Countering Online Extremism as Soft Power and Crime Prevention

Dr. Keiran Hardy
Griffith Criminology Institute
k.hardy@griffith.edu.au
@khardyGCI

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

Theoretical frameworks for online CVE:

- Soft Power
- "Winning Hearts and Minds"
  - *What do these terms mean, are they appropriate to describe online CVE measures?*
  - *Are they just shorthand political/media rhetoric, or do they have a more substantive theoretical meaning which can guide the development of CVE strategies?*
- Crime Prevention

We need "soft power"

- Marketing experts should combat ISIS social media presence: this is the 'disruptive "soft power" response that ISIS doesn't want — and cannot match' (Lawrence et al, *Knowledge@Wharton* blog, 2015)
- Soft Power 'is the contest we are currently losing, and bombs and troops can't comprehensively defeat the Islamic State without it (Stavridis, *Foreign Policy*, 2015)
- "Hard power is not enough, particularly to contest the cyber territory that the Islamic State occupies" (Nye, 2015)

We need "soft power"

- Soft power is 'critical to a successful counter-terrorism strategy within societies that are defined by high levels of cultural and religious diversity' (McCulloch, Pickering & Wright-Neville, 2008)
- Grossman (2015) argues that security-based responses to terrorism must be supplemented with such 'robust soft power" initiatives' for countering violent extremism
- Aly (2015) believes that CVE programs 'should harness the state's soft power resources and instruments of civil society'.

"Hard" vs "Soft" Power Strategies

Hard Power
- Take-downs
- Prosecution for criminal offences:
  - Possessing/making terrorist documents
  - Encouraging terrorism
  - Disseminating terrorist publications

Soft Power
- Counter-narratives
- Positive messaging from credible sources
- Critical analysis of terrorist propaganda
- Cooperation with industry
- Educating user base, building resilience to risks online
- Training civil society groups

A Short History of an Idea

- Harvard Professor of International Relations Joseph S Nye Jr. coined the term 'soft power' in 1990 to counter suggestions that the United States had suffered a rapid decline in power during the latter years of the Cold War (Nye, 1990)

- Nye later developed a general theory of soft power (Nye, 2004), then supplemented this with a theory of smart power to 'counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy' (Nye, 2011)

Hard, Soft, Smart Power

- Hard Power =
  - Influencing behaviour based on coercion, threats, sanctions
- Soft Power =
  - Influencing behaviour by 'changing preferences'; relies on 'attractive' force of cultural, political values and foreign policy
- Smart power =
  - "the combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction"

Moral benefits of Soft Power?

If I want to steal your money, I can threaten you with a gun, I can lure you into a fraudulent get-rich-quick scheme, or I can **persuade you with a false claim** that I am a guru who will save the world. I can then abscond with your money. The first two approaches rest on the hard power of coercion and inducement, whereas the third depends solely on attraction or soft power. Nonetheless, the intentions and result remain theft in all three instances. On the other hand, soft power uses means that allow (on the surface, at least) more choice and leeway to the victim than hard power does (Nye, 2004).

Moral Benefits of Soft Power?

On the dimensions of means, as opposed to goals and consequences, I argued that **a moral case can be made for preferring soft power**. By its very nature, it depends on what goes on in the mind of the followers and usually leaves more space for others to exercise choice. **If we value autonomy** of individuals and respect their choices, then, although coercion may sometimes be necessary, it should generally be disfavored, and it is usually **more moral** for a leader who has options to prefer soft power. (Nye, 2004)

Concerns about 'soft power'

- Undermines 'ontological security' (Mattern, 2007)

- Is "nothing more than ... a polite way of describing the ideological expansionism inherent in US liberal internationalism" (Layne, 2010)

- Manipulating individuals constitutes an 'invasion of autonomy' because it 'perverts the way that [a] person makes decisions, forms preferences, or adopts goals' (Raz, 1986)

Complications with soft power

- Is it persuasion, conscious manipulation, 'attraction', or just any non-coercive (foreign policy?) strategy?
- Is there a clear distinction between hard and soft power in practice?
  - Hard power responses can increase soft power (e.g. military might)
  - Soft power responses can increase hard power (e.g. multilateral treaties)
- If terrorist organisations have a lot of soft power, can it still be considered morally preferable to hard power?
- If soft power involves changing preferences, how can it be consistent with individual autonomy?

Two meanings of soft power?

- In Nye's theory, soft power has two meanings:

    - As a strategy – describes non-coercive measures

    - As a resource – describes something akin to 'goodwill' or 'legitimacy'

- This means a soft power *strategy* which undermines legitimacy can undermine soft power as a *resource*

Soft Power Undermining Soft Power

Revealed: UK's covert propaganda bid to stop Muslims joining Isis

Government unit uses community groups to spread counter-extremism messages but critics say it risks alienating UK Muslims

▲ The government's Ricu unit is based at the Home Office in London. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

The UK government has embarked on a series of clandestine propaganda campaigns intended to bring about "attitudinal and behavioural change" among young British Muslims as part of a counter-radicalisation programme.

