can be more, or less, connected to and co-ordinated with police actions. The empirical data informing this study identified both "co-produced" and more independent community-led disruptions. The latter form is especially important though, given evidence from other studies suggesting that, although some people are so disenchanted with Prevent they are disengaging from any involvement with the formal government schemes or funding,

[10] Of course the efficacy of any such intervention may be limited inasmuch as it may not prevent the progression to violence on its own, but it may provide an opportunity for further dialogue between the police and the individual(s) and the possibility of engaging them in additional Prevent activities.

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they are still involved in efforts against extremist groups outside of these systems and processes (O'Toole et al. 2016).

One interviewee described how, while members of an extremist group were setting up a stall with a loudspeaker and leaflets in the local high street, members of the local Muslim community opposed to their ideological stance decided to dynamically disrupt this activity. Several of them ran past the stall taking the equipment that was being laid out and ran off with it. A second interviewee recalled occasions where:

> One of our friends, you know, him and his wife, I mean I'll just describe him to you, he's got a big beard, his wife wears the whole hijab and everything, they came round and his wife just told him in so many words to go and get stuffed, get out of here, we don't need your type. So they put a lot of pressure, so the community put a lot of pressure on him, so he sort of diluted the whole thing that he was doing. And then the other thing we did was we set up a council of Mosques, so all the Mosques in the area, we got them all together round a table and to have a clear consensus that we don't want this guy in the area, we'll go and speak to him and get him kicked out, because we do not want him. (Community 265)

This "collectivizing" of the problem and the setting up of a network of individuals and associated organizations provided the backdrop for subsequent developments. In particular, having found that they were no longer welcome at the local Mosques, the leader and his group started renting local meeting rooms for events to which they would invite young people from the local area. The police identified this was happening and shared their concerns with the local community, at which point there was a collective deliberation about what to do next:

> The community was saying we are going to 'front' this guy and our line was we'll support you. Because by that time we had explored the prosecution option and there was nothing really on the table. (Police 451)

The latter comment is especially intriguing, for it signals how police were unsure how to proceed against individuals engaging in activities that while certainly undesirable, were not illegal.[11]

[11] The subjects of these interventions were alleged members of the legally proscribed group Al-Muhajiroun, more details on the background and history of which are set out by Wiktorowicz (2005), Nesser (2014) and Kenney et al. (2016). These accounts document how members of Al-Muhajiroun and the network of affiliates and aliases it has established, frequently operate at the threshold of legal regulation, while expressing extreme and challenging opinions.

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They were especially concerned about initiating enforcement actions that were unlikely to be successful. Police trepidation was amplified by a worry that their opponents would exploit any such developments for propaganda value and officers were concerned not to give them the oxygen of publicity. At this point the community group assumed "ownership" of the problem, phoning all the local venues where bookings had been made, informing the owners about the real names of the group who had made the bookings under false identities, and expressing their displeasure at their local presence. As a consequence, all the bookings were cancelled and the proselytizers' activities disrupted.

It is interesting to counter-pose this case, with the one outlined at the start of this article. For the former involved a situation where community concerns led to a police-led disruption. Contrastingly, the events discussed above, were based upon police identified concerns, but it was informal social control by the local community group that disrupted the activities. Documenting both of these modes of disruption, as well as those wholly independent of formal Prevent structures, is important in capturing some of the complexities and nuances associated with the practical delivery of Prevent interventions "on the ground" these days. Doing so foregrounds how these developments are coherent with wider and deeper trends in the conduct of social control associated with a blending of the auspices of formal and informal social control (see Carr 2006; Roussell & Gascon 2014).

