



Countering Terrorist Support Structures

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Abstract. *Terrorist groups have manipulated the underbelly of globalization and its discontents to their great advantage. Confronting terrorism will require an understanding of the three main critical pillars of support upon which terrorists rely for their continued survival: financing, corruption, and citizen support. This study illustrates how the criminal and terrorist communities cooperate. An example of this paper's four policy recommendations is that governments should reduce the volume of hawala transactions by making formal methods of transferring money more attractive. In the section on citizen support, this study acknowledges that Muslim criticisms of western attitudes are not completely without merit, for example the cartoon pictures of the Prophet Mohammad published in Denmark belittled and stereotyped Muslims. Countering terrorism will require a concerted effort on the part of the international community to develop strategies that simultaneously tackle these problems in a holistic and comprehensive fashion.*

Keywords. Terrorism, counter-terrorism, terrorist support structures, global terrorism, terrorism financing, hawala system, criminality, corruption, citizen support for terrorism.

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Introduction

Countering terrorism today requires consideration of a wide range of potential and real factors brought to life by an insidious underbelly of globalization.² While long the scourge of international society, states the world over are increasingly being assaulted by a fresh crop of highly disciplined, technologically savvy non-state actors such as terrorists, organized crime, pirates, and valueless international entrepreneurs who engage in a wide range of illicit activities. Each of these categories is armed with a spiraling array of technology that creates new opportunity for a type of mischief, peculiar to this age, that threatens to undermine society as we know it.

The resulting conundrum for international civilized society is finding the right methodologies to counteract non-state enemies while remaining cohesive and cooperative in the interests of international order. At the heart of the problem is the unfortunate fact that transnational threats increasingly weaken the cooperative spirit between states while simultaneously strengthening their stranglehold on their host nations. While states squabble over counterterrorism measures, opportunistic terrorists are loosing what is akin to a deadly virus that will, slowly and methodically, but inevitably kill their hosts. The only alternative is for states to intensify both multilateral and bilateral cooperation to become unified in the battle against international thugs and thieves.

The influence of these non-state actors causes roles and relations on the international stage to become increasingly blurred and confused. Some states do harbor terrorists, mafia bosses do manipulate state actions, terrorists have been voted into office, criminal enterprises do contribute to the funding of terrorists, and terror tactics are effectively used by some criminals. With such an atmosphere of near global anarchy, it hardly comes as a surprise that along with every other non-state actor, terrorists have resorted to a myriad of schemes to survive and thrive. Not only have they generated a variety of money-making schemes including running legitimate businesses and exploiting charities, they have also delved into criminal conspiracies previously considered the sole enterprise of organized crime groups.

Further, the lack of official sponsorship has meant terrorist groups have sought political and popular support for their activities. When successful, this endeavor is a windfall. By employing the dual strategies of exploiting weak and corruption-riddled states while at the same time appealing to disaffected and marginalized citizens for sympathy and support, a number of terrorist groups have been able to efficiently and effectively carve out safe havens from which to conduct international operations with relative impunity. Because this problem has become so pervasive, it is now one that the global community must tackle head on. Indeed, counterterrorism strategies at the state level will have little success if not undertaken with significant international support and cooperation. It is not so much a question of tactics either. Each state can likely kill a requisite number of terrorists efficiently. The true test will be for a long-term strategy that has far-reaching consequences at both the state level and within international society. Thus rather than prioritize counterterrorism measures or adopt short-term quick-fix tactics, a holistic, long-term strategy is required to comprehensively address the resilient infestation of terrorism.

² Kimberley Thachuk "Globalization's Sinister Underbelly" in *The Global Century* Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2002.

The Main Pillars of Terrorist Support

Arguably, there are three critical pillars of support upon which terrorists rely for their operations and existence: finances; impunity; and, citizen support/passive acceptance for their activities. While these categories are likely bolstered by other factors, they represent a three-legged stool upon which is balanced the success of terrorist conspiracies and the survival of the members of their groups.

With respect to finances, which are a critical first pillar of support, understanding the sources of the funds as well as the methods by which the money is moved and manipulated is critical to erecting barriers to that flow. In a globalized economy, terrorist groups would find international operations next to impossible to conduct without the ability to raise and move money.

The second pillar, impunity, is most often a result of corrupt and weak governments that are susceptible to exploitation by terrorists and their allies. Presumably, the easiest path to plot terrorist conspiracies free from the scrutiny or interference by state authorities is to buy the silence, if not the allegiance, of those willing to rent their public offices. In this regard terrorists have used methods long employed by organized crime to gain access to weak states and then manipulate their sovereign status and governments into serving as fronts for their international criminal schemes.

