Counterterrorism: the State of Scholarship, Directions for Future Data Collection and Analysis

By Mariya Y. Omelicheva

The prominence of counterterrorism analyses in the context of the broader scholarship on terrorism has increased recently as a result of the growing recognition of the inseparable nexus of terrorism and counterterrorism. Terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, and London also triggered exceptional academic interest in the topic of states' responses to terrorism. A bulk of this research has been predominantly descriptive and exploratory in character with the case studies of a handful of established democracies dominating the field. The scholarship of this type has provided invaluable knowledge about individual governments' experiences with combating terrorism and advanced our understanding of the discrete and specific factors affecting counterterrorism policies. Yet, if we aim to understand the general explanatory power of various influences on states' responses to terrorism and make valid predictions and prescriptions for the future behavior; it is necessary to compare states' counterterrorism measures across time and space. Regrettably, the number of studies based on the systematic empirical analyses aimed at accounting for differences and similarities in a broad range of counterterrorism policies across multiple cases have been disappointingly limited.

What has inhibited explanatory research in the area of counterterrorism is insufficient conceptual work. The shortage of data suitable for cross-sectional longitudinal studies of states' responses to terrorism has also decelerated the advancement of knowledge. Several organizations now maintain global and regional databases on terrorist incidents. There are, however, no datasets containing information on different aspects of states' counterterrorism programs. While the quantity of information collected on the counterterrorism efforts by various states' agencies has significantly increased, the conceptual cacophony in the field and the lack of defined theoretical frameworks has hampered the utilization of this data for systematic comparative analyses.

The goal of this essay is to prompt conversation among all interested scholars on the meaning and theory of counterterrorism and invite practical steps toward the development of a databank of states' counterterrorism responses. This essay proposes a simple, yet, comprehensive conceptualization of counterterrorism developed for the purpose of comparative analysis of states' responses to terrorism. It also suggests a pertinent methodology – event data collection techniques – for systematic collection and analysis of data on different aspects of counterterrorism.

Conceptualizing Counterterrorism

The conceptualization of counterterrorism has been complicated by the elusiveness and variability of the empirical phenomenon it seeks to describe. In practice, counterterrorism is not well-defined. In its broadest and fullest sense, counterterrorism spans across numerous policy areas. It is carried out by almost every governmental agency, not only those authorized with law-enforcement, intelligence, and defense functions.

Counterterrorism measures do not stop at states' borders. As the threat of terrorism blurs the boundaries between internal and international security, the concept of counterterrorism also blurs the distinction between foreign and domestic policy dimensions. As a result of this multiplicity of measures and actors involved in combating terrorism, many analysts sidestep conceptualizing what counterterrorism means in favor of describing some of the empirical manifestations of the concept. However, a definition of the respective conceptual requirements for counterterrorism is a prerequisite to a methodical examination of governments' responses.

In the abstract, counterterrorism can be thought of as a mix of public and foreign policies designed to limit the actions of terrorist groups and individuals associated with terrorist organizations in an attempt to protect the general public from terrorist violence. As a type of policy, counterterrorism encompasses a range of actions (e.g., freezing financial assets of terrorist organizations), specific decisions (e.g., a decision to join international treaties aimed at addressing different aspects of terrorism), general guidelines (such as provisions allowing for the use of military forces on the territory of other states), observable behaviors of states (e.g., police raids on possible terrorist sites), and verbal pronouncements of policy makers (e.g., promises of military and economic aid to other states struggling with terrorism).

The literature on counterterrorism has spawned a number of typologies designed to organize a wide range of states' responses to terrorism within classificatory schemes. It has been common, for example, to classify states as "soft-" or "hard-liners" citing diplomacy, negotiation, intelligence analysis, and social reform as examples of the "soft" approach, and the use of military forces, legal-repressive means, and economic sanctions as instances of the "hard-line" strategy.[1] Another typology classifies states' counterterrorism policies into the "criminal justice" and "war" modes. In the former, police is accorded the primary responsibility to struggle with terrorism under the strict observance of the rule of law, whereas in the latter model military is afforded all means to subdue terrorist actions.[2]

Despite their general usefulness, these and similar classifications of counterterrorism are suboptimal for the analysis of a wide range of counterterrorism policy choices. Dichotomizing multiple counterterrorism measures conceals important variations and dimensionality of counterterrorism policies. The existing typologies do not take into account the international realm of policy responses and are not well-attuned to current political, legislative, institutional, preventive, and punitive practices of counterterrorism. In addition, the existing classifications have been developed and applied for analyses of counterterrorism policies in democratic states, where commitment to human rights principles is considered to be intrinsic to any approach to terrorism.

In studies of counterterrorism, two dimensions of counterterrorism policies, namely, the *scope* and *brutality* of states' responses to terrorism are particularly useful for analysis. The two dimensions embrace all commonly used counterterrorism typologies and reflect a wide range of measures that can be adopted by states and international organizations to preempt, disrupt, or destroy terrorists and their support networks. The scope and brutality

dimensions are also conducive to studying the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies and their impact on human rights.

The scope dimension indicates the breadth of counterterrorism measures and is accounted for by a number of counterterrorism actions that a state undertakes in different areas of public and foreign policy. To identify and categorize responses that can be observed on the scope dimension of counterterrorism, this study relied on the framework for international and national counterterrorism measures developed under the auspices of the United Nations and formalized in the UN Security Council Resolution 1269 (1999) and Resolution 1373 (2001). The *brutality* dimension epitomizes the breaches of individuals' rights that often occur in states' counterterrorism practices.[3] It refers to the extent to which a state is willing to breach its commitment to non-derogatory human rights in the name of combating terrorism and is accounted for by the number of extrajudicial killings, instances of torture and physical abuse, unlawful detentions, trials, and disappearances of the suspects of terrorism. A complete classificatory framework, as well as a coding scheme for the scope and brutality of governments' counterterrorism measures, can be found here.

