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Table of Contents:

Conducting Field Research on Terrorism: a Brief Primer3
 by Adam Dolnik

**Towards Global Jihadism: Al-Qaeda's Strategic, Ideological and
 Structural Adaptations since 9/1136**
 by Bill Braniff and Assaf Moghadam

**Pass Em' Right: Assessing the Threat of WMD Terrorism from America's
 Christian Patriots50**
 by Paul D. Brister and Nina A. Kollars

**Addressing Root Causes – the Example of Bruno Kreisky and Austria's
 Confrontation with Middle Eastern Terrorism69**
 by Thomas Riegler

Book Reviews79
 Peter Bergen. The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and Al-Qaeda
 Victor D. Comras. Flawed Diplomacy: the United Nations & the War on Terrorism.

**Selected Literature on Conflict Prevention, Crime Prevention, Terrorism
 Prevention and Violence Prevention85**
 Monographs, Edited Volumes, Non-conventional Literature and Prime Articles
 published since 2001, selected by Eric Price

About Perspectives on Terrorism101

Conducting Field Research on Terrorism: a Brief Primer

by Adam Dolnik

Abstract

This article focuses on the practical aspects of field research on terrorism. Firstly, it outlines some issues involved in the process of attaining a human research ethics/institutional review board clearance in order to be able to even begin the field research. It suggests some ways in which researchers can positively influence this review process in their favor. Secondly, the article focuses on the real and perceived dangers of field research, identifying practical steps and preparatory activities that can help researchers manage and reduce the risks involved. The article also covers the formalities and dilemmas involved in gaining access to the field. It then provides some insights into the topic of operating in conflict zones, followed by a section covering the ways of gaining access to sources, effective communication skills and influence techniques and addresses key issues involved in interviewing sources in the field. The final section focuses on identifying biases and interfering factors which researchers need to take into account when interpreting the data acquired through interviews. This article is a modest attempt to fill a gap in the literature on terrorism research by outlining some of the key issues involved in the process of doing field research. It incorporates insights from diverse disciplines as well as the author's personal experiences of conducting field research on terrorism in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Colombia, Mindanao, Uganda, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and India.

Introduction

In the last 10 years arguably no other field in the social sciences has witnessed as great of an increase in academic output as the discipline known as Terrorism Studies. This has resulted in greatly enhanced understanding of specific contemporary topics such as Al-Qaeda, radical Islam, the radicalization process, terrorist uses of the internet, suicide terrorism, terrorist financing, home-grown terrorism, de-radicalisation and disengagement from terrorism, and the challenges non-state actors face in acquiring and weaponising chemical and biological agents. But while this exponential increase in terrorism literature has led to a welcome broadening of the scope of perspectives and approaches to studying the phenomenon, comparatively little attention has been devoted to attempts to systematically develop the quality of the Terrorism Studies discipline itself. For instance, while a new book on terrorism comes out roughly every 6 hours, only three books evaluating the state of the field and its future directions have been published in the last 10 years.[1] All three of these books as well as many recent panels of Terrorism Studies specialists tasked with evaluating the state of the discipline have unequivocally called for more historical

comparative research across different contexts, increased effort to incrementally build on past research conducted by other authors,[2] and above all, the need for more first hand research.[3]

Field research on terrorism has traditionally been surrounded by many myths, and has been called anything from “necessary” and “crucial” to “dangerous”, “unethical” and “impossible”. But despite common assumptions that such research is inherently difficult and dangerous, the fact is that many authors have over the years proven such assumptions to be unfounded.

According to Silke, “the idea that terrorism research is inevitably highly dangerous and risky is mistaken.”[4] The key, of course, is experience and a prior understanding of the issues involved, as well as the researcher’s ability to anticipate likely developments and to adjust accordingly. But while there is an increasing interest among terrorism specialists in conducting field research, not a single volume that would provide prospective field researchers with a crucial starting point currently exists.[5] This article will attempt to address this critical gap by providing some preliminary practical insights into the challenges of such fieldwork, based on an interdisciplinary literature review as well the author’s personal experiences of conducting field research on terrorism in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Colombia, southern Philippines, northern Uganda, Indonesia, northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, and southern Sudan. Obviously, it is impossible to cover all the issues in a journal-length article without sacrificing crucial details, country- and group-specific aspects (particular cultural and gender concerns), while also avoiding the danger of slipping into an autobiographical mode and war-story telling when providing supporting evidence. To deal with these challenges, this article seeks to address only conceptual issues common to terrorism field research in general, and reserves concrete experiences and specific examples for the endnotes.[6] In addition, it is important to emphasize that it is not the ambition of this article to replace the wide body of relevant literature covering the theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks of qualitative research methods. Rather it is meant to supplement this literature with practical insights relevant to research on terrorism in conflict zones.

More specifically, the article will attempt to briefly address planning and preparation phases, Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) processes, formalities involved in getting into conflict zones, means of gaining access to sources and managing contacts, issues involved in interviewing militants in the field, a discussion on the risks involved, research ethics dilemmas, translation and interpretational issues, effective interviewing and rapport building steps, as well as other practical aspects such as the impact of such research on the researcher. The article will also attempt to help researchers set realistic expectations of how the process of interviewing militants and secretive government sources in conflict zones is organized, what the likely outcomes are, how to handle self-introduction among different interviewee audiences and how to navigate through challenges posed by government forces unsympathetic to researchers, how to reduce risk of physical harm when traveling in conflict zones, etc. The end product will be a preliminary “how to” guide to field research on terrorism, which will also serve as an invitation to the many highly experienced colleagues in the field to

share their fieldwork experiences, in order to assist the next generation of terrorism specialists in raising the standard of the Terrorism Studies discipline.[7]

The Need for Field Research

The field of Terrorism Studies has received considerable criticism for being overly event-driven, essentially descriptive in nature, relying on weak research methods,[8] focusing in isolation on individual groups (especially those that dominate the policy- and media discourse at the time), and for a very limited effort to build on past research conducted by other author.[9] In addition, considerable self-reflective criticism within the field has focused on the fact that much of the Terrorism Studies literature does not incorporate field research. According to Silke, “very few published attempts have been made to systematically study terrorists outside of a prison setting,”[10] confirming Crenshaw’s observation that “the study of terrorism still lacks the foundation of extensive primary data based on interviews and life histories of individuals engaged in terrorism”.[11] Silke concludes: “for a dramatic phenomenon of such intense interest to the media and wider world, such gapping hopes in the literature are nothing short of stunning.”[12] This point has also become a lynchpin for the somewhat dubious discipline of “Critical Terrorism Studies”, the proponents of which have also argued that “terrorism analysts rarely bother to interview or engage with those involved in ‘terrorist activity’ or spend any time on the ground in the areas most affected by conflict.”[13] But the fact is that the relative lack of field research has long been recognized from *within* the Terrorism Studies discipline as well, and many terrorism analysts have in recent years made a significant effort to rectify this problem.[14]

Needless to say, while terrorism research does not easily lend itself to reliable, valid and systematic exploration in the field,[15] there are many ways through which field research on terrorism can contribute to our understanding of the causes, dynamics, and manifestations of terrorism and political violence. Firstly, given the highly emotional and subjective nature of the terrorism phenomenon, available data tends to be strongly politically manipulated by all sides, requiring a higher standard of verification to ensure the reliability and accuracy of findings. This is especially true for historical campaigns that had taken place in environments where the government possessed a virtual monopoly on the dissemination of information to the outside world. For researching such cases, field research becomes absolutely essential. This is especially true given the historical tendency of researchers to rely heavily on citing each other’s work, which has led to the creation of a highly unreliable closed and circular research system, functioning in a constantly reinforcing feedback loop.[16] This then results in the common acceptance of various unsupported myths, which serve as foundations of “knowledge” in the field until proven otherwise.[17] The end product is the exponential proliferation and tacit validation of mistakes made by researchers, their assistants, interpreters, etc., which has led to recording of inaccurate data, including incorrect names, places, casualty figures, and even the creation of terrorist attack plots and case which *never happened*.[18] Today’s terrorism research simply requires fieldwork in order to break this debilitating cycle.

Secondly, much of the current research relies on the government perspective, which brings its own biases. For instance, while effective governmental countermeasures are consistently cited as one of the key historical reasons leading to the decline of terrorist groups, effective tools for measuring success in counterterrorism remain largely nonexistent,[19] and contemporary research tends to be further skewed by factors such as comparatively easier access to government data and the one-sided nature of research funding[20] (in this respect terrorism research is sometimes reminiscent of lung cancer research funded by a tobacco company).[21]

Unsurprisingly, this situation leads researchers to stress the role of government policies as the decisive factor in the decline of terrorist violence,[22] even though such a claim rarely takes the form of a testable proposition. As observed by A. K. Cronin, the extent to which terrorist campaigns transform independently of government countermeasures thus remains among a long list of questions we currently lack reliable answers to.[23] Field research and interviews with perpetrators and organizers of terrorist violence are crucial in providing at least some counterbalance to this inherent and largely unavoidable bias.

Thirdly, secondary source data is frequently incorrect on crucial details. This is especially true with respect to historical cases that occurred prior to the age of electronic media in countries where access to any reliable and independent sources was practically non-existent. For instance, in my research on terrorist innovation[24], I have relied on the meticulous chronological work of Mickolus and his colleagues, who have filled thousands of pages with detailed information on all terrorist incidents recorded since 1968.[25] After having had the chance to interview dozens of perpetrators, witnesses, victims and investigators of many of the historical attacks recorded in those chronologies, I found that many of the details were simply incorrect. Sometimes the dates were wrong, in most cases the casualty figures were uncertain or disputed, there would be at least 3 interpretations of who was behind any given attack and why (including multiple conspiracy theories), there would be multiple claims of responsibility, the details of the specific modus operandi were frequently subject to the guessing and imagination of the reporter, and my overall impression and understanding of practically any historical attack changed dramatically after researching it in the field. This is not to take anything away from the very helpful work of Mickolus and his colleagues; it simply highlights the fact that because of the inherent deficiencies in access to historical data, it is important to engage in more rigorous efforts of cross-checking the facts of specific cases via field research.

Importantly, there is a cultural element that is crucial in determining the level of trust with which one approaches government data. While during interviews with investigators of the 7/7 bombings in the UK, the researcher can have a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the details provided, it would be a mistake to extend the same level of trust to highly controversial cases such as the 1979 hostage takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca or the 2004 Beslan school siege, where existing versions are strongly politically manipulated by all sides. In investigating such cases, field research is simply unavoidable if the researcher is to have any confidence in his or her ability to describe what actually transpired. And since much of our analysis of the terrorist's intentions, tactics, strategy, and possible countermeasures depends on

the ability to accurately reconstruct specific events, the fact is that in most cases this cannot be accurately done from open sources alone.

Fourthly, although there is a considerable amount of data “from the horse’s mouth” available through interviews with terrorists published in mainstream electronic and print media, the fact is that many of the questions asked in such media interviews are designed to trigger a “soundbite” response, as opposed to seeking deeper and more complex insights. In addition, when terrorists speak to the media they have a clear goal of spreading a particular type of message depending on the target audience. Needless to say, if given the chance, terrorism researchers would frequently ask different questions, in a different setting and in a different way, thus very likely triggering different responses. This, of course, depends on the given researcher’s rapport and level of trust with the interviewee, but the point is that a deeper access to terrorists via in-depth interviews has a great deal to offer over the selective “plugging in” of quotes from media interviews we as analysts frequently engage in. This is especially true given the fact that most terrorists speak differently, based on the media outlet the interview is for, and the specific target audience they are trying to influence. This does not mean that in interviews conducted by researchers such problems do not exist; at the same time, conducting the interview personally allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions that help test the validity and reliability of the answers.

And finally, field research is about so much more than data collection. In fact, it could be argued that it is the *process itself* that plays the more crucial role of educating the researcher and deepening his or her knowledge about the context, and everyday realities in which the perpetrators, supporters, and victims of terrorism operate. This exposure to reality alone can rapidly change the researcher’s perceptions on many different fronts. Quite simply, one can read all available books and sources on a particular terrorist campaign, but without field visits and exposure to the environment there is much tacit knowledge the researcher simply will not be aware of. In many ways it is the “just looking factor”[26] of field research that by itself justifies its benefits.

Human Research Ethics Review Process

The concept of human research ethics initially came to prominence in the aftermath of the Nuremberg trials, which uncovered the shocking nature of Nazi medical experiments. Over time, the issue received further attention due to specific controversial projects, such as Stanley Milgram’s obedience/compliance experiment, Philip Zimbardo’s infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, or the recently revisited 1940s National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded study, in which US public health researchers infected hundreds of people in Guatemala with syphilis and gonorrhea without their consent.[27] Today, most universities and public research institutions in Western countries have an internal human research ethics/institutional review body, which has to approve any research involving human subjects. By the very nature of the field of study, terrorism research raises many questions from the human research ethics perspective, and this frequently becomes the biggest challenge of the entire process of terrorism field research. For instance, some of the regulations (i.e.: all subjects should be treated as equally and as justly as

possible during the research) are practically impossible to fulfill, because terrorism is fundamentally about two groups that are in conflict with one another and as observed by Jackson, for some groups “maintaining beneficence for the population and protecting all the individuals involved seems absolutely impossible.”[28] Also, given the nature of terrorism research, there is a frequent conflict between the interests of the research funders and the people who are being studied, and some research results are likely to assist in formulation of governmental counterterrorism efforts, which in essence seek to deliberately *undermine* the “well-being” of “participants”.[29] How does one achieve a balance of risks and benefits in an environment in which “benefits” to the funders (states) in increasing their counterterrorism capability are achieved by causing “harm” to the research participants (terrorists)?

As a result of this core problem, practically no field activity in this area will fall into the category of ‘low risk research’ (defined as research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort)[30] and thus it is highly likely that researchers will have to go through the dreadful Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) process prior to commencing their project.[31] In most cases, the IRB/HREC members will have limited understanding of terrorism research so practically any project in this field will raise alarm. In addition, the members of such committees are rarely active researchers, and the dynamic is such that there is a premium on nitpicking and identifying problems with *any* proposal, so for a terrorism researcher this can be a highly frustrating exercise. This is especially the case when HREC/IRB members mechanically demand documents such as copies of letters of invitation to participate in research, sample questionnaires, participant information packages, copies of all documents and other material used to inform potential participants about the research including advertisements, consent forms, proxy/substitute consent forms, debriefing information, contact detail cards, etc.

When dealing with this process, there are several specific issues to consider. At the most basic level, the ethicality of research is determined by calculating whether the potential benefits of the research outweigh its risks.[32] As a result, the issue of a human research ethics clearance will require a great degree of interpretation of what constitutes risks and benefits of such research. Further, as cited in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the ethical guidelines outlined in the document “are not simply a set of rules. Their application should not be mechanical. It always requires, from each individual, deliberation on the values and principles, exercise of judgment, and an appreciation of context.”[33] It remains a fact, however, that most IRB’s/HRECs may not be in a position to appreciate the context of much of terrorism research, despite their unquestionable and sincerest effort to do so. Consequently, many clearance granting bodies tend to apply ethical research principles (initially designed to deal with ethical issues involved in clinical trials) rather mechanically, which in turn can make the research practically impossible, since the on-the-ground political realities of countries plagued by crime, corruption, conflict and terrorism are markedly different from the controlled laboratory settings that inform IRB/HREC requirements.

First of all, in many cases the interviews will be highly opportunistic, and the questions researchers will ask will be determined by the nature and expertise of each specific respondent they are able to get access to, which, in turn, is something that cannot be predicted before actually attempting to make contact in the field. In such situations, providing advance lists of persons to be interviewed and copies of sample questionnaires makes little sense, since the situation is often fluid and even meetings arranged in advance frequently do not materialize. Similarly, in conflict settings the concept of each interviewee signing a consent form or any other document is completely ludicrous, as it will not only ruin the researcher's credibility due to fears of espionage; being asked to sign documents will also automatically trigger fear of manipulation of the signature for fake confessions by government forces. Finally, in interviews with members of communities involved in political violence, it is in the best interest of the research participants that they be provided deniability of having had any substantial contact with the researcher, as this can lead to subsequent arrest, prolonged interrogation, and even torture in the hands of government troops. As such, the IRB/HRECs routine requirement of signed consent forms constitute an unjustifiable risk to the participants, which is somewhat ironic given that the stated purpose of human research ethics committees is to "protect the welfare and rights of participants involved in research." [34] As observed by Jackson, "standard application of [ethical] requirement across all terrorism research may risk producing some rather perverse outcomes, - some of which ... go against fundamental intent of the regulations themselves." [35]

To assist researchers with the IRB/HREC review process, here are some of the ethical issues that are frequently raised by these bodies in relation to terrorism research. Firstly, when dealing with governmental sources, the one issue that always arises is secrecy and level of classification of the particular information being conveyed during an interview. In reality however, government sources are very well aware of what type of information they can provide, and typically abide by a "when in doubt do not disclose" policy. Occasionally, members of security services do choose to convey information that they deem to be sensitive – accompanied by the request not to be cited. Given ethical considerations as well as the importance of reputation, credibility and trustworthiness in the field, the researcher is naturally motivated to abide by such a request. Moreover, in most cases it is not difficult to fulfill such requests, as the information at hand can often be traced to an existing open source, which allows an academically viable citation of the data without resorting to attribution to a classified source. In fact, since it is frequently estimated that around 90 percent of all information possessed by intelligence agencies is available in open sources, the key challenge in Terrorism Studies is not so much acquiring the information, but rather navigation through the "noise" in order to distinguish which of the many versions of events available in the public domain are credible. This is where classified sources and interviews with investigators, witnesses and direct participants of specific events are exceptionally useful, as they can help the researcher navigate through the jungle of open sources.

The second ethical question that is often raised in relation to interviewing perpetrators and victims of political violence is the issue of emotional distress caused to the interviewee during the process of recollecting specific violent events. The bottom line is that since extreme violence

is at the core of the research field itself, it is simply impossible to fully eliminate such a risk, no matter how sensitive the researcher may be in trying to avoid questions that could trigger painful memories. At the same time, the researcher can minimize the risks involved by acknowledging his or her understanding of the emotional difficulty of the interview process, and can offset the negative impact of emotional recollection by empathetic listening, and by providing the interviewee with the opportunity to recollect positive images associated with their grief (i.e. victims speaking about the death of their loved ones would be provided the opportunity to speak about happy memories of time together, etc.). Especially when dealing with people who feel victimized and neglected, the therapeutic effect of having been heard cannot be overemphasized, [36] and provides a much better alternative to the common HREC/IRB's requirement that the researcher should be responsible for offering psychological counseling services to interviewees that could potentially be traumatized. Though undoubtedly well intentioned, such a suggestion completely misses the mark, as in most countries the issue of "psychological health" is reserved for the mentally ill, and offering such services to an interviewee will frequently be perceived as calling the person "crazy". The point is that the importance of being sensitive to the frequently unimaginable psychological trauma experienced by interviewees, (whether they are on the giving or the receiving end of political violence, or both), is clear. This reality becomes immediately obvious to anyone once they are sitting face to face with former child soldiers who were forced to beat their own mothers or siblings to death as part of initiation, only to later engage in similar brutalities, including rape and forced cannibalism; or former hostages who saw their own children killed in heavy handed rescue operations; or villagers whose sons were brutally tortured to death by government troops; or terrorists who all too frequently crave attention and express cold blooded pride when talking about killing, while at the same time showing considerable emotion when talking about the deaths of their own loved ones. Perhaps it is not the HREC/IRB that is best positioned to issue theoretical advice on how to handle such situations, and it should be left to the researcher who has intimate knowledge of the conflict and the necessary experience.

The third frequently raised ethical issue concerns the risk of interviewees disclosing details about their involvement in illegal activity, which could later be used against them in a court of law. To what extent does the principle of confidentiality apply to such cases? What should the researcher do if in the course of research he or she uncovers specific information about an impending attack? In this case again, there is no clear-cut answer. Fortunately, this scenario is rather hypothetical, since in most interviews terrorists tend to avoid this level of detail, frequently claiming to be falsely accused of involvement in "terrorism" by the state. In some cases, terrorists will talk about their involvement in "illegal activity", but this is typically in reference to activities of a political nature, which they see as justifiable or even admirable (or for which they have already been sentenced), and thus see no point in disguising their involvement. Further, if the interviewees are willing to share their involvement in illegal activities with a Western researcher, they are likely to be willing to share it with anyone. And since terrorism researchers will rarely speak to anyone who has not been already interviewed by local or international media, they are

extremely unlikely to end up in a situation where they have exclusive access to incriminating details about specific criminal activity that has occurred in the past, and absolutely unlikely to learn about any new specific threats for the future.

Fourthly, there is a somewhat curious tendency of IRB's/HRECs to focus on protecting an ethical norm, at the expense of focus on protecting the researcher.[37] It is often assumed that in the relationship to research participants the researcher has the upper hand, and since the ethics process is designed to protect "vulnerable research populations", much of the burden is placed on the researcher in a one-sided way. But is this really appropriate in the context of terrorism research? The notion that an academic sitting with gunmen in their stronghold is the more powerful figure in the relationship, and that the gunmen constitute a "vulnerable population" is somewhat bizarre. In this case the situation is reversed, or at the very least, both sides are "equally unsafe."[38] In addition to this lopsided view of the researcher-participant relationship, the IRB models also do not address the issue of potential exploitation of the researcher by the respondents, which is a major omission given the fact that research subjects frequently regard the research process as a *quid pro quo* relationship.[39]

This is associated with another ethical issue, and that is the possibility of interviewees gaining a false impression that agreeing to an interview will somehow lead to direct improvement of their *personal* situation. For example, villagers that have been subject to harsh treatment in the hands of the terrorists or the government troops may falsely hope that their participation in the project will result in the public exposition of their suffering, leading to possible material compensation from either government sources or the international community. Similarly, combatants often ask for favours directly, whether it is money, donation of computers or generators, assistance in immigration issues, passing gifts to family members living in the researcher's home country, or even university scholarships to study at the researcher's home institution. This puts the researcher in a highly uncomfortable position, as providing some of the requested assistance is not only time-consuming, difficult and costly, it can also be illegal if it is branded as providing assistance to a terrorist organization. Some reciprocal favours are naturally frequently needed to aid in establishing research access in the first place (e.g. buying the respondent tea or lunch, or bringing small toys for his kids), but it is a good idea for researchers to make it clear right in the beginning of the interview that "while the project cannot benefit [the respondent] personally, the knowledge gained can be useful in saving lives in the future." This has proven to be a generally persuasive approach, which motivates respondents to participate, while also pre-empting any false hopes for personal gain. This does not mean that attempts at eliciting reciprocal favours from the researcher will not be made, but the point is to reduce expectations from the start. Then with experience, researchers can expect to become conditioned and rather resilient to this reality, and will develop ways of pre-empting and turning down such requests in an elegant way that does not damage relationships.

Another ethical dilemma lies in the interview process itself. As emphasized later in this article, effective interviewing takes skill and practice, and involves active listening, a nonjudgmental attitude, and sometimes validating the respondents' core views in order to build rapport. This, of

course, takes discipline and training oneself to empathize with views of people that contradict or even deeply offend our own, and to refrain from trying to persuade them or challenge them.[40] At the same time, this approach potentially raises an ethical dilemma, in the possibility of the researcher being viewed as a “legitim�er” of terrorist violence.[41] One way out of this dilemma is to apply an approach commonly used by hostage negotiators, who look for empathetic ways to acknowledge or validate the legitimate grievances behind the militants’ actions while carefully differentiating these from the actions themselves. [42] This process makes it harder for the terrorists to label the interviewer/negotiator as unreasonable, creates chances to de-escalate the situation emotionally, and can help create a wedge between their grievances and their actions, which, in turn, may help them to question the connection.[43] Not only is this approach useful in avoiding a potentially dangerous exchange of views, it can even build more respect for the interviewer than mechanically agreeing with everything that is said, which is an action the genuineness of which will likely be questioned. Still, it is a good idea to refrain from actively contributing one’s own view on the matters of discussion unless the interviewee specifically asks for the researcher’s opinion.

Overall, the two key issues of human research ethics involve “informed consent” and “confidentiality”. The problem is that in the field of terrorism research, these issues can frequently be in conflict with one another, as insistence on signed consent forms to satisfy the former can endanger the fulfillment of the latter (confidentiality), in the scenario that the researcher is detained by government forces and all his or her belongings are searched and confiscated. And while informed consent is undeniably important, the assumption that the researcher or the IRB/HREC will be more aware of the risks to potential research participants than the participants themselves is hardly justified. Quite simply, people engaged in everyday survival in conflict zones have an acute awareness of the risks posed by talking to journalists or researchers, and when in doubt they tend to decline participation. In some cases, the approached candidates are willing to talk, often agreeing to take significant risks to tell their story, simply because they think that it is important. In such cases, should it not be up to them, rather than an ivory tower ethics committee, to make the cost-benefit calculation? The case for this argument is especially strong in relation to militants actively engaging in armed conflict. Since these men and women willingly take extraordinary risks in their daily “occupation”, and since their mission is defined by inflicting bodily harm, should the issue of their own “safety” during participation in research not be treated with greater leniency than in cases involving other vulnerable and disadvantaged researched populations? This is especially the case when the research complies with a strict security protocol dictated by the research participants themselves, often forcing the researcher to put him or herself in potentially dangerous situations in order to protect the participants.

Another issue is: what actually constitutes *informed* consent, and how much specific information should the researcher be obligated to disclose in order to establish this principle? Should the researcher, for instance, be obligated to disclose the source of funding? As Fair points out, in places like Afghanistan or Pakistan, disclosing that the research is funded by “US government”

will almost universally trigger the perception that the researcher is a spy funded by the CIA, and this can of course be detrimental not only to the research project, but to the well-being of the researcher as well.[44] Along the same lines, there is a practical need to negotiate different trust relationships with the state actor who needs to be persuaded about the harmless or even beneficial role of the researcher's activities in the conflict zone in order to allow access, and completely different trust relationships with the research participants who are at war with this state actor. This can pose a serious dilemma to researchers, as self-introduction and rapport building with these disparate actors requires different approaches and even different versions. [45] Do such rhetorical gymnastics involving slight changes in vocabulary and disclosed "opinions" on the conflict depending on the audience constitute deception, or is this just necessary political maneuvering without which no research is possible? And finally, if informed consent is established by providing the participants with a long list of reasons for why participation is dangerous and potentially harmful to them, why in the world would anyone want to participate at all? This is especially the case when any potential outcomes of the research are much more likely to benefit only the funders of the study who seek the knowledge on how to undermine the "well being" of the participants themselves through effective counterterrorism. Are researchers really expected to attempt to talk willing interviewees *out of* speaking to them by presenting an exhaustive list of possible dangers of participation?

In conclusion, dealing with IRB/HREC processes can be a frustrating exercise, and despite the insistence of such bodies that their job is not to make the research impossible but rather to raise awareness of the ethical issues involved, the impression researchers sometimes get after going through the ethics review process is quite the opposite. This is unfortunate because ethical considerations are important, and the whole exercise could potentially be a good opportunity for researchers to genuinely consider the possible implications of their actions in dilemmatic situations that they may encounter in the course of research. Unfortunately, the frequently unqualified micromanagement from the side of ethical review bodies often forces researchers to avoid the process at all costs,[46] creating a lose-lose situation for everyone, including the research participants.

