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Dresser, Paul (2017) Trust Your Instincts – Act! A Critical Examination of PREVENT, Risk and Affect. In: Critical Studies on Terrorism Conference: From Counter-Terrorism to Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism? The Global Governance of Political Violence, 04-05 Sep 2017, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne. (Unpublished)

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A background image showing the lower legs and feet of several people walking on a sandy beach. The scene is backlit by a bright sunset or sunrise, creating a strong silhouette effect and a shimmering, bokeh-like effect on the wet sand. The people are walking from left to right.

Trust Your Instincts – Act! A Critical Examination of PREVENT, Risk and Affect

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Key Arguments

- **Two interwoven claims:**

- 1) PREVENT policing advocates ‘gut-feeling’ as the informational basis of when to escalate intelligence to the police, line manager, etc.*
- 2) The de-politicisation of decision-making and simplification of risk calculus serves strategic / operational purpose(s)

* *Reporting/referral* (i.e. identification) stage in the context of intelligence generation

Methods

- **In-depth semi-structured interviews with Special Branch Officers**
 - Once themes emerged, sample extended to support/challenge intensive data (21 interviews in total)
 - Case study site = ‘non-priority’/ ‘low-risk’ – driven by theory and policy relevance
- **Research caveats:**
 - (1). Generalisability of findings; applicability to police forces. Interpret findings as ‘exploratory’ and ‘instrumental’
 - (2). Truth status of respondents’ accounts (Silverman, 2009) / ‘official’ vs. ‘unofficial’ narratives (Bourdieu, 1977)

Counter-Terrorism Policing

(Innes et al. 2011)

| Stage | Policing Methods / Organisation | Period |
|---------|---|-----------------------------|
| Stage 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Covert/underground▪ 'Clandestine, threat-centric model'▪ Public largely excluded from counter-terrorism policing | Pre- CONTEST (2006) |
| Stage 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 'Refresh' approach (CONTEST/PREVENT)▪ Increase in policing capacity▪ However, lack of innovation regarding public-facing goals | 2006-2011 (CONTEST/PREVENT) |
| Stage 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Entire new method of PREVENT policing▪ Overt – social interaction with police work▪ NP / CP / 'soft power'▪ 'Responsibilisation' / professional settings | 2011 - Present |

Affect

- ‘Affective turn’ - widely applied to explaining anticipatory governance / pre-emption (IR; not novel)
- Affect breakdown: (1) bodily responses (affective resonances)
(2) act as a threshold to trigger action, regarding
(3) imagined potentialities/ (virtual) threat(s)
(Massumi, 2007)
- Action legitimatised by instinctual feeling(s) *i.e. affective facts*.
Erosion of the empirical fact
- ‘Affect’ is used in relationship to instincts, drives and *emotions* (Thien, 2005)
 - Emotion-risk assemblage (Lupton, 2013). Amorphous affects: anxiety, fear, and outrage

Findings: Risk as Feelings

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- ‘Soft facts’ (Innes et al., 2017) as the guiding principle of decisional subjectivity. Capacity to decide based on ‘affective fact’; subsequent decline of the ‘empirical fact’
- Encouragement to trust ‘existential risk system’ which relies on ‘affect’ (i.e. fast, intuitive) over an ‘analytical risk system’ (i.e. slow, reflective, critical) (Slovic et al., 2004) where time is of the essence
- A police tactic used to simplify risk and depoliticise decision-making; lay public/partners could “instantly understand” and “immediately relate” to ‘gut feeling’ as a ‘risk threshold’ (reduce virtual uncertainty, increase reports/referrals).
- Juxtaposed understandings of risk at play within a multi-institutional environment ‘stitched together’ (Dresser, 2015)
- Implanting “It might be nothing, but...” - used as operational linkage for ‘low risk’ police force area

Findings Cont.

- Deleuzian reading of affect as a mechanism of linkage that enables a 'co-functioning of formally distinct processes' (Massumi, 2007: 5) to 'exist in relation' (Anderson, 2007: 160)
- As Massumi puts it: 'affect is an effective mechanism of operational linkage' (2007: 7)
- Sheds light on the practical politics of pre-emption: instinctual stimuli transform radical (virtual) uncertainty from a barrier to *action* (Anderson 2010).