Collecting Data on Counterterrorism

Currently, there are no datasets on states' counterterrorism policies that can be used for cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. This essay suggests using *event data* collection techniques for generating data on governments' responses to terrorism. This method of data acquisition converts verbal and physical actions of states conveyed in the language of reports into specific codes. The latter, then, can be used for a systematic analysis of the reported activities of states.[4]

The majority of efforts aimed at the systematic analysis of international and domestic activities of states take the form of the examination of events (i.e. verbal and physical actions recorded in various sources). Event data provides one of the closest approximations of states' political activity consisting, mostly, of discrete actions and communications directed from one actor to another over time.[5] The open press and other types of systematic reports describe states' political activity, while researchers study states' behavior by reading these reports and assigning to the observed activities nominal or ordinal codes.[6] The largest data sets of international and domestic behavior – The Behavioral Correlates of War, MAR – the Minorities at Risk, WEIS - the World Events Interaction Survey, and others - were created through the systematic computer or human-coding of events.

Any event - a policy decision, action, or verbal pronouncement - can be described in a natural language sentence containing an actor or a set of actors as its subject and object, and a set of actions as its verb.[7] News reports and other accounts of political activities contain such descriptions of events in the form of "who" did "what" to "whom," "when," and "why". These descriptions can be converted into data sets by recording the dates of events and assigning codes to actors, targets, and the types of events. For instance, in the following headline, "Russian Duma to Consider Bill on Fighting Terrorism" (TASS Jun

19, 1998) the source of action is Russia represented by its legislative body; the target of action is World; and the type of action is intent to pass legislation. This description of the event can be converted into the event data record:

980611 RUS WORLD 031

where the six-digit number is a date of the event, RUS is the source of action, WORLD is the target, and 031 is the event code. The mapping of event codes onto the descriptions of events is completed through a process of content analysis of leading sentences, paragraphs, or full reports. This content analysis can be performed by human coders or specialized software on the basis of a coding scheme that identifies political actors and specifies various types of events representing a range of states' counterterrorism responses.

An outcome of the event data collection is an event dataset composed of a long string of records consisting of numbers and codes representing dates of events, sources and targets of action, and types of events. In this form, an event dataset is unsuitable for statistical or graphical examination. Before event data can be displayed graphically or analyzed by standard statistical software, it must be aggregated or scaled. To avoid the loss of validity and information due to aggregation, the aggregation rules must closely correspond to the concepts describing empirical phenomena of interest. The concept of the *scope* of counterterrorism denotes how widely a state's counterterrorism measures spread across different areas of public and foreign policy, or, how diverse or concentrated the state's responses to terrorism are within any particular realm of policy responses (e.g., security sweeps, target hardening, or legislative work). The rules for calculating the *diffusion index* closely approximate the conceptual meaning of the *scope* of counterterrorism. The diffusion index, which originates in econometrics, is designed to measure concentration and diversification of the market. Diffusion is the inverse of concentration calculated by squaring the market-share of each of the firms operating in the market, and then adding up those squares.[8] The higher values on the diffusion index denote greater diversification, whereas the lower values stand for more concentration.

To obtain a measure of the scope of counterterrorism responses one should calculate a diffusion index D calculated by taking an inverse of a sum of the shares (%) of each type of counterterrorism responses within the total number of events recorded for a given state per year. The diffusion index D is, then, multiplied by a total number of events carried out by a state in a given year.

The scores on the scope dimension of counterterrorism responses were calculated using these aggregation rules. The received measures reflect the number of policy areas in which a state adopts counterterrorism measures, the relative amount of actions undertaken in those policy areas, as well as the amount of counterterrorism actions relative to other states included into the analysis. The measures of the scope can be used for testing the effectiveness of various types of counterterrorism policies, as well as for ferreting out factors that steer governments toward the adoption of certain kinds of responses to terrorism.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest an expedient way to think about and study states' responses to terrorism as a way to underscore the importance of better conceptualization and data collection techniques in the area of counterterrorism studies. The essay also aims at encouraging the development of datasets suitable for a wide range of comparative and longitudinal analyses of various aspects of states' counterterrorism programs. Critical reflections and feedback are invited on the proposed classificatory schemes of state's counterterrorism policies. The author also welcomes advice and collaboration on the process of moving the data-gathering efforts on counterterrorism to automated machine coding.

*About the Author: **Mariya Y. Omelicheva** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas.*

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[1] Miyaoka, T. 1998. "Terrorist Crisis Management in Japan: Historical Development and Changing Response (1979-1997)." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10: 23-53; Wilkinson, P. 1986. "Terrorism: International Dimensions." In *The New Terrorism*, ed. William Gutteridge. London: Mansell.

[2] Crelinsten, R.D. 1989. "Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Democracy: The Assessment of National Security Threats." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1 (2): 242-69. See also Chalk, P. 1994. "EU Counter-Terrorism, the Maastricht Third Pillar and Liberal Democratic Acceptability." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (2): 103-45; Pedahzur, A., and M. Ranstorp. 2001. "A Tertiary Model for Countering Terrorism in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13: 1-27.

[3] UN OHCHR. 2003. *Digest of Jurisprudence of the UN and Regional Organizations on the Protection of Human Rights While Countering Terrorism*. http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/digest.doc.

[4] Burgess, P. M., and R.W. Lawton. 1972. *Indicators of International Behavior: An Assessment of Events Data Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage. For an extensive discussion of event data see Schrodt, P. **a**nd D.J. Gerner. 2000. *Analyzing International Event Data: A Handbook of Computer-Based Techniques*. Unpublished Manuscript. October 30. http://web.ku.edu/keds/papers.dir/automated.html.

[5] Schrodt and Gerner 2000, Ch.1, p.39

[6] Schrodt and Gerner 2000, Ch1, p.1

[7] Schrodt and Gerner 2000, Ch.1, p. 4

[8] Foldvary, F.E. 2001. "The Measurement of Inequality, Concentration, and Diversification." *Journal of Interesting Economics*. http://www.daviddfriedman.com/ JIE/jie.htm .

