

The Role of Perception in Countering Violent Extremism

The Joseph Kony Case¹

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Abstract:

The issue of violent extremism has attracted media and policy attention all over the world, particularly after widely reported terrorist attacks. Extensive research and analysis as well as conferences and government projects have been dedicated to understanding the drivers of violent extremism and providing recommendations for what is known as “CVE” (countering violent extremism). This paper addresses the problem of extremism and terrorism from a different perspective. It covers research from before as well as after 9/11 and analyses a situation in which militants were forcibly kidnapped and then manipulated into becoming brutal executioners.

Finding the "keys to perception" has been and remains a goal for all those who wish to manipulate, e.g., voters, their opponents, sponsors, and supporters. The case of Joseph Kony, the charismatic leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army, is worth considering in this context, as he managed to change the perceptual filters of many stakeholders, also those not directly related to his activities. The answer to the question of what irrational levers were used to achieve this goal may add much to the discussion, also in relation to other violent extremist groups including the so-called Islamic State, Boko Haram, or Al-Shabaab.

Keywords:

Perception; counter-terrorism; CVE; PVE; extremism; terrorism; Kony.

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Introduction

There has much been written about violent extremism, many studies have been carried out in this area and considerable evidence has been gathered. The concepts such as Arendt's "banality of evil" or Zimbardo's "Lucifer's effects" are already well established in social, psychological, and political sciences. Nevertheless, one of the missing aspects for understanding "the fluid nature of brutal extremism" is the perceptual prism. Perception is a multi-layered structure. It occurs in individual, family, social and broader, e.g., national dimensions. All its dimensions permeate and correlate with each other, becoming a catalyst for attitudes and, consequently, behaviours and actions. Depending on the characteristics of the external stimuli and the situational context, different components of perception may be activated to different degrees. The multitude of contextual, individual, and group factors influencing perception makes it difficult to estimate the repeatability of reactions to a given stimulus at the level of direct intervention. On the "meta" level, however, it is possible to identify cognitive patterns, which, if correctly identified, support the process of predicting the response from the target group.

Finding the "keys to perception" has been and remains a dream for all those who fight for the hearts and minds of their followers, voters, opponents, sponsors, or supporters. It is usually believed that the success of these efforts is connected with the best possible adjustment of the message to the addressee's stable perception profile and the basket of needs staying behind it. Practice shows, however, that there are mechanisms that have the potential to shatter the natural human perceptual construction, while simultaneously implementing a new set of schemes and values. The case of Joseph Kony, perceived as the charismatic leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (hereafter LRA), is worth considering in this context, as he managed to change the perceptual filters not only of his fighters, but also of some stakeholders not directly related to his activities. It also took place within areas that would seem to be the universal foundations of family and social coexistence. The re-evaluation of fundamental principles occurred not only in the group of children and young people most susceptible to "magical thinking", but also in the adults who had joined or supported the LRA over the years. The answer to the question of what irrational levers were used to achieve this goal may add a lot to the discussion on violent extremism, also in relation to other extremist groups, including the so-called Islamic State, Boko Haram, or Al-Shabaab.

Thorough examination of the International Criminal Court (The Hague) trial of Dominic Ongwen (one of the main commanders of the LRA) literature review and interviews with representatives of NGOs supporting the victims of atrocities in Uganda laid the factual foundations for this article. It endeavours to address the general research problem which is: "How knowledge of human perceptual functions can contribute to the prevention and fight against violent extremism?" In order to meet this challenge, this paper will attempt to reach the following objectives:



- 1) Specifying the theoretical foundation of Perceptual Security System (PSS), a psycho-social construct of human interactions amongst themselves and in relation to the context as well as time frameworks
- 2) Identifying and characterizing the main groups of entities functioning in PSS³
- 3) Determining the basic processes affecting the PSS actors
- 4) Defining a methodology and tools which can be used to analyse actors' responses to a specific violent extremism event
- 5) Specifying what counter-terrorist strategies could be applied to the different actors of the PSS when embracing the violent extremism case of Joseph Kony
- 6) Proposing methods of identification of "Perceptual Security Fuses" and "Terrorist Threats Alerts".

It is hoped that the following analysis will outline Perceptual Security as an important but under-utilized part of the National Security system as well as other, non-governmental research and development. So far, leaving this area unmanaged and without strategic coherence created a space that was successfully exploited by groups such as the LRA, ISIS, and Al-Shabaab.⁴

"The rules of the universe that we think we know are buried deep in our processes of perception."

Gregory Bateson

1. About Perception

Perception accompanies man, as well as all living organisms, from birth to death. It is the basic medium of communication with the world, and on its basis we build both hierarchies of values, attitudes, and behavioural reactions (*Rummel, 1976*). Of the countless impulses which reach man through the five basic senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch), only a small part is consciously perceived. Paraphrasing the concept of "Johari windows" (*Luft, Harrington, 1955*) we can basically distinguish four groups of stimulants:

- those that a person perceives and consciously reacts to (e.g. the light of a torch shining into the eyes),
- those that one notices but chooses not to react to immediately (e.g. street noise),

³ Later referred to as "pillars".

⁴ Although the following text focuses on counter-terrorism issues, it is important to note that perceptual processes are very similar to those described also as critical to radicalization leading to violent extremism. This awareness should impose ethical obligations on the reader to make appropriate use of the information contained in this paper. Attention to the moral aspects of the knowledge conveyed has also modified the descriptions of the phenomena discussed, giving them a more general and selective character. Extended and practical versions can be made available to institutions involved in counter-terrorism or counteracting violent extremism.

- those that are not consciously perceived by human beings, but have an impact on them (e.g. carbon monoxide)
- those, which humans do not notice and do not react to them (nevertheless they can influence the person, e.g., suppressed trauma).