A more productive approach would be for IRB/HRECs to use their experience to alert the researchers to issues they may have not considered, while simultaneously placing greater trust in the conscience and ability of researchers to make decisions on the ground, and being less skeptical of the capacity of potential respondents to make their own decisions about the risks of participation. For their part, terrorism researchers can help their own case by communicating with their institution's IRB/HREC *prior* to applying for clearances, in order to familiarize its members with the specifics of the research field, asking for their feedback and inviting them to a joint problem solving discussion about how potential ethical obstacles could usefully be overcome. This can create a blueprint protocol for handling specific issues in the future, and given the review board members' active participation in the constructive debate in advance, they will likely feel greater ownership of such a protocol, and will in turn be more likely to approach the project constructively, as opposed to playing their not uncommon role of spoilers.[47] This

approach may in some cases not be successful, of course, depending on the dynamics and nature of the review board, personality characteristics of its members, and the institutional influence of the individual researcher applying for an ethics clearance. In addition, the dynamics are likely to be different based on the academic culture of the country where the researcher is applying. Because of these differences, an urgent need exists for terrorism researchers to share individual experiences and learn from each other's experience in overcoming the IRB/HREC trap.

Dangers

Any researcher who has ever gone into the field to interview militants has encountered the common perception that such work is by definition highly dangerous. As stated in the introduction, this is a popular misconception, and the fact is that fieldwork on terrorism can be done rather safely, assuming good preparation, knowledge and prior experience. By the same token, such fieldwork can be incredibly dangerous for the naive and the unprepared, and conducting "risk free" research on terrorism is in some contexts (i.e. Somalia, Chechnya) practically impossible. Either way, the fact is that terrorism researchers frequently face the assumption that terrorism research is dangerous and thus need to have a thorough understanding of what the actual risks are in order to be able to address the issue when dealing with HREC/IRB's or University Occupational Health and Safety Units, which are more likely to be supportive of the research if the researcher demonstrates an understanding of the risks, as opposed to when he or she simply argues that the danger does not exist. While space limitations do not allow a comprehensive treatment of this crucial issue, the following paragraphs will attempt to at least briefly cover some of the most important risks that researchers encounter during field research. Some of the more common risks such as disease and street crime are not covered here, as these are outlined in the widely available general travel advisories.

The first risk that comes to the mind of most people is the danger of being kidnapped or murdered. Despite the fact that instances of this happening to researchers have historically been very rare, the threat is clearly growing. While it would be inaccurate to claim that reporters and academics interviewing terrorists in the 1960s through 1990s were perfectly safe, terrorist groups in the past typically did not see it as advantageous to harm the people whom they depended on to positively influence the public views of themselves and their activities by providing favorable coverage. However, as terrorists gained the capacity to independently access their target audiences and international media via the use of e-mail, designated websites, chat rooms and *Youtube*, there has been a decline in the terrorists' dependence on journalists and researchers to get their "story out", turning the activity of interviewing terrorists increasingly dangerous. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 801 journalists have been killed since 1992, out of which 142 were killed in crossfire/combat and 581 had been murdered.[48] In this regard, it was especially the videotaped beheading of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan and the subsequent adoption of this tactic by Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq that forever changed the perceptions of researchers around the world about the dangers of interviewing terrorists. And while "only" 76 of the total 801 journalists' deaths occurred on what has been assessed as "dangerous assignments",[49] the fact that Daniel Pearl was lured in under the

pretext of conducting an interview only to be kidnapped and brutally beheaded on video, also lingers in the heads of most researchers heading into the field. While accepting a certain level of personal risk comes with field research, it is one thing getting killed in a car accident, crossfire or by an IED, and quite another to die like Daniel Pearl - the prospect of the researcher's family seeing the videotape is truly frightening. Nevertheless, kidnapping and murder of (especially Western) researchers by terrorist groups has been extremely rare, and researchers can manage this risk by proper preparation and planning. Most of the journalists who are murdered in the field are not killed by terrorists, but rather assassinated at the order of different power figures personally threatened by the individual's reporting.

A comparatively greater threat to researchers is kidnapping for ransom. Including unreported cases (which constitute up to 90% of all kidnappings[50]), it is estimated that annually 10,000-15,000 kidnapping incidents occur worldwide[51] though the number of (expatriate) *Westerners* kidnapped annually is "only" around 200-300. The currently most prevalent locations for kidnapping foreigners for ransom include Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Philippines, Nigeria, Iraq, Brazil, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Nepal, India and Russia.[52] A more recent trend in some of these countries (i.e. Colombia and Philippines) has been the use of so called "express-kidnappings" in which the hostage is periodically taken to an ATM and forced to withdraw maximum daily limit from all his or her credit cards until the accounts run dry. Other than the moment of kidnapping itself, the most threatening part is being rescued, with 40-70% of all fatalities among hostages occurring during rescue attempts. Researchers planning to go into the field should remember to budget for kidnap and ransom (K&R) insurance and kidnap survival training (discussed below) in grant applications.

Another important threat in conflict and post conflict areas is constituted by landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnance. According to some sources, there are an estimated 110 million active mines scattered in over 70 countries and about 2,000 people are involved in landmine accidents every month, translating into one victim every 20 minutes. At the current rate of some 100,000 mines being removed each year it would take 1,100 years to rid the world of mines, but with nearly 2 million new mines being planted each year, the end to the threat is nowhere in sight.[53] When moving around in conflict or post conflict areas such as Angola, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mozambique, the danger from land mines is very real and researchers should seek mine and unexploded ordnance recognition and response training prior to travel.

Probably the riskiest activity researchers will ever engage in during fieldwork is simply traveling on roads in third world countries. According to the World Health Organization, over 1.2 million people worldwide are annually killed in traffic accidents and between 20-50 million suffer non-fatal injuries.[54] No one who has traveled in the developing world will be surprised that over 90% of the deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries; the likelihood of being involved in a traffic accident while traveling in these environments is relatively high. It is advisable, though sometimes very costly, to hire a four-wheel drive with a reliable driver (see section on Getting Around). Riding motorcycle taxis (*boda boda*) is naturally a faster way to get

through congested city traffic, but it is also the most dangerous activity a terrorism researcher will engage in on a field trip. In such situations, it is a good idea to look for the oldest driver in the crowd, whose driving skill and style are proven by time and are certainly likely to be superior to that of his 12-year-old competitors. Spending a minute or two casually chatting to the driver to determine whether or not he is intoxicated by alcohol or under the influence of drugs is a good time investment. The same is true for paying attention to the general condition of the breaks and tires.

To conclude, functioning in conflict and post conflict zones has its risks, ranging from high profile threats like kidnapping or landmines to common threats such as disease, street crime and traffic accidents. A traveler's ability to manage these risks increases rapidly with experience and training. Closely following the situation on the ground from local sources is key, as is paying attention to preventive security measures. The best source of knowledge on how to survive in conflict zones can be found in Robert Young Pelton's now slightly dated yet absolutely brilliant book *The World's Most Dangerous Places*,^[55] which provides a humorous and very useful and practice-oriented guide to the world's hotspots. It is also important to point out that contrary to popular perception, research on terrorism does not necessarily have to involve travel to conflict areas. There are many former terrorists who live in exile or are in hiding in Western and Middle-Eastern countries. Sometimes the researcher is much better off traveling to destinations like London, Istanbul or Dubai, where interviews can be arranged in a safe environment. In addition, the interviewees there are frequently more relaxed and more open than in their home countries.

Training

As mentioned above, one of the keys to managing risks during field research is experience and training. Traveling through the developing world with a backpack provides excellent opportunity to acquire the basic instincts, know-how, and etiquette in a less threatening environment where one can still learn from mistakes. In addition, undergoing one of the pre-deployment hostile environment survival training courses that are available for journalists and humanitarian aid workers is an excellent investment.

Like most researchers with incrementally growing field experience in conflict zones, I did not give much importance to survival training until realizing my vulnerability in a highly volatile situation I had encountered in Chechnya. Two years later I underwent a 9-day specialized war-zone survival course annually organized by the Czech army for journalists, diplomats, and NGO workers on war-zone assignments. The course, which included prior psychological and physical testing, combined classroom instruction on weapons, IED dangers, outdoor orientation and radio communication skills, basic emergency trauma medicine, common insurgent ambush tactics, essentials of traveling under armed escort, CBRN awareness, practical aspects of war-zone survival, kidnap for ransom trends, and practical lessons on hostage survival (i.e. self-humanization, building rapport, inducing Stockholm Syndrome etc.). Most of the course took place in the outdoors in the cold and rainy autumn season. It included vertical and horizontal repelling, rock climbing, improvised first aid, improvised hunting and trapping, CS gas

chambers, unarmed movement in the battlefield under fire, highly challenging obstacle courses and boot camp type activities - all designed to completely exhaust the participants. In the next stage the parameters of a simulated conflict zone were introduced, and the participants, assuming the role of a UN peace delegation, were moved into a field base. After facing repeated rocket fire in the middle of the night forcing multiple relocations to a shelter, the team eventually embarked on a long march in full gear in challenging terrain under pursuit. Facing ambushes, violent checkpoints, simulated serious injuries to members of the team, and sleeping in the forest with practically nothing, the participants reach a stage of complete physical exhaustion, starvation, sleep deprivation, and mental fatigue. This is where the exercise moved into the final stage, when one of the night ambushes against “government troops” was successful, and the participants were kidnapped by a group of armed rebels. Having been transported to a remote location, the participants are subject to repeated and diverse “enhanced interrogations methods”, including water boarding, physical and psychological pressure, prolonged periods of immersion in cold water and forced stress positions, attacks by fighter dogs, mock executions, “the hole”, simulated sexual assaults, constantly changing temperatures, and more physical abuse and sleep deprivation designed to completely wear the trainees down. The participants also experienced the mental pressure of being told that a ransom has been paid and that they are being released, only to have their hopes crushed by being transported to another location and “sold” to another group for slave labor, where the ordeal begins again. The whole course ended after the hostages were freed in an armed rescue operation.

Skeptics can point to the fact that participants in such a course consciously know that they will not be killed, and thus do not get a good enough experience to prepare them for a real situation. While that is certainly true, having been stripped down, beaten, attacked by dogs, dragged in an arm lock on knees downhill into a stream, only to have the wind purposefully knocked out for the purposes of getting cold muddy water into one’s lungs, creates a situation in which the sensation of imminent harm becomes very real, triggering primary physical responses that are completely out of conscious control. The course is designed to have a highly functional purpose: to make each participant reach their physical and psychological limit, in order to give them an insight into their own reactions in extreme situations. The key to surviving prolonged captivity is to maintain a positive attitude and determination to survive no matter what. Having reached one’s limits in a course like this is supposed to create a mental blueprint for real situations in the future, where the history of having experienced and “survived” the same mental and physical sensation results in some level of familiarity with the situation, yielding a more positive and determined attitude. It also has many positive side effects: participants who were previously skeptical about potential threats become more careful, and some novices who had naïve ideas about war journalism or NGO work realize their lack of preparedness to deal with the challenges and quit the chosen career path. Overall, researchers are well advised to undergo such a course, which even in the less extreme commercially available versions[56] brings many valuable experiences that will increase the researcher’s survivability and resilience.

Getting In

One of the crucial parts of conducting field research is proper planning, which involves not only establishing initial contacts and arranging visas and travel schedules, but also includes preparation of questions and establishing realistic expectations as to what is achievable, and developing a thorough understanding of the limitations of the selected approach. It is admittedly difficult to do this for contexts where the researcher has no prior experience, and in such cases, it is useful to set modest goals and to conduct an initial scouting trip, in order to get acquainted with the environment and refine one's own expectations and research approach. Such scouting trips can also assist in the IRB/HREC process discussed above, as having previously been in the country of research can be a powerful persuasive criterion when advocating the feasibility and safety of the project. In addition, it is very difficult to actually describe the research plan in any significant detail prior to actually visiting the location, as many interviews are highly opportunistic, and availability and willingness of interviewees to participate changes from hour to hour, depending on external conditions and latest developments.

Going into some terrorism-ridden countries requires little more than a visa and a plane ticket, while some specific areas are impossible to access without violating local laws and regulations (which are sometimes designed specifically with that purpose in mind). The first question that arises is how to address the issue of filling in the "purpose of journey" column on the visa applications. Since researchers are not journalists, obtaining a journalistic accreditation is difficult, and filing in "research" is a highly risky exercise which can result in denial of entry, especially in cases where local security culture views "research" as being equivalent to "spying". Even if this is not the case, the researcher can subsequently be required to provide an official document outlining the purpose of research, sources of funding etc., which can be a time-consuming exercise without any guarantee of success.

That being said, this official approach can be very useful if the nature of the researcher's enquiry requires assistance of government sources only, as in many cases the approval to conduct research will be coupled with the appointment of a contact person who helps in organizing the interviews within government circles.[57] However, if the research design incorporates speaking to militants, terrorists, or people highly critical of the government, alerting the consular officers about the purpose of one's visit can be detrimental. Another risk of the official approach is that since the authorities have been alerted to the intention to conduct research, a rejection leaves the researcher with very little in the way of a backup plan, since conducting research regardless of explicit rejection of an application to do so is certainly seen as a worse case of misconduct than going on a tourist visa and dealing with any potential problems later. The safest option may be to apply for a generic business visa, which covers the researcher for a "work trip" and allows him or her to make the case that conducting research is their "business", and thus does not technically constitute a violation of the visa regime. Yet another useful way of getting around the issue is contacting a local academic institution with an offer to deliver a free lecture, and in exchange to get an invitation letter from that institution for the purposes of obtaining the visa. And given the fact that most visa applications and immigration arrival forms ask about the "primary" objective of the trip, filling in "lecture" does not constitute deceit, especially if the research activity is

framed as an opportunistic secondary purpose of the trip. In any case, it makes sense to be on the safe side, because incorrect visas leave the researcher highly vulnerable to exploitation, blackmail and deportation, which can only complicate attainment of visas in the future.

In many countries getting the entry visa is just the first step, and in order to enter a conflict-ridden area it is necessary to obtain a special permission. This requires a lot of paperwork, time, and money - all without any guarantee of success. Again, disclosing one's research plans can be dangerous, and offering too many details can preclude the researcher from doing any work in the field at all. One such case is Chechnya, which until recently was practically impossible for researchers to enter legally. Yes, if the researcher has been patient and endured enough bureaucratic abuse, passed all the security screenings designed to check how sympathetic his or her previous work had been to the official version of events (that means the only acceptable -- and typically untruthful-- version of events) one may have a chance to go on a guided bus tour to "Potemkin villages" where people are well-off, happy, singing, and all universally love the Russian government. If the researcher, however, wants to conduct serious research, these official trips are essentially useless. In such cases legal options are limited, and it is up to the researcher to determine how far they are willing to go in pursuit of their research objectives. The bottom line is that in most conflict zones, visas and official permissions are useful in getting the initial access to the area, but can become practically worthless pieces of paper once the researcher is on the ground. In fact, during a document check at a militant checkpoint such official documentation in the possession of the researcher can result in accusations of being a spy for the enemy, potentially creating a life-threatening situation.[58] As a result, there are no clear-cut answers and "do's" and "don'ts" to follow. Obviously, having official permissions to conduct research is (sometimes) advantageous. Still if local security services perceive the researcher to be a threat at any point, they will find a way to rid themselves of the problem, whether official permission exists or not. In such cases, a "deportation due to violation of the visa regime" constitutes a rather mild outcome.

Getting Around

Day-to-day operation in conflict areas poses specific challenges, and can be handled in different ways, depending on a number of factors such as the level of funding, personal threshold for discomfort and perceived risk, as well as Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations of one's employer or insurer, etc. Some employers or insurers can make a researcher's life very difficult, especially during travel to countries listed by most foreign ministries on a "do not travel to" list (i.e. Afghanistan, Sudan, Burundi, Iraq, Central African Republic, Somalia, Chad, Niger, Guinea etc.) For instance, on one of my trips to Afghanistan the university generously arranged additional coverage with an insurer, who, however, specified the following conditions for coverage:

- Keep a low profile
 - Meet and greet/ drop off & pick up at the airport with armed escort in B6 armoured vehicle
-

- Daily transport in Kabul with low-profile soft skin vehicle and armed escort
- Movement outside of Kabul with armed escort in B6 armoured vehicle and Satellite Communications morning and evening communications schedule
- Avoid security forces installations, locations that are frequented by police and army personnel and government buildings in Kabul
- Emergency response and communications to be provided via local security provider
- Adhere to strict journey management planning and issue a daily movements plan to HQ (e.g. local security provider)
- Register with home nation embassy to receive current threat update and alerts
- Use approved accommodation only – secure guest-houses or internationally branded hotel such as the Serena Hotel.

Overall, this list is not so unreasonable, at least not for a businessman who wants to hold a few meetings with business partners in Kabul and get out as quickly as possible. But for a researcher on terrorism, whose interest focuses specifically on the sources of the threat, following these rules would make any meaningful research activity impossible.[59] Moreover, in addition to prohibitive costs, following many of the other regulations actually turns the researcher into a high profile target, as driving around in an easily identifiable Toyota landcruiser and an entourage runs somewhat contrary to the instruction to “keep a low profile.” Staying in hotels like the Kabul Serena poses additional risks, as confirmed by the January 14th 2008 twin suicide attack in which Taliban militants penetrated the Serena and killed 6 people in the hotel’s gym, [60] or the January 18th 2010 attack on the Serena, several shopping malls and the presidential palace, in which 5 people died and 71 were wounded.[61]

I opted for a compromise solution, by choosing a hotel in a less high-profile part of town which housed few foreigners and practically no westerners, was almost 80% cheaper and still had several guards at the front door. And while this hotel was not as well protected against a possible vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack as the Serena due to its closeness to the road and absence of blast mitigating barriers, it was at the same time a much less likely target for such a tactic due to its low profile and the close proximity to a Sunni mosque, which at the time still provided some deterrent to the employment of a large scale VBIED in the area.[62] Another option is staying with locals, which besides cost effectiveness can also be very useful in improving the researcher’s credibility with the local population, as well as access to new sources. [63] When considering this choice it is vital to assess the security situation and the researcher's ability to reasonably fit in. The downside of this approach is the practical impossibility of sufficient rest, which can lead to complete exhaustion due to social activities, the local population's hospitality and the all-important process of actively communicating with people for 20 hours per day, especially in a foreign language.

In terms of travel, a similar range of options exists - using local buses and taxis, hiring a car with a driver, or traveling with armed escort. Each of these options presents specific challenges and

risks. For local transportation within cities, local taxis are usually sufficient, though in areas where kidnapping is prevalent, several rules should be followed. First of all, it is generally a good idea for the researcher to be the one selecting the taxi driver (as opposed to being the one selected), in order to avoid drivers that are potentially fishing for a prospective kidnap victim. In addition, it is important to rely on instinct, which is something that Westerners are not used to doing on a daily basis, because our lives are more or less straightforward and follow certain predictable rules and regulations. Quite simply, if driving into the mountains with a specific person does not feel right, for whatever reason, then do not do it. Even if the driver is a friend of a friend and even if turning him down will create a slightly socially uncomfortable situation, going against one's instincts is simply not worth the risk. Even among drivers that do "feel right", it is a good idea to go with experienced people who are preferably from the area to be visited, know the roads and have local contacts. Do not feel bad about "shopping around", as experienced drivers also assess the risk factors involved in the trip before deciding whether to accept the business. Admittedly, for some destinations there are not many drivers to choose from. In any case, it is prudent to be kind to drivers and to treat them like brothers, as they will be the ones on whom the researcher's life may depend on in moments of crisis.[64]

The same general rule applies to travel with armed escort, even in situations where the escort consists of soldiers or policemen assigned by the local government. For someone who is getting paid US \$3 per day, protecting the researcher may be a very low priority if the situation gets messy, unless the former takes active steps toward giving them a personal stake in the matter. Giving guards cigarettes (depending on context and religious prohibitions), treating them for a meal or drink, remembering their names, asking about their families, sharing one's own food, or giving them small presents for their children will go a long way in increasing their loyalty. Creating bonds based on similarity and showing a sense of humor is key. The same goes for the many checkpoints researchers will encounter along the way. Here are a few rules to follow:

- Be patient, friendly, smile a lot.
 - Do not give the impression of being in a hurry; this only drives the price up.
 - Even if you have written permission to enter, do not be surprised if you are told that it is "not valid".
 - Just because the checkpoint is manned by "the good guys" do not expect them to be friendly. The guards are frequently on edge, suspicious, traumatized, and facing constant danger of ambush, while being underpaid (if paid at all).
 - Engage in small talk, share food and cigarettes, pass on souvenirs. Even small friendly gestures go a long way.
 - Do not pay bribes. Making a personal bribe will leave you exposed and vulnerable to exploitation. If making a payment is unavoidable, ask the driver to negotiate and make the payment on your behalf, and reimburse him later.
 - Leave a trail to make it easier for people to look for you.[65]
-

Making Contact

Making contact with terrorists is not as difficult as most people imagine. In practically any country it is possible to find people (usually journalists) who have studied the respective conflict for many years, speak the language and have had extensive prior dealings with the militant groups; they also often possess all the necessary phone numbers and contacts. These journalists never get the credit in the Western world they deserve for their expertise. The fact is that they are frequently extremely knowledgeable and helpful, taking serious risks in the field without any protection, insurance coverage, or reasonable remuneration. Many get kidnapped or killed in the line of duty (92 percent of all journalists killed on duty are local journalists)[66] without coming even close to the recognition granted to their Western colleagues.

It is specifically the generous help of local journalists that can provide a researcher with the all-important introduction to initial contacts.[67] And while many journalists may not logically be rushing to share such details with people that might be deemed as potential competition, being a researcher (as opposed to member of press) eases the situation, and many journalists are genuinely happy to assist without asking for anything in return. In other cases, cooperation can be incentivized, especially when the journalists realize that the researcher's expertise and network of contacts in other places around the world can be very useful to them as well. Similarly, agreeing to be interviewed for their articles or talk shows can constitute a useful *quid pro quo* gesture. In some cases, local journalists can benefit from arranging an interview with high-level officials themselves, as these figures can sometimes be persuaded to talk to a Western professor at a time when they would be reluctant to find the time to meet a local journalist.[68] And finally, many local correspondents in conflict areas also make a living as fixers for their Western colleagues; their services can be hired for a payment. Such an option can be attractive at many levels, as it is time efficient, fair, and can help the researcher maintain a professional distance and reduce feelings of obligation, which in turn can help the researcher to be more assertive in asking for what he or she wants. Further, a fixer can sometimes also serve as an interpreter and a driver in one person, reducing the overall expenditure.

When working with fixers, there are several things to keep in mind. First of all, it is typically better to pay fixers on the basis of meetings arranged, as opposed to a daily basis, as this encourages greater efficiency. Secondly, in some cases it is advisable to enlist the assistance of multiple fixers, as it is not infrequent for fixers to grossly overstate their reach and connections. By relying on one fixer the researcher risks wasting valuable time only to discover that the particular person cannot deliver. Also, each fixer will have a different network of contacts, which results in greater diversity of potential interviewees. Thirdly, as a responsibility to other researchers who will come in the future and who may not have a great deal of research funding, it is important to always negotiate the price for these services down as much as possible, in order to prevent the inflation of fixer/interpreter prices to unaffordable levels. In media attractive conflicts, the prices for these services quickly skyrocket, as resource abundant media companies move in and inflate the market. Skillful negotiation based on the argument that researchers are not journalists and do not have that kind of money can, in some cases, bring the price down by

50 percent.[69] Fourthly, it is not necessary to use fixers for interviews that researchers can easily arrange by themselves or via existing contacts. In most cases, when working in a new context where the researcher has no prior experience, fixers can be useful for establishing the initial “foot in the door”, after which the researcher can use the snowball technique to significantly expand and build up his or her own network. Fifthly, researchers should be aware of the possibility of fixers (or interpreters and drivers) doubling as informants for the security services, resulting in a direct threat to the researcher and his interviewees.[70] On a final note, it should be noted that paying for access to sources can result in various scams, especially in media popular conflicts where the lucrative nature of the fixing business does not escape many creative minds. It is not unheard of for journalists in Peshawar to pay large sums of money for a phone interview with a “senior Taliban leader,” who happens to be the fixer’s cousin calling from a house next door.[71] In other cases, genuine terrorists agree to being interviewed but ask for money to “cover their expenses”, stating a completely inflated figure in anticipation of making a profit. Researchers can prevent these situations by doing their homework, knowing which specific people are most relevant to the research question at hand, and doing a background check on the individuals the fixer is trying to set up interviews with out of their own initiative. Above all, it pays off to use common sense - if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

At the same time this is not to suggest that researchers should not be ambitious about pursuing meetings with persons crucial in their research, and should not *a priori* assume that something is impossible. Interviewing government ministers, generals and other high officials is in most countries surprisingly easy. High-level leaders of terrorist groups who are hiding in mountains and jungles with large sums of money offered as a reward on their head are naturally much more difficult to get to, but there is typically also a large number of lower level leaders, commanders, sympathizers, financiers, ideologues etc., who can usefully be interviewed. Expressing repeated and persistent interest to speak with them, accompanied by a consistently logical narrative can bear fruit. Also, just because the researcher is rejected the first time he or she asks for an interview, does not mean that the situation is unchangeable. In fact, a blanket rejection is often part of the game, which helps militants separate the casually interested from those who are really interested. So even when rejected, calling back and asking specifically about the reason for rejection, (safety issues, sensitivity of topic etc.) and asking for ways that these concerns could be addressed is a very useful way of going about it. In short, keep coming back and make it hard to say “no”. [72] At the very least, researchers should strive to elicit a verbal commitment to an interview “next time” – since “commitment and consistency” is one of the key elements that drive human behaviour, an initial promise can be effectively leveraged in the future.[73]

On a final note, researchers should also be aware of the fact that interviews with terrorists almost never yield any ground-breaking information, especially when this is the first encounter between the researcher and the interviewee. Researchers should thus prepare themselves for a painstaking process of building trust, listening to very basic lectures on the “evil nature” of the West or the enemy government, standard ideological proclamations, and many conspiracy theories and twisted facts. This can, of course, be a highly frustrating process for a researcher who has

traveled a very long distance and spent a lot of time and resources on arranging the meeting in the first place, only to walk away with little new information. A somewhat classical example is the experience of Pakistani journalist Hasnain Kazim, who in a commendably honest article described the process of conducting an interview with a Pakistani Taliban commander in Islamabad. After spending a whole day changing locations and worrying about his safety, Kazim ended up with a thirty minute interview in which he learned absolutely nothing new.[74] Many interviews with “terrorists” take exactly this form, although it should be pointed out that Kazim’s interview can still be considered comparatively successful, since he did not spend two weeks in a ridiculously overpriced container accommodation at a campsite located in a malaria infested swamp waiting for a phone call providing instructions for a meeting that never materialized.[75] But while many interviews with “terrorists” reveal little new information it does not necessarily mean that getting any useful insights is impossible. It is all about building relationships, establishing trust, trying to progress further over time, coming back, and asking the right questions.

The Encounter

As mentioned above, it is unlikely that the researcher will acquire exceptional pieces of information when meeting the research subject for the first time. This is usually due to the limited level of rapport and trust existing at the beginning. It is thus a good idea to focus the first few encounters primarily on rapport-building, with the objective of developing rapport and trust in order to gain better access in future interviews. Importantly, years of research have shown that first impressions are absolutely key - people form 60 to 80 percent of their initial opinion about a person in less than 4 minutes.[76] In most contexts then, the researcher has very little time to make a good impression, and even less time to do so by talking, especially in the absence of local language capabilities and working through an interpreter. Given these limitations, it is important to make the most of the opportunity through as many additional factors as possible. And while in most cases simply being polite and respectful is enough for the researcher; to be accepted, there are certain steps that researchers can take to develop their access even further.

