

TERROISM IN EUROPE

**WHO IS BEHIND IT
AND HOW TO PREVENT IT**



**TERRORISM IN EUROPE:
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AND HOW TO PREVENT IT**

**Terrorism in Europe:
who is behind it
and how to prevent it**

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SUMMARY

- Vienna and Dresden attacks have shown the unreliability of deradicalisation programmes and a systematic failure of the counterterrorism policy.
- Prisons serve as one of the most common places where Islamic radicalisation takes place.
- In recent days, the media has focused mainly on the statements of President Macron and President Erdoğan, both opting for a populist way of expression to engage their domestic voters.
- The common denominator of presented measures is the so-called proactive approach which emphasizes prevention policy.
- If the Czech Republic wants to minimize the risk of a terrorist attack, it is crucial to prepare a complex proactive strategy focused on the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.
- Working with communities prone to radicalisation should be an absolute priority.
- Deepening trust and cooperation between authorities, security forces, civil society, and the Muslim community is also key.
- The Muslim community's loyalty cannot be gained through Islamophobic rhetoric, which is typical for the Czech extreme right.
- How the media informs the public about terrorist attacks matters. The media tends to emphasize the attacker before the victim. The opposite should be the case.

INTRODUCTION **6**

THE WAVE OF TERRORISM IN EUROPE **7**

LONE ACTORS OR THE “ISLAMIC STATE”? **9**

THE PROBLEM WITH DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES **11**

LACK OF RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING AS A CAUSE OF RADICALISATION **13**

RECOMMENDATIONS **15**

- 1) Prevention **16**
- 2) Prisons and deradicalisation programmes **18**
- 3) International cooperation **19**
- 4) Role of the media **20**

CONCLUSION **21**

REFERENCES **22**

INTRODUCTION

The following text aims to identify and critically analyse the causes of the recent attacks in Europe. We reject a simplistic view proposing that the attacks are due to hostile statements of Turkish President Erdoğan or the former Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad (Al-Jazeera, 2020). Unlike some commentators and mainstream media (Kar-Gupta, 2020), this analysis is not based on the expression *Allahu Akbar*, which jihadists shout during attacks. It rather emphasizes the key aspect of prevention, calls for respect for the limits of humour, and points out the problematics of prison radicalisation and the deradicalisation programmes. This paper also offers a set of recommendations, all based on a proactive approach towards combatting terrorism. The Czech Republic's current situation is also taken into account as its Muslim community has long been considered moderate and problem-free. However, it is necessary to intensify the efforts to maintain the status quo so that radicalisation does not occur at all. As the recent attacks in Europe have shown, the deradicalisation process is hugely problematic.

THE WAVE OF TERRORISM IN EUROPE

Last year in the autumn, Europe faced a series of terrorist attacks. October 4, Dresden: a Syrian asylum seeker stabbed two men, one of whom did not survive the attack. The attack is also believed to be homophobically motivated (The Economist, 2020). Twelve days later, on October 16, a young Chechen refugee decapitated a schoolteacher Samuel Paty in the Paris suburbs for presenting controversial caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad to children at school (BBC News, 2020a). The caricatures were first published by the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, whose editorial office was attacked by Said and Chérif Kouachi in 2015. Two weeks later, a Tunisian immigrant, Brahim Aouissaoui, murdered three people in Notre-Dame in Nice, Southern France (BBC News, 2020b). He, too, decapitated one of the victims (Picheta & Thompson, 2020). On the same day, paradoxically, the French police neutralized a right-wing extremist threatening his surroundings with a firearm in Avignon. The man was allegedly a member of the anti-immigrant radical group, Generation Identity (TRT World, 2020).

