

Summary

Evaluation of the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020, Phase 1

Analysis and identification of measurable policy measures

CT strategy

Many different agencies and organizations are involved in (the implementation of) the counterterrorism policy (CT policy). Local, national and international governments work together with civil society organizations, companies and key figures to take preventive and repressive measures. The National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) has fulfilled the coordinating role in counterterrorism since 1 January 2005.

The NCTV describes the common approach to counterterrorism for the first time in the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011-2015. The counterterrorism measures in the period 2001-2010 were not based on an overarching strategy. The *National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020* (CT strategy) is the successor to the CT strategy 2011-2015. The aim of the CT strategy is to provide a strategic framework to government partners for countering the terrorist and extremist threat against the Netherlands.

Evaluation of the CT strategy

The CT strategy 2011-2015 was evaluated in 2016 by Utrecht University, USBO Advies. At the time, the researchers noted that the complexity of counterterrorism is too great for an impact assessment. The impact of counterterrorism policy is hard to determine because the impact might also be related to some other measure or action. The policy area is highly fragmented and consists of networks, but it is also still relatively young and goal-seeking. This means that a lot of information is not yet available, or is widely spread over different parts of the network. It also implies that further development steps have to be taken in policy analysis and that those limitations play an important role in an evaluation.

Measuring the impact of the CT strategy is therefore not easy. The evaluation of the CT strategy is therefore carried out in two phases. This study is the first phase in the evaluation of the CT strategy and makes clear, among other things, which policy measures from the CT strategy are the most suitable for evaluation. The study foreshadows a possible follow-up study (phase 2) that aims to make statements regarding the contribution made by a limited number of policy measures to the objectives of the CT strategy.

Research questions

The central research question is:

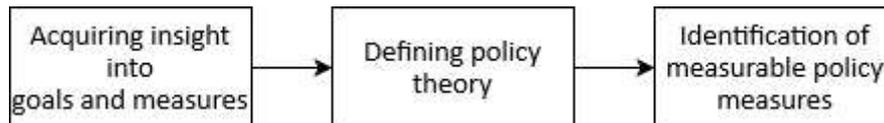
What are the goals and policy measures of the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020, what is the expected contribution of the policy measures to the realization of the goals and which measures are promising for an evaluation of their contribution to the objectives of the CT strategy?

This main question is divided into the following sub questions:

1. What were the goals of the CT strategy 2016-2020?
2. Which policy measures fall under the strategy?
3. What is the rudimentary policy theory behind the policy measures?
 - a. What is the measure based on?
 - b. What are the goals (output and outcome) of the measure?
 - c. Has the assumed contribution of the measure to the objective been made explicit?
 - d. Has it been made explicit how that contribution should be delivered?

- e. Which interventions fall under the measure?
- f. Which organizations are involved in the measure?
4. Which policy measures are suitable for determining the contribution policy measures make to the objectives of the CT strategy and what influences such measurability?
5. Which measures are suitable for a goal achievement study in the second phase of the evaluation?

The research is conducted in three phases. In the first phase we answer the first and second sub question, in the second phase the third sub question and in the third phase we answer sub question four and five. This can be shown schematically as follows:



Research approach

Sub study I: Acquiring insight into goals and (policy) measures

To determine what the goals of the CT strategy are and which policy measures fall under the CT strategy, we conducted extensive desk research. The focus was on the CT strategy, but we also studied other relevant documents, such as parliamentary documents and the Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme. We presented the first list of goals and policy measures to six key officials from the NCTV.

Sub study II: Defining policy theory

We have reconstructed the policy theory behind each individual policy measure. In doing so, we followed the realistic evaluation approach of Pawson and Tilley (1997), in which we analyzed the policy measures using the (I)CMO model (this model is explained on the next page). We collected the information about the policy measures in various ways:

- We conducted a detailed document study. We studied information provided by the NCTV, the Public Prosecution Service (OM) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). Additionally, we consulted public documents. We studied, for example, the Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme, the Integrated Approach to Terrorism Report, the National Security Strategy and parliamentary documents.
- We interviewed 17 key officials from various organizations involved in CT policy.
- We presented the first results of our analyses and findings in two focus groups. The first focus group took place in the official consultation of the Working Group on Global Jihadism, where all organizations involved in CT policy are represented. The second focus group took place during the directors' meeting of the CT organizations.

Sub study III: Identification of measurable policy measures

In the third sub-study we assessed how promising each policy measure is for an assessment of the contribution the policy measure makes to achieving the objectives of the CT strategy. We used an assessment framework with six criteria to determine how promising each measure is (the criteria are explained later in the summary). The analysis of the measurability was based on desk research in public sources and the aforementioned interviews and focus groups. This led to recommendations as to which policy measures can be evaluated in phase 2 of the evaluation. This overview was discussed in an expert meeting with scientists and several organizations involved in CT policy.

Findings of sub study I: Acquiring insight into goals and (policy) measures

The CT policy consists of a central objective, five intervention areas and ten basic strategic principles. The intervention areas are: acquisition, prevention, defence, preparation and prosecution. Each

intervention area has different goals, interim goals and measures. We created five goal trees to indicate the relationships between ends and means, one for each of the intervention areas. We then identified thirty policy measures in the CT strategy. These are shown in the table below.