In the case of the first three groups, an impulse is registered by the sensory receptors, which encode it in the form of neural information. They then reach the brain, which qualifies, organizes, and interprets⁵ them, preparing the feedback. This feedback can be manifested "externally" or internalized, both in its parts and in its entirety. It should be noted that just as the receiver has only a partial awareness of the number and character of the impulses he assimilates, so the sender of the message "sends much more than he thinks he sends" (*Mehrabian, 1971*). Each of the groups mentioned above offers a spectrum of possible interventions both radicalizing the recipient and having the exact opposite effect. In practice, the vast majority of interventions are aimed at easy-to-see stimulation, which, in addition, seems verifiable on the basis of the recipients' responses. Many theories are being developed to determine what impulse causes what reaction. Such research has been conducted at least since the 1930s (*Skinner, 1938*), but the results are so diverse (and sometimes contradictory) that, despite decades of effort, the clear impact on human perception remains undefined. One of the reasons for this is the insufficient interest in impulses from the second group (lack of immediate reaction despite perceiving a stimulant) and the third one (lack of perceiving an impulse that nevertheless has its effect on the recipient). This picture is further complicated by the fact that even if the recipients notice the stimulus and know that it has an impact on them, its interpretation is highly subjective. To simplify, we can give an example of radicalization. People have a distorted self-assessment of the level of this process.⁶ It is extremely rare that they call themselves extremists, while they usually name their opponents as terrorists.

Research on the phenomenon of perception has shown that although the capacity for conceptual modelling is innate in all humans (*Anderson, 1983; Fodor, 1983; Johnson-Laird, 1983*) different nationalities, communities and genders have different ways of perceiving the world (*Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner, 1983; Deregowski, 1972; Hudson, 1960*). Their conclusion is also that within their national, religious, ethnic, linguistic (and so on) groups, each person has their own unique way of perceiving incoming impulses. So how can one build counter-terrorist strategies for the national security in such an important and complex system?

⁵ Using a whole set of processes in which generalizations, distortions, and deletions also play a significant role.

⁶ Moved at e.g. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg97916/html/CHRG-114hhrg97916.htm> accessed 15.09.2021.



2. Perceptual Security System – Characterizing the Five Pillars and Basic Processes

When considering the issue of perception in the context of security, it is necessary to define five pillars of which the Perceptual Security System (hereinafter System) consists:

- 1) Sender – an entity that intentionally or unintentionally interacts with the system
- 2) Recipient – a subject who is consciously or unconsciously exposed to messages
- 3) Context – the information environment surrounding the other pillars of the System at a given time, generating modifications to existing messages within them
- 4) Time frame – periodically occurring groups of social and psychological phenomena affecting the System
- 5) Message – a set of information that changes its properties in interaction with other pillars

All of the pillars identified above interact dynamically with each other, with each pillar both influencing and being influenced by the other elements.

Taking the perspective of one of the pillars⁷ and the subsequent weight-attribution analysis of all the components of the System allows us to define **PERCEPTUAL COHERENCE**. It includes a parameterized set of perceptual processes related to radicalization into violent extremism as they occur at a given time within – and between – the five pillars. The verification of the contribution of each pillar to Perceptual Coherence makes it possible to build hypotheses about the relationships occurring between the five elements of the System,⁸ indicating at the same time the pillar representing **PERCEPTUAL DOMINATION**.⁹

The example of the interview with Joseph Kony that follows illustrates, in a simplified way, how Perceptual Coherence can be used in the analysis and design of counter-terrorist activities.

2.1 Sender, Receiver and Message

The architecture of human perception consists of a number of cognitive models/patterns with different levels of complexity (*Vernon, 1955; Herschfeld and Gel, 1994; Mayer et al., 1995; Hjørland, 2002*) whose common function, however, is the selection, organization, and interpretation of incoming data.¹⁰ As mentioned, each subject has a unique “perceptual set”

⁷ Sample Research Assumption: “What is the effect on Recipient A of Message B generated by Sender C in context D and time E?”

⁸ E.g., what influence would the Context have on the Sender in formulating the Message for a particular Recipient

⁹ Perceptual Dominance – the numerically determined perceptual advantage of one of the pillars over the others, also answers the question of which pillar has the greatest influence on the Perceptual System

¹⁰ Cognitive patterns help to cope with an excess of stimuli that reach a person. In a world of increasing information overload and the expectation of faster and more unreflective reactions to incoming stimuli, the role of cognitive patterns will continue to grow. They accelerate and simplify all existing communication processes.

(Allport, 1955; Bruner & Minturu, 1955; Sternberg, 2009, p.449-457),¹¹ which of course does not mean that all its components and the processes that permeate it differ significantly. Within a single species, nationality, culture, religion, and gender, they are diverse manifestations of the same phenomenon. Numerous scientific debates that are conducted around the issue of perception contribute, on the one hand, to a better understanding of this phenomenon, but, on the other, (paradoxically) they may decrease the cognitive accessibility of the studied matter for a wider audience. Two mainly polemicizing camps are related to the concept of mental models assuming that humans create and manipulate their mental representations to predict and/or cause outcomes (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Fodor, 1983). vs. connectionism camp (Churchland, 1989; Marcus, 2001), claiming that the reference point is an internal understanding of the external world through networks of relationships. One of the more recent, popular, and very clarifying concepts that explain perceptual issues is the “filter bubble” (Pariser, 2011), according to which people often build around themselves hermetic, “safe shelters” into which they allow only information that represents the same characteristics as their own bubble.

