Terrorism: Its Past, Present & Future Study

A Special Issue to Commemorate CSTPV at 25

Edited by Gillian Brunton & Dr Tim Wilson

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Introduction - CSTPV at 25

by Tim Wilson

Everybody was telling me there was no funding for terrorism research. Everybody was telling me that, with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, terrorism was going to end.

Bruce Hoffman (on 1994)[1]

Complacency has no half-life. When it is gone, it leaves little trace. So it is hard to recall the general quality of public debates a quarter of a century ago: and, in particular, their prevailing tone of optimism that terrorism was yesterday's nightmare. During the immediate aftermath of the Cold War – the period portentously proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama as 'the End of History'[2] – the freelance atrocities of anti-state groups often seemed a rather trivial subject: especially when viewed against the genocidal tableaux of Bosnia and Rwanda. In short, terrorism seemed a distinctly faded and fading phenomenon. Even the superb Global Terrorism Database managed to lose an entire year's worth of data around this time. Even the Provisional IRA called their first ceasefire for nearly two decades, in August 1994.

Yet that very same month the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews (CSTPV) was founded: and with it an enduring scholarly tradition that continues to evolve. Indeed, it was to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the CSTPV's foundation that leading academics gathered in St Andrews on 7-8th November 2019 to debate the past, present and future study of terrorism. This special edition of CVIR seeks to capture the general effervescence of that symposium. Its format has been deliberately cast as an academic conversation in print. Short versions of original papers given at the symposium are reproduced: but each paper is, in turn, commented upon by another esteemed contributor. Thus the whole special issue tries to retain a little of the quality of lively debate and interchange of opinion that marked the original gathering. True addicts, though, may find videos of the original sessions online here:

https://cstpv.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/cstpv-25th-anniversary-symposium/

Quite deliberately, the range of debates printed here has been kept very wide-angled. Terrorism constitutes a messy and broad subject area for academic enquiry. Some of the older speakers had been among the founding pioneers who decades ago fought to have terrorism recognised as a serious subject worthy of academic investigation in its own right. It is therefore only fitting that some of the pieces here return to classic debates: on how to delineate terrorism as a phenomenon, and religion's role in generating it.

But other pieces here capture how key debates have evolved radically in the quarter century since CSTPV was founded and as such reflect the evolving interests of younger generations of scholars: taking in the contested efficacy of terrorism and its bewildering persistence, as well as its deep inter-penetration with other forms of violent conflict such as civil war. And given just how radically the world changed just after the November 2019 symposium due to the eruption of the Covid-19

[1] Quoted in: L. Stampnitzky, Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented "Terrorism" (Cambridge, 2013), p. 140
[2] F. Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', The National Interest (16), 1989

crisis, it seems only appropriate that discussion should close dramatically – with a fresh examination of the provocative concept of 'Apocalyptic Terrorism'.

A remote clifftop in eastern Scotland might not be the most obvious location for investigating such dramatic horrors: after all, terrorism remains largely a phenomenon of the big city. Yet over 25 years CSTPV has put St Andrews firmly on the map as the ideal place from which to contemplate the dynamics of horrific mayhem. As the troubled 21st century enters its third decade, as the ingenuity of human cruelty continues to dazzle our public life, as new threats continue to breed relentlessly, the need for sharply-focused and rational analysis of terrorism only grows. CSTPV's founding fathers, Paul Wilkinson and Bruce Hoffman saw that only too clearly back in August 1994. This collection honours their vision.

Dr Tim Wilson, Director, CSTPV, August 2020

Discussion 1 - Revisiting the wicked problem of defining terrorism

by Alex P. Schmid

Introduction

Terrorism is a contested concept, and polemical political discourse and social science use interfere with each other, leading to misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the concept of terrorism continues to be used and debated more than ever. If one goes to the website *Academia.edu* – the social networking website for academics with nearly 100 million users listing 23 million scholarly papers – one can find more than eleven thousand (11,070) articles that feature 'The definition of terrorism' in their title. (URL: www.academia.edu/people/search?q=Definition+of+Terrorism [as of 12 June 2019]).

Another hundred thousand (99,217) articles discuss the 'definition of terrorism' in the text of a paper. If you step outside the academic ivory tower and google "definition of terrorism" you can find 155,000,000 entries (Google as of 26 June 2019). People are still searching for *the* definition – a search that has been equated to the search for the Holy Grail (Levitt, 1986, p. 97). Yet, most seekers tend to get lost in what Brian Jenkins in 1980 called the 'Bermuda Triangle' of terrorism (p. 10).

Six difficulties in arriving at a common definition of terrorism

Why are there so many attempts to find an adequate definition of terrorism?

It has to do with the fact that the definition problem is a wicked problem – whereby 'wicked' denotes a problem resistant to resolution. This is due to six main factors:

First of all, terrorism is a complex phenomenon. As Monty G. Marshall and Ted R. Gurr (2005, p. 63) have pointed out: 'Terrorism, as a political act, stands at once at the nexus between individual and collective action, the emotional and the rational, the conventional and the unconventional. It can be the strongest form of protest, the weakest form of rebellion, or a specialized tactic in a broader process of tyranny or warfare' This diversity, in turn, has implications for both definition and theory formation.

A second problem is the existing confusion regarding the relationship between "terror" and "terrorism". While some take these two terms to be synonyms (as in the 'Global War on Terror') they are not. Others use "terror" for state terrorism and "terrorism" for non-state terrorism, which is also not helpful if we talk about one and the same tactic of violent intimidation. In the Handbook of Terrorism Research, I tried to define "terror" on the one hand as a state of mind characterised by acute and overwhelming fear of a threatening mortal danger on an individual level and, on the other hand, as a climate of fear on the collective level when indiscriminate atrocities are perpetrated in public. The dissemination of fear by traumatised survivors, shocked witnesses and sensationalist media enhances the political impact of what is often only small-scale, but extra-normal, wanton, unprovoked and random and, therefore, more terrifying violence (Schmid, 2011, pp. 2–3). In one

of my earlier writings, I tried to visualise the relationship between terror and terrorism in this way (Schmid, 1984, p. 91):

Figure 1 The Triangle of Terrorism

A third problem leading to confusion is that in terrorism, there is often more than one ultimate target. Terrorism does not "terrorise" everybody but only the direct victims and those who strongly identify with them. There is a whole spectrum of different reactions to acts of terrorism from very negative to very positive, depending with whom an observer identifies: the victims, the terrorists, the government or someone else. The individual scale of reactions to acts of terrorism includes those who are:

1. terrorised and intimidated;
2. panicking and confused;
3. frightened and showing loss of confidence;
4. worrying and distressed;
5. angered, with hardened opposition to the terrorist cause;
6. indifferent or wavering;
7. positively impressed by short-term impact of terrorist act;
8. sympathetic to terrorist cause;
9. supportive of terrorist tactics;
10. seeking to join terrorist organisation.

One only has to recall that after 9/11 some of the reactions listed under points 7 to 10 were not unusual in the Arab world.

The fourth problem – and one related to the third problem – that makes terrorism difficult to understand is that there are up to ten audiences and conflict parties the terrorists perform for. Firstly,

adversary (-ies) – usually government(s) and the society of the adversary. There are direct victims and their families and friends and others who have reason to fear that they might become next targets. Members of a terrorist organisation and other rival terrorist or political party organisations and the constituency terrorists claim to represent/act for are also included along with potentially sympathetic sectors of domestic and foreign (diaspora) publics and "neutral", distant publics. Last but not least – the mass and social media themselves. Depending on what the purposes of a given act of terrorism are, an attack can be directed at one or several specific audiences.

A fifth problem that complicates our understanding of terrorism is that terrorism is confused with some other forms of political violence. In fact, there are many forms of political violence other than terrorism and short of (civil) war, ranging from individual disappearances (= kidnapping + torture + murder) to collective genocide (cf. Kalyvas, 2019). Some of these usually criminal acts are worse, some less bad than terrorism, but many lend themselves to confusion with terrorism, for instance assassinations when it is not immediately clear whether or not the victims were the ultimate targets. One should add to this that a group once labelled "terrorist" by those with definition power is likely to engage in a variety of other tactics as well, which are not in themselves terrorising but closer to guerrilla warfare tactics or those of regular armies. If militants attack not civilians but military or police forces, such attacks are often also labelled "terroristic" once the group perpetrating them has been characterised as a "terrorist group", especially when such attacks occur outside zones of direct armed conflict.

A sixth problem is that not only are there many forms of political violence other than terrorism, but also many types of terrorism. In the 1980s, I developed a classification with a dozen types of terrorism (Schmid, 1988, p. 48). In the meantime, new variants like cyber-terrorism have surfaced in the field of terrorism studies. Yet, one can question whether some of these new variants are all "terrorism". There are many manifestations of cyber-crime, cyber-warfare, cyber-sabotage and other illicit internet- and computer-based activities going on – but should the fact that terrorists also use the cyber space lead us to the conclusion that they automatically engage in "cyber-terrorism"? I have yet to be convinced, as so-called "cyber-terrorism" has (so far) not terrorised or killed people, is usually anonymous with no claims of responsibility, tends to be discriminate and tends to be the work of state agents.

The proliferation of new types of "terrorism" makes the term's definition even more complicated as, ideally, all new types have to be "caught" also by one and the same definition of the concept. That is increasingly impossible. Not everything that is carelessly, or polemically labelled "terrorism" is, social scientifically speaking, terrorism. Not all individuals and groups labelled "terrorist" by someone who claims definition power (typically a state) are what they are called. In the course of more than two hundred years of the existence of the term 'terrorism' (coined in 1793 by the journalist and political agitator Gracchus Babeuf to denounce the 'reign of terror' of Maximilien de Robespierre) (Rubin and Rubin, 2008, p. 7), terrorism has undergone changes (as has war) but a number of ideal-type characteristics, which are usually present in terrorist tactics, can be found.

Gideon Aran has identified a dozen ideal-type elements:

1. Terrorism involves violence, even extreme, direct physical violence;
2. The violence must be deliberate, premeditated and systematic;
3. A distinction must be made between the violence under discussion and other types of malicious and intentional violence;
4. The violence employed in terrorism is self-aware and understands its consequences very well;

5. Terrorism is an act of political violence which means that in the end it is intended to force senior decision makers to change their policy radically…;

6. The violence of terrorism is primarily directed at civilians;

7. The direct victims of terrorism are selected at random from a general target group;

8. The actual victims of terrorism, its direct targets, are not identical to its target group, which is the indirect but principal objective of the violence;

9. Between the violence of terrorism and its political consequences, or, between the direct victims of terrorism and its target group, there is an intermediate variable: fear;

10. The scene of terrorism is a monumental drama that arouses primordial, primitive instincts;

11. Behind the active aspect of terrorism there is an underground group that is either more or less autonomous or a secretive executive arm of a large and well-known organisation;

12. The terrorist group is a non-state organ or, at most, only partially associated with an established governmental institution and under its control (Aran, 2019. For an alternative list of twelve elements defining terrorism, see: Schmid, 2011, pp. 86-7).

While this is a very useful list, there is one crucial element missing.

Propaganda by the deed

The crucial element that has stayed central with the tactic of terrorism is the role of witnesses and the media. While in the late eighteenth century serial public executions of 'enemies of the revolution' by the guillotine were used to create and spread terror, in the nineteenth century a sensationalist rotary press amplified the impact of terrorist bombings. Anarchist and social-revolutionary theorists and practitioners discovered that one could use demonstrative acts of public violence as a way to enter the news system. They called it 'propaganda by the deed'. To quote one of them, the German-American Johannes Most (1885): 'Everyone knows […] that the more highly placed the one shot or blown up, and the more perfectly executed the attempt, the greater the propagandistic effect. […] What is important is not solely these actions themselves but also the propagandistic effect that they are able to achieve. Hence, we preach not only action in and for itself, but also action as propaganda' (quoted in Laqueur, 1978, pp. 100, 105).

By killing heads of state and government, ranging from the Russian Czar Alexander II (1881) to the Italian King Umberto (1900), terrorists made headlines without paying a penny in advertising costs. The principle of accessing the world's news system by deliberately creating bad news has remained the same. As one German terrorist explained in 1970: 'We give the media what they need: newsworthy events. They cover us, explain our causes and this, unwittingly, legitimises us' (quoted in: Weimann and Winn, 1994, p. 61). A German journalist turned academic described this relationship, looking at the collaboration from the other side, in these words: '[T]he news media and terrorists are not involved in a love story; they are strange bedfellows in a marriage of convenience' (Nacos, 2010, p. 263). Both want to obtain the attention of large publics.

In the twentieth century, radio and television created ever larger audiences to terrorist hijackings and acts of hostage-taking, and in the twenty-first century the Internet and social media carried terrorist deeds, such as suicide bombings, to all corners of the world (cf. Schmid and de Graaf, 1982). The basic idea of the propaganda by the deed, namely to perform acts of extraordinary violence to get attention and instrumentalise the publicity in an effort of gaining (or maintaining) power, has not changed. Key is the triangular relationship between perpetrator, victim(s) and ultimate target(s).

This can be clearly seen in Al-Qaeda's explanation of the rationale behind the 9/11 attacks – not the United States but Muslims worldwide were the ultimate target that mattered most: '…al Qaeda has, and always had, a specific aim: to arouse the sleeping body of the Islamic Nation – a billion Muslims worldwide – to fight against Western power and the contaminations of Western culture. In support of this aim, the 9/11 attacks were designed to force the Western snake to bite the sleeping body, and wake it up' (al- Adel, 2005; cf. McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011, p. 157).

AQ's leader, Ayman al Zawahiri, wrote in 2005 a letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (AQ's representative in Iraq), reminding him that '…more than half of the battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma' (Available at: https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/zawahirs-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2/ [Accessed: 13 July 2020]). The rise of non-state terrorism has been intimately linked to the growth and expansion of mass media: the bigger the audience, the greater the temptation to engage in terrorism. A Palestinian terrorist attack on Israeli sportsmen during the Olympic Games of 1972 in Munich was played out before an audience of 800 million TV viewers. In that year, Brian M. Jenkins (1972, pp. 1–2) concluded that terrorism was theatre: 'Terrorism is violence for effect: not only, and sometimes not at all, for the effect on the actual victims of the terrorists' cause. Terrorism is violence aimed at the people watching. Fear is the intended effect, not the by-product of terrorism'.

The search for a consensus definition of terrorism

Triggered by the terrorist attack in Munich, in 1972, the United Nations set up a commission to elaborate a common definition of terrorism. Yet, the work of that UN commission petered out in the late 1970s and it was only twenty years later, in 1996, that the definition issue surfaced again when India pushed for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations. As a consequence, the General Assembly's legal committee set up an Ad Hoc Committee and working group. It was charged with defining terrorism in a way that would go beyond the existing international sectorial conventions like those against hijacking, hostage-taking and bombings, which had been created within and outside the UN framework since the 1960s.

This Ad Hoc Committee has still not completed its task, despite being in existence for more than twenty years. The old controversy that 'one man's terrorist is the other man's freedom fighter', has been one of the reasons for the impasse. To illustrate, the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (adopted on 22 April 1998) provides in article 2 (a) that: 'All cases of struggle by whatever means, including armed struggle, against foreign occupation and aggression for liberation and self-determination, in accordance with the principles of international law, shall not be regarded as an offence. This provision shall not apply to any act prejudicing the territorial integrity of any Arab State' (League of Arab States, 1998). By 2001, however, the UN's Ad Hoc Committee had reached a *draft* definition of terrorism which reads as follows (United Nations, 2001, UN Doc. A/C/.6/56/L.9, Annex I.B):

'Any person commits an offense within the meaning of this [the present] Convention if that person, by any means, unlawful and intentionally, causes:

- Death or serious injury to any person; or

- (b) Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility; a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or to the environment; or

- Damage to property facilities or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of this [the present] article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss; when the purpose of the conduct,

by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.'

This UN draft definition is silent about the possible role of state actors (although 'any person' might possibly include specific state officials). The fact that terrorists deliberately victimise civilians and non-combatants in demonstrative public performances aimed first of all at obtaining media coverage and thereby influencing third parties, is not at all reflected in this UN draft definition. The deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians is arguably the core of terrorism. In the words of the legal scholar Ben Saul (2019, p. 46): 'Most minimally agree that the instrumental political killing of civilians in peacetime is terrorism. Beyond that, "terrorism" remains a contested terrain of diverse political and moral opinion'. There are currently 19 international conventions and protocols that address specific aspects of terrorism (e.g. hijackings) but none have the same authority which a comprehensive convention on international terrorism adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations would have.

Given the fruitless efforts of the international community to reach a legal definition of terrorism since the early 1970s, I worked towards reaching at least an academic consensus definition. In 1984 (pp. 76–77, 111), I identified 22 elements which were common to more than 100 definitions of terrorism and I formulated a tentative consensus definition that contained 13 of these 22 elements. In 1988 (p. 28), after another round of consultations with academic and professional colleagues, I made another attempt to reach an academic consensus definition. It contained 16 of the original 22 elements. After yet another round of consultation with colleagues, I proposed in 2011 (pp. 86–87) this revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism with 12 elements:

1. Terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a *doctrine* about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial *practice* of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties;

2. Terrorism as a tactic is employed in three main contexts: (i) illegal state repression; (ii) propagandistic agitation by non-state actors in times of peace or outside zones of conflict; and (iii) as an illicit tactic of irregular warfare employed by state- and non-state actors.

My search for an academic consensus definition of terrorism had been preceded in the early 1990s by a proposal I had made to the UN Crime Commission. While acts of terrorism were, at that time, typically occurring in peacetime and outside zones of active armed conflict, I had noticed that acts of terrorism largely overlapped with what would be considered war crimes in regular armed conflicts in international humanitarian law:

1. wilful killing of civilians and prisoners;

2. taking of hostages;

3. intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;

4. attacking and bombarding, by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended and which are not military objects;

5. intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable institutions (cf. Fleck, 1995; Arnold, 2004, pp. 66–69).

Given the broad overlap between acts of terrorism and war crimes, I proposed in early 1992 (pp. 8–10) to the secretariat of the UN Crime Commission to use the consensus that already exists in the

international community regarding war crimes and extend it to terrorism, calling acts of terrorism 'the peacetime equivalent of war crimes'. The proposal was not accepted.

Conclusion

The debate about the definition of terrorism is ultimately also a debate about the legitimacy of the use of force in conflict. While international humanitarian law has made clear rules about the licit and illicit use of armed force in wartime so that we now have common definitions about transgressions like aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity, we still struggle to reach a parallel legal consensus for uses of political violence in peacetime and outside zones of armed conflict. Given the fuzzy borders between war and peace and the use of proxy and hybrid warfare, and the increasingly transnational character of terrorism (partly due to diaspora involvement), the borders between international humanitarian law and international criminal law have become fuzzy too. This is another factor which makes the definition of terrorism a wicked problem.

The fact that there is still no universally agreed definition of terrorism in international law that has the broad approval of the General Assembly of the United Nations has serious consequences. James Dorsey (2017), a scholar at Nanyang University in Singapore, has outlined the price we pay for our inability to reach a consensus about a legally binding definition of terrorism:

'…the absence of an agreed definition of terrorism […] allows autocrats to abuse efforts to counter extremism by repressing non-violent critics […] Proponents of maintaining the term terrorism as a multi-interpretable catchall phrase argue that one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Authoritarian leaders have a vested interest in either imposing their definition of terrorism on the international community or preventing it from adopting a definition. The absence of a definition has allowed them to brutally suppress basic human rights, including freedom of expression and the media, and to put tens of thousands of non-violent critics behind bars'.

In the end, terminological precision appears to be linked to moral clarity. In this sense, a narrow and objective definition of terrorism is not only something necessary for cumulative scholarship in the field of terrorism studies. It is also a necessity for building a broad coalition against an indiscriminate use of violence – an immoral modus operandi that deliberately attacks unarmed civilians to intimidate, coerce or otherwise influence direct and indirect witnesses with the help of mass and social media.

About the author

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Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research (2011, 2013). Currently Dr Schmid is preparing a 'Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness', a volume with 40 contributors to be published in 2020 by ICCT.

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In Response - Defining terrorism: communities and context

by Sarah Marsden

In *Revisiting the wicked problem of defining terrorism*, Professor Emeritus Alex Schmid sets out a series of issues that undermine the effort to define terrorism. His argument is based on decades of academic enquiry and practical engagement with the problem of setting terrorism's boundaries. Multiple books, articles and contributions to policy and practice attest to his deep interest in, and commitment to defining terrorism (Schmid and Jongman, 1988; Schmid, 1992; 2004; 2012). His paper in *Contemporary Voices* demonstrates the significant challenges this effort still faces.