It was probably the last attack that shocked the Czech society the most. A twenty-year-old Kujtim Fejzullai, identified as a supporter of an organization known as the Islamic State, shot four people and injured another twenty-three in Vienna's centre on November 2. It might be the reaction of Czech and Austrian societies that shows the success rate of the attack. Terrorism is not primarily about violence as such but rather about the psychological impact on society. If we are shocked and in fear, which we evidently are after the attacks, the operation was successful. This effect has been amplified by the fact that Vienna has long been generally considered a safe and peaceful city and has not experienced an attack like this in recent years.¹ Fejzullai, armed with an AK-47 automatic rifle, pistol,

¹ Even though in 1975 the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) representatives were kidnapped by one of the world's most famous terrorist - Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, commonly known as Carlos the Jackal.

and a machete, launched an attack at the Vienna main synagogue Stadtempel. However, the house of worship was empty at that time², and despite initial assumptions, it seems it was not the target of the attack. Fejzullai had been killing in the city centre for about nine minutes before he was shot dead by the Austrian special forces.

The day after the attack, the so-called Islamic State claimed responsibility for the operation, saying the perpetrator was a “caliphate soldier.” The organization also released several photos of the attacker and a video in which Fejzullai swears allegiance to the head of the Islamic State (Doherty & Holmes, 2020). Whether this was an attack of a so-called lone actor, or the perpetrator was somehow connected to the organization, coordinating his plan with it, is not clear. The problematics and overuse of the term “lone actor” in the context of a series of recent terrorist attacks is further developed in the next part of the paper. There is one more aspect of the Vienna attack that is worth mentioning, perhaps surprising or paradoxical for many. A Palestinian and two Turkish-Austrians helped an injured policeman and an older woman to safety (Prugger, 2020). One of them then even confronted the attacker and got shot. After this type of attack, it is quite common that simplistic terms pointed against a concrete religious or ethnic group arise. However, terrorism is a complex problem that is not black or white. The heroism of these three immigrants above is an example of this.

LONE ACTORS OR THE “ISLAMIC STATE”?

Attacks of the so-called “lone wolves” are generally known to be more challenging to detect and prevent. The media reported that the attacks in Vienna, France and Germany could have been the work of “lone wolves”. Nevertheless, this commonly used metaphor is problematic and inaccurate. The problem with the designated word “wolf” is that it can unnecessarily glorify the attacker. It is also inaccurate because the attackers rarely operate truly alone. The proper term should be “lone self-radicalised actors”. For this paper, the abbreviated term “lone actor” will be used.

In the case of terrorist incidents that seem to be clearly committed by lone actors, three critical factors should be evaluated: the actual rate of independency, task, and motivation of the attacker. The rate of independency analyses whether the attacker worked entirely independently, had any accomplices, or even whether he was in contact with extremists who influenced him in some way. For example, the attacker who entered the crowd in Nice, France in 2016 acted on his own but at the same time, he received logistical support and encouragement from other people (Borum, 2016). He, therefore, was not a “lone self-radicalised actor.” The rate of task evaluates the level of autonomy in making decisions regarding the attack. In other words, it evaluates who had any influence on the choice of place, time, method or target of the attack. For instance, in 2019, Omar Farook Abdulmutallab, known as the “underwear bomber,” was given the task of detonating an explosive in an American plane (White, 2012). However, he could choose a specific flight, day and time to do so (Savage, 2012). The third factor, the rate of motivation, is quite similar. Who or what motivated the attacker to carry out the attack? Was it for political, social, or ideological reasons, or it was fuelled by something personal, like revenge? When using the term “lone actor,” all these aspects should be considered to avoid misinformation.

² The attack began at 20:00 and ended with police intervention at 20:09 local time.

Along these lines, in the case of the Vienna attacker, Kujtim Fejzullai, it is not clear if he was a lone actor or if he was connected to the Islamic State. A couple of hours before the attack, Fejzullai published an Instagram post, swearing allegiance to the Islamic State's leader. He used his *nom de guerre*, Abu Dujana al-Albani, and he was holding an assault rifle, a handgun, and a machete (Wolfe, 2020). A day later, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, designating Fejzullai as a "soldier of the caliphate." The organization also shared the video of his oath of allegiance (Bennhold et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this type of statement cannot be entirely relied upon as the organization has falsely claimed responsibility for many real "lone actor attacks" in the past.