The first such factor is the initial greeting. Obviously, the ability of the researcher to greet people in their own language is the first natural step. Strict observance of local cultural practices, insightful handshakes and traditional hugs can also be very effective, as is local attire.[77] And while on a rare occasion suspicious questions about the reasons behind wearing the local dress sometimes arise, this can be quickly diffused by an explanation that as a visitor in their country, the researcher is trying to show respect to local custom, which also presents a good opportunity to express disapproval of the way in which Western culture is often forcibly imposing itself on the locals. The initial encounter alone typically gets the interview off on the right foot. Of course, when interviewing officials and members of the security forces, the researcher is well advised to wear a suit and tie instead, because traditional clothing can be seen by power elites as backward, and when worn by foreigners, a bit tacky. This does not mean of course, that researchers in field conditions will always be expected to have a neatly pressed suit for official meetings. The point is to understand what sort of influence one can gain by indirect factors, and to maximize these to

his or her advantage. Obviously, age and gender also play an important role, but these are factors the researcher can rarely influence.

As suggested above, the second important factor is body language, and training oneself to be aware of what signals one sends and how these are likely to be perceived by the other side, is a core skill of any effective communicator. This is especially true during interviews with terrorists and their ideologues, whose logic and statements may quickly offend the researcher, who can inadvertently give this negative internal reaction away by sending dismissive or defensive signals. Having the ability to quickly identify one's own posture and quickly substituting negative or defensive signals for more friendly and open ones, can be the key difference between success and failure in terms of creating a bond.

Similarly, in the initial encounter with a shady character it pays off to consciously assume confident but open and non-threatening body language, with open palms up and frequent smiles, and a periodic but non-continuous eye contact.[78] In addition, knowledge of body language can also help researchers in basic orientation while spending time among people whose language they do not speak, and in gauging attitudes at checkpoints. Further, body language research has shown that not only is body language reflective of our emotions, changes in body posture can also influence the way we feel. When encountering negative postures at checkpoints, the researcher can use knowledge of body language not only to detect the attitudes, but also to find the appropriate opportunity to initiate a level of bonding, e.g. by sharing food and drink with the fighters. Not only is sharing a natural social lubricant,[79] handing an unfriendly combatant a bottle to hold can break his defensive posture, which in turn can make him feel less defensive. [80] While there is no space in this article to elaborate on all the benefits and caveats of analyzing body language, a wealth of literature exists that can help prospective researchers in their effort to learn this important skill.[81] It is also important to emphasize that body language is notoriously cultural, and that reading signals accurately takes time, practice and deep knowledge of cultural variations.[82]

Thirdly, language matters, and if the researcher can communicate directly with the locals and conduct interviews without relying on an interpreter, this introduces a much faster rapport building process and overall a more effective approach.[83] This does not mean that working in environments where the researcher does not speak a foreign language is impossible. But it is certainly more difficult and researchers will have to adjust their expectations accordingly. But even here a caveat is in place; despite the clear benefits of knowing the local language it is not always advantageous to disclose this ability, for the sake of clarity and safety.[84]

To conclude, there are many specific steps a researcher can take in the initial encounter to make a favorable impression, and to begin to earn trust with the research population, and to build it further up over time. *Trust* of course, is absolutely key - without trust any meaningful research is unlikely. As observed by Norman, "the cognitive dimension of trust has been analyzed through rational choice methodologies such as game theory in which trusting relationships are defined by an implicit assumption that one person will not deliberately hurt the other to satisfy his own

needs.”[85] But as Norman also points out, it is emotional trust (one based not so much on reason or rationale, but rather on personal relationships) that is even more important. Both cognitive trust and emotional trust then reinforce each other and combine into behavioral trust. This is essentially based on reciprocity; it grows with time and observed actions.[86] This suggests that in-depth field research is highly dependent on building trust over time, and reinforcing it with one’s actions. It is therefore advisable to make several trips into the same area, and initially focus on rapport-building by engaging in communal activities, active listening, avoiding difficult or controversial questions, and spending social time with research participants. [87] Knowledge of, or at least an observable desire to learn about local culture, history, religion etc., openness and friendliness will go a long way, as will making people feel that they really matter to you. Learning at least a few phrases in the local language, knowing how to accept hospitality, eating enthusiastically with locals regardless of how unappetizing or unhygienic the meal,[88] offering to help with work, paying a visit without asking for anything at all, playing football with children, and being pleasant company – all of these steps can make a crucial difference.

The Interview

Effective interviewing is a skill, which needs to be developed and practiced. Unfortunately, this skill is taught at universities only superficially (if at all), and there is a prevailing assumption that interviewing is something all academics know how to do. However, effective interviewing is not just about asking from a list of questions; the manner in which the questions are asked, and the reactions of the interviewer to the answers both directly influence how much relevant data he or she will get. In addition, academics are not a population widely known for strong communication skills, which may be the reason why we are frequently stereotyped as being somewhat socially awkward. On the one hand, academics are used to lecturing and conveying complex concepts through presentations, so speaking and expressing one’s ideas is rarely the problem. On the downside (and perhaps as a direct result of the former), most academics are generally not very good listeners, which is a major obstacle to being an effective communicator for purposes of collecting interviews in the field. This is especially the case in interactions with the “common folk”, which typically entails engaging in politically incorrect, simple, and highly opinionated and biased conversations with lay people about subjects that academics either know very little about, or in contrast, have an excessively more complex and qualified view of. Whether it is a product of social elitism or a simple lack of confidence, the fact is that such situations do make most academics uncomfortable.[89] The problem is that during field interviews with combatants of *any* kind, academics will typically find themselves talking precisely to simple, not very educated men (and sometimes women), who tend to have a very one-dimensional view of the world, and to whom they will find it very difficult to relate. This can constitute a crucial obstacle in the effort to capitalize on the opportunity to acquire valuable insights through interviews, which is a pity given the fact that the researcher has invested valuable time and resources to gain access to interviewees in the first place.[90]

The good news for those of us who are not so lucky as to have a natural talent for effortlessly building instant rapport with just about anyone, this is a skill that *can* be acquired. The key is realizing one's own deficiency in this area in the first place, and then pro-actively train oneself in acquiring the necessary tools. There is a wide variety of excellent literature on effective communication and its principles that can be consulted and training for dealing everyday situations is possible without much additional effort. Forcing ourselves into making contact with strangers, building conversations with people we would not normally talk to, and acquiring the discipline to actively listen to views that we strongly disagree with - these are all good opportunities to train.

The key principle in effective interviewing is the use of active listening, a loose system of style, manner and technique that demonstrates the listener's caring, concern, and attentiveness.[91] Useful communication techniques in this regard include paraphrasing, reflection, asking clarifying questions, open-ended probing, interpretation, and self-disclosure.[92] The purpose is to make the subject feel "heard", satisfying one of the core needs we all have as people.[93] Not only does the interviewer's attentive style encourage a greater sharing of information, it can also have a positive rapport-building effect; especially with people who see themselves as self-defending victims who frame their involvement in terrorism as the "only way to be *heard*". An essential part of this effort is to maintain the mindset in which the interviewer is not talking to a "terrorist," but rather to a rational human being who, for some set of reasons, has chosen – or felt forced into - an extreme, violent course of action.[94] Militants rarely dispute the observation that their actions are extreme; they do however see them as justified. This acknowledged extremity of terrorism is one of the possible reasons why militants have a tendency to passionately explain and rationalize their actions, especially when speaking to a Westerner whom they perceive, (at least initially) as someone who is judging them and who does not understand the true drivers and "root causes" of their actions. This is where actively listening to their grievances and validating some of their frustrations helps contradict many of the terrorists' demonized perceptions of "Westerners", and makes it harder for them to label the researcher as unreasonable, creating chances to build rapport and increase trust.

A specific challenge is then posed by interviews conducted through an interpreter, since in many cases the interpretation process constitutes the single greatest obstacle to a successful interview. First of all, most interpreters willing to work in conflict zones have a less than perfect knowledge of the English language and have no formal interpretation training, which creates considerable room for error. Secondly, interpreters are frequently difficult to control, have their own agendas, often do not translate what the researcher or the interviewee considers important and sometimes interject their own opinions and interpretations on the subject of the interview into both the question and the answer. Less experienced interpreters also sometimes interpret in reverse, starting with the last point made and working backwards to the beginning of the question posed, completely negating the effects of a carefully and diplomatically crafted question on a sensitive topic. Thirdly, interpreters sometimes have their own discussions on the side with the interviewee, failing to interpret its content to the researcher in the process. Fourthly, interpreters

are typically not well versed in the art of interviewing, which can result in the negation of the potential benefits of using some of the aforementioned communication techniques. For this reason, it is advisable to set firm rules for the interview process beforehand and to brief the interpreter on the principles of active listening, explaining that when the researcher asks clarifying questions it is all part of the technique. It is therefore not helpful if the interpreter, instead of translating the clarifying question, simply answers affirmatively on behalf of the interviewee, as this will fail to convey the message of the interviewer's attentiveness and keen interest. By the same token, working effectively with interpreters also requires preparation and experience on behalf of the interviewer. The one crucial mistake people tend to make when interviewing or negotiating through interpreters is that they talk to the interpreter instead of the subject. In such indirect conversation, speakers have a tendency to face the interpreter, and convey their questions and comments in a very factual, monotonous, and emotionless voice. To the interviewee, who does not understand what exactly is being said and has only the tone of voice to go on, this can sound like an indifferent, uninterested, even dismissive questioning – creating exactly the opposite effect of what the researcher should strive to achieve.

To avoid this situation it is important to face the interviewee and speak to them directly, to maintain eye contact and an attentive posture in the process of asking questions, as well as when listening to the answers. Further, body language research has shown that people tend to talk three to four times more when the listener nods their head using groups of three nods in regular intervals. Especially slow nods in deliberate clusters coinciding with the interviewee making a point are very powerful in conveying the interviewee's interest.[95] Crucially, this dynamic is the same whether using an interpreter or not, and it is sensible to focus on the interviewee in the same way as if he or she spoke in a language the interviewer understands. The same gestures should then be repeated during consecutive interpretation, to further reiterate one's interest and understanding of what has been said. In addition, due to cause and effect and the contagious nature of head-nodding, engaging in this practice will also cause the other side to reciprocate, creating a more favorable impression of the interviewer. Finally, continuing to nod for several seconds after the interviewee has finished speaking, generally encourages the person to fill the silence by adding additional information, which can be further encouraged by the listener's hand-to-chin evaluation gestures. Overall, head nodding is an excellent rapport-building tool across most cultures.[96]

Traps Impacting on the Interpretation Phase

Most interviews in the Terrorism Studies field are unstructured, using open-ended questions in order to allow for a greater breadth of data. Whereas structured interviewing seeks to collect precise data that can be coded and that can be interpreted through a set of prescribed categories, unstructured interviewing seeks to gain insights about the complex behavior of the subject without pre-imposing limitations on the interpretation of the information.[97] This also means however, that unstructured interviews leave a wide-open playing field for subsequent interpretation of the data, which, however, can be subject to many biases and interferences. These can be based on multiple internal and external factors as well as underlying assumptions.

This section focuses on the biases and traps involved in interpreting data collected via interviews in the field.

Given the elusive nature of terrorists and their activities, most of the interviews are highly opportunistic, which raises the issue of limited representativeness of the data. It is important to recognize that the findings of any study based on interviews with terrorists only apply to the population of terrorists who are willing to speak to a Western researcher, which, by itself, may be a minority. Similarly, when interviewing “terrorists” it is important to distinguish between different roles that people play within terrorist organizations. Most interviews will be conducted with leaders, spokespersons, and ideologues of the group; that means with people who do not necessarily participate in actual killing. These people frequently come across as intelligent, worldly, and educated, which is a characteristic that may not be representative of the rank-and-file fighters (who typically form the majority of the group). Moreover, in the case that the purpose of these interviews is to determine the characteristics of people who become terrorists, then such a study might give too much credit to variables such as “education” and “intelligence,” while simultaneously missing the importance of the “capacity to inflict violence” variable, simply because of limited representativeness of the data. The final example comes from the realm of the popular area of suicide terrorism, where many of the insights about this phenomenon are based on interviews with “suicide bombers”. The problem in this case is similar, as the people interviewed represent only the population of *failed* suicide terrorists, which may be quite different in their thinking and personal characteristics from the population of their ‘successful’ colleagues, who for obvious reasons, can no longer be interviewed. Some of these limitations in empirical research are inherent, but openly acknowledging them as qualifiers for one’s findings is an important part of the research process.

The second bias lies in the process of the interview itself, which tends to be influenced by a combination of different factors. Some of these factors include liking, rapport, language ability, the environment in which the interview takes place, etc. In other words, it is not so much about what questions the researchers is asking, but also the manner and sequence in which these questions are asked, that determine what the answers will be. In fact, different researchers could be posing exactly the same questions to the same respondent, and could receive significantly different answers depending on what level of rapport and trust exists between them and the interviewee, and under what conditions the interview is taking place. Timing of the interview as well as the exact wording of each question are, of course, crucial as well.[98]

The third critical issue, as observed by Goodhand, is that conflict creates an “information economy” in which the political situation privileges some voices while suppressing others, thus enabling powerful actors to manipulate the content of information and control its dissemination. [99] Field research then involves choices about which voices are heard, and whose knowledge counts.[100] The fact is that such decisions are not always the sole product of the researcher’s methodological choice as these are heavily influenced by the environment. For instance, factors such as greater ease of access, sense of familiarity, comfort and security, often leads researchers to privilege information coming from capital cities at the expense of information coming from

rural areas. And since capital cities are also more tightly controlled by governments, this may inadvertently privilege government narratives.[101] Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in terrorism research where state narratives are often by default given much more credibility and attention than those of the “terrorists”.

A closely related danger in field research is the problem of so-called “seduction”, or a situation in which the researcher’s objectivity is impacted by favors granted by a party to the conflict, such as providing exclusive access to data or sources, allowing the researcher to embed him or herself with a combat unit, or simply by being friendly and hospitable. The fact is that even if such acts of “seduction” (whether deliberate or unintentional) are fairly obvious, as human beings we are programmed to find it difficult to feel indebted, and have a tendency to repay favors.[102] Whether researchers admit it or not, the principle of reciprocity does affect their views, and consequently the level of critique of government policies in the author’s conclusions will at least partially reflect the way the researcher was treated by the government while spending time in the country. By the same token, this situation can also exist in reverse. Researchers who spend time among militants on their territory and could potentially become easy victims of kidnapping, find themselves subject to a variation of the Stockholm Syndrome, or the mutually positive relationship between captives and their captors that frequently occurs in hostage situations.[103] The researcher’s awareness of his or her own vulnerability, can result in feelings of gratitude toward the militants for not exploiting the situation, which then by itself can cause the researcher to view the militants more favorably than he or she might have if presented with exactly the same data in a more detached setting.[104] And as observed by Zahar in “giving voice to the voiceless we could fall for another bias: either accepting the ‘counter-hegemonic’ discourse of the non-state actors at face value or imposing upon them our own interpretation of the situation and romanticizing their reality.”[105]

On a final note, researchers should be aware of the principle of scarcity, or the natural human tendency to assign more value to that which is difficult to attain.[106] In other words, researchers subconsciously tend to assign greater meaning to data that was difficult for them to acquire, or data to which they have exclusive access. In reality, the information gained from an interview in the process of which the researcher was nearly killed, or a classified document that the researcher spent months trying to get access to, could be less meaningful than information available in open secondary sources more easily accessible over the internet. But the human tendency to assign greater value to the former can easily skew the researcher’s conclusions, frequently without him or her even being aware of it. Although the value of researching terrorism in the field is clear, it is important to remember that the fact that a certain piece of information comes from an interview with a terrorist does not necessarily make it the “Holy Grail.”[107]

Conclusion

Greater emphasis on field research is the clear next step in taking the discipline of Terrorism Studies to the next level. Field research is useful in helping researchers in navigating with greater certainty through multiple contradictory versions of events available in open sources. It

contributes to counterbalancing some of the key research biases that inherently exist. It also enhances the reliability and accuracy of findings, and above all, the process itself can be highly beneficial in educating the researcher by allowing him or her to acquire a tacit knowledge of the context. But while many researchers have answered the call and have ventured into the field, there is still an acute absence of attempts to share the know-how on the intricacies of the step-by-step process of conducting such research. This is needed in order to enable other researchers to build on the experiences of their colleagues and to learn from their insights and mistakes.

One key aspect that was not covered sufficiently here is the need to demystify the everyday reality of field research. The majority of time spent in field research involves idleness and even boredom. Myriads of phone calls to contacts are often followed by endless hours and days of waiting for a return call that may or may not come. Interviews with *active* terrorists, if they actually materialize, are often not nearly as insightful as people expect: the frustrated researcher often walks away with a basic lecture on the group's ideology and stated grievance; something of which the researcher who has done his homework typically has a deeper knowledge of than the interviewed terrorists themselves. *Former* terrorists are a more "user friendly" population, as their disengaged position allows them to share more details.[108] Such interviews are frequently more interesting – yet still inherently limited in their representativeness. Most meetings with local government officials, investigators and intelligence agencies are full of predictable propaganda. Any information acquired in such meetings needs to be treated with a healthy dose of scepticism. And, to make matters more difficult, in most cases, after a long enough exposure to the conflict, the overall picture becomes much more blurred for the researchers than it was back at the university office where the illusion of having objective, exact knowledge that could be neatly compartmentalized into typologies still may have existed. Instead, researchers exposed to the greyness of everyday reality of conflict zones where no information can be fully trusted and everything is open to alternative interpretations, may start to second-guess almost everything they thought they knew for sure. After realizing how different their perceptions of a given conflict are as a result of direct first-hand experience, researchers may start to doubt absolutely everything they have learned through standard academic study about other conflicts and terror campaigns as well. Often the more a researcher learns, the greater the number of questions that arise. This state of "confusion" and "uncertainty about anything" is possibly the greatest non-physical "danger" of field research.

Similarly, functioning in conflict zones involves much time spent in frustration while dealing with even simple logistical issues, rather than the hoped for but rather rare experience of excitement and action. The limited ability to move around freely often leaves the researcher in desperate need of some physical activity. However unless one is staying at a ridiculously overpriced hotel completely secluded from the local everyday reality, the security environment makes opportunities for exercise practically non-existent. Being perpetually stereotyped and constantly treated as a potential threat, does not add to the enjoyment of the experience, especially for those academics that are used to being treated with at least some respect. The perpetually busy and fast-paced terrorism specialist often cannot escape the thought whether

there is not something more rewarding and productive to be done in the field than endless waiting, coupled with constant uncertainty and only doubtful prospects of achieving the imagined results.

Coming home after weeks or months in a conflict environment is not easy either. Whether the researcher admits it or not, spending endless hours talking to victims and perpetrators of political violence about massacres of civilians in gruesome detail and constantly having to worry about one's own safety, does take its toll. But despite all these unpleasant by-products there is something invaluable that field research does contribute: an overall increased understanding of the context in which terrorism occurs. This incremental acquisition of a more insightful, sceptical and nuanced lens through which the researcher processes subsequently incoming information on a conflict of terror campaign is simply priceless - it cannot be acquired in any other way than through direct exposure to the field. In the end, it may well be that the "greyness" and "confusion" of the researcher resulting from this experience simply represents an more advanced level of knowledge.

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Notes

[1] Andrew Silke. *Research on Terrorism*. London: Frank Cass, 2004; Magnus Ranstorp *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions*. London: Routledge, 2007 and Alex P. Schmid (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.

[2] Cited in Audrey Kurth Cronin "How al Qaeda Ends. *International Security*, Vol. 31, No.1 (Summer 2006), p. 10.

[3] Jon B. Alterman, "How Terrorism Ends". United States Institute of Peace *Special Report* No. 48 (25 May 1999). Available at: <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr990525.html> (accessed on 11.5. 2007) or M. Ranstorp, op. cit., p. 15.

[4] Andrew Silke, "An Introduction to Terrorism Research," in A. Silke, op. cit., p. 13.

[5] The only text focusing on the process of field research on terrorism to date is John Horgan. *The Case for Firsthand Research*. In: A. Silke, op. cit., pp. 30-56.

[6] A more detailed collection of chapters from experienced authors representing different risk groups, disciplines, methodological approaches, regional specializations, varying levels of local credibility and knowledge, and other context specific aspects is forthcoming in: Adam Dolnik (ed.) *Terrorism Field Research: A Guide*. London: Routledge, forthcoming in 2011.

[7] As observed by J. Horgan, authors engaging in fieldwork rarely, if ever, describe the process of establishing contact with terrorist interviewees. - John Horgan "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).

[8] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 11

[9] Cited in A. K. Cronin, op. cit., p. 10.

[10] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 9.

[11] Martha Crenshaw: *The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 2. (June 2000), p. 410.

[12] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 9.

- [13] David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith. We're All Terrorists Now: Critical—or Hypocritical—Studies “on” Terrorism? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2009) Vol. 32, pp. 292–302.
- [14] In fact, the list of researchers that have engaged in field research on terrorism in conflict areas is so long, that it is not safe to list them here without fear of significant omissions.
- [15] John Horgan; in A. Silke, op. cit., p. 30.
- [16] Magnus Ranstorp. “Introduction: Mapping Terrorism Research” in M. Ranstorp (ed.) *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions*. London: Routledge, 2007, p. 6.
- [17] Edna Reid. Terrorism Research and the Diffusion of Ideas, *Knowledge and Policy*, 6, (Spring 1993), p. 17.
- [18] For examples, see Jonathan B. Tucker., *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.
- [19] Raphael Perl. “Combating Terrorism: The Challenge of Measuring Effectiveness,” Congressional Research Service Report, available at: <http://www.fas.org/spp/crs/terror/RL33160.pdf>. For one of the few systematic attempts to measure effectiveness, see: Christopher Hewitt. *The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorist Policies*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
- [20] A. K. Cronin op. cit.
- [21] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 18.
- [22] Martha Crenshaw. “How Terrorism Declines,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 3, No.1 (1991), p. 73.
- [23] A. K. Cronin, op. cit.
- [24] Adam Dolnik. *Understanding Terrorist Innovation: Technology, Tactics and Global Trends*. Routledge, London, 2007, p. 220.
- [25] Edward F. Mickolus. *Transnational Terrorism: A Chronology of Events, 1968-1979*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Edward F. Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean M. Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology of Events, Volume I: 1980-1983*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
- Edward F. Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean M. Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology of Events, Volume II: 1984-1987*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
- Edward F. Mickolus. *Terrorism, 1988-1991: A Chronology of Events and a Selectively Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Edward F. Mickolus. *Terrorism, 1992-1995: A Chronology of Events and a Selectively Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.
- Edward F. Mickolus, *Terrorism, 1996-2001: A Chronology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- [26] Patricia Rawlinson “Mission Impossible?: Researching Organized Crime”, in Roy King and Emma Wincup (eds.), *Doing Research on Crime and Justice*. Oxford: University Press, (2 edition), 2007, p. 304.
- [27] AFP: Obama apologizes to Guatemala for US sex-disease study. Available at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20101001/hl_afp/usguatemalahealthsexdisease ; accessed on 09/11/2010.
- [28] Tora K. Bikson, Ricky N. Blumenthal, Rick Eden, Patrick P. Gunn. Ethical Principles in Social-Behavioral Research on Terrorism: Probing the Parameters. RAND Corporation. Available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/2007/RAND_WR490-4.pdf (accessed on 9/11/10).
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research , p. 14. On Internet available at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/e72.pdf
- [31] Certainly, some of the research can be feasibly completed without a human ethics clearance, if its purpose is “to obtain publicly available information or only seeks the professional view of an office holder on the basis of that person’s professional role.” Nevertheless, most research in the field will raise human research ethics questions.
- [32] For instance, according to National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, “research will be ethically acceptable only if its potential benefits justify the risks involved.”
- [33] National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, p. 13. Available on Internet at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/e72.pdf .
- [34] Ibid.
- [35] Tora K. Bikson, Ricky N. Blumenthal, Rick Eden, Patrick P. Gunn, op. cit.
- [36] Susan M. Thompson, “That is not what we authorized you to do...”: access and government interference in highly politicized research environments”; in: Chandra Lekha Sriram, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, and Olga Martin-Ortega (eds.), *Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 121.
- [37] John C. King, “Demystifying Field Research” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 15.
- [38] Carolyn Gallaher, “Researching repellent groups: Some methodological considerations on how to represent militants, radicals, and other belligerents” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 136.
- [39] Ibid, p. 137.
- [40] While building rapport and trust is a crucial part of field research, it sometimes becomes difficult to find the cut-off point for when one should start focusing on difficult or controversial questions that can represent a setback in terms of rapport building. It is too easy for researchers to fall into the trap of focusing so much on the relationship that one can simply avoid (consciously or subconsciously) controversial issues all together, especially in interviews where the initial contact or trust was very difficult to establish. It has certainly happened to me in the past, and it is still difficult to provide a useful answer on how to avoid this. The rule of thumb should be for the researcher to at least recognize that this interference exists, and to incorporate it into the data interpretation phase as something that may be skewing the picture.
- [41] John C. King, “Demystifying Field Research” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 10.
- [42] Adam Dolnik and Keith M. Fitzgerald. *Negotiating Hostage Crises with the New Terrorists* Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008.
- [43] Ibid.
- [44] Tora K. Bikson et al, op. cit., p. 62.
- [45] For instance, in attempts to negotiate access to Gaza to conduct research on Hamas, one needs to initially create a good enough rapport and trust with Israelis, emphasizing the “counterterrorism” value of the research, while in subsequent contact with the militants one might be best advised to talk about “root causes” of conflict etc. In some contexts, such a separation is not even possible, as being seen with one community will already taint the researcher in the eyes of the other.

