

The smart arm of the law

Suppose you're a police officer at a major airport. Every hour thousands of people walk past. How do you pick out those people that have wrong intentions? The Dutch Police Academy is training its officers in the Search, Detect & React™ method and now wants to scientifically substantiate the method with the help of TNO.

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Most people at airports have no wrong intentions but there are a few that could be planning a terrorist attack or other crime. If people exhibit terrorist, dangerous or suspicious behaviour, then the police know exactly what to do. But if the behaviour deviates yet is not directly suspicious, then it becomes an awkward situation. How can you know whether someone has wrong intentions? On what grounds do you single someone out from the crowd? 'We did not actually know what to look for, the officers reacted in a random fashion,' says Niels Brouwer, Police Academy trainer and advisor. 'Until we came into contact with the Search, Detect & React™ method at the Israeli *International Security & Counter-terrorism Academy*. This gave us insight into the factors we had to look out for and the way to deal with them.' If an officer sees deviating behaviour, then he could address or look that person straight in the eyes. Depending on the reaction, the police officer will decide the next step. Some 1600 police officers and military police have already followed the training.

The method appears to work: the number of complaints about police action is falling and efficiency is rising. Brouwer: 'Before the training we would get complaints about 'ethnic targeting', with people believing that they were being confronted about their behaviour because they were wearing a djellaba, an Arabic male robe. Sometimes they were right but sometimes not. But the officer was unable to satisfactorily explain why these persons had been singled out. Since the training we have many fewer "false positives": if we confront someone, then now it is for a good reason.' The training was the recipient of the Safety & Security Award 2009.

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However, according to Brouwer and TNO's Maaike Lousberg, there is still room for improvement. 'Scientific substantiation can boost the yield.' Further professionalisation of the training is a good thing because human observation will always be the key factor in detecting deviating behaviour. Lousberg: 'On behalf of the National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, TNO identified the behaviour of people preparing, carrying out or having carried out terrorist activity. An interdisciplinary team of psychologists, technicians and field experts suggested that about half of all these behaviours could never be detected by an intelligent camera so good observers remain indispensable. However, much deviating behaviour will, in time, become automatically detectable through the use of smart cameras and the like. They have much to offer and that bodes very well in the fight against criminal activity.'

Lousberg and Brouwer are now working on a scientific basis for the training. Brouwer: 'The police goal of *Better Blue* aims to do the same amount of work with fewer people. Further professionalisation is therefore essential. TNO can help us achieve this.' Lousberg is also enthusiastic: 'Using police input we can develop training that is ultimately valuable for private security companies, customs and defence.' And therefore good for all those visitors to airports that have nothing other than good intentions.

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Photo: Jean-Pierre Jans