From an information security perspective, it is significant that cognitive patterns are distributed on a scale from very general to specific. The former determine what information will be subsequently analysed by the latter. A good illustration of this phenomenon (referring to Pariser) would be to imagine perception as a set of “filters” in which smaller ones are placed in these larger, “more general and external” ones. The data that arrives at these internal ones is the set left over from the first “filtering”. General cognitive patterns, which here are called structural, are also of a more permanent and unchanging nature. The next ones, detailed patterns, often related to its specific content, show greater susceptibility to modification. Perception research should therefore be carried out in at least two sets of cognitive patterns: structural (general) and “content like”.¹²

An important research assumption that is firmly established in practice and theory (e.g., Senge, 1990) is that the confrontation of two different cognitive patterns is conflictogenic, whereas the “meeting” of two similar patterns significantly expands cognitive availability. Patterns, represented by different subjects, can be congruent or conflicting. In the first case, when, e.g., the parametrized pattern of the Sender is the same as the pattern of the Recipient, one can speak of a **COGNITIVE BRIDGE**. This phenomenon encompasses both general and specific (content) patterns, at both individual and group levels. Cognitive Bridges are “roads without barriers” that the Sender may use to influence the Recipient. It is worth emphasizing here that convergence at the level of general cognitive patterns cancels or minimizes differences at lower levels, which can be summed up by the often-quoted proverb “We may disagree about details, but having a common goal, at least we can shake hands”. This hypothesis is of fundamental importance for anti- and counter-terrorist activities. The

¹¹ Perceptual set, which includes past experiences, assumptions, given meanings, combined with information emotions, etc.

¹² This would become a significant change from the current situation, in which institutions related to the security sector analyze and react mainly to “extremist content”.



media and political establishment very often focus on responding to the most current manifestations of extremism, which is completely in line with the calculations of terrorists. It is the general schemes – and not the specific ones – that shape the “terrorist consciousness” (e.g., *Falk, 2008*), and counter-terrorist strategies should be built on them. When the situation is reversed – i.e., there is a convergence of lower-level patterns (detailed, content-related) and a conflict of general ones – the information is usually not analyzed at all.

Another aspect related to the Sender and the Receiver is the difference between the intention and the actual “value” of the message sent or received. The Sender sends more data than formally contained in the message itself, and the Recipient may absorb it without having full conscious control over it. If, for example, an information attack is to be considered, one should also mention the “collateral” recipients (similar to a conventional “collateral damage” attack) – entities which the message has reached despite the fact that it was not intended for them. Their reactions should also be analysed, as these recipients may influence the attacked subject in many ways. This broad spectrum of audience analysis is particularly relevant to the study of terrorism, which, by definition, focuses on influencing actor A (such as the government, media, international community, etc.) by attacking actor B (ethnic and social minorities, security services, symbolic artefacts, etc.). Designing effective anti- and counter-terrorist actions in such a social panorama is a difficult but necessary challenge to undertake.

Message can be defined as any portion of information that has been generated by the sender in any way with the intention (or not) of delivering it to the recipient. It should be noted here that messages can refer to stimulation of any of the senses and take verbal, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and haptic (or combined) forms. Thus, they will include, for example, both radio messages, news and photos on social media, the use of specific incense, specific foods as well as the laying of hands with a “blessing” on the head. Messages immediately after leaving the Sender begin to “live their own life”, subjected to a whole range of different influences, noises, and distortions on their way to the Recipient. Thus, they acquire their own subjective character and should be treated as such. The consequence of such an assumption in the perceptual analysis is also the need to consider the attributes of the Message in the light of its potential impact on the cognitive schemata of the other pillars of the System. In the approach presented the Communication is “subjectified”, i.e., treated as a pillar that has its own perceptual attributes. In the information space it does not carry the same semantic values assumed by the Sender but fluctuates under the influence of other pillars just like any other subject. The empowerment of the Message (as well as of the Time Frames and the Context) allows for their more precise examination, comparative juxtaposition, and identification of the Perceptual Coherence.

2.2 Time Frames and Context

Time frames are fixed sets of attributes that occurred at specific moments identified as important in the past. They were significant enough to change the architecture of the entire System, intensely affecting other entities. Examples of such moments include elections, coups, epidemics, natural disasters, etc. The analysis of Time Frames has a fundamental prognostic-preventive significance – knowing how the forces in the Perception System were shaped in the past, we can prepare scenarios for how to react if similar events were to occur in the future.¹³

Context in classical strategic analysis terms can be encapsulated by the acronym PESTLE (politics, economics, sociology, technology, legislation, ecology). The context is the nucleus of many ideas about the systemic causes of terrorism. In cognitive terms, it is, on the one hand, more transdisciplinary and integrative, and, on the other, focused on the research objective (it analyses macro, meso, and micro processes, as in the example of the interview with Joseph Kony below). The context in the light of terrorism research has generated the greatest number of publications, speeches, conferences, and declarations. It is also an extremely structurally diverse pillar of the Perception System, encompassing de facto all the social, economic, and political processes surrounding the Sender and the Recipient. This makes it in many cases so complex that it is impossible to fathom. From a perceptual perspective, however, it is different. Humans have a limited capacity to assimilate new information, and they use a number of processes that reduce the complexity of the external world. In this sense, the Context for a given Recipient, Sender, Message, and Time acquires specific features, has a specific “value”, and in a specific way affects the decision-making processes of the Recipient. Thus, it is no longer an infinite number of competing hypotheses, but is reduced to a single “form” that is “compressed” enough to “squeeze” through the narrow tunnel of human cognition.

2.3 Construction of Pillars

Each pillar has its **PERCEPTUAL PROFILE**,¹⁴ which, in turn, consists of perceptual dimensions. These dimensions were conceptualized as a result of:

- 1) Identifying the socio-psychological phenomenon associated with radicalization into violent extremism
- 2) Identification of cognitive schemata and their attributes found in a phenomenon
- 3) To isolate in one dimension those attributes that “complement each other” and to describe their importance in radicalization.

¹³ It should be noted that not in every Perceptual System study is there a need to include analysis of Time Frames. During periods of relative normalization or normality, the Context attributes may be a sufficient information base.