- [46] In my experience, framing the field research aspect of a given research project as opportunistic, unstructured interviews focusing not on data collection per se, but more on helping the researcher navigate through the different versions of events available in existing open sources is one way of dealing with the problem.
- [47] Robert B. Cialdini. *Influence: Science and Practice* Boston: Pierson Education, 5th ed. 2009, p. 81.
- [48] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Available on Internet at: <http://cpj.org/killed/index.php> (accessed on 17/2/2010).
- [49] Ibid.
- [50] Robert Young Pelton, *The World's Most Dangerous Places*. New York: HarperCollins, 5th ed. 2003, p. 206.
- [51] Thomas Hardgrove. Testimony at the House Committee on International Relations 3/31/98. Available on Internet at www.g21.net/narco.html (accessed on 1/30/2002).
- [52] Minwoo Yun, *Understanding Global Terrorist Hostage Taking and Kidnapping*. Saarbruecken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller & Co. 2008, p. 9; Robert Young Pelton, op. cit., p. 206.
- [53] New Internationalist Magazine 1997; <http://www.newint.org/issue294/facts.html>.
- [54] WHO Global Status Report on Road Safety. Available at http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241563840_eng.pdf
- [55] Robert Young Pelton, op. cit., p.1088.
- [56] Among the leading training providers are Centurion Risk Assessment Services, AKE group, and Athena Security & Intelligence Consultants Ltd and others.
- [57] It follows that if one is receiving assistance from the government, it is not advisable to try to conduct side trips to the "other side", and the researcher should also develop a high level of tolerance for government propaganda, and should take this interference into account in the data analysis stage.
- [58] In one instance, one of my close friends who worked for an NGO in the North Caucasus came extremely close to being executed, after the Ingush militants found a Russian government stamp in her passport. The only reason why she is still alive was that she was in late stages of pregnancy, and her appeal to the militants to shoot her in a way that would cause the least amount of suffering to the baby, saved her life.
- [59] For instance, how is a terrorism researcher supposed to conduct any interviews with officials if he or she is expected to avoid "security forces installations, locations that are frequented by police and army personnel ... and government buildings in Kabul"?
- [60] Afghan Paradise Lost: Suicide Attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel. Available at: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/540787/afghan_paradise_lost_suicide_attack.html?cat=9, accessed on (09/11/2010).
- [61] Afghan capital Kabul hit by Taliban attack. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8464763.stm>, accessed on (09/11/2010).
- [62] While this would constitute little reassurance in Iraq and parts of Pakistan where mosques have been routinely targeted, in Afghanistan at the time this did provide at least some form of protection.
- [63] I adopted this option during my second and third research trips to Beslan in North Ossetia when researching the September 2004 school hostage crisis. Since I was able to communicate in Russian and had been to Beslan before, I had quite a bit of sympathy for the people in the town. Spending long evenings with local people in their courtyards provided unprecedented informal access to hundreds of hostages who had never spoken to any media representatives.
- [64] I am forever indebted to Ismail, who risked his own life to get me out of Chechnya safely, following my release from a detention facility in the middle of a forest at night.
- [65] I used to leave a trail by sending SMS's to a contact from every village we passed through. Today, in areas with GSM coverage iPhone's "HereJam" app allows the user to send e-mail coordinates to a predetermined e-mail address with a simple touch of the screen.
- [66] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); Available on the Internet at: <http://cpj.org/killed/index.php>, (accessed on 17/2/2010).
- [67] J. Horgan also suggests formal contacts with political fronts or other formal gatekeepers, and informal introductions during formal events and informal approaches in conflict zones as possible access routes to interviewees. - See John Horgan. "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).
- [68] This approach also has its risks, such as the journalist independently interrupting your line of questioning, and sidetracking the interview. This is a very frustrating experience, especially if the researcher has painstakingly progressed through mundane questions to establish rapport, etc.. Similar issue can sometimes arise with a driver, who out of courtesy is frequently also invited inside for the interview. Some drivers can be incredibly helpful if they are good communicators or come from the interviewee's extended family or tribe, but they can also be a very disruptive influence if they interfere with the interview process by asking their own questions or offering their own views.
- [69] This may be an uncomfortable process for many researchers, but if you are inclined to pay the fixer/interpreter more money, do so after the job is done as a "tip" for good work. In this way, your conscience is clear, your assistant is happy, and this step does not necessarily raise the price for more modestly funded researchers (especially self-funded PhD students).
- [70] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.
- [71] Discussion with Amir Rana, Islamabad (January 2010).
- [72] One useful method I frequently use is what I call the "rebooking" trick. This is how it works. One of the most frequent questions that prospective interviewees ask is: "Until when are you here?" This is a reasonable question to ask when looking for a timeframe that is mutually suitable to conduct an interview. It is a generally good idea to give a date that is several days earlier before the actual date, in order to leave room for any last minute opportunities. Also, people who don't necessarily want to speak to you but do not want to reject you outright remember the date, and graciously consent to an interview, but their availability is universally limited to the day after you have already supposed to leave. Leaving that cushion at the end gives a researcher the option of calling back the interviewee and saying: "Talking to you and learning from your experiences is very important to me, so I changed my ticket to fly two days later just so I can meet you. You said that you were free tomorrow, what time would suit you?"
- [73] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*. Boston: Pierson Education, 5th ed. 2009, p. 68.
- [74] Hasnain Kazim, "Among Pakistan's Radical Islamists: A Wild Goose Chase with the Taliban", *Spiegel Online*, 10/2/2010. Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,677031,00.html#ref=nlint> (accessed on 11/2/2010).
- [75] Reflecting the author's experience from one of his trips to Southern Sudan.
- [76] Allan Pease and Barbara Pease. *The Definitive Book of Body Language*. New York: Bantam Books 2004, p. 10.
- [77] For instance, when interviewing militants in Pakistan, I have had much success with wearing a long beard, panjshiri hat, and a *shalwar kameez*, and using the traditional Muslim greeting "*Assalamu aleikum/Wa aleikum assalam*", accompanied by a gentle half-hug followed by a soft handshake. This first encounter alone tended to become a good icebreaker and a topic of conversation in which the respondents and their entourage commented on the dress.

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- [78] It is important to avoid prolonged continuous eye contact, as this can be perceived as a challenge. The key difference in whether the eye contact will be perceived favorably or not lies in the level of pupil dilation, which cannot be consciously controlled.
- [79] A. Pease and B. Pease, op. cit., p. 142.
- [80] Ibid p. 99.
- [81] The following books provide a good starting point:
A. Pease and B. Pease, op. cit., 400 pp.; Joe Navarro. *What Every BODY is Saying*. New York, Harper 2008, 272 pp.; Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, Wallace V. *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions From Facial Expressions*. Cambridge, MA: Malor Books, 2003, 212 pp.; Paul Tieger and Barbara Barron Tieger *The Art of Speed Reading People*. New York, Little Brown and Co., 1998, 224 pp..
- [82] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this issue.
- [83] Unsurprisingly, the pace and progress of my interviews in Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya directly in Russian contrasted sharply with the frustratingly slow pace of working through an interpreter in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Colombia.
- [84] For instance, using an interpreter and having an agreement with him or her to “receive” an important phone call during the interview and to have to leave the room, and staying around to listen on the sidelines conversation between the militants who do not know that you can understand them, can be an effective way to gauge the interviewee’s intentions and identifying potential threats to the researcher. And there is nothing unfair about such a “trick,” as in most interviews with militants, there is someone in the room who understands English in order to monitor everything that is said in the conversation between the researcher and the interpreter. Another way in which knowledge of the local language can be a double-edged sword, is the fact that it eliminates the option for the local intelligence agencies of questioning an interpreter about the researchers’ activities. As a result, in some areas the researcher can expect long hours personally spent in interrogation.
- [85] Julie M. Norman, “Got Trust? The Challenge of Gaining Access in Conflict Zones” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 72
- [86] Ibid., p. 73.
- [87] For example, during my first trip to Minadano (Philippines), I spent half a day planting coconuts with the MILF fighters making small talk and joking around while refraining from any formal interviews at all during the first visit. Similarly, in my research on the LRA in Northern Uganda, my first meetings with ex-LRA senior commanders focused on self-introduction and informal conversation followed by a request for an interview, providing the option to the recipient to think about it. Following their consent and organizing the interview, in the second meeting I asked fairly general questions, and specifically refrained from asking about personal involvement in the LRA atrocities, which have become infamous for their unprecedented brutality. Before leaving I organized an informal party for all my interviewees, and specifically stated that it was not for work but for fun. It was in this setting when people started coming out with their stories...and the process was reinforced even more during future visits.
- [88] In my travels, I specifically train myself in sampling the most exotic and off-putting food in order to be able to eat just about anything.
- [89] Perhaps it is precisely this unwillingness to step out of one’s comfort zone (more so than the perceived physical dangers) that is responsible for the comparative rarity of field research on terrorism to date.
- [90] Of course, this stereotypical view of academics is highly reductionist, and there are certainly some brilliant and natural communicators in the Terrorism Studies field. Similarly, many soldiers, militants and terrorists are also rather astute and intelligent individuals.
- [91] Arthur A. Slatkin. *Communications in Crisis and Hostage Negotiations*. Springfield IL: Charles C Thomas Publishers, 2005, p. 19.
- [92] *ibid.* p. 20.
- [93] Psychotherapists make a living precisely on this natural desire of people to share their problems and their need to feel heard and understood.
- [94] A. Dolnik and K.M. Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 162.
- [95] A. Pease And B. Pease, op. cit., p. 231.
- [96] The only exception here are Bulgaria (nodding indicates rejection rather than affirmation) and Japan (nodding illustrates listening, but not necessarily agreement).
- [97] A. Fontana and J. H. Frey. “The Interview: From Structured to Negotiated Text” in: Jaber Gubrium, and Jams Holstein (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research*. London: Sage Publications, 2nd ed., 2000), p. 652.
- [98] John Horgan. “Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research.” *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).
- [99] Julie M. Norman, “Got Trust? The Challenge of Gaining Access in Conflict Zones” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 77.
- [100] Susan M. Thompson, “‘That is not what we authorized you to do...’: Access and government interference in highly politicized research environments” ,in: Chandra Lekha Sriram, et al, op. cit., p. 112.
- [101] Marie-Joelle Zahar. “Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, p. 194.
- [102] Daniel Coleman, *Social Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Book 2006, p. 5.
- [103] James Poland and Michael McCrystle. *Practical, Tactical and Legal Perspectives of Terrorism and Hostage Taking*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, p. 24.
- [104] Another factor that can play a role in affecting the researcher’s perceptions is the “celebrity factor” associated with interviewing important figures in the terrorist domain. Few researchers could argue that having a chance to interview Osama bin Laden would leave them impartial and objective.
- [105] Marie-Joelle Zahar, “Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise” in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 204.
- [106] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*. Boston: Pierson Education, 2009, 5th edition, p. 210.
- [107] Horgan expresses a similar sentiment in his article “Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research.” *Political Psychology*, Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here? (forthcoming).
- [108] *Ibid.*
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Towards Global Jihadism: Al-Qaeda's Strategic, Ideological and Structural Adaptations since 9/11

by Bill Braniff and Assaf Moghadam

Abstract

In recent years, Al-Qaeda has suffered a number of setbacks, but has also successfully spawned an expansionist global jihadist movement that will survive the death of Osama bin Laden. This article describes how the multifaceted threat posed by global jihadism has evolved over the last decade. It first recounts some of the more salient examples of Al-Qaeda's post-9/11 strategic, ideological, and structural adaptations, and then offers a balance sheet of Al-Qaeda's contemporary strengths and weaknesses. Al-Qaeda continues to enable the violence of others, orient that violence towards the United States and its allies in a distributed game of attrition warfare, and foster a dichotomous "us versus them" narrative between the Muslim world and the rest of the international community. Despite this overarching consistency, Al-Qaeda shepherds a different phenomenon than it did ten years ago. The aggregation of the movement's strategic, ideological, and structural adaptations has fundamentally changed the nature of the jihadist threat to the West. This evolved threat is not inherently more dangerous, as counterterrorism efforts today focus on and disrupt capability earlier and more consistently than prior to September 2001. This multifaceted global jihad will, however, continue to produce greater numbers of attacks in more locations, from a more diverse cadre of individuals spanning a wider ideological spectrum.

Introduction

Approaching the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, there is a growing sense among counterterrorism analysts from the policy community and academia that Al-Qaeda has substantially weakened in the last decade and is destined to lose the battle against its enemies, and in particular the United States.[1] Indeed, signs that Al-Qaeda is flagging are ample, and include its loss of Osama bin Laden and important operational leaders; defeat or near defeat of various Al-Qaeda franchises outside of Pakistan; a large number of ideological challenges leveled against the group by some of its former allies; and the series of protests that shook several Middle Eastern and North African states beginning in early 2011. Because the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and other countries were mostly nonviolent, they provided a striking counterexample to Al-Qaeda's emphasis on violent regime change in the Middle East.

These organizational setbacks are significant, but must be viewed in the context of Al-Qaeda's success in spawning an expansionist global jihadist movement.[2] Ten years into the fight against

Al-Qaeda, that movement's overarching narrative continues to attract followers from a multitude of countries. All the while, the interplay of Al-Qaeda Core (AQC) with its affiliated groups, associated groups, and inspired adherents provides an increasing number of pathways to violence.[3] A number of successful and unsuccessful plots in the past decade, and especially the last two years, serve as a stark reminder that the global jihad remains devoted to striking its enemies, often with ingenuity. The examples listed below span the breadth of the movement; taken together, these representative plots allude to the tactical, geographic, and organizational variability of the violence emanating from the global jihad.

Al-Qaeda

The August 2006 plot to blow up transatlantic airliners using liquid explosives—an attack most likely timed to coincide with the fifth anniversary of 9/11—served as a striking example of Al-Qaeda's ongoing attempts to inflict significant pain on the United States five years after 9/11. Its interdiction may have forced Al-Qaeda's external operations branch to be more risk averse, but not to desist. In November of 2009, this branch trained three separate cell leaders, all from separate Western nations, on bomb-making techniques. After training them, AQC redeployed them to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway, where the operatives led respective terrorist cells in a geographically distributed complex suicide attack—an adaptation of Al-Qaeda's trademark complex attack. The successive deaths of Al-Qaeda's primary external operations planners at the time, Saleh al-Somali and Rashid Rauf, did not prevent the plots from progressing, albeit unsuccessfully.[4]

Affiliated Organizations

On 27 August 2009, Abdullah Hassan Talea Asiri, a Saudi national and member of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), attempted to assassinate Assistant Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, using a Pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN)-based explosive device hidden in his underwear.[5] On Christmas Day 2009, AQAP-trained Nigerian citizen Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab used the same compound when he attempted to detonate explosives hidden in his underwear on Northwest Airlines flight 253. A third variation of the AQAP attack placed PETN within printer cartridges shipped in cargo planes intended to detonate over the continental United States in a plot discovered in late 2010.

Associated Organizations

On 30 December 2009, a Saudi national named Humam Khalil al-Balawi wore a bomb vest into a CIA outpost in Khost, Afghanistan, killing himself, 7 CIA employees and one Jordanian intelligence officer. Balawi, a formerly imprisoned Al-Qaeda devotee and an infamous jihadist blogger known by the pen name Abu Dujana al-Khorasani, had been recruited as an informer for the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID), but played a sophisticated double game on

behalf of the *Tehriki Taliban Pakistan* (TTP). In a second TTP plot in May 2010, a Pakistani-American citizen, Faisal Shahzad, demonstrated effective operational security and planning but poor bomb-making skills when he targeted New York's Times Square with a crude vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

Adherents

In November of 2009, Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army Officer with only tangential personal ties to a radical cleric and no known organizational affiliation to Al-Qaeda, conducted a firearms attack at a deployment center on Fort Hood, killing thirteen individuals and wounding over thirty others. Al-Qaeda and its Yemen-based affiliate both endorsed the action, but neither entity claimed the alleged assailant as a group member. In 2010 in Portland, Oregon, Mohamed Osman Mohamud, a naturalized Somali-American citizen attempted to detonate a VBIED at a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. In March of 2011, authorities in the United States arrested Khalid al-Dawsari, a Saudi Arabian student who, acting alone, procured explosive materials for use against targets in the United States.

This anecdotal survey of plots illuminates the contours of a multi-faceted threat fostered by, but not unique to, the Al-Qaeda organization. To describe how this multifaceted threat has evolved over the last decade, this paper will first recount some of the more salient examples of Al-Qaeda's post-9/11 strategic, ideological, and structural adaptations. It will then offer a balance sheet of Al-Qaeda's contemporary strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, the aggregation of Al-Qaeda's adaptations since 9/11 has brought about an evolutionary change in the landscape of anti-Western Islamist militancy, ushering in an era of global jihadism beyond Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda Post-9/11: Strategic, Ideological and Structural Evolution

In the years following the 9/11 attacks, Al-Qaeda adapted—by necessity as well as design—to a new reality in which the United States and its allies were determined to defeat the group militarily.

Strategic Evolution after 9/11: Changes in Emphasis

Al-Qaeda's strategic adaptations have been numerous, but are frequently a matter of degree rather than type. For that reason, these adaptations tell a story of both organizational continuity as well as organizational change.

First, Al-Qaeda increased its media production in the years following 9/11 to compensate for the loss of its training camp infrastructure and its corresponding centrality among jihadist groups. This increase also reflected its maturation as a terrorist organization seeking to capitalize on its newly-found brand recognition.[6] Spurred on by the thoughts and actions of fellow travelers

such as Abu Musab al-Suri and Younis Tsouli (aka Irhabi007), AQC embraced the agenda-setting power of the internet,[7] hence Ayman al-Zawahiri's assertion that at least half of the overall battle against the Crusader-Zionist foe takes place in the media.[8] A look at the number of official Al-Qaeda releases demonstrates the steadily growing output of media productions on the part of the group, from six in 2002 to 11 in 2003, 13 in 2004, 16 in 2005, 58 in 2006, and peaking in 2007 with 97 releases. The number of media releases dropped to 49 releases in 2008 and picked up slightly to reach 79 releases in 2009, but seemed to drop again in 2010.[9] After 2003, Al-Qaeda proved particularly skillful at exploiting widespread negative sentiment about the American invasion and occupation of Iraq.[10] It would seize upon the Ethiopian occupation of Mogadishu in a similar way, urging the erstwhile Islamist militia turned jihadist group *al-Shabaab* to "fight on" as "champions of Somalia." [11]

The second element of Al-Qaeda's strategic evolution after 9/11 was its determination to exploit perceived weaknesses of the West. Al-Qaeda and its scions have increasingly monitored, identified, and exploited gaps in Western defenses by reading Western literature and downloading materials from Western websites. This new jihadi tactic was exemplified by a new genre of jihadi publications termed "jihadi strategic studies"—writings that draw on Western secular-rationalist sources, identify and analyze weaknesses of both parties, consider political, economic, and cultural factors in the conflict, and recommend realistic strategies.[12]

Inspire magazine, an English language jihadist magazine produced by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), illustrates this trend. The first edition of *Inspire* featured a "Message to the American People and Muslims in the West" by Anwar al-Awlaki, a dual U.S. and Yemeni citizen—an article that points to a future of religious intolerance for Muslims in the United States. Al-Awlaki contextualizes this prediction with examples of racism from American history.[13] In follow-on editions, *Inspire* amplified examples of Islamophobia in the West, such as proposed Qur'an burnings and protests over the establishment of mosques, to underline al-Awlaki's argument and reify Al-Qaeda's narrative of a war against Islam.

Third, since 9/11 Al-Qaeda has become more political in terms of its communiqués as well as the timing and targeting of its attacks. The group has attempted to create a rift between the United States and its allies, conducting attacks against Spanish, British, German, and other forces to undermine popular support for the war efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other theaters. Osama bin Laden's offer of a truce to European countries in April 2004 served a similar goal, as he withheld that offer to the United States. Further, the group began exploiting the Western political calendar, as was most clearly evident in the timing of the 11 March 2004 attacks in Madrid, which were carried out just prior to the Spanish presidential elections. Peter Nesser and Brynjar Lia assess a plot disrupted in Oslo, Norway, in July 2010 as another indicator of Al-Qaeda's interest in attacking "peripheral" Western nations allied with the United States and Israel.[14]

A fourth strategic adaptation in the post-9/11 period is Al-Qaeda's emphasis on economic jihad, foremost by targeting oil facilities in Middle Eastern and Gulf states. Prior to the 9/11 attacks,

bin Laden acknowledged the strategic importance of the energy sector, as is evident in his 1996 declaration of war, where he called upon the mujahideen to “protect this (oil) wealth and [do] not ... include it in the battle as it is a great Islamic wealth and a large economical power essential for the soon to be established Islamic state.”[15] The shift in Al-Qaeda’s strategy to emphasize these targets was complete by the end of 2004, when in December bin Laden declared the “bleed-until-bankruptcy” strategy. He called the purchase by Western countries of oil at then-market prices the “greatest theft in history” and concluded that there was now “a rare and golden opportunity to make America bleed in Iraq, both economically and in terms of human loss and morale... Focus your operations on it [oil production] especially in Iraq and the Gulf area, since this [lack of oil] will cause them to die off [on their own].”[16] Within a year, an Al-Qaeda cell attempted to hit a key energy facility in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and in February 2006 Al-Qaeda’s Saudi affiliate was able to breach security at the Abqaiq processing facility, the world’s largest crude processing plant. Although the attack was not able to interrupt production, it foreshadowed Al-Qaeda’s growing focus on strikes at the economic assets of its enemies.

In a recent example, the November 2010 Special Issue of *Inspire* celebrated the economic rationale of Al-Qaeda’s attrition strategy. Demonstrating the centrality of economic jihad, the magazine’s cover-art superimposed “\$4200” in large font over the blurred image of a United Parcel Service jet, referring to the low price tag of its plots targeting the cargo airline industry. It also alluded to a quote by al-Awlaki, who contrasted the low cost of “Operation Hemorrhage” with the high cost that the attacks were expected to exact from the West due to stepped up security expenses.[17]

Ideological Dilution: From Elitist Organization to Catch-All Movement

Al-Qaeda has endeavored to widen the target audience of its recruitment and propaganda campaign. Whereas before 9/11, Al-Qaeda made exclusive appeals to Muslims, it gradually adopted more populist rhetoric following 9/11 in order to appeal to a wider audience, including non-Muslims. In an essay published in February 2005 titled “The Freeing of Humanity and Homelands Under the Banner of the Quran,” Ayman al-Zawahiri, for the first time, attempted to appeal to anti-globalization and environmental activists. An article from the first edition of *Inspire* magazine attributed to Osama bin Laden echoes this approach, placing the blame for global warming squarely on American shoulders.[18]

Some of the populist propaganda emanating from Al-Qaeda is intended to increase anti-Americanism among the camp of the ‘infidel’ proper, tearing at the social fabric of the United States along racial lines. Examples include Ayman al-Zawahiri’s co-opting of Malcolm X as a Muslim martyr who died fighting against racial injustice; al-Zawahiri’s use of the term “house-slaves” to discredit the success of prominent African-American politicians; and Abu Dujana al-Khorasani’s appeal to various minority communities in the United States to fight against their oppressors.[19] Al-Qaeda has also made appeals to Muslim and African American members of

the military to turn their weapons against their own government, foreshadowing such incidents as the Fort Hood shooting of November 2009.[20]

Al-Qaeda has also increased its efforts to frame local grievances in accordance with its global narrative outside of the United States. While not a new characteristic of Al-Qaeda propaganda, increased media production amplifies its attempts to aggregate disparate Islamist conflicts since 2001. Al-Qaeda has attempted to harmonize its propaganda with the grievance narratives associated with local and regional jihadist movements in Yemen, Somalia, the Caucasus, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, India, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. While its ability to globalize these disparate conflicts has been limited, isolated successes across a spectrum of theaters has increased the number of ideological pathways to participation in the global jihad.[21]

Structural Adaptation: Towards Multipolarity

The evolution from organization to movement in the decade since 9/11 can be explained by three structural adaptations more so than from the strategic and ideological changes witnessed over the same time period. As an organization, Al-Qaeda has changed in three significant ways: it has formally affiliated with geographically dispersed groups; it has informally partnered with geographically co-located groups; and it has fostered a virtual safe-haven with few barriers to entry.

Al-Qaeda's mergers with militant groups, including *Jama'at Tawhid wal Jihad* in Iraq, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in Algeria, *al-Shabaab* in Somalia, and the reconstitution of AQAP, have all resulted in a fundamental structural shift. Rather than an organization with cells spread in scores of countries, Al-Qaeda in 2011 is better understood as a multi-polar organization with a central hub in North Waziristan and a small number of autonomous regional nodes. By offering their organizational fealty to Al-Qaeda, these organizations extend Al-Qaeda's ideological and operational influence in their respective regions, while also allowing Al-Qaeda to engage in networking, propagandizing, and resource mobilization in active conflict zones.[22] These nodes create resilience and dynamism in the movement, amplify the world's perception of Al-Qaeda, and even provide a degree of redundancy should Al-Qaeda suffer a devastating blow in Pakistan.

The most consequential implication of Al-Qaeda's structural transition into a multi-polar entity lies in the resulting locations, targets, and tactics of terrorist violence. Thus, the most likely theaters for current and future attacks against local and Western targets are those in proximity to the main territorial hubs of Al-Qaeda Core and its affiliates, such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and their neighbors.[23] It is not a coincidence that Al-Qaeda tactics such as suicide bombings have been introduced precisely in these regions, where jihadist cells, including Al-Qaeda affiliates, have sprung up. Algeria, Somalia, and Yemen, for example, have seen prolonged periods of localized, brutal violence, but radical Islamist groups in these

countries traditionally shunned the use of suicide bombings against Western targets until Al-Qaeda solidified its affiliations in these areas.[24] Besides the adoption of suicide attacks, the use of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) offers additional evidence of knowledge transfer to these regional nodes.

Although patterns in attack locations, targets, and tactics can be observed in relation to Al-Qaeda affiliates, the establishment of regional nodes introduces increased complexity into the demographics and travel patterns of the terrorists themselves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, tens of members of the Somali diaspora from Minnesota, Canada, Sweden, and Great Britain have reportedly joined *al-Shabaab* in Somalia, but so have many non-ethnic Somalis with no personal connections to Somalia.[25] While one may have expected a Nigerian jihadist to join the movement through a militia in West Africa or Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a wealthy Nigerian named Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab studying in England sought training in Yemen in order to attack the United States.

Al-Qaeda's merger with the Algerian GSPC serves as an example of what Al-Qaeda stands to gain from regional mergers. This merger enabled Al-Qaeda to leverage AQIM's existing reach into Europe where AQIM enjoys well established connections, as well as into the Sahel, where ungoverned spaces provide opportunities for fundraising and training. Al-Qaeda intends to use affiliates such as AQIM as force multipliers, as was evident from an intercepted message in which Ayman al-Zawahiri asked AQIM leader Droukdel to help exact revenge against Denmark following the Danish cartoon controversy.[26]

Al-Qaeda seeks to build regional alliances where it believes them to be beneficial, and rejects them when the risks are excessive. Thus, the group did not hesitate to reject an offer from the Lebanese jihadist group *Fatah al-Islam* —likely a result of Al-Qaeda's calculation that the embattled group's chances of survival looked rather dim. Similarly, Al-Qaeda does not seem to have taken seriously overtures by Salafi-Jihadist factions in the Gaza Strip such as *Jaesh al-Islam*. Aware of the animosity Hamas harbors for these jihadist groups and its willingness to use violence to obviate competing groups or rogue behavior, Al-Qaeda was careful not to ally itself with entities whose existence might be endangered. Al-Qaeda is keenly aware of perceptions of strategic competence, and therefore would like to bet on winning horses only.[27]

Al-Qaeda has always maintained associations short of formal affiliation with militant organizations, primarily as a result of geographic co-location in training environments and conflict zones. While this tendency has not changed over the last decade, what has changed is the intensity of intelligence collection and military pressure on Al-Qaeda itself. As a result, Al-Qaeda has utilized these associations more aggressively in recent years, facilitating the reorientation of jihadist violence against Western interests.

Al-Qaeda attempts to reorient violence against the West by superimposing a transnational explanatory framework on local grievances. The extent to which it has been successful in instilling a global jihadist ideology into locally oriented groups is reflected in the growing involvement of such groups in attacks against Western targets. While there are many other examples, Al-Qaeda's relationship with *Tehriki-Taliban Pakistan* is perhaps the most illustrative. [28] In addition to the above mentioned attacks on the CIA outpost in Khost, Afghanistan, and in Times Square, New York, Pakistani citizens trained by TTP have also been involved in a sophisticated plot to target the Barcelona metro with multiple suicide bombers.[29]

In addition to operational convergence, regional affiliates and associates have also embraced the same types of information operations for which Al-Qaeda has become famous. As a result, *al-Sahab* media is now only one of many organizations producing propaganda. The proliferation of highly differentiated content found on dynamic jihadist websites, the empowering nature of user-generated content, and links between jihadist activity on-line and jihadist activity in the real world has created a third structural shift in the global jihad. Independent jihadist pundits like Abu Dujana al-Khorasani can articulate a new narrative, cultivate a new demographic of consumers, and move seamlessly from the e-Jihad to the battlefield by building trusted relationships on-line that translate into mobilization networks. Further, when an iconic jihadist blogger makes this transition, he is celebrated by jihadist media organs and on the virtual forums he left behind, becoming a new role model and paving a new pathway to participation in the global jihad.