Alex suggests there are six difficulties confronting those who seek to define terrorism: its complexity; confusion over the semantic, phenomenological and practical relationship between terror and terrorism; the range of targets terrorism is directed at; the number of different audiences and actors that are involved in terrorism; the difficulty in differentiating terrorism from other forms of political violence; and the range of types of terrorism that have been proposed. He goes on to set out what he suggests is one of the central features of terrorism, that it constitutes 'propaganda by the deed': the communication of political ambitions through extreme violence disseminated via the media to provoke fear. Going on to describe the as yet unfulfilled ambition for a definition that is agreed and ratified by the United Nations (UN), he concludes with a call for a narrow and objective definition of terrorism to inform scholarly enquiry, policy and practice.

The paper offers a careful and concise summary of the main debates associated with attempts to define terrorism. It admirably demonstrates the complexity of terrorism, and the range of actors that are implicated in the debate over its conceptual boundaries. In responding to Alex's article, I would like to focus on what is at stake for these different communities and consider how they are evolving. In doing so, I develop his (1992) earlier work that identifies the different arenas involved in defining terrorism, including the media, academia, and nation states. More specifically, I suggest that defining terrorism poses a different kind of problem for each of these groups, and that it is useful to recognise the differing priorities, scope and real-world implications of each community's engagement with the definitional question. Further, I propose that increasing efforts to police the digital arena have led to a relatively new set of actors becoming involved in determining what constitutes extremism and terrorism. Increasingly, commercial companies such as Facebook, Google and Twitter are being asked to identify and remove extremist online content, a process which implies the ability to identify and designate particular kinds of material as terroristic.

For academics, defining terrorism helps inform analysis and enable scholarly enquiry. For criminal justice professionals, a concrete definition provides clarity over the legal limits of behaviour. For international organisations such as the UN, a definition of terrorism would reflect agreement over the norms that govern state and non-state actors. For the media, the issue of labelling terrorism is associated with communicating sometimes devastating events in a commercial context, whilst for social media companies, it involves deciding what material should be accessible to service users. These fields overlap but, nevertheless, each represents different interests and identities, a better understanding of which helps to further the debate over terrorism's definition.

The impact of defining terrorism obviously differs across these spheres. A changing legal definition of terrorism clearly has greater real-world impact than academic disagreement over how to

conceptualise terrorism. They are both part of long-running social, political and legal debates, however, which reflect how different sectors respond to terrorism. Alex's article invites the reader to consider the process as well as the outcome of these debates. By highlighting the different definitional needs and goals of academics compared with, for example, the media or the UN, he makes it possible to see how these might be disaggregated.

Focusing on the nature of debates over terrorism's definition, it is possible to see that for academics, definitional clarity is far from the norm, whereas for criminal justice agencies it is an important part of professional practice. For those who seek to put boundaries on terrorism's conceptual, legal and practical limits it is, therefore, important to identify clearly the audience, and the problem defining terrorism seeks to address. In this way, it is easier to understand the different kinds of roles academics might play in these debates.

Many academic concepts are subject to intense debate. Terrorism is no exception. From war to genocide, and from peace to revolution, scholars have engaged in sometimes fierce disagreement over what these terms mean. Despite Ramsay's (2015) argument that there is rather more consensus over the core features of terrorism than might appear to be the case, it remains common for books on terrorism to begin by reviewing the challenges associated with agreeing a definition. A number of problems are often cited as the cause of these difficulties. As Alex explains, the phenomenon of terrorism is highly complex and is often conflated with other forms of political violence. Because it is about who has the legitimate right to use violence, it is also deeply politicised.

Over the past few years, some of the more significant debates around the concept of terrorism have been made by scholars committed to critical terrorism studies (Jackson, 2011). As Richard Jackson (2011) has suggested, terrorism may remain a useful analytical category but only if it is applied equally to states and non-state actors. Others have argued that the term is analytically hollow and is best understood as a label used to delegitimise opponents (Bryan et al., 2011). The contention between critical terrorism studies and their interlocutors illustrates the different stakes each group has in the debate over terrorism's definition. One of the fault lines in this debate is that an insufficiently critical perspective on the theory and practice of terrorism and counter-terrorism can lead to academics overlooking harmful state practices and neglecting their role in violence. For those willing to operate in a similar definitional space to that occupied by policymakers and practitioners, what is at stake is the kind of moral and conceptual certitude Schmid argues is so important.

Although this debate has generated significant heat in recent years, it is not that different to those which have played out in other fields. For example, disagreements over concepts such as protest and riots have drawn attention to similar issues about who has the right to label acts in particular ways, and the implications of this for conceptual clarity and political legitimacy (Campbell et al., 2004). Definitional debates are, therefore, not unusual in many areas of the social and behavioural sciences. It is also not uncommon for different epistemic communities to develop contrasting positions about key concepts. Arguably, the evolution of these debates within terrorism studies reflects the health and vibrancy of the field, as it continues to accumulate a body of work which pursues theoretical insights and empirical findings.

A second important space implicated in the debate over terrorism's definition is the criminal justice system. Here, the problem over defining terrorism is closely related to the need for clarity over the legal limits of state and non-state actors' behaviour. As Alex highlights, the lack of an agreed definition in international law makes it easier for dictators to muddy the waters in order to pursue policies which undermine human rights. It also reduces the scope for extradition, counter-terrorism support and international cooperation (Young, 2006).

At national and regional levels, the question over the legal definition of terrorism has raised a series of issues and been dealt with in different ways. One area of debate has been over whether the increasing scope of terrorism legislation has undermined civil liberties and freedom of speech (Parker, 2007). Further, it is argued that legislation casts too wide a net, capturing a wide range of actions which do not properly constitute terrorism (Murphy, 2012). Because many of the specific acts through which terrorism is perpetrated, such as murder or bombing, are already criminalised, some have argued that much counter-terrorism legislation is not necessary because existing law is sufficient (Walker, 2006).

The increasing scope of terrorism-related offences means that, as well as the implications for civil liberties, there is now a growing gulf between the 'ideal type' of terrorism articulated by Gideon Aran (2019) and referred to in Alex's article, and many of the offences which are defined as terrorism-related. For Aran (2019), terrorism involves twelve ideal-type aspects such as violence, largely civilian targets and intentionality. This idealised notion of terrorism is a long way from contemporary legislation such as the UK's 2019 Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act, which made viewing online extremist content illegal.

There are two implications of these debates. The first more pragmatic point relates to how best to set the outer limits of terrorism given the growing scope of legislation and the need to protect civil liberties. The second is a broader conceptual question about what constitutes terrorism and how this shifts over time. There are disagreements about the scholarly community's role in this debate and how this differs from lawmakers and practitioners (Simon, 2011). Some argue academics should take a problem-solving approach, for example by proposing legal definitions. Others suggest they should stand apart from these debates and contextualise them in relation to the social and political dynamics that influence changing understandings of terrorism (Jarvis, 2009).

Moving beyond disciplinary or national-level debates, Alex's article goes on to set out the challenges facing efforts to find an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism. One of the main problems for international organisations, such as the UN, is how to identify and agree norms around the legitimate use of violence. This is an issue with significant consequences for both state and non-state actors who argue they have the right to pursue their aims through force. It is, therefore, not surprising that there has been such disagreement within the UN.

Debates over how to clarify norms and laws around internationally significant issues such as terrorism reflect fundamental differences in state power and interests. They highlight the difficulties associated with developing a shared position on global problems, where the consequences differ significantly between countries. Two of the main fault lines have been whether a given definition might implicate states and leave them open to international sanctions, and determine the conditions under which non-state actors have the right to use violence, in particular in relation to movements for self-determination (Saul, 2015).

The seemingly intractable nature of these issues has seen the UN focus more heavily on specific kinds of acts, such as hostage-taking, hijacking or terrorist-financing (Young, 2006). This approach has sought to sanction discrete behaviours in the absence of an agreed international definition of terrorism. Alex's paper demonstrates why this more pragmatic option has prevailed by highlighting the complexity of terrorism including the different types of terrorism, the range of targets, and the variety of actors that are involved. In contrast to academic or national debates, an internationally binding definition would have the potential to impact many more people. Agreeing a definition given the complex, deeply politicised and potentially highly consequential debate seems as challenging today as it was when he first began writing about it.

The relationship between the media, communication and terrorism is another area where Alex has made a significant contribution (Schmid, 1989; Schmid and De Graaf, 1982). For the media, the definition of terrorism involves the problem of how to frame and communicate acts of violence, and how, informed by commercial, political, normative and legal factors, media portrayals of terrorism have evolved. From Margaret Thatcher and her famous edict to deny terrorists the oxygen of publicity, through the media saturation of the War on Terror era, up to contemporary responses which are increasingly focusing attention on victims and first responders rather than perpetrators, the media has taken different positions in relation to violence. The press has at once been accused of aiding militants by publicising their violence, supporting governments through an insufficiently critical perspective on state policies, and of ignoring victims' experiences. All of these issues are informed by more or less implicit assessments about what constitutes terrorism, and how different media outlets should position themselves in relation to violence.

The power of the media to capture and shape public opinion in relation to terrorism has always been significant but has changed over time (Nacos et al., 2011; Livingston, 2019). Technological advancements have provided militants with greater control over the messages that reach the public. The most recent innovation involves the live streaming of attacks, enabling the unmediated consumption of violence by anyone with an internet connection (Conway and Dillon, 2019). Although these developments have changed the communication landscape, the central idea of terrorism being propaganda by the deed, to which Alex makes powerful reference in his paper, remains intact.

The increasing diversity of channels by which people learn about terrorism has interesting implications for how conceptions of terrorism evolve and who determines the scope of extremism. The expanding nature of the information available to the public, the increase in online spaces where terrorism can be consumed and contested, and the capacity of the digital environment to enable militant actors to share propaganda, mean there is a more complex and emergent set of communicative processes at work. The impact of these dynamics is diverse, encompassing everything from radicalisation processes through to the potential for dictators to suppress dissent. One of the more distinctive features of contemporary debates is the increasing role of commercial companies, such as Google or Facebook, in determining operational definitions of terrorism and extremism which inform decisions about what material to remove from the Internet.

These are significant developments with important implications for public understanding of what constitutes terrorism. This is particularly the case as the impetus to reduce the online space for militant propaganda is significant and growing (Citron, 2017). Given the global nature of Internet service provision, this is likely to involve similarly contested debates as those seen in other spaces. This is especially the case as agreements made about censoring online content have the potential to be abused by authoritarian regimes in much the same way as Alex suggests is possible in the absence of an international, legally binding definition of terrorism.

In responding to the challenges facing efforts to define terrorism set out in Alex's paper, I have suggested that it is useful to disaggregate the different communities that are implicated in the debate. Academics, law enforcement agencies, the UN, the media and commercial companies, all have a stake in putting boundaries around terrorism informed by the particular kind of problem it poses for them. The scale of the implications of the definitional question across these spaces differs. From an internationally binding agreement on what constitutes terrorism with global reach to the narrower conceptual debates which preoccupy academics, the scope of these communities' influence differs dramatically. The number of actors involved in these debates is also increasing, with commercial companies being drawn into defining terrorism, as governments seek to enlist their

help in counter-terrorism efforts. There are, of course, interactions between different fields, and for scholars of terrorism there is, as Alex's work testifies, the opportunity to feed into conceptual, operational and normative debates about terrorism's definition, whilst ensuring there remains space for constructive debate between different positions.

About the author

Sarah Marsden is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. Sarah's research and teaching takes an interdisciplinary approach to radical and violent politics. She has published widely on global jihadism, religious nationalism, and radical social movements in journals including Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism and the Journal of Strategic Studies. Sarah is part of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), a national hub for security research based at Lancaster University. Her current research focuses on counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policy, 'foreign fighters', and women's involvement in radical politics. Her last book Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance (Palgrave Macmillan) was published in 2017, and her monograph Violent Legacies: Why Militant Movements Endure is forthcoming with McGill Queen's University Press.

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In 1971, Saul Alinsky published a book called *Rules for radicals* in which the 'father of modern community organizing' shared lessons he had learned over the years for successful protest. But the problem with *Rules for radicals* is that protesters often conclude that protesting is not enough. Historically, many social movements have escalated to violence after non-violence failed.

Michael Collins, for example, determined that 'Irish Independence would never be attained by constitutional means' and that 'when you're up against a bully you've got to kick him in the guts' (Boot, 2013). In his memoire, Irgun leader Menachem Begin (Begin, 1978) described the Zionist group's predicament after non-violence failed to protect the Yishuv: 'What use was there in writing memoranda? What value in speeches? No, there was no other way. If we did not fight, we should be destroyed.' When asked why they adopted violence in the 1950s, Algerian nationalists complained that the French had shrugged off their futile strikes and boycotts. In her autobiography from the American Weather Underground, Susan Stern (Stern, 2007) explained why her radical left-wing group escalated: 'As the years have passed, I've seen my efforts fail with thousands of others in the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. The time has come not merely to protest but to fight for what we believe in.' The leader of the Tamil Tigers shared a similar rationale for why his group embraced violence: 'The Tamil people have been expressing their grievances [...] for more than three decades. Their voices went unheard like cries in the wilderness' (Richardson, 2007). The African National Congress released a similar statement in July 1963 about why it ramped up its anti-apartheid tactics: 'It can now truly be said that very little, if any, scope exists for the smashing of white supremacy other than by means of mass revolution action, the main content of which is armed resistance leading to victory by military means' (Turok, 2003). The truth is that some radicals will become rebels. And there are rules for them, too.

My book, *Rules for rebels*, starts off where *Rules for radicals* ends. It analyses hundreds of militant groups from all over the world to discern why some succeed and others fail. I come with welcome news for the rebel leader. My research reveals that they possess a surprising amount of agency over their political destiny. Triumph is possible. But only when they know what to do. It turns out there is a science to victory in militant history. But even rebels must follow rules.

Smart militant leaders follow three golden rules to increase the odds of victory.

The first rule is for the leader to recognise that not all violence is equal for achieving their stated political goals. In fact, smart leaders grasp that some attacks should be carefully avoided because they are deeply counterproductive for the cause. In 2006, I published an article entitled 'Why terrorism does not work' – the first empirical study to demonstrate variation in the political utility of attacks depending on the target.

Compared to more selective violence against military and other government targets, indiscriminate violence against civilian targets lowers the likelihood of political success. This relationship is not just correlated. It holds true whether the unit of analysis is at the group, campaign or down to the incident level even after controlling for a raft of variables that plausibly proxy militant capability, from the membership size of the group to its age and external support. Beyond observational

studies, I find in experiments embedded in surveys that respondents are significantly less inclined to favour concessions when the perpetrators are presumed to have harmed civilians.

So, the first thing smart militants do is recognise that civilian attacks are a recipe for political failure. You might say that the first rule for rebels is not to use terrorism at all. There is no consensus over the definition of terrorism. But most scholars define it as attacks against civilian targets in particular. When we talk about terrorism, we mean attacks on civilian targets like schools, markets, movie theatres, rock concerts, soccer games, commercial airplanes, cruise ships, mosques, businesses and apartment buildings unless occupied by military personnel. We are certainly not talking about blowing the treads off a tank. What matters for the militant leader, though, is not how we define terrorism, but that they learn the folly of harming civilians.

The second rule is to restrain actively lower-level members from harming civilians. It does not matter whether the leader understands the futility of terrorism if their members continue to do it. Preventing lower-level members from committing terrorism is difficult because militant groups suffer from principal-agent problems. Compared to leaders, lower-level members are generally less strategic, possess less education and combat experience, and have stronger personal incentives to harm civilians, such as to engage in extreme performative violence to gain stature among their peers. The key to mitigate terrorism is for the leader to centralise the organisation, so they can educate fighters to avoid civilians, discipline those who harm them, and vet our prospective members who seem prone to undermining the cause with terrorism. When a militant leader follows the first two rules, the odds of their group committing terrorism plummets from 100 percent to just 15 percent – a massive improvement in the quality of tactics and, hence, the prospects of political success.

The third rule is for the leader to distance the organisation from terrorism whenever wayward subordinates flout their targeting guidelines by attacking civilians. Like CEOs, smart militant leaders know how to brand their organisation for maximum appeal when members publicly shame it. In practice, this means denying organisational responsibility when members kill civilians. My research shows that, as leaders gain combat experience, they are significantly less likely to claim organisational responsibility for attacks against civilians. When caught red-handed, smart leaders apologise for the terrorist attack and blame it on rogue fighters in order to highlight that their grisly methods run counter to the ideals of the group.

When you look scientifically at the history of militant groups, one thing becomes immediately clear about the Islamic State (ISIS): Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was one stupid leader. Baghdadi could have written a book called *Rules for rebels to fail*. Indeed, he did the exact opposite of what smart leaders have historically done to achieve their stated political goals. Baghdadi clearly did not understand the most important rule of sparing civilians to reduce the audience costs. Like Antar Zouabri of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi of the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq and other imbecilic militant leaders throughout world history, Baghdadi failed to appreciate that blowing up innocent people only jeopardises the cause by turning the population against you and reducing the likelihood of political concessions.

In order to maximise civilian carnage, Baghdadi also flouted the second rule by decentralising ISIS' recruitment and operations. By 2016, he had accepted the *bayat*, or allegiance, of 43 terrorist group affiliates, from Boko Haram in Nigeria to Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. Now, they were all fighting under the black banner. Where affiliates did not exist to maximise the bloodletting, he appealed to lone wolf terrorists to kill essentially anyone on their wish list.

And Baghdadi broke the third cardinal rule by publicly broadcasting in lurid detail ISIS' heinous crimes against civilians over social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Rather than denying

organisational responsibility for the carnage, he encouraged members to brag about it, leaving no doubt that his group was the baddest one on the block.

This was a terrific strategy for attracting sociopaths to the group, but quickly turned other militant organisations against it, dried up local support, and elicited the largest counterterrorism coalition ever assembled, costing his life along with the caliphate. The media fixated on every known foreign fighter to join ISIS, while ignoring the bigger picture that its attrition rate had steadily outstripped its recruitment rate.

Because most militant leaders restrain the rank-and-file, taking them out with drones or other means typically increases the amount of organisational violence against civilians by empowering less strategic lower-level members. But Baghdadi's death will not increase the amount of terrorism, because he was too dense to recognise its limitations. Baghdadi was like a CEO so incompetent that losing him will have no discernible effect on the firm's performance.

About the author

Max Abrahms is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at Northeastern University. His new book with Oxford University Press entitled Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History proposes and tests an original theory to explain why some militant groups succeed while others fail. Abrahms has published in International Organization, International Security, International Studies Quarterly, Comparative Political Studies, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, and the New York Times, among other venues. He frequently fields interviews about terrorism and counterterrorism with the Atlantic, Associated Press, BBC, Bloomberg, CNN, CNN International, Newsweek, the New York Times, Voice of America, the Washington Post, and other media outlets. He has held numerous fellowships and other affiliations with the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, the Empirical Studies of Conflict project at Princeton University, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy, the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at George Washington University, the Center for the Study of Terrorism in Rome, the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, the economics department at Bar Ilan University, the political science department at Johns Hopkins University, and the Belfer Center at Harvard University. Abrahms frequently advises government intel agencies on the contemporary terrorism landscape.

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The book, *Rules for rebels: the science of victory in militant history* (Oxford University Press, 2018), by Max Abrahms, is an important contribution to the literature on terrorist decision-making and the strategic and tactical choices confronting terrorist leaders. It assesses the key elements that are likely to determine the success and failure of terrorist campaigns. The book also commendably employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, evidencing the author's systematic engagement with the dynamics of terrorist organisational behaviour. This brief paper by Professor Abrahms applies the arguments of *Rules for rebels* to assess the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the late founder and leader of the Islamic State (aka ISIS, ISIL and Daesh) and self-proclaimed caliph of Sunni Islam. It seeks to explain the failures of al-Baghdadi's leadership and, hence, underscores the key mistakes he made that, Professor Abrahms claims, ensured the caliphate's demise.

Professor Abrahms presents a lively and cogent argument about al-Baghdadi's leadership shortcomings based on the core conclusions he presents in *Rules for rebels*. Al-Baghdadi's cardinal error, Professor Abrahms argues, is that the Islamic State's 'indiscriminate violence against civilians lower[ed] the likelihood of [its] political success.' Al-Baghdadi's second major mistake as a leader, Professor Abrahms continues, was his failure to 'restrain lower-level members from harming civilians'. The third and final fundamental mis-step was al-Baghdadi's inability as 'leader to distance the organisation from terrorism whenever wayward subordinates flout[ed] his targeting guidelines by attacking civilians'. This leads to Professor Abrahms' conclusion that 'Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was one stupid leader'. These are powerful and provocative arguments and a bold judgement.

