

International Terrorism Dimensions of a Security Challenge

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The attacks of September 11, 2001 focused the world's attention on the phenomenon of international terrorism. Terrorism is certainly not a new form of violence, and indeed the use of terror to achieve political or ideological ends may be traced back several millennia. Be that as it may, the current terrorist threat differs in significant respects from the forms of terrorism that have been encountered until now, what we might term, "old terrorism." In this paper I propose to apply some analytical insights and perspectives from the disciplines of international security studies, political science and economics to examine the new phenomenon of international terrorism that we have before us, and to consider the responses which we might expect from intelligence and security organizations to counter the threat, minimize the risks and pursue the cause of justice, and indeed of international peace.

If we accept Clausewitz's famous dictum that war is politics "by other means," then we might conceptualize terrorism as war by other means. Terrorism wages war by intimidation, by seeking to provoke mass fear and demoralization so as to undermine public confidence in governments and break the public will to resist. Terrorism applies violence for political ends.

I. THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

What differentiates the "old" terrorism from contemporary international terrorism is that the former waged its war within a more or less universalistic normative framework. One of the early outbursts of what we might want to call "modern terrorism", launched by the Narodnicki against the Czarist Russian autocracy during the late 19th century, even desisted from attacks when these risks injuring innocent bystanders. In other words, terrorism was still sensitive to humanitarian values. Terrorist movements in the Balkans and elsewhere attacked

symbols and institutions of empire and despotism while proclaiming the higher values of nationalism and emancipation.

By the 1920s and 30s, political terrorism lost its moral inhibitions as new ideologies offered justification for terrifying political violence outside, and indeed hostile to the established, universalistic normative framework. The Soviet Union, and later fascist Italy and Nazi Germany used state instruments of terror at home and abroad to promote their respective ideological-political objectives, oblivious to so-called “bourgeois” or “democratic” values. Terrorism today manifests two distinct types of normative framework. On the one hand, there are nationalist movements waging a terrorist war inside or outside their countries for essentially national objectives, and operating within the universal normative framework of fighting a regime change; whereas the old terrorism often does kill innocent bystanders, it is typically aims at creating headlines more than at causing dead bodies. On the other hand the new phenomenon of Al-Qaeda invokes a terrorism that is not directed specifically against any territory or any regime, or indeed any set of policies, but is transcendental in aiming to transform a global belief system. This new form of terrorism emanates from a belief system of one community, but seeks through mass violent means to transform the belief system of their targets; a belief system which is global.

The networking of the new international terrorism is global in its extensiveness. The Al-Qaeda network has been found present in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and also as far afield as the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Globalization as a phenomenon in finance, trade and culture is also manifest in the globalization of international terrorism.

Before going on to examine this notion of the target, I want to summarize the characteristics of the new type of international terrorism. This new terrorism is essentially global in its purview rather than national or country-specific. It is not based on a territorial command structure, as were old terrorist organization or conventional armed forces. The new international terrorism is organized into “networks”—loosely structured systems of cells, virtually global in extent, without direct and explicit lines of command and control. This cellular structure renders the networks much harder for the authorities to infiltrate and therefore to counter. These cells typically tend to get involved in three important sets of illicit activities, in Canada and elsewhere, in order to mobilize resources for the wider terrorist network: thus they engage in the raising of funds, since

vast sums of money are needed to finance international terrorism; they are also involved in the creation of false identities, needed to facilitate movement and access to targets, including the boarding of aircraft or entry to countries, and thirdly they help to procure weaponry and technologies needed for the terrorist effort. There is evidence that the Al-Qaeda network even sought to procure weapons of mass destruction, biological, chemical and radiological.

The political culture of this new international terrorism demonstrates the transcendental power of their alternative normative framework. The Mujahiddeen struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan played a formative role in the creation of the political culture that became Al-Qaeda. Available evidence indicates that four countries, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Sudan and Yemen, have generated many, if not most of the active Al-Qaeda network operatives. It is noteworthy that most of the Al-Qaeda terrorists who have come to our attention had their identities kept secret, unlike, for example, Palestinian suicide bombers whose “martyrdom” is celebrated with perverted pride. This anonymity reflects the transcendental character of this new terrorism: the terrorists sacrifice their very individualism on the altar of transcendental violence. That is why identity creation or fabrication is an important function of the network and its component cells.