An Al-Qaeda Scorecard

Despite much talk in recent years suggesting Al-Qaeda's imminent demise, Al-Qaeda capitalizes on a number of core strengths that will ensure its relevance at least in the foreseeable future. The first, and most obvious, strength is that after regrouping along the Afghan-Pakistan border, Al-Qaeda has been able to reestablish a limited safe haven in an active conflict zone. This allows Al-Qaeda to link up to other like-minded groups either directly involved in the conflict or living parasitically off of the war economies of that conflict. These associated organizations can then share training resources, fundraising and mobilization networks, and opportunities to propagandize. Al-Qaeda can facilitate violence locally, enable jihadist attacks abroad, and shape propaganda as consultants to violent jihad.[30]

The second of these strengths is that Al-Qaeda's foundational ideological assumption remains convincing to politicized demographics; the United States is, in their perception, waging a war on Islam as evidenced by its occupation of Muslim countries. As long as U.S. military is present in Arab and Muslim countries—a political reality beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, given current events in Yemen, Libya, and Somalia—Al-Qaeda's propaganda will resonate.

A third, and related, advantage is that Al-Qaeda's Salafi-Jihadist ideology has been subsumed in a more inclusive global jihadist ideology.[31] Adopting the elitist tenets of Salafi-Jihadism has

been a potential barrier to entry in the past, and ideologically contested components of Al-Qaeda's Salafi-Jihadism left it vulnerable on theological grounds. Global jihadism, in contrast, is populist and malleable. The only requirement is to identify with the basic world view presented through various lenses by various components of the movement: the Muslim world, or one's portion of it, is in decline as a result of an anti-Islamic conspiracy, and only jihad (understood solely in militant terms) can redeem it. Recognizing the value of inclusivity, Al-Qaeda has subordinated itself to the broader violent movement. Al-Qaeda now endorses lone-wolf jihadism conducted by those who may lack Salafi credentials;[32] its closest affiliate, AQAP, endorses anti-regime violence by ideologically distant organizations;[33] and Al-Qaeda-inspired political organizations like Hizb ut-Tahrir America endorse jihadism while making little pretense of piety. [34]

The Internet provides Al-Qaeda its fourth core advantage. Legally constrained and uncomfortable in the propaganda realm, the United States and its allies have largely ceded the virtual arena as a platform in the war of ideas.[35] Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, on the other hand, have built a geographically distributed and resilient communications architecture that they have saturated with highly differentiated propaganda. In the tribal belt, for example, DVDs, movies, and other media produced by local branches of companies such as *As-Sahab*, *Ummat Studios*, and *Jundullah* CD Center feature jihadist propaganda in Urdu, Pashto, Arabic, English, and other languages. *Al Fajr* media center distributes copies of such videos in German, Italian, French, and Turkish on-line, where web forums make them available to a broader community. Members of those forums sub-title, translate, expound upon, and further disseminate these materials on social media sites, availing new consumers of jihadist propaganda. In September 2006, jihadism scholar Reuven Paz declared, "global jihad has clearly won the battle over the internet. As a means of indoctrination, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates dominate this medium, while the West and the Muslim world have so far failed to devise... a serious 'counter-Jihadi' response." As we approach the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Paz' assessment of the digitally-mediated war of ideas rings as true today as it did in 2006.

Offsetting many of Al-Qaeda's advantages, however, are several signs that the group has been significantly weakened in recent days and years. Most recently, the American raid of Osama bin Laden's safehouse in Abbottabad, Pakistan, ended the life of the organization's emir and the most important unifying symbol of global jihadism. This decapitation strike will not sound Al-Qaeda's death knell outright, but the symbolic void left by bin Laden's death may lead to the fracturing of a geographically distributed and ideologically fraught AQC. Furthermore, intelligence collected during the raid may amplify an existing trend for Al-Qaeda – the death or capture of key operational figures. Examples include the capture Abu Faraj al-Libi in May 2005 and the killing of others, such as Hamza Rabia, who died in November 2005; Abu Laith al-Libi (January 2008); Abu Sulayman al-Jazairi (May 2008); Abu Khabab al-Masri (July 2008); Rashid Rauf (November 2008);[36] Saleh al-Somali (December 2009); and Saeed al-Masri (May 2010).

Accompanying the loss of Al-Qaeda senior leaders has been the defeat, near defeat, or stagnation of a number of Al-Qaeda's local affiliates. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, prior to its current reincarnation in Yemen, was decimated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,[37] while Al-Qaeda in Iraq suffered a strategic defeat at the hands of the Sunni Awakening and "the Surge." At its most lethal in 2007, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) failed to destabilize Algiers, and its initial calls to conduct attacks in neighboring countries did not materialize in significant numbers.[38] In the Sahel, where AQIM is currently most active, Moktar Belmoktar's *katiba* engages in kidnap for ransom and counterfeiting while also engaging in a turf war with the committed AQIM jihadist Abdel Hamid Abou Zaid.[39] *Al-Shabaab*'s popularity in Somalia saw its high-water mark during the 2007-2008 Ethiopian occupation, but now struggles to retain nationalist Islamists among its ranks as it battles the African Union troops in Mogadishu and the *al Jamma wal Sunna* Sufi militia in Central and Southern Somalia. Tribal rivalries and competing interests further hamstring the group, such that its relative position as the strongest group in Somalia does not mean that Somalia is or will be what Afghanistan and Pakistan have been for Al-Qaeda.

Exacerbating Al-Qaeda's problems in recent years are a number of underlying weaknesses and long-term challenges.[40] The first is structural. While mergers can afford Al-Qaeda the benefits described above, they are not without risk. Principal-agent problems can dilute or undermine Al-Qaeda's brand. The clearest example of an Al-Qaeda affiliate 'going rogue' was that of Al-Qaeda in Iraq under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Although Al-Qaeda needed to take credit for violence waged against American troops if it was to remain relevant, internecine violence fomented by al-Zarqawi alienated erstwhile supporters from the Muslim world and provided the impetus for Sunni tribes to mobilize against AQI. The result was not only a strategic loss for AQI, but a significant black-eye for Al-Qaeda Core.[41] This and similar problems are inherent in Al-Qaeda's structure as a decentralized organization.

Competition from state and non-state entities poses another long-term challenge. Iran's ongoing defiance of the West, and especially the United States, undermines Al-Qaeda's credibility in claiming the status of the Muslim world's leading anti-American force. Iranian foreign policy "successes" such as its determined pursuit of a nuclear weapon, its pursuit of regional hegemony, and its hostile attitude to Israel are problematic for Al-Qaeda because it reminds Al-Qaeda's current and potential supporters of the mismatch between what the group preaches and what it does. It underscores Al-Qaeda's failure to attack Israel and act against Iran despite the jihadist movement's extremist rhetoric vis-à-vis both nations.

Al-Qaeda also perceives popular Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizballah as a threat. The Brotherhood provides an Islamist alternative with a record of performance legitimacy on the Arab street. With regard to the latter, Hizballah's ability to stand up to Israel in the 2006 war has presented the Shia militant group as the Muslim world's only movement capable of fighting the Jewish state. Similar to the case of Iran, the political and

military success of Hizballah undermines Al-Qaeda's ability to claim a leadership role for the Islamic community at large.

More recently, non-violent protests beginning with the Jasmine Revolution highlight another weakness. For decades, jihadists have argued that violence is necessary to overthrow authoritarian, apostate regimes. The recent wave of protests across the Muslim world undermines the assertion that violence is necessary, as several have succeeded where Al-Qaeda and its brethren have repeatedly failed. While significant, this set-back is conditional and predicated upon the successful establishment of legitimate government in the wake of the Arab Spring.

The recantations and condemnations by individuals who were part of Al-Qaeda's foundational history, meanwhile, have presented Al-Qaeda with what is perhaps its most significant challenge. [42] Al-Qaeda has been plagued by a series of recantations and defections by formerly venerated jihadists including Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz, aka Dr. Fadl, and the Saudi cleric Salman al-Awdah. These more recent recantations follow previous condemnations of isolated acts of extreme jihadist violence by theologians highly respected in the jihadist community, including Abu Basir al-Tartusi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who have rejected the usefulness of the London bombings and AQI's systematic targeting of Shia civilians, respectively.[43]

While the downplaying of its elitist, Salafi rhetoric has softened the blow of these recantations to some extent, Al-Qaeda has been put in an untenable position with respect to one issue. Al-Qaeda has been forced to defend itself against charges that its actions lead to the death of countless innocent Muslims. Whether Al-Qaeda uses allegations of apostasy to justify these deaths ideologically; whether it argues pragmatically that the ends justify the means; or whether Al-Qaeda genuinely tries to minimize Muslim fatalities is irrelevant. Declining opinion polls in the Muslim world reflect the indisputable fact that Al-Qaeda has failed to redeem Islam, but has succeeded in killing innocent Muslims in large numbers. Despite its many adaptations, this is Al-Qaeda's major weakness, and it remains an enduring weakness of the global jihad that the West should continue to expose.[44]

Conclusion

Al-Qaeda continues to enable the violence of others, orient that violence towards the United States and its allies in a distributed game of attrition warfare, and foster a dichotomous "us versus them" narrative between the Muslim world and the rest of the international community. Despite this overarching consistency, Al-Qaeda shepherds a different phenomenon than it did ten years ago. The organization has adapted to changing environmental pressures at the strategic, ideological, and structural levels, and the aggregation of these adaptations has fundamentally changed the nature of the jihadist threat to the West. This evolved threat is not inherently more dangerous, as counterterrorism efforts today focus on and disrupt capability earlier and more consistently than prior to September 2001. This multifaceted global jihad will, however, continue

to attempt greater numbers of attacks in more locations, from a more diverse cadre of individuals spanning a wider ideological spectrum.

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Notes

[1] See, for example, Kristen Chick, "CIA Director says Al-Qaeda on the Run as a Leader Killed in US Drone Strike," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 March 2010; and Peter Bergen, "Bin Laden's Lonely Crusade," *Vanity Fair*, January 2011.

[2] For a similar argument, see Leah Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2011. While acknowledging that Al-Qaeda continues to pose a threat today, the present authors would not go as far as Farrall in arguing that "al Qaeda is stronger today than when it carried out 9/11." See L. Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works." The global jihadist movement is defined here as a transnational movement of like-minded jihadists led by Al-Qaeda. It includes affiliated and associated individuals, networks, and groups. The term "affiliated" denotes groups that have formal ties to Al-Qaeda, and have often adopted the Al-Qaeda name, e.g., Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The term "associated" refers to entities with more informal ties to Al-Qaeda, i.e., those that are influenced by Al-Qaeda's guiding ideology but that have not sworn fealty (*baya'a*) to bin Laden. It also includes 'adherents,' i.e., individuals who are inspired by the world view propagated by Al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and/or associates. The authors recognize that these divisions are not perfect, that some groups associated with Al-Qaeda have not fully adopted Al-Qaeda's ideology, and that still other groups fall into a gray area between associates and affiliates. However, for descriptive purposes in this article, that division shall suffice.

[3] Although universal data is difficult to gather, in the United States itself, there has been a marked increase in the number of individuals radicalized toward jihadist violence. See, for example, Brian Michael Jenkins, "Would-be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States since September 11, 2001," *RAND Occasional Paper* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2010).

[4] Al-Qaeda's trademark attack is the complex suicide terrorist attack in which multiple bombers strike multiple targets simultaneously, thereby magnifying the psychological effect of the attack. In a heightened security environment, the authors see the centrally planned but operationally and geographically distributed plots as an adaptation of this trademark attack intended to diversify risk across a portfolio of plots, thereby increasing the likelihood of at least partial tactical success while maintaining the psychology impact of a complex plot. See Raffaello Pantucci, "Manchester, New York, and Oslo: Three Centrally Directed Al-Qa'ida Plots," *CTC Sentinel* 3.8 (August 2010); and Petter Nesser and Brynjar Lia, "Lessons Learned from the July 2010 Norwegian Terrorist Plot," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 3, Issue 8 (August 2010).

[5] Early reports suggested that the bomber had hidden the explosive device in his rectal cavity, but subsequent Saudi investigations discovered that the bomb had been hidden in the attacker's underwear. See Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat," *Bipartisan Policy Center*, 10 September 2011, p. 9.

[6] See Vahid Brown, "Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qa'ida 1989-2006" (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, September 2007).

[7] For a concise explanation of Abu Musab al-Suri's advocacy for a sophisticated media campaign, to include decentralized Incitement and Media Brigades best embodied by the actions of Younis Tsouli with respect to Iraq, see Hanna Rogan, "Al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies:

From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007,” Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, Report No.2007/02729, 28-29; and Rafael Pantucci, “Operation Praline: The Realization of Al-Suri’s Nizam, la Tanzim,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 2, Issue 12 (2008). On Abu Musab al-Suri, see also Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For a good discussion of Younis Tsouli, see Yassin Musharbash, *Die Neue Al Qaida: Innenansichten eines lernenden Terrornetzwerkes* (Cologne, Germany: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006).

[8] “Letter from Al-Zawahiri to Al-Zarqawi.” Available online at GlobalSecurity.org, http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm, last accessed 20 April 2011.

[9] For figures until 2009, see Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, “The Almanac of Al-Qaeda,” *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2010, available online at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/26/the_almanac_of_al_qaeda, last accessed 20 April 2011. A report released in September 2010, quoting the IntelCenter, stated that “in 2010 Zawahiri has so far released the fewest tapes in seven years.” See P. Bergen and B. Hoffman, “Assessing the Terrorist Threat,” op. cit., p. 21.

[10] While this easy propaganda victory evidenced Al-Qaeda’s opportunism, Iraq presented a problem for Al-Qaeda as well; the organization did not have members on the ground in Iraq who could violently resist the American presence. Al-Qaeda would address this issue not through a change in strategy but a change in organizational structure, as discussed later in this paper.

[11] “Fight on Champions of Somalia” is a meme used frequently in *Al-Sahab’s* propaganda to demonstrate support for *al-Shabaab*, which offered it organizational *baya’a* [oath of allegiance] to Al-Qaeda in March of 2009.

[12] Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, Issue 5, (September-October 2004). On jihadi strategic studies, see also Mark E. Stout, Jessica M. Huckabey, and John R. Schindler, *Terrorist Perspectives Project: Strategic and Operational Views of Al Qaida and Associated Movements* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008); and Dima Adamsky, “Jihadi Operational Art: The Coming Wave of Jihadi Strategic Studies,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 33, Issue 1 (January 2010).

[13] Anwar al-Awlaki, “Shaykh Anwar’s Message to the American People and Muslims in the West,” *Inspire*, Issue 1 (Summer 2010). This is a reprint of the speech published as an audio file. It was released originally on 10 March 2010, and again in July 2010.

[14] Petter Nesser and Brynjar Lia, “Lessons Learned from the July 2010 Norwegian Terrorist Plot”, op. cit.

[15] Bin Laden’s Fatwa, August 1996. Available at the “Online News Hour” website, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html; last accessed 20 April 2011.

[16] Quoted in Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “Large-scale Arrests in Saudi Arabia Illustrate Threat to the Oil Supply,” *Long War Journal*, 24 March 2010.

[17] *Inspire: Special Edition* (November 2010). In his “Message to the American People” from March 2010, and re-released by the Global Islamic Media Front in July of 2010, al-Awlaki states: “But imperial hubris is leading America to its fate: a war of attrition, a continuous hemorrhage that would end with the fall and splintering of the United States of America.” The plots alluded to by AQIM are the placement of explosives on UPS and FEDEX cargo planes, as well as the downing of a UPS cargo plane that had taken off in Dubai on 3 September 2010. To date, only the failed printer cartridge plot involving the UPS flight to Chicago has been confirmed by the U.S. intelligence community.

[18] Usamah bin Ladin, “The Way to Save the Earth,” *Inspire*, Issue 1.

[19] Benjamin Haas and Daniel McGrory, “Al-Qa’ida Seeking to Recruit African-American Muslims,” *CTC Sentinel* 1.8 (July 2008). Abu Dujana al-Khorosani was an elite pen on *al-Hesbah* and an independent blogger before conducting the December 2009 suicide attack at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Khost, Afghanistan.

[20] From a speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri broadcast on 5 May 2007 and translated by the IntelCenter. Excerpts published in Michael Scheuer, “Latest al-Zawahiri Tape Targets American Society,” *Terrorism Focus* 4.13 (May 8 2007).

[21] For a detailed argument of Al-Qaeda’s inability to aggregate disparate Islamist conflicts despite their efforts to do so, see Vahid Brown, “Al-Qa’ida Central and Local Affiliates”, in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa’ida and its Periphery* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2010), pp. 87-91.

[22] V. Brown, “Al-Qa’ida Central and Local Affiliates,” op. cit., pp. 77-80.

[23] Examples include the proliferation of suicide attacks of attacks against Western and UN targets in Pakistan, the February 2008 attack against the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania carried out by militants trained in AQIM camps, the July 2008 attacks against the Danish embassy in Pakistan, the September 2008 attacks on the U.S. embassy in Yemen, and the September 2008 coordinated suicide attacks in Somaliland and Puntland that included an attack on the local compound of the United Nations Development Program.

[24] Assaf Moghadam, “Shifting Trends in Suicide Attacks,” *CTC Sentinel* 2.1 (January 2009); Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); and Yoram Schweitzer, “Al-Qaeda and Suicide Terrorism: Vision and Reality,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 2.2 (October 2010). See also Jean-Pierre Filiu, “The Local and Global Jihad of Al Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghrib,” *Middle East Journal* 63.2, (Spring 2009), 213-226; and Lianne Kennedy-Boudali, “Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb: Evaluating the Results of the al-Qa’ida Merger, Occasional Paper (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, September 2009).

[25] The phenomenon of Somalis returning from the diaspora to join *al-Shabaab* is not surprising due to the group’s positioning as a resistance movement with respect to the Ethiopian occupation from January 2007 to January 2009. Most famously in the case of non-Somalis joining al-Shabaab, consider Omar Hamami, an American from Daphne, Alabama, born of a Syrian father and Southern Baptist mother, who went on to be featured in English language *al-Shabaab* propaganda. For a biography of Hamami, see Andrea Elliot, “The Jihadist Next Door,” *New York Times Magazine*, 27 January 2010.

[26] Souad Mekhennet, et al., “A Threat Renewed: Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Lifeline From Al-Qaeda,” *New York Times*, 1 July 2008.

[27] On Al-Qaeda’s perceptions of strategic competence, see James J. F. Forest, “Exploiting the Fears of Al-Qa’ida’s Leadership,” *CTC Sentinel*, 2. 2 (February 2009).

[28] For example, the Islamic Jihad Union provided training to a German cell of jihadists known as the Sauerland bombers, who plotted to attack numerous targets in Germany before they were apprehended in September 2007.

[29] “Spain Becoming Breeding Ground for Jihadism – Experts,” *BBC*, 4 January 2011.

[30] Alex Gallo, “Understanding Al Qa’ida’s Business Model,” *CTC Sentinel* 4.1 (January 2011).

[31] The authors are indebted to Jarret Brachman for this observation.

[32] Adam Gadahn, “A Call to Arms,” *Al-Sahab*, May 7 2010.

[33] Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, “Developing Policy Options for the AQAP Threat in Yemen,” *CTC Sentinel* 3.11 (November 2010).

[34] Authors' interview with Madeleine Gruen, September 2010.

[35] While the internet provides Al-Qaeda with an advantage in the war of ideas, the counterterrorism community is conducting continually more effective disruption operations online. Successes include sting operations in which putative jihadists were first identified online. This was the case in Dallas, Texas in 2009, the shutting down of virtual facilitation networks such as *al-Tibyan*, and even clandestine commandeering of jihadist websites and materials. See *U.S.A. v. Hosam Moher Husein Smadi*, Case number 3-09 MJ 286, Warrant for arrest, 24 September 2009; and Steve Swann, "Aabid Khan and his Global Jihad," *BBC*, 18 August 2008. Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7549447.stm; last accessed 20 April 2011; Ellen Nakashima, "Dismantling of Saudi-CIA Web Site Illustrates Need for Clearer Cyberwar Policies," *Washington Post*, 19 March 2010, A1.

[36] Rashid Rauf's death is contested, but most open sources indicate that he was killed in a Predator drone strike on 22 November 2008 in Pakistan.

[37] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," *CTC Occasional Paper* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 25 February 2010).

[38] Upon affiliating with Al-Qaeda, GSPC veteran Abdel Malik Droukhal initiated a campaign of vehicle-borne IED attacks against Western and Algerian targets including the Algerian president, parliament, prime minister, and constitutional court, as well as the United Nations. He also encouraged AQIM to conduct attacks in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Mauritania, but activities in these countries have been limited, with the exception of Mauritania.

[39] J.-P. Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib."

[40] For a discussion of Al-Qaeda's internal problems, see Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[41] Brian Fishman, "Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned From Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq" (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 16 March 2009). For more on Al-Qaeda's principal-agent problems, see Jacob N. Shapiro, "Theoretical Framework: The Challenges of Organizing Terrorism," in Joseph Felter, Jeff Bramlett, Bill Perkins, Jarrett Brachman, Brian Fishman, James Forest, Lianne Kennedy, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Tom Stocking, "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities" (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, February 2006.).

[42] For a dissenting view, see Nelly Lahoud, "Jihadi Recantations and their Significance: The Case of Dr. Fadl," in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[43] Figures that are more marginal within the jihadist movement have also distanced themselves from Al-Qaeda's violent tactics. Top Deobandi institutions such as the *Dar ul-Ulum Deoband* have issued fatwas condemning terrorism, while former members of the radical *Hizb ut-Tehreek* have formed Quilliam, an institution designed to voice opposition to terrorist violence.

[44] Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaidi, "Deadly Vanguard: A Study of al-Qa'ida's Violence Against Muslims," *CTC Occasional Paper* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, December 2009); and Brian Fishman and Assaf Moghadam, "Do Jihadi and Islamist Divisions Matter? Implications for Policy and Strategy," in A. Moghadam and B. Fishman (eds.), "Self-Inflicted Wounds."

Pass Em' Right: Assessing the Threat of WMD Terrorism from America's Christian Patriots

by Paul D. Brister and Nina A. Kollars

Abstract

Within the field of terrorism studies, great effort has been devoted to the topic of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their potential usage in the hands of terrorist organisations. This article deepens the discussion of WMD terrorism by focusing upon an oft-overlooked movement that resides within American borders. The Christian Patriot Movement – which rightfully claims the likes of Timothy McVeigh – is a phenomenon that has gone largely unnoticed as American counterterrorism efforts focus largely upon Islamist terrorist organizations. Here we aim to bring the Patriots back into discussions of terrorist threats by assessing their potential to use WMD. We conclude that, although the Patriots have demonstrated intent to employ such weapons, they lack the overall capability to design, acquire, or employ a WMD of significant lethality. We end by looking at the pathways which the Patriots are currently exploring to narrow the divide between intent and capability.

Introduction

As students and scholars of terrorism studies, we may be doing a disservice to analysis. For far too long, we have crowded around our single-lens telescopes, jotting down notes and hypothesizing about what terrorist threats will originate from across the seas. From these studies, we have convinced ourselves that home-grown terrorist threats largely resemble the images found in our telescopes. In doing so we may have confused the specific for the general, the narrowly construed for the full range of possible cases. It is time we step back from these telescopes, open both eyes, and look out our own windows.

Alongside well-studied Islamist terrorists, the United States is threatened by a loose affiliation of armed groups linked by a belief that the federal government has intentionally undermined the founding principles of liberty, democracy, and Christianity. This amorphous network, commonly referred to as the Christian Patriot Movement, is an eclectic blend of white supremacists, neo-Nazis, survivalists, militia members, and Christian Identity adherents. The aim of the network is, at its most basic level, the marginalisation or destruction of its 'enemies' – immigrants, Jews, African Americans, or the American government at large – and the establishment of a governmental system favouring a select elite. To the chagrin of many, the movement has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in both strength and size in recent years.[1] These trends are more troubling when coupled with indicators of Patriot willingness to use weapons of mass destruction

(WMD) in future attacks. This article aims to understand and assess the actual scope of that threat.

WMD threat assessments are generally a synthesis of three factors; first, a terrorist group's *intent* to use a WMD; second, a group's *capability* to either acquire or develop WMD; and third, the *vulnerability* of the intended target. Target vulnerability being beyond the scope of this article, our focus is levelled primarily on Christian Patriot intent and capability. Because WMD is often a broad term, for the purposes of this article, it will be defined as any chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear device employed with the purpose to inflict harm upon either humans or physical structures. [2]

Lethality or economic impacts – often measured by body count or overall economic loss – will not be included in the definition, as it is possible to employ a WMD which may fall short of some apocalyptic effect. Take, for instance, Aum Shinrikyo's 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway. Although sarin is universally considered a lethal chemical weapon, the attack resulted in twelve deaths. The attack was regrettable, but far less lethal than either the non-CBRN terrorist attack in Oklahoma City (168 dead) or the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York (over 2,700 dead). If a measure of lethality was used here, Aum's employment of sarin gas may not make the cut as a WMD example – although it clearly is. Therefore, this article looks only at the physical characteristics of the weapon being developed or acquired, not at the potential outcomes of its use.

This article will proceed in four parts. As the Christian Patriot Movement is an often overlooked phenomenon in the world of Islamist-focused modern terrorism studies, an historical overview of the Patriots is provided to clarify its unique ideology and highlight the paths which led to its current highly atomised organisational manifestation. Next, we move forward with the assessment on three fronts. We first establish Patriot intent by tracing the key texts considered central to the ideology and its call to action. We emphasise the fact that Patriot groups have continually expressed a desire to acquire, develop, and employ WMD. We also examine the patterns of acquisition, since on multiple occasions Patriots have achieved a measurable degree of success in acquisition.

Secondly, we turn attention to what is understood to be the Achilles heel of the movement – its limited capabilities – by drilling down into the material and intellectual resources at their disposal, their organizational structure, and the extremely restricted operational freedom of maneuver given legal initiatives used against them. Intent without capability is a reason for concern but not necessarily intervention, and since a veritable chasm exists between the intent and capabilities of the Patriots, it is not yet time to sound alarms. That said, the article concludes by outlining a series of disturbing new trends that signal a potential bridging of the gap between Patriot intent and capabilities; scenarios which dramatically increase the potential for a WMD attack from the Patriot camp through an alliance with more capable groups.

Origins of Christian Patriotism

When scholars and political leaders speak of terrorist threats emanating from the American radical right, they most commonly refer to the Christian Patriot Movement. As described by David Neiwert, the Patriot Movement is “an American political ideology based on an ultra-nationalistic and selective populism which seeks to return the nation to its ‘constitutional’ roots – that is, a system based on white Christian male rule.”[3]

This movement can be viewed as a loose umbrella ideology that incorporates – not necessarily in their entirety – at least three distinct and often competing sub-movements. [4] The first of these is the Militia movement, a fairly recent right-wing phenomenon that is home to several anti-government armed paramilitary groups. The second is the Sovereign Citizen movement, comprising Americans that formally renounce their US citizenship and refuse to pay taxes, citing it a violation of the parameters originally laid down by the Constitution. Lastly, a portion of the White Nationalist movement falls under the ideological tent of Christian Patriotism. True to name, White Nationalism is a biologically-racist belief system that seeks the establishment of an Aryan-controlled nation and – contingent upon the level of racism present in the particular organization – the subjugation, transfer, or violent elimination of ‘lesser’ races. [5]

While traces of all three beliefs can be followed from the beginnings of American history, their merging into a greater Christian Patriot narrative extend back to the 1958 founding of the John Birch Society. Although its primary aim was to eliminate communist influence within the United States, the Birch Society took aim against Martin Luther King and the civil-rights movement, claiming it to be the handiwork of communist infiltrators seeking to destabilise the country. The racist undertones prevalent in the Birch Society attracted individuals such as William Potter Gale, former aide to General MacArthur and self-proclaimed World War II guerrilla strategist. [6]

Shortly after its founding, a small faction within the John Birch Society, led by Gale, grew tired of political rhetoric and split with the organisation. This group called for the establishment of paramilitary units and supported a more violent means with which to crush “America’s enemy.” This enemy, according to Gale, was communism propagated by the “international Jewish conspiracy.” [7] To further clarify – or more accurately, obfuscate – who should be targeted, Gale proclaimed: “you got your nigger Jews, your Asiatic Jews, and you got your white Jews...they’re all Jews, and they’re all the offspring of the devil.” [8] The turn to a more violent form of ‘resistance’ appealed to many, and Gale’s prior history and connections within the John Birch Society proved a recruiting boon.