UK government running 'covert' propaganda campaign to stop Muslims joining Isis

Unit uses local community groups to spread its anti-extremism message - without revealing its government links
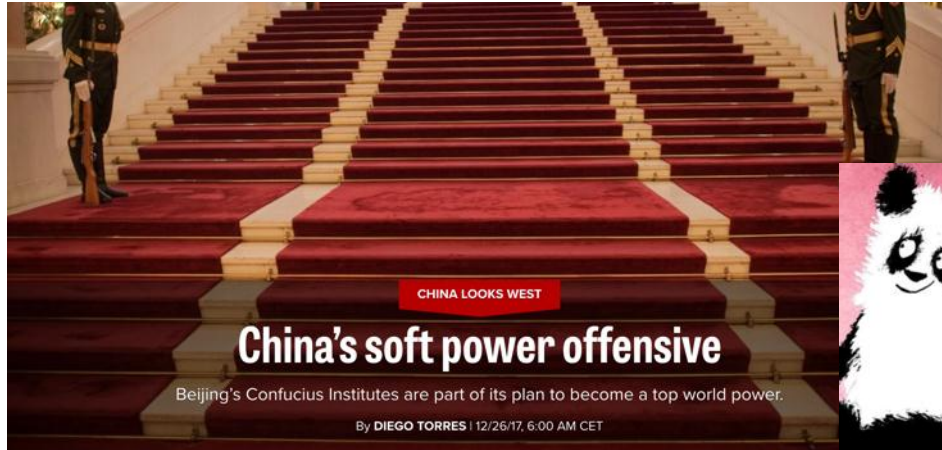
Caroline Mortimer | @cjmortimer | Monday 2 May 2016 18:45 | 💬 17 comments

👍 Like   Click to follow
Indy Politics

Double standards of soft power

CHINA LOOKS WEST

China's soft power offensive

Beijing's Confucius Institutes are part of its plan to become a top world power.

By **DIEGO TORRES** | 12/26/17, 6:00 AM CET

The FT View Chinese politics & policy   (+ Add to myFT)

China's soft power comes with a very hard edge

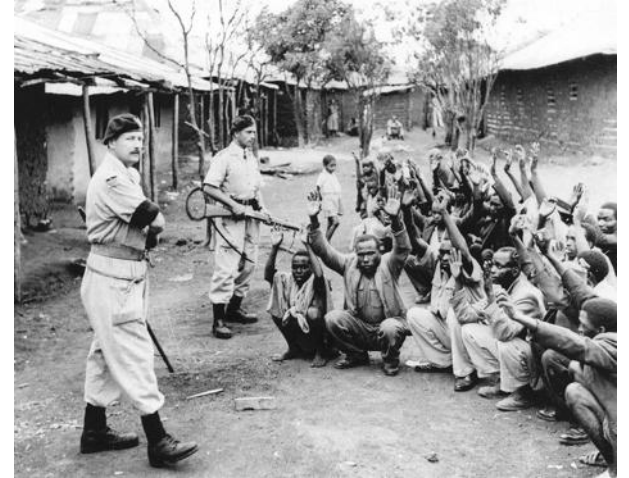Even 'panda diplomacy' is not nearly as warm and cuddly as it seems

We need to "win hearts and minds"

- Aly (2015): "there is hope that a smarter approach to terrorism, one that acknowledges that the war for hearts and minds will not be won by military action, will emerge."

- Guardian Editorial (2015): defeating ISIS is 'not a question of drones and bombs, but of hearts and minds'

- Grace Provines (2017) "policymakers should reconsider the approach to counterterrorism and the weight given to traditional versus alternative policy options, which place greater importance on winning the hearts and minds of citizens and promoting inclusive state culture"

- Bill Shorten (Aus opposition leader): "Words and ideas, hearts and minds are at the core of winning the struggle against terrorism"

'Winning Hearts and Minds'

- Attributed to Sir Gerald Templer in the Malayan Emergency of 1948-60 ('that nauseating phrase I think I invented")
- Traditional historical account: the British military was able to resolve a communist insurgency by offering benefits and services to the Malayan population
- This followed attempts to search and destroy and forcibly relocate some 400,000 rural ethnic-Chinese Malayans into resettlement camps
- 'Hearts and minds' strategy continued to rely on forced relocation, collective punishments, destruction of local villages
- Templer's approach heavily influenced counter-insurgency doctrine: winning the support of a population will turn them against the insurgents (Galula, Thompson)
- Classical counter-insurgency strategy directly influenced US military strategy in Iraq (The Surge – Kilcullen, Petraeus)

"Winning Hearts and Minds" 1.0

"Winning Hearts and Minds" 2.0

Soft Power and "WH&M": A Critique

- Not fit for purpose: based in post-Cold War IR theory and post-WW2 military strategy
- Provide only basic (binary) categorisation of CVE measures
- Frame CVE strategies as benefiting populations, even if those strategies also target communities with coercive measures, involve manipulation or reduce freedom of choice
- Ideas have intuitive appeal, but because of this, tend to be used as shorthand political/media rhetoric
- Reflect ongoing concerns about CVE programs re: encouraging 'moderate' Islam and 'spying' on communities

Crime Prevention

"Crime prevention" comprises strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring, and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society, including fear of crime, by intervening to influence their multiple causes.