Once firmly entrenched and armed with the funding, citizen backing, or at least tacit public acceptance, becomes the final pillar of support. Acceptance and or compliance by the citizenry is often comprised of complex and overlapping psychological and sociological conditions that may differ not only between countries, but even amongst regions or cities within countries. Factors such as political culture, historical legacy, religious prominence, the role of the media, disparate economic conditions, traditions of leadership, and so forth all play a vital role in the extent to which terrorists are enabled. Further, these particular conditions are important in terms of whether or how terrorists recruit and train new members from amongst the host population.

These three factors are most often interrelated; therefore strategies that address them in a stove-pipe fashion will likely fail. For example, to tackle only issues of terrorism finance eschews the fact that many terrorist money-generating schemes rely on public support and the oft-paid for willingness of corrupt officials to look the other way. Moreover, public support is often garnered by terrorist groups who provide services and quasi-government functions to gain sympathetic allies where weak governments are unable or unwilling to do so. Understanding and integrating strategies for combating terrorism requires a careful survey of the factors that underlie it, but more importantly those which sustain it. Attention to the details will ensure that the three main pillars of terrorist support are addressed simultaneously. In so doing the careful balance upon which terrorists rely is more apt to become unstable and unreliable rather than simply shaky.

1. TERROR FINANCES***Criminal Activity***

With state sponsorship for terrorism at an all time low, many terrorist groups have turned to criminal schemes to fund their day-to-day operating expenses, purchases of equipment and information, and for training, communications and travel. Like many organized criminal schemes,

terrorists' crimes have a quick turn-around and can raise significant cash. In a number of cases, it might be difficult to discern exactly who constitute the terrorist groups and who constitute the organized crime groups, their criminal activities are so similar. Indeed, there is speculation that there are *ad hoc* connections between segments of the two "communities" for the purposes of raising capital. While some terrorists' money sources still include contributions and donations, sale of publications (both legal and illegal), and funds derived from legitimate business enterprises, individual donors tend to be focused on particular groups—notably those associated with, or patterned on, al Qaeda. Terrorists without that sort of sponsorship increasingly have turned to criminal transactions for quick cash.

There are at least four main criminal activities traditionally thought of as being the domain of organized crime that now are money-generating activities of terrorist groups. These include any number of lesser crimes such as extortion, kidnapping, gambling, trade in counterfeit goods, shake-downs, document forgery, bank robbery, identity theft, credit card fraud and so forth.³ Most tend to be *ad hoc*, informal arrangements that rather than being strategically or purposefully perpetrated, are simply the quickest and easiest options for making a lot of cash. In addition to money laundering and money manipulation, the four main criminal activities that sustain terrorism are:

- A. *Narcotic Trafficking*
- B. *Arms Trafficking*
- C. *Human Smuggling and Trafficking*
- D. *Smuggling of WMD*

The profits from criminal activity are immense. While impossible to quantify accurately, it is estimated that between two and five percent of the world's gross domestic product or approximately \$600 billion to \$1.8 trillion annually is involved in illicit financial transactions. Drug trafficking alone nets between \$300 and \$500 billion, with trafficking in humans amounting to approximately \$7 billion, counterfeiting between \$150 and \$470 billion, computer crimes \$100 billion and trafficking in small arms comprising between \$1 and \$4 billion of the "gross criminal profit".⁴ It is unclear how much of this largesse contributes to terrorism, but it is clear that some does, and it is likely a considerable amount.

Many of the associated enterprises demonstrate sinister terrorist motives. For example, in November 2002 the FBI helped to halt two major drugs for arms deals. In the first case, an American and two Pakistanis were attempting to trade five metric tons of hashish and 600 kilograms of heroin for four Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, which they were planning to send to al Qaeda operatives.⁵ In the second case, four members of the paramilitary organization, the United

³ Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering *Report on Money Laundering Typologies 2001*: 19.

⁴ Bossard Andre "The Basic Principles of Money Laundering" in *Crime and Justice International* Vol. 15, No. 26, March 1999:1; Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State "Remarks at International Conference on Pathbreaking Strategies in the Global Fight Against Sex Trafficking", February 25, 2003.

⁵ "Feds Break up Drug Smuggling Linked to Terrorist Groups" *New York Times* November 6, 2002.

Self-Defense Forces of Colombia were planning to trade \$25 million in cash and cocaine for five containers of Warsaw Pact weapons.⁶

Further, the terrorists behind the Madrid bombings financed themselves from money earned almost exclusively from trafficking hashish and ecstasy. They paid for their explosives by trading hashish and cash with a former miner. When police raided the home of one of the terrorists they seized 125,800 ecstasy tablets, which turned out to be one of the largest illicit drug hauls in Spanish history. In all, Spanish authorities recovered about \$2 million in drugs and cash from the group—meanwhile the attack itself cost only about \$50,000.

