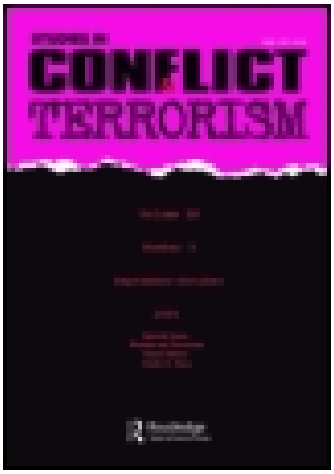

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20

Terrorism Research: Past, Present, and Future

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Published online: 21 Nov 2014.

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 0:1–13, 2015

ISSN: 1057-610X print / 1521-0731 online
DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2014.976011

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Research Note

Terrorism Research: Past, Present, and Future

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Research on terrorism and counterterrorism draws on many disciplines, including Politics, History, Sociology and Anthropology. Yet there are concerns about scope, methodology, impact, and the level of public debate. An agreed definition of terrorism is unattainable: there should be more focus on particular acts rather than labelling whole movements. The threat of terrorism should be kept in proportion. Understanding its causes, and associated belief-systems, is crucial to conducting effective counterterrorist operations. Evaluations of the effectiveness of both terrorism and counterterrorism need to encompass more factors, including terrorism's deadliest legacies: wars on terror that fail, and a habit of violence.

The propositions that terrorism and counterterrorism might be appropriate subjects for academic research—and that together they could constitute a field of study—is of comparatively recent origin. Until about half a century ago terrorist movements featured less in the work of academics than in that of novelists, whose insights and approaches to the subject have lost none of their relevance today.

Systematic and comparative academic research on the subject can trace its origins at least as far back as the 1960s and 1970s, when some important work was done on Algeria and on Indochina/Vietnam. The subject has not merely continued to exist, but has grown, and has developed in interesting ways. Terrorism and counterterrorism have been recognized as legitimate subjects of study not only for the distressingly obvious reason that there is a lot of terrorism and counterterrorism going on, but also for the better reason that many works of the last few decades have made a real contribution to the understanding of an often misunderstood phenomenon. Work on the subject has drawn on a wide range of disciplines and subject-areas, including Politics, International Relations, History, Sociology, Anthropology, and more. It has yielded some remarkable insights—not least into the motivations, world-views, and dynamics of terrorist movements, the threat they pose to many societies including some liberal democracies, the ways in which they decline and fall, and both the strengths and the weaknesses of counterterrorist policies pursued by states. On these and many other issues, we know far more than we did. As we

Received 9 October 2014; accepted 13 October 2014.
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mark twenty years of research in the field here at St Andrews, and the unique contribution of Paul Wilkinson to this field of study over many decades, it is appropriate that we salute what has been achieved.

The Controversial Nature of Terrorism Research

Yet research into terrorism and counterterrorism is always and unavoidably controversial. The very word "terrorism" is notoriously problematic—not least because to many it epitomizes an unattractive mix of shrill condemnation, political orthodoxy, and conceptual narrowness. The definition of terrorism is a long-standing bone of contention that will not be sorted out any time soon. The links between students of terrorism and practitioners involved in it, including members of national intelligence agencies, is a rich source of difficulty: too close, with the risk of being perceived as complicit in the group-think or worse that often pervades such agencies; or too distant, and the research may be academic in the worst sense of the word.

For some academic disciplines, the study of terrorism is especially problematic because it changes—one might even say deforms—the central core of the subject. For example, Political Theory, Sociology, and International Relations have all in their different ways tended to accept the Weberian view of the state as having a monopoly of the means of violence in its territory. The subject of terrorism not only blurs that focus, but also introduces disconcerting new elements. The optimistic idea that political theory is about the pursuit of the good life may take second place to a much less Olympian notion of the state as a Leviathan not just protecting its citizens against external threat, but also controlling them and being in a state of struggle with them.