Gale put in place an ideology, loosely defined, that gave him the utmost flexibility to alter his recruitment pitches in way which resonated with shifting societal concerns. The underlying

ideology promoted by Gale lacked logical consistency, but its amorphous nature ultimately proved beneficial. When Americans sought to pinpoint and place blame for the ills of society, Gale provided easy answers. By adopting a diverse set of enemies – all bound in a complex conspiracy to create a new world order – Gale offered common ground upon which all right-wing extremist organisations could rally. Although their reasons varied, multiple right-wing organisations came together and agreed upon three core concepts: a re-dedication to individual gun rights; a fear of a one-world government (especially a Jewish-controlled one); and a recognition that a vanguard party should be established to defend American ideals. The paramount importance of the vanguard party was Gale’s most dangerous contribution, an organisation known as Posse Comitatus (historically, the term originally referred to the body of men summoned by a sheriff to enforce the law; later it was used more generally for a group of people with a common interest or purpose).

Alongside the like-minded competitor Henry Beach, Gale constructed the philosophical foundations of Posse Comitatus, a belief system which asserted an evil global conspiracy could be defeated only by returning legal power to its lowest level. Posse ideology emphasised “that the only legitimate government is at the county level.” [9] To this end, Gale demanded the creation of “common law courts” to be staffed and run by members of the local community. These courts, according to Gale, had the authority to organise “volunteer Christian posses” to arrest and indict government officials that were deemed to oppose American values. [10] As could be expected, government workers were soon threatened and in some instances found themselves victims of vicious attacks. [11] At the time, Posse Comitatus was only one organisation amongst a stew of right-wing extremist groups. Fortunately for Gale and its members, not only was the Posse low on the domestic threat list, but the actions of other groups drew the more immediate attention of law enforcement. As the leaders of other groups were arrested or put under legal pressure, Gale rounded up members of the now-leaderless organisations, merged them into a more united front, and indoctrinated them into Posse ideology.

Despite the tacit help afforded by law enforcement’s blind eye, the organisation grew in fits and starts. This changed dramatically in the turbulence of the 1970s tax protest movement. Seeing the potential to fish from a particularly abundant pool of potential recruits, Gale immediately altered Posse recruitment pitches. The new rhetoric emphasised the evils of the taxation system and identified the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as an unconstitutional entity that should be resisted by all means. The pitch rang true to citizens desperate for an outlet. Angry, disillusioned citizens flocked to Gale’s decree to “get ready for a declaration of war... if you don’t have a gun, bring some rope... because there’s going to be one tax collector removed from office!” [12] By 1975, the Posse was described as “the newest – and fastest growing – of a seemingly never-ending stream of militant right-wing organisations.” [13]

Although Posse was expanding, the lack of strategic vision combined with ineffective leadership and tactical ineptitude resulted in little more than boisterous talk. Despite its violent rhetoric, so

unthreatening was the Posse at the time, a sheriff once jokingly commented: “Our feeling was that if they armed themselves, they’d probably severely injure themselves before they got out of the room.” A colleague added: “If brains was gunpowder, they couldn’t blow their noses.” [14] What little actionable leadership they were able to muster was quickly destroyed. During the late 1970s, successful tax-evasion prosecutions decimated Posse leadership ranks. Talk of revenge followed, but little violence materialised.

The following decade would change the scope of Patriot operations. If the 1970s were an era of boisterous but peaceful expansion, the 1980s would prove the reverse. Turning talk into action, the 1980s Posse would form an alliance with a seemingly unlikely – but very capable – segment of the U.S. citizenry.

The farm crisis of the 1980s injected a host of fresh recruits into Posse ranks. Unlike the tax-protestors of the 1970s, farmers joining Posse Comitatus possessed both demolitions and the technological knowhow to employ them. The early 1980s were particularly harsh on the American family-owned farm. For a myriad of political and economic reasons, farmers were forced to sell their land to large corporations or suffer the humiliation of foreclosure. Pride and self-sufficiency, key components of small farm identity, were wiped out. Farmers – whose identity was tied to their land and line of work – could not bear the humiliation. A wave of self-inflicted violence followed. According to one study, the suicide rate among Oklahoma farmers jumped to 300 per cent above the rest of the population. [15] Government studies revealed similar trends throughout the American heartland, mainly that “people in farm families were dying at an incredible rate by their own hands.” [16]

As the 1980s progressed, farm foreclosures continued to soar among mid-level farmers. The effects were felt not only in the fields, but also in the towns that depended on their daily business. Small, family-owned feed stores, restaurants, grocery stores, and salons felt the impact of the farm crisis. Among the crowds at foreclosure and repossession auctions, a clear and confident voice asserted that the farmers’ problems were a result of a Jewish conspiracy to establish a ‘New World Order’. The voice revealed that the *Zionist-occupied government (ZOG)* was working to destroy the freedoms and ideals laid forth by the US Constitution. The pitch resonated well with the desperate and destitute farmers who had no other way to explain their loss. The Posse recruited from among these souls and easily convinced farmers that they should turn their inner anger outward and to punish those responsible for their pain.

Although racism, anti-Semitism, and a pseudo-Christian belief system lie at the core of its ideology, the Posse hid its true agenda and, instead, offered solutions to the farmers’ foreclosure and social problems. [17] The Posse travelled the countryside telling farmers that it was possible to save their lands if they attended Posse-led “constitutional law seminars.” [18] The Posse taught farmers how to create and file lawsuits – chock full of legal nonsense – against their lenders. They convinced eager audiences that their mortgage payments were a ruse. Mortgages

were simply a government conspiracy to take land in exchange for paper stacks of dollars. Dollars, they argued, that were worth nothing given the separation from the gold standard in 1971.

The technique worked, of course, but only for a limited timeframe. After the dismissal of the false legal claims in courtrooms throughout the nation, the Posse re-framed both the problem and the solution for farmers. According to the Posse, farmers could not find justice in courts because the legal system was controlled by a Jewish supra-national entity that wanted to strip America of its last honest and independent form of work. To free themselves from this puppet-like state of affairs, the Posse recommended that farmers return their driver's licenses, social security cards, and license plates to the state in order to renounce their American citizenship. Many farmers complied and mailed the state letters declaring themselves 'sovereign citizens', thereby free from governmental jurisdiction higher than the county level.

As expected, the government was forced to act, often triggering tense standoffs. When farmers were confronted, Posse founder William Potter Gale offered a clarification on what he expected from them: "Yes, we are going to cleanse our land. We are going to do it with a sword. And we are going to do it with violence... it is about time somebody is telling you to get violent, whitey." [19] The radicals preached hatred to a receptive audience that listened and positioned themselves to act upon those sermons. Soon, as Joel Dyer notes in *Harvest of Rage*, Patriot actions went "from paper to pipe bombs." [20]

Influenced by Posse rhetoric and operating under Aryan Nation guidance, a group known as The Order initiated a wave of extremist violence that swept the country. Based loosely on the secret revolutionary organisation portrayed in William Pierce's *The Turner Diaries*, the Order was responsible for a string of bank robberies that spanned over two years. [21] Their biggest heist occurred in 1984 when members successfully held up an armoured vehicle and made off with US \$ 3.8 million. [22] The Order's most notorious crime, however, was the murder of conservative Jewish talk show host Alan Berg in June 1984.

Others followed suit, and a string of robberies, bombings, and assaults followed in the wake of The Order's violent example. Groups such as the Covenant, the Arm, and the Sword of the Lord (CSA) backed violent talk with capability, raising legal concern and spurring government intervention. On April 19, 1985, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began a raid on a CSA compound which recovered a startling cache of weapons. The arsenal included anti-tank rockets, bombs, land mines, grenades, and cyanide canisters destined to be used in the water supply of several large cities. [23] Even more disturbing were linkages to plans to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City.

The mastermind behind the Murrah bombing plan was CSA leader Richard Wayne Snell. Snell drew inspiration from a description of the bomb used to destroy an FBI building in the book *The*

Turner Diaries – a narrative that called for the use of a 5,000-pound Ammonium Nitrate/Fuel Oil (ANFO) weapon. A victim of IRS property seizures himself, Snell held a deep hatred of the US government and planned to attack the IRS agents that impounded his home. These agents, of course, worked in downtown Oklahoma City. Fortunately in 1983, a premature detonation occurred as Snell and accomplices tried to build the bomb, severely disabling Snell and effectively putting the brakes on the attack. [24] Snell was arrested the following year after killing an African-American Arkansas state trooper in a vicious gun battle. Arkansas governor Bill Clinton signed an executive order for his execution and set the date of his death – April 19, 1995.

Under increased attention from law enforcement agencies, Posse leaders were forced to change their identity and recruitment tactics. [25] By the late 1980s, the label Posse Comitatus was officially linked to violence and terror, a branding that hindered recruitment and, in turn, the existence of the organisation. In order to survive, a shift was in order. The term Posse Comitatus was discarded in favour of a new label. Although fundamental Posse beliefs and ideology were altered little, Christian Patriots became the accepted label for former Posse members. Christian Patriots, in line with Posse beliefs, still harboured a distrust of the American government, a devotion to gun rights, and a belief that Constitutional power lay only at the county level. Although the new title resonated well, the underlying Posse ideology was too difficult for many on the outside fringes of the organisation to swallow. People simply found it hard to believe that the US government was actively planning covert warfare against its citizens.

The governmental missteps that unfolded at Ruby Ridge and Waco would offer Posse ideology an air of truth and help convince the sceptics. The 1992 fiasco at Ruby Ridge began to solidify the Christian Patriot movement in a manner which exceeded Patriot leaders' wildest expectations. It was here, at a small cabin in northern Idaho, that the Patriots began to merge into a more united front. After Randy Weaver, a former Army Green Beret and Christian Identity adherent, failed to show in court to address weapons sales charges (two sawn-off shotguns), federal Marshals staked out Weaver's compound, bringing in the FBI Hostage Rescue Team to serve as sharpshooters if needed.

Although narratives differ over what triggered the incident, most describe an FBI agent throwing a rock to test the reaction of Stryker, the Weaver's dog. Stryker barked in alarm, as any dog would, and the results were disastrous. Weaver's son, Sam, emerged from the cabin to investigate the noise. He laid eyes upon Stryker just in time to see the dog run up onto the FBI position and get shot by an agent. Sam Weaver, witnessing his dog being killed, shot back at the agents. The FBI returned fire and killed both Sam Weaver and a family friend that had been walking with him. After retrieving the body of his son, Randy Weaver refused to come out or talk with the government task force. Operating under revised rules of engagement, the following day an FBI sniper attempted to kill Weaver as he left the cabin to visit his son's body in a nearby barn. The shot missed Randy, but hit his wife squarely in the head, killing her instantly as she held her baby

girl Elishiba. As the story leaked into mainstream media, the radical right saw an opportunity to rally. Following the eventual surrender of Weaver, a special meeting was called in Estes Park, Colorado, bringing together one of the most diverse collections of right-wing extremists ever. The overall tone of the meeting urged solidarity, a point hammered home in Louis Beam's proclamation:

“We are viewed by the government as the same, enemies of the state. When they come for you, the federals will not ask if you are a Constitutionalist, a Baptist, Church of Christ, Identity Covenant believer, Klansman, Nazi, home schooler, Freeman, New Testament believer or a feast keeper, nor will they ask whether you believe in the rapture or think it is poppycock. Those who wear badges, black boots and carry automatic weapons and kick in doors already know all they need to know about you. You are enemies of the state!” [26]

Less than six months after the Estes Park gathering – and with men like Timothy McVeigh looking on – the US government once again solidified the Patriot Movement and bolstered Beam's rhetoric. The scene played out on the outskirts of Waco, Texas in an isolated compound run by David Koresh and the cult organisation known as the Branch Davidians. Once again, the US government executed a poorly-designed weapons raid that took a tragic turn. On April 19, 1993, in a cloud of CS gas, tanks approached the Waco compound as an FBI task force raided the compound. The result was the destruction of the compound, resulting in the fiery deaths of over 70 compound residents – a death toll which included twenty children. [27]

The most devastating domestic terrorist attack in United States history took place on April 19, 1995 – not coincidentally the anniversary of the CSA compound raid in 1985, the same date of the beginning of the surveillance of Ruby Ridge in 1992, anniversary of the 1993 Waco raid, and most notably, the exact date of Patriot-hero Richard Wayne Snell's execution. The attack was perpetrated by a former Klansman with strong ties to the Christian Patriot movement. Timothy McVeigh, rumoured to sleep with a copy of *The Turner Diaries* near his bed, interacted heavily with like-minded Patriots on gun show circuits and was known to have ties with the Aryan Republican Army. It was in the name of Patriot goals that McVeigh carried out Snell's plan to bomb the Murrah building. With this single act, the Christian Patriot movement reached its peak of violence and seemed primed to unleash a wave of terrorism across the country. What actually occurred, however, leads us to the atomised state of the current movement.

Following the Oklahoma City bombing and the public outrage over the deaths of 168 people (including 19 children playing in a day care centre), the unravelling of the Christian Patriot movement began. While many within the movement deplored the attack, others were more supportive and urged American citizens to prepare for civil war. As law enforcement agencies began to focus attention on right-wing extremist groups, many went to ground – severing

communications, tempering rhetoric, and attempting to distance themselves from any association with the McVeigh attack.

The once unified movement had fractured to become different strands of constantly bickering individual organisations. A huge shift occurred as groups began to drop their ‘Christian Patriot’ labels and adopt more pure White Nationalistic identities. [28] From the Oklahoma City bombing to the early 2000s, the Christian Patriot movement could best be described as a very loose network of anti-government groups that fought more often than they cooperated. The path towards complete atomisation has undermined every attempt to generate surges of support or unified action.

Unfortunately, the trend of atomization and bickering may be coming to an end. As indicated by the recently ‘leaked’ Department of Homeland Security (DHS) report, the current political and economic climate may once again help re-unify the Christian Patriot movement. [29] The coalescence of various right-wing groups alarms many, opening up the potential for attacks with greater destructive outcomes than the Oklahoma City bombing. Political leaders are deeply concerned at the possibility of Christian Patriot reunification and even more disturbed at the possibility of Patriot attacks which employ WMD. It is to this subject that the article now turns.

Patriot Intent

Judging Patriot intent to use WMD is one part rhetoric and four parts action. Intent is generally hard to determine since we cannot be inside the minds of others, let alone determine a singular clear refrain from the hums and whistles of an entire movement. Rhetoric alone does very little to establish intent; however rhetoric combined with an established history of violence at least establishes credibility. Delving into the literature by which the Patriot members most closely identify themselves is the first step in examining intent.

To establish intent in literature, one needs simply thumb through the pages of *The Turner Diaries* – commonly referred to as the Bible of the racist right. One excerpt from the book paints a clear picture with regards to Patriot aims:

“As I watched, the gigantic fireball continued to expand and rise, and a dark column, like the stem of an immense toadstool, became visible beneath it. Bright, electric blue tongues of fire could be seen flickering and dancing over the surface of the column. They were huge lightning bolts, but at a distance no thunder could be heard from them. When the noise finally came, it was a dull, muffled sound, yet still overwhelming: the sort of sound one might expect to hear if an inconceivably powerful earthquake rocked a huge city and caused a thousand 100-story skyscrapers to crumble into ruins simultaneously.” [30]

This apocalyptic narrative describes the nuclear annihilation of Baltimore. The carnage continues; within the final 25 pages of the novel, the entire California coastline, Detroit, and New York – a victim of 18 separate nuclear explosions – had been wiped-off the face of the Earth. In addition, Israel and the Soviet Union were on the receiving end of a salvo of nuclear strikes. The penultimate climax of the story involves the story's hero piloting a small plane over the Pentagon for a final nuclear detonation, a blast which triggers nationwide racial war. Keeping in mind that McVeigh built the Oklahoma City bomb to the near-exact specifications portrayed in *The Turner Diaries*, and Robert Matthews' creation of *The Order* during the 1980s, the willingness of Patriots to follow the narrative with regards to nuclear weapons should be taken seriously.

With this foundational literature showing support for WMD usage, we turn now to actions. Christian Patriot groups have taken steps to acquire and use chemical substances capable of WMD effects on multiple different occasions. In an aforementioned example, during a 1985 raid of the CSA compound in northern Arkansas, FBI agents unearthed an arsenal of weapons. Among these weapons were over 30 gallons of cyanide. [31] Investigations revealed that CSA members intended to use the cyanide to poison the water supplies of New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. to initiate end times and the second coming of Christ. When informed that the amount of cyanide they possessed could not have killed anyone, a CSA member confidently asserted: "God would... make sure the poison got to the town." [32]

In 1991, another Patriot-affiliated group attempted to use biological toxins to assassinate law enforcement officials. The Minnesota Patriots Council – an anti-government organisation founded by retired Air Force colonel Frank Nelson – attained the instructions to create ricin from a right-wing publication focused on constructing chemical and biological weapons from home laboratories. [33] The group eventually produced 0.7 grams of ricin, enough, according to federal prosecutors, to "kill hundreds of people." [34] Despite claims that the defendants had already been exonerated by a common law court, and thereby making a federal prosecution illegal, the perpetrators were the first to be convicted under the 1989 Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act.

In 1998, a third Patriot attempt to acquire WMD was noted. Larry Wayne Harris, a delusional paranoid who propagated tales of his secret employment with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was arrested for possessing a biological agent for use as a weapon. After telling an FBI informant that he possessed enough military-grade anthrax to "wipe out" all of Las Vegas, law enforcement agents seized Harris' car and found eight flight bags full of substances labeled "biological." [35] The substances were later discovered to be a harmless strain of anthrax, but Harris' history – which included a 1995 arrest for the illegal acquisition of bacteria that causes bubonic plague – clearly indicates the willingness of some Patriots to use WMD in a terrorist attack.

According to a 2008 FBI/DHS report, there were at least five other instances “in which individuals attempted to acquire or manufacture CBRN materials but were unsuccessful or were disrupted before they could complete the process.” [36] Of the five known attempts, four are rightfully understood through the lens of Patriot ideology. In 2004, the ATF found the precursors to ricin (castor beans) and abrin (lucky beans) in the apartment of an anti-government extremist. Two Texas anti-government extremists were also arrested and convicted for purchasing the precursors to hydrogen cyanide gas, which was intended for use through a building’s ventilation system. In 2006, a neo-Nazi attempted to buy a canister of sarin from an undercover FBI agent. Later that year, a survivalist was sentenced for attempting to produce ricin as a weapon. Clearly, the intent to acquire and employ WMD has been demonstrated by members of the Patriot movement.

Also troubling are the overly-high ambitions in the operational realm derived from Patriot beliefs in a pervasive Jewish international conspiracy theory. If we are to take Christian Patriot rhetoric at face value, this is indeed problematic as it hints at a desire for weaponry beyond the conventional. Patriot ideology is based on the belief that an international Jewish cabal is well on its way to establishing a ‘one-world government’. Patriots believe, to varying degrees, that the American government has been infiltrated and is being steered to promote Zionism and accommodate Jewish needs. The only remedy to combat this Zionist occupied government (ZOG) is to destroy it. According to one expert of Patriot ideology: “Virtually anyone who disagrees with them is the enemy, and thus becomes essentially disposable... For many in this alternative universe, this also includes (and focuses upon) homosexuals, minorities, immigrants, and Jews.” [37] Needless to say, the elimination of all these groups should highlight an overly-high ambition in the operational realm and, in turn, suggest a Patriot pre-disposition to WMD.

Patriot Capability

Although possessing WMD intent in spades, the Patriots have a significant capabilities problem. Capabilities are more than just access to WMD materials. Rather, any capabilities assessment must include considerations of at least four factors: a permissive environment in which to operate; an organisational structure that can capitalise on that permissive environment; accessibility of physical resources from which to actually construct a weapon; and the intellectual resources necessary to make use of those materials without causing inadvertent self-harm. If this were not challenge enough, the factors themselves are each necessary but not individually sufficient. Rather, these factors are mutually reinforcing and interdependent, and for an organisation to possess true capability, each of these factors must be present during WMD development. With these factors in mind, the Patriots demonstrate little to no actual capability to acquire, develop, or employ truly lethal amounts of WMD.

The Patriot movement, hamstrung by internal dissention and constant bickering, has, to this point, demonstrated no determined and unified commitment to produce anything beyond the

most basic of CBRN weaponry. A prevailing hypothesis concerning organisational structure and WMD innovations states “highly structured and highly cohesive groups led by an undisputed leader are likely to demonstrate a higher capability to innovate successfully than loosely knit or heavily factionalised groups that experience strong internal pressures.” [38] Turning to Aum Shinrikyo as the ideal type, we find a very hierarchical (even totalitarian) form of leadership and operational decision-making. Shoko Asahara’s position atop the organisation is best described as god-like, an undisputed entity whose wildest, most insane visions and orders would be reacted upon with complete loyalty and unrivalled zeal. This undying devotion to their leader, as noted by Adam Dolnik, “only underscores Asahara’s absolute and undisputable position within the group;” when Asahara demanded something, his followers “responded with an absolute commitment to that project.” [39]

This degree of loyalty, hierarchy, and internal unity present in Aum Shinrikyo are entirely absent within Patriot organisations. The Patriots are a mixture of several sub-movements, many of which differ in their interpretation of a utopian future world. Militias, which allow membership from minority groups, often disagree with the racist rants of the White Nationalists. Many groups advocate offensive operations against their enemies, while others promote a defensive posture. Additionally, a huge rift exists between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘blue collar’ members of the movement. This distrust has generated intolerance of the other camp, preventing cooperation on even the most mundane issue. A recent example of this internal turmoil can be found on the White Nationalist website *Stormfront* in the discussion section labeled *Problems with our Movement – The Class Divide*, and best exemplified by the comment “when I hear the word intellectual, I reach for my pistol.” [40] There are no Shoko Asaharas within the Patriots capable of emphasising and directing work towards a single project. In fact, when reviewing the notes from any Patriot meeting or website, it is difficult to find a united expressive emphasis to anything other than conspiracy theories. [41] If anything, the Patriot movement has demonstrated almost complete operational stagnation during the past 15 years.

If one accepts the argument that the path to WMD employment requires either coordination or the presence of empowered leadership capable of overseeing the process and pushing it to its conclusion, then we find a major obstacle for Patriot WMD usage. Multiple terms have been used to describe the Patriots, but the labels ‘hierarchy’ or ‘organized’ have never been among them. In fact, it is extremely difficult to define exactly what the Patriot movement is, due to its amoeba-like ability to merge and dissociate with organisations on a near-constant basis. The Patriots simply lack a true leader or empowered governing body with which to direct or oversee any innovative process. Instead, the movement is ‘inspired’ – steered or directed being too indicative of actual control – by different personalities that reside in different ideological milieus. The overwhelming theme of Patriot leadership is the inability to agree upon strategy, operations, or underlying ideology, a factor which impedes WMD acquisition or development.

A second factor which promotes WMD acquisition or development is the presence of a safe haven from which a terrorist group may operate. Such a haven affords the organisation the space needed to experiment with various forms of weaponry, conduct tests, and engage in trial runs. Again, the case of Aum Shinrikyo is instructive. Following the nuclear conclusion of World War II, allied nations began to reconstruct Japanese society in a manner which prevented a backslide into authoritative savagery. The victors put into place a set of laws that severely curtailed the intelligence gathering and enforcement capabilities of law enforcement entities. One such law prevented police from gathering preventative intelligence against 'religious organizations', as it would violate codes against religious persecution. Aum, which went to great lengths to be officially labelled as such an organisation, used this legal loophole and was able to build – in plain sight – various factories from which it tried (but mostly failed) to develop a range of biological and chemical weapons. [42] Additionally, Aum was able to use a sheep ranch in Australia to test the lethality of its sarin gas.

Where Aum had a virtual free hand to develop CBRN weapons, the Patriots have little breathing room. Stifling the prospects for Patriot WMD acquisition is the complete absence of a safe haven from which to organise and operate. This lack of a safe can be attributed to the deep penetration of Patriot groups by FBI and local law enforcement agencies as well as the persistent efforts of right-wing watchdog groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League. The combined efforts of these entities keeps constant pressure on various Patriot affiliated organisations and gives Patriot leaders little room to recruit, merge resources, or to coordinate efforts. The constant pressure compels the Patriots to adopt a form of 'leaderless resistance', a strategy which makes terrorist organisations difficult to penetrate, but exceedingly difficult for terrorist leaders to control. [43] Without a safe haven, Patriot organisations busy themselves with the task of sheer survival, preventing them from using that time to develop new theories or technologies for future attacks.

But there is a more pressing problem which confronts the Patriots. The absence of deep intellectual resources able to develop and/or procure the most deadly forms of WMD is another trait which stifles Patriot WMD development. Although classifying Patriot members as 'uneducated hillbillies' is largely inaccurate, so too would be any attempt to classify them as deep thinkers. The radical right is characterised by members coming from intermediate and disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Chris Hewitt, 74 per cent of Klansmen and 57 per cent of the 'New Right' extremists are drawn from disadvantaged social classes. [44] Accordingly, few of these extremists possess education levels beyond what is required in state school systems. It is unlikely that a poorly educated extremist would possess the intellectual skills needed to craft a formidable WMD or the means to disperse it if created. This was evident in the 2009 case of neo-Nazi James Cummings and his amateurish quest to craft a 'dirty bomb'. [45] The fact that so many Patriots come from a disadvantaged social class also curtails the financial resources any Patriot group can mobilise.

In general, the ability of the Patriots to craft a WMD of significant lethality remains a distant prospect. It is likely that Patriot groups will continue to dabble in relatively low-lethality CBRN production – small amounts of ricin, poisons, or caustic materials – but too many factors work against the creation of a truly lethal WMD. For the time being, Patriots are better served by employing conventional weapons.

Bridging the Intent/Capability Divide?

While the prospect of a Christian Patriot WMD attack should be considered low, a troubling wildcard factor has resurfaced that warrants scrutiny and concern. Given the vast array of capability problems addressed in the previous section, the most immediately effective path to WMD acquisition is to bootstrap capability and marry it to intent through an alliance with a group already in possession of WMD but lacking access to the target.

As discussed in George Michael's 2006 book *The Enemy of My Enemy*, there are disturbing indications of a temporary alliance being made between Patriot-affiliated groups and militant Islamic organisations. [46] If we lend credence to the notion that jihadist organisations are “close to making ‘workable and efficient biological and chemical weapons’ capable of killing thousands of people” – as a report by the Investigative Project on Terrorism suggests – then the Patriots have found a capable organisation with which to ally. [47] This right-wing-jihadist cooperation would not necessarily be a new phenomenon – as indicated by tales of mutual admiration and operational cooperation between Adolf Hitler and the Islamic militant Haj Amin al-Husseini during World War II. [48] Nevertheless, a modern variant of the alliance could add the missing capability to Patriot intent, greatly increasing the likelihood of a WMD attack on American soil.

Many Patriot groups view Islamist terrorists as – although not necessarily on the ‘same team’ – at least working for the same cause. Patriots sympathise with jihadist aims of eradicating Jewish influence, while Islamists are presumably supportive of Patriot aims of bringing down the US government. Should we allow ourselves to delve into a Tom Clancy-like narrative and give voice to the idea that cheerleading could translate into operational ties, the Patriots have a role to play in bringing WMD terrorism on American soil.

