

Speech: Baroness Shields closing speech at the Global Counter Terrorism Forum

On behalf of the GCTF co-chairs of the working group on countering violent extremism, I would like to thank the Swiss government and the UAE for making this experts meeting possible.

In particular I'd like to thank the Swiss government for their leadership and industry representatives for their constructive engagement and recognition of the benefits of GCTF and other such forums in providing a multi-national, multi-stakeholder platform for these important discussions.

And finally, my thanks goes to ISD, D-CAF and the GCTF administrative unit for organising the event and all participants for their insightful and thoughtful contributions.

Just over the last 3 days, whilst we have been at this conference, Daesh has continued its attempt to poison the minds of the young and vulnerable. On Monday the group produced a cartoon presented as a bedtime story for children, in which viewers are urged to join the group and fight the supposed tyranny of the West.

They followed this by producing a video showing child soldiers beheading and shooting to death Kurdish captives in Syria. Aside from the moral depravity these 2 examples evidence, they also illustrate the breadth and many nuances of the Daesh proposition.

Of course we cannot focus on Daesh in isolation. Just last night al-Qa'ida released perhaps the most polished version of their English-language magazine al-Risalah, which celebrated the cowardly murder of Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov and provided instructions for using the TOR browser to discreetly access terrorist content online.

Since Monday, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham published a video of a suicide operation involving 15 terrorists in Homs. The Afghan Taliban claimed to have wounded 70 people in a twin suicide bombing in Kabul. And 2 terrorist groups released proof-of-life videos featuring hostages from Australia and Switzerland, their captors demanding ransoms for their release.

At the outset of this conference, I challenged us collectively to set our ambitions higher to respond to the evolving global threat of terrorist and violent extremist abuse of the internet. The reality, as these examples demonstrate, is that terrorism is destroying lives across the world every day.

As I previously acknowledged, a lot of good work has already been undertaken by civil society, governments and industry but we all recognise the need to

amplify the pace, scale and reach of our efforts to address the immediacy of the challenge we face.

We cannot be complacent. We must continue this dialogue to ensure our collective efforts have a true impact in tackling such heinous content. I am therefore encouraged to hear the innovative ideas and good practice that has been discussed at this forum.

It is clear to me that we have real will and expertise in this room to make a difference and ensure people around the world are not exposed to the violent narratives terrorists seek to spread online.

In setting our ambitions high, it is vital to acknowledge the fundamental importance of partnership working and of continuous innovation.

As I set out previously, this is not a threat that can be tackled by one nation, company or group in isolation and this forum has provided an opportunity to bring together our knowledge, expertise and capabilities to improve our response.

This is an unrelenting challenge and we must continue to make progress. In light of this, I would like us all to consider the following emerging themes from this conference.

First, the need to develop and maintain effective partnerships across sectors to scale existing and new efforts, by drawing on unique capabilities of each.

Second, the importance of being agile and innovative, sharing best practice and data driven research and analysis to act as the foundation for effective policy making and counter-narrative communications.

And third, alongside developing national capacity, to continue engagement at international forums such as the GCTF to ensure we collectively amplify our response to this global threat.

Public private partnerships

So to my first point. A lot of the discussion at this forum has rightly centred on the value of effective public private partnerships. Collaboration between and across a wide range of actors is key to ensuring a holistic approach that draws on the best we all have to offer.

I welcome innovative thinking in casting the net wider on who we bring into our partnerships including collaborating with advertising agencies and other sectors like the cyber security industry to tackle this ever evolving threat from different perspectives.

As such I am encouraged by the model supported by D-CAF, for the International Code of Conduct Association, to deal with private security companies and the potential to apply that approach to this challenge.

Like the WeProtect model the UK set up to tackle online child sexual exploitation, we need to show that a global partnership can also make a

significant impact on tackling terrorist and extremist communications online.

These past 3 days have shown us that in terms of motivations and incentives, there is broad alignment between civil society, public and private sectors. We all want the same outcomes.

But what is needed is greater understanding of each other's positions and how best to approach collaboration. Going forward we need to consider how we can make more of existing partnerships to scale our response, working towards understanding the impact of promising existing initiatives. We also need to continue to build new partnerships, exploring innovative ways to tackle the threat. Following this conference I hope we can continue our dialogue on maximising effectiveness through partnership and learning from best practice globally.

Innovation, sharing best practice, research and analysis

To my second point, over the past few days it is clear that many of you have developed and are keen to share innovative ideas on tackling terrorist and violent extremist use of the internet. This is very encouraging.