Explaining Terrorism: A Psychosocial Approach

by Luis de la Corte

Introduction

Terrorism is a difficult topic. Its explanation may be biased by political assumptions and social prejudices. Policy makers and experts disagree about their theoretical perspectives. At a minimum, there are three approaches to studying terrorism: macrosociological, psychological, and psychosocial. Because the first two approaches have received more attention in past decades, this paper will discuss the third approach, which has gained more and more followers over the past few years (De la Corte, 2006)

Those researchers who subscribe to a macrosociological approach view terrorism as a reflection of various social dysfunctions or conflictive trends in the social system. In general, terrorism has been associated with several so-called "root causes" that have promoted other kinds of political violence such as riots and street protests, revolutions, civil wars, and international armed conflicts. Some of the possible root causes are poverty, authoritarian and repressive regimes, or cultural and religious practices. However, most of the studies that have analyzed the relationship among those sociological variables and terrorist campaigns are inconclusive (Crenshaw, 1995; Laqueur, 2003; Reinares, 2003; De la Corte, 2006; Newman, 2006). Classifying these sources is difficult because terrorism is usually promoted by minorities and the perspective of terrorists often involves a severe distortion of social reality.

The most popular psychological explanations of terrorism involve disruptive or psychopathological personalities. While research is speculative, some researchers have tried to analyze terrorists by their propensity for violence or an inability to control their aggressive impulses. However, impulsive aggressiveness is not a common trait of terrorists. According to biographical studies, people joining the same terrorist organisation have different motivations and personalities. Some common psychological attributes among terrorists are a lack of empathy with their victims, dogmatic or ideological mentality, or a simplistic or utopian worldview, (see Beck, 2003; De la Corte, 2006). However, one must consider that psychological profiles are based on information about the more fanatical and higher ranking members of terrorist organisations. While terrorist activity involves spreading one's ideology or carrying out attacks, it also requires strategic planning, logistical support, raising funds, and recruiting. Each of these activities usually requires people with different capabilities and varying psychological traits. Finally, it is not clear if the psychological attributes of the terrorists are fixed traits or attitudes induced by the experiences of the terrorist's life.

In sum, neither the individual psychology of terrorists, nor the social environments provide a complete explanation of why individuals become involved in terrorism. For this reason, more and more researchers are turning toward a psychosocial perspective in their studies.

First psychosocial principle: terrorism must not be seen as a syndrome but as a method of social and political influence

Social psychologists describe one's environment as the place where a person's behaviour is influenced by the social settings in which they live and their psychological predispositions. But first and foremost, it is a sphere of social influence, an area where people attempt to influence the behaviour and beliefs of other people. Therefore, the psychosocial perspective is not congruent with the widespread interpretation of terrorist attacks as a direct effect of any social or psychological determination, but viewed as several social interactive processes that take place both in both inter and intragroup environs. Moreover, many of these influential processes develop in a deliberate and strategic way. Often, terrorist organisations utilize an advertising technique similar to propaganda campaigns when promoting their cause. The idea is best describe by a well-known anarchist saying which defines terrorism as "propaganda by the fact".

Many minority groups conduct terrorist activities as a way to bring about social change. (Kruglanski, 2003). Usually, these groups represent beliefs and positions on political and religious issues which are not readily accepted by the majority. These terrorists are what some social psychologists define as "active minorities" (Moscovici, Mugny and Perez, 1991; Moscovici, 1996). According to research conducted by experimental social psychologists, minorities attempt to gain influence by persuading majority members to consider their point of view. Effective persuasion depends on the minority member's ability to clearly communicate their positions over several different occasions. Through such persistence, a minority may be able to change or influence the majority position. Terrorism is not much different from this process because the spreading of fear or terror through violence has a communicative dimension. Remember the relationship between terrorism and propaganda: after all, terrorist violence is a means to direct people's attention to certain problems (real, exaggerated or fictitious) and publicize the terrorist's political or religious demands.

Second principle: the attributes of terrorists are shaped by processes of social interaction

As a whole; social psychologists are predisposed to explain the psychological characteristics of individuals a result of several processes of socialization and social interaction. This ideal also applies to the mental attributes of terrorists. Previously, some researches suggested that the process of joining a terrorist group was heavily influenced by the prevailing political and social environment shared by friends and relatives. Obviously, growing up in an environment marked by radical ideas and values could lead one to a join terrorist group which embraces the same ideas and values. For example, many members of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), Red Brigades or Irish Republican Army (IRA) were born and raised in families respectively attached to the subculture of Basque nationalist (Reinares, 2001; Romero, 2006), Irish Catholic (Lee, 1983) or Italian radical left-wing (Della Porta, 1990).

In other cases, joining a terrorist organisation is the result of making contact and relationships with people who embrace extremist political or religious ideas. Sageman (2004) states that personal paths, interactions, and choices may lead young Muslims to become radical jihadists. According to that research, the act of joining a jihadist organisation such as al-Qaeda stems from the individual making an unintentional friendship with a person who has radical jihadists' views. In the sample of 168 subjects who were investigated by Sageman, 68% said friendship was the main influencing factor contributing to joining jihadist groups. In about 14% of the cases, one joined a jihadist organisation because of familial bonds. The two other explanatory variables also dealt with socialization experiences prior to involvement in terrorist activity: 1) experiences related to education in certain *madrassas* or Koranic schools (8% of the members of the sample,) or 2) assiduous participation in the activities of certain radical mosques.

The psychosocial perspective also emphasizes the importance of "secondary socialization" processes in which terrorists become involved after joining a radical organisation. It should be noted that some experts have found significant similarities between the indoctrinative method of sectarian groups and those that are used inside terrorist organisations (Rodriguez, 1992; Della Porta, 1998; Sageman, 2004; De la Corte, 2006). In any case, there is no doubt that the activities and lifestyles developed inside terrorist organisation shape the mentality of its members, intensifying their commitment to such organisations, and preparing them to engage in criminal activities.