According to the 2008 Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism, the most likely source of WMD acquisition is Pakistan – described as the “intersection of Nuclear Weapons and Terrorism.” [49] According to the Commission report, 74 per cent of terrorism experts surveyed “consider Pakistan the country most likely to transfer nuclear technology to terrorists in the next three to five years.” [50] The concern over Pakistani nuclear weapon proliferation – especially to terrorist organizations – has been recently expressed in numerous diplomatic cables attained in the recent Wikileaks disclosures. [51]

The concern – a theoretical one at this point – is that militant Islamists are able to acquire such a weapon through black markets in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and smuggle them near the US border. Unable to cross American borders due to concerns of being caught through security profiling, the jihadists may require a more ‘Americanised’ group to get their weapon through. To cross US borders, it would be theoretically easier for a Patriot to blend in, smuggle the weapon into the US and carry out an attack. From the perspective of the allied terrorist groups, this type of approach completely blurs the lines of responsibility and puts the US government in a tremendous predicament with regards to response options; a potential win-win scenario for both the Patriots and jihadists.

This scenario is currently more fiction than fact. While unsettling, current prospects of cooperation between Patriots and jihadists remain fairly bleak. Steven Barry, the former leader of right-wing Special Forces Underground, sums it up well:

“What does the ‘extreme right’ have to offer Militant Islam? Militant Islam possesses every quality absent in the “extreme right.”” Militant Islam, on the whole, has (i) organisation (ii) hierarchy (iii) autonomy (iv) money and logistics (v) media (vi) liaison and (vii) covert support... the extreme right is (i) disorganised and chaotic (ii) leaderless, fractionalised, and defiant of subordination (iii) anti-authoritarian, more often than not to the point of anarchic (iv) bankrupt and lacking anything remotely resembling logistics (v) voiceless (vi) uncooperative and more often than not hostile in their mutual relations (vii) utterly bereft of popular support – indeed “the People” are hostile toward them, and (viii) without the least sympathy in any government at any level. [52]

Steven Emerson, the director of the Investigative Project on Terrorism, is another doubter of significant operational alliances existing between the Patriots and jihadists, his scepticism resting largely on the unsubstantiated operational backgrounds of most Patriots. Emerson notes: “Operationally, I do not know how extensive there will be an alliance, because at least from the Islamic militant community, to really have access to the high level operators, you have to have a pedigree that these guys [right-wing extremists] would not have.” [53] From this perspective, it is the sub-par operational record of the Patriots that serve as an obstacle to operational collaboration. It is an argument that carries weight.

Although currently minimal, the potential for cooperation across ideological milieus carries enough significance to warrant further study, and focused work on the issue is underway. Under the Department of Homeland Security’s Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) program, terrorism scholars Jeffrey Bale and Gary Ackerman have tracked and documented ties between Western extremists and Islamist groups. European extremist organisations being more sophisticated than their American brethren, Bale and Ackerman’s preliminary findings suggest cooperation exists, but interaction between European extremists and jihadists is predominately relegated to various forms of rhetorical support and, to a lesser degree,

assisting detained Islamist terrorists procure legal representation. [54] Cooperation beyond this, especially in the operational realm, is largely speculative or wholly undocumented.

A Patriot-jihadist operational alliance is unlikely at the current time, owing mainly to jihadist ideological barriers and the overall lack of Patriot operational bona fides. [55] Should this alliance ever materialise, it would likely be initiated by an Islamist terrorist organisation lacking more attractive options. Although rhetorical and low-level logistical support is likely to continue and intensify, a true operational alliance should be considered a last-ditch option for Islamist groups with the means to acquire truly lethal WMD capability. Should it come to pass, however, Patriot groups appear willing to do their part. The Patriot-affiliated white supremacist group Aryan Nations, as one example, has already established a Ministry of Islamic Liaison which expresses public support for the aspirations of transnational jihadists. [56] With this in mind, those studying this phenomenon should raise flags as they see jihadist rhetoric become more accepting of Patriot groups or *fatwas* issued that provide religious justification for such cooperation.

Conclusion

The face of domestic terrorism in the US is older than we often think. From the Anti-Masons and Know-Nothings of the early 1800s, the birth of the Ku Klux Klan in 1866, to the rise of militias and neo-Nazi groups in modern times, there has never been a period of American history devoid of right-wing violence. Right-wing terrorism, to put it bluntly, has existed and is virtually guaranteed to exist for the duration of the future of the US. While it will remain a problem, the point of inquiry for this article is not whether right-wing terrorism persists, but in what form and to what degree their acts impact society. More pointedly, will the US be a victim of WMD terrorism employed via Patriot organisations? In response, this article has argued that prospects for WMD employment from the Christian Patriot movement are low owing primarily to a lack of capability. This assessment is of course transient, and should not spur celebration or complacency.

Continued, relentless pressure on this movement is required to ensure it never has the safe haven, the opportunity to restructure the organisation, or the appeal to effectively recruit from a disaffected segment of society. Should the movement ever coalesce and have the operational freedom needed to plan, organise, train, and openly communicate with their various branches, the Christian Patriot movement has the ideological drive and intent to commit a WMD attack. The ability to create and maintain a safe haven is, in the near-term at least, a distant possibility. Groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, Anti-Defamation League and other watchdog organisations perform a tremendously valuable role in keeping pressure on the Patriots at no cost to the US government. While it would be wrong for the government to openly support such organisations (it would only lend weight to the Patriots conspiracy theories), it is worthwhile to

publicly highlight the efforts of these groups through media outlets to ensure their continued existence.

WMD use being improbable, we should expect to see the continuation of Patriot efforts to expand their capabilities with conventional munitions. Although use of WMD is unlikely, the prospect of a conventional attack generating mass effects and high lethality is considerable. The Patriots have the tools necessary to carry out a high casualty attack, as reflected by the 2007 raid of multiple Alabama Free Militia compounds. This particular raid netted “130 grenades, a grenade launcher, approximately 70 hand grenades rigged to be fired from a rifle, a machine gun, a short-barrel shotgun, explosives parts, two silencers, numerous other firearms, commercial fireworks and 2,500 rounds of ammunition.” [57]

Clearly, the resources are available to carry out a conventional attack, and given the relative paucity if not total absence of Patriot nuclear or biological scientists, it is probable that Patriots would employ these weapons rather than developing, acquiring, or employing a WMD of equal lethality. We can also expect to see the continued development and sporadic employment of limited-lethality WMD. Chemical and biological substances and agents such as cyanide and ricin are definite possibilities for Patriot arsenals, but weaponisation and dispersion challenges hamper the overall lethality of their deployment. Barring a forged alliance with a jihadist group – a remote but not entirely unfeasible prospect – we should not expect to see a significant radiological or nuclear device employed by a Patriot group.

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Notes

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- [1] Mark Potok, "The Year in Hate & Extremism," *SPLC Intelligence Report* Spring 2011, no. 141 (2011), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2011/spring/the-year-in-hate-extremism-2010>; SPLC, "Southern Poverty Law Center News," *U.S. Hate Groups Top 1000*(2011), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/news/us-hate-groups-top-1000>.
- [2] This definition is consistent with the general use of the term. For one example, see Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, "WMD Terrorism and Pakistan: Counterterrorism," *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 1, no. 2 (2006).
- [3] David A. Neiwert, *In God's Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest*. Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 1999, p. 4.
- [4] Rather than identify these groups by a single set of characteristics under which all fall as in a typology, it is more useful to think about these groups as having a family resemblance, also known as a the fuzzy set, for which there are no necessary and sufficient characteristics, but that are nevertheless understood as part of the same group. For more see Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker (eds.), *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* Cambridge: University Press, 1992.
- [5] For additional background and group-specific data see the Anti-Defamation League's Website on "Extremism in America"; http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Christian_Identity.asp?.
- [6] Morris Dees and James Corcoran, *Gathering Storm: America's Militia Threat*, 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p.16. Gale was known to greatly exaggerate the role he played on General MacArthur's staff as well as his training of Filipino soldiers.
- [7] Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan: History, Organization, Language, Influence and Activities of America's Most Notorious Secret Society*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2007, p. 152.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] John George and Laird M. Wilcox, *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe: Political Extremism in America*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 344.
- [10] Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2002, pp. 108-12.
- [11] Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. Cambridge: University Press, 2007, pp. 65-68.
- [12] D. Levitas, op. cit., p.113.
- [13] Ibid., 137.
- [14] Ibid., 153.
- [15] Pat Lewis, "Preventable Agricultural Deaths in Oklahoma 1983-1988: Self Inflicted or Suicides," *Unpublished thesis*. Oklahoma State Agricultural Department: Oklahoma State University, 1989.
- [16] Joel Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City Is Only the Beginning*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997, p 33.
- [17] Here, we speak of the ideology known as Christian Identity (CI). CI preaches that non-white races are Pre-Adamic creations, and are therefore, sub-human. They also preach that Jews are the offspring of the Serpent/Eve copulation that produced Cain (the 'two-seed line theory'). For CI adherents, Jews are the literal spawn of Satan. See: Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*, Rev. ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- [18] J. Corcoran, *Bitter Harvest: Gordon Kahl and the Posse Comitatus: Murder in the Heartland*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990, p 32.
- [19] J. Corcoran, *Bitter Harvest*, p. 31.
- [20] Joel Dyer, op. cit., p. 177.
- [21] William Pierce wrote under the surname Andrew Macdonald when publishing. See: Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries*. Hillsboro, WV: National Vanguard Books, 1978.
- [22] David A. Neiwert, *In God's Country: The Patriot Movement and the Pacific Northwest*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1999, p. 59.
- [23] D. Levitas, op.cit., p. 207.
- [24] Kerry Noble, *Tabernacle of Hate: Why They Bombed Oklahoma City*. Prescott, Ont. Canada: Voyageur Pub., 1998.
- [25] This "identity transformation" from Posse to Patriots is provided in: D. Levitas, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
- [26] Transcription of white supremacist Louis Beam's 1992 speech in Estes Park provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- [27] A detailed narrative of the Waco account is provided in Chapter 5 of: Lane Crothers, *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security*, People, Passions, and Power. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- [28] An excellent portrayal of this trend is provided in: Stuart A. Wright, "Strategic Framing of Racial-Nationalism in North America and Europe: An Analysis of a Burgeoning Transnational Network," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21 (2009), pp. 189-210. Additionally, an excellent (and far more detailed) history of the Patriot movement is provided in: Stuart A. Wright. *Making War: Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Cambridge: University Press, 2007.
- [29] DHS, "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Refueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment," ed. Department of Homeland Security (Washington DC: Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009).
- [30] Andrew Macdonald, *The Turner Diaries: A Novel*. Hillsboro, WV: National Vanguard Books, 2nd ed. 1995, p. 188.
- [31] "The Covenant, The Sword and the Arm of the Lord." Federal Bureau of Investigation. <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/covenantwordarmlaw.htm> (accessed November 11 2010)
- [32] Jonathan B. Tucker, *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, Basic Studies in International Security. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000, p. 151.
- [33] Ibid., pp. 160-161.
- [34] Ibid., p. 177.
- [35] Ibid., p. 227.
- [36] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Domestic Terrorist's Intent and Capability to Use Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Weapons," in *Joint Special Assessment*, ed. FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate. . Washington, D.C. ,14 October 2008).
- [37] D. Neiwert, op. cit., p. 36.
- [38] Adam Dolnik, "Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Innovation," in Maria Rasmussen and Mohammed Hafez (eds.) *Terrorist Innovations In Weapons of Mass Effect: Preconditions, Causes, and Predictive Indicators—Workshop Report*. Ft. Belvoir, VA: Defense Threat Reduction Agency, August 2010), p. 133. Report located at: <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/Centers/CCC/Research/2010%20019%20Terrorist%20Innovations%20in%20WME.pdf>
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- [39] Ibid., 134.
- [40] <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t502133/>
- [41] For an example, see Chapter 1: Carolyn Gallaher, *On the Fault Line : Race, Class, and the American Patriot Movement*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- [42] One such plant, Satian-7, was actually inspected by Japanese police at one point following complaints of chlorine leaks. Despite barrels clearly labeled caustic material and dangerous acid, the police did not follow up. Aum was attempting to manufacture weapons based on botulism, VX, ricin, and anthrax as well as experimenting with seismic weapons which Asahara requested to fulfill his plans to trigger massive earthquakes.
- [43] Leaderless resistance was a concept promoted by white supremacist Richard Beam as early as 1984, and reiterated during the Estes Park meeting in 1992.
- [44] Christopher Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in America : From the Klan to Al Qaeda*, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy. London & New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 72.
- [45] Eric Russell, "Officials Verify Maine Dirty Bomb Probe Results," Bangor Daily News, <http://www.homeland1.com/homeland-security-news/455003-officials-verify-maine-dirty-bomb-probe-results/> accessed 10 January 2011.
- [46] George Michael, *The Enemy of My Enemy : The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right*. University of Kansas Press, 2006.
- [47] Investigative Project on Terrorism, "Documents Show Jihadis Seek Mass Destruction Weapons," 11 February 2011. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/2608/documents-show-ts-seek-mass-destruction-accessed-04-March-2011>. Although several Islamist terrorist organizations have the same organizational problems as the Patriots, the likelihood that they are able to acquire WMD is greatly increased due to sponsorship of failing or under-governed states sympathetic to their cause.
- [48] G. Michael, op. cit., pp. 112-24.
- [49] Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism (U.S.) et al., *World at Risk : The Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Wmd Proliferation and Terrorism*. New York: Vintage Books, 2008.
- [50] Ibid., 67.
- [51] David E. Sanger Jane Perlez, and Eric Schmitt, "Nuclear Fuel Memos Expose Weary Dance with Pakistan," *New York Times* 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/01/world/asia/01wikileaks-pakistan.html?_r=1 accessed 02 December 2010.
- [52] As quoted in: G. Michael, op. cit., pp. 278 - 279.
- [53] Ibid., p. 275.
- [54] Jeffrey Bale and Gary Ackerman, "Where the Extremes (Might) Touch: The Potential for Collaboration between Islamist Terrorists and Western Right- or Left- Wing Extremists," (START research project, publication forthcoming, 2011) <http://www.start.umd.edu/start/research/projects/>
- [55] As J. Bale and G. Ackerman note, some Quranic verse interpretations may prohibit Muslims from befriending non-Muslims. One such example is Quran 5:51, "O believers, do not take the Jews and the Christians as your friends and protectors, they are friends of each other. And whoever makes them a friend then he is from amongst them. Verily God does not guide the unjust people." See also Quran 5:57 "O you who believe! do not take for friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery and a joke."
- [56] Henry Schuster, "An Unholy Alliance: Aryan Nation Leader Reaches Out to Al Qaeda," *CNN News*, March 29, 2005, US News Section. <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/03/29/schuster.column/index.html>. Accessed 05 March 2011.
- [57] Anti-Defamation League, "Alabama Militia Raid Uncovers Massive Cache of Munitions – 6 Indicted" http://www.adl.org/learn/extremism_in_the_news/Anti_Government/militia5.07.htm?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_the_News accessed 19 January 2011.
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Addressing Root Causes – the Example of Bruno Kreisky and Austria’s Confrontation with Middle Eastern Terrorism

by Thomas Riegler

Abstract

The tenure of Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky (1970-1983) is best known as a period of socio-political reform that profoundly transformed and modernized the country. Kreisky is also renowned as a statesman whose international stature was disproportional to Austria’s actual geopolitical insignificance. What is less well known is Kreisky’s counterterrorism policy, which is exceptional both in the context of the 1970s and 1980s as well as that of today. In short: Kreisky argued strongly that terrorism could only be tackled if its root causes were addressed. In order to fight terror, the grievances causing it have to be removed as a form of prevention. Kreisky specifically focused on the Middle Eastern conflict, which, from his point of view, could only be solved by means of a just peace. To achieve this result, a legitimate political representation of the Palestinian cause had to be fostered, thereby rendering the rampant “armed struggle” of militant Palestinians obsolete. This article aims to explore and evaluate Kreisky’s unique counterterrorism policy - both in terms of its successes and failures: on the one hand, Kreisky contributed to the international legitimisation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its chairman, Yassir Arafat, while, on the other hand, Austria suffered some ‘blowback’ in the form of terrorist attacks orchestrated by hard-line Palestinian elements.

Terrorism in Austria

Terrorism is a rare phenomenon in Austria’s recent political culture. A study by the author of this article puts the toll of political violence at 27 dead and 141 wounded between 1945 and 2010.[1] By comparison, the terrorism orchestrated by the Red Army Faction (RAF) in West Germany alone claimed 67 dead and 230 wounded over more than two decades.[2] Among other factors, Austria has been relatively spared from terrorism because of the nature of its post-war political system, which had been devised to provide maximum stability and consensus. Possible areas of conflict were defused by reforms from above during the 1970s and did not produce societal tensions like in neighbouring West Germany or its southern neighbour Italy.[3] Yet a platform for possible conflict existed due to the struggle for minority rights in South Tyrol during the 1950s and 1960s; Austrian right-wingers actively supported the struggle of German-speakers against the dominance of the Italian central state. During the 1970s, the southern province of Carinthia witnessed occasional bomb attacks on infrastructural targets due to a conflict regarding non-German-speakers stressing their minority rights.[4] Left-wing extremism played only a minor role – in 1977 two Viennese students assisted the Western German “2nd June Movement” in holding a prominent Austrian businessman for ransom. Later, in 1995, two activists were killed,

when the explosive device they had planted detonated prematurely. In comparison, right-wing terrorism was a larger factor – reaching a highpoint during the 1990s when a lone perpetrator mailed several “waves” of letter bombs and, on one occasion, planted a booby trap – resulting in four people being killed and 15 others wounded.

To a large extent, terrorism was the work of foreign elements operating on Austria soil: Armenian and Kurdish extremists targeted Iraqi, Iranian and Turkish institutions, while the Libyan secret services tried to kill a prominent dissident on two occasions – but without success. In 1989, three Kurdish politicians were lured into a trap and murdered by Iranian agents. Yet it was Middle Eastern terrorism that formed the single most virulent brand of political violence in Austria: Both in 1973 and 1975 there were two major hostage crises while one bomb attack occurred in 1979. During the 1980s, the country was attacked three more times. All in all, nine people were killed and 71 wounded. Apart from these violent episodes, Austria - and especially Vienna - served mostly as a base or transit point for operations elsewhere.[5] Therefore, the official response to terrorism was limited and avoided to create controversies as it did in the German Federal Republic. Thus, analyst Heinz Vetschera summed up the response of government and society in Austria: “Modern terrorism has induced adaptations rather than innovations in the legal, political and organizational approaches to counter-terrorism.”[6]

Kreisky and Palestinian Terrorism

Born in 1911, as the son of Jewish clothing manufacturer, Bruno Kreisky had escaped Nazi persecution by emigrating to Sweden in 1938. Returning to Austria in 1946, he made a political career, rising to foreign minister in 1959 and to chairman of the Socialist party in 1967. A stunning election victory in 1970 made him chancellor. He successfully defended the Social-Democratic party’s electoral hegemony in two successive polls before leaving office in 1983, when the party’s absolute majority was lost. Kreisky’s “reign” soon became the object of nostalgic idealisation. He had left a distinct mark in almost every sphere of policy, but it was his handling of international diplomacy that made Kreisky a politician of international stature and significance. As a skilled negotiator, he strongly believed in the power of dialogue and compromise to overcome even major differences, whether it be Cold War superpower rivalry or the muddles of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While attracted to “Third World” affairs and the decolonisation struggle in general, and concerned about the effects of the energy crisis of 1973, Kreisky concentrated his mediation efforts especially on Middle Eastern affairs. As an agnostic Jew and one who harboured highly controversial anti-Zionist beliefs, Bruno Kreisky remained highly critical of Israeli actions and was sympathetic towards the Palestinians cause. This identification also stemmed from his own past as a political refugee and an Austrian patriot engaged in the restoration of his home country from Nazi occupation.

In 1974 Yasser Arafat had addressed the United Nations in his famous “gun and olive branch”-speech - thereby providing new possibilities for diplomatic initiatives. Until then – starting in 1967/1968 – Palestinians had concentrated on the “armed struggle” as the sole means to liberate their homeland. Once their commandos began to hijack international flights, the Palestinian cause became almost synonymous with “international terrorism”. While also condemning terrorism, Kreisky was careful when applying the term. For him two forms of terrorist violence existed. Firstly, “terrorism for its own sake”- by which he referred to Italian or West German left-wing extremism. That was derided by Kreisky. He argued that in the context of a democratic society, terrorism was extremely damaging and could lead to a dictatorship. But there was another form of terrorism, one which he approached with a sense of understanding: “Terrorism is one of the political weapons of the underground, of illegality. [...] They are cruel and I reject them without constraint. (...) But there are dictatorships, in which underground movements are fighting for freedom and democracy, and occasionally by means of employing terrorism”.[7] This sort of violence, according to Kreisky, often marked the start of a political movement or a subsequently respectable political career. To emphasise this point, Kreisky frequently brought up the example of the Nobel Peace prize winner and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who had fought both British occupation forces and Arabs in 1940s.

When it came to the crucial question of how to deal with terrorism, Kreisky took the view that one had to address the root causes of the problem. In 1982, when he hosted a reception for Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi, Kreisky stated: “Without a doubt, we are living in a time, where politically motivated terrorist attacks take place frequently. We loathe these actions and fight them with all means. One instrument to prevent this from happening, is to address the causes which lead up to terrorism”.[8] At the same time Kreisky dismissed the notion that a counterterrorism policy relying only on law enforcement measures or the military could be successful. Therefore, when it came to hostage takings, saving the lives of innocent people had absolute priority for him – especially after considering the bloody disaster of the rescue effort for the Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics in 1972.

In 1973, Austria was for the first time directly confronted with Middle Eastern terrorism: Two gunmen, belonging to the “Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution”, entered a train with Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union and took three people hostage. After long hours of negotiation, Kreisky granted them a plane to fly out of the country. Furthermore, he imposed restrictions on the transfer of Russian Jews via Austria by closing down a camp operated by the Jewish Agency. This move drew angry protests from Israel and throughout the West, but served its purpose of deflecting attention from the continuing emigration process, which was seen by the Arab world as a hostile demographic strengthening of Israel’s position.[9]

On December 21st, 1975, Illich Ramirez Sanchez (aka Carlos), acting on orders by Wadi Haddad, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - Special Command (PLFP-SC), attacked an OPEC summit in Vienna. This operation against the Organisation of the

Petroleum Exporting Countries, possibly sponsored by Muammar al-Gaddafi, had nothing to do with Austrian politics – its aim was blackmail in the form of a huge ransom to arm the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. With three people already killed during the takeover of the OPEC building, Kreisky wanted to avoid further bloodshed at all cost. He secured the release of all Austrian employees and provided a flight that took the terrorists and their remaining 33 hostages to Algeria, where the crisis was finally brought to an end after two days. Confronted again with criticism, Kreisky defend his position: “Fighting terror through complete refusal of terrorist’s demands has resulted in the terrorist’s capitulation only in a minority of cases, but all too often in more victims. Apart from that, a strategy of retribution has brought about an escalation of terrorism”.[10] But he conceded that so far negotiations also had not been successful in tackling the problem.

Kreisky’s actions were not unique at that time – most European governments had given in to terrorist demands. Yet a major policy shift was about to take place. Only some days before the OPEC hostage taking, the Dutch government had refused to consider the demands of South Moluccan separatists occupying a passenger train. Two hostages were killed as a result, but shortly afterwards the terrorists surrendered to police. In 1977 the Moluccan separatists from the Dutch diaspora struck again and occupied yet another train. After three weeks, a military rescue mission was finally authorised - it ended in the death of two of the hostages and six of the nine gunmen. Also in 1977, West Germany’s chancellor Helmut Schmidt remained defiant after the Red Army Faction (RAF) had kidnapped industrial leader Hanns-Martin Schleyer. The chancellor even sent the elite police unit GSG-9 to Somalia to storm a passenger jet, which had been taken over by the PLFP-SC in order to strengthen the RAF’s demands. The rescue mission was successful, yet Schleyer was executed in response. Kreisky did not approve of Schmidt’s handling of the crisis, because of the risks involved. He questioned whether a government had in fact the authority to endanger the lives of hostages and reached the conclusion: “In my opinion no government has that right”.[11]

Getting Down to the Root of the Problem

By firmly rejecting counter violence and a policy of “no compromise” , Kreisky took a stand in a “mined” discourse. Basically, then and now, two major schools of thought are clashing. One school, which included Kreisky, stress the importance of addressing the political, social, and economic root causes for terrorism. For the other school of thought, political violence exists detached from objective reasons. Adherents of this second school of thought are primarily interested in the manifestations of the problem and how to “fight” it best. A good example for this is former Israeli UN-ambassador and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In his influential book “Terrorism. How the West Can Win” (1986) he argued: “The attempts to explain away terrorist outrages as the result of the ‘desperation’ of individuals or groups are not only based on a simplistic fallacy; they neatly echo the terrorists’ own assertions, which are meant to legitimize their criminal actions and divert public attention from the real forces behind terrorism.”[12] The

“real forces” for Netanyahu were in fact rogue nations, sponsoring terrorist “surrogate warfare” in their struggle against Western democracies. One-sided interpretations like Netanyahu’s have since the 1970s become dominant in the official discourse on terrorism. By negating any context, political violence can, for example, be characterized as simply the product of an “evil ideology”, devoid of any basis in reality. As a consequence, security and military counterstrategies are advocated as if there is no alternative.

The other school of thought analyses the subject in relationship to its root causes. The Irish researcher Louise Richardson, for example, observed in 2006 that most explanations of terrorism centre on war-mongering states and crazy loners, but the “best explanations” can be found on the level of societies that produce terrorism.[13] American expert Martha Crenshaw stated in 1995: “Both causes and consequences of terrorism can only be understood in terms of interaction among political actors, primarily governments and oppositions, at specific points in history.”[14] At the same time, Crenshaw cautioned that explaining terrorism simply in terms of “background conditions” (social, economic, demographic, political, cultural) is insufficient, since terrorism is a complex and diverse phenomenon.[15] In line with this, Norwegian political analyst Tore Bjorgo differentiated between general root causes and “trigger causes” – those “immediate circumstances and events” that motivate and facilitate terrorism.[16] According to Bjorgo, “an outrageous act committed by the enemy, lost wars, massacres, contested elections, policy brutality, or other provocative events”[17] might be the spark that sets off terrorism, while general issues like poverty, unemployment, discrimination or social injustice provide fertile ground for radical groups to legitimise the use of violence in the name of nationalism, revolution, or religion.