The Madrid scheme was likely only the tip of the drug financing iceberg. According to the U.S. State Department at least a dozen of the world's 25 largest terrorist groups have ties to drug traffickers around the world.⁷ Some of these terrorist groups include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Shining Path, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizbollah, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and Abu Sayyaf.

Besides drug trafficking, to raise capital, terrorist groups engage in a variety of intricate, at times almost convoluted, schemes involving numerous countries. The perpetrators are as complex to follow as their machinations. For instance, in June 2003, Italian financial police targeted some forty sites in and around Milan arresting five Tunisians and a Moroccan. The suspects, an imam among them, were accused of providing financial and logistical support to the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The charges against them ranged from false accounting, engaging in illegal immigration, receiving counterfeit documents, abetting and financing a terrorist organization and trafficking in stolen cars. They are also believed to have been running legitimate businesses as fronts to raise money for terrorist purposes.

In an almost surreal twist, along with other counterfeit criminal operations that pirate everyday goods such as condoms, repackaged medicines such as Viagra with expired shelf lives, toiletries such as Armani and Chanel perfumes, Head and Shoulders shampoo and Olay cream, chocolates and other food products, spare car parts, and compact discs, al Qaeda has been linked to a scheme in which counterfeit Vaseline is moved from Dubai to Britain.⁸ According to the OECD, counterfeiting accounts for approximately 7% of world commerce. At present the terrorist enterprise share of counterfeited goods is unknown.

Nevertheless, one reason to be concerned is that the counterfeiting and smuggling trade has tended to be perceived as a 'victimless crime' and, therefore, not high on the law enforcement priority list. Yet, the U.K.'s Organized Crime Task Force reports that in 2000 alone, state revenue losses from fuel smuggling and counterfeit tobacco products between Northern Ireland and the

⁶ The weapons cache included 9,000 assault rifles, 300 pistols, 53 million rounds of ammunition, 300,000 grenades and some rocket-propelled grenade launchers. "Feds Break up Drug Smuggling Linked to Terrorist Groups" *New York Times* November 6, 2002.

⁷ For recent trends, see for example, United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention *World Drug Report 2005*.

⁸ "Massive Haul of Counterfeit Goods" *BBC News* July 26, 2002.

Irish Republic by the paramilitary groups of Northern Ireland were \$568 million. One of the benefits for criminals of smuggling counterfeit goods has been that to date the penalties for those caught are less serious than for drug trafficking. Hence, while the paramilitaries have been known to bring shipments of heroin from suppliers in Southern Spain, counterfeit tobacco products from Eastern Europe have netted similar profits but with less risk. In the case of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), it is estimated that between \$1 million and \$15 million is needed to sustain terrorist campaigns. The PIRA's estimated fundraising capacity from smuggling counterfeit goods and contraband is believed to be between \$7.7 and \$12.3 million.⁹

The overarching goal is of course to stop terrorist attacks before they occur. Significant treasure and human resources have been dedicated to attempting to hunt down terrorists and prove their conspiracies in courts of law. However, this is much more difficult than it sounds. In general, international cooperation against organized crime has had several generations to be tested by the world community whereas counterterrorism efforts are often highly political and therefore emotionally charged.

Policy Recommendation Number One: *work closely with international partners to cooperate on the law enforcement side to apprehend and incarcerate terrorists for criminal activity and thereby interdict terrorist plots while they are still in the planning stages.*

There is a substantial and often impossible evidentiary burden for proving a terrorist conspiracy, not so criminal activity. While criminal prosecution does not have the same political or social value as trying someone for terrorism, the result ostensibly will be that one less act of terrorism will occur. Investigating and apprehending terrorists for committing or plotting terrorist acts may take years and consume untold resources and political capital; courts require high standards of evidence for terrorist conspiracies that are often difficult to meet. To circumvent these obstacles, the fact that terrorists are engaging in criminal activity serves as an opportunity for authorities to apprehend and detain them even if the connections to terrorist plots are not strong. While many counterterrorism experts argue that terrorists must be brought to justice for conspiracies and acts of terrorism, the fact is that apprehending them for criminal activity will take them off the streets and thereby impede future terrorist conspiracies. Al Capone was not caught for engaging in organized criminal activity, rather, he was indicted for tax evasion and failure to file tax returns. The eleven-year sentence that he received effectively terminated his criminal career.¹⁰

Money Movements

While engaging in both licit and illicit transactions, terrorists must be able to obscure the movements of cash, especially as they pertain to the funding of on-going illegal operations. This is important regardless of whether the money is being laundered in order to disguise its origins or to secure its clandestine distribution to interlocking cells of globally-dispersed terrorist operatives. If

⁹ "UK Threat Assessment 2002" *National Criminal Intelligence Service* (UK), July 2, 2003.