¹⁴ Perceptual Profile – a set of specific features defining cognitive properties of a given subject

Each dimension is composed of two or three attributes. The attributes of the perceptual dimensions¹⁵ are combined in such a way that, within a given dimension, they form a coherent form “*Gestalt*” of the identified psycho-sociological phenomenon related to violent extremism and terrorism. The distribution of attributes “on a numerical axis” allows not only for a more complete understanding of a given phenomenon, but also to see what in a psychological/sociological sense is on the “opposite side” of, for example, a particular narrative used by terrorist organizations to recruit new members. Attributes within one dimension are not always “black” and on the other side “white”. However, they always aim at the fullest possible cognitive description of a given phenomenon.

Dimensions are described by two criteria: **intensity of occurrence and direction**, which indicate which attribute in a dimension becomes dominant.

For example, if to be considered on the “Me, Others, Mission” dimension, which describes a preferential, automatic way of ordering incoming data in the direction of Self (focus on the realization of one's own needs), Others (focus on the realization of other people's needs), Mission (focus on the realization of the set “higher goal”). This dimension is described from other perspectives also in various other sociological, anthropological, and psychological concepts (e.g., related to motivational psychology). It is commonly referred to as “egoist”, “altruist”, and “missionary”.

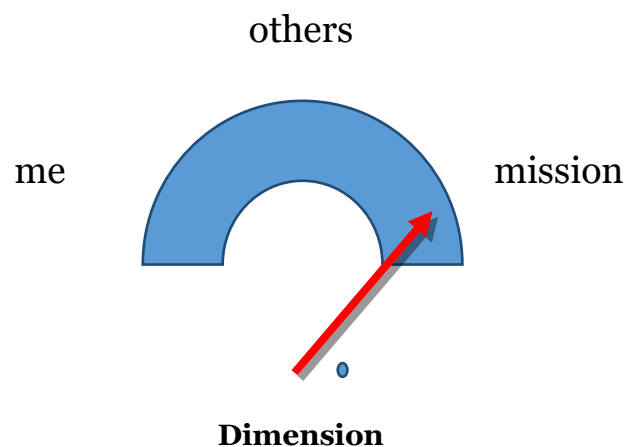


Figure 1. Me, Others, Mission, 2020
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

Once complete Perceptual Profiles of the pillars have been built, the next stage of the analysis is to verify which of the dimensions belonging to different entities exhibit similarities and which show differences. The profiles are then “superimposed” onto a single data network, where it is possible to identify in graphical form which strategy of influencing the perception of other entities is adopted by the selected pillar.

¹⁵ Perceptual attribute – a specific feature, phenomenon describing from a particular perspective the examined socio-psychological phenomenon.

3. Methodology and Tools for Analysing the Perceptual Security System

3.1 Application of Integrated Attribution Analysis (IAA) to the Joseph Kony Case

The author's *Integrated Attribution Analysis* described here in brief is a transdisciplinary concept for the study of cognitive susceptibility to radical content. It consists of 45 correlating perceptual dimensions (and a total of 105 of their attributes) that describe socio-psychological phenomena related to radicalization, extremism, and terrorism. Its conduct involves the following steps:

- 1) Deciding on the scope of analysis
- 2) Choosing the time frame, receivers, and context territory
- 3) Assigning weights to each of the five Pillars
- 4) Realizing assessment
- 5) Deciding what CT strategy to choose for which receivers.

Methodologically, it is based on the tenets of *Structured Professional Judgement* (hereafter SPJ), an approach that is used in many radicalization risk assessment methods. Its description goes well beyond the scope of this paper (it can be found with practical applications in: Cole, Cole, Alison, Alison, Waring, Elntib, 2016; Dolnik, 2011; Meloy, Gill, 2016; Nakayama, Lee, 2018), while in operational practice, SPJ has found its application in, among others (Pardyak, 2021):

- a) **Extreme Risk Guidance (ERG22+)** – HM Prison and Probation Service, Great Britain and Wales
- b) **Islamic Radicalisation (IR-46)** – Dutch National Police
- c) **Identifying Vulnerable People (IVP)** – University of Liverpool
- d) **Terrorist Radicalisation Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18)** – American Board of Professional Psychology
- e) **Violent Risk Assessment (VRA)** – University of Ottawa, Netherland Institute for Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry, Correctional Service of New South (Wales)
- f) **Violent Risk Extreme Assessment (VERA)** – Public Safety Canada
- g) **Multi-level Guidance (MLG)** – Fraser University, Canada
- h) **Searching Concealed Information Test (SCIT)** – Kansai University of International Studies, Japan
- i) **Community Policing and the Prevention of Radicalisation (COPpra)** – Europol, Cepol, Belgian Federal Police, EU members



A simplified summary of IAA will be presented for a specific moment in Joseph Kony's more than 30 years of activity, which was the interview the LRA leader gave to Sam Farmer on the Uganda-Congo border in 2006. This was a period of relative "ceasefire" between Joseph Kony and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, after more than two years of devastating fighting between the two sides. Kony (Sender) directed his Message mainly to the international community (Recipient), which pressured both Uganda and South Sudan¹⁶ to become more active in the fight against the LRA.¹⁷

The following table summarizes the survey results for the selected 12 (out of 45 available) perceptual dimensions derived from the analysis of the above interview. Perceptual Coherence was generally defined as either not existing or existing. In the first case, if coherence is not present, it means that for a given dimension there is such a large variation in the directions of pillars that using this dimension for counter-terrorism (CT) purposes will be ineffective. This is because the variation is too great, and the observed differences will work to the disadvantage of all the System's actors (including counter-terrorism institutions if they step in). In other words, anti-terrorist actions would also be neutralized by the influence of other pillars. In the opposite case if there is Perceptual Coherence, there is a risk of radicalization into violent extremism, which requires CT intervention.