The methodology of studying terrorism has also been a perennial worry. To understand, for example, why a movement grows or declines, why it pursues particular forms of action, and how it relates to the people it claims to represent, it helps to have extensive data on how it is perceived among a given population—and some of the finest studies in the field have achieved exactly this. Yet obtaining such data in, say, the Islamic State would involve not only health and safety problems for the researcher and indeed for any respondents, but also credibility problems so far as any results are concerned. For those to whom all social research revolves round the idea of data against which a falsifiable proposition may be tested, terrorism research, because it sometimes has to rely on something less than fully formed social datasets, risks being as open to abuse as it is to criticism.

The study of terrorism and counterterrorism has indeed faced many criticisms, not least in the pages of this journal. None of us can view the present state of the subject as satisfactory. In many countries, the level of public and official exposition of the subject is often crude; the impact of academics in actually influencing policy is less than it should have been; and sometimes our own explorations of fundamental issues have verged on the superficial.

There are many issues on which hard thought is needed about future research agendas. I will briefly allude to eight of them: (1) The case for a historical approach. (2) The perennial problem of the definition of terrorism. (3) The need to keep the subject in proportion. (4) Key controversies about the causation of terrorism. (5) Evaluations of its effectiveness as a method. (6) Weaknesses of the doctrine of attacking terrorism at source. (7) Terrorism's deadliest legacy: the habit of violence. (8) The shortcomings of counterterrorist thought and policies.

The Case for a Historical Approach

Many in the contemporary world live in a temporal ghetto, believing that they are somehow more blessed than their forebears, that the past is a benighted realm of which they do not need to take account. Being a former student of the historian A.J.P. Taylor, I am nervous about drawing lessons from history. However, without making any excessive claims for the study of history as necessarily conferring wisdom, there are some important lessons to be drawn from the history of terrorist movements. If the last few decades have taught us anything about terrorism and counterterrorism, it is precisely that we ignore history at our peril. The old adage that those who ignore the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them could have been crafted with the subjects of terrorism and counterterrorism in mind.

The first historical lesson is that there can be an illusory element in both terrorism and counterterrorism. In both cases there is often a belief that a few acts of great violence (the destruction of the twin towers, or the invasion of Iraq) will transform the political landscape. In neither case did they do so in quite the way the perpetrators intended. I will look more at this matter below.

A second lesson is that the belief that terrorism represents a new and worrying threat to international order is itself far from new. Narodnaya Volya in Russia, in the nineteenth century, and the spate of anarchist bombings and assassinations that followed in succeeding decades, contributed powerfully to a widely held fear that the world faced a unique and dangerous challenge. In the 1980s there was another huge wave of concern about international terrorism. Consider, for example, the first paragraph of the declaration on terrorism issued by the G7 Tokyo summit of May 1986:

> We, the heads of state or government of seven major democracies and the representatives of the European Community . . . strongly reaffirm our condemnation of international terrorism in all its forms, of its accomplices and of those, including governments, who sponsor or support it.[1]

There is a natural human tendency to ignore such earlier episodes of extreme concern about terrorism, for the simple reason that we now know that humankind survived these crises. But an awareness of these earlier episodes might help us to put our present concerns into a historical context that helps us to think about the problems involved. The argument that 9/11 changed everything contains of course a germ of truth, but it is also deeply deceiving, and reinforces the retreat into a temporal ghetto.

A third historical lesson is that terrorist campaigns end in an extraordinarily wide variety of ways. Audrey Kurth Cronin and others have in recent years done notable work on this hitherto neglected subject of how terrorist campaigns actually end, but there is scope for more.[2] An awareness of the variety and complexity of actual endings has huge implications for how counterterrorist actions are conceived.

To urge the validity of these three, and indeed other, lessons is not to deny the seriousness of current security problems faced by states, nor is it to suggest that there are no new elements in contemporary terrorism and counterterrorism. Although our current concerns have their historical precedents, the degree of concern is undeniably very great today. Questions related to terrorism have become central in the security policies of many states and in their relations with each other; policies regarding terrorism often clash with norms prohibiting torture or upholding the doctrine of state sovereignty; and, alongside some modest successes, there has been much evidence of failures in addressing the problem.

