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Editors



TERRORISM, HOT SPOTS AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES

The Theory and Practice of Terrorism

Alternative Paths of Inquiry

NOVA

TERRORISM, HOT SPOTS AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES

**THE THEORY
AND PRACTICE OF TERRORISM
ALTERNATIVE PATHS OF INQUIRY**

**ELENA MASTORS
AND
RHEA SIERS
EDITORS**

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Chapter 1

GAPS IN THE STUDY OF TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies in the area of terrorism studies were conducted since September 11, 2001. Even so, there are still gaps in the study of terrorism. The chapters assembled in this book focused on what was missing, and how could focusing on those gaps better inform operational and policy decision making. The chapters were assembled into two broad areas: alternative models and approaches and definitional issues and emerging fundamentals. The authors represent a depth and breadth of experience and knowledge, address a number of different areas, and provide unique insight into the gaps in the field.

INTRODUCTION

In the sixteen years since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there was an explosion of terrorism related research, analysis, and publications. There

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was also significant growth in intelligence, policy and think tank positions focused on the topic. Like any growing field, there is a wide body of knowledge, expertise, and breadth of focus. Despite the significant amount of information generated in the last sixteen years, there are still gaps in the area of terrorism research. Those who spend significant time in the field, often point out these gaps in their study of terrorist activities, groups, and uses of violence. Gaps come in a variety of forms. They usually offer alternative evidence, different perspectives, and theories and approaches not thoroughly addressed by academics, policymakers, policy experts, and media commentators that could inform our understanding of terrorist behavior, and provide much more robust information to inform operational and policy decision making.

The purpose of this book is to address some of the identified gaps in the study of terrorism. To do so, we assembled a diverse team of academic and professional experts on terrorism and asked them to focus, from their perspective, on what the field was missing. Specifically, we asked them to answer the following questions: What are the current gaps in terrorism studies, and how can focusing on these gaps better inform our policy and operational decision making? The answers to the questions we posed to our authors were diverse, which was not surprising given the breadth of the field, and their education and expertise. However, that is not to say there were not some main areas of convergence. In organizing the chapters, we realized that generally, one set of authors addressed topics involving alternative models and approaches, while the other focused on definitional issues and emerging fundamentals. Within these general areas, while focusing on different topics, there was also agreement on how to address the gaps referred to by the authors. We now turn to an overview of the book within these two general areas.

CHAPTER TOPICS

Alternative Models and Approaches

The first set of authors in the book, concentrated on alternative approaches and models to answering the question about current gaps in terrorism research, and how focusing on them can better inform our decision making. With this in mind, Thachuk and Lal addressed the area of terrorism and criminal enterprises. The authors pointed out that terrorist groups have long engaged in criminal activities,

and many experts argued that they do so while still maintaining their ideological or religious zealotry. Thachuk and Lal suggested the opposite, and provided case studies of the FARC, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Daesh to illustrate that the appeal of money leads to an evolution from a terrorist to criminal group. The metamorphosis results in an adaptation of tactics and strategies, and recruitment needs. Obviously, these conclusions have implications for policy and operational counterterrorism planning.

Along the same lines, Alexander suggested that errors in framing female terrorists has serious consequences. She argued that popular conceptions of differences amongst female and male terrorists, drives erroneous media coverage, and the serious misconception that they are less threatening than males. Siers and Mastors also used the case study approach to demonstrate how counterterrorism and information operations techniques used against the Abu Nidal Organization led to its demise. However, they also argued that by examining these multi-pronged effective techniques in the areas of targeting criminal enterprises, leadership and mid-level operatives, and psychological vulnerabilities, there are lessons learned that can be applied in current counterterrorism planning. In other words, past wins are still applicable to counterterrorism operations today.

Siers proposed using simulated exercises to aid students in understanding the challenges of interpreting terrorist group behavior with limited information often indicative of intelligence collection. She provides a learning tool to demonstrate the “analytic gaps” that can occur, the reality of alternate analysis and the difficulty in presenting responsive options to policy makers. Exercises as a learning tool leads to generation of alternative viewpoints and analysis.

In her chapter, Hesterman argued for a new approach to studying terrorism and proposed that organizational and behavioral sciences provide alternative and significant insight. But, she goes a step further in suggesting that based on these insights, like Siers and Mastors, she proposed a series of operational disruptive activities to be pursued. These include targeting group conflict, cohesiveness, decision making, individual group members, and the environment.

