THE ROLE OF TERRORISM IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY WARFARE

Susanne Martin and Leonard Weinberg

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN TERRORISM STUDIES

A series edited by

Max Taylor

Professor in International Relations (retired), University of St Andrews, Scotland where he was formerly Director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence

P. M. Currie

Senior Visiting Fellow at the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, Scotland

John Horgan

Associate Professor of Science, Technology and Society and Director of the International Centre for the Study of Terrorism at Pennsylvania State University, USA

New Directions in Terrorism Studies aims to introduce new and innovative approaches to understanding terrorism and the terrorist. It does this by bringing forward innovative ideas and concepts to assist the practitioner, analyst and academic to better understand and respond to the threat of terrorism, challenging existing assumptions and moving the debate forward into new areas. The approach is characterized by an emphasis on intellectual quality and rigor, interdisciplinary perspectives, and a drawing together of theory and practice. The key qualities of the series are contemporary relevance, accessibility and innovation.

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Abbreviations

17N	Revolutionary Organization 17 November (Greece)
AK	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
ALF	Animal Liberation Front
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
AQAP	al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	al Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AS	al Shabaab (Somalia)
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
AUC	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organization (South Africa)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
COIN	counterinsurgency
COW	Correlates of War
ELA	Revolutionary Popular Struggle (Greece)
ELF	Earth Liberation Front
ELN	National Liberation Army (Colombia)
ETA	Basque Fatherland and Liberty (Spain)
EU	European Union
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FMLN	Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (El Salvador)

FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GIA	Armed Islamic Group of Algeria
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IED	improvised explosive device
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sharm
JDP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
JVP	People's Liberation Front (Sri Lanka)
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LeT	Lashkar-e Tayyiba (Pakistan, India)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Tamil Tigers
M-19	19th April Movement (Colombia)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress (South Africa)
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army, Provos
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Turkey)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
RAF	Red Army Faction (Germany)
RAHOWA	racial holy war (United States)
RMA	revolution in military affairs

ABBREVIATIONS

START	National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (University of Maryland, United States)
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UHRO	Ustasha – Croatian Revolutionary Organization
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	weapon of mass destruction

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Introduction

Most observers cannot help but notice that each of the major armed conflicts that occurred during the 1990s and the first decade of the present century – Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria – has involved the use of terrorism by one or more of the contestants, at one time or another. Conflicts involving armed non-state actors challenging states and each other have become the main form of warfare thus far in the new millennium. The main participants are insurgents and counterinsurgents. Their conflicts are primarily internal, though they occasionally cross borders. They often involve outsiders, including states and other non-state actors, supporting one side or the other. The conflicts are carried out with a type of brutality that can be expected when the people of a country turn on each other and the institutions responsible for upholding law and order and protecting the population begin to fail. The types of weapons used by contestants in the armed conflicts of the twenty-first century are less sophisticated than those available to states. Whereas states may carry out wars from the sky or sea, or at least from a distance, with the aid of satellites, long-range missiles and other sophisticated technologies, the armed non-state actors fighting in the present century's armed conflicts do so primarily on the ground and at close range.

Another feature of warfare in the twenty-first century – the global battle being waged against perpetrators of terrorism – was not part of earlier warfare. The "global war on terrorism" began with the aim of eliminating the threat posed by transnational terrorists, al Qaeda in particular. As the "war" progressed, political vacuums were opened, insecurities were manifested, and new violent actors emerged. Localized violence pitted armed groups (some of them affiliated with al Qaeda) against states, local communities, and each other. Meanwhile, some of the same armed groups, which are

identified at times as "terrorists" and at other times as "insurgents," have contributed to sectarian conflict in Iraq, civil war in Syria, and civil unrest in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Some of the "terrorist" groups that have received so much of the focus during the "war on terrorism" have become "insurgents," though they continue to use the types of violence typically identified as "terrorism."[1]

The discussion that follows concerns the role of terrorism in twenty-first century warfare.[2] This is a study of the ways in which militants use terrorism to trigger and sustain insurgency. It is also a study of the ways in which the resort to terrorism may signal an end to insurgency, or its failure. The text that follows introduces, describes, and analyzes patterns in the incidence of terrorism as a tactic used in wars past and present. Drawing insights from these patterns, this study addresses implications for efforts to counter the continuing threat.

An evolving threat

There are reasons to believe that terrorism's role in wider-scale warfare has changed since the beginning of the new millennium. The ways in which the use of terrorism has changed are apparent through observations of terrorists and their tactics, targets, and objectives. These changes are not occurring in a vacuum. They are not disconnected from the groups currently using terrorism or the ideologies that drive these groups. Nor are these changes occurring independently of other changes in the international environment.

