

Global Counterterrorism: Offence, Defence ... & Deterrence?

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**Canadian Political Science Association
Annual Conference ~ University of British Columbia
2008**

Abstract

Deterrence theory predicts that an attack can be prevented if a defender communicates a clear, costly, and credible retaliatory threat that persuades an opponent that the costs of pursuing an action outweigh possible benefits. Theories of deterrence have received detailed treatment within IR, typically applied to the coercive relations between state actors. By contrast, research on the application of deterrence theory to various aspects of counterterrorism has received no systematic analysis. The theoretical impasse stems from the mistaken belief that terrorist groups are irrational, suicidal, religiously fanatical organizations with no hierarchy or territorial base, while their disconnected global organization dampens a state's ability to find targets to threaten. Put together, the conventional wisdom leads to the unsettling conclusion that terrorists remain undeterrable and counterterrorism a kinetic rather than suggestive enterprise.

However, this paper argues that a more robust understanding of terrorism and a better appreciation of the logic upon which deterrence theory is based provides some surprising results. Preliminary findings suggest that deterrence is indeed applicable in the conflict against terrorism. Terrorist groups are human organizations with rational leaders, compelled to recruit, train, arm, and fund followers, while retaining specific objectives. They also use a number of coercive tactics and depend on state and non-state actors for financial, popular, ideological, and diplomatic support. These features provide opportunities for imposing costs within terrorist systems such that some form of punitive action can conceivably deter and influence components of the terrorist threat, planning, and operation.

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Introduction

In a 2006 address to the US Military Academy, President George W. Bush suggested that deterrence – a cornerstone of American foreign policy since 1945 – was no longer a viable guiding principle for safeguarding American security interests in the international arena. “In the Cold War,” President Bush remarked, “[America] deterred Soviet aggression through a policy of mutually assured destruction. Unlike the Soviet Union, the terrorist enemies we face today hide in caves and shadows ... The terrorists have no borders to protect, or capital to defend. They cannot be deterred – but they will be defeated.”¹

President Bush has been echoed by an array of political and strategic commentators. Elie Wiesel, in a 2003 remark that encapsulates much of the immediate sentiment that surrounded 9/11, argued that “unlike their distant predecessors of ... the nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth, the nihilist, anarchist, and other revolutionaries ... [modern terrorists] attack people, any people, all people at a certain place, simply because they happen to be there, at that moment.”² According to Wiesel’s rationale, there was little reason behind 9/11 except to wreak havoc and spread fear. Lawrence Freedman adds that post-Cold War terrorists were “much readier to inflict massive loss of life and move to ever more horrific methods in their efforts to do so.”³ John Gearson admits that “publicity is no longer a main priority of the perpetrators ... the objectives have changed from achieving ends to simply punishment – terrorists now seem to want people dead.”⁴ Consider further Barry Cooper’s perplexing sentiment, that modern terrorists “have grown increasingly indifferent to the risk of high casualties because their mission is ... to attempt a large-scale transformation of political reality by means of large-scale violence ... *typical of modern pneumopaths living imaginatively in a second reality of their own construction.*”⁵ They kill for killing’s sake, it would seem, to serve some abstract purpose of their own fantastic construction.⁶ Other authors remark

¹ George W. Bush, Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy, (West Point), (May 27, 2007).

² Elie Wiesel, “Why Terror Must be Unmasked and Defeated”, *International Peace Academy: Fighting Terrorism for Humanity*, (Conference Proceedings), 22 September 2003, 13.

³ Lawrence Freedman, “Superterrorism: Policy Responses”, in Lawrence Freedman (ed.) *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 4.

⁴ John Gearson, “The Nature of Modern Terrorism”, in Lawrence Freedman (ed.) *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 11.

⁵ Barry Cooper, “Unholy Terror: The Origin and Significance of Contemporary, Religion-based Terrorism”, *Studies in Defence and Foreign Policy*, No. 1, The Fraser Institute, (March 2002), 15. (Italics added)

⁶ In a compelling piece, Lee Harris argues that al-Qaeda’s attack on the U.S. was a “symbolic drama” that fit the organization’s “fantasy ideology” of a “pure Islamic David” combating the American/Western Goliath. The attack was less about structuring a Clausewitzian victory against an adversary, he explains, and more about fulfilling the “collective fantasy of radical Islam.” See, Lee Harris, “Al Qaeda’s Fantasy Ideology: War without Clausewitz”, *Policy Review*, Iss. 114, (Aug/Sept. 2002).

on the seemingly inane objectives sought by modern terrorist groups. Mark Juergensmeyer, for instance, argues that the “new terrorism” appears “pointless since it does not lead directly to any strategic goal ... It is the anti order of the new world order of the twenty-first century.”⁷ Likewise, Brian Michael Jenkins laments that the terrorists of the past, unlike those of today, “had a sense of morality, a self-image, operational codes, and practical concerns – they wanted to maintain group cohesion, avoid alienating perceived constituents, and avoid provoking public outrage.”⁸ Not so today; the terrorism of 9/11, these and other scholars seem to argue, is not only ruthless but rudderless too. The very idea of deterring it seems ludicrous.