It is worth noting that some of what was proposed in the areas of targeting, were also lessons learned from the case of Abu Nidal. This suggests that operational approaches and outcomes, and theoretical approaches converge in agreement.

Definitional Issues and Emerging Fundamentals

The second portion of the book focused on authors who wrote about definitional issues and emerging fundamentals in the field of terrorism studies. Vidino, Hughes, and Papatheodorou tackled the subject of countering violent extremism (CVE). They explained the practice of CVE in the West, and discussed the effectiveness and need for targeted interventions to address radicalism at its earlier stages. In his chapter, Campos addressed the topic of root causes, a much studied and controversial area. Campos explained the debate and argued that the discussion of root causes enhances the overall understanding of this security issue. Like Campos, Miller also looked at drivers of terrorist behavior and joining of terrorist groups. However, he focused specifically on the subject of the social construct of hypermasculinity and its relation to terrorism. The author maintained that males participate in violent and extremist behavior because of a perceived or real emasculating marginalization. Finally, McQuinn took a look at the role that religious asceticism and performative devotion plays in Islamic extremists sects. She suggested a connection between a lack of performative expression in the religion and terrorist recruitment.

CONCLUSION

As is evident from the discussion above, though the authors are diverse in background and approach, they often come to similar conclusions. From the strategic level, the authors point out that there are clearly a myriad of gaps in the study of terrorism. Additionally, often times, although approaching topics from different theoretical or operational vantage points, they draw similar conclusions about the nature of terrorism, and what should be done moving forward. Overall, the chapters offer a wide range of thinking on the question, and offer policymakers and operational planners much to think about and apply.

Chapter 2

TERRORIST CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT

Terrorist networks may initially be ideological, but the illegal nature of their activities leads to their transformation into organized crime groups in order to continue their operations. Financing continued terrorist attacks, including the payment of terror fighters and supporters requires vast sums of cash. Terror groups such as the FARC, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Daesh resolved their need for money by entering the world of organized crime and trafficking, thereby blurring the lines between their own activities and those of other criminal syndicates. As governments moved to intercept terror finance, these groups moved further into the shadow economy. The FARC, originally a revolutionary Marxist insurgency, transformed into a capitalist and criminal enterprise supported by the sale of cocaine, kidnapping, extortion, and robberies. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb supports its activities through kidnapping, trafficking in drugs and weapons, and smuggling, although these activities are clearly in opposition to its ideological and religious goals. Daesh in Iraq and Syria similarly pursued criminal businesses to expand its reach. Extortion of occupants and businesses in its territories provides half of the group's income, while the capture of oil assets and the trafficking of antiquities and

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drugs such as Captagon provide considerable illegal profits for Daesh. In Afghanistan, Daesh continued its use of drug trafficking as a source of income, seeking to wrest control of the heroin trade from the Taliban. Each of these groups can certainly be termed terrorist in that their goals remain firmly to politically control people through the use of terrorist activity. However, their transformation into profit-making terrorist criminal enterprises calls for new strategies that attack them as organized crime.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, terrorist groups evolved from orthodox global insurgents funded by a handful of rogue sponsors into nimble and profitable transnational criminal enterprises whose motivations are not always evident or ideologically pure. Like traditional organized crime,¹ terrorist criminal enterprises engage in a variety of illicit operations including large-scale drug trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, the theft and sale of antiquities, illegal mining, and oil bunkering. Indeed, the factors that distinguish terrorist criminal enterprises from traditional organized crime may only be their motivation for raising money and the manner in which the illicit funds are spent. Hence, it is increasingly difficult, and arguably fruitless, to continue to classify terrorists and organized crime separately.

Understanding that terrorist groups are criminal enterprises will provide a fresh perspective on terrorism. Breaking the false dichotomy that defines these groups as separate phenomena will have far-reaching consequences for the manner in which states deter and dismantle terrorist groups. Since September 11, 2001, countering terrorism has become its own industry for entire government departments. In particular, competitive bureaucracies often guard jealously their monopolies on countering terrorism and thereby tend to endorse particularistic and outmoded definitions for defining it. Yet, rather than continuing to treat terrorists as zealots who fund their activities through illicit means, such groups should be understood for their engagement in complex illicit commerce; that is, their ideological goals should not obscure the fact they act as organized criminal enterprises. Hence, clinging to moribund policy categorizations ultimately may be counterproductive to addressing the problem

¹ The FBI defines organized crime as any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. Such groups maintain their position through the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupt public officials, graft, or extortion, and generally have a significant impact on the people in their locales, region, or the country as a whole.

of terrorism. This chapter seeks to redefine this phenomenon using the cases of three terrorist groups that transformed into terrorist criminal enterprises. These are the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Daesh² (formerly al-Qaeda in Iraq).