This is a time at which those of us involved in studying terrorism and counterterrorism could usefully take stock, and perhaps also make some historically informed contributions to public debate and governmental decision making about these issues.

The Perennial Problem of the Definition of Terrorism

The problem of defining terrorism has occupied much time of academics, lawyers, and diplomats. There has been some progress, both in the national legislation of states and in a number of international deliberations, including those under UN auspices. However, there is no sign of anything resembling a final resolution of the definition problem. I want to advance four propositions about it.

a. As with other abstract terms in politics (think of the debates over the meanings of "imperialism" and "democracy") the core meaning is clear and the periphery is, and is likely to remain, debatable.
b. Like many words, its meaning has changed over time and also changes as between different countries and political traditions. It is the very nature of international relations that there should be profoundly different views of the world.
c. Somewhere in the definition there should be acknowledgment of the phenomenon of state terror. To rule this out of the definition is to give a gift to the critics of terrorism studies, who see the whole project as inherently too statist.
d. Since terrorism is a contested concept, the word should be applied with care and appropriate scholarly caution. We academics interested in the subject may need to do more about what are arguably misuses of the term.

One of the main underlying reasons for attempting to define terrorism has been to provide a basis for outlawing particular terrorist movements. Some such outlawing can be an entirely proper activity that can help in the process of denying particular organizations funding and help from outside. However, there are well-known hazards in outlawing whole movements on the grounds that they are terroristic. I will mention three of them. (1) Labeling a whole movement as "terrorist" can be crude, and can even amount to serious misrepresentation. The 1988 U.S. and U.K. listing of the African National Congress as "terrorist" is one example, implying as it did a shocking failure to distinguish between one activity of one wing at one time and the movement in its entirety. A current case of simplistic use of the term is the Ukrainian government's labeling of the pro-Russian separatist forces in Ukraine as "terrorists." (2) Labeling a whole body as terrorist may, under certain national legal systems, make it difficult if not impossible to conduct negotiations with them. Yet there can be a range of solid and respectable reasons why, at certain times and in certain contexts, it may be sensible for governments to try to negotiate even with adversaries who have used terrorist methods. (3) Similarly, the labeling of a body as terrorist may inhibit the subsequent forming of a de facto or even open alliance with such a body when circumstances change and many see an alliance against a greater threat as urgently needed. A possible example is the pressure in late 2014 for forces opposing the Islamic State to come to some kind of agreement with the Turkish Kurdish organization PKK, despite the fact that is classified by numerous Western states and Turkey as a "terrorist organization."

Because of the inherent problems of defining terrorism, and of securing agreement on listing particular movements as terrorist, there may sometimes be a case for focusing on terrorist *acts*, not on terrorist movements or terrorism as such. To define particular

acts as terroristic may be intellectually more defensible, legally sounder, and perhaps even politically more productive.

The Need to Keep the Subject in Proportion

If we think of terrorism as one among many natural and man-made hazards that human beings face, it has to be rated quite low on the scale. There is no doubt at all that, as John Mueller and others have shown, an individual citizen is far more likely to drown in the bath, or get killed in a car crash, or be struck by lightning, than to be a victim of terrorism. We all need to keep terrorism in proportion.

However, there are reasons for taking what is a statistically quite minor threat seriously. First, it is at least possible that the low level of incidence of terrorist attacks may be due partly to the counterterrorism efforts of the police and countless others. Taking the problem seriously—for example, by airport scanning of luggage—may actually help to keep it under control. Secondly, unlike a drowning in the bath and similar hazards, terrorist acts are intended to have a wider effect on populations, to make them change their behavior in one way or another. For example, killing tourists at Luxor did huge damage to Egypt's tourist industry. Thirdly, the very deliberate quality of terrorist acts naturally inspires revulsion and a desire for counteraction in some form, whether through local acts of revenge, legal process, or military action. In short, to say that terrorism needs to be kept in proportion does not necessarily mean that it can be safely treated as one of life's minor hazards about which relatively little can and should be done.