¹⁰ "Al Capone" *History Files* <http://www.chicagohs.org/history/capone.html>.

conducted through legitimate channels, the greatest obstacle terrorists face is banking reporting requirements.¹¹ Particularly since September 11, due to highly successful law enforcement efforts and stricter controls on monetary transactions, terrorists have been driven underground. This has paradoxically created a more pronounced problem for tracking terrorist money movements. There is now greater reliance than ever before on informal money laundering and manipulation networks that currently lay beyond the scope of most international money laundering agreements.

Significant also is the role of informal financial transfer systems, which go by a variety of names but are usually grouped under the term “hawala” systems, and which are widely used in the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, the regions of greatest concern for terrorism. The hawala system evolved precisely as an attempt to evade strict exchange and capital controls and as a method for avoiding taxes and usurious bank charges. The system has served as an efficient and relatively safe and cost-effective free-market transaction instrument for decades, if not centuries, in some states. From a law enforcement and counterterrorism perspective, the problem with the hawala system is precisely the lack of a “paper trail” recording the transaction between payer and payee.¹²

While law enforcement and counterterrorism focus on the two ends of the hawala transaction, the key to understanding the hawala is the network of hawaladars that stand between the payer and payee and the mechanisms they employ to settle outstanding balances between them. The typical hawala transaction in which a resident of one country makes a payment to a local hawaladar, who then arranges payment by a correspondent hawaladar in the destination country, leaves an unsettled balance between the two hawaladars. The ways in which the balances are settled among hawaladars is central to the operation of the system. Typically, at least one of the countries involved in the hawala transaction maintains exchange or capital controls, or punitive taxation. Thus, a simple funds transfer of net balances between the two participating hawaladars is seldom possible. In fact, this is really what differentiates the hawala from banks.

The settlement of balances among hawaladars typically involves complex financial and sometimes trade transactions (often with over or under-invoicing) among multiple hawaladars, often involving transactions in third countries. This is the reason that attempts to impose regulations on hawalas are almost certainly doomed to failure. Hawalas exist to evade regulation, and, over the centuries, hawaladars have become very good at it.

Individuals and small businesses must have a way to effect cross-border financial transactions. If states and the international community wish to track movements of money, they must provide honest citizens with an efficient, legal, and economical way to conduct transactions. To promote the use of legitimate channels of commerce via a combination of the elimination of exchange and capital controls (at a minimum, controls on outgoing transfers), together with a promotion of

¹¹ Currently for movements of \$10,000 or more that appear to be ‘suspicious’ a suspicious activity report (SAR) is filed in the 101 countries of the Edgmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units that have implemented national collection centers to gather information on suspicious or unusual financial activity.

¹² In a hawala transaction, the person making the transfer makes a payment to a local hawaladar who then contacts a hawaladar in the destination country. This correspondent hawaladar makes the payment to the payee.

formal financial market services—including banks, but also savings cooperatives—to small transactions should be undertaken.¹³

Policy Recommendation Number Two: *Assist with the diversion of legitimate transactions to formal channels thereby greatly reducing the volume of transactions passing through hawalas, among which criminal and terrorist transfers are currently hidden. Over time, the reduction in volume should mean the only groups left using the hawala system will be those who need to hide the purposes of their transactions.*

2. CORRUPTION: PURCHASING IMPUNITY

Understanding and curbing corruption is a significant and often overlooked ingredient in combating terrorist activity. Corruption serves as the second main pillar of support for terrorist groups. As such it is a critical enabler which guarantees impunity for terrorist groups who must be able to safeguard the immunity from detection and prosecution of their members and maintain their operations free from interference by the authorities. Not only does corruption minimize the opportunities for state control over the activities of terrorists, it inevitably prevents real sovereignty from being exercised.

At a minimum, to operate fluidly across the frontiers of several states simultaneously, secret networks must have a guarantee of impunity from detection and apprehension. The subornation of public officials and political leaders through the use of bribery, graft, collusion and/or extortion is the vehicle by which to secure that exemption.

Allowing dishonest officials to launder corruptly acquired money serves to further complicate attempts to apprehend and deter terrorists. In essence, in laundering money derived from a bribe the corrupt official enables terrorists to deftly place a second buffer between themselves and detection; this stratum is more difficult to penetrate as it relies on the collusion of, and lies behind the cloak of, official state power. Unfortunately, it is not a matter of simply rooting out one or two corrupt officials. Successful crackdowns and tighter controls and oversight will likely herald an increase in the attempted, and successful, subornation of officials especially in states that are already susceptible to money manipulation and laundering.