Third principle: terrorist organisations can be analyzed by analogy with other social movements

Many terrorist organisations can be closely related to cycles of political mobilization and mass protests against states that take place from time to time (Tarrow, 1989; Gonzalez Calleja, 2003). Very often, terrorist campaigns are the result of a long radicalization process of certain political or religious movement. When those movements lose their social influence, they tend to split off and form different groups. Sometimes, extremists in those groups adopt terrorism as its preferred method of social influence (Reinares, 1998; De la Corte, 2006).

One aspect that terrorist organisations share with ordinary political or religious movements is the central role played by psychological processes of collective identification. Typically, terrorist organisations present themselves as the defenders of the values and interests of an ethnic or religious community (see Javaloy, Rodriguez and Espelt, 2003). As Social Identity Theory predicts, the self-identification of terrorists as members of a much larger community will help them to fulfil their goals; see table 1 (Tajfel, 1984; Turner, 1991; Javaloy, Rodriguez and Espelt, 2003; Taylor, 2003).

Table 1: Psychosocial effects and relationship to social identity

Effect	Explanation
Depersonalization	Terrorists tend to perceive themselves as interchangeable members of an organisation. This motivates terrorists to give

	preference to the interests and goals of the organisation
Social cohesión	The collective identity shared by members of terrorist organisation promote positive relationships among them, which increases intragroup cohesion and cooperation
Conformity, obedience	The greater identification with the terrorist organisation, the greater identification with the norms which rule the members' behaviour. Therefore, a reduction in disobedience and challenging the orders of their leaders.
Bipolar worldview	Identifying with their organisation and reference community motivates terrorist to develop negative prejudices about people from other communities. The world is divided between us and them. The responsibility of problems and injustices suffered by the terrorist's reference community may be attributed to another community who could play a scapegoat role.

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Fourth principle: terrorism only is possible when terrorists have access to certain resources

Resource Mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1973; McAdam, 1982) states that the probability of the emergence of any social protest movement depends not only on the opportunities offered by the social situation, but also by the capability of the movement to "mobilize" certain basic resources. Specifically, a terrorist campaign requires materials (money, technology and others), people (militants, collaborators, supporters) and symbols (clearly linked to the ideologies that motivate terrorist acts) (Waldman, 1997). It is important to note that a majority of a terrorist's time and effort is dedicated to obtaining the above resources. In order obtain these primary resources, terrorist may engage in predatory activities such as theft, extortion, kidnapping or various legal and illegal businesses (see Bovenkerk and Chakra, 2004; Ward, 2004). To obtain their human resources, terrorist organisations design unique methods of radicalization, recruitment strategies, and training programs (De la Corte, 2006).

Fifth principle: the decision to begin and sustain a terrorist campaign is always legitimized by an extreme ideology

Terrorism would not be possible without the existence of an extreme ideology that provides meaning and justification for the people who plan, execute, and support the violent actions. Ideology here refers to a system of extremist beliefs and values that are shared by a terrorist organisation and its allies. When the terrorist's ideology is rooted in the traditions and history of their reference community (for example, the Palestinian community for Hamas or the Basque people for ETA), it is possible that ideology also earns the acceptance of many individuals and other groups not involved in terrorist activity. As stated by Krunglanski (2002), the latter is important because the more people who share a similar point of view to that of the terrorists, the greater the potential for violence.

Several investigations have been undertaken regarding the nature, contents, and functions which characterized the ideologies of different terrorist organisations. One study found similarities in the ideologies of ETA (Sabucedo, Rodriguez and Fernandez, 2002; Sabucedo, Blanco y De la Corte, 2003), the Colombian guerrilla *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (*FARC), the paramilitaries group called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) (Sabucedo et al., 2005) and the jihadist propaganda and the message of al-Qaeda's leaders (De la Corte, 2005; De la Corte and Jordan, 2007). Overall, the research has found at least five elements shared by all these ideological discourses. Table 2 lists these elements and describes their psychosocial functions.

Table 2: Arguments and beliefs which legitimize terrorism

Ideological resources	Psycho-social functions
Arguments and beliefs that identify and criticize certain social injustices, offences, or threats that affects a terrorist's reference community	· Activation of feelings of frustration and moral outrage
Arguments and beliefs that identify a collective enemy as responsible for such injustices, offences or threats and insults. Those arguments and beliefs configure a stereotype which devalues the enemy image even to the point of dehumanization	· Transference of responsibility related to terrorist attacks · Inhibition of empathetic reactions toward victims · Activation of feelings of hatred and desires for revenge
Arguments and beliefs that describe a positive social identity shared by terrorists and their reference community	· Identification of terrorists with the interests and values of their reference community
Arguments and beliefs that define: 1) collective goals linked with the values and interests of the terrorist's reference community; 2) violence as the only effective method to achieve those collective goals	· Legitimization of violence by their presumed political, social, or religious consequences
Arguments and beliefs which predict a future state in which terrorists would have reached their collective goals through violence.	· Increase in the efficacy expectations associated with terrorist activity

Sixth principle: every terrorist campaign involves strategic goals but the rationality which terrorists apply to their violence is imperfect

According to the most influential theoretical model in contemporary social sciences, individuals, organisations and social movements usually behave like rational actors (Coleman, 1990; Rosenberg, 1995). A rational actor only chooses those actions that he considers as the most effective means to attain his objectives or satisfy his preferences. In

its original version, Rational Choice Theory assumed that people always try to behave as rational actors and that human rationality tends to be almost perfect. In other words, it was understood that the actions undertaken by rational actors were the most effective according to the real situations in which they operate. Certainly, it seems that terrorist perceived themselves as rational actors. Many terrorist organisations have been able to introduce changes into their strategies in order to adapt themselves to changing situations and to react to their opponents (State, social audiences, etc). Some authors have interpreted those adaptations as a substantial proof of the terrorist's rationality (Crenshaw, 2001).