Fejzullai was born in 2000 near Vienna, in Mödling (Khera, 2020). He grew up in Austria but had dual citizenship: Austrian and North Macedonian. He was ethnically an Albanian, which led to his choice of *nom de guerre* (see above) (Dearden, 2020). Allegedly, he was coming to a mosque that was believed to promote extremist attitudes by the Austrian intelligence services (Bennhold, 2020). It could have been there where he got radicalised. The Austrian authorities first dealt with him when he tried to join the Islamic State in Syria alongside about ninety Austrian extremists (Reuters, 2020). However, he failed to cross the Turkish-Syrian border, got arrested, repatriated in Austria, and was sentenced to twenty-two months in prison in April 2019. In December 2019, he was released on parole (Holmes et al., 2020). His early release was due to good behaviour, young age (The Economist, 2020), and participation in a deradicalisation programme (Bennhold et al., 2020; Ozsváth, 2020).

THE PROBLEM WITH DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES

Fejzullai was not the only one who managed to deceive the workers of the deradicalisation programme. A similar scenario took place with the perpetrators of the attacks in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, the Osny prison in 2016, and the London Bridge in 2019 (Basra, 2020). Even the Dresden attacker who knifed the alleged gay couple had been released from jail five days before the assault. That is an alarming trend that points out both the unreliability of these programmes and the systemic failure of the counterterrorism policy. Peter Neumann, an expert on prison radicalisation at King's College in London, also warns that prisons serve as one of the most common places of Islamic radicalisation. When trying to get rid of radicalised people by imprisoning them, European states contribute to the spread of radicalisation among prisoners and subsequent terror (The Economist, 2020).

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said: "The attacker tried to join the Islamic State for which he was convicted and imprisoned. He then got released before the sentence expiration. It has to be clarified why the judiciary released him sooner" (Bennhold et al., 2020). The question is whether we can blame the judiciary or the deradicalisation programme workers for the release of Fejzullai. He managed to convince his own lawyer, Nikolas Rasta, too. He said Fejzullai regretted his past actions and no longer seemed like a dangerous person (Ibid.). Watching the video with the attacker coldly shooting a man in Vienna, it is hard to believe Mr. Rasta's words. However, Fejzullai effectively deceived those around him and did not show any signs of radicalisation, despite secretly arming himself and preparing for a terrorist attack immediately after his release. The only signal indicating his real intentions was his trip to Slovakia to buy ammunition. Although the Slovak forces informed their Austrian colleagues about this journey, the Austrian forces were unable to take advantage of that information (Ibid.).

Even in the other cases mentioned above, the deradicalisation programme workers were under the impression the convicted extremists had become exemplary prisoners who had abandoned violent practices – had become deradicalised. The convicts were publicly claiming that they had changed. For example, Adel Kermiche told the judge: “I am a Muslim believing in mercy, doing good, not an extremist... I want my life back, see my friends and get married” (Basra, 2020). The judge released him in 2016. Four months later, Kermiche killed a priest in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray in Normandy (Davenport & Allen, 2016).

LACK OF RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING AS A CAUSE OF RADICALISATION

The terrorist attacks of recent weeks need to be analysed in a particular social context. There is an ideological conflict between two incompatible concepts: liberal democracy and conservative Islam. These concepts are not compatible because one is based on a social contract principle while the other draws directly from God. Nevertheless, both concepts can co-exist, complement and even enrich each other. However, this requires mutual respect and understanding.

Recently, the media has focused mainly on the statements of President Macron and Erdoğan, both opting for a populist way of expression to engage their domestic voters (Alouane, 2020). Macron said Islam was suffering a crisis (Deutsche Welle, 2020), and there is a need for its reform in France. He also proposed a bill to strengthen republican principles and secularism in the country. In return, Erdoğan called on the Turks to boycott French goods and questioned Macron’s mental health (Farooq, 2020). To add some more fuel to the fire, Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, said that Muslims have every right to feel anger and kill millions of the French given the massacres in the past. Despite how unnecessary and reckless the statements of these politicians were, they alone did not cause terrorism in Europe. The problem is much deeper and has recently manifested in the different approaches of different political parties towards the case of the caricatures of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.