The accounts above all reference interventions targeted at extremists seeking to disseminate and indoctrinate others with their ideologies. There were however, a small number of instances identified in the fieldwork, where disruptive interventions were steered toward those seen as potentially vulnerable to these overtures, or to becoming involved in conflict. This approach was clearly evident where the local Muslim community mobilized their resources in response to a planned Welsh Defence League march. Fearing the potential for a confrontation between their young people and the Far-Right supporters, one community worker described how local civil society and faith groups:

> Put on events to keep the young people away. Mainly, just for you know worrying about our young people getting involved and getting arrested…In the local park we had a football tournament, we had BBQ…and family fun day. So it's basically trying to get the whole community out…we had over 100 people turn up that day. (Community K)

Scheduled to run at the same time as the protest marches, the activities were deliberately designed to appeal to the local

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youths; thereby distracting their attention away from the other events that day. This represents a specifically counter terrorism inflected example of a familiar pattern from crime prevention more generally, where diversionary activities are routinely implemented in support of preemptive crime risk reduction efforts (Bjorgo 2015).

## The Practical Ethics of Prevent and Pursue

The preceding sections have documented a range of practices and logics being used to disrupt individuals and groups propagating extremist ideologies that might radicalize others, as well as those posing a risk of engaging in terrorism related crimes. A situation where police are deciding that certain individuals and ethno-political groups should be subject to surveillance and censuring actions, absent any independent oversight or adversarial judicial "testing" of the evidence for this, is obviously replete with potential ethical concerns. This is particularly so, given the governmental policy imperative has increasingly pushed for "earlier intervention" and the need to tackle "extreme ideologies," rather than just activities directly connected to the commission of violence.

Such concerns resonate with issues in the ethics of crime prevention more generally. Any interventions premised upon prediction, pre-emption, and prevention pose challenging ethical questions about: "how far 'upstream' from the harm being countered it is viable and/or appropriate to go?"; "how strong the causal links between the point of intervention and the problem to be prevented needs to be?"; and, "how discriminating any intervention should be in respect of targeting 'at risk' groups versus individuals?" (von Hirsch Garland & Wakefield 2000). In respect of the police function, and the increasing predilection for proactive strategies that seek to prevent rather than just react to incidents, repeated concerns have been expressed about the efficacy of governance and regulation processes (Uglow 1988); especially since front-line police officers possess considerable discretion in deciding how, when and against whom their legal powers are expressed (Skolnick 1966).

One key limitation of many previous commentaries on Prevent has been a tendency to view it in isolation, neglecting how it articulates with the other strands of the CONTEST strategy. This is a significant oversight as Prevent led disruptions can sometimes offer an alternative course of intervention to more coercive and "covert" Pursue tactics. Illustrating this, one officer recalled his decisionmaking in respect of a situation he was confronted with:

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> We've got a gym, but it's also a school, it's one of these multi-user buildings...and there's some suggestion that at some point radicalisation may have occurred...There's some other reporting that's a little more specific...Now I've looked at that and thought what do I do? Do I send a UC (undercover) in? Do I try and recruit an informant? And I thought actually I'll just go and see them and wandered in and the chap that I met was very compelling when I spoke to him. (Police 2659-03)

This account lays out some of the uncertainties and contingencies that officers frequently encounter in their Prevent work. Concerns about risks of people being radicalized are often based upon rumors, suspicions and "soft" rather than "hard facts." Viewed in this way, more overt Prevent based interventions may afford an opportunity to deal with concerns in ways precluding the need to resort to more intrusive, covert or coercive measures. But as with any "risk" based management system, there are always problems with "false positives" and "false negatives" in terms of targeting individuals and groups who should not have been identified as "risky," and missing others who should have been.

The more assertive and explicitly enforcement oriented aspects of police Pursue operations frequently shape and influence the context in which Prevent is delivered. Foregrounding some of these strategic interactions, one of the community respondents described the community impacts associated with the nationally high profile "Operation Gamble":

> All of a sudden you find that there's people in your midst who may have been up to no good. You've got the whole of the media, you've got a house being raided with ten police vans and 50 fluorescent jackets and the raid's done...and all life kind of stops because you've got all this media attention and everyone in the community is affected by it.... (Community 2654-01)

Counter-pointed with these kinds of local community consequences in the aftermath of major police counter terrorism operations, disruptive interventions may provide a more subtle way of tackling an issue. One that, because it is less high profile, might limit the stigmatization and labelling of a particular area and its residents, thereby, at least hypothetically, minimizing the community impacts felt in the aftermath of a policing action.