The new millennium began a decade after the apparent end of communism as an ideological rival to Western ideas and influence in the world.[3] This period also marked the decline of a communist bloc capable of challenging Western hegemony and power. Communism and the superpower seemingly spearheading its spread ceased to be a common threat for its Western and non-Western opponents. The new era brought with it new ideas, which are shared via new technologies. This era has also seen the rise and fall of state and non-state actors, a new distribution of power and new perceptions of threats, as well as a continuation of an old competition among state and non-state actors seeking to maintain or increase their power. The relevance of non-state actors in this competition for power and influence represents a continuation of earlier efforts with two notable exceptions – the introduction of a religious ideology and objectives and the more global nature of some of these objectives. Among the armed non-state actors of the twenty-first century are some seeking not to change the government or political system within a single state but rather to establish a religious system of governance

that bridges continents and incorporates (or subsumes) otherwise diverse national and religious communities.

In this context, non-state actors challenge states – including the strongest states – as they learned to do decades earlier in places like Vietnam, Iran, and Afghanistan. These are archetypal weak actors, whose targets include even weaker actors: civilians. Most of their attacks take place locally, close to the groups' primary areas of operations. The same groups attacking civilians also target states and their militaries, as well as each other. These groups are the main actors in the first wars of the twenty-first century.

There are precedents regarding the use of terrorism by weak actors in warfare and, in particular, in insurgency. There is also observable evidence that terrorism and warfare are changing. Terrorists and terrorist groups have "adapted."[4] The tactics they use have changed as have the tools available for their use. In some cases, the same groups have been labeled as "terrorist" and "insurgent." Similarly, references to "counterterrorism" and "counter-insurgency" have become practically interchangeable.[5] Given attention to specifying definitions and references to these terms – in particular to "terrorism" in the first decades of the twenty-first century – it is possible that these developments indicate the evolution of a modern threat more than a lack of conceptual clarity.

Changes in terrorism are not surprising; they are practically expected. David Rapoport, for instance, observes changes in the dominant ideologies of groups using terrorism at different periods in time, as well as the targets of attacks and types of attacks that are prevalent at a given time.[6] Despite these variations, one understanding that has not changed much over the years is that terrorism is a "weapon of the weak."[7] Those groups relying primarily or exclusively on terrorism tend to do so when they are too weak to engage their adversaries directly. They are weak actors in military terms, especially in comparison to the military strength of states. They are also weak in political terms. They often lack popular support and legitimacy, even among their presumed or desired constituency. Their primary targets – unarmed civilians – are even weaker.

If terrorism is the weapon of these weak actors, then one may expect that terrorists could be easily quashed by the superior power of states and their militaries. This is not always the case. Terrorists' strength lies in their clandestine nature, their ability to hide among a noncombatant population, and their capacity to survive, even when they cannot achieve their objectives. In reality, some terrorist groups are more capable challengers than others. Hence, some terrorist groups may pose a greater threat than others.

There is another point of reference for the question of whether or not states can defeat terrorists. This is the twenty-first century's "global war

on terror." The goals expressed by those administering this "war" seem straightforward enough: reduce the threats posed by non-state actors willing to use terrorism, and especially those threatening national security and international peace.[8] With this goal in mind, it would seem like an oversight not to make note of the ways in which the armed groups on which the war on terrorism has focused – for instance, al Qaeda and its affiliates – use terrorism as one tactic within a more diversified arsenal. Moreover, it would also seem like an oversight to discount the violent conflicts that have followed the initiation of the war on terrorism. Many of these new wars are occurring in or near the places where the war on terrorism has been focused. Among the participants in these wars are some groups previously identified as terrorists. Some of the groups known to have used terrorism before and after September 11, 2001, are also engaging in forms of wider-scale warfare, including insurgency. This is not to suggest that the same groups have abandoned terrorism; instead, terrorism is a tactic they may continue to use in the context of insurgency.

The threat posed by insurgent groups in the twenty-first century is not limited to terrorism employed outside of war. These terrorists and now insurgents are engaging in wider-scale warfare. They seek to replace some prevailing order. In the process, insurgent groups can be expected to carry out the same types of attacks against military and civilian targets.[9] If their coercive capacity grows, they may find harder, better fortified state and military targets more accessible. As this happens, they are likely to expand their repertoire of tactics and targets. This does not mean that the terrorists-turned-insurgents will cease to attack civilians, nor does it mean that they will use different types of weapons when targeting state or military entities. Rather, they will likely continue using the same types of weapons (e.g., guns, bombs, suicide vests) with which they have become familiar and adept. They can apply the weapons and tactics rehearsed in attacks against softer (e.g., civilian) targets in their attacks on harder targets. To the extent that perpetuating fear is a goal of these groups, they may continue to pursue this goal and achieve it regardless of the targets of their attacks. There is an assumption that with sufficient resources, terrorist-insurgents may begin engaging in the types of activities more commonly associated with guerrilla warfare, including sabotage, hit-and-run attacks, and other tactics used by the weaker parties in militarized disputes. There is, however, no reason to assume that these activities must exclude terrorism, nor is there reason to believe that guerrilla warfare will be played out according to the styles set by earlier guerrillas. As Walter Laqueur has suggested, the conditions for guerrilla warfare as seen during the Cold War may no longer exist.[10]

Furthermore, the association between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) is not surprising given the evolving threat posed by the