In this response, I offer a different assessment of al-Baghdadi's performance as ISIS's leader. Indeed, I think that he was perhaps more successful, effective and consequential than Professor Abrahms maintains. Let me stress that this alternative interpretation is not in any way meant to lionise al-Baghdadi or praise his leadership. Rather, it is driven by the recognition that, if we are to continue to be successful in countering malevolent personages like al-Baghdadi and defeating the malignant movements they command, we need to avoid the temptation to dismiss them as fools or incompetents. Instead, we should always seek to understand better the reasons behind the heinous decisions they made and, even more so, the potential longer-term ramifications and consequences.

First, al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State undeniably changed the nature of terrorism. And they did so in a remarkably short time. Acknowledging this fact will enable us both to understand better the Islamic State's continued trajectory and anticipate better the next iteration of the Salafi-Jihadi terrorist threat. Al-Baghdadi, it must be said, achieved what no other state leader in the Middle East, much less terrorist group commander, had been able to accomplish for nearly 50 years: he re-drew, albeit only ephemerally, the map of the region. The Islamic State's conquest of western Iraq from its base in Syria thus fulfilled Osama bin Laden's pledge from 7 October 2001. On the day that U.S. military operations in Afghanistan formally commenced, bin Laden had declared that the force of radical Islam would both dissolve the artificial boundaries imposed on the former Ottoman Empire's Middle Eastern possessions by the victorious Western powers following World War I and resurrect the caliphate that the war had swept away (*The Guardian*, 2001).

Al-Baghdadi's June 2014 proclamation of a new caliphate straddling Syria and Iraq with himself as caliph may have been short-lived, but it nonetheless required an international coalition of some 80 countries and five years to defeat it. Despite its demise, al-Baghdadi's broken caliphate will doubtless serve as a source of inspiration and replication for current and future jihadist fighters, fuelled by the powerful added motives of revenge and retaliation. Al-Baghdadi may be dead and the caliphate may be in ruin, but as with any divinely ordained war, the struggle he led continues today.

Second, al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State revolutionised terrorist recruitment and radicalisation. Through the group's innovative and adroit exploitation of social media, it was able to create arguably the first truly global terrorist movement. It attracted 40,000 foreign fighters from some 120 to 140 countries, representing nearly two-thirds of the world's independent states. The repercussions of the Islamic State's ability to muster this diverse array of nationalities should not be underestimated. Moreover, through ISIS's entreaties to lone actors to carry out attacks in their own or adopted homelands on the group's behalf, al-Baghdadi effectively eroded the boundaries between foreign and domestic terrorism as well, creating a broader and uniquely ambidextrous terrorist movement.

Third, the exultation in violence and serial, sustained killing of civilians arguably enhanced rather than negated the Islamic State's recruitment efforts. This not only galvanised the online attention of precisely the audience that the Islamic State most coveted, but helped motivate and inspire them to come join them physically (McCants, 2015, p. 153). As Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger observed in their book, *ISIS: the State of terror*, 'Ultraviolence sold well with the target demographic for foreign fighters – angry, maladjusted young men whose blood stirred at images of grisly beheadings and the crucifixion of so-called apostates' (Stern and Berger, 2015, p. 72; Farrow, 2014).

Fourth, al-Baghdadi and ISIS's deliberate targeting of civilians was perhaps more calculated than is described by Professor Abrahms in his paper. I would argue that it was designed on the one hand to achieve the ethnic cleansing of the Sunni Muslim regions of Iraq and Syria by removing all infidels and non-believers, including Shi'a, Alawites, Kurds, Yazidis, Chaldeans, and other Christians, and on the other to bind the Sunni community closer to the Islamic State. In other words, the Islamic State directly made the local Sunni population complicit in its savagery and depredations to ensure their loyalty. Al-Baghdadi and his chief lieutenants understood that this would bind local Sunni to the Islamic State for the simple reason that this populace knew that once its protection was removed, they would be subject to the revenge and retaliation of those who had only recently been so viciously persecuted.

Finally, was the Islamic State's wanton targeting of civilians really such a failed strategy when al-Baghdadi was able to persuade former al-Qaeda franchises, such as Boko Haram among other groups, to change their affiliations and swear oaths of personal fealty (*bayat*) to him? Indeed, even after the caliphate's defeat, two hitherto unknown local terrorist groups in Sri Lanka saw advantage to hitching their fortunes to the Islamic State's falling star to stage among the most consequential terrorist attacks in years on Easter Sunday 2019.

Admittedly, the Islamic State's governance of its caliphate, which at one time comprised 34,000 square miles with a population of some ten million persons, proved short-lived. Despite the killing of its founder and leader, however, and its battlefield defeats from an unprecedented international coalition, the Islamic State is still alive and while not thriving, is present in more countries and places than it was even two years ago, much less when it was founded five years ago (National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America, 2018, p. 8). To date, moreover, there have been no defections of any of the Islamic State's branches or disavowals of its oath of allegiance to al-Baghdadi's successor. Indeed, the number of branches pledging *bayat* continues to grow. This in

and of itself is a highly lamentable but undeniably towering achievement of al-Baghdadi's, made all the more significant given the prolonged exertions of the international coalition mobilised against the Islamic State. It is one that shows how successful al-Baghdadi was in ensuring the survival of the movement he created – the hallmark, of course, of any effective leader.

In conclusion, we should avoid the temptation to denigrate reflexively al-Baghdadi's short-lived caliphate and castigate his failed leadership, however satisfying and justifiable that might feel. Instead, we need to assess his stewardship of the Islamic State coldly and clearly. Only then will we be able to anticipate and more effectively counter the emergence of a similarly malevolent leader and equally abhorrent organisation.

About the author

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Discussion 3 - Civil war, transnational terrorism and military intervention

by Martha Crenshaw

Civil war, transnational terrorism and foreign military intervention have been studied separately, but they are rarely considered in combination.[1] This neglect may be due to the fact that establishing linear relationships among these phenomena is difficult. The connections between terrorism, civil war and military intervention are complex, and their points of intersection do not fit neatly into simple causal models.

Despite these difficulties, an integrated framework is necessary for at least three reasons. First, the interconnections help explain the staying power of the decades-long appeal of the jihadist call for a pan-Islamic identity to defend Muslims against Western aggression. Civil wars and third party intervention in local conflicts constitute propaganda assets in modern information war and help justify transnational terrorism. Second, civil war, state weakness and instability provide opportunities for non-state actors to establish operational bases and acquire material resources, which makes them more threatening (in terms of mounting transnational terrorist attacks in particular) and provokes third party military intervention. In turn, foreign military intervention can precipitate both civil war and transnational terrorism. Third, civil wars furnish openings for transnational terrorist networks to exploit local struggles, with the effect of transforming them in terms of goals, strategy, tactics and international significance, as well as extending the global reach of violent jihadism.

These arguments point to two corollary questions: first, what is the likely outcome of a civil war in which extremists are players? Do extremists win? Is terrorism an asset? Are negotiations feasible? Second, does foreign military intervention lead to the escalation of transnational terrorism, which in turn leads to more intervention? Since 9/11 and the advent of the Global War on Terrorism, the United States has relied extensively on military force to defeat terrorism, but intervention often becomes part of the problem, not the solution.

Explaining the power of extremist ideology and messaging

The Rand Corporation recently issued a detailed study of 'political warfare', a term coined at the outset of the Cold War to describe non-kinetic actions short of war, such as "grey zone" or "hybrid" tactics. In comparing the capabilities of Russia, Iran and the Islamic State, the report noted that recruitment was the most important element of the Islamic State's carefully targeted information campaign (Robinson et al., 2018). Civil war, military intervention and terrorism are propaganda assets for extremists in what is essentially an information war as much as a kinetic conflict. Even when states possess vastly superior military power, non-states can excel at the "battle of ideas". The current jihadist threat can be seen as globalised insurgency or, if not about winning "hearts and minds", at least a violent campaign aimed at influencing a global audience, using modern communications technology.

Civil wars, especially accompanied by external intervention, aid Islamist-oriented extremist groups seeking to establish legitimacy, mobilise popular support, recruit fighters and suicide bombers for local struggles, and trigger "homegrown" terrorism in enemy territory. In addition to mass

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[1] The scope of this analysis is limited to transnational terrorism associated with Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and their affiliates and associates.

media, the message is now spread globally through social media, which the Islamic State proved particularly adept at exploiting. The reality of civil war and military force as a response to terrorism and insurgency, especially when employed by third parties in local conflicts, sustains the ideological narrative and makes it actual, credible, persuasive and urgent.[2] The threat to identity is now, not in the distant future, and it is real, not imagined. The war is not metaphorical. Information war is conducted through rhetoric and discourse and especially through visual images used to the media's advantage. Striking images of fighting, death and atrocities, such as beheadings of hostages, originate in war settings.

The framing of the advocacy of violent extremism as a core appeal to pan-Islamist identity, including the defence of Muslims worldwide and the vital necessity of establishing systems of rule based on Islam, helps explain the strength and staying power of the ideas that motivate violence. The 1980s civil war in Afghanistan not only gave Al Qaeda its start as an organisation but also launched the narrative of an individual religious obligation to come to the defence of a threatened Sunni Muslim community, initially propagated by Palestinian cleric Abdullah Azzam, a mentor to bin Laden. The emotional appeal to shared identity (at the time not opposed by the United States and its allies, since it was directed against a Cold War adversary) frames a potent message of in-group versus out-group and makes the local universal.

Much analysis of jihadist messaging focuses on the method by which the message is communicated (from websites to YouTube and Twitter to Instagram to encrypted channels like Telegram), as well as the historical and religious themes that recur, but without content based on contemporary reality the message would not resonate so strongly with audiences. Government efforts to counter terrorism and extremism often emphasise the ways in which the message is conveyed and the social-psychological susceptibility of those who receive it (and are "radicalised" as a consequence), not the facts that support the message. Efforts to prevent extremist use of the Internet, limit online propaganda, and regulate the tech industry risk overlooking the impact of the reality on which propaganda is based.

Opportunity, territory and resources

There is also a material side to the interaction of civil war, terrorism and intervention, which often reinforces the ideological dimension. Civil wars provide transnational terrorists an opportunity to establish bases for organising, planning and training, although holding territory has distinct disadvantages as well (Asal et al., 2012). War settings are also propitious for acquiring weapons, equipment, money and recruits. When rebels build these capacities and use fixed bases to launch campaigns of transnational terrorism, local states and foreign allies are more likely to perceive them as a serious threat, leading to government repression (in the case of relatively strong states) and/or third party intervention (in the case of weak states with powerful patrons). Third parties are motivated to act to prevent both terrorist attacks against their own interests and the destabilisation of weak partners.

The utility of safe havens, as well as the most useful locations for them, are contested issues. Clearly, a territorial base of operations was important to the emergence of a threat from Al Qaeda. Today, a key obstacle to settling the conflict is the question of whether the Taliban can credibly commit to not providing a base for Al Qaeda or other like-minded terrorists. As the case of Afghanistan shows, having a base or safe haven confers both costs and benefits. Among liabilities is the simple fact that the adversary now has a fixed address. The risks of having a fixed base have mounted in an

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[2] Although I disagree with Stewart Patrick's (2017) observation that war-torn states are not hospitable environments for transnational terrorist networks, I agree that the most important benefits they confer are probably symbolic.

era of drone warfare. Conversely, perhaps holding territory is not so much a liability as superfluous. The value of holding territory is lessened if extremist groups can function without fixed bases. Ideological and material considerations can reinforce each other, as the example of the Islamic State Caliphate shows. Predictably, the assets that made IS powerful also made it vulnerable. It was the establishment of the territorial Caliphate that catalysed the formation of the international coalition to defeat ISIS.

The vexed question of safe havens aside, weapons and money are critical resources for violent non-state actors. Cutting off terrorist financing is a key international counterterrorism policy objective. Civil wars tend to release flows of small arms, ammunition and equipment, especially if turmoil follows sudden state collapse (as in Iraq or Libya). In civil war settings, third party allies of either the government or the rebels also supply weapons, with limited control over their end-use (as in Syria, for example, where arms destined for "democratic" rebels fell into the hands of extremist groups such as the Al Nusrah Front, evolved later into Hayat Tahrir al-Sham). Funding for transnational terrorism and local rebels also comes from criminal activities, as well as exploitation of local populations through various forms of extortion.

How transnational extremists transform local conflicts

Civil wars provide an opportunity for transnational networks to co-opt or exploit local struggles and to expand their global reach. Not only do transnational actors intervene in local struggles, but local rebels also reach out to global organisations for needed support. Loyalty to a transnational terrorist organisation provides access to its financial resources as well as its ideas. The influence of ideologues and financiers from global networks can shape the identity, allegiance and practices of local militants and rebels. The mutual attraction between local rebels and transnational jihadist networks is an important mechanism for the diffusion of violent extremism.[3] Analysing the evolution of the 1990s Chechen resistance from a nationalist to a militant Islamist orientation, Norwegian researcher Julie Wilhelmsen (2004, p. 25) observed that '[a] key motivation behind adopting Political Islam and Radical Islam was clearly also that willingness to commit to these ideologies paid off in financial and human resources'.[4] She continued, '[m]oney can buy ideas', especially when rebels are desperate.

Outcomes: do extremists win civil wars?

Are extremists likely to win? Is extremist ideology an advantage? Is the use of terrorism an advantage? Are foreign fighters, who typically come with the adoption of extremist ideology, an asset or a liability on the battlefield for civil war rebels? Findings by scholars are mixed.

If extremists do not win, then what? Civil wars usually end either through the military victory of one side or a negotiated settlement and peace agreement. Yet, local governments and their outside supporters typically exclude the possibility of negotiating with jihadist extremists, who are regarded as untrustworthy absolutists hostile to any compromise. Conversely, the United States has entered negotiations with the Taliban, so far inconclusive.

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[3] See the Stanford Mapping Militants Project's combined organisational charts/timelines outlining the evolution of Al Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates.
[4] She also concludes that the conflict in Chechnya was one of the factors driving Russia and the West apart and blocking the adoption of democratic norms and procedures in Russia, as security concerns became paramount.

Does foreign intervention cause transnational terrorism? Or vice versa?

Transnational terrorism can trigger military intervention, as in the case of the Global War on Terror. At the same time, most analysts agree that third party military intervention increases the risk of terrorism against the intervening party in the aggregate, particularly suicide attacks. Out-of-theatre terrorist retaliatory attacks against third parties intervening to restore order and/or support an incumbent government are relatively commonplace. Campaigns of terrorism may undermine third party resolve to stay the course in a civil war, especially in the case of democracies.

Yet, rather than conceding, the targeted states then have an incentive to strike back, leading to a provocation–retaliation spiral. In addition, even if terrorism does not successfully coerce third party states into withdrawing from foreign policy commitments, non-state actors may still believe that terrorism works and act on that assumption.

Conclusions

Questions about the effects of terrorism should be framed in terms of overlapping and mutually reinforcing inter-relationships rather than a linear model of cause and effect. Scholars should not avoid complex questions just because answers are messy and complicated.

Military intervention, for example, is sometimes but not always both the cause and effect of terrorism. Whether states use force in retaliation for terrorism or in an effort to prevent the collapse of weak local partners, its use motivates terrorism. The ideological narrative justifies terrorism, but terrorism also strengthens the power of the narrative. The introduction of transnational terrorist networks into local conflicts transforms them, but the conflicts themselves are also a cause of terrorism – civil war and instability provide permissive conditions or opportunities, as well as motivational catalysts. Terrorism may not facilitate victory by extremists in civil wars (a potential effect that may be one of the greatest fears of governments and a motivation for intervention) but they can prolong conflicts and make them intractable.

This piece is drawn from the following:

Crenshaw, M. (2020) 'Rethinking transnational terrorism: an integrated approach', *Peaceworks, 158. Washington: United States Institute of Peace. [Online]* Available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/pw_158-rethinking_transnational_terrorism_an_integrated_approach.pdf

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"Mapping Terrorist Organizations," which is ongoing (see the website https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants). She has served on several committees of the National Academy of Sciences. In 2015, she was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. She is the recipient of the International Studies Association International Security Studies Section Distinguished Scholar Award for 2016. Also in 2016, Ghent University awarded her an honorary doctorate. She serves on the editorial boards of the journals International Security, Political Psychology, Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, Orbis, and Terrorism and Political Violence.

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In Response - Terrorism studies: blind spots in the field

by Max Abrahms

In her presentation on '*Civil war, transnational terrorism and military intervention*', Martha Crenshaw makes two important points. First, the relationship between civil war, terrorism and intervention is complex. Second, this complexity should not preclude researchers from trying to elucidate the interrelationship of these phenomena. Crenshaw notes that civil war, terrorism and intervention 'are rarely considered in combination' because their points of intersection do not fit neatly into simple causal models. I believe that this 'neglect', as she puts it, is due to four main factors elaborated upon below.

First, the study of terrorism has fallen in love with regression analysis. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, the portion of quantitative studies on terrorism has risen exponentially. This quantitative uptick derives not only from the unprecedented supply of terrorism event data, but the broader trend in political science to make international affairs more "scientific". In his study, 'Technique trumps relevance', Michael Desch (2015) underscores how efforts in political science to add analytical rigor usually with statistics can inhibit more nuanced understandings of the world, particularly when it comes to elucidating complex causal relationships between variables. Although sophisticated statistical models can offer insight, most quantitative studies merely establish bivariate relationships that are robust to controlling for alternative variables. Not only are statistics limited in their ability to unearth complex causal relationships, but the dependence on this methodological approach dissuades researchers from trying to publish studies that are more qualitative in nature and often better suited for such inquiries. The method determines not only the answer, but even the research question. Although the study of terrorism is in its heyday in terms of the number of data-backed studies, the overreliance on quantitative methodologies deters researchers from grappling with complex causal processes, such as the relationship between civil war, terrorism and intervention that often do not lend themselves to such research designs.

Second, the relationship of these phenomena has been neglected because historically many scholars have treated terrorism and civil war as distinct phenomena. Indeed, many definitions of terrorism emphasise that it is the "select" use of violence rather than a form of violence often employed in the context of protracted civil wars (Abrahms, 2010). Indeed, terrorism and civil war are frequently studied by different scholars altogether. In general, the political science sub-field of international relations has focused on terrorist groups whereas comparative politics has focused more on civil war. This disciplinary boundary, never a hard one, has eroded over time with more studies situating terrorism within civil wars (Findley and Young, 2012). Although political scientists who study terrorism are today more likely to cover civil war as well, the most knowledgeable scholars on terrorism and civil war are seldom the same people. Further, the "terrorism pundits" and "ISIS specialists" at think tanks, who dominate the news cycle, tend to be weakly educated in the civil war literature, halting progress on understanding how terrorism fits into protracted conflicts such as in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Iraq, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

Third, research on terrorism has historically exceeded research on counterterrorism. Compared to studies on terrorists, studies on government countermeasures against them have been surprisingly few. Of course, it is essential to understand terrorists in order to combat them (Abrahms, 2008). But

the relative lack of academic research on counterterrorism has impeded understanding its effects – including its contributions – to terrorism threats around the world. An important corrective to this lacuna is the profusion of studies on leadership decapitation, particularly the use of drones to eliminate militant group leaders (e.g. Jenna, 2009; Johnston, 2012; Price, 2012). Still, researchers need to investigate not just whether leadership decapitation "works", but how this counterterrorism strategy and others may actually exacerbate the terrorism threat. In recent work, I have tried to shed light in this area by demonstrating how killing the leaders of militant groups tends to make them more tactically extreme (Abrahms and Mierau, 2017; Abrahms and Potter, 2015; Abrahms, 2018). Now that academics have a firmer understanding of our terrorist enemies, we need to redouble efforts to understand how to combat them or at least not to contribute to the problem.

Fourth, academics have tended to eschew studying state-sponsored terrorism, clouding understanding about the relationship between civil war, terrorism and intervention. In civil wars, much of the intervention is designed not to counter terrorism, but to assist it. Ironically, academics have published countless studies to unearth the so-called "root causes" of terrorism for governments to address while neglecting how they contribute to the problem. The root cause literature is frustrating because it has largely failed to find robust correlations between either poverty or poor education with terrorism (Berrebi, 2007). Even if such relationships to terrorism were to exist, the practical implications would be only minimally helpful because promoting wealth and education are already priorities around the world independent of their potential counterterrorism value. State sponsorship, by contrast, is unquestionably a major cause of terrorism that can in fact be alleviated if governments prioritised counterterrorism over their use of shady militant proxies in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Libya and Yemen, among other geopolitically contested conflict zones. Unfortunately, I do not expect this research lacuna on state sponsorship to be filled because governments seldom regard their own proxies as terrorists and support for them is often kept secret, preventing the type of empirical studies that now dominate the research landscape.