A further reason for keeping terrorism in proportion is sometimes, in response to terrorist acts, the best response a target population can make is to get on with their lives. When the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) launched a bombing campaign on the U.K. mainland, the U.K. population was quite largely unresponsive. The bombers faced, and failed to do anything much about, a veritable ocean of indifference. It is a hard thing to fight against.

Key Controversies About the Causation of Terrorism

Those involved in combating terrorist campaigns sometimes have difficulty in accepting how important it can be to understand the political context of the conflict. Crude characterizations of the causes of a particular campaign may actually make it more difficult to conduct effective counterterrorist operations, and to retain public support. Such characterizations may also make it more difficult to conduct effective negotiations with a movement using terrorist methods.

Some of the most interesting debates in the literature on terrorism have been about underlying causes. For example, writings on the U.S. war in Vietnam, including the work of the late Douglas Pike, contain important evidence-based explorations of the extent to which popular support for the Viet Cong was terror-induced or, alternatively, grievance-based. And Richard English's work on the Provisional IRA is a model of how to cover the causes and self-pronounced rationale of a terrorist movement fully and carefully, even sympathetically, while at the same time maintaining a strong critical stance and appropriate scholarly detachment.[3]

In the "War on Terror" since 2001, there are at least three aspects of causation that need to be understood better than they generally have been.

a. Foreign military occupation is a central issue in the causation of at least some terrorist campaigns, not least those of the present day. Robert Pape has argued convincingly that a main cause of much terrorist action, including suicide bombings, is the perception that foreign armed forces are essentially occupying powers.[4] Here both he and I are using the term "occupation" as it is commonly used in political to-and-fro, including of course in the Middle East. This involves a distinct stretching of the international legal concept of occupation, which generally excludes the case where foreign forces are present in a territory with the consent of the government of the country for what are essentially defensive purposes—as was the case with the intensely controversial U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia following the Iraqi attack on Kuwait in 1990. As always in politics, it is perceptions that count, and the view of the United States as an occupying power, which was reinforced by the invasion of Iraq in 2003, was a major problem.
b. Torture and ill-treatment by governments in the name of preserving order can be a major driver of terrorist movements. In Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, as well as more generally in the George W. Bush years of the "War on Terror," many movements have specifically and credibly cited torture as a part of the rationale for their existence and/or their continued activities.
c. Belief systems, and the religious garb in which they are often cloaked, are all-important and need to be understood. Indeed, much terrorist activity is the product of a set of beliefs about the world and how it might be altered that are not as such exclusively religious, and may be subject to change. Because of this, it is important that attempts be made to challenge and weaken such belief systems as are particularly conducive to terrorism. Jeff Goodwin and others have criticized the naming of this activity as "deradicalization," because it involves a misuse of the word "radical"—a term that can have a perfectly honorable meaning.[5] I agree with him, but we do need some term to describe elements of a terrorist-inclining belief system and how individuals arrive at it. And we do need to emphasize the importance of studies in this tricky area.

Evaluations of Terrorism's Effectiveness as a Method

Assessments of the effectiveness or otherwise of terrorism need to be made with particular care—not least because they are liable to affect the behavior of individuals and the policies of states. The task is both delicate and complex, and we do not always get it right. It is true, and should be conceded from the outset, that sometimes terrorist movements achieve some of their objectives. However, listing particular cases as successes or failures tends to over-simplify the frequently ambiguous outcomes of terrorist campaigns. Three examples of what have sometimes been classified as terrorist "successes" illustrate the point:

- *Lebanon.* The United States and others left Lebanon after the October 1983 bombing of the U.S. barracks. This withdrawal, which was indeed a U.S. setback, can easily be viewed as a terrorist "success," but Lebanon remained a society deeply divided and torn by violence, and subject to military occupation of parts of its territory by both Syria (1976–2005) and Israel (1982–2000). Acts of terrorism continued. Indeed, it was such an act in 2005, the assassination of Rafic Hariri, widely attributed to the Syrian government, that caused a wave of indignation and precipitated the Syrian withdrawal: a case of the unintended consequences that often flow from terrorist

acts. In short, looked at through a Lebanese lens and over a long time-frame, the 1983 events do not constitute a terrorist success.