Dimensions and their attributes	PERCEPTUAL PILLARS				
	Sender (Kony)	Receipients (Intl comm.)	Message	Context	Perceptual Coherence
Me, Others, Mission	Me	Others	Mission	Others	absent
Stress, Normal, Comfort	Stress	Normal	Normal	Stress	absent
Attention, Resonating, Escalating	Escalating	Resonating	Resonating	Resonating	present
Unconsciousness, Interference, Consciousness	Interference	Consciou sness	Consciou sness	Consciou sness	present
Emotions – Rational analysis	Emotions	Rational	Rational	Rational	present

¹⁶ Also present at the same meeting was the Vice President of South Sudan, Mr. Riek Macker.

¹⁷ This interview in the form of a short report can be found in an open source: <https://vimeo.com/8617828>, accessed 21.11.2020.

Revolution – status quo	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	present
Religiosity – Secularity	Religiosity	Secularity	Secularity	Religiosity	absent
Quick reward, Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	Prolonged feedback	Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	absent
External / Internal authority	Internal authority	External authority	Internal authority	Internal authority	present
Punishment – Forgiveness	Punishment	Punishment	Forgiveness	Forgiveness	absent
Blaming / Justification	Justification	Blaming	Blaming	Justification	absent
Past / Nowadays / Future	Future	Future	Future	Past	present

Table 1. Dimensions, Attributes, Pillars, and Perceptual Coherence, 2021
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

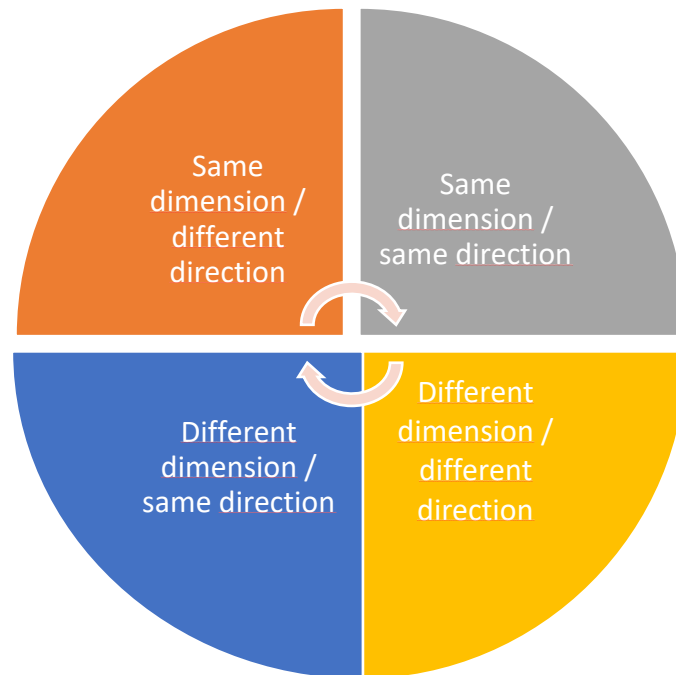
The above table indicates twelve dimensions that can become the basis for building a counter-terrorism strategy. Such activities should cover all the pillars in parallel (in the analysed example: Sender, Recipient, Message, Context) in a coherent and individualized way for each pillar.

3.2 Identification of Counter-terrorism Strategies

Once the dimensions of Perceptual Coherence have been identified, the counter-terrorist institution can choose from four main response strategies as shown in the diagram below. These strategies may include either individual dimensions, specific groups of dimensions, or the entire Perceptual Profile containing all attributes of the analysed entity.

The most intensive efforts should be directed at the pillar that represents the largest share of Perceptual Coherence (rather than, as is often the case, only on the Sender or, even worse, mainly on the Message). Such an approach is a paradigm shift in operation, as it focuses not on populist “firefighting” but on influencing the actors that most constitute vulnerability to the message sent by terrorist organizations. The “same dimension, same direction” strategy is the most confrontational. A potential failure in its application may not only have particularly severe consequences for the counter-terrorist institution, but may also entrench the terrorists. In the case of two of the four strategies on the diagram, the

dimensions they contain are different from the one currently being analysed. The methodology of their selection is based on correlations between dimensions:



*Figure 2. Reaction strategies to terrorist actions; perceptual perspective, 2020
(Source: Pardyak, M.)*

Using historical databases relating to the fluctuation of dimensions and directions within different pillars, it is also possible to build more complex counter-terrorism efforts by, for example, rotating strategies for the same actor, sensitizing a given pillar to specific perceptual dimensions, or combining terrorist strategies with others in such a way as to discredit the former. Staying with the base model, the following example presents a palette of possible responses for one of the dimensions (Attention, Resonating, Escalating), assuming that the Recipient is Kony himself.