In sum, I share Crenshaw's concern that scholars have failed to illuminate sufficiently the complex relationship between civil war, terrorism and intervention. This response suggests several explanations as to why.

About the author

Max Abrahms is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at Northeastern University. His new book with Oxford University Press entitled Rules for Rebels: The Science of Victory in Militant History proposes and tests an original theory to explain why some militant groups succeed while others fail. Abrahms has published in International Organization, International Security, International Studies Quarterly, Comparative Political Studies, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, and the New York Times, among other venues. He frequently fields interviews about terrorism and counterterrorism with the Atlantic, Associated Press, BBC, Bloomberg, CNN, CNN International, Newsweek, the New York Times, Voice of America, the Washington Post, and other media outlets. He has held numerous fellowships and other affiliations with the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, the Empirical Studies of Conflict project at Princeton University, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy, the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at George Washington University, the Center for the Study of Terrorism in Rome, the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, the economics department at Bar Ilan University, the political science department at

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Discussion 4 - Examining terrorism's persistence: a relational approach

by Sarah Marsden

Across the world, violent non-state actors orchestrate campaigns that kill thousands and can last decades. Yet, the chances of them achieving their political ambitions are small. What does this suggest about the utility of terrorism? And what explains terrorism's persistence in the face of political failure? To explore these questions, I would like to propose three shifts in emphasis to develop existing work that has examined these issues. First, it is valuable to look beyond the short-term measures of political success or failure which have dominated the literature to date in order to examine how the organisational, political and cultural consequences of violence interact and unfold over time. Second, rather than seeking out large-scale theoretical explanations for terrorism's persistence, it is useful to examine those mid-level mechanisms and processes that change relations between actors across cycles of contention. And, finally, instead of assuming that states and their non-state opponents are locked in an inherently antagonistic relationship, I argue that there are explanatory gains to be made by looking at how opponents' interests coincide and occasionally overlap in ways which can create the context for militancy to endure.

Terrorism's impact and persistence

Terrorism's effectiveness has been assessed using a variety of measures: from process and outcome goals (Abrahms, 2006), to strategic, tactical and personal rewards (English, 2017) and more specific strategies such as attrition, intimidation, provocation or outbidding (Kydd and Walter, 2006). These contrasting measures lead to somewhat different conclusions about terrorism's success rate (Marsden, 2018). Those studies, however, which look at terrorism's efficacy at achieving wider-scale political goals agree it is largely ineffective, with perhaps seven to 13 per cent of groups achieving their aims (Cronin, 2009; Weinberg, 2012; Jones and Libicki, 2008; Abrahms, 2006; 2012).

Alongside debates over terrorism's effectiveness, work has looked at the longevity of militant groups. Despite the oft-cited claim that ninety percent of terrorist groups last less than a year (Rapoport, 1992), more recent work on datasets examining hundreds of groups has found that, on average, around 50 per cent last longer than 12 months, and perhaps half of these are still active after ten years (Philips, 2017). Although there is considerable variation behind these figures, it is striking to note the significant number of groups which persist despite the apparently low chances of achieving their political aims.

There is a number of possible explanations as to why militant groups continue to use violence despite its apparently weak strategic potential. Groups may not know that using terrorism is liable to be ineffective or may perceive that it is likely to be more effective than available alternatives (Chenoweth et al., 2009; Muro, 2018a). Given the difficulties maintaining clandestine groups, organisational or security concerns may come to take precedence over strategy (Fortna, 2015). Alternatively, they may be guided by less instrumental objectives such as revenge or solidarity (Abrahms, 2008).

Adjudicating between these reasons for terrorism's persistence in the face of failure is challenging. Militant groups are not unitary; leaders and followers, and different factions can have contrasting

motivations which shape decision-making (Krause, 2014). The interaction between different outcome measures can make it difficult to develop a holistic interpretation as to why terrorism continues to be used (Marsden, 2012). There is significant variation in militant groups; some are small cells whilst others are large organisations with sophisticated command and control structures. More fundamentally, the assumption that militant groups abide by a strategic logic rooted in rational choice models has been questioned (Abrahms, 2008; Taylor, 2018). Finally, the perennial problem of gaining access to militant group's decision-making processes means analysis is often hampered by incomplete information.

These issues make generalisations about militant groups challenging. One alternative is to take a historically informed, case-study based approach to look at specific groups and their trajectories (Hoffman, 2015; English, 2017). These offer valuable detail, highlighting the evolution of violent campaigns, but are perhaps less able to inform broader comparative insights. They do, however, demonstrate the benefits of looking beyond short-term assessments of success and failure, illustrating the value of longitudinal assessments of terrorism's outcomes (Muro, 2018b). Although individual groups might disintegrate or be disrupted, it is not uncommon for militant organisations to be part of wider movements which persist over long periods of time. Understanding the impact of violence across cycles of contention promises important insights into terrorism's effects and can help explain its persistence (Bosi and Uba, 2009).

Interpreting terrorism's outcomes: relational perspectives

Moving forward, it is helpful to look beyond terrorism studies to explore the potential of theory and methods developed in political sociology, and in particular the body of work on contentious politics and social movements. This is well placed to address the fact that terrorism is not, as Charles Tilly (2005) argued, a causally coherent phenomenon. Recognising that terrorism is a type of violence used by different types of groups, for reasons which can change, and which can differ within and between violent organisations draws attention to the importance of looking at lower-order processes.

Such an approach is better able to interpret terrorism's impact and persistence by deploying more nuanced outcome measures. It recognises the need to assess group characteristics and behaviours in relation to the political context in which they operate. Importantly, it also takes account of the role of the state in shaping the opportunities for violence. Finally, work on social movements and contentious politics considers the dynamic nature of wider cycles of contention and the complex ways in which these evolve (Chandler, 2005; della Porta, 2013).

The body of work on social movement outcomes has long recognised the limitations of 'net effect' assessments of collective action (Amenta et al., 2010), instead looking in more detail at political, organisational, biographical and cultural outcomes. In order to explain how these still relatively broad outcome measures play out, it is helpful to draw on the relational approach developed in contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001; Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou, 2015). This focuses on identifying those mechanisms and processes which drive contention by examining how collective action changes relations between actors, and are defined as 'a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations' (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007, p. 29).

Such mechanisms might include brokerage, which creates links between previously unconnected sites, or identity boundary formation which generates new us–them distinctions. In order to refine the conceptualisation of mechanisms even further, and to address one of the debates in work

that has examined terrorism's outcomes, it is useful to apply an alternative account of decision-making that goes beyond rational choice models which emphasise strategic considerations. Rather than rejecting them entirely, it is possible to incorporate rational choice accounts into a broader approach rooted in American Pragmatism and developed by analytical sociologists, notably Neil Gross (2009). This sees people and groups as problem solvers. Faced with culturally and socially mediated problems, this approach argues we mobilise habitual – that is, after Dewey 'acquired predisposition[s] to ways or modes of response' (Dewey, 1922, cited in Gross, 2009, p. 366) – or where these fail, creative responses to address them. These problem–actor–response chains are social mechanisms, examination of which makes it possible to trace how causal processes play out.

As it encompasses a wide variety of problems, from achieving political visibility to how to live a meaningful life, this approach has the advantage of recognising that actors can, but may not always, maximise the utility of their choices. By acknowledging that much behaviour is habitual, and that instrumental decision-making can itself be a culturally and historically informed habit, it takes account of a wider range of factors which can drive action. Finally, this approach recognises that means and ends can both emerge from social action and be informed by deliberative processes.

Reducing the explanatory weight that rational choice accounts have to carry makes it easier to see how violent non-state actors and their opponents may not always be locked in a permanently antagonistic relationship. Instead, it reveals how militant groups can be guided by emergent and dynamic problems that develop as a result of interactions with those states implicated in their claim-making. Recognising the crucial role these interactions play in the dynamics of violence reveals how sometimes, militant and state actors' goals can coincide.

As David Keen (2012) has argued in relation to armed conflict, '[w]inning is only one part of war (and sometimes a surprisingly small part)'. Keen further contends that violence serves different functions for conflict actors, which play out in the context of complex interactions between state and non-state actor interests. These interests are not always antagonistic and, where they align, can prolong war. In a similar vein, I would like to suggest that understanding these dynamics can help explain how permissive environments are created, which can provide the conditions for terrorism to persist. By focusing on how violence changes relations between state and non-state actors, this approach answers the call to 'bring the state back in' to assessments of terrorism's outcomes (Muro, 2018b) through a more clearly relational approach to understanding how cycles of contention play out over time.

Cycles of contention

Considered individually, many of the groups that make up violent movements fail. Looking across the generations of claim-makers implicated in wider cycles of contention, however, can reveal a different picture. Taking this longer view illustrates how changing relational dynamics between the state and militant movements can create the conditions which see terrorism persist over long periods of time. It is possible to trace these dynamics by looking at how specific mechanisms play out, and in doing so develop comparative insights into how cycles of terrorist contention unfold.

A range of outcomes emerge from violent claim-making, which operate across cultural, organisational, biographical and political domains. Looking at this wider palette of outcomes by asking first what problems militant actors seek to resolve, and then tracing the relational mechanisms through which these are addressed, helps make sense of complex causal processes. For example, considering cultural outcomes such as the diffusion of ideas, collective identities and practices, helps interpret how future generations of militants come to learn about and evolve the claims of their forebears.

Looking at how organisational outcomes unfold over time demonstrates how material and social relations enable movements to regroup and remobilise. Politically, considering how alliances are negotiated and political agendas framed, it reveals how interactions between militant actors and their state opponents can see violence persist. Looking across cycles of contention makes it possible to see how one generation can create the context for future contention through the production of cultural, organisational and political resources. These processes change the opportunities available for future generations of claim-makers and shapes the potential for violence.

In interpreting terrorism's outcomes, I've sought to move the debate on in three ways. First, suggesting that efforts to understand why terrorism persists in the face of political failure, and to explain its impact, benefit from a more flexible and comprehensive approach to outcomes than the political or strategic measures commonly used in the literature to date. Second, taking a relational approach to interpreting how particular outcomes emerge makes it possible to go beyond individual case studies, whilst avoiding higher-level interpretations which are perhaps less able to explain satisfactorily the complex processes implicated in political contention. Finally, I have argued that it is important to recognise the crucial role of the state in shaping the opportunities for violence over the long-term. Doing so, makes it possible to see how these interactions can create the context for different kinds of cultural, organisational and political outcomes to unfold across cycles of contention. In order to understand better these dynamics, it is important to recognise that state and militant movements' interests can at times align in ways which can create the context for terrorism to persist, sometimes over generations.

About the author

Sarah Marsden is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. Sarah's research and teaching takes an interdisciplinary approach to radical and violent politics. She has published widely on global jihadism, religious nationalism, and radical social movements in journals including Terrorism and Political Violence, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism and the Journal of Strategic Studies. Sarah is part of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), a national hub for security research based at Lancaster University. Her current research focuses on counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policy, 'foreign fighters', and women's involvement in radical politics. Her last book Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance (Palgrave Macmillan) was published in 2017, and her monograph Violent Legacies: Why Militant Movements Endure is forthcoming with McGill Queen's University Press.

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In Response - Examining terrorism's persistence: a relational approach

by Martha Crenshaw

The point that research on the effectiveness of terrorism needs to go beyond the analysis of short-term consequences is well taken. In a much earlier piece, I suggested that a distinction should be made between effects and effectiveness, and I think that our two arguments are compatible (Crenshaw, 1995). There is also a great deal of subjectivity in defining success and failure from the perspective of the terrorist group. As Sarah points out, the actors using terrorism are often embedded in larger constellations of opposition and are involved in cycles of contention, as opposed to a simple dyad in a narrowly circumscribed conflict system with a clear end (when it is really often hard to tell when a conflict is actually over). My contribution to this project focused on the links between terrorism and civil war, which is an instance of embeddedness of terrorism in a broader context with an extremely long and indefinite trajectory. Seeing such conflicts unfold over generations of combatants and endless cycles of contention would be useful.

Interest in linking terrorism studies and political sociology or social movement theory is longstanding. Donatella della Porta, for example, began thinking along these lines in the early 1990s (1995). She was one of the first to propose meso-level theorising as opposed to meta-theory and micro-theory. The question I would ask if we were to continue this discussion is what major findings have resulted from taking this approach and how they differ from other findings about effectiveness (e.g. those drawn on rational choice theories). Could one, for example, draw up a chart comparing and contrasting major concepts, assumptions, hypotheses and findings? That is, a more explicit comparison could highlight contributions and bring contradictions to the fore.

Bringing the state into the explanation is also important. Put simply, the choice of state response can determine the effectiveness of terrorism. Sometimes it is the state's reaction that prevents terrorism from ending and produces unending cycles of violence. Violent non-state actors can choose to escalate or de-escalate violence as a conflict proceeds (the choice is not determined forever at the outset), and their choices are highly dependent on what the state does as well as what their constituencies think. As Dr Marsden says, states shape opportunities for terrorism, and motivation as well. It is also worth stressing her point that sometimes the interests of states and their opponents are aligned – researchers should not overlook this possibility. Terrorism, for example, can strengthen the power of the state.[1] Nevertheless, it has seemed very difficult to develop rigorous theories of strategic interaction. This is another avenue for further research.

About the author

Martha Crenshaw is a Senior Fellow Emerita at Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) and at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI) and was professor of political science by courtesy at Stanford. She is also Professor Emerita in the Department of Government at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. She has published extensively on the subject of terrorism. In 2011, Routledge published Explaining Terrorism, a collection of her previously published work. A book co-authored with Gary LaFree titled Countering Terrorism was published by the Brookings Institution Press in 2017. She served on the Executive Board of

[1] For another reference from further in the past, see Dror (1983), particularly the section 'Report from Copper Mountain on benefits of terrorism'.

Women in International Security and is a former President and Councillor of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP). In 2005– 2006 she was a Guggenheim Fellow. She was a lead investigator with the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland from 2005 to 2017. In 2009, the National Science Foundation/Department of Defense Minerva Initiative awarded her a grant for a research project on "Mapping Terrorist Organizations," which is ongoing (see the website https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants). She has served on several committees of the National Academy of Sciences. In 2015, she was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. She is the recipient of the International Studies Association International Security Studies Section Distinguished Scholar Award for 2016. Also in 2016, Ghent University awarded her an honorary doctorate. She serves on the editorial boards of the journals International Security, Political Psychology, Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, Orbis, and Terrorism and Political Violence.

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Discussion 5 - Terrorism: a continuing threat[1]

by Bruce Hoffman

The famed British Foreign Office mandarin and opponent of his country's pre-war appeasement policy towards Germany, Sir Robert Vansittart, could have been referring to 2019 when he observed of the 1930s that 'Left or Right, everybody was for the quiet life' (Manchester, 1983, p. 85). How else can one explain President Trump's abandonment of the Kurds in Northern Syria by withdrawing the few remaining American military forces along the border with Turkey in order to finally cease 'stupid endless wars'? (Crowley, 2019). Or, account for the Trump Administration's meretricious courtship of the Taliban? The credulous, one-sided negotiations that unfolded despite escalating terrorist attacks? And, the unseemly invitation to the leaders of a movement that was complicit in precisely the tragic events commemorated on September 11th for talks at the presidential Camp David retreat just days before that anniversary?

The Democratic presidential candidates who debated later that same week as the Taliban talks collapsed had little to offer themselves in terms of clarity or new policy options either for Afghanistan or the war on terrorism. From thoroughly discredited nostrums linking terrorism to poverty (Senator Bernie Sanders) to glib declamations about the 'need to bring the troops home' (Senator Elizabeth Warren) alongside a 'pledge to end the forever wars' (Andrew Yang) (*ABC News*, 2019), the debate on these issues, the *Washington Post* opined, 'served up evasions and fantasies not much different from the cut-and-run impulse that at times seems to be animating Mr. Trump's outreach to the Taliban' (*The Washington Post*, 2019).

But prophecy is not policy, and as the commander of the U.S. Central Command presciently reminded us back in 2013: 'No war is over until the enemy says it's over. We may think it [is] over, we may declare it over', General James N. Mattis explained, 'but in fact, the enemy gets a vote' (Goldberg, 2013). And, despite U.S. military expenditures now totalling some $2 trillion and ongoing counterterrorism missions being conducted in 80 countries on six continents (Savell, 2019), our enemies have incontrovertibly voted to continue this war.

Indeed, according to The Global Extremist Monitor, a total of 121 violent Islamist groups are active throughout the world. In 2017 (the last year for which data has been published), they carried out an average of 21 attacks per day that affected 66 countries (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2018, pp. 9, 13–14). Although a report released by the CSIS Transnational Threats Project cites a lower figure of 67 such organisations, this more modest number still represents a 180 percent increase in the number of Salafi-Jihadi groups that existed on September 11th, 2001. Regardless of which calculation is more accurate, neither points to the timeous conclusion of this war (Jones, 2018, p. iv). It is thus hard to deny that, if Osama bin Laden were alive today, he would likely be a happy man. The enterprise he begat over three decades ago has survived the sustained onslaught of the most technologically advanced military in the history of mankind. Despite serial setbacks, including the killing of its founder and leader, the narrative that he crafted continues to resonate and inspire a new generation to take up arms in a war that bin Laden first proclaimed 23 years ago, before many of these latest recruits were even born.

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[1] Presented at 'Terrorism: its past, present and future study: a symposium to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the CSTPV', 7–8 November 2019.

ISIS's stubborn resiliency was recently highlighted in the 2018 *U.S. National Strategy for Counterterrorism.* Despite ISIS's catastrophic military setbacks in Syria and Iraq, the document nonetheless cautioned that '[t]he group's global reach remains robust, with eight official branches and more than two dozen networks regularly conducting terrorist and insurgent operations across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East' (National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America, 2018, p. 8).

Unfortunately, this was not the only bad news that the new strategy imparted. In addition to ISIS, and the continuing threat posed by al-Qaeda, which had monopolised the three previous iterations released respectively in 2003, 2006 and 2011, the 2018 edition also listed Iran and Iranian-backed Shi'a militias, domestic violent far-right and far-left extremists, and militant single issue organisations as significant security concerns (National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America, 2018, p. 1).

ISIS

ISIS rebounded quickly from the killing of its founder and leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Only a few days had passed before it had announced a successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi, and issued a renewed call to battle.

The 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings underscore ISIS's undiminished allure to extremists even in places where ISIS hitherto had little to no presence. A key dimension of the attacks may have been the terrorist cell's ability to harness the experiences of at least one member, named Jameel Mohammed Abdul Latheef, who had left Sri Lanka in 2014 to join ISIS (Mandhana, Taylor and Shah, 2019).

Latheef's survival and escape from Syria is by no means atypical. Only about 10,000 of the 40,000 foreign fighters who came to fight with ISIS in the Levant and Iraq in fact were killed. At least 15,000 were reportedly able to flee the caliphate before its collapse. Of this number, approximately 7,500 returned home, of whom only about half are imprisoned or being actively monitored by local authorities; 5,000 others were deported by Turkey without notification given either to the recipient governments or those countries of whom they are citizens; 2,500 more found sanctuary in the Sudan; and, about 2,700 others migrated to ISIS branches elsewhere. Approximately 8,000 are believed to be fighting in the remaining pockets of Syria where ISIS has a presence or in western Iraq where the group has launched a new insurgency.[2]

In sum, ISIS today appears unbowed by its battlefield defeats, the loss of its caliphate, and the death of its founder leader.[3] We should therefore be very circumspect that we have any better understanding of ISIS's post-caliphate capabilities and intentions today than we did when the group first emerged. It is perhaps worth recalling that the 2015 Paris attacks were the biggest terrorist attacks on a Western city in over a decade. They occurred with no advance warning and in defiance of the prevailing analytical assumption that ISIS was not interested in mounting external attacks and, further, lacked the capability to do so. Moreover, just two weeks earlier, ISIS was able to perpetrate the single most significant attack against commercial aviation in more than a decade. These incidents, like the recent Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka that similarly surprised everyone,

[2] Data made available courtesy of Dr R. Kim Cragin, National Defense University, Washington, DC. The most recent United Nations monitoring team report also cites the number of surviving foreign fighters as 30,000. See Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, twenty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 15 July 2019 (New York: United Nations Security Council), p. 6. [Online] Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813209?ln=zh_CN (Accessed: 13 July 2020).
[3] 'Translated Text: IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi orders fighters redouble efforts at all levels, promotes religious activism', 16 September 2019.

suggest caution in precipitously declaring ISIS '100% defeated', as President Trump himself recently noted (Bennett, 2019).