However, and contrary to suggestions which come from the first version of Rational Choice Theory, many investigations have showed that the rationality which guides human behaviour is rather limited and imperfect (Kahneman and Tversky, 1982; Elster, 1984; Simons, 1995). This paper will discuss only two aspects of the concept of human rationality (for a broader review see De la Corte, 2006). First, no individual or collective actor is really able to anticipate perfectly or realize *a posteriori* the complete sum of consequences that could be produced by their own actions. Therefore, many of the forecasts and assessments conducted by terrorists will not be completely accurate. Second, the emotions (anger, desire for revenge, hatred, etc.), ideological motives, and other psychological elements could influence the terrorist's subjective perspective in the sense to distort their expectancies and their reflections about the result of their violent actions. Various studies suggest that terrorists tend to overestimate their chances of success and sometimes have problems recognizing the ineffectiveness of their actions. Indeed, those biases are typical among the members of many non-violent protest movements (San Martin, 2005). Moreover, sometimes terrorists may underestimate the negative reaction that their most brutal attacks could provoke among their own actual or potential supporters (Bandura, 2003). Finally, the scientific literature shows that, if individual actors' rationality tends to be limited and imperfect, the rationality of collective actors (groups, organisations, social movements, institutions, etc.) becomes even more problematic.

Seventh principle: the activity of terrorists partly reflects the internal features of their organisations

The chances of terrorists acting in a rational way are not only limited by their individual psychological attributes, but also by the characteristics of their organisations. Research in the psychology of groups and organisations offers knowledge highly relevant in this regard (Blanco, Caballero y De la Corte, 2004). There exist at least two kinds of terrorist organisation attributes that affect their activities. The first has to do with the organisational structure, and the second one is relating to group dynamics.

The structure of any organisation is equivalent to the formal pattern of social relations that are established among their members depending on certain roles and norms. There are two main structures of terrorist organisations (De la Corte, 2006). The first type is a more or less hierarchical one, as in the case of terrorist groups such as the IRA or the Italian Red Brigades. The second structure is much less hierarchical and much more

flexible and decentralized. It corresponds to terrorist groups composed by multiple cells which usually operate almost autonomously. The small jihadist networks which today operate in various parts of the world offer the most obvious examples of this second type. The hierarchical structure involves stronger leadership and control over the organisation and ensures a greater compliance to the operational guidelines and order which emanate from the highest positions in the organisation. In turn, the less hierarchical structures are more difficult to dismantle because the neutralization of some cells or networks does not necessarily result in irreparable harm. According to Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2003), many contemporary terrorists have adopted more flexible organisational models which also are better adapted to the strategic and tactical demands of transnational terrorism campaigns.

Regarding group dynamics inside terrorist organisations, we need to be aware of the decision-making process. Many experimental studies have shown that human groups tend to polarize attitudes and decisions to a greater extent than individuals. Sometimes this group polarization effect promotes highly risky actions (Myers, 1978). Terrorist cells exhibit the same conditions which facilitate group polarization. For instance, during certain periods, terrorists tend to reduce drastically their contact with people who do not embrace their similar extremist ideology. Furthermore, terrorists are frequently subject to strong discipline. Both factors also could promote 'groupthink'. The social psychologist Ervin Janis (1972) coined that expression to define the dynamic of interactions which have caused some serious decision-making mistakes made by important political or military committees during the last century. Several researchers have applied the concept of groupthink to their explanations of different cases of terrorism.

Other group aspects that facilitate terrorist activities concern: the norms and roles to which terrorists use to adjust their behaviour; the influence exerted by group leaders; and the material benefits and psychological rewards associated with the terrorist's militancy. Finally, research on social influence, persuasion and changing attitudes show that reasons which people use to justify some of their actions are actually only developed after such actions haven take place (see Briñol, De la Corte and Becerra, 2001). Aronson (1972) coined the term "retrospective rationality" to design this tendency which has been demonstrated by several experiments. Furthermore, the same trend has been identified as a thought pattern frequently applied to justify collective and organisational actions (Pfeffer, 1998). In a similar way, some of the "reasons" that terrorists use to justify their activity could be mere rationalizations. Alonso and Reinares have found evidence that supports the rationalization hypothesis in their studies of IRA (Alonso, 2003) and ETA terrorism (Reinares, 2001).

Conclusions

This paper has offered some clues which can be used to characterize a social psychological approach to the explanation of terrorism. In addition, this approach provides some suggestions to future research and analysis of the following key issues: 1) the socio-political environment, social relations, and the primary socialization processes that could promote the radicalisation of and enlistment in terrorist organisations; 2) the relationship between terrorist organisations and broader political or religious movements;

3) the recruitment processes and indoctrination techniques applied by terrorist organisations; 4) the structure of terrorist organisations and their group dynamics, and 5) the discourses and ideological principles that some leaders and ideologists developed and propagate in order to legitimize their criminal activities and garner support from their reference communities.

About the Author: Luis de la Corte is a Professor of social psychology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and an investigator at Athena Intelligence.

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Jihadist Propaganda and Its Audiences: A Change of Course?

by Manuel R. Torres Soriano

Winning the 'hearts and minds' of the Muslim world have been a priority of al-Qaeda and its network of affiliated groups of the Global Jihadist Movement (GJM) from the earliest days. This is a logical priority when considering that to achieve their primary strategic objectives; jihadists need to mobilize Muslim Populations. Indeed, an analysis of jihadist communiqués shows a clear preference for Muslim audiences. From 2001 to 2005, 92% of the GJM propaganda products targeted Muslim audiences, 6 % were designed for an undifferentiated audience, while only 2 % was directed specifically at non-Muslim audiences.[1]

Past messages directed exclusively at the non-Muslim not only constituted the smallest percentage, but were mostly dedicated to articulating threats and blackmail. The general tone was scorn or indifference with respect to the possibility of 'winning over' this portion of the population. Therefore, the desired effect of such propaganda on Western public opinion was to demoralize through fear rather than attempting to invoke feelings of sympathy for or comprehension of the motivations of GJM members. For example, one of the principle strategists of al-Qaeda, Abu 'Ubeid al-Qurashi, wrote: *"They did not aspire to gain Western sympathy; rather, they sought to expose the American lie and deceit to the peoples of the world – and first and foremost to the Islamic peoples…"* [2]in an article posted in a Jihadist website in reference to September 11th.