In line with this type of discourse, Kreisky’s approach is an excellent example for understanding terrorism as an expression of grievances shaped by the interaction of political and social forces. Instead of dismissing any relationship with politics right away, Kreisky understood terrorism and politics as relating to each other. For him the expulsion of the Palestinians, the conditions in the refugee camps, the military incursions of Israel into neighbouring Lebanon and the lack of an internationally recognized Palestinian representation were responsible for the emergence, escalation, and persistence of Middle Eastern terrorism. On the other hand, it has to be said that Kreisky has neglected the legitimate motives on the part of Israel, like its right to self-defence and the deterrence of terrorism. Also, his stance on the Palestinian issue did not result in de-radicalisation, since Middle Eastern terrorism was also fuelled by factors beyond his limited influence – the regional interests of actors like Iraq, Libya or Syria and the overriding conflict between East and West during the Cold War. This illustrates that addressing root causes is a complex and difficult manoeuvre since there are always powerful interests affected by parties that resent changes to the status quo. This might be a foremost reason why this approach is rarely chosen and terrorism is countered within the traditional security- and defence policy.[18]

Kreisky, Arafat, and the PLO

Despite setbacks, Kreisky's preventive counterterrorism policy enjoyed some significant successes. By granting the PLO a political dimension, he opened both space and possibilities for the development of moderate forces inside the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. In turn, this weakened the radicals and contributed to the political endorsement of Arafat. It began after the October War of 1973, when the Socialist International (SI) sent Kreisky on several fact-finding missions to Arab countries and to Israel in order to explore possibilities for a settlement of the Middle East conflict. In his concluding report, Kreisky stated that peace was only possible by including the PLO as the rightful representative of the Palestinian people. In 1979, Kreisky broke further ground, by granting the PLO-representative in Vienna diplomatic status. This was the first official recognition of the organisation in the Western world and it was primarily done to inspire other countries to follow. In July 1979, Kreisky hosted a widely reported meeting between Arafat and Willy Brandt, then chairman of the SI, in order to provide further legitimacy for the PLO-leader further.[19]

Yet most of the time Kreisky worked discretely behind the scenes: in 1976 he functioned as patron of secret talks between Israeli peace activists and the PLO special envoy Issam Sartawi. Only one year later, Sartawi and the "red prince", Ali Hassan Salameh (who was suspected to be the mastermind behind the taking of Israeli hostages at the Munich Olympics in 1972) met a West German government official behind closed doors in Vienna. The PLO offered their counterpart assistance in locating RAF-members in the Middle East in exchange for political recognition.[20] In May 1979, Kreisky opened up another diplomatic channel, this time by bringing together Sartawi and US ambassador Milton A. Wolf.[21]

Chancellor Kreisky also continually warned Arafat about the dangers of terrorism. While Arafat's own organisation Fatah had abandoned international terrorism in 1974, other groups under the PLO-umbrella continued their armed struggle. In 1979, the Syrian sponsored "Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution" again struck in Austria by bombing the Viennese synagogue. Fortunately, the bomb claimed only material damage, but nonetheless Kreisky was deeply upset. He wrote to Arafat: "I find this sudden rise in Palestinian terrorism extremely damaging to the Palestinian cause. It makes it more difficult for me to enlarge the circle of Palestinian supporters and it negates my previous efforts".[22] In 1981 there was another crisis of confidence: The PLO representative in Vienna was caught in the presence of two men from Arafat's own bodyguard while smuggling weapons. Even more damaging proved to be the murder of Issam Sartawi in 1983 by a killer of the rivalling Abu Nidal group. Kreisky blamed Arafat for the death of his close personal friend, because the PLO president had withdrawn his "protective hand" by publically rebuking Sartawi shortly before the murder.[23] Despite this tragedy, Kreisky continued to support the PLO-chairman even after leaving office: For example, in 1985 he toured the Middle East to organise the first major prisoner swaps between Israel and the Palestinians.

Despite these efforts, Austria was standing practically alone with its PLO-friendly course in the Western world. In the context of the Cold War, the US was opposed to negotiations with the “communist” PLO. Furthermore, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 with the explicit aim to destroy the “terroristic” organisation. The PLO itself hardened its position after losing its last base in the Middle East. Even within the Socialist International support for Kreisky was lukewarm at best. One considerable breakthrough was, however, achieved: in 1980 the European Communion passed the declaration of Venice, in which all member states recognised the Palestinian right of self-determination. But mostly, Kreisky’s initiatives bared fruit only with time passing: The idea of a two state solution for Palestine, which enjoys now widespread consensus, had been heralded by Kreisky decades before. Looking back later, Israel’s president Shimon Peres, a long time critic of the chancellor, took a more balanced view. In 2010, he lauded Kreisky for his contribution in bringing about that Arafat became a more and more conciliate leader.[24]

Security for Austria

The most important aim of Kreisky preventive policy was, of course, security for Austria itself. As already mentioned, the country’s function as a transit point for Jewish emigration from the Eastern block to Israel practically involved it in the Middle Eastern conflict. In 1981, Kreisky argued that because of his good relations with the PLO, Austria had been more or less spared by attacks from international terrorism in the past – despite the fact that extremist groups had a strong motive to attack and disrupt the transfer of Soviet Jews. Even after the 1973 hostage crisis there was a considerable risk: In the following year the CIA warned that an “unidentified fedayeen group” planned to shoot down a Jumbo aircraft carrying émigrés in the coming months. [25] In 1975 another alarm was raised: According to the CIA, Salah Khalaf, one of Arafat’s deputies and leader of “Black September”, intended to set off a renewed wave of terrorism – by detonating a bus in Vienna to demonstrate against the Jewish emigration to Israel.[26]The fact that none of these warnings was eventually realised, can be attributed as a success to Kreisky’s policy.

But it was not possible to keep terrorism entirely away from Austria: while Austria was less affected than other European countries like France and Italy, it nevertheless felt the shocks from the Middle Eastern conflict. In 1981 Heinz Nittel, a high-ranking Viennese city official and Jewish representative, was murdered. A few months afterwards, the synagogue was assaulted by two Arab gunmen who killed two worshippers and wounded 22 others. The worst attack took place on December 27th, 1985: Three terrorists attacked the El Al-counter at Vienna’s Schwechat airport with grenades and assault rifles. Three bystanders were killed, 39 wounded. Responsible for all three terrorist plots was the group Al Assifa, led by Sabri al-Bana, widely known under his nom de guerre “Abu Nidal”. Since 1974, Abu Nidal was a sworn enemy of Arafat’s line and instead wanted to “ignite” total chaos in the Middle East by terrorist provocation. He also waged a merciless shadow war against moderates within the PLO and had its most active proponents assassinated - among them he killed Issam Sartawi in 1983.[27] Sartawi had been in frequent

contact with Austrian state police. The disruption of this security cooperation may have formed another objective for Abu Nidal.

Since Austria was supporting Arafat, it had become a target of Al-Assifa like other PLO-friendly countries (Italy, Greece). In targeting Austria, Abu Nidal also met the strategic intentions of his state sponsors – Iraq, Libya, Syria – who wanted to push back Western influence in Middle Eastern affairs. Kreisky’s policy had not caused this wave of violence. It struck Austria as “blowback”, as an unintended consequence of the country’s engagement in a much wider conflict beyond its control.[28] When the Stasi, the East German intelligence agency, with its links with the major protagonists of “international terrorism”, questioned one of its sources in 1981 about Abu Nidal’s motive for assassinating the Austrian politician Heinz Nittel, he pointed to the “relatively stable links between PLO-Chairman Yasser Arafat and chancellor Kreisky for a solution of the Middle Eastern problem”. The source continued to explain: “Through Kreisky negotiations for a realisation of the Camp David peace accords and for the Middle Eastern-ambitions of the EC (European Communion) are pursued. (...) Since Abu Nidal is against a political settlement of the Palestinian problem, he obviously wanted to demonstrate to Arafat that by murdering Heinz Nittel, his group would not stand idle when compromises with the US or other imperialistic nations are made”.[29] But there was another motivation for Abu Nidal to threaten Austria: in the wake of the attacks of 1981, three Al-Assifa members had been arrested, among them a high-ranking “officer”. The group wanted to liberate him at all costs. As a consequence, the danger of further acts of terrorism loomed high in Austria for many years. In order to prevent further bloodshed after the 1985 airport attack, a deal was struck. In 1988, the chief of the Austrian state police secretly met with an Al-Assifa representative at Orly airport in Paris. It was agreed that the group would not target Austria again. In return their emissaries were allowed to visit the imprisoned “officer” and to occupy an apartment in Vienna. By allowing such a presence in the capital, the Austrian authorities managed to postpone the pressing issue of an early release of the prisoner. He was a free man by 1995, after serving two thirds of his jail term. At that time, the Al-Assifa base in Vienna did not exist anymore – aided by a foreign intelligence service it had kept operating under close surveillance until 1993. Despite the high risks involved, there was no further act of Palestinian terrorism in Austria.[30] By that time, Kreisky’s successors had already abandoned the former highly visible role of Austria in international affairs and instead concentrated on joining the European Union. In part, this was also a result of the public’s growing concern about terrorism after the wave of attacks in the early 1980s.

Conclusion

It was Kreisky himself, who had authorised the first secret negotiations with Al-Assifa in 1982. When those talks stalled and the terrorists subsequently attacked Vienna’s Schwechat airport in 1985, Kreisky had left office two years before. Yet he had tried to thwart the plot by utilizing his contact to Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi. A trusted official was sent on a last minute

mission to Tripoli to appeal to Gaddafi to discourage Abu Nidal from his plans. The Libyan leader agreed to do just that, yet the attack did nevertheless take place. Afterwards Kreisky received an apology – the Libyans had been unable to contact the terrorist commando, which operated out of a base in Syria, in time.[31]

When Kreisky was questioned by a journalist only weeks after the terrorist act, if his preoccupation with the Middle Eastern conflict had somehow drawn the radical elements to Austria, he strongly denied that. Kreisky claimed instead that the fact that 300.00 Russian Jews had emigrated over Austria to Israel for 15 years without a bomb exploding at Schwechat airport, was proof of the success of his policy. He argued that violence was not a sufficient response to Abu Nidal's terrorism, but pleaded for engaging in a sort of dialogue. When the journalist raised his doubts and suggested that there was no moderation possible when dealing with such people, Kreisky replied: "I would talk to the devil if I could achieve something positive".[32]

In conclusion, the results of Kreisky's preventive counterterrorism policy remain mixed: Austria's security was not particularly enhanced by his contacts to the PLO, since Chairman Arafat never attempted to exercise direct control over the numerous groups composing his organization. Abu Nidal, who had broken links with Arafat in 1974, primarily followed the instructions of his varying state sponsors. These nations – mainly Hafez al-Assad's Syria – wanted to keep the Palestinian resistance under close control and therefore regarded Kreisky's initiatives as a form of Western interference. By engaging preventively in the dynamics of the Middle Eastern conflict and by supporting the moderates inside the PLO, Kreisky antagonised the radicals and their sponsors, who, in turn, targeted Austria. But there were no further attacks against the transfer of Russian Jews after the 1973 hijacking, despite the resentment caused by this in the Arab world. Kreisky deserves praise also for another reason: He made the case for addressing the political and social root causes of terrorism and followed this devise. A re-evaluation of this method of dealing with terrorism – by extracting its "roots" and thereby remove its justification – is even more relevant today when a militarily dominated counterterrorism effort draws more and more countries into the vortex of terrorism.

About the author: *Thomas Riegler studied history and politics at the universities of Vienna and Edinburgh. Currently he works as a journalist and historian in Vienna. Dr. Riegler has published on a wide range of topics, including terrorism, film studies, and contemporary history. His most recent books are: 'Terrorism. Actors, Structures, Trends' (Vienna: Studienverlag, 2009; in German) and 'In the Crosshair: Austria and Middle Eastern Terrorism, 1973-1985' (Vienna: University Press, 2010; in German).*

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Book Reviews

Peter Bergen. *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and Al-Qaeda*
London: Free Press. 473 pp. ISBN 0743278933; £17.99 /US \$ 28.

Reviewed by Richard Phelps

Among the voluminous literature written about Osama bin Laden and his organization, writers who can be trusted appear to be less than common. Peter Bergen however, has already published two books on the subject that have long entered the canon of trustworthy accounts. His first, an oral history of Bin Laden, and his second, a general narrative of Al-Qaeda up to 9/11, are now joined by Bergen's third book on the subject: a history of conflict during the decade since. Bergen stated his aim is to write a "narrative history of the "war on terror", based upon a synthesis of all the open-source materials". True to his word, this is exactly the value of what *The Longest War* delivers: a generalist synoptic account of the 'War on Terror'.

In his opening passage, Bergen faults most histories of the "war on terror" for being written from a purely American perspective. Claims that an author's testimony is based, in part, on interviews with "leading members of Al-Qaeda, including bin Laden", should usually be grounds for severe skepticism by the reader. In Bergen's case, however, he is one of few Western journalists to have interviewed the man, back in the 1990s. Indeed, in addition to quoting from the predictable pantheon of stock commentators on all matters Al-Qaeda-related, the high point of *The Longest War* is that Bergen gives time to the testimony of a number of lesser-known figures.

Bergen quotes Ali Hamza al-Bahlul, a Yemeni who made propaganda videos for Bin Laden, on the reaction of Al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan when the news reports of the 9/11 attacks were first broadcast over the air. Likewise, he quotes Ayman Saeed Abdullah Batarfi, a Yemeni doctor, who provides an account of the battle of Tora Bora from Bin Laden's side. "I did a hand amputation by a knife, and I did a finger amputation with scissors" to wounded Al-Qaeda's fighters, the doctor states. Giving airtime to such fox-hole figures, and others such as the Saudi fighters Khalid al-Hubayshi and Gahemin al-Harbi, represents the high point of Bergen's book; it is a shame that he passes over them quickly in his survey.

In the later chapters however, Bergen falters from his earlier commitment and becomes distracted with the American-centric policy debates over how to continue the ongoing occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Like the histories he earlier faulted, Bergen too becomes side-tracked at times with personality clashes and differing approaches of policymakers and Pentagon officials – all at the expense of the wider picture. In so doing, he neglects to relate the ramifications of the differing sides' approaches on the overall *Conflict between American and Al-Qaeda* that the book is supposed to be about. This stands in contrast to the way he introduces the debates over which

trajectory that the jihadist movement has taken – be it leaderless or centrally directed - in the decade since 9/11. In place of such a tangent, the book would have benefited from a more regional treatment of Al-Qaeda's franchises in the past decade, looking at the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa in addition to Afghanistan and Iraq.

In no small part, Bergen's book is an account of the strategic errors and miscalculations on both sides of the conflict. The 9/11 attacks almost destroyed bin Laden's network, and lost it the safe haven it had once enjoyed in Afghanistan. Likewise, though the Iraq war was a gift to the jihadist movement, allowing it to regenerate itself in the heart of the Arab world, it squandered any popularity capital Al-Qaeda had in resisting the occupation through its wanton and indiscriminate violence targeting fellow Muslims. Given the opportunity to mess up, Al-Qaeda frequently has done so. Likewise on the American part, concerning the intelligence failure of 9/11, Bergen writes "[r]arely have the enemies of the United States publicly warned so often of their plans." Moreover in the decade since, Bergen depicts the worldwide sympathy for the US in the wake of 9/11 dwindling amid an adventurist foreign policy and a disdain for international legal protocols on extradition, torture, child soldiers, and prisoner rights.

There can be no mistake about Al-Qaeda and its sisters being products of the authoritarian regimes found across the Middle East and Central Asia. Though its members vigorously reject the ruling systems 'back home' and opt instead for the austere life of wandering 'Strangers', the organization itself mirrors such regimes quite profoundly in its make-up. Structured around the personality cult of a front man, the underlying architecture of Al-Qaeda, writes Bergen, is intensely bureaucratic with its committees, admin, and form-filling. Its appeal may be utopian and escapist, but its reality is both squalid and mundane.

Bergen suggests that an attitude of "if you are against the terrorists, then you are with us" would have been strategically more helpful to the US than "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists". Yet the latter is precisely the attitude that *was* taken by the Bush administration in the years since 9/11, and it was used to justify sustaining the continued rule of authoritarian regimes across the Muslim-majority world as valued allies in a "war on terror".

The author sees the events of 1979 as being of profound importance in inspiring and shaping the 22 year old Osama's vision of world politics. Indeed, 1979 was a remarkable year in the Middle East: a peace deal signed between Egypt and Israel, a pro-US authoritarian regime ousted in Iran by a popular uprising, gunmen taking over the Grand Mosque in Mecca in dissent against the house of Saud, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. More than three decades later, one can only speculate on what impact the events in the Arab world of 2011 will have on shaping the world-views of today's 22 year olds. Though Bergen's CNN jargon occasionally gets the better of him, with passages describing the "feeling that burns inside bin Laden..." a "blind hatred" and a "fanaticism [that] burned so hot", Bergen's assessments of the political landscapes are sensible and his history of the past decade remains lively and informative.

About the Reviewer: *Richard Phelps* is an Associate Fellow at the Quilliam Foundation (London). He focuses on the history and development of Islamist dissent in the Arabic world.

Victor D. Comras. *Flawed Diplomacy: the United Nations & the War on Terrorism*. Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2010. 265 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59797-438-7 (hc). US \$ 29.95

Reviewed by Naureen Chowdhury Fink

Even to close observers, the United Nations can be frustratingly opaque, with decisions often being taken in hushed corridors, smoky coffee shops or behind closed doors. Victor Comras' book, *Flawed Diplomacy: the United Nations and the War on Terrorism*, therefore provides a welcome insight into the complex processes which shaped the UN's response to the terrorist threat since September 11, 2001. As the tenth anniversary of those events approaches, the UN and its members will find themselves asking what impact their decisions have had on the threat posed by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Are mechanisms set in place a decade ago still relevant to contemporary realities on the ground? Comras, a senior US career diplomat, addresses these questions with a 'no-holds-barred' approach that makes for a distinct change from the more diplomatic language used around Turtle Bay. But these are important questions and it is a particularly timely reminder of the need for the UN and its membership to consider the necessary answers.

Flawed Diplomacy begins with a history of the UN's engagement on international terrorism, highlighting Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim's efforts to put it on the agenda after the attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympics - after some earlier efforts to take a more technical approach to international counterterrorism policy. Comras then moves into the heart of the matter: the sanctions regime and the related monitoring mechanism against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1267 (1999), and those entities established to help implement resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1540 (2004). The UN's Global Counterterrorism Strategy (2006) and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (2005) established to support it receive a brief mention but there is little analysis about their potential impact and the important diplomatic and political steps that they represent.

The relative speed with which the UN has established its counterterrorism architecture since 9/11 is especially appreciable given its members' historical reluctance to address international terrorism in the UN. However, as the book notes, the focus has largely been more on process and less on results. This underscores Comras' key argument: that the 1267 sanctions regime is weakened by the Council's lack of enforcement mechanisms and its reluctance to "name and shame" noncompliant states and hold them accountable.

These arguments are not without merit. Comras rightly echoes an often-made critique that the UN's counterterrorism efforts lack "teeth" and that they are usually so influenced by political dynamics among states as to be watered down to the lowest common denominator. His argument that the 1267 regime risks being outdated has been raised by several states themselves; they have

also suggested that the very technical nature of this anti- Al-Qaeda/Taliban regime often isolates it from political dynamics on the ground. This is particularly relevant given ongoing discussions about the role of the 1267 Committee's "Consolidated List" of individuals and entities supporting terrorism in the political dialogue underway in Afghanistan. Comras also argues that the list captures only a small number of Al-Qaeda operatives and supporters, making it "sorely out of date." This is a vital question as Al-Qaeda reportedly moves towards a more decentralized structure and states are increasingly concerned about the threat posed by lone actors or "homegrown" terrorists who are, of course, not on the Consolidated List.

Comras reserves some of his most pointed criticism for the political culture and diplomacy that he believes transformed the original independent Monitoring Group (of which he was part), able to publicly cite non-compliant countries, into the Monitoring Team, more closely supervised by the Security Council's 1267 Committee and the UN Secretariat. To address these deficiencies, Comras suggests a return to the "name-and-shame" approach, giving the Monitoring Team some means of holding non-compliant states accountable. Additionally, he pleads for "concrete results" such as the adoption of a comprehensive counterterrorism convention, a consensus definition of terrorism and a report on steps actually taken by states to implement the Security Council resolutions.

Creditable though Comras' recommendations may be, these call for an apolitical response – a technical monitoring exercise – in what he acknowledges to be a "heavily politicized international forum." He comes across as dismissive of any challenges to the validity of the UN's counterterrorism efforts, whether by groups of states or in the form of ongoing legal challenges to the sanctions. Yet, the perceived legitimacy of the regime and buy-in from the broader UN membership is vital to ensuring their compliance and making it effective. Comras admits that no studied assessment exists about the effects of asset freezing; yet he presumes that they nonetheless have a deterrent value and claims that the 'criticality' of the Consolidated List cannot be understated. No evidence is presented to actually substantiate that claim.

Flawed Diplomacy also faces the challenge of trying to capture a moving target. Its historical approach is valuable but, while much of its commentary was relatively valid at the time of writing, it does not keep pace with the contemporary discourse. Between the time the manuscript was submitted and the time many readers will pick it up, events and discussions at the UN and within the international community more broadly, have moved forward. Many of the critiques he raises are being echoed by the 1267 Committee and its Monitoring Team members themselves and there are efforts underway to address them – most notably, in terms of updating the list and considering its relationship to ongoing political events, in particular, in Afghanistan.

Like Comras, experts at the UN have also themselves raised the question of the 1267 regime's impact. And, like the experts, Comras offers ways of improving the system without quite

challenging its existence altogether. However, if the sanctions regime cannot deliver on asset freezes, travel bans or in any way inhibit the activities of listed individuals and groups, what is its real purpose? Given the diffuse nature of today's terrorist threat, is such a list still an appropriate response? If states feel that it is, they must act to ensure that its keeper is granted all the necessary tools to make it truly effective. However, if not, then - as one ambassador recently noted in a query - we may be paying too high a price with civil liberties for such a regime.

Comras' book is valuable in that it provides a timely description of what is often an opaque political process; it raises valuable questions about international efforts to address terrorism. However, for this reviewer, it is clearly a very personalized perspective that would have done better had it focused more on the 1267 regime and the author's own experiences with the Monitoring Group, rather than including a historical overview, and commentary on the definitional question or the role of the Secretary-General. Comras fails to appreciate that, given states' sensitivities regarding the counterterrorism agenda, it is often not that the UN diplomacy is flawed but that member states act to prevent the UN from adopting measures perceived as contrary to their interests.

About the Reviewer: *Naureen Chowdhury Fink is a Senior Policy Analyst at the International Peace Institute, in New York, working on counterterrorism and transnational security challenges.*

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About Perspectives on Terrorism

PT seeks to provide a unique platform for established scholars as well as academics and professionals entering the field of Terrorism, Political Violence and Conflict Studies. It invites them to:

- present their perspectives on the prevention of, and response to, terrorism and related forms of violent conflict;
- submit to the journal accounts of evidence-based, empirical scientific research and analyses;
- use the journal as a forum for debate and commentary on issues related to the above.

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT) could be characterized as ‘nontraditional’ in that it dispenses with some of the traditional rigidities associated with commercial print journals. Topical articles can be published at short notice and reach, through the Internet, a much larger audience than fee-based subscription journals. Our on-line journal also offers contributors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles - but without compromising professional scholarly standards. While aiming to be policy-relevant, PT is not supporting any partisan policies regarding (counter-) terrorism and conflict-waging. Impartiality, objectivity and accuracy are guiding principles we expect contributors to adhere to.

Editorial Team of Perspectives on Terrorism:

Alex P. Schmid, Editor

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Tim Pippard, Assistant Editor

Shazad Ali, Assistant Editor

Brad McAllister, Assistant Editor

Eric Price, Editorial Assistant

About the Terrorism Research Initiative:

PT is the journal of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* - an initiative that seeks to support the international community of terrorism researchers and analysts by facilitating coordination and cooperative initiatives. TRI was formed in 2007 by a broad association of individual scholars and representatives of institutions in order to provide the academic community as well as counter-terrorism analysts and practitioners with scientific tools to contribute to the enhancement of human security by collaborative research – thereby allowing them to better actualize the full potential of their efforts. TRI is working to build a truly inclusive international research

community and seeks to empower it by creating synergies that can extend the impact of each participant's research endeavours.

The Journal can be accessed at the following website URL:

www.terrorismanalysts.com

Legal Note: *Perspectives on Terrorism* hosts articles that reflect a diversity of opinions. The views expressed therein, and the empirical evidence cited in their support, remain the sole responsibility of the contributing authors; they do not necessarily reflect positions and views of the journal's Editorial Team or its parent organization, the *Terrorism Research Initiative*

Greetings and Welcome to 'Perspectives on Terrorism'

It is an pleasure to welcome you to one of the newer publications in the field of Terrorism Studies. We would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our journal and explain in a few words the underlying impetus that motivates us and the intended direction of this online publication and the underlying *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI).

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT) seeks to provide a unique platform for established and emerging scholars to present their perspectives on the developing field of Terrorism Studies, based on scholarship focusing on political violence and armed conflict; to present original research and analysis and to provide a forum for discourse and commentary on related issues. The journal could be characterized as 'non-traditional' in that it dispenses with some of the traditional rigidities of academic journals in order to allow its editors and authors a higher degree of flexibility in terms of content, style and length of articles while at the same time maintaining professional scholarly standards. Although PT differs from other publications in the field, it is intended to be complementary and non-competitive. Indeed, the establishment of this journal was brought about in consultation with leaders in the field of terrorism and political violence studies, several of whom have also editorial responsibilities for various other scholarly journals.

One of the objectives of *Perspectives on Terrorism* is to allow authors to write on subjects or present thoughts that might precipitate further debates and commentary from the wider community of scholars studying violence and conflict and how to prevent and counter such threats to human security. Since PT is using an electronic platform, it is possible to engage in discourse more promptly than in paper-based publications.

PT is a journal of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI), an initiative that seeks to support the international community of terrorism researchers and scholars through the facilitation of collaborative projects and cooperative initiatives. TRI was formed in 2007 by scholars from various disciplines in order to provide the global research community with a common tool than can empower them and extend the impact of each participant's research activities. By including promising young scholars working on their PhD theses as Research Assistants in its network, the *Terrorism Research Initiative* also seeks to create opportunities for them to enter the circle of more established scholars and analysts. To enhance the quality of academic research in the field, TRI has facilitated the publication of the *Handbook of Terrorism Research* [London: Routledge, 2011; 736 pp. ISBN: 13: 978-0-415-41157-8 (hbk)], by Prof. Alex P. Schmid, Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

TRI Openings (*May 2011*)**1. Editorial Assistant (PT)****2. Research Assistants (TRI)**

TRI is currently accepting applications for Research Assistants, Editorial Assistants as well as Technical Assistants for Information Technology. Responsibilities for these part-time, non-paid positions will include assisting the Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism* and the Director of TRI with developing collaborative projects, conducting in-depth topical research, and assisting with the daily activities of the Initiative.

The Editorial Assistant position will support the production of TRI's *Perspectives on Terrorism* journal.

Responsibilities of Research Assistants (RA) will include assisting the Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism* and the Director of TRI with monitoring terrorist organizations and developments, developing collaborative projects, conducting in-depth topical research as well as offering assistance with the daily activities of the Initiative.

Interested candidates should send a letter (e-mail) outlining their motivation to apply for a TRI position. In addition, they should attach a CV/Resume to the letter (and, if available, a publication list) as well as the names of two references who are familiar with their work and educational achievements to info@terrorismanalysts.com. Applicants with an interest in integrating emerging web-based technologies and techniques into scholarly activities are especially encouraged to apply.

The workload of TRI positions is flexible and negotiable but averages 5-10 hours per week. RA positions run for six months (renewable) whereby the first month is a trial month.

International Advisory Board of the Terrorism Research Initiative

Adam Dolnik is the Director of Research Programs and Professor at the Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention (CTCP) at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He has just been appointed as Professor of Counterterrorism at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security Studies in Germany.

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Participating Institutions of the Terrorism Research Initiative

Athena Intelligence, Spain. <http://www.athenaintelligence.org/>

Center on Terrorism, John Jay College, USA.

Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (CTC) at Campus The Hague of Leiden University, Netherlands. <http://www.campusdenhaag.nl/ctc>

Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), University of St. Andrews, Scotland. <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/>

Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention (CTCP), University of Wollongong, Australia.

Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, USA. <http://www.comops.org/>

Defense & Strategic Studies Department, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Global Terrorism Research Centre (GTReC), Monash University, Australia.

International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), Singapore.

International Center for the Study of Terrorism, Pennsylvania State University, USA.

Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism, Syracuse University, USA. <http://insct.syr.edu/>

The Institute of International and European Affairs, (IIEA), Dublin, Ireland, with a branch in Brussels.

Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Islamabad, Pakistan.

Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), Athens, Greece. www.rieas.gr

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