- *Northern Ireland.* The "Good Friday Agreement" concluded in Belfast on 10 April 1988—a key part of the peace settlement in Northern Ireland after two decades of the Troubles—is indeed a case of an outcome that did have significant input from terrorists. However, the terms were not ones that the Provisional IRA would have dreamed of accepting when the struggle began three decades earlier. The Irish republicans had bombed themselves as well as their adversaries to the negotiating table.
- *Rwanda and Srebrenica.* Claims that, in some general sense, "Genocide works!," or that genocide "worked" in these two cases in 1994 and 1995, should be viewed with extreme scepticism. In both Rwanda and Bosnia, those who perpetrated mass killings were out of power within a year, partly because the effect of their actions had been to strengthen the determination and international legitimacy of their opponents.

In general, as these cases illustrate, we need to think hard about how we gauge success. Havens, Leiden, and Schmitt, in their book on *The Politics of Assassination*, showed how important it is to distinguish between technical success in achieving the immediate intended goal (in this case, killing a head of state or prime minister) and more substantial success in bringing about an intended change in government policy or the social order. The first was achieved frequently, the second almost never.[6]

I will add more in a moment about another problem that necessitates additional caution in making claims of success: terrorism's tendency to spread, and to become an endemic sickness within a society or region.

The question of how success and failure are assessed has many other dimensions. We all owe a debt to Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan for their interesting comparison of the relative success of violent resistance and civil resistance, "Why Civil Resistance Works," first published in *International Security* in Summer 2008, and then developed in 2011 in their book *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*.[7] Their consideration of violence is not specifically about terrorism, but the book and the methodology employed in it are germane to our consideration of success or failure in terrorism as well. Their central conclusion is summed up thus: "The most striking finding is that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts."[8] I claim no expertise in the statistics of conflict, and I raise one aspect of this not as an objection, but as a question: does their generally excellent analysis make sufficient allowance for the possibility that violence may sometimes arise in more desperate (and often more chaotic) circumstances than does nonviolent action, and may show a higher failure rate for that reason as well as the other ones they identified so convincingly? In chapter 3 of their book, they carefully explore alternative explanations for the comparative success of civil resistance. Further, they show full awareness of "the confounding effects of other factors that may influence the outcome," and they state:

> For example, instead of trying to compare a nonviolent resistance campaign in Serbia with a violent resistance campaign in the Philippines, we compare both types of campaigns in a single country. In this way we avoid trying to compare violent and nonviolent campaigns that occurred in different circumstances that might have affected the outcomes.[9]

The concern is thus not that they are blind to the problem of different circumstances. Nor is it a problem that in their lists they include certain armed resistance campaigns that took place in exceptionally hard circumstances, including several of the cases of armed resistance against Axis occupations during the Second World War.[10] Nor is it a problem that they evaluate many of them as failures. The question is whether some of these cases of violent resistance took place in violent and chaotic circumstances that were different from many of the circumstances encountered in some of the nonviolent campaigns in their lists. This may have influenced their overall finding about the likelihood of success of civil resistance.

I am not suggesting here that there could be no nonviolent resistance against the Axis powers, nor indeed am I suggesting that any such resistance was doomed to failure. There were some modest successes on this front, including the rescue of the Danish Jews. The suggestion here is simply that there may be a need for a bit more granularity in assessing the circumstances, and comparing the outcomes, of violent and nonviolent campaigns.

This problem relates also to the question of the criteria for evaluating whether a given case should be judged a failure or success—or something in between. Chenoweth and Stephan explain their approach to this with much care, but I retain a doubt about whether it makes enough allowance for the complexity of many cases and the ambiguity inherent in historical judgments. There is room for debate about several of their judgments of success or failure, including for example the evaluation of the nonviolent resistance of the 1923 *Ruhrkampf* in Germany as a "success." And that type of doubt about characterizations of movements as success or failure applies, as I have indicated, as much to the evaluation of terrorist campaigns as it does to other violent (or indeed nonviolent) campaigns.

