

ICSR Update

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ICSR is a unique partnership in which King's College London, the University of Pennsylvania, the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, and the Regional Center on Conflict Prevention Amman are equal stakeholders.

Our joint mission is to bring together knowledge and leadership to counter the growth of radicalisation and political violence.

Dear Friend,

I am very happy to present you with the latest edition of ICSR Update. It's an exciting time for our centre, not least because we will soon be releasing our first major research report. *Countering Online Radicalisation – A Strategy for Action* tackles the thorny yet hugely important issue of radicalisation on the internet.

Ever since the British Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, declared that the internet was 'not a no-go area for government' at our launch conference in January, we have been investigating what can be done to counter the activities of violent extremists on the internet. Our report will contain a set of concrete proposals, setting out the parameters of a comprehensive strategy to combat online radicalisation not by 'pulling the plug' but by making radical content both unacceptable and less desirable.

An interview with one of the report's authors, Tim Stevens, can be found on the second page of this newsletter. The report itself will come out on 10 March and can be downloaded free of charge from the ICSR web site.

The past few months have been a busy period for ICSR, with numerous events taking place at our headquarters here in London and at all our partner institutions. We've also been working hard on redesigning our website, which I invite you to take a look at (www.icsr.info).

If you have any questions or ideas, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Dr. Peter Neumann
Director, ICSR

Recent Events

On 2 February, the former President of Colombia Andres Pastrana gave an exclusive briefing at ICSR, talking about the prospects for peace in his country and updating officials, experts and journalists on the situation in the region.

On 29 January, Atkin Fellows Amal Abusrour and Sefi Kedmi presented their papers on reviving Palestinian civil society and the work of Israeli peace NGOs. They will be published by ICSR in early April.

On 15 December, former Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain MP spoke about conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, and the lessons that can be applied to other conflicts.

New Atkin Fellows Arrive

A new set of Atkin Fellows have started their research at ICSR. They are Odelia Englander, a social activist from Israel, and Oday Abu Karesh, an NGO activist from the Palestinian Territories. They are now conducting research and writing papers at the ICSR offices in London, and will be working on policy papers related to the conflict in the Middle East as well as holding a series of talks and workshops in London.

Thanks to the generosity of the Atkin Foundation, ICSR offers young leaders from Israel and the Arab world the opportunity to come to London to develop their ideas on how to further peace and understanding in the Middle East through research, debate and constructive dialogue. More information about the Atkin Fellowships can be found at www.icsr.info/project/atkin.

Advance Praise for Countering Online Radicalisation

The report is accessible yet sophisticated. It reflects a deep and up-to-date understanding of Internet radicalisation and offers detailed and practical solutions to the daunting challenge of regulating the jihadi Internet. In short, this is essential reading for policymakers and analysts worldwide.

Thomas Hegghammer,
Kennedy School of
Government, Harvard
University

Particularly useful are the report's practical recommendations on user-driven mechanisms to regulate internet content, small grants for relevant stakeholders, arguments against censorship, and focus on the role of schools... The authors clearly 'get' the Internet, radicalisation, and policy.

Johnny Ryan, author of
*Countering Islamist
Militant Radicalisation on
the Internet* (IIEA, 2007)

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Countering Online Radicalisation

On 10 March, ICSR will officially release its long-awaited report on *Countering Online Radicalisation*, which was carried out in partnership with the *Community Security Trust*. This project has, for the first time, brought together governments, experts and industry. It sets out a concrete strategy for action, identifying concrete proposals for how the problem can be addressed. *ICSR Update* spoke with one of the report's authors, Tim Stevens.

What is the report about?

Tim Stevens: The report looks at the question of online radicalisation and what can be done to counter it. This has become a hugely important issue in dealing with home-grown terrorism and violent radicalisation, because there have been a number of cases recently in which the internet has played a significant role in the transition of people that had previously been peaceful to violence.

What kind of cases have you come across?

Tim Stevens: One recent case is that of Hammaad Munshi, who was labelled 'Britain's youngest terrorist' by the media. He was 15 when his recruitment into extremism started and 16 when he was arrested. He was someone who came from a perfectly respectable family, who was peaceful and law-abiding and – with the help of the internet – turned into someone wanting to kill 'infidels'.

How active are extremist groups on the internet?

Tim Stevens: Very active, though it is important not to overstate the case. Extremists are using the internet in ways similar to most of us: they communicate, spread information, and network. The ends are obviously different, and that's why governments are so concerned.

For example, until they were shut down recently, some of the most prominent Islamist militant web forums were populated by thousands of users. The neo-Nazi site *Stormfront* is one of the oldest extremist websites and has over 100,000 registered users.

What can be done to counter this?

Tim Stevens: First of all, it's important to understand the nature of the problem rather than overreact to perceptions of it. There is a consensus among experts and practitioners that restricting the use of the internet would be a mistake and probably counterproductive.

That doesn't mean that nothing can be done. The approach that we are suggesting aims at leveraging the positive characteristics of the internet whilst mitigating its negative aspects. This includes identifying and dealing with the really problematic people, whilst developing more constructive approaches for those who may be at the margins of extremist movements.

What will the report add?

Tim Stevens: It is the first time a concrete strategy has been set out that can help address the problem. Up to now, all the reports were simply restating the problem without providing any concrete solutions. *Countering Online Radicalisation* will change that.

Who will benefit from the report?

Tim Stevens: All the stakeholders in this important debate: governments, businesses, civil society, and of course internet users. In fact, one of the points we make very strongly is that all of these groups need to be part of the solution – indeed, that it is a comprehensive solution that's needed.

From 10 March 2009, *Countering Online Radicalisation – A Strategy for Action* will be available free of charge on the ICSR website (www.icsr.info). Paper copies cost £4 (£5, US\$6) and can be pre-ordered by writing to mail@icsr.info.