Although quantitatively these types of messages pale in comparison to the avalanche of messages directed at Muslims, it is important to distinguish the "quality" (measured by the importance placed on the messages by their protagonists, such as Bin Laden or al-Zawahiri) of some of these communiqués. That stated, a detailed analysis of these messages reveals that although some relative importance was placed on non-Muslim audiences; it was by far the least emphasized.

Nevertheless, recently we have observed a possible change in this trend. Increasingly, jihadist groups devote more energy attempting to connect with this potential "western" audience by developing new communication "products" that seek to demoralize and evoke fear in the realm of non-Muslim public opinion. For example, the Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups are on the vanguard of this change of strategy as they attempt to reach beyond their traditional support base and target foreign audiences.[3] They create English mirrors of their Arabic websites and translate various public messages and reports about their 'main operations' against the 'invader' into several European languages.

This new communicative priority has been implemented through initiatives which have been adapted to the characteristics and modalities of the Western public. For example, an organization created a website to glorify 'juba', the sniper of the Islamic Army of Iraq. The website contained English commentary and claims of responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of US soldiers. The sophisticated videos of his sniping operations could be downloaded from the website. Another significant example is the insurgent's engagement

in the 'black propaganda' operation called 'Lee's Life for Lies.' This operation involved fabricating the false history of American soldier Lee Kendall, whose USB flash drive was found by insurgents. The insurgents utilized the information contained in the USB to write a fake letter that described the desperate situation of the foreign soldier in Iraq and the existence of abuses and unpunished war crimes.[4] A person could obtain the material via a downloadable video which contained the reading of the false letter by an anonymous narrator using American-accented English.

However, the emergence of the Taliban movement bolsters the principal argument of this thesis regarding the increasing importance of the propaganda directed to the western public opinion. One of the most significant observations of the last several years has been how the Taliban have changed from their very strong iconoclasts beliefs, into zealous practitioners of the propagandistic lessons popularized by al-Qaeda. For example, in July, 2007 a Pakistani journalist filmed a Taliban "graduation ceremony" for would-be Western suicide bombers organized in six national "brigades" (British, American, Canadian, German, French and Afghan). The video shows a large group of terrorist ready to travel to the United States and Western Europe to carry out suicide attacks. Whereas prior videos attempted to inspire others to become "martyrs," this one sought to intimidate and threaten Western populations, promising a "storm" of brutal attacks in American and European cities. The Taliban commander Mansur Dadullah said in this video: *"Listen, all you Westerners and Americans. You came from thousands of kilometers away to fight us. Now we will get back to you in your countries and attack you."* [5]

What is the reason for this change of communicative priorities? A possible explanation is the limited effectiveness of the jihadist propaganda directed at the Muslim world. In spite of its capability to mobilize significant activist support, the reality is that the dream of a Global Islamic Insurgency has yet to be achieved in the intended capacity that would be capable of demolishing some of the Muslim governments that al-Qaeda has qualified like "apostates" and corrupt. To be sure, and in spite of their limitations, the majority of the polls in the Muslim world indicate that jihadist propaganda has not significantly increased the levels of popular support towards al-Qaeda and its objectives.[6]

Although Bin Laden's organization has an enormous influence on more radical segments of Muslim populations, its influence has been very limited on the vast majority of Muslims who view with incredulity or distaste al-Qaeda's political assertions. This ineffectiveness may have caused jihadist networks to devote increasing attention to Western audiences. The jihadists recognize that the 'crusader enemy's' determination to fight and use its material superiority depends on the support of its internal constituencies. Certain propaganda initiatives have further demonstrated to jihadists that reaching and manipulating the Western public is an attainable goal.

The jihadists' desire to continue developing this line of propaganda work, along with their relative failure to mobilise significant Muslim participation, has led to a perceived change of strategy in terms of communication products. The next months and years will reveal

whether this is a merely a perceived or actual strategic shift and what insights it will illuminate on the strategy and direction of jihadist mobilisation efforts.

About the Author: **Manuel R. Torres Soriano** *is a Lecturer of Political Science at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla, Spain.*

NOTES:

[1] Torres, M.; Jordan, J. & Horsburgh. N. "Analysis and Evolution of the Global Jihadist Movement Propaganda", *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 18 Number 3 Fall 2006. (pp. 399-421)

[1] MEMRI, "Al-Qa'ida Activist, Abu 'Ubeid Al Qurashi: Comparing Munich (Olympics) Attack 1972 to September 11", *MEMRI*, March 12, 2002.

[3] See: Zambelis, Chris. "Iraqi Insurgent Media Campaign Targets American Audiences", *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 4, Issue 33 (October 16, 2007). http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373721

[4] See: http://www.lee-flash.blogspot.com

[5] Combelles, Pascale. "Taliban Graduation Ceremony Demonstrates Change of Tactics", *Terrorism Focus*, Volume IV, Issue 21 July 3, 2007

[6] For example see the different polls of Pew Research Center like: PEW RESEACH CENTER. "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics. 17-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey". July 14, 2005. Available in: http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/248.pdf

Books on Terrorism: Review Essay

By Joshua Sinai

To understand the nature and magnitude of the terrorist warfare in all its configurations, which constitutes one of the primary security threats facing the international community, as well as the components of effective response; the academic and think tank communities have produced a myriad of books. Some of these are of exceptional quality and provide insight that advances our understanding of these issues. Others, unfortunately, are of dubious value because not only are their arguments weak, but they lack the necessary documentation to substantiate what are often sensationalistic claims. In the following three reviews, the first review illustrates the latter problem, while the final two reviews compliment the authors' exceptional insight on the role of anti-modern religious extremism in driving contemporary religiously fundamentalist terrorist insurgencies.