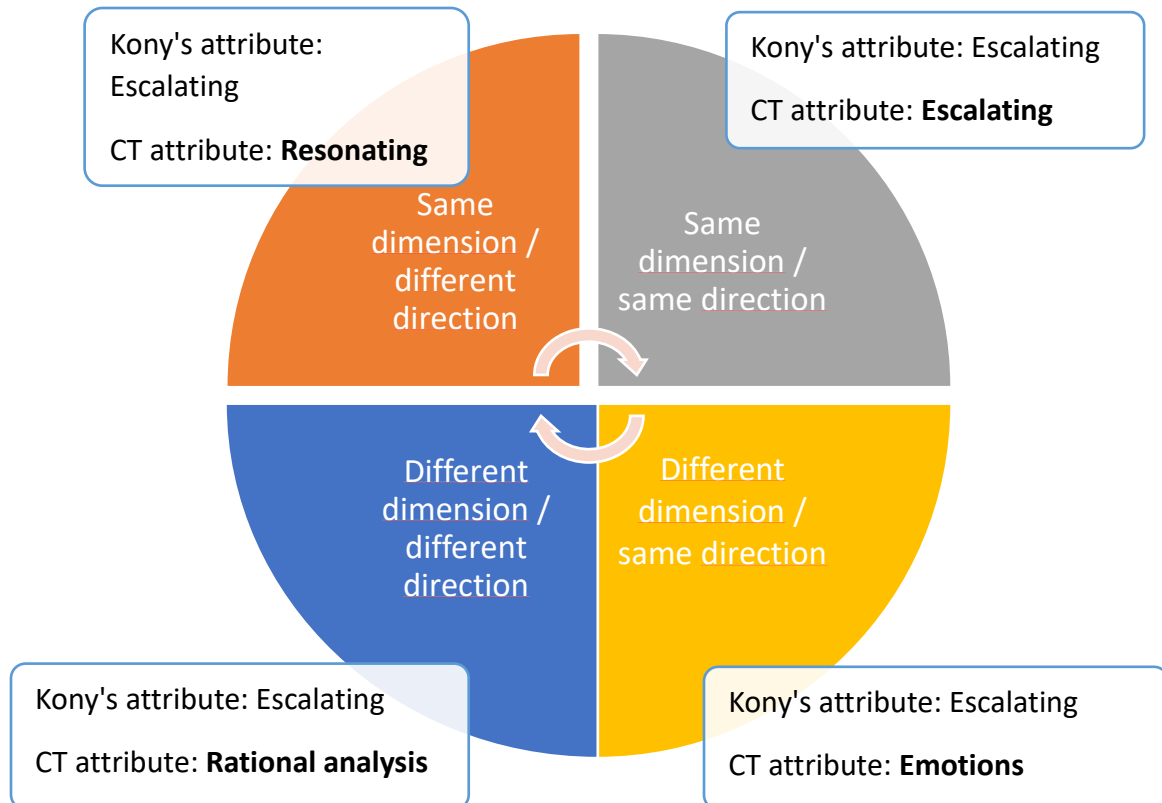


Figure 3. Perceptual response strategies to Kony's message in the dimensions "Attention, Resonating, Escalating", 2021
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

The choice of a particular strategy for a given pillar depends on strategic and operational objectives. Rarely is the immediate annihilation of a terrorist organization possible and equally rarely do attempts to do so have a positive long-term effect. Cutting off one head of the Laemean hydra caused it to grow two others. After the experience of several decades of the "war on terror", one can already draw clear conclusions about effective anti-terrorist strategies and those that had exactly the opposite effect. Acting on all the pillars is a kind of "holistic" and long-term anti-terrorist strategy. This activity may take various operational forms, such as:

- kinetic actions
- socio-psychological actions
- diplomacy (including economic diplomacy)
- attacks on supply chains
- exploiting the advantage in information technology
- and so on.

All of them require a change of perspective and a considerable dose of self-reflection. From the moment an anti-terrorist institution decides to react, it automatically becomes a Sender, and thus contributes its own profile to the Perception System. It rarely happens that its participation is dominant (which in some countries is difficult to admit in front of the



dispensers of financial resources). A similarly high degree of objectivity is required in determining the Perceptual Profile. Arguably, many counter-terrorism institutions would like to be perceived as:

- 1) caring about others (Me, Others, Mission dimension)
- 2) for the safety and comfort of citizens (Stress, Normal, Comfort dimension)
- 3) in the clear. (Unconsciousness, Interference, Consciousness dimension)
- 4) and rational way. (Emotions, Rational Analysis dimension)
- 5) communicating (Attention, Resonating, Escalating dimension)
- 6) its stabilizing functions (Revolution, Status Quo dimension)
- 7) based, among other things, on the equality of different religions. (Religiosity, Secularity dimension)
- 8) Implementing long-term action strategies (Quick reward, Prolonged feedback dimension)
- 9) and building on its extensive experience in countering extremism; (External authority, Internal Authority dimension)
- 10) capable of (Blaming – Justification dimension)
- 11) and punishing anyone (Punishment, Forgiveness dimension)
- 12) who would dare violate the public good (Past / Nowadays / Future dimension).

Unfortunately, often it is only wishful thinking, and an external assessment would be highly advisable. IAA is dynamic and specific for a given Message, Context, Sender, Recipient, and Time. One subject may have as many as a dozen of his base profiles, just as every person may be assessed in different ways depending on whether he is perceived, for example, through a professional, private, spiritual, social, or physiological prism.¹⁸ He can also step into different roles depending on the situation at hand. And it is still the same person. This reflection can lead to another one – the will to influence a subject should include a wide spectrum of influence on and by various other subjects (pillars). Analyzing the LRA example – in column one of the table below is an abbreviated perceptual profile of Joseph Kony. Assuming – for the sake of clarity – that the same Recipients (international community) and context remain, the table below provides an example of what dimensions and attributes could be used to describe CT messages to each of the remaining three actors.

¹⁸ The multiplicity of dimensions that are evident in humans' reactions were addressed also by the Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen (2006).

PILLARS Dimension / Directions	Receiver 1 (Kony)	Message 1	Receiver 2 (Intl comm.)	Message 2	Receiver 3 Context	Message 3
Me, Others, Mission	Me	Me	Others	Others	Others	Others
Stress, Normal, Comfort	Stress	Normal	Normal	Stress	Stress	Normal
Attention, Resonating, Escalating	Escalating	Attention	Resonating	Attention	Resonating	Escalating
Unconsciousness, Interference, Consciousness	Interference	Interference	Consciousness	Interference	Consciousness	Interference
Emotions - Rational analysis	Emotions	Emotions	Rational	Emotions	Rational	Rational
Revolution - status quo	Revolutionary	Status quo	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary
Religiosity - Secularity	Religiosity	Religiosity	Secularity	Religiosity	Religiosity	Secularity
Quick reward, Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	Prolonged feedback	Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	Quick reward	Prolonged feedback
External authority / Internal authority	Internal authority	External authority	External authority	Internal authority	Internal authority	Internal authority
Punishment - Forgiveness	Punishment	Forgiveness	Punishment	Forgiveness	Forgiveness	Forgiveness
Blaming / Justification	Justification	Blaming	Blaming	Blaming	Justification	Blaming
Past / Nowadays / Future	Future	Past (Lakwene)	Future	Nowadays	Past	Past



Table 2. Differentiation of anti-terrorist messages for different pillars of the Perception Security System, 2021
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

The analysis above is not complete as it does not take into account the impact of the Sender and the possible Time Frame, therefore the Perceptual Coherence has not been defined and, for the sake of clarity, the counter strategies have been limited to the same dimensions as the Recipients. Nevertheless, even in this limited form, it is possible to construct a sample “core message” dedicated to different pillars.