The threat we face is unrelenting and constantly evolving. The terrorists and violent extremists do not rest – they are constantly innovating and adapting their methods to stay one step ahead. Together we must outmatch their efforts.

I am pleased that right here in this room we have the expertise and commitment to drive this innovating thinking in your respective sectors.

For civil society groups, this innovation could focus on the different mediums of messaging, be it counter, alternative or subtle messaging delivered through human-centric entertainment. For industry, this could mean innovative technical solutions including detecting and removing harmful content as soon as it is released. And for governments this means developing innovative polices and partnerships to tackle terrorist propaganda online to safeguard their citizens.

All of this needs to be underpinned by cutting edge research and analysis and innovative communications.

Whether that be the entertaining cartoons developed and presented here by Big Bad Boo, the counter narratives based on the lives of female defectors as promoted by Hedayah or the data driven approach to peacebuilding developed by PeaceTech Labs.

In the UK we have conducted research into the role that different channels play in the Daesh's propaganda ecosystem online which can be grouped into 3 broad categories:

- what we refer to as beacons, like Twitter and Telegram, are used to coordinate and disseminate propaganda to the wider public
- aggregators, like file hosting or pasting sites, WordPress and social networks like Facebook and Google+ fulfil the function of hosting

catalogues of vile propaganda

- content stores, like YouTube, archive.org or Google Drive, are sites on which propaganda can be stored

Daesh are acutely aware of the different roles that each platform plays in the online propaganda ecosystem. And they are adept at maximising their exploitation of this ecosystem.

Our response needs to be mindful of this and we need to continue conducting ground breaking research and analysis to inform our response.

International forums and national capacity building

Moving to my final point, alongside building national capacity this conference has once again demonstrated the importance of international fora, like the UN PVE, the GCTF and the Global Coalition Strat Comms Cell. The internet has no borders and it is clear that international engagement is imperative in ensuring a holistic response to the online terrorist threat.

We need to ensure that our joint efforts complement each other, that international standards and conventions that we all hold dear including freedom of expression and human rights are upheld. And that that our global strategic discussions at forums like the GCTF drives effective local action.

I am deeply encouraged that this conference has led to calls for further discussions on specific topics and hope this will lead to further tangible, collaborative initiatives.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude by returning to the threat we face once more. Terrorist groups rely on closed communities of supporters on social networks and messaging applications to increase support for their cause. These online echo chambers serve to normalise and more deeply entrench, dangerous extremist views, which, as we've seen, can have horrific consequences.

By working more closely with industry and community partners, we can loosen the stranglehold that terrorist radicalisers have on vulnerable people in these echo chambers, removing this vile terrorist propaganda and promoting positive alternatives.

It is clear to me that through the GCTF and other collaborative international fora, we can scale efforts to tackle terrorist and extremist abuse of the internet in all its forms. As you have rightly acknowledged, whilst Daesh are the current focus, there is a need to ensure we don't lose sight of other growing threats, like far-right extremism and the vicious cycle of islamophobia.

It is great to see the passion and appetite for collaboration, allowing each of us to benefit from the breadth of knowledge and expertise of all of the participants.

Specifically, I note the following key outcomes and points from the conference:

Firstly, the need to develop harmonised approaches across countries to understand and evaluate impact. Here I think governments have a role to play in setting objectives, building consensus on theories of change, and ensuring that strategic gaps are met.

Secondly, the need to build a comprehensive framework for communications beyond narrow counter speech efforts online. This could including offline engagement, educational initiatives and work across different forms of media.

I also note the appeal from yesterday's panel members for governments to involve youth in understanding the appeal of these narratives in policy-making and counter narrative response. This is valuable idea to gain better insight and understanding and something the UK government will continue to explore.

Finally, yesterday, discussions ended with you all agreeing that working towards a single, shared and clearly defined core objective, underpinned by a common theory of change is crucial. And I think the GCTF is an excellent forum to drive this through.

As co-chair of the GCTF working group on countering violent extremism, the UK is keen to continue this vital discussion and hear from all of you on how we best shape this initiative going forward.

We must ensure that the internet – which was built to create a more closely connected world and provide greater access to knowledge and information continues to empower people to shape their own futures.

We must ensure that the Internet does not become a battle ground where extreme views, hatred, division and intolerance are amplified and the vulnerable, victimised.

Collectively, through our shared expertise and drive we can innovate to reclaim the internet from the terrorists and violent extremists that seek to divide us.

Thank you.