## Discussion: Legal Cynicism and Legal Entrepreneurship

Prevent and its associated practices of disruption are "pre-crime" interventions coherent with and constitutive of the

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broader precautionary imperative identified by Zedner (2007) in terms of a policy paradigm shift toward pre-empting harms. Ashworth and Zedner (2014) describe how criminal law has adopted several offence types embodying this precautionary stance (including, and of particular relevance in counter terrorism legislation: preparatory, possession and membership offences). Alongside which there are several "restraining principles" that guide and frame the circumstances and conditions under which such offences can be applied—including "remoteness"—understood as the distance and imputed causal links between the prohibited conduct and harm-to-be-prevented. But while criminal law clearly enables the conduct of disruption to prevent harms associated with violent extremism, police often resort to disruption to circumvent the challenges with operationalizing law to "solve" such problems. Communities may similarly engage pre-crime disruptions because of the perceived difficulties in working with police and/or because of a view that legal provisions afford inadequate levels of protection.

Disruptive interventions in counter terrorism work are sometimes channeled through defined legal instruments, such as powers of proscription or arrest for other offences, but can also involve attempts to circumvent what officers perceive as constraining or inhibiting influences upon their conduct. From Skolnick's (1966) pioneering analysis of discretion onwards, there has been a recognition that the activity of policing is never just "law enforcement," but is a rather more intricate and nuanced affair. As Dixon (1997) summarized, law in policing is simultaneously constraining and enabling, seeking to limit some police behaviors while encouraging others. Leo's (2009) detailed account of police interrogation procedures, for instance, describes officers deliberately seek to "bend" and manipulate the provisions of legal constraints in their interactions with suspects. In his ethnographic account of major crime investigations Innes (2003), building on Hobbs (1989), offers the concept of "legal entrepreneurship" to capture how creatively circumventing legal constraints on police action, in ways not contravening key principles, was especially valued by police investigators in their understandings of "the craft" skills of detective work. In effect, while law was accepted as a regulatory influence on police decisionmaking and behavior, it was equally understood by officers that there are "regulatory gray zones" that could be negotiated and "stretched" in terms of what was permissible. There are clear resonances here with the utilization of disruptive interventions in countering violent extremism described above. For what can be observed is officers innovatively and creatively seeking ways to work around legal frameworks to

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try and manage risks and threats where legal provision is not necessarily helpful.

One way of understanding police recourse to disruption to manage violent extremism risks is as a unique inflection of legal cynicism by police. The extensive literature on police culture documents a long-standing set of norms and beliefs held by officers and propagated by their organizational culture that are similar, in some ways, to the tenor and tone of descriptions of legal cynicism within neighborhoods. Writing in the 1980s, Smith and Gray (1983) described police discriminating between: "working rules" that were internalized practical guides to action; external "inhibiting rules" that have a deterrent effect on their conduct; and "presentation rules" used to give a publicly acceptable gloss to what actually happens. More recently, in her ethnographic study of front-line patrol officers, Loftus (2009) recorded how many officers still expressed cynical views about the law and criminal justice process on the grounds that it was balanced, in their view, to favor the rights of suspects.

For officers engaged in countering violent extremism, submitting all cases to the full criminal justice process was perceived as untenable and requiring too great an investment of resources, set against a backdrop where there are a larger number of risks to be managed. As it stands, Home Office (2016) statistics show that of the 3349 individuals in England and Wales arrested under terrorist legislation since 2001, 28 percent were convicted in court, albeit 10 percent of these involved lesser, nonterrorism offences. Mounting disruptions is a pragmatic way of managing large and complex case-loads, especially for those circumstances where it is thought likely that the provisions available in law may not be adequate for accomplishing a desired outcome. Positioned in this way, recourse to disruption in delivering Prevent policing appears as a manifestation of a blend of legal cynicism and entrepreneurialism. It reflects the skepticism officers feel about the extent to which law covers all of the complex issues encountered when dealing with individuals holding and propagating extremist viewpoints. At the same time though, disruption involves them creatively doing something in respect of issues that although of concern, are not necessarily priorities when positioned alongside other risks.