Intervention area		Policy measure
Acquisition	1	Acquisition, analysis and interpretation of information
	2	Acquisition of information outside the security domain
	3	Scientific research
Prevention	4	Well-considered government communication
	5	Increasing the resilience of vulnerable groups
	6	Timely intervention in the event of the radicalization of individuals
	7	Undermining extremist and terrorist propaganda
	8	Disrupting access to means of attack
	9	Disrupting the financing of terrorism
	10	Preventing travel movements of potential extremists and terrorists
	11	Disrupting the spreading of extremist and terrorist ideologies online
	12	Disrupting extremist and terrorist networks
	13	Disrupting threats from extremist or terrorist persons
	14	Early identification of potentially violent loners (PGEs) and estimating willingness to commit violence
Defence	15	Proportional and adequate security measures
	16	Improving national collaboration
	17	Promoting and improving international collaboration
	18	Making use of technological developments
	19	Civil aviation security
	20	Increasing cyber security
Preparation	21	Monitoring societal consequences of the terrorist and extremist threat
	22	Strengthening critical partners network
	23	Strengthening effective crisis organization
	24	Preparing crisis communication
	25	Keeping the Special Interventions Department (DSI) decisive and effective
Prosecution	26	Making use of legal opportunities to disrupt extremist and terrorist acts and prosecute suspects
	27	Strengthening information exchange and collaboration between intelligence, security and investigation services
	28	Increasing and safeguarding knowledge and expertise within the criminal justice chain related to extremism and terrorism
	29	Preparing for the return to society of persons suspected of or sentenced for committing terrorist offences
	30	Criminal justice chain capacity

Findings of sub study II: Defining policy theory measures

We reconstructed the policy theory behind each individual policy measure using Pawson and Tilley's (I)CMO model (Interventions, Context, Mechanism, Outcome). In addition to the interventions, the context, the mechanisms and the outcome, we identified the objectives of the measure and which organizations are involved for each policy measure.

- *Interventions:* Obtaining an overview of the many interventions that fall under the CT strategy policy measures was not easy because CT organizations draw up their own implementation

programmes based on the principles of the CT strategy and not on the specific policy measures set out in this strategy. The interviews and desk research show that the thirty policy measures include at least 150 interventions. The number of interventions differs per policy measure. Most policy measures consist of more than five interventions. The interventions can be divided into different types of interventions, including financial, legal and communicative interventions and interventions involving specialized bodies and partnerships.

- *Context:* In the context we have described the positioning of the policy measures in the CT strategy. We also identify various relevant contextual elements for each policy measure, such as preconditions, the context at the time the measure was drawn up and the background of the policy measure.
- *Mechanism:* We have described the assumed mechanisms for each policy measure and how they contribute to the goals of the CT strategy. The mechanisms are not explicitly mentioned in the CT strategy. We reconstructed the mechanisms ourselves through document study, policy reconstruction and interviews.
- *Outcome:* The CT policy can be characterized as a policy that is constantly changing and this also includes a continuous evaluation of the underlying policy measures. Some of the policy measures have already been evaluated. The results of these evaluations can be used to make interim adjustments to policy, which is in line with the strategic framework of the CT strategy.

Findings of sub study III: Identification of measurable policy measures

The reconstruction of the policy theory behind the various policy measures shows that some policy measures are based on the same mechanism. We clustered these policy measures into groups, so that we could better identify which (parts of) measures contribute to achieving the goals of the CT strategy. To determine to what extent it is possible to measure whether the various (groups of) policy measures contribute to the realization of the objectives of the CT strategy, we assessed these on the basis of an assessment framework. The assessment framework included six criteria for measuring how promising the measures are for evaluation:

- The presence of a rudimentary policy theory behind the measure;
- The presence of information about the zero situation;
- The presence of an ex-ante analysis;
- The availability of information about the impact of the measure;
- The presence of information about the impact of comparable measures abroad;
- The presence of an evaluation of the policy measure, for example with regard to the design, introduction, implementation and/or results.

The analysis shows that for most policy measures not all criteria are met. The research confirms that quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of CT policy is not possible. This is mainly because information about the before-after and with-without situation is not available. In addition, a number of characteristics of the policy theory behind the policy measures make evaluation difficult. First, each policy measure consists of many interventions that are carried out simultaneously by several partners. As a result, it is difficult to determine that an effect can be explained by the use of one policy measure. Second, the distance between intervention and objective is great; two or more successive mechanisms per policy measure is no exception. This makes it hard to prove causality between the policy and the effects.

The fact that quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of counterterrorism policy is not possible does not mean that evaluation is not possible at all. A qualitative evaluation, consisting of, for example, interviews about the projected goal achievement and case studies, can be used to assess the plausibility of the goal achievement of the CT policy. It may be necessary to choose a different form of evaluation than for other policy areas. Evaluations already carried out show that the evaluation of sub

topics leads to recommendations with which the policy can be strengthened, such as the evaluation of the crisis organizations. When several mechanisms are presumed, whether these mechanisms actually occur should be assessed individually for each mechanism. Evaluation should therefore consider smaller parts rather than the whole of the policy, whereby the outcome of each part provides more information about the operation of the CT strategy. Subsequently, all evaluations combined tell us something about the effectiveness of the CT policy.