We should note, in this regard, that the key Al-Qaeda operatives deployed to Western Europe and North America, including the terrorist network that launched the attacks of September 11, spent their formative years in Western Europe, immersed in higher education and training whilst remaining alienated from the surrounding culture. Their transcendental militance had cultural roots in the West, in secular learning; familiarization with advanced technologies, and comfortable lifestyles, while manifesting extreme antipathy, hostility and rage against the value system they encountered. The terrorists responsible for the attacks of September 11 included twenty educated people, with relatively high levels of skills, who had spent months at loose ends in the United States. They went out socially, circulating among Americans, but never developing or evincing an empathy or an affection for the people around them. They never came to terms with the moral values of the society in which they were living. They remained apart and absolutely loyal to their cause and mission, and there were no defections. They carried out their vicious deed and sacrificed themselves for a cause. All of which suggests that the ultimate challenge for our security and intelligence efforts is how

to counter a terrorist political culture of such commanding, transcendental belief?

II. THE TARGETS OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

The targets of the new international terrorism extend beyond mere governments, institutions or specific sets of policies. While some have argued that particular US policies towards the Middle East for the Israel-Arab conflict may have “caused” an international terrorist response, this is not at all evident either from the pronouncements of Al-Qaeda itself or from its actions. Al-Qaeda activities have targeted predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia and Malaysia whose domestic politics and foreign policies, including towards the Middle East, are quite congenial to the Arab and Islamic cause. While Al-Qaeda has targeted countries in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as in the “West”, the objective is not merely a regime change. Certainly the terrorist effort seeks the destruction of the established political systems in the Arab and indeed wider Muslim worlds in the name of “reform”, the thrust of this transformation is not forward towards a new political arrangement but backward to an ostensibly pure and politically sacralized system of governance. Reform, in the lexicon of Al-Qaeda and its consorts, is conceptualized as transforming the Arab and Muslim countries back to a pristine archetypal Islamic political system .

This transformative objective has transcendental, global ramifications. These, in turn, drive Al-Qaeda’s international terrorist network. In so far as Al-Qaeda seeks to reform the Muslim countries, the *Dar ul-Islam*, the world of Islam, it considers that it must attack the *Dar ul-Harb*, the world of violence, the rest of the (non-Islamic) world. This is a fundamental dichotomy of the Al-Qaeda world view. The existing world consists of the *Dar ul-Islam*, the Muslim world which is defined as a haven of peace, and an outside non-Islamic *Dar ul-Harb* that is characterized by chaos, social corruption and moral degeneracy. If the Muslim countries are today stigmatized by degeneracy and failure, this is because their flawed leadership succumbed to the blandishments emanating from *Dar ul-Harb* and therefore failed to appreciate the truths of Islam. In order to restore the purity of *Dar ul-Islam*, believers must act to attack and transform also the *Dar ul-Harb*, those places of chaos, corruption and degeneracy, into a *Dar ul-Islam*. Daniel Pipes, an American scholar of the Middle East, calls attention to pronouncements calling for the Islamization of the United States, the most powerful element of *Dar ul-Harb*. For Al-Qaeda and its offshoots, terrorism is the

means of bringing about this transcendental transformation. Terrorism would undermine the self-confidence of Americans and others in their system of Government, it would subvert the capacity of political, economic and social institutions to address public needs, and would demonstrate the weakness of *Dar ul-Harb* before a militant and triumphant agency of *Dar ul-Islam*. By creating a Muslim United States of America, the proponents of the transcendental Islamic transformation believe they can bring the world's richest, most powerful, most influential country into *Dar ul-Islam*, and thus achieve global Islamic ascendancy.

With America not just on side, but inside, the *Dar ul-Islam* can be transformed *back* to its original, pristine, sacralized form.

III. RESPONDING TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Clearly, the attacks of September 11 and its precursors in East Africa, Yemen and the World Trade Center, represent the opening salvos of what is likely to be a sustained terror assault on the United States and its friends and allies in *Dar ul-Harb*. In as much as the new terrorist threat is global, so must the security response be globalized. This globalization of security is already taking shape along four dimensions of international cooperation in intelligence and counter-terrorism. Firstly, a international coalition is being formed which facilitates more extensive partnering and sharing in the collection and analysis of intelligence and the conduct of counter-terrorist operations. Intelligence sharing is becoming more extensive and widespread as allies and partners help to piece together a complex and vast puzzle depicting the structure, proponents and threats of international terrorism. Intelligence sharing today extends beyond familiar allies and extends to trade in intelligence information with countries and services of doubtful human rights record. These are the kinds of partners with whom we would have preferred not to share intelligence information, but sharing is now deemed vital since they seem to have an ability to penetrate international terrorist organizations in a way that we and our allies cannot.