As with the successful interdiction of illegal monetary transactions, that drives terrorists underground, arresting one or two compliant officials will mean only that terrorist groups will then locate still more compliant officials—in essence broadening their circle of collusion. Although this time, as was seen in countries such as Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s, the stakes may then become higher. During this era in Colombia when simple bribery stopped working, officials were given the choice between a bullet or a bribe (the so-called “lead or silver” option) by the drug cartels. In so doing, these mafias managed to at once safeguard their illegal business activities, maintain their impunity from arrest and prosecution, and contribute to the almost complete erosion of the legitimacy of Colombian institutions. The corruption and extortion of public officials was so rampant that the state was unable to guarantee even the most basic order for its citizens. Indeed,

¹³ I am deeply indebted to Dr. Varun Sani for this valuable insight.

this is the razor's edge of corruption; what often begins as the greasing of a few palms often ends as a violent and bloody hijacking of sovereign power.

For their part, in terms of their ability to use corruption to hijack governments, terrorist groups enjoy an even greater advantage than other non-state actors such as organized criminal groups. This is so because to bolster their subornation campaigns many of today's terrorist groups have the added invaluable dimension of religious or ideological popular appeal. Indeed, terrorists are often seen as having important, overarching and long-term social goals that outweigh any negative effects their corruption might have. Indeed, if exposed, from the vantage point of public opinion this kind of corruption may not be viewed as particularly deleterious to society.

At the heart of the issue is whether the government is able to command the loyalty of the citizens or if some other group now holds sway. If the government is not itself limited by its own laws, or its members are perceived as being corrupt and above the law, or if the government is unable to compel compliance with the laws by powerful groups, the belief in the "rightness" or legitimacy of the government will be seriously lacking. In this case the death struggle may already be lost and terrorists or other power brokers may have firmly established roots in the community.

Indeed, such a setting is a magnet for private power brokers. It is much easier to operate illegal businesses, plot conspiracies, train terrorists, and bypass a system in which order is lacking and public institutions are rife with patronage and graft. When the instruments of coercion are in the hands of groups other than the government, communities become more subject to arbitrary and personally-motivated interests. In some regions an extremist quasi-government can emerge in which groups, including insurgents, drug mafias, and terrorist groups such as Hizbollah in Lebanon, the Wa in Burma, and the Tijuana Cartel in Mexico, provide "public services" such as housing, education and even justice to the people. In so doing they virtually replace the state as the governing authority in certain sectors of their countries. However magnanimous these deeds may appear to the recipients, these self-appointed leaders were not democratically chosen by the people, and act from corrupt motives. They insinuate themselves using large amounts of money coupled with some ideology and appeals to the disaffected, to breach vulnerable jurisdictions and then mold them into "states of convenience" for themselves. Such situations only serve as a breeding ground for those who are liable to take advantage of feelings of alienation and despair as was demonstrated in Afghanistan and Somalia.

Additionally, the coercive power of some sub-state groups already rivals state law enforcement agencies in a number of states; often these criminals are better equipped and outfitted than are justice officials or security forces. Some terrorist groups frequently have extensive intelligence networks that inform them of the activities of the police and military, many of whom they ultimately co-opt into their fraternity. Police are paid to provide information on planned raids, and on when arrests will occur and how investigations will proceed. Prosecutors are further bribed not to prosecute, judges not to convict and penal officials to release terrorists that do end up in jail. Such impunity translates into great power and leaves communities vulnerable to capricious rule. As a result, the citizens in these regions are often subject to as much arbitrary rule as exists in any authoritarian state. The lack of liberty and personal safety that are characteristic of both authoritarian government and corrupt states amount to the same thing, but in the latter case the coercion is simply employed by groups other than the government.

At the end of the day, these citizens are too the victims of systems of almost unchecked power in which there is a pervasive and often precarious reliance on persons rather than institutions. While such regions may have well-written and just constitutions on the formal level, at the informal level the people are subject to as much arbitrary rule as exists in any authoritarian state. Indeed, in order to prevent new extremist groups from gaining power, not only is there a requirement for a lasting and functioning government but also it must be able to take power back from local bosses and present a more visible and trustworthy authority in the lives of citizens. It is largely through this hijacking of strategic pieces of sovereignty that groups who commit conspiracies on a global scale have been able to threaten international stability and security with relative impunity.

Governments have little hope of attacking terrorist groups operating within the borders of their countries unless they first address the problem of corruption. Shortly after 9/11, Ronald Noble, the Director of INTERPOL, noted that “[t]he most sophisticated security systems, the best structures, or trained and dedicated security personnel are useless,[in combating terrorists] if they are undermined from the inside by a single act of corruption”.¹⁴ Corruption is no longer simply the greasing of the wheels of commerce—it is an insidious enabler of terrorist groups.