Samuel Paty, a high school teacher from the French city Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, showed his pupils caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in early October, for which he was assassinated ten days later by an Islamic extremist Abdoulkhalik Abouyevdovich Anzorov. Just like in January 2015, when terrorists attacked members of Charlie Hebdo magazine’s editorial office, the violence occurred in connection with offensive caricatures of the Islamic Prophet. Paty was discussing the topic of freedom of speech. Before screening the caricatures, he warned

the children, Muslim children included, that they did not have to watch³ should they feel disturbed. One of the pictures he then showed depicted a completely naked Prophet in a lascivious position with his private parts revealed, having a golden star in his behind with a legend “A star was born” (NIKIB551, 2016; Finkelstein, 2020). It definitely should be reconsidered whether this type of education material is appropriate for thirteen-year-old children.

It was the murder of the high school teacher Paty that was at the beginning of a dangerous spiral of verbal and physical attacks, inappropriate political statements, and civic protests (Debre, 2020). The needed debate was overshadowed by the terrorist attacks and, in response, the proposed short-lived solutions. However, if European society wants to live in peace with the Muslims, it needs to respect them. One cannot despise a culture as such, its foundations, and key figures. Of course, humour is possible, but insults and attacks that hurt others and stimulate natural defensive reactions are not acceptable. At the same time, freedom of speech must not be challenged. The needed debate should not be about whether or not something can be published; the question is, it is right or wrong. In an interview with DTV, Catholic priest Tomáš Halík said: “We are fighting for souls and attitudes of billions of Muslims. The vast majority of Muslims reject acts of violence. They are very close to us, and they want to be in the same boat. Showing them these pictures and sponsoring the authors is like spitting into their faces” (Halík, 2015). Halík talked about the official financial support of the Charlie Hebdo magazine by the French government, which continues to this day (DT Next, 2020).

President Macron assured the public that France would not restrict art, satire, and freedom of speech in any way. In this context, one can remember the three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi who drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to enter Europe (Smith, 2015). Charlie Hebdo “made fun” of his death (Nelson, 2015). Even humour should have its limits. Topics such as anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, death of children, and even race and religion should be beyond the limits of humour. Cultural sensitivity would contribute to a peaceful coexistence of two different cultures, and the extremists would lose the key pretexts to justify their violent acts.

³ Some sources state that he encouraged those who were uncomfortable looking at the cartoons to leave the classroom (Finkelstein, 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The common denominator of the following recommendations is a proactive approach to countering terrorism with an emphasis on preventive policies. A reactive approach in counterterrorism would comprise measures to respond to the situation, such as counterterrorism laws, surveillance of specific people or airstrikes on terrorist positions. Some reactive measures could be applied in the European context, but the focus should primarily be on prevention. Many European countries, such as the Czech Republic, have not yet encountered religious extremism in their territory. In order to maintain the status quo, these should already set preventive policies. Therefore, each country’s first and necessary step should be to develop a comprehensive proactive policy aimed at radicalisation and extremism prevention.

The following prevention recommendations focus on, among other things, prisons and deradicalisation programmes. In this context, the case of Austria should be reiterated. In 2013, Austria did not have any convicts in jail who were accused of terrorism. In March 2019, however, there were already 39 of such convicts (Basra, 2020). A system and expertise should be established as soon as possible. For Austria, it came too late. Even the Czech Republic, like many other European countries, lacks a system and expertise in this dimension. However, there is no need to start from scratch, as there is a possibility of international cooperation in this area.