A Dubious Source: Counterterrorism Book Falls Short

<u>Countering Terrorism: Can We Meet the Threat of Global Violence?</u> (Reaktion Books, $22.95, 240 pages)

Michael Chandler and Rohan Gunaratna argue that the United States and its allies have squandered their opportunity to defeat the terrorist threat posed by al Qaeda and its affiliates. The authors find the United States and its allies "have not appreciably reduced the threat," which is growing significantly across the world, stretching from Asia to Europe.

Principally, America has failed by acting unilaterally and not cooperatively, for instance through the United Nations, and by seeking short-term political expediency, such as intervening in Iraq (termed a "strategic defeat") and allowing Iran's geopolitical role to grow.

To effectively meet the challenges contemporary terrorism poses, the authors recommend, "it is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the threat." A cogent understanding of the threat and the means necessary to counter it, however, are not found in this volume.

This is, in fact, two books combined into one: Mr. Gunaratna's often disjointed, sensationalistic, and difficult to follow assessments of the threat posed by al Qaeda and its networked affiliates, and Mr. Chandler's recommendation for international cooperation as the means for effective counterterrorism, without showing how it can be executed.

Mr. Gunaratna heads the terrorism research center at the formerly named Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in Singapore. His chapters consist of undocumented claims, and, as if this were not bad enough, exaggerated self-promotion.

In an assertion bound to evoke derision in U.S. government counterterrorism circles, Mr. Gunaratna writes that "while much of the threat posed by al Qaeda is known and manageable, the multiple threats posed by its associates and affiliated entities have not been fully studied and assessed. Even within the U.S. intelligence community... there are very few specialists who know and understand the Islamist terrorist groups associated or affiliated with al Qaeda. The real threat to the West comes from the politicized and radicalized migrant and diaspora communities."

This is an affront to all who deal with these issues; the implication is that only Mr. Gunaratna understands the problem. In fact, many experts who study al Qaeda know the information he relays.

Moreover, while reviewing his sections I found more than 100 unsourced claims. For example, he estimates the current strength of al Qaeda is "a few hundred members." In Yemen, he claims, "only 35 percent of the country is under government control." (What does this really mean?) The late Abu Musab Zarqawi's Iraq network has "either absorbed" or "influences" other Salafi jihadi networks to become "one of the most serious terrorist threats to the European continent and beyond to North America."(On the contrary, terrorism in Europe is largely indigenous, not Iraqi-affiliated).

The list goes on. "Al Qaeda was responsible for attacking the World Trade Towers in 1993." (In fact, a loose affiliate was involved, but not al Qaeda). "Several hundred al Qaeda operatives, led by Saif al-Adel and Saad bin Laden, are located in Iran" ("Several hundred"? Does this mean most of al Qaeda is hiding in Iran? Aren't they in Pakistan's Waziristan province?). By "2004-5 al Qaeda related cells existed in some 60-70 countries around the world." (Which countries and how large are their cells?). And, finally, "more than 300 radicalized Muslims living in Europe have traveled to Iraq and experienced the jihad." (Where's the proof?).

Since none of these figures and estimates is documented, the reader is left wondering if Mr. Gunaratna invented them. His portions of the book, as a result, cannot be taken seriously.

Mr. Chandler's chapters, on the other hand, are well reasoned, reflecting the sound judgment and experience of a former British Army officer who also served as the chairman of the U.N. group established in 2001 to monitor sanctions against the Taliban and the al Qaeda network.

To Mr. Chandler, reducing terrorism requires resolving four problem areas: transforming Islam into a more tolerant religion, harnessing the world's clergy to fight religious intolerance, fostering coexistence for Muslim minorities in Western societies and solving regional conflicts, such as the Palestinian-Israeli one. International collaboration, whether through the U.N. framework or among governments, is key to counterterrorism effectiveness, he believes.

These recommendations are reasonable, but insufficient. To dismantle terrorism, deep-rooted problems in Muslim societies must be resolved, centering on improving the relationship between orthodox religion and modernity. It also requires encouraging governments committed to creating opportunities for all their citizens to advance economically, socially and politically. Lacking such a solution, the pool for potential terrorists keeps growing.

As a result, this book cannot be recommended as an authoritative source on counterterrorism.

To the Extreme: When Faith Becomes Fanaticism

Neil J. Kressel, "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism" (Prometheus Books, 327 pages; $26.00).

Al Qaeda and its myriad affiliates — whether as organized groups or self-radicalized "wannabes" — pose a grave threat to international security because they believe themselves to be divinely inspired to carry out mass destruction against their "apostate" adversaries all over the world.

The threat radical Islamists pose is not merely terrorist warfare but religio-cultural warfare, as well. This is directed against Western values as well as mainstream Muslim tendencies. Salafi Islam, their primary religious identity, is anti-modern and nihilistic (which is why they turn to terrorist tactics to strike at their adversaries), so it is important to understand why their adherents opt for a violent form of religious extremism rather than more constructive and progressive religious ideologies.

These are the central issues facing the counterterrorism community as it searches for solutions to the kind of terrorist activities that threaten the survival of our civilization.

In "Bad Faith: The Danger of Religious Extremism," Neil J. Kressel, a professor of psychology at William Paterson University, incisively addresses these issues.

What is religious extremism? To Mr. Kressel, whose previous books include "Mass Hate: The Global Rise of Genocide and Terror," religious extremists are "those persons who — for reasons they themselves deem religious — commit, promote or support purposely hurtful, violent, or destructive acts toward those who don't practice their faith."

It is not only Islam that fosters religious extremism, Mr. Kressel points out. Christianity and Judaism have their share of anti-secularists who elevate sacred religious texts, such as the Bible or Koran, to a position of supreme authority in a state. However, fundamentalist believers in these three religions adhere to "widely divergent perspectives."