The Doctrine of Attacking Terrorism at Source

After the events of 9/11 in the United States, the U.S. and U.K. governments both adopted policies and even doctrines advocating that all international terrorism should be attacked at source—that is, in the country from which it originates. As the U.K. government document *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* put it: "Experience shows that it is better where possible to engage an enemy at longer range, before they get the opportunity to mount an assault on the UK".[11] In October 2002, when the House of Commons Defence Committee held an inquiry that looked at this and other changes to U.K. defense doctrine, I submitted evidence pointing out that such a doctrine could be a recipe for disaster.[12] There is no shortage of evidence that antiterrorist invasions of foreign countries tend to go wrong. Three illustrations must suffice.

Outbreak of the First World War in 1914. "Terrorism" and "terrorists" were mentioned twice in the Habsburg ultimatum to Serbia that followed some time after the Sarajevo assassination. It took the Austrians over three weeks to draw up the ultimatum, yet Serbia, which stood accused of state-sponsored terrorism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was supposed to agree to its terms in two days. Although the Austrians were of course concerned with a range of issues, going beyond wiping out the "hornet's nest" in Serbia, the war was at least in part an antiterrorist war. In this anniversary year we need to recall that by starting this war the Habsburg monarchy signed its own death warrant. Such wars tend to fail—especially in situations in which, as was the case in Serbia in 1914, there is a significant degree of public sympathy or support for those labeled as "terrorists" by the intervening power. In the United Kingdom and many other countries we have excised from our collective memory the fact of the war's antiterrorist beginnings: perhaps it is inconvenient to remember that we fought in

World War I on the same side as the terrorism-supporting Serbia. In all the commemorations of 1914 I have seen no reference to the war's beginnings as a counterterrorist project.

Israeli intervention in Lebanon 1982. This invasion, and the consequent occupation of parts of Lebanon, was explicitly an antiterrorist war. This too went dreadfully wrong, resulting in the creation of a new terrorist organization, Hezbollah, and in the long and costly Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon.

Interventions during the "Global War on Terror" since 2001. The U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), both of which were stated in Washington and some other capitals to be part of this "War on Terror," have both had results that have fallen far short of what was hoped for and planned.

Why do these wars tend to go so badly wrong? An underlying reason is that there has been a tendency on the part of those intervening to underestimate the nationalism of others. To explain in more detail, antiterrorist invasions often involve extensive policing and other activities by outsiders in the target country, and also finding collaborators willing to help in this difficult process. Such wars and the resulting occupations sometimes even involve outsiders in appearing to blame an entire country for the activities of terrorists in their midst. Friction and resentment are almost inevitable, especially if the outsiders have little understanding of the target country, its history, culture, and languages. Nationalist appeals to resist such an outside presence frequently get a positive response from the general population.

Terrorism's Deadliest Legacy: The Habit of Violence

The consequences of terrorist acts do not end with one event. Any such act may have a wide range of consequences. One of the most serious consequences of terrorism is the spreading of violence so it becomes a habit in society. There is remarkably little literature on this either as a fear than drives policy, or as a reality.

Past cases of terrorism spreading include:

Middle East. Terrorist acts were undertaken by the Irgun (from 1931) and its offshoot the Stern Gang (from 1940), and were later taken up by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and numerous other bodies.

Cyprus. The formation of *Ethnikí Orgánosis Kipriakoú Agónos* (EOKA) in the 1950s, calling for union with Greece, was followed by the formation of the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT), reflecting the fears of the Turkish minority population of Cyprus.

Sri Lanka. The country's descent into political violence began with the armed socialist uprising led by the People's Liberation Front (JVP) in 1971, followed by the formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with which the Sri Lankan government was engaged continuously from 1983 onward.