1) Prevention

- The top priority should be **working with radicalisation-prone communities**. In the European context, this would primarily concern the Muslim community. Insufficient integration of Muslim foreigners is one factor contributing to the adoption of radical attitudes towards the host society.
- Development and dissemination of positive **narratives** providing the communities with **an alternative to radical ideologies** are closely related to the previous point. The Islamic State's propaganda foundation addressed to the Muslims living in the Western countries could be characterised as follows: "Since you are Muslims, you are not welcome in the West. You must join the caliphate, which is the only way possible to defend Islam" (Russell, 2016). The main Islamist argument used across the spectrum of jihadist organizations is relatively simple – Islam is under attack, and Muslims must defend it. Common evidence to support this claim is the military interventions of Western countries in the Middle East. If European society wants to prevent radicalisation and terrorist attacks, it must create counterarguments against the Islamist narratives. Hateful rhetoric must be opposed and refuted.
- The key is to **increase trust and cooperation** across authorities, security forces, civil society and the Muslim community. Indeed, this is especially imperative within the last-named group, because its representatives are able to identify compelling anti-Islamist narratives and preclude radicalisation. Countries should work closely with local Muslim communities to prevent them from being marginalized and disadvantaged within the majority of society. That is because any wrongdoing would be used by the extremists in their arguments and propaganda.
- **Radicalised attackers** who are considering or determined to use violence to achieve their **goals are likely to talk about their intentions with people around them**. In two-thirds of the cases, attackers confided their intentions to a close person – a family member or a friend (Borum, 2016). In more than half of the cases, these loved ones even knew the details of the preparation and planning of the attack. We can refer to the part about the so-called lone actors that are not always as independent as they might seem at first glance. It is crucial to encourage Muslim community members to report suspicious behaviour of their friends or loved ones before a tragedy happens.
- Furthermore, the **loyalty of the Muslim community cannot be gained through Islamophobic rhetoric**. In the Czech Republic, the main political party characterized by hateful rhetoric is Tomio Okamura's SPD. Islamophobia and hate rhetoric are the main factors that could lead to a potential future radicalisation of the Czech Muslim community, currently described as moderate and unproblematic. It is perfectly logical. A person who feels threatened naturally feels the need to defend himself. The Czech context is not just about the xenophobic outbursts of Tomio Okamura and other SPD members. There are also proposals to ban wearing Muslim swimsuits (burkini) in Czech swimming pools, etc.

2) Prisons and deradicalisation programmes

- Prisons, just like certain mosques, need to be viewed as potential centres of radicalisation. Careful monitoring of the prisoner and his placement in a secure and stably funded prison is essential (Basra, 2020).
- Prison staff should be trained to be able to build a relationship with prisoners and get along with them. The level of prison radicalisation should be assessed regularly and led by a larger number of experienced staff supported by complex intelligence information.
- The conditions mentioned above should facilitate the noticing of prisoners' attempts at manipulation in deradicalisation programmes. There may be several exceptionally disciplined prisoners who can effectively deceive prison staff for months or even years. However, that is truly exceptional.
- During the deradicalisation process, it is critical to monitor whether convicted terrorists express regret over their actions and whether they feel remorse. It should be possible to clearly read from the convict's expression the criticism of the organization to which the person concerned has subscribed, such as the Islamic State. In many cases, the convict may meet all the criteria except expressing disapproval of former shareholders.

3) International cooperation

- International cooperation in the area of information sharing, especially between intelligence services and national security forces, is crucial. As the recent Vienna attack has shown, there are still gaps in the transmission of information between individual European states. The attacker Fejzullai arrived in Slovakia in July, trying to buy ammunition. Slovakian authorities informed their Austrian counterparts; however, the Austrian authorities were unable to use the information (ABC News, 2020).
- This is not the first time that Central European countries have been indirectly involved in the investigation of terrorist attacks. Another example is the Norwegian right-wing extremist and terrorist Anders Breivik who came to the Czech Republic looking for weapons (Richter, 2011). In January 2015, attackers of the Charlie Hebdo editorial office in Paris were using Slovakian weapons (Rekawek, 2018). The V4 countries have not yet become a target of Islamist attacks, nor a significant source of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. However, they have served as transit countries or as sources of finance, weapons, and logistical support for terrorists many times. To prevent these phenomena, international cooperation must be emphasized.