*CT’s response to **Kony’s profile (Receiver 1)** should be based on influencing his egotistical vision of himself while creating a semblance of normalcy to the situation (stress heightened his cruelty). It would be necessary to cause a split in attention by using both “real life” and immaterial means. The message should arouse emotions, as they were the catalyst for changes in the LRA structures. It is not Kony but a “force majeure” (also religious) that should be the initiator of these changes, thus limiting his personal sense of influence. The search for any guilt should begin with the sins committed by Kony himself and all his fighters, as only this will save them from the fate that befell his aunt Alice Lakwene (Behrend, 1999; Currey, 2000).¹⁹*

*The CT response to the **international community (Receiver 2)** should raise attention to the real, not assumed, needs of others, which are based in the LRA countries on the symbiosis of spiritual and real life. Stress and emotional tension should be created, because only these attributes have been conducive to change in the past. It is necessary to have a greater understanding of other cultures but also of the real impact that international action has on the “on the ground situation”. The international community, especially Christians, should be encouraged to exert pressure on global and local clerical representatives, because these actions have had positive effects and “stripped” Kony of his supernatural qualities. It would be important to emphasise the time factor and the need to act “here and now” – every day of delay means more civilian victims. Accusations could be directed at the sluggishness of the clergy, part of the media, and politicians (both local and foreign) who used the activities of the LRA²⁰ to satisfy their particular interests. Forgiveness (or none) should be the option and the choice made by the victims, not internationally ordered or imposed.*

*CT response directed to **Context**, which contains information that is more general and can be further disseminated. The message should include that it is necessary to take care of the needs of others. The situation may become normalized if the duality of the functioning of the spiritual and material worlds is emphasized more intensively. There is a need for a “cooler”*

¹⁹ Alice Lakwene – Joseph Kony’s aunt, on whose activities, mistakes, and successes Kony based the creation and development of the LRA

²⁰ In the years prior to Sam Farmer’s interview, the local political and military kaleidoscope was very complex – Uganda was supporting Sudanese insurgents, the Khartoum government was helping guerrillas in Uganda. Sudan armed guerrillas in Chad, and Chad, in turn, sent rifles to rebels in the Central African Republic. The Central African Republic harboured Congo insurgents at home, and the Congo is a safe haven for rebels from many Great Lakes countries. Ethiopia was trying to harm Eritrea and Somalia, and Somalia was destabilizing Kenya.

and more calculated assessment of the occurring events. Such an approach may bring the desired changes, although we will certainly have to wait patiently for them. The awareness of the significance and role of secular structures should be deepened, if not nationwide then regionally, at the municipal/civic or even tribal levels. It would be necessary to emphasize locally occurring resources, raising the belief in one’s own potential for healing. Accusations should be attributed to the perpetrators so that they weigh on them, but in parallel, much forgiveness is needed. “Peace is sometimes more important than justice” (anonymous Acholi).

4. Perceptual Security Fuses & Terrorist Threat Alerts

Integrated Attributional Analysis can be used for a broad set of CT/PVE activities in both the reactive and proactive countermeasures subgroups. It also has “perception fuses” built into its structure, i.e., algorithms that automatically report increasing levels of threat that require immediate intervention. Calibration of the fuses can take place for different categories of data and for different entities, but they are all subject to the same three-stage, progressive scale of threats. It is expressed by three types of alerts:

- 1) convergence
- 2) closure
- 3) domination

Ad.1) The convergence condition occurs when the Perceptual Attributes of the Sender coincide with those of the Recipient:

PILLARS Dimension / Directions	Sender (Kony)	Receipients (Intl community)	Message	Context	Perceptual Coherence
Me, Others, Mission	Me	Others	Mission	Others	absent
Stress, Normal, Comfort	Stress	Normal	Normal	Stress	absent
Attention, Resonating, Escalating	Escalating	Resonating	Resonating	Resonating	present
Unconsciousness, Interference, Consciousness	Interference	Consciou sness	Consciou sness	Consciou sness	present



Emotions - Rational analysis	Emotions	Rational	Rational	Rational	present
Revolution - status quo	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	present
Religiosity – Secularity	Religiosity	Secularity	Secularity	Religiosity	absent
Quick reward, Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	Prolonged feedback	Prolonged feedback	Quick reward	absent
External authority / Internal authority	Internal authority	External authority	Internal authority	Internal authority	present
Punishment - Forgiveness	Punishment	Punishment	Forgiveness	Forgiveness	absent
Blaming / Justification	Justification	Blaming	Blaming	Justification	absent
Past / Nowadays / Future	Future	Future	Future	Past	present

Table 3. Perception Fuses – analysis for the “convergence” alert, 2021
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

Ad.2) Closure condition occurs when the convergence condition is met and, in addition, the Message and/or Context in the given dimensions represent the same attributes:

Dimension / Directions	Sender (Kony)	Receipts (Intl community)	Message	Context	Perceptual Coherence
Revolution - status quo	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	Revolutionary	present
Punishment - Forgiveness	Punishment	Punishment	Forgiveness	Forgiveness	present
Past / Nowadays / Future	Future	Future	Future	Past	present

Table 4. Perception Fuses – analysis for the “closure” alert, 2021

(Source: Pardyak, M.)

Ad.3) The Perceptual Domination condition occurs when the closure condition is met and, in addition, the Sender represents the highest share of Perceptual Coherence for the dimension:

Dimension / Directions	Sender (Kony)	Receipients (Intl community)	Message	Context	Perceptual Dominance
Revolution status quo	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	Revolu tionary	Context
Past / Nowadays / Future	Future	Future	Future	Past	Context

Table 5. Perception Fuses – analysis for the “dominance” alert, 2021
(Source: Pardyak, M.)