What sets Islamic extremism apart from extremism in Christianity and Judaism, in the modern world, is that their fundamentalist believers form a larger percentage in the

Muslim world, their ideology is filled with hatred and "the consequences [and destruction] they have produced are worlds apart." In other words, today's Islamic extremists are far more dangerous than other religious fundamentalists.

What are the characteristics of religious beliefs that lead to extremist militancy and terrorism? According to Mr. Kressel, such beliefs assert that non-believers are destined for eternal damnation, non-believers are hated by God, non-believers must not blaspheme against God, faith should be spread by military means, people cannot freely convert out of their religion, non-believers are not allowed to live in geographical locations controlled by members of the dominant religion, any method is justified if it is used to implement God's will, and God prefers men to women, with women living in a subjugated role.

While many of these beliefs characterize elements in mainstream religions (Orthodox Judaism, for example, opposes the ordination of women as rabbis and imposes sanctions on inter-marriage), Mr. Kressel argues that "the danger is greatest when individuals and ideologies embrace four tendencies: 1) opposition to compromise with those who see things differently; 2) acceptance of religious ends as justification for any means; 3) willingness to assume the role of defender of God's honor by punishing all those who show disrespect; and 4) a drive to obtain heavenly rewards without regard for the earthly consequences of behavior." The latter tendency, in particular, is responsible for influencing the practice of suicide "martyrdom" operations by Islamic terrorists.

While Mr. Kressel is critical of religious extremism, this is emphatically not an anti-religion treatise. He recommends that once a religiously extremist minority within a religion begins to act violently, then mainstream leaders must immediately identify and "self-police" such outbreaks. In this way, constructive elements have the best chance of overtaking destructive ones.

As Mr. Kressel concludes, "only Muslims can delegitimize and root out Muslim extremists in a lasting way. The struggle must come from within and, despite the West's vast resources, good intentions, and occasionally important support, this must, ultimately, be a battle waged by Muslims for the heart of their culture."

All those in the counterterrorism community who wish to understand and respond to the characteristics of religious extremism that lead to terrorism will greatly benefit from reading Mr. Kressel's important book.

Fighting Modernity: The Causes of Terrorism

Michael Mazarr, Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity (Cambridge University Press, 2007), $19.99, 304 pages.

The al Qaeda "brand" of Salafi Islam seeks to galvanize its adherents to "revitalize" the Muslim world by imposing on their respective societies the Shariah legal regime, free of what they consider to be corrupting Western influences. What makes this threat so

significant is that this "revitalization" of "true Islam" is occurring in the most modernized regions of the world, such as Western Europe and North America, and in Muslim lands where the Salafists consider the ruling elites to be apostates.

This question is at the top of our national security agenda, as everyone tries to figure out these retrogressive rebellions' root causes and effective countermeasures. Interestingly, Congress is so concerned about this threat that it is in the process of establishing a national commission and a separate university center to study radicalization and home-grown terrorism in the United States.

For such a commission to be effective, however, it must view the radicalization processes that lead to today's militant Islamist-driven terrorism as rooted not only in real world grievances (e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, trouble in Kashmir, and so on), but as an expression of the conflict between tradition and modernity because of the nature of the anti-modern "brand" of religion that these extremists promote.

In this context, since much has been written on militant Islam's political grievances, the congressional commission and all those involved in studying these issues would greatly benefit from reading Michael Mazarr's important book, "Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity." It is one of the best diagnoses of the resentment by Islamist forces toward modernity, which has led them to utilize terrorism to retaliate against the effects of modernity on traditional life in their respective societies.

In one of his many insightful passages, Mr. Mazarr, a professor at the National War College, writes that modernization challenges the religious and spiritual element of tradition by threatening to secularize society "in order to replace a religious view of the world with a scientific, rationalist one... modernization and modernity place faith under stress, call it into greater question, threaten to trade it out in favor of rationalist humanism. And one result, unsurprisingly, is a flight back to religion, so that the actual effect of modernization in many contexts is an upwelling of devotion."

The opposition to modernity leads to terrorism when several factors converge. Mr. Mazarr cites Emanuel Sivan, a prominent Israeli expert on Islam, who formulated the notion of the "triad" of radical Islamism: "the diagnosis — modernity as jahaliyya [ignorance of the faith]; the cure — rebellion (first internal, then external); the means for administering that cure — the tali-a (vanguard) of the True Believers organized as a counter-society."

How are the Islamic militants expressing anti-modernism? According to Mr. Mazarr, the Islamists believe that the "social devastation" of the Muslim world can only be redressed by emulating "the pure moral life practiced by the Prophet and his immediate followers" and expelling "evil outside influences — Israel and the United States chief among them" from Muslim lands.

What can be done to counter the anti-modern components in Islamic militancy?

Mr. Mazarr recommends that "to degrade the terrorist organizations and discredit their ideology" requires America to encourage the resolution of underlying problems by promoting "peaceful, even if sometimes radical, social change" in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as well as supporting the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in order to demonstrate that "violence is unnecessary for reform." In a further step, Mr. Mazarr calls for the United States to engage in dialogue and negotiation with militant Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, as long as they begin to speak "openly and directly about the evil of terrorism."

I agree with Mr. Mazarr that the threat presented by militant Islam must be countered in a comprehensive fashion, with every aspect resolved through conciliation, where possible, or law enforcement and military measures, where it is not.

However, his solution, which focuses primarily on reducing violence, still does not address the underlying problem of how modernized society can persuade religious militants to embrace the best characteristics of modernity, such as democracy, pluralism, freedom of expression, separation of church and state, religious liberalism, gender equality, and technological and scientific progress. Under current conditions, such a counterterrorism policy may be too difficult and complex to implement, but what other solutions are possible?

About the Author: Joshua Sinai *is a program manager for counterterrorism studies at The Analysis Corporation, McLean, VA.*