4) Role of the media

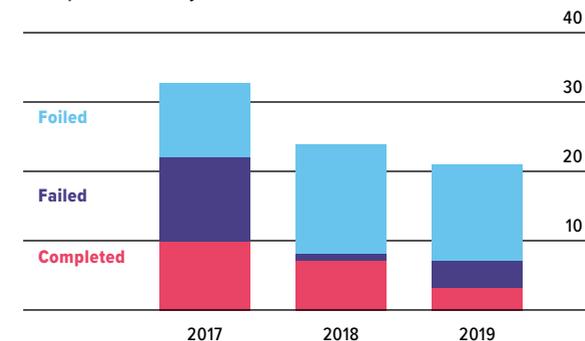
- The way the media informs about terrorist attacks matters. Research shows that the media tends to emphasize the attacker before the victim (Borum, 2016). The opposite should be the case.
- Active shooters, including lone actors, often seek fame and followers through their actions. Because of the risk of the rise of followers, who may imitate or who plan to imitate the attacker, providing too many details about the shooter, which could potentially lead to his glorification in the eyes of certain parts of the society, is something media should avoid.
- What should be highlighted are positive and heroic stories. As mentioned above, the heroes of the Vienna attacks were two Austrian-Turkish and a Palestinian. Despite the attacker's fire, they helped an older woman to safety and saved the life of a 28-year-old wounded policeman. These people's names should resonate throughout society, serve as a model, and help create narratives against extremist propaganda.
- When informing about terrorist attacks, details about the weapons used and the methods of the attack should not be provided. The attacker's name and his social networks should also be avoided (Ibid.).
- Finally, the media should not interview victims and survivors immediately after the attack when these people are frightened and shocked. The media often does that to get sensational content, but this way, they contribute to the success of the attack. It is important to remember that the primary goal of terrorism is not the attack itself but the subsequent psychological effect it has on society.

CONCLUSION

Since 2017, the number of Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe has declined, as shown by Europol's graphics (below) (The Economist, 2020). However, they are far from disappearing, even though it might seem so in a time of pandemic crisis. It was the Covid-19 pandemic that removed a crucial component of every terrorist attack – the media attention. Even though there were several terrorist attacks in different parts of Europe, these were reported rather sporadically. However, the threat of terrorism is still something that keeps security forces busy. Ken McCallum, Director General of British Counterintelligence MI5, recently said that Islamic extremism remains a primary threat to Europe (Ibid.). He then also pointed out a new trend: the growing share of terrorist conspiracies by right-wing extremists. As an example, he cited the recent attack in Avignon (Garda, 2020). While in years shortly after 9/11, the focus was mainly on countering Islamic extremism, the typology of threats is now more sophisticated. In recent years, the number of terrorist incidents committed in the name of white supremacy or other right-wing extremist ideology has been growing. It seems that these new threats have been overshadowed by excessive attention paid to religious extremism and the fight against organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. This trend is noticeable in the Czech scene, too. Worryingly, it is the hateful rhetoric of Czech and other European right-wing extremists that could give rise to another terrorist attack in European countries in the future.

RADICAL CHANGE

European Union, jihadist terrorist attacks



Source: The Economist, 2020.

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About ELF

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 46 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European.

We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

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About Institute for Politics and Society

The Institute for Politics and Society is a Czech think-tank founded in October 2014. The mission of the Institute is to cultivate the Czech political and public sphere through an in-depth and open discussion and to create a living platform which addresses problems and offers recipes for their solutions through international conferences, seminars, public discussions, political and social analyses available to the whole Czech society. We believe that an open discussion is a prerequisite for any successful solution to political and social problems. Our main themes are foreign and security policy, defence, European matters, but also schooling, digitalisation, power industry, urbanism, life in a city and in the public space, values in politics and human rights in our country and abroad.