Al-Qaeda

While ISIS has dominated the headlines and preoccupied our attention for the past five years, al-Qaeda has been quietly rebuilding. Al-Qaeda today is numerically larger and present in more countries than at any other time in its history. From northwest Africa to southeast Asia, al-Qaeda has maintained a global movement of some two dozen local networks.

The big question now is: will the killing of al-Baghdadi prove a boon to al-Qaeda? The prospect that the rump of ISIS in Syria and Iraq might ally itself again with al-Qaeda is a distinct possibility, despite their public, hostile divorce in 2014. Should ISIS's branches in Africa and South Asia follow suit, the West would face a renewed and perhaps even greater global terrorist threat. Several factors would seem to support this outcome, including that the two organisations share similar ideologies; that their estrangement was more a product of a clash of their leaders' egos than differences in core beliefs; and that ISIS's once compelling attraction to foreign fighters and homegrown recruits is now likely to atrophy if not reverse.

A merger would result in a terrorist force of chilling dimensions and influence. Their combined power could prove compelling enough to persuade competing Islamist insurgent groups in the region, like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), al-Qaeda's former Syrian franchise, to merge into an umbrella movement led by al-Zawahiri. Indeed, relations between HTS, al-Qaeda and other militant factions, including Hurras al-Din (HAD), al-Qaeda's stalking horse in Syria, have warmed in recent months.

Violent far-right and far-left extremism and Incels

For the past couple of decades, we have rightly been focused on the threat from Salafi-Jihadi/ Islamist organisations like al-Qaeda and ISIS. American law enforcement, however, has long warned of the threat from the violent, far-right (Kurzman and Schanzer, 2015, pp. 3–4). A 2004 FBI strategic planning document, for instance, firmly placed the lone wolf threat in the United States within the context of the threat from the indigenous far-right at a time when everyone was completely preoccupied with al-Qaeda (FBI, 2004, pp. 15–16).

This assessment accurately presaged the series of mass shootings that have occurred in the United States over the past twelve months. This spate of attacks challenge some of our most fundamental conceptualisations about terrorists and terrorism.

In the past, a terrorist was mostly recognisable as someone committing violence at the deliberate behest of, or on behalf of, some existent organisational entity or movement that had an identifiable chain of command. Each of these tragic attacks, however, was perpetrated by a lone gunman without any demonstrable affiliation to, or membership in, an identifiable terrorist organisation. Each involved a lone, male gunman acting entirely on his own, who was neither directly commanded nor specifically encouraged by an established terrorist group leader, propagandist or spokesperson. Nor, sadly, is this a phenomenon confined to the U.S. Last March, another lone, male gunman attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 persons.

This leaderless strategy in fact has its origins not in the Middle East or with a foreign Muslim terrorist organisation but in America and with its own peculiar variant of extreme far-right terrorism. It dates to the early 1980s when, frustrated by the FBI's success in penetrating the racist, white supremacist

movement then active in the western United States, a Vietnam War veteran and former Grand Dragon of the Texas Ku Klux Klan named Louis Beam conceived his leaderless resistance strategy.

ISIS's remarkable success in speaking to a global audience via social media and digital means is yet another inheritance from Beam and America's own domestic terrorists. In the early 1980s, he also pioneered the use of primitive computer bulletin boards as a means for like-minded hatemongers in the U.S., Canada and West Germany to communicate with and inspire one another. Beam had therefore positioned the twenty-first century far-right to exploit the advanced capabilities afforded by the Internet, the Worldwide Web, and the variety of social media and messaging apps available today.

The Christchurch, New Zealand gunman, for instance, took full advantage of modern communications technologies both before and during his attack. He hinted at it on Twitter, publicised it on the anonymous message board, 8chan, and posted links to his 74-page manifesto titled 'The great replacement', explaining himself and his actions, on both media. He also strapped a camera to his forehead in order to live-stream the shootings and posted more links on the Internet with instructions on how to access them.

Nearly half a century ago, terrorism expert Brian Jenkins famously described terrorism as 'theatre'. The power of social media turned the terrorist attack in New Zealand into a heinous act of performance art, designed to inspire imitation and emulation elsewhere. For example, the attacks were live-streamed for 17 minutes and viewed at least 4,000 times before Facebook took down the link. Over the next 24 hours Facebook removed another 1.5 million copies of the live streamed attack from its pages. YouTube recorded one upload per second of the assault from its website during the 24 hours following the incident (Ardern, 2019).

Increased attention has also been increasingly focused in the United States and elsewhere on the threat posed by violent far-left, as well as far-right extremists, on newly emergent single-issue movements such as the Incels, or Involuntary Celibates.

Like their extremist far-right counterparts, the violent, extremist far-left in the United States and other countries belong to no actual, existing organisation with leadership or a chain of a command, but rather are united by a common imperative. A warning sign of the potential escalation of violent far-left extremism into terrorism occurred last July when a long-time activist attempted to firebomb a Tacoma, Washington Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility.

The term involuntary celibate, or "Incel", was first linked to violence by Elliot Rodger (Baker, 2016), this movement's putative "patron saint" (HolyAx, 2018), who is credited with the first Incel attack. On 23 May 2014, Rodger killed six persons and wounded 14 in Isla Vista, California before committing suicide. As has become de rigueur for today's white supremacist shooters, Rodger also left behind a 133-page manifesto. It was titled 'My twisted life' and he also posted numerous misogynistic videos on YouTube.

Dozens of online forums, from Reddit subreddits to Incels.co to 4chan and 8chan, now exist where self-identified members of the Incel community bemoan their collective fate. The Incels' fundamental complaint is that they have been systematically deprived of their "right" to sexual relations. Rodger's manifesto and YouTube videos exulted in the use of violence in retaliation for his serial rejection by women. Through his attack, Rodger deliberately sought to terrorise women and inspire a broader uprising of men to follow in his footsteps. At least 30 persons have been killed and 42 wounded in definitively proven Incel-linked or inspired attacks since 2014.

In sum, none of the above terrorists, whether left, right or Incels conforms to the traditional model of terrorism. Accordingly, they challenge counterterrorism policies and strategies, which have long been oriented towards targeting terrorist organisations and their leaders. Because of the power of the Internet, social media and other twenty-first century communications platforms, the threat is changing and evolving rapidly and the relevant authorities both in the United States and elsewhere need to be fully knowledgeable about these dangerous advances in radicalisation and recruitment, the ease of exchanging operational and attack information, and the likely indicators whose recognition will facilitate intervention, prevention and the thwarting of future terrorist incidents.

About the author

Bruce Hoffman has been studying terrorism and insurgency for over four decades. He is a professor at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service and also the Shelby Cullom and Kathryn W. Davis Visiting Senior Fellow at Counterterrorism and Homeland Security at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the George H. Gilmore Senior Fellow at the U.S. Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center. Hoffman previously held the Corporate Chair in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency at the RAND Corporation and co-founded and was the first director of St Andrews University's Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, where he is currently visiting Professor of Terrorism Studies. Hoffman was appointed a commissioner on the 9/11 Review Commission by the U.S. Congress and has been Scholar-in-Residence for Counterterrorism at the Central Intelligence Agency; adviser on counterterrorism to the Coalition Provisional Authority, Baghdad, Iraq; and, adviser on counterinsurgency to Multi-National Forces-Iraq Headquarters, Baghdad, Iraq. He is a recipient of the United States Intelligence Community Seal Medallion, the highest level of commendation given to a non-government employee, and the author of the award-winning book, Anonymous Soldiers (2015). Hoffman's most recent books include Inside Terrorism (3rd edition, 2017), cited as one of the 25 most notable books published by Columbia University Press on the occasion of its 125th anniversary, and, The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat (2014). He holds degrees in government, history and international relations and received his doctorate from Oxford University.

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In Response - Counterterrorism: also a continuing threat?

by Alex P. Schmid

Since I agree with much of what Bruce says, what follows is more of a running comment, with some updating and expansion of the information he provided, than a critique.

The issues Bruce addresses in the opening pages of his text – the situations in Northern Syria and Afghanistan – have not gone away and even gotten arguably worse since he wrote his text, certainly in Syria. There, the United States downsized its presence only to see Russia, Turkey and the Syrian regime move in and trigger a humanitarian catastrophe. In Afghanistan, President Trump's efforts to reach an agreement with the Taliban at any price, side-tracking the Afghan government in office, look more like a capitulation than a withdrawal after an orderly transfer of responsibilities.

While the Islamic State's territorial presence in the Middle East has been largely eliminated and its attacks have diminished, the Taliban has become the world's worst terrorist organisation. In the words of the 2020 report of Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre:

Taliban attacks increased by almost 90% and resultant fatalities by more than 60% as the group surpassed the Islamic State to become the world's deadliest non-state armed group (NSAG). Indeed, JTIC data highlights that the group accounted for more fatalities than the next nine deadliest groups combined.

Bruce rightfully questions the wisdom of shaking hands with such murderers. In his text, he subsequently turns to the broader issue of Islamist jihadism, citing a report from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, which pointed out that a total of 121 violent Islamist groups were active throughout the world. That figure has been updated to 140 Islamist extremist groups in the latest Global Extremism Monitor of the Blair Institute. In the foreword to the new report, published on 15 January 2020, former Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested that 'Islamist extremism will remain one of the biggest challenges for global policymakers for generations to come' (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020). This echoes Bruce's title 'Terrorism: a continuing threat'.

Bruce focused on the continuing capabilities of ISIS and al-Qaeda and raises the possibility of a merger. That has not yet occurred but we should not delude ourselves, because al-Qaeda is, relatively speaking, more "moderate" than the "extreme" ISIS, that such a "marriage in hell" can be ruled out. War and necessity have made even stranger bedfellows in the past.

Terrorism and conflict

The world is full of powder kegs and the number of conflicts, while decreasing at the end of the Cold War, has increased again. A recent UN report (2020) noted:

The nature of conflict and violence has transformed substantially since the UN was founded 75 years ago. […] Globally, the absolute number of war deaths has been declining since 1946. And yet, conflict and violence are on the rise, with many conflicts today waged between non-state actors such as political militias, criminal, and international terrorist groups. Unresolved regional tensions, a breakdown in the rule of law, absent or co-opted state institutions, illicit economic gain, and the

scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change, have become dominant drivers of conflict. In 2016, more countries experienced conflict than at any point in almost 30 years […] Furthermore, the regionalisation of conflict, which interlinks political, socio-economic and military issues across borders, has seen many conflicts become longer, more protracted and less responsive to traditional forms of resolution. (p. 1)

The International Crisis Group currently monitors over 80 conflicts and crises and its monthly conflict tracker reports for February 2020 again makes for grim reading, noting 15 deteriorating situations and only four improved ones, with not a single apparent conflict resolution opportunity.

Conflict and terrorism are intimately linked and need to be studied together as Bruce, as editor-in-chief of *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* would be the first to acknowledge. The Institute for Economics & Peace noted in its 2019 report that:

Conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism, with over 95 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurring in countries already in conflict. When combined with countries with high levels of political terror [that is, regime terrorism – APS] the number jumps to over 99 per cent. Political terror involves extra-judicial killings, torture and imprisonment without trial. The ten countries with the highest impact of terrorism are all engaged in at least one armed conflict. (p. 2)

This sombre assessment is also echoed by the latest report of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) which recorded a total of 91,448 political violence events in 2019, with the number of events increasing in more countries than decreasing. ACLED noted that:

Most forms of political violence are on the rise. The drop in total political violence events [a 2% decrease from 93,642 events in 2018 – APS] is driven by a 15% decrease in battles. Yet other forms of political violence increased from 2018 to 2019: explosions/remote violence by 5%, violence against civilians by 7%, and mob violence by 47%. […] Although fewer civilians were killed in direct attacks, civilian targeting actually increased. ACLED records a 2% rise in civilian targeting last year, with 20,578 events reported in 2019 compared to 20,121 in 2018. […] Syria remains the deadliest and most dangerous country for civilians. These numbers include civilians who were targeted or killed directly, and do not include civilians killed in "collateral damage", meaning that the true civilian death toll from political violence is far higher.

Different databases – Similar threat perceptions

Different databases provide different statistics on armed conflict, political violence and terrorism, due to their specific assembly methods, extent of coverage and working definitions. The International Centre of Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague, for instance, has, for its Terrorism Threat Assessment 2018–2019 (p. 2), adopted Schmid's (2011, p. 86) academic consensus definition of terrorism (terrorism = 'a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restrains, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties'), while the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) of START at the University of Maryland, which has recorded more than 190,000 terrorist events since 1970, uses one that is closer to the American government's definition. (The GTD defines terrorism as: 'The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation".) Based largely on GTD data, the Institute for Economics & Peace (2019, p. 35) found that:

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, there have been four distinct trends in global terrorism […] Between 2002 and 2007, attacks increased steadily, correlating with an increase in violent conflict in Iraq. The trend peaked in 2007, coinciding with the US troop surge, after which terrorism steadily fell, with deaths from terrorism falling by 35 per cent between 2007 and 2011. The third trend from 2011 to 2014 saw the level of global terrorism surge, with deaths from terrorism increasing by more than 350 per cent in just three years. This surge coincided with the rise of ISIL, the start of the Syrian civil war, and the re-emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. The fourth and current trend, from 2014 onwards, has seen a substantial decrease in deaths from terrorism, with the most dramatic reductions occurring in Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. The winding down of the Syrian civil war, the collapse of ISIL, and increased counterterrorism coordination at both the state and international level have all played a role in reducing the impact of terrorism around the world.

Both the Institute for Economics & Peace and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism noted a rise in right-wing extremism and terrorism, which Bruce also addressed in his text. While he largely focused on the origins and rise of right-wing terrorism in the United States, ICCT's focus is on countries in Europe. For the period between January 2019 and (including) August 2019, ICCT researchers Liesbeth van der Heide and Reinier Bergema (pp. 5–6) found that a total of 301 failed, foiled and completed terrorist attacks were recorded in 32 European countries of which 19 (seven per cent) were of right-wing origin (eight in 2018 and 11 in 2019).

A steeper rise in right-wing extremism was reported in the Global Terrorism Index. Based mainly on GTD data, the Institute for Economics & Peace (2019, p. 3) noted:

One of the more worrying trends is the surge in far-right political terrorism over the past five years, although the absolute number of far-right attacks remains low when compared to other forms of terrorism. In North America, Western Europe, and Oceania, far-right attacks increased by 320 per cent over the past five years. This trend has continued into 2019, with 77 deaths attributed to far-right terrorists to September 2019. […] Far-right terrorism is also more likely to be carried out by individuals unaffiliated with a specific terrorist group. Nearly 60 per cent of far-right attacks from 1970 to 2018 were carried out by unaffiliated individuals, compared to under ten per cent for both far-right and separatist terrorist groups.

The role of the Internet and religion

Another feature of contemporary terrorism that Bruce refers to is 'the power of the Internet, social media and other 21st century communication platforms…'. Yet, he did not work out the full implications of this. We are far away from the nineteenth-century "propaganda of the deed" of anarchist and social-revolutionary terrorists, who could rely only on newspapers to spread their grievances and demands. When the rotary press and the cheap yellow press emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century, terrorists still had to rely on the news media's parallel interest in attracting the attention of large publics by sensational news which the terrorists were happy to provide by bombing and shooting heads of state and governments. Editors of newspapers, however, still had the choice to sell or not sell fear by printing or not such terrorist "news". With the advent of the Internet and social media, control over access to mass publics has been lost thanks to direct real-time streaming technologies and the ability of consumers to re-distribute terrorist news almost instantly. While some of the larger social media have tried to regain a degree of control over content distribution by introducing thousands of "content moderators", there are now too many secondary online fora acting as additional news outlets to undo the harm done by media-hungry terrorists who also inspire non-ideological crackpots to have their moment of fame by committing

public murders. As long as social media refuse to take full responsibility for what they broadcast, and act accordingly, the fight against non-state terrorism remains an uphill struggle.

One aspect that I largely missed in Bruce's text is the role of religion. It is true that he refers to the 'similar ideologies' of al-Qaeda and ISIS but he avoids a direct reference to religion. Yet AQ and ISIS' interpretation of Islam is arguably uncomfortably close to what fundamentalist readers can literally find in the Quran and hadith. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation with its 57 member states, however, has been successfully pushing the message that 'Terrorism has no religion' in the United Nations (*UN News*, 2019). Not all religions, however, are equally peaceful. It is no coincidence that most terrorism occurs in Muslim majority countries. While Muslims are often the first to suffer from Islamist terrorism, they are also bearing the brunt of counterterrorism actions by their own rulers and their foreign allies.

Human costs of terrorism and counterterrorism

While Bruce accurately sketched the continuing threat of terrorism and noted that the United States alone conducted military counterterrorism missions in 80 countries at a cost which he conservatively estimated at $2 trillion, he did not explore the role misguided counterterrorism strategies play in fostering terrorism in many parts of the world. The role of the 2003 intervention in Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom, which arguably revived al-Qaeda and created ISIS is hardly mentioned. Yet, the human costs of the American reaction to al-Qaeda's 9/11 terrorist provocation are indeed staggering. According to a press release (Brown University, 2019) summarising two 2019 reports of Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs:

since late 2001, the United States has appropriated and is obligated to spend $6.4 trillion on counterterrorism efforts through the end of 2020 […] between 770,000 and 801,000 people have died in post-9/11 wars. The total estimate includes civilian deaths – some 312,000 or more – as well as deaths of opposition fighters (more than 250,000), members of the U.S. military (7,014), and journalists and humanitarian workers (1,343).

If one recalls that al-Qaeda numbered only about 400 fighters in Afghanistan when 19 of these jihadists killed nearly 3,000 civilians on 11 September 2001 in the United States, the price paid by civilians in subsequent years has been staggering: an estimated 43,074 civilians died in Afghanistan, 23,924 in Pakistan, between 184,382 and 207,156 in Iraq, 49,591 in Syria, 12,000 in Yemen – altogether between 312,971 and 335,745 civilians or one hundred times more than had perished in the 9/11 attacks – not to count the national military and police forces of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, who lost between 173,073 and 335,745 men and women in uniform (Crawford and Lutz, 2019, p. 1).

Bruce's address delivered at St Andrews on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of CSTPV had the title 'Terrorism: a continuing threat'. Paul Wilkinson, who together with Bruce founded CSTPV, once coined the term 'counterproductive counter-terrorism'. If terrorism is equated with a social disease, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the cure of US-led global counterterrorism has been worse than the disease. The Global War on Terror has not been a success and came at a terrible cost. The number of Salafist jihadists rose from a few hundred at the time of 9/11 to an estimated 230,000 fighters operating in nearly 70 countries by late 2018 (Schmitt, 2018, citing Jones and Harrington, 2018). Nevertheless, in two decades they have been unable to create for themselves a secure and permanent territorial basis or draw the Arab and Muslim masses over to their side, despite suffering terrible losses themselves.

In a rational world, both sides to this conflict would thoroughly reconsider their strategies. Unfortunately, there are few signs that either side pauses and thinks again what works and what does not work when it comes to terrorism and counterterrorism. Both current terrorism and counterterrorism strategies remain largely unchallenged and continue to be threats to unarmed civilians and non-combatants.

About the author

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Discussion 6 - Intelligence and counterterrorism in a long-term perspective: the perils of Historical Attention-Span Deficit Disorder (HASDD)

by Christopher Andrew

A quarter of a century ago, my fellow speaker at the final session of the Symposium, Bruce Hoffman, identified the looming threat from Holy Terror before 9/11 more clearly than any other academic expert on terrorism. Bruce did so largely because he had a longer-term perspective than most other academic experts and most intelligence agencies. So far from being a short-term deviation, the rise of religiously inspired terrorism in the late twentieth century marked a return to a much older tradition of Holy Terror.

Richard English, who chaired the Symposium session on 'Religion and terrorism', reminds us that '[i]ntelligence is the most vital element in successful counter-terrorism' (English, 2013). It always has been. Historical Attention-Span Deficit Disorder (HASDD), however, has hampered recognition that intelligence was at least as vital to CT in the 1580s as in the 1980s. The first writer to use the word 'intelligence' in the way intelligence agencies now use it was William Shakespeare, beginning with his play *Richard III.* Intelligence, however, played a significant role long before the word came into use. So did terrorism.

In the opening session of the Symposium, Alex Schmid quoted the definition of terrorism in the 1879 manifesto of the Russian Narodnaya Volya ('People's Will'), which begins: 'Terroristic activity consists of the destruction of the most harmful persons in the government…' For fanatical English Catholic plotters three centuries earlier, the 'most harmful person in the government' was the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I, whom they sought to replace by the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots. Assassination (another word invented by Shakespeare) was the only practicable method of regime change.