Policy Recommendation Number Three: *Countries must make a concerted effort to eradicate corruption in both their public and private sectors. Leaving terrorist groups with no place to plan conspiracies and conduct criminal enterprise will impede both their current and future operations by lessening the likelihood that they will be able to either penetrate or remain in any state for very long.*

3. CITIZEN SUPPORT

Countries must make a public display in the media of corrupt officials by naming those who engage in criminal acts, and contrast them with those who do not. The media can publicize the subordination campaigns mounted by terrorist groups and can point to the links between corruption, criminal activity that finances terrorism and acts of terrorism. The role of the media can be critical in this regard. It is often an essential element for advertising the government’s positive work in addressing and uncovering corruption, criminal and terrorist activities. A free press should make it easier to fight corruption.¹⁵ Finally, the media can help to build a ground swell of public support to attack those enablers of terrorism such as corruption and money laundering.

When the people know that something is being done and that corrupt behavior is being punished, from the very large abuser to the small one, public cynicism will evolve into confidence in government. It is critical that citizens understand that the rule of law is being observed, no matter the circumstance or person involved. Once confidence takes hold in the imaginations of the people, their acceptance for even the most minor offenses will diminish. In turn, the political

¹⁴ Ronald K. Noble. Chief, Interpol *Interpol Press Release*, October 8, 2001.

¹⁵ Philip Heymann, “Democracy and Corruption”, 20 *Fordham International Journal* 1996: 323, 328.

culture of corruption will be removed as a support structure for terrorist groups to manipulate at will.

Indeed it is the concept of political culture—the fundamental norms and beliefs of society—that is central to an explanation of stability and change for support of terrorist groups in any given society. Generally passed on to succeeding generations through various forms of socialization and providing a unifying societal bond, political culture refers to the general attitudes and values that individuals and societies hold toward such political institutions as the government, political parties, the judiciary and even terrorist groups and their causes. This lends itself to a brief discussion of why some people can be recruited to terrorism and why even the backing of a small percentage of citizens is a critical third pillar of terrorist support.

The question as to why people become terrorists and why so many of their fellow citizens do not condemn, but often condone, and even support, acts of terrorism is highly complex. One of the more prevalent arguments has been that poverty, ignorance and deprivation have sparked the tendency to use terrorist methods to resolve grievances. Yet this argument rings somewhat hollow. To argue that people become terrorists because they are poor and uneducated is doing a great disservice to poor people who are generally hard-working citizens struggling to provide a better future for themselves and their children. Indeed, most terrorist master-minds of the 21st century are well-educated and come from the middle and even upper classes of their societies.

What is a more plausible and perhaps more understandable stimulus is what unites the members of groups such as al Qaeda, Peru's Sendero Luminoso, the IRA, and even the now executed Timothy McVeigh. This is a sense of profound dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and/or social opportunities available in their own societies, combined with the presence of an alternative ideology (political Islam, Marxism-Leninism, Irish nationalism, and the militia movement, respectively) which gives them a vision of an alternative society, however improbable, around which to organize. In any society, feelings of humiliation, loss of dignity, loss of status, or disenfranchisement, can aggravate cultural and ethnic tensions and contribute to violent social and political movements.

After September 11 one of the disquieting questions for Americans was "why do they hate us?" In attempting to answer that question, more valuable clues for countering the support that some citizens lend to terrorists may be revealed. Opinion leaders were polled by the Pew Research Center along with the International Herald Tribune in late 2001 and some telling sentiments were brought to light.¹⁶

People in the countries polled almost overwhelmingly felt that "it is good that Americans now know what it is like to be vulnerable". It is unclear whether such sentiments represent an unattractive, but, perhaps, understandable *Schadenfreude* on the part of the world's poor, weak, and vulnerable, or a more deep-seated hostility to American values.

They further expressed the belief that U.S. policies contribute to the widening gap between rich and poor states. This, coupled with numerous perceived and/or real historical political grievances

¹⁶ "Little Support for Expanding War on Terrorism: A multinational Survey conducted with International Herald Tribune" The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (Washington, D.C. Pew Research Center, December 19, 2001): 1.

in which the U.S. has somehow been involved, has shaped much of the pathology of al Qaeda at the very least. In the Middle East, for example, colonialism, the inability of Arabs to prevent the formation and survival of Israel and a double standard on the part of the U.S. in supporting Israel over the Palestinians has led to deep and long-lasting resentments. Along with this has been a record of endorsing, both past and present, regimes such as those in Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, despite some shaky human rights records, and a variety of other American policies that have led to very deep bitterness, if not outrage, among many sectors of local populations. Hence, while only a few may resort to fanatical terrorist acts, others who do not condone such outrageous violence may not condemn it either.

In other words, the terrorism of this era is not only exponentially more menacing but also more effective and deadly than the familiar terrorism of the 1980s and 1990s. For disturbingly large numbers of people, the pivotal nature of the struggle and the religious aura that surrounds it generate not only an aversion to the modern world, but also a resolution to destroy it. Meanwhile, the abundance of advanced technology and other tools wrought by globalization gives those who are so inclined the capacity to inflict catastrophic damage against anyone, anywhere.