THE EVOLUTION TO TERRORIST CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES

The gangsterization of terrorist groups was not always a straightforward process. Many did not embrace criminal enterprise rapidly or readily, often because crimes such as drug trafficking are viewed as antithetical to their ideological or religious values (Lal 2007). In general, necessity was the motivating factor: criminal activity ensured group survival. Terrorists began to raise money when successful anti-money laundering initiatives combined with the global economic downturn led state sponsors to withdraw financial support. This meant groups such as al-Qaeda had to find reliable alternative sources of income to fund both short and long term operations. As a result, many terrorists began to delve into criminal enterprise through “nexus” or convergence relationships with more traditional organized criminal groups. Initially this involved guarding drug labs, and providing security for airstrips, or paying counterfeiters to provide fake identity documents (Cornell 2005; Lal 2005; Makarenko and Mesquita 2014; Makarenko 2015; Rollins and Wyler 2013; Shelley et al. 2005). Over time, recognizing they could make more money through their own illicit enterprise, many groups began acquiring criminal competencies, and soon were engaged in extortion, credit card fraud, bank robberies and other street crime. From there they graduated into drug, arms, and human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, and other crimes traditionally thought to be the purview of organized crime. They were wildly successful.

What likely obfuscated much of this criminal trajectory was the fact that although terrorists developed a range of illicit enterprises, most did not lose their ideological and/or religious zealotry. Rather, the reverse may be true. The large amounts of money realized through organized criminal activity not only allows these groups to prosper, increase their numbers, and buy matériel, but it also enables them to promulgate their ideologies more widely. Moreover, in some cases younger recruits need more incentives than simply ideology to make up for the privations they encounter in places like Iraq and Syria. That is not to say that engaging in criminal enterprise did not alter the ideological complexion of

² Also known as Islamic State (IS), and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

many terrorist groups. In some instances, such as occurred with the FARC, over time and as immense profits are realized, many groups' ideological goals become subordinate to their criminal enterprise. Hence, in such cases, the more professionalized and business-minded the criminal modus operandi, the less terrorists may be able to cling to their ideals. Some of this stems from newer members being recruited into an organization that already is financially dependent on illicit activities, and whose members enjoy lavish criminal lifestyles. Once introduced to such wealth, its lure often corrupts and supplants loftier ideals, leaving ideology to serve as little more than the group's façade (Rosenthal 2008).

In the mid-2000s, terrorist groups like al-Qaeda began to move into more networked and devolved cell structures. In the West this trend manifested in small groups of young men who formed what the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) calls "groups of guys" (Thachuk et al. 2008). Often radicalized via the internet, these largely unemployed, second generation immigrants bond over feelings of social alienation. Many meet while serving time in prison, often for petty crimes. In "prison school houses," they are further radicalized and meet more sophisticated criminal entrepreneurs who teach them advanced illicit tactics and methods. The Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004 were one of the first attacks to showcase the new breed of terrorist criminal enterprises (Williams 2008). Its military planner, also a Moroccan drug trafficker named Jamal Ahmidan, led a "small, but effective drug trafficking group, which smuggled hashish from Morocco and ecstasy from Holland to Spain," the proceeds of which paid not only for the weapons and matériel for the attack, but also for transportation, phones, and safe houses for the bombers (Rotella 2004).

In more tribal societies, terrorist groups such as AQIM, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Taliban traditionally engaged in smuggling of contraband. AQIM emerged from tribal structures that for centuries trafficked humans for the transatlantic slave trade. It began as an insurgency against the "apostate regime in Algeria." In 2007, it turned to criminal enterprise including smuggling of contraband, cigarettes, weapons, and drugs to fund increasingly violent assaults. In Central Asia, the IMU rose out of the ashes of the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) to launch a protracted insurgency against a number of the region's governments which it funds through narcotics trafficking. Its criminality causes many members to also "drink alcohol, poach women, [and] survive on banditry ..." (Pakistan's Militant Drift 2007). In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban long exercised feudal control over contract killings, kidnapping, arms and drug trafficking, and extortion campaigns on a local scale (Lal 2005). To counter coalition forces after the US-

led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, its commanders became involved in “systematically promoting, financing, organizing, and protecting the drug trade” (Moreau 2013). Yet, the huge profits from narcotics are not always invested in terrorism, but instead leaders build flashy mansions, and buy new Toyota Land Cruisers, and other luxury items.