Two of today's most basic counterterrorist intelligence tools – surveillance combined with SIGINT – were first developed in Elizabethan England to defeat assassination plots by religious fanatics. As the Rainbow portrait (the last of her reign) shows, Elizabeth was fully aware of their importance.[1] Eyes and ears cover her cloak, symbolising the members of the Queen's supposedly all-seeing and all-hearing intelligence system. She personally awarded a royal pension to Thomas Phelippes, the codebreaker who decrypted the correspondence between Mary and the plotters. Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's intelligence chief and (in effect) foreign secretary, whom she saw almost daily, told Phelippes that he would 'not believe in how good part she [the Queen] accepteth of your service' (Andrew, 2018, ch. 10).

SIGINT sealed Mary's fate as well as that of the chief plotter, Sir Antony Babington. On 6 July 1586, Babington sent a ciphered letter seeking her approval for the 'dispatch' (assassination) of the 'usurping Competitor' (Elizabeth I): 'there be six noble gentlemen all my private friends, who for the zeal they bear to the Catholic cause and your Majesty's service will undertake that tragical execution'.[2] Mary's reply, sent on 17 July via a messenger who, unknown to her, took it straight to Phelippes, praised Babington's 'zeal and entire affection' for the Catholic faith and her own cause.[3]

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[1] As one participant in the Symposium commented after I displayed the Rainbow portrait, the world's most photographed royal dresses are currently those of the Duchess of Cambridge, a St Andrews graduate.
[2] Babington to Mary, 6 July 1586, TNA SP 12/193/54.
[3] Mary to Babington, 17 July 1586, TNA SP 12/193/55.

After discussion with Walsingham, Phelippes forged a ciphered postscript on Mary's original letter, asking Babington to provide the names of his co-conspirators.[4]

The extremist Catholic terrorist plots against Queen Elizabeth I in the 1580s were more successfully penetrated than the IRA's against Margaret Thatcher and John Major three centuries later. The IRA 'Brighton Bomber', Patrick Magee, came far closer to killing Thatcher in 1984 than Babington did to assassinating Elizabeth I in 1586, largely because surveillance of him was far less effective. One of Walsingham's Cambridge student recruits, Robert Poley, penetrated Babington's entourage by posing as a militant Catholic. Poley ingratiated himself so successfully that Babington regarded him as a close personal friend, to whom he gave a diamond ring (Andrew, 2018, p. 176). The assassination of both Henry III and Henry IV of France by religious fanatics was due largely to French rulers' lack of the English intelligence combination of surveillance and SIGINT.

The Symposium opened only two days after the annual fireworks celebration of by far the best-known counterterrorist success in British history, the Gunpowder Plot, which came close to killing the King, his ministers and many others during the state opening of Parliament in 1605. The fact that the plot came so close to success serves as a reminder that the history of counterterrorism, like that of intelligence, is not linear. Over the centuries both have sometimes regressed rather than progressed. Despite the use of 'false priests' as penetration agents to report on Catholic plots, James VI and I's intelligence community was not in the same class as Elizabeth I's. Nor, three and a half centuries later, was British counterterrorist intelligence when IRA (PIRA) bombing campaigns emerged as a serious threat at the end of the 1960s. Walsingham would never have tolerated the confused CT organisation for which successive twentieth-century British governments were responsible – a confusion which helped to make possible, inter alia, IRA assassination attempts on two successive prime ministers which came closer to success than any of those against Elizabeth I.

At the heart of the confusion of twentieth-century British CT was the irrational division of responsibilities between MI5 and the police. Absurdly, until 1992 the lead intelligence role against Republican terrorism on mainland Britain belonged to the Met's Special Branch, while that against Loyalist paramilitaries (and all non-Irish terrorists) was assigned instead to MI5 (Andrew, 2010, pp. 600, 683–684). This eccentric anomaly had a largely forgotten historical explanation. The Special Branch, originally the Special Irish Branch, had been founded in 1883 to deal with the Fenian 'Dynamite War'. The Security Service, originally the Home Department of the Secret Service Bureau, was not founded until 1909. When Irish Republican terrorism later re-emerged as a threat in mainland Britain, the Met was determined not to surrender any part of its historic responsibility for dealing with it to MI5. HASDD in Whitehall prevented any serious discussion of this damaging historical anomaly.

The Thatcher government was slow to learn even the recent lessons of the Grand Hotel bombing. Slowest of all branches of government perhaps was Number Ten Downing Street, which was responsible for its own security. Not until the end of 1990 was it persuaded by MI5's C Branch (protective security) to fit reinforced laminated glass to its windows. It was only just in time. On 7 February 1991 an IRA mortar, fired from a white Ford Transit van parked in Horseguards Avenue at the junction with Whitehall, exploded on the 10 Downing Street lawn outside the Cabinet Room in the middle of a Cabinet meeting. The Prime Minister, John Major, was told that, if the mortar had landed 10 feet closer to the Cabinet Room, 'half the Cabinet could have been killed' (Andrew, 2010, pp. 771–772).

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[4] Ibid. Fraudulent addition by Phelippes in Mary's cipher.

The intelligence lessons not learned after the IRA's first attempt to assassinate a British prime minister were learned after the second in 1991. Operation ASCRIBE, which in May 1992 gave MI5 the lead intelligence role for Republican as well as Loyalist terrorism in Britain, was a major, overdue, turning point in the history of British CT and played a key role in defeating the IRA bombing campaign in London in the 1990s. The thoroughness of the surveillance in 1993 of one of the leading figures in the mainland bombing campaign, Robert 'Rab' Fryers, a senior Belfast Provisional, more closely resembled that of Antony Babington three centuries before than that of the 'Brighton bomber', Patrick Magee, only a decade earlier (Andrew, 2010, pp. 772–774, 783–785).

At the end of the twentieth century, terrorist motivation proved more difficult to comprehend than during the assassination plots against Elizabeth I, largely because of the much greater difficulty of understanding religious extremism in today's secular age. MI5 told the heads of special branches in December 1995 (Andrew, 2010, pp. 799–802):

Suggestions in the press of a world-wide Islamic extremist network poised to launch terrorist attacks against the West are greatly exaggerated […] The contact between Islamic extremists in various countries appears to be largely opportunistic at present and seems unlikely to result in the emergence of a potent trans-national force. General James Clapper, later President Obama's Director of National Intelligence, recalls that, while he was head of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) from 1991 to 1995, there was not, to his knowledge, a single high-level Washington discussion of the role of religious extremism in inspiring terrorism (Danan and Hunt, 2007, p. 24). Bruce Hoffman's now celebrated 1995 article, '"Holy Terror": the implications of terrorism motivated by a religious imperative', made little immediate impact on official mindsets in London and Washington corrupted by HASDD. Both British and American intelligence, though it scarcely occurred to either of them, suffered from a serious shortage of theologians. Walsingham, by contrast, was a theologian as well as a spymaster, with a series of theological works dedicated to him (Kendall, 2003). The portrait of Walsingham, which I displayed at the symposium, bears, in my view, a striking similarity to Bruce.

Only a quarter of a century ago, few Western intelligence analysts gave serious thought to the influence of Islamist theology on the terrorist threat. Muhammad's most widely read Muslim biographer today, Safiur Rahman Al Mubarakpuri, concludes, like other biographers, that '[t]he Prophet was the greatest military leader in the entire world', winning twenty-seven battles as well as instigating about fifty armed raids (2002).[5] Because the Quran is about the Message, not the Messenger, it has very little to say about the Prophet's use of intelligence. By contrast, the Hadiths (sacred records of Muhammad's words and deeds) give many instances of his use of intelligence during military campaigns. Though Muslim biographers of Muhammad, like Western historians, barely mention his intelligence operations, some Islamist extremists claim to be inspired by them. According to one well-known Hadith, Muhammad declared, like Sun Tzu a millennium earlier: 'War is deception'. As on 9/11, Islamist terrorism follows the same maxim (Andrew, 2018, ch. 6).

HASDD has also degraded Western understanding of Chinese counterterrorism. Liu Jieyi, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, told the Security Council early in 2017: 'Terrorism is the common enemy of mankind. Whenever and wherever and in whatever forms it occurs, it must be countered resolutely' (*China Daily*, 2017). The PRC presents its persecution of the Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang in north-west China as part of a counterterrorist campaign against international Islamist terrorism. Thanks to Western ignorance of Uighur history (which includes the closure of mosques and burning of copies of the Quran during the Cultural Revolution), Chinese propaganda has been remarkably successful. Twenty-two Uighurs were, probably mistakenly, included in the alleged terrorists interned by the United States in Guantanamo Bay after 9/11. Uighurs in Xinjiang

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[5] This book won first prize in a competition held by the World Muslim League in 1976 for the best biography of the Prophet Muhammad.

are currently subjected to more intensive intelligence surveillance and internment in "re-education" camps than any other alleged terrorist group in the history of counterterrorism. All are required to carry their smartphones and ID documents giving their ethnicity. If they try to pass any of the thousands of surveillance checkpoints without them, digital scanning devices alert the police, who during spot-checks sometimes plug Uighurs' smartphones into the scanners to record their contents The West has been slow to protest but, somewhat belatedly, has begun to do so. Only a few days before the Symposium at the UN General Assembly, the UK permanent representative, Karen Pierce, issued a statement on behalf of 23 countries (among them the US, Canada, Japan and Australia), detailing 'credible reports of mass detention, efforts to restrict cultural and religious practices, mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uyghurs, and other human rights violations and abuses'. Shortly afterwards, however, a statement by Beijing's ally Belarus on behalf of 54 countries (including Russia) praised China's 'counterterrorism' programme in Xinjiang for 'effectively safeguarding the basic human rights of people of all ethnic groups'.[6] Since the Symposium, leaked documents by Chinese whistle-blowers have provided further detailed evidence of the abuse of human rights in Xinjiang, masquerading as counterterrorism (Ramzy, 2019).

The final session of the Symposium was entitled 'Looking forward and back'. 'The further backwards you look', wrote Winston Churchill, 'the further forward you can see.' His maxim is one of the keys to understanding the future priorities of twenty-first century counterterrorism. A very long-term perspective gives greater insight into the coming terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) than the short-term experience of low-tech terrorist attacks since 9/11. In 1998, bin Laden declared it 'a religious duty' to obtain weapons of mass destruction for use against the monstrous conspiracy of 'Jews and crusaders' that had supposedly threatened Islam for the past thousand years and was now led by the US.

The first al Qaeda plan to explode a dirty bomb in Britain was prepared as long ago as 2004 by Dhiren Barot. MI5 believed he had been 'personally selected and groomed for operational deployment by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the [al Qaeda] planner behind 9/11', who reported personally to bin Laden. Though Barot and other terrorists failed to acquire the radioactive material for a dirty bomb, sooner or later one will succeed (Andrew, 2010, pp. 819–821). One of the great constants of the last few thousand years has been the inevitable global proliferation (once slow, now rapid) of all human inventions. Those who believe there is no realistic prospect of terrorists acquiring WMD have first to explain why they should be the first exception to this iron law of history. The realistic question now is not *whether* some future group of (probably Islamist) terrorists will use WMD but *when* they will do so.

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[6] UN General Assembly, 29 October 2019. I am grateful to Professor David Sneath, Director of the Cambridge University Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit (MIASU), for a number of briefings in recent years.

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In Response - Intelligence and counterterrorism in a long-term perspective: the perils of Historical Attention-Span Deficit Disorder (HASDD)

by Mark Juergensmeyer

It is a pleasure to have the perspective of someone who takes history seriously, or to put it in the acronym of Christopher Andrew, is possessed of LOHASDD (Lack of Historical Attention-Span Deficit Disorder). This is especially true of the field of counterterrorism, for which many engaged in it think that it was discovered only last week, or maybe shortly after 9/11.

Andrew takes us back to the era of Queen Elizabeth. This would be the first QE, some four centuries ago, when she was pestered with a series of plots to do her in. Catholic terrorists were incensed at what they thought was the marginalisation of their community by the Protestant monarchs, and thought that offing them would be a neat way of making their point.

The most famous of these attempts actually occurred a couple of years after her death. This was the notorious Gunpowder Plot, which was aimed at her successor, James 1 and the whole of the British parliament. The miscreants had procured 36 barrels of gunpowder, enough to level most of the parliament along with the King at the appropriate moment. Among the co-conspirators was a Catholic chap in charge of the explosives, one Guy Fawkes, who was caught before he could light the fuse, and later was convicted, hanged, drawn and quartered. The thwarting of the plot is remembered to this day in the celebration of Guy Fawkes day. And not coincidentally, the fellow's name has been appropriated to designate any randy young male who is slightly out of control. So, all the guys of today can owe their moniker to a religious terrorist some four centuries ago.

But I digress. During Queen Elizabeth's reign she was annoyed with the same sorts of mischief, and as Andrew says, found some crafty ways of dealing with them. These included spies, double-agents, observant intelligence, decoding encrypted messages, and some manipulation of communiqués to confuse the conspirators. Andrew is understandably in awe of these counterterrorism abilities and compares them with favour to the bungling attempts of the British to infiltrate and undermine the IRA during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

There are, in general, three broad approaches to counterterrorism. These are surveillance, interception and transformation. In his remarks, Andrew discusses how the first two have a history. There has been what is called "intelligence" for centuries, gathering information often clandestinely on one's opponents. There have also been attempts to foil the plots before they can be accomplished, as Andrew points out. There are lessons to be learned from this history of counterterrorism. Andrew is right to say that our amnesia about this past is an impediment to appreciating the range of options for the present. He makes a convincing case for history to be a part of security studies, however that may be conceived.

What Andrew does not much discuss is whether there is a history to the efforts to transform the potential terrorists or the movements of which they are a part. These are attempts to change their ways of thinking before they commit an act, or to reprogram the thinking of those who have already been involved in terrorist acts to persuade them not to do so again. Quite a bit of the contemporary efforts at counterterrorism are aimed at this project of de- and re-programming. I am thinking especially of the special camps that are set up for jihadi activists with moderate mullahs in

attendance to correct their thinking about Islam. Or the many videos that have been produced and posted on YouTube and elsewhere portraying Muslim authorities giving what they consider to be the accurate and non-violent interpretations of Islam.

Alas, there is no evidence that these efforts actually work, at least on a large scale. Those who are converted, or deprogrammed, are often figures who were somewhat marginal to the movements in the first place. Those who were deeply committed are less easily dissuaded of their beliefs. This includes those who think that their very existence, or that of their culture and the community, is in peril. It also includes those who have entered into a worldview dominated by the idea of a great cosmic war, one with religious dimensions. To accept this worldview is similar to undergoing religious conversion, and when one's whole identity is linked to it, withdrawing from it is both a personal as well as a political transformation.

What does sometimes work in these cases are organisational rather than ideological transformations. This is when the movement's organisation collapses from within, either through corrupt or missing leadership or internal ruptures, or when it is destroyed from external forces, such as military engagement or police attacks. These are the kind of changes that Audrey Kurth Cronin discusses in her comprehensive study, *How terrorism ends* (2009). Many of the endings that she mentions, including implosion, negotiation and transitioning to another approach, involve a change in the way the individuals view their organisations and their roles in it. In these cases, the ability to fight is diminished, even if the will remains and the ideology survives.

For the past several years I have been working on a project regarding how those involved in terrorist movements withdraw from them. What interests me especially is the commitment to a grand war, a cosmic battle, and how worldviews related to it can shift. I am aware that even though hostilities may have ended, often the war worldview persists, ready to reignite into violence when movements regroup and the timing seems propitious. Is it possible to change one's thinking about the grand struggles that lead to terrorism?

What I have found is that there are cases where there have been reconversion experiences. People can fall out of war, just like they can fall out of love. In the Mindanao region of the Philippines, for example, I talked with a number of old leaders of the Moro liberation movements. Some were once directly involved in guerrilla combat with the Philippine government. Now, however, a Bangsamoro Peace Agreement has been ratified that gives the region new hope. Many of the former fighters are now engaged in the political process, developing new political parties to champion their concerns. Former fighters are receiving government-supported job training to allow them to enter into the workforce.

In India, some leaders of the Sikh Khalistan movement in the Punjab have also made the transition into electoral politics. In the Punjab, however, there was less of a government effort at reconciliation with the separatist movement. And though some of the old fighters are now forming political parties, I talked with many others who continue to be disaffected. Some are simply bitter that their efforts were wasted. Others are biding their time, hoping that the movement will rise up again.

The followers of the ISIS movement in Iraq and Syria are in an even less happy situation. The most active of the fighters and their leaders are serving long-term prison sentences. Their supporters are now languishing in huge refugee camps. In many cases, their homes have been destroyed in the battles in Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, Raqqa and elsewhere, and they have nowhere to return. Moreover, there are no efforts to help them rebuild their shattered lives. ISIS continues to be active as an underground movement, and many old jihadis I met claim that it is gaining strength. Though

not able to mount an army, they are able to carry out sustained terrorist strikes throughout the region on an almost daily basis.

My conclusion is that counterterrorism as a long-term strategy requires structural changes. It involves dealing with the social tensions and alienation that produced the support for extremist actions in the first place. Though surveillance and intervention are essential for the immediate problem of the threat of terrorist violence, in the long run the relationship between old enemies will have to be in some way reconciled.

About the author

Mark Juergensmeyer is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Global Studies and the founding Director of Global Studies and the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, and Affiliate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a pioneer in the global studies field and writes on global religion, religious violence, conflict resolution and South Asian religion and politics. He has published more than three hundred articles and twenty books, including the recent Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State (University of California Press, 2008). An earlier version of this book was named by the New York Times as a notable book of the year. His widely read Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence (University of California Press, revised 4th edition 2017), is based on interviews with religious activists around the world – including individuals convicted of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, leaders of Hamas, and abortion clinic bombers in the United States – and was listed by the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times as one of the best non-fiction books of the year. His book on conflict resolution, Gandhi's Way (University of California Press, Updated Edition, 2005), was selected as Community Book of the Year at the University of California, Davis.

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Discussion 7 - Does religion cause terrorism?

by Mark Juergensmeyer

When I was in northern Iraq earlier this year one of the things I wanted to know was whether the appeal of ISIS was because of religion or for some other reason. This was the question I posed to those who had been under ISIS control and to former ISIS fighters now in prison. In the huge Hassan Sham refugee camp near Mosul I talked with several Sunni Arabs who had lived through years of ISIS control. Most of them described ISIS as a political movement, though one thought for a moment and ventured that it might be a kind of religion, but that it was 'a strange religion'.[1] It was not his kind of Islam. When I interviewed actual ISIS fighters in prison after the end of the conflict I found that their motives were mixed; some proclaimed that the idea of an Islamic Caliphate was their main attraction, others focused on the bad treatment of their Sunni Arab community in Iraq and Syria as the motivation for the anger and the attraction of a Sunni Arab-led ISIS regime.[2] Interestingly none seemed to regret their decision to fight for a caliphate, for whatever reason, but some blamed the inept leadership of the movement for their downfall.

Thus, it remains unclear whether and to what extent religion is the key to understanding the motivations for participation in the ISIS movement. Though I do not discount the possibility of a role for religion, it seems to me that whether or not it was a factor is something that would have to be examined on a case by case basis (Juergensmeyer, 2020).[3] I do not think it is fair to assume that just because religion is in the background that is what has propelled people into violence.

But this is precisely the assumption that is popular with a certain segment of the general public. The idea that religion leads to violence has become almost a mantra. Leading the charge are several aggressive atheists including Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, who assert that the very nature of religion leads to violence. 'Religion causes war because it generates certainty', Dawkins is frequently quoted as having said, adding that recent acts of terrorism were motivated by religion, because 'only religious faith is a strong enough force to motivate such utter madness in otherwise sane and decent people' (Dawkins, 2008, p. 343). Sam Harris (2005), a neuroscientist and writer, chimes in on the same theme with what seems to him to be an obvious remark, that 'religion is the most prolific source of violence in our history' (p. 26).

Opposite stand the sympathisers of religion, including Karen Armstrong, who feel called upon to defend religion against these spurious religion-causes-violence claims. In a well-researched book, *Fields of blood,* Armstrong surveys the history of religion's relationship to violent actions. She analyses specific cases in depth and concludes that these are political confrontations where religious language is simply used to justify and support a conflict that is based on social confrontation and the acquisition of power. Armstrong (2014) ends with the observation that 'the problem lies not in the multifaceted activity that we call "religion" but in the violence embedded in our human nature and the nature of the state' (p. 412). I tend to side more with Armstrong than with Dawkins in this debate, though I am not really comfortable with either side. I do not think either side would understand the mixed messages I received from my conversations earlier this year with former ISIS

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[1] Author's interview with refugees from ISIS, Hassan Sham refugee camp near Mosul, Iraq, 11 March 2019.
[2] Author's interview with former ISIS fighters in a prison near Sulaimaniya, Iraq, 13 March 2019.
[3] I explore the relation of religion and violence further in a forthcoming book, Juergensmeyer (2020).

fighters in the northern Iraq prison. Religion was certainly part of the equation, but not all of it. Their stories were complex.