One could cite many other such examples, not least from the former Yugoslavia, Ireland, and South-East Asia. Why does terrorism become almost endemic in certain societies? Part of the answer lies in the way in which a terrorist movement to advance the cause of a majority ethnic or religious group in a society is likely to be perceived as a threat by minority groups, which then seek to defend their homes, land, and political claims. Another part of the answer is that by its very nature a campaign of terrorism does not require the degree of social organization that is needed to create, say, a rebel army to fight a civil war: it can start from very small and informal beginnings. And precisely because terrorist groups

are relatively easy to set up, if a movement as a whole reaches a negotiated settlement of a conflict, there is always the possibility of a sub-group splitting off in order to continue the struggle. Finally, fascination with the deed can make terrorism attractive to individuals dissatisfied with their lives.

If the proposition about terrorism's propensity to spread within a society where it occurs has any merit, then a possible conclusion follows. This is that terrorism poses the greatest threat, not to Western societies, but to those in which it has become more or less endemic. Indeed it is not difficult to see that, for example, it acted as a brake on social and economic development in many of certain Arab countries, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and many others.

Some Shortcomings of Counterterrorist Thought and Policies

In the period since 11 September 2011, the record of counterterrorist thought and policies is at best patchy. One could even say that both sides are losing the "War on Terror." An underlying question arises: Is there something in the way we have framed terrorism and counterterrorism that has led to these great road crashes? I cannot offer a definitive answer in these short remarks, but I can point to some issues that would need to be considered.

Counterterrorism is not a monolithic target. It has taken many different forms, and some have been notably more successful than others. Patient and skilled national police work lies at the core of successful counterterrorism, but is not on its own enough when faced with a terrorist challenge as multinational and hydra-headed as that encountered in the "War on Terror." We certainly need more, and more systematic, analysis of why counterterrorism sometimes proves effective, and also why it so often goes wrong.

When counterterrorism assumes a military form, and particularly when it involves invading foreign lands, it risks running into trouble. Invading and occupying foreign lands in order to hunt down terrorist movements tends to involve constant friction with the population as doors are bashed down at night, and the innocent are detained along with the guilty.

Thought about how armed forces can deal with terrorism has been greatly influenced by doctrines of counterinsurgency. The key publication of the period since 9/11 is unquestionably *Counterinsurgency*, US Army Field Manual 3-24, published in December 2006. Its intellectual starting point is a wholly admirable recognition of the damage that can be done by using conventional military tactics against an adversary who hides among the people. However, the approach of this publication also exhibits a key weakness, which is the apparent assumption that there is a state with real power, that really impinges on people's lives, and can win the loyalty of its inhabitants. This is hardly the case in Afghanistan.

The recognition that, whether or not with the benefit of counterinsurgency doctrine, Western military presences end up being viewed as occupations, and involve heavy losses for the intervening forces, has led to a belated understanding in both Washington and London that Western "boots on the ground" are not a good way to try to turn countries away from supporting or tolerating terrorists in their midst. Instead, there is an even greater tendency than before to rely on air power as the preferred means of action by outside states.

This preference for air power as the default position has been evident in Western responses to the establishment of the Islamic State in the course of 2014. Neighboring and Western states cannot do nothing about the Islamic State. As we saw in August and September 2014, when hundreds of those fleeing the state were stranded and vulnerable

in mountains, something could be, had to be, and was done. Questions still faced by policymakers include:

- Will the Islamic State implode? It will certainly face internal problems within the territory it controls; and more generally in the Islamic world, because its intention to make the caliphate universal is a direct threat to all other states in the region.
- What are the dangers of Western states leading the coalition against the Islamic State? May it appear in many eyes as yet another Western crusade?
- Above all, does the reliance on air power as a weapon of choice pose problems at least as great as boots on the ground? Will the present campaign be any more successful than the pioneering British uses of air power in the doomed attempts to control Iraq in the inter-war years? It is true that bombing from the air has changed out of all recognition in the past half century, but it is still very limited in what it can achieve against a terrorist movement, even when it is holding territory and constitutes a state of sorts. In addition, there remain some worrying similarities between the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) tendencies to rely on air power, and some elements of the terrorist tradition itself.