Finally, some revolutionary terrorist groups internationalized their criminal enterprises to realize greater profits. Groups such as the FARC, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the PKK/KONGRA-GEL all maintain convincing guerrilla wings that sometimes engage in fierce battles against authorities, but which camouflage decades of criminal enterprise. They are highly successful especially in Europe where the latter two groups extort their respective diaspora communities, and engage in drug and human trafficking, human smuggling, as well as credit card fraud.

Once instituted in the criminal world many terrorist groups changed their operational goals and strategies. Like traditional organized crime, in addition to savvy criminal operators with a variety of skills, successful terrorist criminal enterprises require safe havens and corrupt law enforcement to guarantee impunity (Thachuk 2008). To maintain a monopoly over their criminal operations, some groups prefer to dominate quasi-lawless regions— even if their turf only consists of an immigrant neighborhood into which the police rarely venture, such as Molenbeek, Belgium where the November 2015 Paris attacks were planned. These “hubs of badness” also range from areas such as the *despeje* (safehaven) zone in Colombia³ controlled by the FARC, to the Rasht Valley in Tajikistan sometimes dominated by the IMU, to sprawling “feral” cities like Karachi and Lagos, to suburbs built from drug cash like “Cocaineboujou”⁴ in Mali, to vast territories in Iraq and Syria ruled by Daesh (Keefe 2013; Norton 2003).

In such locales, tacit citizens’ acceptance, if not their full cooperation, is important to successful criminal operations. As with conventional organized crime, within their turfs, terrorist criminal enterprises often coopt the local populations. It is presumably easier to operate criminal schemes in places where the majority of the public does not actively undermine, and may even assist illicit transactions. Often the image of ideological or religious purity is

³ In January 1999, following an agreement with the Colombian government the FARC took control of a 15,000-square mile area, known as the *zona de despeje* from which the government withdrew its security forces.

⁴ As a result of the money earned in the cocaine trade, local drug lords erected mansions in neighborhoods known popularly as Cocaine City (Cité de Cocaine or “Cocaineboujou”) on the outskirts of Gao.

cultivated, especially where the people are religiously adherent. At the same time, ‘salaries’ are paid to a wide range of people including young men with few employment prospects. In Mali for example, new members of Islamist militant groups receive a monthly salary of roughly \$900 -- a terrific sum in a country with a GDP of \$1,100 (Melnikov 2013). Finally, many terrorist criminal enterprises engage in public relations campaigns and provide social services to local communities. Their provision of housing, schools, hospitals, sports centers and even public markets is well-received especially in poor countries where the government is absent or corrupt.

At least as important as public acceptance in terrorist criminal hubs is the corruptibility of officials. Terrorist criminal entrepreneurs need the guarantee of impunity from detection and apprehension in order to conduct unimpeded operations. To secure such exemption, they generally engage in the subornation of pliant and corrupt public servants. Bribery, graft, and collusion in criminal activities are but some of the ways in which officials may be drafted to ensure terrorist criminal enterprises remain undetected and uncontrolled. When subornation fails, groups generally resort to murder.

Within their “hubs of badness” terrorist criminal enterprises often bypass official systems and impose their own institutions and arbitrary regulations. This criminal rule sometimes translates into entire regions being hijacked by terrorist criminal entrepreneurs who install themselves as the governing authority. Nowhere is this more evident than in some parts of Iraq and Syria currently controlled by Daesh. There they provide “public services” such as housing, education, and their own brand of justice (Zelin 2014). Although much of the explanation for its current *de facto* power over these territories goes to the ferocity with which Daesh conquered them, much of the fault can also be attributed to their former rulers who were incompetent and corrupt. In some cases, Daesh only needed to add the invaluable dimension of religious appeals to the catalyst of absent government legitimacy to occupy entire cities for their criminal purposes.

The ability to launder money is as critical to terrorist criminal enterprises as it is to conventional organized crime groups. Criminal activity generates vast sums of money, a great deal of which continues to be cash. At least in the West, terrorist criminal enterprises need to alter the complexion of illicit funds in order to use them for operational purposes as well as for such mundane matters as paying members (Freeman and Ruehsen 2013; Pillar 2001; Thachuk 2002). Overall, there are various ways money is laundered including basic bulk cash smuggling, as well as trade-based money laundering, money laundering into real