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About the author

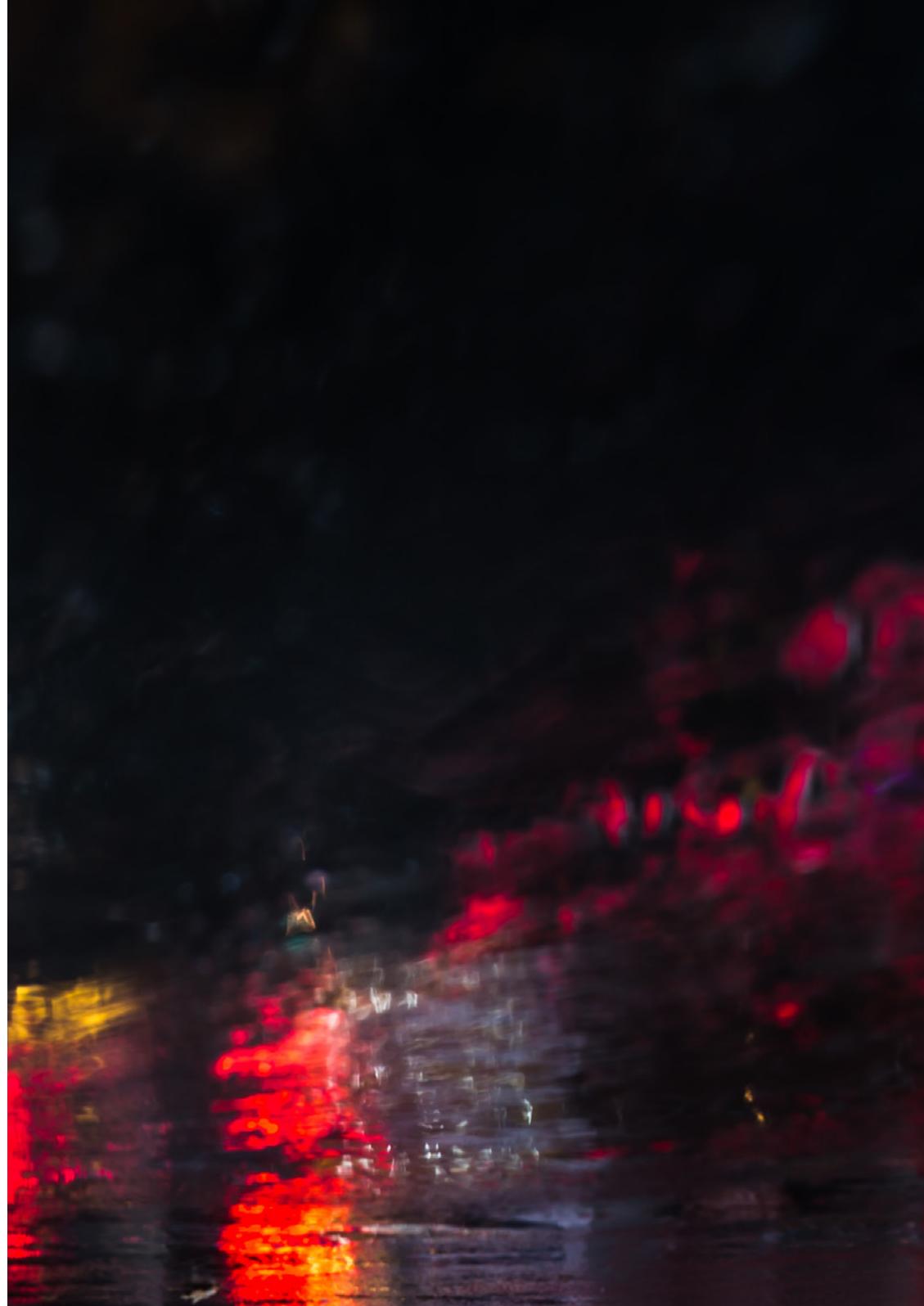
Jan Havlíček is a graduate of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, California, where he acquired a Master's degree in Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies. A common thread throughout his education was the focus on radicalization and terrorist recruitment, Islamic extremism, terrorism in Africa and the Middle East, and the use of predictive profiling as a threat assessment technique. Following his studies, he has gathered experience in the fields of counterterrorism and disarmament, working on projects for the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism (CTEC) in California, as well as the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) in New York.

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