In the example above, none of the dimensions reached the Alert 3 ceiling. Perceptual dominance was assigned to the contextual dimensions.

Perception Fuses find their application both in the analysis of threats of individual and group acts of terror. Each alert level is combined with a series of specific recommendations intended for various actors of national anti-terrorist systems.

Integrated Attributional Analysis with all its functionalities is a concept designed for professional users. A caveat: like any other set of tools used in similar contexts, it can be used either ethically or in violation of moral principles. The principles governing human perception are universal and should be explored to enhance security, prosperity, and humanitarianism regardless of national, cultural, or religious differences.

Summary of Interim Findings to Date and Prospective Research

Despite some enthusiastic (and highly subjective) analyses,²¹ Joseph Kony and the LRA have stood the test of time. The organization, which began its activities (according to various sources) in 1986-1988, although weakened and divided into factions, still exists today.²² Each of the operations carried out against the LRA took place at a disproportionately high cost to

²¹ As in the report of Kasper Agger dated October 2013, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Completing-The-Mission-US-Special-Forces-Essential-to-Ending-LRA.pdf> accessed 20.09.2021.

²² One of the most precise online maps showing the on-time terrorism incidents <https://crisistracker.org/map>, access 25.09.2021.



the civilian population,²³ leaving behind transgenerational trauma, regardless of whether these actions were directly military or other causes.²⁴ The LRA organizational culture was built on fear and cruelty toward vulnerable civilian populations. When threatened – it was these elements that were most explored and directed mainly at the civilian population. From the perspective of thirty-odd years, it appears that one of the significant motives of at least some of the forces fighting the LRA was to “achieve spectacular success”, i.e., the capture or killing of Joseph Kony, which might then have been internationally publicized. Would it really have been worthwhile? After all, just as he had taken Alicia Lakwena's place, a successor could quickly be found after his death.

Another perspective rarely raised is that the “humanitarian balance” between the treatment of victims and perpetrators has been upset. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most LRA fighters were both of them. The common narrative was that a 12-year-old from Gulu in Uganda living with his family was a bullied child, while a 12-year-old, kidnapped by the LRA, beaten, raped, and forced to murder others, became a “bloodthirsty beast”.²⁵ Did the concern for those children, 70% of which (at least until the Iron Fist operation) were in Kony's ranks (*Jagielski, 2005*),²⁶ result in sending against them later the machinery of the most powerful army in the world? Compared to that fact, one must also ask how much was done for the long-term protection and rehabilitation of the survivors.

On a slightly broader note, Kony became globally recognized (*CNN, BBC, New Yorker, Oprah Winfrey* etc.) after 1996, when the LRA abducted 139 schoolgirls from Saint Mary's College. A dozen years later and over 4,000 km further northwest, there was the process of a major “internalization” of another terrorist organization, Boko Haram. This group abducted 276 schoolgirls from the Nigerian region of Borno. With this action, the group gained “international fame”, which continues to this day.²⁷ Joseph Kony kidnapped girls for the internal purpose of realizing his “mission” in Uganda, but unintentionally gained global recognition. This behaviour became a model for other terrorist organizations, which, in the following years, also wanted to use media leverage. One of the most effective ways to achieve this goal would be to attack and abuse minors. Thus, the kidnapping of girls will continue as long as, in the opinion of terrorist organizations, it is the most effective way to achieve their goals. The publicity that Kony drew has inspired subsequent imitators and will

²³ It is estimated that, after Operation Iron Fist, the number of displaced persons increased several times to 1.7 million (mainly Acholi); after Operation Lightning Thunder, the number of newly displaced persons exceeded 400,000 (coming from DRC and CAR), the subsequent Operation African Union bears large discrepancies in statistics. The comprehensive report of the aftermath of Operation Lightning Thunder dated April 2009, Schmerus M, Tumutegyerize https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/AfterOperationLightningThunder_200904_ENG.pdf accessed 10.09.2021.

²⁴ Such as the handbills and subsequent trial of Dominic Ongwen at the International Criminal Court <https://www.icc-cpi.int/uganda/ongwen> or the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of US President Barack Obama <https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ172/PLAW-111publ172.pdf> accessed 12.07.2021.

²⁵ Such narratives were a gift to Kony, helping him maintain discipline in the group.

²⁶ Later, due to the trans-border nature of the conflict, statistics vary widely. So do estimates by various organizations stating that the LRA has abducted between 25,000 and 70,000 children through its entire period of operation.

²⁷ Despite the fact that a year later in the village of Baga they massacred probably 2000 inhabitants of this village. Allison S. “I am Charlie but I am Baga too. On Nigeria's forgotten massacre” Daily Maverick 12.01.2015 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-01-12-i-am-charlie-but-i-am-baga-too-on-nigerias-forgotten-massacre/> accessed 22.10.2021.

continue to do so as long as new paradigms of CT/PVE strategy are not adopted. The use of existing ones will unfortunately often be counter-productive.

The role of perception in countering violent extremism is crucial, and in an environment of information overload, its importance continues to grow. It is perception that determines whether or not people are radicalized, recruited, ideologized, and persuaded to commit violent acts. Perception, by analogy, can also play a supporting role in the prevention, deradicalization, and rehabilitation of those experiencing extremism. Finally, perception can become a mortal weapon. The Perception Security System is another space of constant struggle between humanistic development and extremist hatred. The rivalry for hearts and minds is as important as the advancements on any other preventive or combat solutions.

Creating a “*culture of security and defence*”,²⁸ both from internal and international perspectives, requires active promotion, well thought-out strategies, and effective tools. Perception plays a key role in these vitally important domains.

Conflict of interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exist for this manuscript.

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