## Conclusion: The "Disruptive Turn"

This article has located a distinct "disruptive turn" in UK counter terrorism policy and practice. Conducting interventions designed explicitly to disrupt individuals, groups and networks

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who are suspected of extremist or terrorist affiliations, has become a more pronounced feature of counter terrorism work. These interventions are not being performed in pursuit of prosecutions or police detections, but rather to inhibit and interfere with the ability of suspected adversaries to operate effectively and efficiently.

This turn toward disruption, conceptualized as a particular formulation of preventative behavior influencing, is the product of three principal causes. First, the challenges of managing a species of public problem involving individuals and groups whose intrinsic motivations toward engaging in violent criminal activity are not opportunistic, but strongly ideological. The second causal factor relates to how disruption affords a pragmatic way of reconciling issues of supply and demand across the policing and security agencies. It is a way of doing something, at least over the short-term, about risks and threats that are potentially troublesome but cannot be prioritized given the resource intensive requirements of mounting full investigations to support a prosecution. Finally, the disruptive turn also reflects some of the complexities deriving from how many counter terrorism investigations are initiated on the basis of secret intelligence from both digital and human sources that is passed to the police by the Security Service, and the difficulties that inhere in translating this material into evidence that will function in an adversarial legal setting. In this sense, disruption can be understood as a flawed but necessary policing response.

The notion of there being a disruptive turn is clearly coherent with recent academic studies that have found contemporary counter terrorism is being steered and guided by an underpinning logic of prediction and pre-emption (Ashworth & Zedner 2014; Mythen & Walklate 2013). What the focus upon disruption affords though is a more precise depiction of how this preemptive work is being performed by police and their partners. The majority of counter terrorism investigations are conducted to try and stop particular kinds of harm from being enacted. Disruption provides a mode of intervention for acting in circumstances where securing evidence to support a prosecution is perceived as difficult, or where resource constraints do not permit a full investigation to be conducted. Undoubtedly, this raises important ethical concerns about the scrutiny and accountability of such modalities of social control.

Over the past 10 years high profile police counter terrorism actions have become a regular part of the news cycle. In contrast to these instances of "shock and awe policing," this article has attended to some of the more mundane and routine behavior management strategies of police counter terrorism work. A blend of interventions designed to divert and disrupt are now a staple

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ingredient of the delivery of the Prevent strand of the cross-governmental CONTEST strategy.

The principal proposition set out in this article is that Prevent counter terrorism policing actions increasingly seek behavioral disruption, conceptualized as both a method of intervening and a desired policy intent. This arc of development has inflected official discourses and rhetorics associated with Prevent, and counter-extremism and radicalization work more generally. Equally however, it points to the need for research in this area to accurately document and describe how Prevent and associated aspects of counter terrorism are actually being performed. For while there have been empirical studies of Prevent, most of these have been concerned with community and social reactions to aspects of the discourse and policy framing. Far less attention has focused upon describing the specific details of the counter-terrorism work performed and how it is enacted in particular situations and settings. It is to this gap in our knowledge that the current article has attended.

More generally, the research literature on crime prevention identifies a spectrum of preventative activities, from "early interventions" seeking to interfere in causal processes "upstream," through to others designed to work far closer to the crime event. The empirical data reported herein clarifies that, in the context of preventing violent extremism, disruptions occupy a distinctive space. They function as "near event" interdictions, in that, for all the instances documented in this article, the issues of concern were already well underway. Indeed, the defining quality of disruption is that many of the predicate conditions for a presenting problem are in place, but disrupting it mitigates and minimizes associated impacts and harms. Understood in this way, this analysis helps to define disruption's unique conceptual position as an important modality of contemporary crime prevention.

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