Findings:

Qualitative Quotes

“I think a gut feeling is something [...] probably because it is so broad and **everybody knows what you mean**, because we do talk about theories of radicalisation, some of the concepts are difficult, you know? Getting your head around some of the concepts; being socially isolated and all the other things [...] that may be talked about. But **gut feeling is something that everybody understands instantly** and it is that catch-all, you know [...] ‘I’ve just got a feeling that something’s wrong’ [...] And it could be **as simple as that. People feel relieved that it is a term that they can completely understand** and I don’t have to know what the Terrorism Act. S.1 Part 1 is - you know? Stuff like that. The gut feeling is **simple language** that people know [...] ‘I’ve got a gut feeling that something’s not right’ [...]”

- Interview with practitioner No. 2

“It might be nothing, but...”

“For me, everything you do has to be focused around trust and confidence. So we go back to the doctors and we’ve given them the phrase. If they can leave the presentation with “I’m sure it’s nothing, but [...]” in the back of their mind, that hopefully gives them the trust and confidence in terms of what we’re trying to do with PREVENT. And no matter how little, no information is insignificant because we say a lot of the time, it’s the smallest bit which can complete the picture”.

- Interview with Practitioner No. 4

ACT: Make Nothing Happen

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‘The national campaign by Counter Terrorism Policing continues to urge the public to ***act on their instincts*** to help tackle the terrorist threat. ‘Make Nothing Happen’ focuses on the critical role the public can play in defeating terrorism. Specifically, police are calling on communities to ***act on their instincts*** to help prevent atrocities taking place in the UK and overseas’ (HM Government, 2017: 1, *emphasis added*).

‘If you see or hear something that could be terrorist related, ***act on your instincts*** and call the police, in confidence. It could be someone you know or even someone or something you notice when you are out and about that ***doesn’t feel quite right***’ (HM Government, 2017: 1, *emphasis added*).

- Discourse analysis of official police force websites:
 - (i) **27** make reference to ‘gut-feeling’, ‘trust your instinct(s)’, and/or ‘it might be nothing, but...’
 - (ii) **16** make no such reference

COMMUNITIES DEFEAT TERRORISM


MAKE NOTHING HAPPEN

If you see or hear something that could be terrorist related,
act on your instincts and call the police, in confidence,
on **0800 789 521** or visit **gov.uk/ACT**



ACT

ACTION
COUNTERS
TERRORISM

 Terrorism Police UK @TerrorismPolice · Nov 28
Listen to your instincts or that gut feeling you have. You can remain anonymous. Call the #ATH 0800789321 - Your call could save lives.



Project PEGASUS

HEAR OR SEE ANYTHING UNUSUAL IN OR AROUND YOUR LOCAL AIRFIELD?


 National Crime Agency  Border Force  ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

If you see or hear something that could be terrorist related, **trust your instincts** and call the confidential


ANTI-TERRORIST HOTLINE


Specially trained police officers will take it from there

 Small Ports Team @HantspolPlanes · 30 Nov 2016
Welcome to the aviation community to be vigilant. Trust your instincts. Report anything suspicious.
#CTAW2016 #avgeek
Trust your gut instinct

 West Mercia Police ✓
@WMerciaPolice 

Counter Terrorism Awareness Week - listen to your instincts and read the advice below #ATH #CTAW2016

 Prevent Tragedies @PreventUK · Feb 1
Listen to your instincts or that gut feeling you have & call the #ATH 0800789321. Your call could save lives.

 Prevent Tragedies @PreventUK
Listen to your instincts or that gut feeling you have and call the #ATH 0800 789321 to speak specially trained officers about it.
#CTAW2016

IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING, BUT...
IF YOU SEE OR HEAR SOMETHING THAT COULD BE TERRORIST RELATED TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS AND CALL THE CONFIDENTIAL ANTI-TERRORIST HOTLINE. Specially trained officers will take it from there.
0800 789 321

ANTI-TERRORIST HOTLINE

0800 789 321

Your call could save lives

0:03  10  5

Conclusion

- (1) Exploration of the PREVENT/risk relationship; (2) How PREVENT policing is actualized, (re)configured and performed
- Decisional subjectivity devoid of critical, reflective judgement
- Depoliticising decision-making and simplification of risk proffers operational benefits. Research ambivalent on effectiveness
- Concluding thought ...
- ...'Professional judgement' in NHS (Heath-Kelly, 2017) - evacuation of pre-fixed profiling; suspicious and non-suspicious bodies collapse into a vague and capricious jigsaw
 - Affect heuristic (Slovic et al. 2004)
 - Risk as *politics*

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