A second dimension of this globalized counter-terrorist campaign relates to the coordination of intelligence and counter-terrorism efforts. Historically, it seems clear that "intelligence failures" arise less because of an inability to discern threats than to properly synthesize and analyze the collected information, produce accurate assessments, and ensure the dissemination of intelligence product to those who need to know. Compartmentalization, inadequate coordination and turf battles all

militate against effective utilization of intelligence. The response of Canada's Security and Intelligence Community to the attacks of September 11 has been to reinforce the role of the existing intelligence services, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and Communications Security Establishment (CSE) whilst strengthening the specialized intelligence units of other Government departments and agencies, like Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Transport Canada and the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency, and also establishing new organizations to deal with particular threats, most notably the Office for Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness (OCIPEP) and the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre (FINTRAC). The current debate over the development of a Canadian foreign intelligence capability, either within the CSIS or separately, may augment this proliferation of responsibilities and functions. Yet, organizational proliferation can be a recipe for a diffusion, if not confusion, of effort. Coordination will be called upon to focus effort and avoid untoward institutional rivalry between and among the intelligence services that investigate and collect information, and analysts who have to make intelligence assessments, if the risk of intelligence failure is to be minimized. Coordination must ensure that there is synergy between the Security and Intelligence Community and other related elements in the inter-departmental community, and especially foreign affairs, defence, justice, finance and law enforcement in responding to terrorist threats confronting Canada and its friends and allies.

Thirdly, a globalized counter-terrorist effort is impelling intelligence communities towards a tighter fusion of operational methods. The new international terrorist networks present a daunting challenge for intelligence gathering. Technical means such as signals intelligence may not be adequately effective against these types of networks, and human intelligence is especially difficult and hazardous against secretive, closely-knit cells. Counter-terrorist operations are fostering a fusion of sophisticated technical and traditional human intelligence disciplines so as to identify these obscure target networks, penetrate their secretive cells, and deflect their activities.

Fourthly, globalized counter-terrorism is creating a need for confidence building measures in democratic societies to reassure a broader political community of the validity of the effort, and of the *bona fides* of the Security and Intelligence Community. The campaign against

the new international terrorism has brought about changes in law, notably Bills C-36¹ and C-42² (which was since withdrawn), that enhance the powers of the Security and Intelligence Community. As there are concerns about the inappropriate use of such powers in any democracy, it behooves the Security and Intelligence Community to institute confidence building measures designed to reassure the public and parliament, and indeed Government, that its activities are appropriate, effective and entirely consistent with law, policy and the public interest. The Security and Intelligence Community itself has an interest, which it shares with other parts of Government and our democratic political system, in sustaining broad public and political support for the counter-terrorism effort and for security objectives in general. While existing mechanisms have value so far as the Security and Intelligence Community is concerned, measures to enhance both executive and parliamentary oversight, and initiatives to improve transparency to media and scholarly inquiry, can serve to build up a knowledge base among the informed public, parliamentarians, media and educators that could sustain public confidence and support for the expanded counter-terrorist effort. To be sure, there is sufficient scope for openness to oversight and inquiry for a democratic society to gain a fuller awareness and comprehension of Security and Intelligence functions, while appreciating that some information must be kept secret, that certain things cannot be made public, but that much can.

Public confidence building is itself a component of the counter-terrorism campaign. It is, indeed, the antidote to terrorism, which aims at destroying public confidence in our institutions and values. The ultimate achievement of national security in face of international terrorism rests on sustaining public confidence that our governments, societies, and our Security and Intelligence Community operate on our behalf within the law, in conformity with human rights and civil liberties, to protect us all against forces that threaten democratic values and public safety.

¹ *Anti-terrorism Act*, S.C. 2001, c. 41 [hereinafter *Bill C-36*].

² *Bill C-42, An Act to amend certain Acts of Canada, and to enact measures for implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, an order to enhance public safety*, 1st Sess., 37th Parl., 2001 (1st reading November 22, 2001).