Indeed modern terrorists are driven more by hostility to trends they perceive as being inflicted upon them and over which they are (indeed really anyone is) powerless to halt—modernization, globalization, secularization, westernization, and democratization—than to any specific policies being pursued that may directly affect them. That in itself poses a significantly complicating factor in determining how to gut the support terrorists enjoy in their surrounding communities. By stereotyping the West (and most often the United States) as the root of the myriad problems confronting the Arab and Islamic worlds, terrorists and their supporting propagandists greatly expand the potential base of sympathizers, supporters and potential recruits to include virtually anyone who is unhappy with his lot in life.

Their point of view is not completely without merit if one pauses and momentarily considers the printing of cartoon pictures of the Prophet Mohammed in Danish and other European newspapers in late 2005 which led to riots and bombings all over the Muslim world.¹⁷ That this is hurtful and humiliating to Muslims seems to have completely escaped those in the West who claim that they have the right to a free press. It must be noted that while the exercise of a free press is a liberty that a great many countries enjoy, publishing derisive cartoons hardly constitutes serious reporting; rather it is a thinly veiled attempt to belittle and stereotype Muslims. Such a message only plays into the hands of terrorists who, with their already dubious and amorphous causes, are happy to stumble on new ways to prod others to action or to provide support. In February 2006, Prime Minister Abdullah of Malaysia observed, “[t]he demonisation of Islam and the vilification of Muslims, there is no denying, is widespread, within Western mainstream society”.¹⁸ What is

¹⁷ The scandal began on 30 Sept 2005 when a Danish paper published the cartoons. The problems unfolded as follows: 20 Oct 2005: Muslim ambassadors complain to Danish PM; 10 Jan 2006: Norwegian publication reprints cartoons; 26 Jan 2006: Saudi Arabia recalls its ambassador; 31 Jan 2006: Danish paper apologizes; 1 Feb 2006: Papers in France, Germany, Italy and Spain reprint cartoons; 4-5 Feb 2006: Danish embassies in Damascus and Beirut attacked; 6-7 Feb 2006: At least eight killed in Afghanistan as security forces try to suppress protests; 9 Feb 2006: Hundreds of thousands protest in Beirut.

¹⁸ “Islam-West Divide Grows Deeper” *BBC News* February 10, 2006.

more, via modern communications, incidents such as these are capable of generating almost instant and incendiary emotional appeals to violence throughout the Islamic world.

Why do prosperous, educated people become terrorists? First and perhaps foremost, it is likely that they feel they do not have the ability to realize their aspirations. In many (but certainly not all) societies, there has been a crisis of unmet political, economic, and social expectations such that citizens look upon the works of government and their society more generally with disapproval. They see a lack of credible and accountable governments, factional loyalties that tend to splinter already fractured societies, an epidemic of public offices afflicted with graft, waste and serious misallocation of public money. They also see impunity for criminals who find safe havens if they are wealthy and powerful enough to pay the tithe, and whose growing criminality, amorality, and lawlessness has caused society to become ill and further aggravate conditions of unemployment and environmental decay.

Further, despite the near-global trend toward democratization, aspects of arbitrary government remain in states as diverse as Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Indonesia, and Nigeria where universal justice is often absent and the rule of law is applied unequally. The citizens of such countries feel an increasing sense of outrage at, and alienation from, those who are meant to be serving their interests. They find they are no better off than they were yesterday or last year or even a decade ago; rather, they see an ever widening gap between themselves and those that have reaped the rewards of globalization. It is not so much that they aspire to a violent terrorist society or that they support terrorism, but they are cynical and resigned when confronted with their governments' inability or unwillingness to act as the vehicle for change. Such frustration increases public tolerance for alternative messages, no matter how illogical they may be. The terrorists' propaganda need not be complicated if the public already has reason to be outraged and demoralized, the path has already been paved; the terrorists need only add some rhetoric and back it with some zeal. Many revolutions have begun with less.

The key to a better future is the hope that it is actually possible. The more that the political culture transforms and invests in its own successful future, the less likely it is that violence will be an option for resolving social and economic dissatisfaction. The likelihood is high that private power brokers, leaders with a cause célèbre, corrupt government, and recruiters for terrorist groups will have an exponentially lower chance of securing a foothold in a society that has invested in peace, order, and prosperity for its children. This can only occur if people see that their investment will pay off and that the government will not steal it from them.