What is missing from both of the positions – that religion is innocent and that religion is at fault – is an exploration of the actual role that religious language and ideas play in real situations involving violence. Is religion simply part of the social identity of people who are fighting for their community? Are leaders of the battle clerics who rely on religious authority for their leadership? Do they use the flag of religion to urge the faithful into war? Or is it a case where scripture inspires people to slay the infidels, any infidels who may be at hand? One would have to examine each case to see what role religious ideas or images or scriptures or leadership or social identity have to do with each act of violence.

There are several ways in which violence and religion are related. There are instances where wily militants simply use religious images and ideas to buttress their political motivations and their attempts to seize power. There are also instances in which religion has embraced images of violence and war – scriptures are full of such examples, from the Bible to the Qur'an and the blood Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Yet, usually, these images are domesticated and turned into metaphors for spiritual struggle. The word *jihad*, for instance, is interpreted by most Muslims to relate to the internal striving for goodness that each person struggles with, and not to external battles. Yet, some Muslims do see *jihad* in this bellicose way. This indicates another way in which religion and violence are related, in visions of religious war. Such images animate the most apocalyptic scenarios of religious struggle, including the ideology of ISIS.

Not all the supporters of ISIS buy into this apocalyptic scenario, at least not with the same enthusiasm that many of its leaders have shown for it. As I have said before, my own interviews with Sunni Arabs in Iraq, including former ISIS fighters and refugees from ISIS-held territories, affirm that for most of the ISIS foot soldiers from the region, their motivations are primarily for Sunni Arab empowerment. And many of the foreigners who have flocked to the region have done so with the lure of war, any war, the excitement and thrill of a slightly sketchy dangerous encounter without any apparent real knowledge of or interest in the theological aspects of the war worldview.

There is no question, however, that for some of the former ISIS fighters I interviewed and most of the movement's leaders, the apocalyptic image of righteous religious war is what appealed to them. And it is what has animated them. Graeme Wood, in reporting on this way of thinking in the Islamic State in his book, *The way of the strangers,* says that for many of the followers of ISIS, 'this war is the main event in human history – not a skirmish decades away from the end'. He goes on to quote the Swedish scholar Magnus Ranstorp, the former director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St Andrews University in Scotland, in saying that for those who believe in this vision of religious war, joining the Islamic State is 'better than getting tickets to the World Cup', since it is like being able to 'play in the championship and score a goal' (Wood, 2016, p. 264).

This is an instance where the two, religion and war, are fused. This fusion creates a powerful construct of human imagination that in other writings I have called 'cosmic war' (Juergensmeyer, 2016; 2017, ch. 8). The term 'cosmic war' refers to the idea of a divine intervention in human history, an existential battle between religion and irreligion, good and evil, order and chaos. It is a remarkable combination of the concept of religion and the idea of war that is often expressed in real war and not just in its literary and legendary representations. When it takes on a life of its own and is not contained within the symbolic language of religion, it can pose a whole new kind of alternative reality that is both religious and bellicose.

Some Islamic activists also see their struggle as part of a cosmic war. They may, like the leaders of the Islamic State, imagine that they are entering into an apocalyptic struggle at the end of history, or they may accept that although ultimately the cosmic war will be waged on a transcendent plane, the earthly skirmishes of the present are but the harbingers of a more glorious confrontation to come. The ninth section of the Qur'an urges the faithful to stand up in righteous defence against 'people who have violated their oaths and intended to expel the Messenger' and those who 'attack you first' (Surah 9:13). Though the historical context is one in which a fledgling Muslim community on the Arabian Peninsula was attempting to survive in a hostile environment in the seventh century CE, some Muslims take this passage from the Qur'an as a clue that a cosmic war is being waged in transcendent time, and the faithful are being called to struggle against any of those in the present day who would try to destroy them and their religion. Like the battles in the Christians' New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, it is ultimately not a human battle, but God's war: 'fight against them so that Allah will punish them by your hands and disgrace them and give you victory over them and heal the breasts of a believing people' (Surah 9:14).

Ordinarily, images of cosmic war are confined to myth and symbol, but if they are implanted on real-world social and political confrontations those who believe in them can be swept up into a grand scenario of warfare. Conflicts over territory and political control are lifted into the high proscenium of sacred drama. Such extraordinary images of cosmic war are meta-justifications for religious violence. They not only explain why religious violence happens – why religious persons feel victimised by violence and why they need to take revenge for this violence – but also provide a large worldview, a template of meaning in which religious violence makes sense. In the context of cosmic war, righteous people are impressed into service as soldiers and great confrontations occur in which non-combatants are killed. But ultimately the righteous will prevail, for cosmic war is, after all, God's war. And God cannot lose.

When cosmic war bursts from its confinement in myth and legend and is implanted on real earthly confrontations, such as the territorial raids of the Islamic State, it can change the nature of the conflict. For one thing, it expands the horizons of the confrontation. It expands them spatially in that cosmic war is thought to be larger than one region or location on earth but rather a manifestation of a global tension between forces of good and forces of evil. It is also expansive in a temporal sense, for cosmic war can endure beyond one's lifetime and still ultimately reign victorious.

As powerful as the notion of cosmic war may be, it arises from real social and political tensions. Hence, it can be seen as a symptom of problems as much as it is itself a problem. Though it is popular to blame religion for inspiring acts of violence, my own studies show that the story is more complicated. In examining religion-related terrorist movements from ISIS and Hamas to Buddhist militants and Christian White Supremacists, most cases exhibited real grievances, namely economic and social tensions experienced by large numbers of people. These grievances were not religious. They were not aimed at religious differences or issues of doctrine and belief. They were issues of social identity and meaningful participation in public life that in other contexts were expressed through Marxist and nationalist ideologies.

But in this present moment of late modernity and embryonic globalisation when secular nationalism is under siege, these concerns have been expressed through rebellious religious ideologies. The grievances – the sense of alienation, marginalisation and social frustration – are often articulated in religious terms and seen through the grand religious image of cosmic war. Thus, my conclusion is that religion is neither the cause nor the victim. It is not the sole problem. It is simply a factor in the nexus that conduces to religious-related terrorism and political violence. But that in itself is problematic.

About the author

Mark Juergensmeyer is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Global Studies and the founding Director of Global Studies and the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, and Affiliate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a pioneer in the global studies field and writes on global religion, religious violence, conflict resolution and South Asian religion and politics. He has published more than three hundred articles and twenty books, including the recent Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State (University of California Press, 2008). An earlier version of this book was named by the New York Times as a notable book of the year. His widely read Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence (University of California Press, revised 4th edition 2017), is based on interviews with religious activists around the world – including individuals convicted of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, leaders of Hamas, and abortion clinic bombers in the United States – and was listed by the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times as one of the best non-fiction books of the year. His book on conflict resolution, Gandhi's Way (University of California Press, Updated Edition, 2005), was selected as Community Book of the Year at the University of California, Davis.

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In Response - Does religion cause terrorism? The problem of *religion* and the need for a better question

by Justin J. Meggitt

It would be hard not to agree with most of what Professor Juergensmeyer has said in his contribution, not least because, unlike many who write on the subject of religion and terrorism, he has spent much of his professional life talking *to* religious terrorists, rather than solely talking *about* them. And his nuanced conclusion, that religion is neither the cause nor the victim of terrorism, is a difficult one from which to dissent. Many critics of religion, and its apologists, have added little to our understanding by treating the question as though it can only be answered by "yes" or "no". It is also extremely helpful to be reminded by Juergensmeyer of the variety of ways that religion and violence may be related, and the mixed motivations of religious terrorists, but above all, of his own definitive contribution to the subject, his notion of 'cosmic war', something that has, over the years, proven its explanatory value.

There are some elements of what Juergensmeyer has said, however, that need further reflection, and the question itself, 'Does religion cause terrorism?' needs to be amended for it to deliver any useful answers.

Definitions and their consequences

One of the first questions anyone studying religion is faced with is also possibly the hardest one to answer adequately: what is a religion? Although this might strike many of those who study terrorism as obvious, and not requiring further comment (and it is unsurprising Professor Juergensmeyer does not feel the need to provide a definition on this occasion), for many of those involved in the study of religion professionally, it has proven an enormously difficult one to answer (Harrison, 2006; Bruce, 2011). There are a number of reasons for this. It is, for example, hard to determine what characteristics unequivocally identify something as a religion, and many cases where the classification is disputed: it is unclear, for example, whether Confucianism is a religion (Rosker, 2017) or the *Juche* ideology of North Korea (Armstrong, 2005), or the traditions of indigenous peoples like the Dené of North America (Walsh, 2017). It is also notoriously difficult to find terms in other languages that closely equate with what is currently meant by the English word *religion*: the Arabic term *dīn* does not mean the same thing as religion for Muslims nor the Sanskrit term *dharma* for adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism (Nongbri, 2013, pp. 39–44; Tareen, 2017; Juergensmeyer, 2019, p. 61)

One of the things, however, that has emerged, perhaps most acutely, in the definitional debates surrounding the term is the extent to which religion, as it is currently conceived, is a relatively recent creation that reflects the circumstances of its birth. More specifically, it is often claimed that the idea that religions are things that are primarily concerned with matters of belief and doctrine, reflects the discursive origins of the concept in Christian, and more specifically Protestant, culture, where such things are paramount in a way that they are not elsewhere (Harvey, 2013, pp. 43–57). Further, the idea that such things as science, politics, law, economics and medicine are self-evidently distinguishable from religion, and constitute separate domains of secular human activity, reflects the European Reformation and Enlightenment contexts that shaped the genesis and subsequent

development of the idea (e.g. Asad, 1993; King, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2003). Indeed, for many scholars, "religion" and "secularism" are mutually constitutive (Sambrooke, 2017).

Although such definitional debates might look like the kind of inconsequential navel-gazing beloved of many disciplines, Juergensmeyer's essay reminds us that they are of relevance when we examine the question of whether religion causes terrorism. When he says that most terrorists experience 'real grievances' but also asserts that these are not 'religious' because they are social and economic in character, and not concerned with 'religious differences or issues of doctrine and belief', he inadvertently reflects, in this essay (though not in his wider scholarship), a rather narrow notion of what constitutes religion, and one common to many commentators on religion and terrorism. Such a view is unlikely to be shared by religious perpetrators of terrorist acts. Indeed, this tension over what exactly constitutes religion might well play a part in explaining some acts of violence, as terrorists seek to assert or reassert the totalising claims of their religion (or, better, the totalising claims of their understanding of their particular religion) against those whom they see, not necessarily inaccurately, as eviscerating their faith by limiting it to matters of private belief and worship. While etic or outsider accounts of religion are clearly legitimate, though far from unproblematic (Chryssides and Gregg, 2019; McCutcheon, 1999), it is important not to underestimate the interpretative chasm that needs to be bridged between religious terrorists and those who seek to understand them.

One possible strategy that may be of help in doing this, for those who study terrorism professionally rather than religion, is to approach religion through the lens of Ninian Smart's 'dimensions of religion' (Smart, 1996, pp. 10–11, 20–21) or something comparable. Smart sought to give 'a kind of functional delineation of religions in lieu of a strict definition' (1996, p. 9) and identified religions as containing nine dimensions: (1) ritual or practical, (2) doctrinal or philosophical, (3) mythic or narrative, (4) experiential or emotional, (5) ethical or legal, (6) organisational or social, (7) material or artistic, (8) political, and (9) economic. Each one, for Smart, was to some extent, affected by the others, and different traditions put different weights on different dimensions (1996, pp. 8, 10). Despite the problems that have been identified in Smart's proposal (e.g. Rennie, 1999), and his failure to make much of many factors that now preoccupy those who study the relationship of religion to terrorism, such as identity (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2009), his approach is, at the very least, of pedagogical and heuristic value for those who do not regularly think about religion in a critical manner. It may now be over two decades old, but it continues to demonstrate its utility (e.g. Bain-Slebo and Sapp, 2016). For our purposes, it reminds us that a range of aspects of a religion may be implicated in an act of terrorism, not just its beliefs and doctrines. Explanations of terrorism that absolve religion, or specific religions, because they see things other than religious *ideas* as carrying the primary explanatory burden in making sense of an act of terror, therefore, need to be queried as they may overlook other factors that may legitimately be identified as religious (e.g. Goodwin, 2018; cf. Gregg, 2018).

It should also be added that when examining the content of these dimensions in order to uncover data that might explain a terrorist act, it is useful to be aware that what might be salient may well be counter-intuitive. For example, while Juergensmeyer is surely right to draw attention to the significance of 'cosmic war' in religiously inspired acts of terrorism, something that can be present in a number of Smart's dimensions, from the mythic and emotional to the ethical and political, 'cosmic love' could be just as significant a factor and just as widely discernible. As Glucklich has suggested, terrorism may come from a hedonistic desire for divine love and the need to do whatever is necessary to obtain or maintain it (Glucklich, 2009).

Violence and terrorism

Before turning to the problem of the question that Juergensmeyer sought to answer, one further observation about his response is necessary. Juergensmeyer's contribution identifies a number of ways in which religion and violence are related, from the former's role in buttressing political ambitions to providing the reader with an introduction to his notion of 'cosmic war'. Whilst not wishing to deny the value of any of his insights, claims about the causal relationship between religion and violence *in general* are not necessarily relevant for our purposes. Although virtually all definitions of terrorism involve a violent act, or the threat of a violent act, terrorism is distinguished from other kinds of violence, even if commentators are not always in agreement about how this is the case, whether, for example, it is the perpetrators, the victims, or the intended effects, that set it apart (Easson and Schmid, 2011). It is therefore reasonable to question whether claims about the causal relationship between religion and violence, however attractive and legion these are (Rowley, 2014), tell us anything helpful. What any explanation of terrorism requires is why this *particular* form of violence is chosen by the perpetrators.

The specificity of religions

Perhaps even more significantly, however, Juergensmeyer's contribution also invites reflection on another matter, one that reveals a fundamental problem with the question itself: the specificity of religions. Whilst the question he sought to answer invites us to advance suggestions about the causal relationship of *religion,* in the abstract, to terrorism, the variegated character of *religions*, may limit the explanatory value of any theories proffered. Even Juergensmeyer's notion of 'cosmic war' is, for example, not easy to map onto religious traditions from South Asia (King, 2007, p. 225) despite working well for the example of ISIS given in his paper.

Thus, rather than ask 'Does religion cause terrorism?', if we want to say something that has any real-world utility, it is more helpful to ask 'Does religion *x* cause terrorism?'. Or, to be more accurate, given that the number of terrorists who can be identified as adherents of any specific religion is never more than a miniscule fraction of the total number of adherents of that religion (e.g. Kurzman, 2011), we should ask 'Does religion *x sometimes* cause terrorism?'.

Many scholars are, however, very wary of talking about the potential relationship of specific religions to terrorism and are far happier dealing with abstractions. This is, in part, because many claims made today about the relationship between specific religions, such as Islam, and terrorism, are often 'self-servingly selective and implicitly racist' (Dawson, 2018, p. 143) and probably reflect 'Orientalist' discourses in which the 'East' and the religions primarily associated with it, are constructed as barbarous, irrational and inherently violent (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 200). Exploring the relationship between a specific religion and terrorism also runs the risk of appearing to accept uncritically the religious claims and justifications of terrorists. This is often not only objectionable to many adherents of the religion with which the terrorists identify, but may have damaging consequences for them, leading to their stigmatisation and victimisation by association (Tellidis, 2016, p. 134). Indeed, partly to prevent this, and put clear water between terrorists and other members of a religion, it has become increasingly common to hear the claim, and not just from adherents themselves, that terrorists are perverting or abusing a religion or the 'true' form of it (e.g. UNDP, 2016, p. 5). It is also not unusual to hear it being said that terrorism is common to *all* religions, not just the one to which terrorists say that they belong, an argument that is intended, once again, to protect a religion and its adherents from unwelcome, hostile attention. Nonetheless, despite its potential risks, it is not, *per se*, unreasonable to ask whether a specific religion might *sometimes* cause terrorism. Just as we should 'challenge the curious erasure of religion from the study of religious terrorism' (Dawson,

2018, p. 141), we should challenge the erasure of any named religion from the study of any act of terror carried out by those identifying as its adherents.

Some, however, might object that the revised question – 'Does religion *x sometimes* cause terrorism?' – is still too general to be useful. After all, it is common in terrorism literature to identify a specific form of a religion as more likely to be associated with terrorism, whether a generic subtype of the religion in question, such as 'extremist', 'radical' or 'fundamentalist', or an identifiable, named movement within it, such as Salafism within Islam or Christian Identity within Christianity.

Whilst there are numerous problems with the utility of such labels – for example, terms such as 'fundamentalist' are often evaluative and pejorative rather than descriptive (e.g. Marranci, 2009, pp. 26–50; Toscano, 2010), and Salafism encompasses a range of positions on questions of violence, many inimical to terrorism (e.g. Meijer, 2009; Wehrey and Boukhars, 2019) – it is not unreasonable to accept this narrower focus. Therefore, we should amend the question further, so that it reads 'Does *some form of* religion *x sometimes* cause terrorism?'.

Causation

There is a further way in which the question needs to be qualified if it is to have any utility. Is it asking us to determine whether religion can be *the* or *a* cause of an act of terror? And, if so, what kind of cause? *The* or *a* long-term, underlying, root cause, or one that is more immediate, triggering, precipitant or proximate? Or, is it legitimate to think of it as a cause that lies somewhere between the two extremes? Can we talk about degrees of causation when we think about terrorism, just as in law they are practically accepted for the purposes of distributing responsibility and proportionality in sentencing (Braham and van Hees, 2009)? Does the question, as originally worded, exclude the possibility that religion might be a factor in terrorism only in the presence of something else that facilitates its activation? For example, Benjamin Barber suggests that 'fundamentalist' terrorism has a dialectical tension with secularism (Barber, 2010, p. xv), raising the possibility that without secularism, fundamentalist terrorism would not exist. There is more that could be said but clearly it would be useful if any questions asked about the relationship between religion and terrorism recognised that causation is far from straightforward. The question should be revised yet further to take this into account: 'Does *some form of* religion *x sometimes* cause, *in some manner,* terrorism?'.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude, if we wish to answer the question 'Does religion cause terrorism?', we should begin by reflecting critically on what we understand by *religion*, and the extent of its domain, and also what it is about *terrorism* that requires an answer that is not identical to the question 'Does religion cause violence?'. Then, given that religion has no transhistorical and transcultural essence, and the lack of clarity as to what kind of relationship between religion and terrorism can be legitimately considered *causal*, if we wish to say anything potentially useful, we should rewrite the question in the inelegant way that I have just suggested: 'Does *some form of* religion *x sometimes* cause, *in some manner,* terrorism?'.

The answer to this revised question may well be obvious. It is hard to find a religion whose adherents have not included terrorists of some kind – even pacifist faiths, like the Doukhobors, beloved of Leo Tolstoy, have had their fair share (Androsoff, 2013). And any cursory examination of terrorism databases reveals that there is, at the very least, a clear correlation between individuals and groups who identify as religious and many acts of terrorism (see, for example, Romano et al., 2019). *Why,*

however, this might be the case is a different question. Although there may be sufficient resemblances between different religious terrorists that some general theories, like Juergensmeyer's concept of 'cosmic war', may have some explanatory power, when it comes to religious terrorism, the devil is almost certainly in the detail.

About the author

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Discussion 8 - The study of terrorism and the problem of "apocalyptic"

by Justin J. Meggitt

An apology

I am not a scholar of terrorism but rather someone who has spent most of his academic life engaged in the critical study of religion. This means that I come to the study of terrorism mostly ignorant of what those in the field do, and how they do it. As a result, I was, at least initially, at a loss to think how I could contribute to such an important symposium in a way that might be of benefit to other participants. Venturing some thoughts on the relationship between religion and terrorism seemed the most obvious way I could say something of interest, but I was very conscious that I was to share a panel with Mark Juergensmeyer, the leading expert on this question, and so anything I had to say would be of limited value in comparison.

So, after further thought, I decided to focus on something rather different. As I undertook a cursory survey of recent literature in the study of terrorism that touches upon religion, I was struck by the frequent use of the term "apocalyptic" or its close synonyms (end-time, doomsday etc.) to describe various contemporary forms of terrorism, in particular when describing the kind of terrorism that is often claimed to be dominant today. Especially following the attacks of Aum Shinrikyo in 1994–1995 and the events of 9/11 in 2001, it is increasingly common (notably amongst advocates of the "New Terrorism" thesis), to hear the claim that terrorism has become inexorably apocalyptic, and the recent publication of a number of influential works about ISIS have reinforced this perception in public and scholarly discourse (McCants, 2015; Wood, 2015, 2016; Stern and Berger, 2016).