- United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 2002. Guidelines for the prevention of crime. 11th Commission on the prevention of crime and criminal justice.
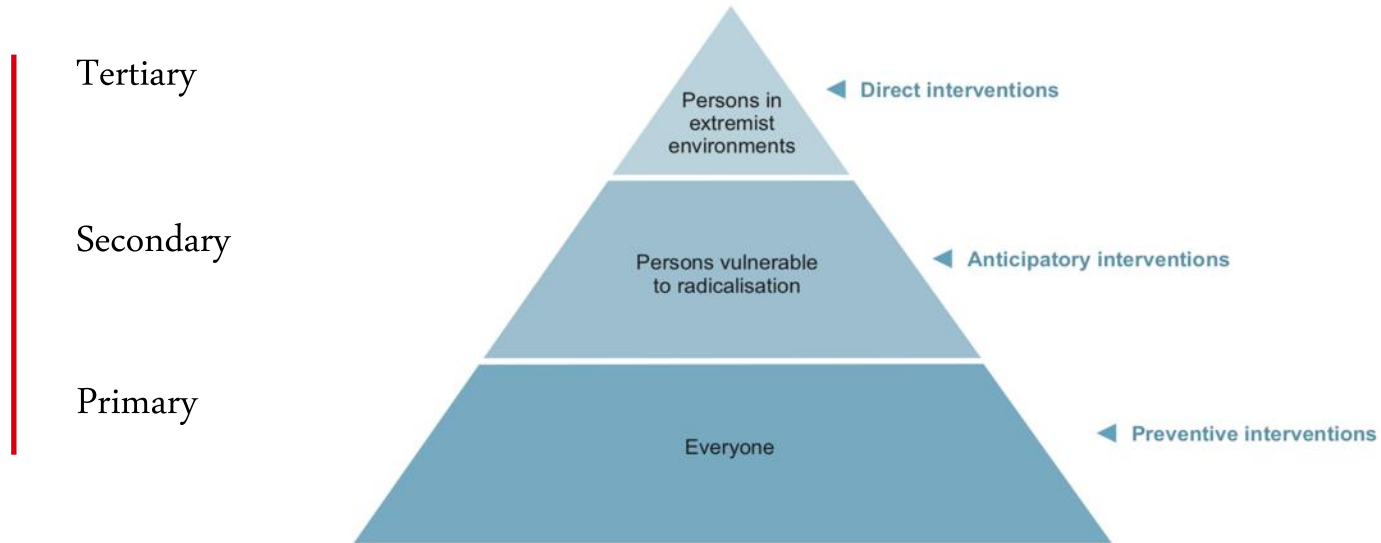
Crime Prevention

Crime prevention can be defined as addressing problems "upstream" before they become "downstream" problems requiring criminal justice responses. (Cherney, 2018)

Crime Prevention

There is clear evidence that well-planned crime prevention strategies not only prevent crime and victimization, but also promote community safety and contribute to the sustainable development of countries. Effective, responsible crime prevention enhances the quality of life of all citizens. It has long-term benefits in terms of reducing the costs associated with the formal criminal justice system, as well as other social costs that result from crime. Crime prevention offers opportunities for a humane and more cost-effective approach to the problems of crime.

- United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 2002. Guidelines for the prevention of crime. 11th Commission on the prevention of crime and criminal justice.

Public Health and Crime Prevention

Tertiary

Secondary

Primary

Persons in extremist environments — Direct interventions

Persons vulnerable to radicalisation — Anticipatory interventions

Everyone — Preventive interventions

Crime Prevention Frameworks

- **Situational crime prevention**
    - Limiting access, increasing risks, reducing rewards
- **Community crime prevention**
    - Strengthening and educating communities
- **Procedural justice**
    - Building trust and legitimacy to increase community intelligence
- **Networked and third party policing**
    - Legal levers that require technology companies to police online content

Benefits of a Crime Prevention Approach

- 'Fit for purpose'

- Improved categorisation – targets, actors, methods

- Multiple relevant theoretical frameworks

- Large evidence base

- Promotes rational, evidence-based policy

- Avoids framing strategies as harmless and designed to 'help' Muslim communities

Limits of a crime prevention approach

- Does crime prevention adequately capture methods involved in counter-narratives and countering terrorist propaganda?

- Does crime prevention adequately account for ideological nature of terrorist crime?

- Soft power and "winning hearts and minds" might capture these developments – but they should be used as a critical rather than descriptive or normative framework

Thank you

k.hardy@griffith.edu.au

@khardyGCI