Fulfilling the hope for a better future and rectifying the crisis of legitimacy will also require government investment in a stronger state. Yet, strengthening the state does not mean strengthening only the coercive power of the state. To guarantee that social and economic stability may thrive, governments must at a minimum maintain order. In carrying out that task, security forces and police or military units should be closely monitored to ensure that they operate within the framework of the law to whose defense they are committed.

Indeed, oppressive governments become oppressive precisely because they are otherwise weak and unable to carry out essential functions efficiently and effectively. Given unlimited power, corruption is tempting; grabbing the greatest share of the state's coercive strength may be too alluring, especially when democratic processes move too slowly to resolve exigent issues. A

strong state needs an effective judiciary, effective delivery of essential services, a healthy and vibrant economy, as well as effective defense and law enforcement agencies operating within the rule of law. The use of extra-legal force by government, no matter how tempting, ultimately undermines the legitimacy of government itself. Above all, people must see there is justice in all matters of state and society even as it pertains to acts of terrorism and treatment of terrorists.

***Policy Recommendation Number Four:** Foremost consideration must be given to the rule of law in tracking, apprehending, detaining, prosecuting, and carrying out the sentences of terrorists. Further, anti-terrorist policies of liberal democracies should not involve reprisals against segments of the population thought to be sympathetic to the terrorists. If democratic governments react to violence by using indiscriminate force against certain segments of the population, they will not only be resorting to the same practice as the terrorists, but build rather than weaken whatever support the outlaw group may enjoy among members of the population.*

Above all, the greatest care must be taken to avoid humiliating people. Humiliation breeds resentment that can fester and become deep hatred over a loss of dignity that cannot be restored or rectified with any amount of money or property. Declarations of martial law and emergency measures, therefore, do not tend to strengthen the fight against violence, but rather, serve to buttress the terrorists' cause. Careful attention must also be paid to how the government treats terrorists and how this is viewed by a public supportive of, or potentially sympathetic to, the terrorists.

To slowly and carefully diminish the amount of support given to terrorists by the public, the government must appear to be doing everything for the greatest good of the society and its future. It must be a change that involves the political culture such that people decide as a whole to no longer tolerate terrorism, criminality or corruption. To slip in this regard is a loss in the favor of the terrorists; in a state infested by terrorists, government mistakes are exponentially more costly. Indeed, it might be best viewed as a zero sum game in locations where terrorists have the support of even small numbers of the public.

Government can be the guarantor of expectations such that human endeavors are possible. When a government is working well, the political process unobtrusively and continuously resolves conflict. However, when a government loses legitimacy, the citizens fluctuate between being largely indifferent and skeptical that the situation will improve, to being outraged that the government is incapable of upholding fundamental justice. In turn, this leads to the citizens seeking alternatives to resolve daily problems. As institutions increasingly lack credibility, and more crucially legitimacy, the public's enthusiasm to finance their operations wanes and private justice and alternative messages often become the favored dispute resolution mechanism.¹⁹ Public support is thus perhaps the most serious ingredient for terrorists' survival, yet the most difficult challenge for governments to address. It is a social scorecard of sorts that at once reflects how poorly governments are doing and what headway terrorists are making. Terrorists are, or pretend

¹⁹ One example of such private justice is the militia groups in U.S. that argue that since the courts are not legitimate, they have no jurisdiction over militia membership.

to be, the voice of social outrage and alienation, so it is the job of governments to reverse that image.

Conclusion

Confronting terrorism will require an understanding of the three main critical pillars of support upon which terrorists rely for their continued survival. Terrorists are highly adaptive and are increasingly successful at manipulating the weaknesses of the global system and of weak states to their advantage. In recent years many terrorists have become astute criminal operators out of necessity. They have further found the cracks in cultures that have allowed them to garner support from sympathetic populations who are disgusted with corrupt and ineffective governments.

While only a small number of disaffected people turn to terrorism, the message has spread. These non-state actors with state-like capabilities have taken advantage of the fruits of globalization: rapid communications and travel, and the ease of carrying out cross-border financial transactions. They have zeroed in on the aspects of disaffection that can be focused on globalization, western secular culture, and free market systems, all of which are perceived to be driven by a West that is painted as perverse, decayed and scornful of Muslims.

Indeed, terrorist groups have manipulated the underbelly of globalization and its discontents to their great advantage. They have not only drawn followers from alienated populations but money and material support from angry citizens. They have corrupted and usurped weak governments and perverted political cultures all for their own rather amorphous but violent purposes. To counter this will require a concerted effort on the part of the international community to develop strategies that simultaneously tackle these problems in a holistic and comprehensive fashion. The balance upon which terrorists' survival rests must be toppled; it is not enough to simply cause the structure to wobble—that merely gives terrorist groups time to adjust and regain their equilibrium. The three main pillars of terrorist support must be damaged simultaneously and irrevocably leaving these groups no alternative resources with which to rebuild their structures.

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