We have indicated for each group of policy measures how promising they are for evaluation and how evaluation can take place. The results are shown in the table below. We have designated five groups of measures as being promising for evaluation (green), evaluation can take place with regard to eight groups of measures, but there are limitations (yellow) and one group of policy measures cannot be evaluated (red). The groups of policy measures 'monitoring and security system', 'civil aviation security' and 'increasing cyber security' are not included in the table, because they are part of a separate system and therefore do not have to be evaluated within the CT policy but within a separate framework (groups 9 to 11 are therefore not included in the table).

No.	Groups of policy measures	Promising
1	Acquisition of information: Mechanism 1: timely insight into (potential) threats Mechanism 2: ability to act adequately as organizations	
2	Preventing fear	
3	Preventing upsurge	
4	Disrupting access to means of attack and to money	
5	Preventing travel	
6	Disrupting online (dissemination of) ideologies	
7	Disrupting networks	
8	Increasing organizations' action perspectives	
12	Strengthening crisis management	
13	Strengthening critical partners network	
14	Keeping the Special Interventions Department (DSI) decisive and effective	
15	Strengthening the criminal justice chain	
16	Reintegrating ex suspects and persons who have been sentenced	

For a number of policy measures groups marked with green, evaluations are already available that can be used as input in phase 2 of the evaluation. So an extensive evaluation is not required since the available information can be used and the results of these evaluations (and the additional sub evaluations proposed below) can be viewed in conjunction.

For the groups of policy measures marked with yellow, there is a major limitation to evaluation. With regard to these policy measures, the concrete intervention can be evaluated, but whether the goal (such as the prevention of fear or the prevention of threat) is achieved is difficult to measure because the step from intervention to goal is too great. We do, however, recommend that an evaluation be carried out for these policy measures, because this can provide information about the impact of the relevant interventions. However, measuring the contribution that the policy measures make to the objectives of the CT strategy is not feasible because of this large distance between intervention and goal.

Reflection on the CT strategy

The main question of this research is what the goals and policy measures of the CT Strategy are, what their expected contribution to the realization of the goals is, and what measures are promising for

measuring the contribution they make to the CT strategy objectives. The underlying reason for this identification process in the first phase before the CT strategy can be evaluated is that the evaluation of the CT strategy 2011-2015 demonstrated that an impact assessment is not possible due to the nature of the policy field. The impact of CT policy is hard to determine because the impact might also be related to some other measure or action. The policy area is highly fragmented and consists of networks, but it is also still relatively young and goal-seeking. This means that a lot of information is not yet available, or is widely spread over parts of the network. It also implies that further development steps have to be taken in policy analysis and that those limitations play an important role in an evaluation.

The research confirms that quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of CT policy is not possible. A qualitative evaluation of various elements of CT policy is an option. A qualitative evaluation, consisting of, for example, interviews about the projected goal achievement and case studies, can be used to assess the plausibility of the goal achievement of the CT policy.

The CT strategy can be seen as a strategic framework document in which the main principles and measures are laid down for five years. Implementation differs per CT organization. The concrete policy measures in the CT strategy were not leading when the various organizations involved in the CT policy drew up their implementation programmes. Neither is the prioritization always set out in specific policy documents, but has been established in the various consultations that exist in this area.

Compared to the previous CT strategy, the CT strategy 2016-2020 has been improved in terms of stronger focus (more strategic starting points, fewer operational details) and clearer formulation of objectives. For the next CT strategy, we recommend further clarifying the relationship between intermediate goals and goals and formulating more clearly how these should be achieved. The analysis of the policy theory behind the various measures in this report can be used for this. At the same time, the CT strategy also has specificities that do not belong in a strategy, such as 'keeping the DSI decisive and effective'. It is important to put the CT strategy into practice without losing sight of the fact that a strategy must reflect the main outlines of the policy and not the implementation of that policy.

The strategy runs for five years. There have not been any explicit interim adjustments to date, nor has the strategy been included in an annual implementation plan in which the strategic principles are given more concrete substance. In practice, it can be seen that the CT strategy provides a strategic framework and has a coordinating effect, but that subsequently there is a greater need for alignment, continuous explicit evaluation (for example because insights change) and for the periodic review of the policy commitments recommended in the previous evaluation. This is currently done in the board of directors in which all CT organizations are involved, but without the agreements or decisions being structured and recorded for external use (or even internally).

To summarise, we make the following recommendations for the CT strategy 2021-2025:

- Formulate strategic goals in the CT strategy and formulate how they should be achieved.
- Establish an annual implementation plan to concretise the strategic objectives and adjust that plan flexibly if necessary.

- Extract concrete interventions from the CT strategy and include them in an annual implementation plan.
- The periodic analysis tool recommended in the evaluation of the CT strategy 2011-2015 and included in the current CT strategy should be given a place in the implementation plan.