The tendency to rely on air power brings us back to arguments about the comparative ethics of terrorism and counterterrorism. Has the tendency to neglect certain ethical provisions and those of the laws of war been damaging? An argument often heard is that there is some moral equivalence between a bombing from the air hitting a wedding party and the beheading of captives. There is much truth in this claim of equivalence between terrorists and their adversaries, but in this case there is one difference between them. The beheadings have occurred when individuals were under the control of the adversary. To commit atrocities against those under one's control is a particularly clear violation of basic moral and legal precepts.

Action by states against terrorists frequently involves detaining and holding large numbers of suspects—a process that tends to be intensely controversial domestically and internationally. The "War on Terror" has seen countless abuses in this area. Treating prisoners in such a way that you dare not put them on trial, for fear that they will spill the beans about torture, is a legacy from the George W. Bush era illustrating some of the absurdities of the way the counterterrorist struggle has been conducted.

However, it is never any use criticizing a policy if any clear notion of a possible alternative is lacking. So I repeat, we do urgently need more and better research on what actually works in counterterrorism. And that needs to encompass some forms of military as well as police action.

There is one aspect of counterterrorism that has been sadly under-emphasized in recent years. In view of the importance of belief systems to terrorist activities, the use of the media is absolutely fundamental to both terrorism and counterterrorism. The connection between terrorism and journalism has long been recognized, not least by Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf in their great book *Violence as Communication*.[13] Yet today there are some odd gaps in the way terrorist beliefs are countered. In particular, the Internet has created a revolution in communications technology at least as great as the invention of the printing press. It needs to be employed much more effectively than it has been. For example, it could be used to counter the simplistic argument that terrorism is the only possible method and that it works. It could also be used, much more than it has been, to counter the equally simplistic argument that Western policy consists of a systematic pattern of assaults on Muslim lands and people: for example, it would be good to see more forthright and clear reminders that two major military interventions of the post–Cold War era—the 1995 NATO

bombings in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the 1999 bombings in Kosovo and Serbia—were intended to, and did, help beleaguered Muslims who were under threat from supposedly Christian adversaries.

Conclusion

I confess that I sometimes worry that terrorism and terrorism studies are the last refuge of the scoundrel. Present company excepted of course. Aspects of counterterrorism are indeed sometimes positively fraudulent. Both in the United Kingdom and the United States, fake explosive detectors were manufactured that were of no practical value whatever, yet were sold in numerous countries. Some British makers were sentenced and jailed in 2013. I hope all this is not taken as a symbol of the "War on Terror," but it does seem to be a consequence of it.

In these remarks I have tried to indicate certain directions in which the study of terrorism and counterterrorism might usefully go. I conclude by specifying two further areas on which there is plenty more work to be done. Both are implicit in this short review of the subject, but they should be made explicit.

First, we need to broaden further the disciplinary basis of the study of terrorism. That includes putting the focus, even more than has been done in the past, on the societies within which terrorism occurs, and the effects of terrorism on those societies. There has often been too schematic a view of the subject. Perhaps we are too influenced by a tradition of Western political science that inclines toward viewing Western liberal democracy as a form of government that should be universal, and anything else as, if not heresy, at least failure. One of the directions in which the disciplinary basis could be expanded would be to put more emphasis on Anthropology, which can often contribute much on how different societies understand the world, on the roles of terror in them, and on how terrorism is avoided or minimized.

Second, we need to emphasize the way in which legal and moral considerations belong at the heart of discussions about terrorism, how it can be countered, and how it ends. Legal and moral issues are not a mere add-on. The poor way in which they were handled in the first years of the "War on Terror" contributed to the problems of those years.

I submit that, if it moved in some of the directions at which I have hinted in this article, the study of terrorism and counterterrorism could be strengthened, not just in universities, but also in the wider societies in which we all live.

Acknowledgment

This article is based on the author's contribution to the final session of a conference at St Andrews University in Scotland on "Terrorism Research: Past, Present and Future: Symposium to Mark the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence," 19–20 September 2014.

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