It is hardly surprising that my attention was drawn to the appearance of the word "apocalyptic" as its study is one of my major intellectual interests. The term is, after all, in its origin, a religious term, and one that, even in its multitude of current uses, carries with it religious connotations. Even the paradigmatic film *Apocalypse now*, mentioned by Dr Peter Lehr in response to this paper, as an example of how "apocalyptic" language now has a life of its own, is not lacking in such religious resonances (Garcia-Escriva, 2018). Indeed, such is my fascination with this subject that a few years ago I helped establish the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), which specialises in the study of the many religious, historical and cultural manifestations of apocalypticism. Regardless of my predilection for all things apocalyptic, however, the use of this word in the study of terrorism warrants attention, not least because it has real-world implications, both intended and unintended. Some contributions have made substantial assertions about the analytical utility of employing the term "apocalyptic", not just in identifying and understanding a distinctive form of contemporary terrorism, but also in its potential for informing counterterrorism policy (e.g. Flannery, 2016, pp. 7, 214; Saiya, 2018, pp. 16–17).

What follows could be criticised for being impressionistic but, as this is an opinion piece, I hope that readers will be tolerant if it lacks the detailed evidential support for what I have to say. I have attempted to provide exactly that in a fuller analysis of the subject along the lines sketched here, in another publication (Meggitt, 2020). I nearly always feel a little unwell when I hear experts in other fields talk about my own, not least because they often seem to declaim with such certainty about subjects about which I have long since ceased to be so sure. Thus, I apologise in advance if what I

have to say strikes those who study terrorism professionally as another example of that unwelcome cocktail of ignorance and arrogance that is no doubt characteristic of many contributions by those outside their area of expertise.

It is my belief that there is a problem in the use of the term "apocalyptic" in the study of terrorism. Or, rather, there are a number of related problems. These are substantive and worth briefly surveying.

Definitional problems

Despite its popularity, there is a striking inconsistency across the scholarly literature in what is meant when the adjective "apocalyptic" is used in relation to "terrorism". Most employ it to describe one of three kinds of terrorism: (1) terrorism that is catastrophic, world-ending or existentially threatening (e.g. Hughes, 1998; Umbrasas, 2018); (2) terrorism that is catastrophic, world-ending or existentially threatening but also possesses a handful of additional features, such as the desire to usher in a new world on the part of its perpetrators (e.g. Berger, 2015; Gregg, 2014); (3) terrorism that stands in some kind of genealogical relationship with ancient apocalyptic literature and the ideas it allegedly contains (e.g. Flannery, 2016).

Clearly those in the field are not necessarily talking about the same thing. For example, uses of the term "apocalyptic" that fall into the first category, and which use it as little more than a synonym for "catastrophic" have little to do with those that fall into the third, where it may be assumed that "apocalyptic" implies a range of ideas concerning reality and such things as God, time and human agency.

We should be wary of the assumption of existential threat inherent in the first two uses of the term. Such claims are a common trope in popular and scholarly discourses about terrorism and are regularly made about terrorists who, by any reasonable criteria, clearly do not pose any such thing (Wilson, 2017). For example, few terrorist acts in recent decades have resulted in excess of 100 deaths and of the handful that have (Oklahoma City, 1995; New York, 2001; Beslan, 2004; Gamboru and Ngala, 2014; Paris, 2015; Baghdad, 2016, Sri Lanka, 2019), none, however appalling and traumatic, can reasonably be judged to be *existentially* threatening to anyone other than the victims themselves.

Definitions of the third kind also have substantial problems. They are dependent upon those currently used in biblical studies, which are themselves far from uncontested. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of these definitional debates for those outside that field is the degree to which the relationship of apocalyptic to eschatology or the end-times is contested (e.g. Rowland, 1982), as are claims about its social context and function (Hellholm, 1986, p. 26). Such a way of thinking about "apocalyptic" runs the risk of encouraging an essentialist, immutable and reified conception of apocalyptic that is, at best, analytically problematic.

"Apocalyptic" as a synonym for "religious"

"Apocalyptic" terrorism is regularly treated as the equivalent of "religious" terrorism (e.g. Gunning and Jackson, 2011, p. 372) or claims are made that imply that the violence perpetrated by religious terrorists is, at some essential level, apocalyptic in character (e.g. Stern, 2003, p. 281).

For example, "religious" terrorism is regularly distinguished from other kinds of terrorism by the violence it employs; its perpetrators are seen as especially relentless, brutal and indiscriminate in comparison with other kinds of terrorists (Ranstorp, 1996, p. 54), not least in their willingness to use

weapons of mass destruction (e.g. Ackerman, 2009, p. 382). Of course, not all contributors take such an approach, and some are much more nuanced (e.g. Lewis, 2017; Juergensmeyer, 2017) but the treatment of "apocalyptic" and "religious" as more or less interchangeable is not unusual in terrorism studies. Whilst this could be explained as a consequence of the dearth of religious specialists within terrorism studies, it also appears to be a result of the influence of polemical, discursive representations of religion, especially those popularised by the so-called "New Atheists", where religiously motivated terrorism is often presented as emblematic of the irrationality and violence allegedly inherent in religion itself (Foster, Megoran and Dunn, 2017; Khalil, 2017).

Assumption that "apocalyptic" is always primary and totalising

Those who wish to invoke "apocalyptic" in their analysis of terrorism, often fail to view it as anything other than primary and totalising (e.g. Gregg, 2014, p. 36). That such ideas might be held superficially, sporadically or indifferently, seems to be rarely considered, yet there are good reasons for thinking this might be so for anyone who studies apocalypticism professionally. The failure to think about the potential fluctuation in the saliency of apocalyptic convictions amongst "apocalyptic" terrorist groups is especially problematic because such groups are often at their most violent precisely when apocalyptic beliefs are ebbing and members begin to defect (Mayer, 2001a, p. 366).

Homogenising claims about "apocalyptic" radicalism

Discussions of "apocalyptic" terrorism regularly assume that apocalypticism is self-evidently destructive and invariably threatening to the status quo. Both suppositions are wrong and fail to take account of its diversity.

"Apocalyptic" radicalism is often creative rather than destructive. It is regularly associated with innovations, as pre-existing relationships are often comprehensively reconfigured and reimagined. One need only look, for example, at the developments in design, technology and ideas of gender associated with the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (Shakers) (e.g. Miller, 2010). Apocalyptic can also be profoundly conservative, bolstering the status quo rather than challenging it (McGinn, 1998, p. 35). Indeed, a case could be made for apocalypticism as a prophylactic *against* terrorism, much as some have argued that "non-violent extremism" is inimical to "violent extremism" (Bartlett and Miller, 2012, p. 2) rather than a precondition for it. Evidence of its potential conservatism is evident in the longevity of some groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, for which apocalyptic ideas have consistently remained central (Chryssides, 2016). As a student once proudly declared in one of my classes on the Book of Revelation: 'I believe the world will end in my lifetime, my father believed it would in his, and his father before him'.

Assumptions about the causes and character of "apocalyptic" violence

Violence is often inadequately treated in scholarship concerned with "apocalyptic" terrorism. This is especially true in two respects. The first relates to assumptions about the causes of violence, and the second, its nature.

Discussions can betray a rather simplistic understanding of the causal relationship between apocalypticism and violence. In particular, they often ignore or treat superficially, the role of factors *other* than apocalyptic ideology that may account for violent actions. Given the enormous complexity of the relationship between *religion* and violence – a recent study found three hundred

different ways the former has been claimed to bring about the latter (Rowley, 2014) – we should be cautious of claims about how, or indeed, whether, *apocalyptic* causes violence.

Discussions of apocalyptic violence and terrorism are inadequate in other ways too. Focus upon the allegedly indiscriminate and lethal character of acts by "apocalyptic" terrorists is understandable but other aspects of the violence may be neglected as a result. Terrorist violence is often as much expressive and communicative as instrumental, and much more could be said about the performative character of such events, along the lines of Juergensmeyer (2013); nevertheless, their ritualised characteristics are regularly overlooked (Nanninga, 2017). Nor is enough attention paid to the "apocalyptic" violence generated by the opponents of terrorism, who may share with the terrorists an "apocalyptic" perception of the nature of the conflict, and behave accordingly, engaging in "apocalyptic mirroring" (Wessinger, 2006, p. 191) or "counterapocalyptic" (Falk, 2003, p. 205).

Cross-cultural and non-religious uses of the term "apocalyptic"

The cross-cultural utility of the term "apocalyptic" is far from clear. Globalisation has seen the spread of apocalyptic ideas, even its cross-fertilisation with previously distinct traditions, seen, for example, in the recent appropriation of evangelical Christian apocalyptic ideas in popular Islamic apocalyptic writing (Stowasser, 2000; Cook, 2005; Filiu, 2012; Nash, 2018). The term, however, is so ineluctably associated with a specifically *Christian* text, the Book of Revelation, that we run the risk of erasing important differences of content and context by employing it. Given that most definitions of apocalypticism are predicated on a clear end to earthly history can it really be helpful in understanding terrorism that emerges from a Hindu or Buddhist context, where, for example, rather than being linear, time is conceived of as, in some sense, cyclical? Or that which comes from secular fascist groups whose ideology is "palingenetic", concerned with rebirth rather than some kind of temporal climax to history? (Griffin, 1991, pp. 32–40).

Neglect of hermeneutics

Discussions of apocalyptic terrorism rarely address the question of hermeneutics. For example, despite claims about the role of the Book of Revelation that are found in discussions of "apocalyptic terrorism", Rowland rightly observes:

the Apocalypse has only rarely been directly linked with the prosecution of violence. In the cases where there is evidence that it has had a catalytic effect, it would appear that there is often a particular hermeneutical move in which actualizing the text takes place, which may be supported by resort to visions, dreams and direct divine communication. (Rowland, 2004, pp. 12–13).

Indeed, the desire to demonstrate the instrumental role that the Book of Revelation has allegedly played in motivating violence has meant that it is easy to find unwarranted claims about the text in the scholarly literature. Frances Flannery's recent study, for example, makes much of a quotation from the Apocalypse found in the manifesto published by Anders Breivik justifying his murderous actions – 'And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was death, and Hell followed with him' (Rev 6:8). This is sufficient for her to declare: 'Breivik's own words demonstrate how the Book of Revelation, which was used in the Middle Ages to justify killing Muslims, still spawns the same hatred today' (Flannery, 2016, p. 52). This, however, is the *only* quotation from Revelation found in the entire 1,518 pages of Breivik's work; the biblical book is quoted as often as the poems of Tennyson. Such simplistic claims obscure a far more complex range of discourses

evident in Breivik's text (Brömssen, 2013; Sandberg, 2015) and the multiple explanations for that act of terrorism (e.g. Ranstorp, 2013; Gardell, 2014; Hemmingby and Bjørgo, 2016).

Conclusion

Given the problems generated by qualifying the noun "terrorism" with the adjective "apocalyptic", there are good grounds for avoiding its use altogether. Although some of the difficulties we have identified could, theoretically, be rectified, it is unlikely that the term "apocalyptic" will have much analytical utility in the study of terrorism. To put the case succinctly: whenever apocalypticism is deployed, the cultural power of the idea seems so great that instead of shining a useful light on the object of study, it runs the risk of obliterating it completely. Indeed, it may well be time for a moratorium on the use of "apocalyptic" to label *any* form of terrorism. To continue to use this adjective to describe terrorism only encourages what could be called "pale horse syndrome" (Rev 6:8), an affliction in which the sufferer too readily believes that they are seeing something that is an existential threat. Colleagues were right, when I presented this idea at the symposium, to note that it is impossible to control the use of a term that is now so entrenched in popular culture, and that moratoriums, as a rule, do not work (see Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p. 138; Barton, 2007, p. viii). Nonetheless, my advice to those who work in the study of terrorism, where words have real-world consequences, is that just as one should never drop the f-bomb in polite company, never drop the a-bomb in terrorism scholarship.

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In Response - The study of terrorism and the problem of "apocalyptic"

by Christopher Andrew

"Apocalypse" is a word used by, among others, ISIS, the most homicidal terrorist group of recent years, and the FSB, Russia's domestic intelligence and counterterrorist agency. No wonder Justin Meggitt is frustrated by the unscholarly confusion of the use of "apocalyptic" in a terrorist context. At its heart is a doomsday vision, sometimes inspired by theology. William McCants's *The ISIS apocalypse* shows how religious fervour and doomsday prophecy combine in Islamic State ideology. ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assured his followers that the final battles of the Apocalypse were upon them and that sacred prophesy guaranteed their victory (McCants, 2015; 2016).

"Apocalyptic" is sometimes used to describe terrorism capable of posing an existential threat. It does not appear in British official National Security Risk Assessments (NSRA), where the highest category of threat is 'catastrophic' (Hopkins, 2020).[1] Potential catastrophes, however, are becoming more catastrophic. The Nobel Prize-winning cosmologist, Martin Rees, former president of the Royal Society and co-founder of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk in Cambridge, persuasively concludes:

Because our world is so interconnected […] the magnitude of the worst potential catastrophes has grown unprecedentedly large, and too many have been in denial about them. We ignore the wise maxim "the unfamiliar is not the same as the improbable" (Anthony, 2020).

We face at least two catastrophic, potentially even existential, terrorist threats.

The first is the looming terrorism of the nuclear age. At the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, attended by over fifty world leaders, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, warned that the nuclear threat from ISIS and its successors is now 'only too real'. 'The danger of a terrorist group obtaining and using a nuclear weapon', said President Obama, 'is one of the greatest threats to global security […] There is no doubt that if these madmen ever got their hands on a nuclear bomb or nuclear material, they would certainly use it to kill as many people as possible' (Andrew, 2018, pp. 758–759).

The FSB agrees and from time to time claims to be prepared to meet the threat – as in a film which it promoted in 2007: *Apocalypse code*, the most ambitious Russian spy film yet made. The *Wall Street Journal* called it 'a plot straight out of Hollywood. A sexy female super-agent circles the globe in pursuit of a cold-blooded terrorist who has hidden nuclear bombs in four of the world's major cities' (Osipovich, 2008). The female super-agent is the Russian film star, Anastasia Zavorotnyuk, who plays the role of FSB Colonel Darya Vyacheslavovna, chasing terrorists in lingerie and stiletto heels. Despite interference from the bungling CIA, Darya successfully deactivates all four nuclear bombs. Even US soldiers applaud her as, mission accomplished, she returns by helicopter to FSB HQ, escorted by Russian fighter jets. The FSB eulogised the film's 'highly artistic creation of Russian security services' and claimed, absurdly, that it provided a 'most objective depiction of FSB's activity'. At a public ceremony, it awarded prizes to both the director, Sergei Bazhenov, and Anastasia Zavorotnyuk (Mesropova, 2015; Andrew and Green, 2021, ch. 13). Fictional representations

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[1] The latest (2019) NRSA has yet to be declassified. Part of it, however, has been leaked to the Guardian.

of apocalyptic terrorism commonly lead to such nonsense, though they rarely receive the official praise showered on *Apocalypse code* by the FSB.

The second potentially existential threat is the pandemic. In 2011, Nick Bostrom, Milan Cirkovic and Edwin Kilbourne, wrote prophetically: 'Pandemic disease is indisputably one of the biggest global catastrophic risks facing the world today, but it is not always accorded its due recognition'. The biggest infectious disease killers, then as in the 2020 pandemic, were upper respiratory infections, with an annual death rate of 3.9 million (Bostrom and Cirkovic, 2011; Kilbourne, 2011). The path-breaking study of existential risk by Toby Ord, published in March 2020, by coincidence at the very moment when Covid-19 was recognised by the WHO as a global threat, forecast that it is 'engineered pandemics' (presumably by terrorists or rogue regimes), not 'naturally' occurring pandemics, 'which we shall soon see to become one of the largest risks facing humanity' (Ord, 2020). The experience of Covid-19, together with the historical record, suggests that, on the contrary, "natural" pandemics are currently the greater threat. The threat of "engineered" pandemics, however, cannot simply be dismissed. As far back as 1977, an outbreak of H1N1 flu was probably an accidental release from a Soviet laboratory (Osterholm and Olshaker, 2020).

The international havoc wrought by Covid-19 is bound to encourage Islamic State's successors to take the interest which Toby Ord forecast in 'engineered' pandemics. Some current Islamist extremists believe, as bin Laden told his followers in 1998, that acquiring WMD is a 'religious duty'. A year before 9/11, without realising it at the time, MI5 disrupted a first attempt by al Qaeda to obtain material in Britain to develop biological weapons (Andrew, 2010, pp. 807–808). Both in Britain and elsewhere it will not be the last.

From its foundation in 2010, the UK National Security Council was aware of the threat of a pandemic. In the wake of the swine flu epidemic, recalls Sir Peter Ricketts, the first National Security Adviser, '[w]e put it up in lights'. The government's 2010 National Security Strategy concluded:

The risk of human pandemic disease remains one of the highest we face… Possible impacts of a future pandemic could be that up to one half of the UK population becomes infected, resulting in between 50,000 and 750,000 deaths in the UK, with corresponding disruption to everyday life.

According to the 2010 National Risk Register, published at the same time, a pandemic would lead to 'wide social and economic disruption; significant threats to the continuity of essential services; lower production levels; shortages; and distribution difficulties'. In 2015, the possibility of a pandemic was again categorised as a 'Tier One' risk. In 2017, the Risk Register issued by Theresa May's government reported that the likelihood of 'emerging infectious disease' had further increased since 2015 (Bloomfield, 2020).[2]

Coincidentally, at the same time as the 2017 UK Risk Register, two US academics, Robert Meyer and Howard Kunreuther, published what, in the light of Covid-19, now seems a prophetic study of why we failed to prepare adequately for a global pandemic. Their book is aptly titled *The ostrich paradox* (2017). Governments around the world, like May's, seemed psychologically incapable of planning for 'black swan' (high-risk, low probability) catastrophe. Sir Oliver Letwin, who ran the Cabinet Office for four years and was a member of the National Security Council for six years, endorses the main conclusions of *The ostrich paradox*. He recalls (2020, loc. 964):

…meetings where some truly horrendous but very remote possibility is being contemplated, and someone at the meeting lightens the mood by saying 'oh, well we don't need to worry too much about that, since if that happens we will all be dead!', at which point everyone laughs and we go

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[2] The article includes interviews with former UK National Security Advisors.

back to discussing clear and present dangers, where the scale is sufficiently small to be imaginable but the likelihood is high enough to cause concern.

Governments, however, have proved better at preparing for some potentially existential risks than others. Over the past decade, there has been a striking contrast between the clear, occasional warnings issued by UK and US leaders about the threat of nuclear terrorism and their public silence on the horrendous threat of a global pandemic, whether natural or (less likely) "engineered". The 2019 NRSA specifically warned ministers: 'A novel pandemic virus could be both highly visible and highly virulent. Therefore, pandemics significantly more serious than the reasonable worst case […] are possible' (Hopkins, 2020).

The much greater governmental awareness of the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons is to be explained by Hiroshima and the Cold War. I once had the opportunity to visit the formerly top-secret underground bunker (now closed) near Corsham in the Cotswolds, constructed even before the Cuban Missile Crisis. Codenamed successively BURLINGTON and TURNSTILE, it would have become 'the seat of government' in the countdown to thermonuclear war. Like other visitors, I was struck by both the scale and thoroughness of the doomsday preparations: miles of underground tunnels; transport by electric trolleys; numerous recharging stations (some still functioning during my visit); a large telephone exchange with *Rolodex* rotating card indexes of numbers; kitchens capable of feeding 2,000 people; even a well-stocked library (Andrew, 2014). There, had the Missile Crisis not been resolved peacefully, British history might have ended.

Preparations for pandemics were miniscule by comparison. Despite their presence on bureaucratic risk registers, they were seen as historical phenomena rather than clear and present dangers. There was no convincing attempt to explain, however, why a pandemic as horrendous as the mid-fourteenth century Black Death, which in a few years killed a third of the English population, could not recur in the twenty-first century. The 'Spanish Flu' of 1918–1919 was treated – even by most historians – as a mere appendage to the First World War, despite the fact that it caused greater loss of life. Both would have had even more horrendous consequences in the interconnected world of the twenty-first century.

The failure to prepare adequately for the catastrophic consequences of twenty-first century pandemics, whether natural or man-made, reflects what I called in my own presentation to the Colloquium, the 'perils of Historical Attention-Span Deficit Disorder (HASDD).[3] As Winston Churchill put it, '[t]he further backwards you look, the further forward you can see'.

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[3] See pages 59-64.

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