Generally, deterrence sceptics base their conclusions on three assumptions. First, the fundamentalist religiosity espoused by al-Qaeda and its ilk negates the role of rational deterrence theory. “The religious orientation of the Islamists,” Fareed Zakaria writes, “breaks down deterrence. How do you deter someone who is willing, indeed eager, to die?”⁹ Unlike the nationalist, irredentist, Marxist, and ecological terrorists of yesteryears, religious terrorism approaches transcendentalism; violence is rationalized as a sacramental duty, bowing to neither political nor practical constraint. Consider the case of the Chechen suicide squad dispatched to Moscow in 2002 on orders to take the Dubrovka Theatre hostage. Operatives clipped bomb-belts around their waists and wired the pillars, walls, and ceiling of the theatre with explosives, underscoring that they were, as their spokesperson explained, “more keen on dying than you [the hostages] are keen on living.”¹⁰ While Western audiences interpreted this contemptuous desire for murder-suicide as simple lunacy, the squad’s message was a carefully crafted script laden with pietistic allegories dating back a millennium: in 634 CE, Khalid ibn al-Walid, the commander of the outnumbered Arab army on its way to battle the Persians at Mada’in, sent message to his foe that “In the name of G-d ... enter into our faith [lest we come with] a people who love death just as you love life.”¹¹ The Moscow operation, like the hundreds of other acts of terrorism since 9/11, was absolved by invoking G-d’s rule. How does one possibly deter that?

Second, sceptics assume that fanaticism creates diverging rational contextualizations, “second realities”, and “deformed consciousnesses”.¹² The modern religious terrorist, while actualizing a splendid life after death, has little fear of worldly retaliation. As the Chechen squad admit, death is welcome. Without fear, the threat of punishment – a critical element of deterrence – can not be properly issued. Indeed, retaliation and punishment might be *desired*. It is not far-fetched to assume that al-Qaeda and its

⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, “Understanding the New Terrorism”, *Current History*, Iss. 99, (April 2000), 158.

⁸ Brian M. Jenkins, “The New Age of Terrorism”, in *McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook*, (David Kamien, ed., 2005), RAND Reprint.

⁹ Fareed Zakaria, “America’s New World Order” *Newsweek*, (September 15, 2003).

¹⁰ Michael Wines, “Hostage Drama in Moscow: The Moscow Front”, *The New York Times*, (October 25, 2002).

¹¹ Quoted in Jerry M. Long, “Confronting an Army Whose Men Love Death”, *Joint Force Quarterly*, 44:1, (2007), 79.

¹² Bruce Hoffman, “Old Madness, New Methods: Revival of Religious Terrorism Begs for Broader U.S. Policy”, *Rand Review*, 22:2, (1998/99), 13; and Barry Cooper, “Unholy Terror: The Origin and Significance of Contemporary, Religion-based Terrorism”, *Studies in Defence and Foreign Policy*, (2002).

followers calculate the costs and benefits of their actions differently than do our governments. Accordingly, might they want *more* rather than less Western military intervention around the globe in order to hasten political, social, and religious upheaval? Consider too that a religiously self-assured terrorist is prone to be highly motivated and innately resolute. As Hussein Mussawi, a founder of Hezbollah explained, “We are not fighting so that the enemy recognizes us and offers us something. We are fighting to wipe out the enemy.”¹³ If escalation is sought and conflict is measured as a success while compromise a failure, then deterrence cannot be applied.

Third, deterrent sceptics note that terrorists lack a “return address” – a target of value against which a retaliatory threat can be issued.¹⁴ Because deterrence requires that a punishment be levied against something, somewhere, statelessness is an asset. The United States Government’s *National Security Strategy* issued in the months following 9/11 made careful note of the dilemma, stating that “traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy ... whose most potent protection is statelessness.”¹⁵ With few targets to threaten, deterrence is moot.

All is not lost, however. A more nuanced appreciation of the logic upon which deterrence theory is based and a more robust understanding of terrorism provide some counterintuitive findings. Indeed, influencing terrorist behaviour is not as impractical as sceptics suggest. Carefully tailored and purposely applied, deterring terrorism can work. Understanding why requires that we expand the logical underpinnings of deterrence theory and apply it to a terrorism unpacked into its various parts and processes. What follows is an evaluation of how deterring terrorism might work.

The Logic of Deterrence: A Look at the Theory

It is useful to begin first by addressing the existing literature on deterrence theory in order to appreciate how deterrence logic can be successfully applied against terrorist adversaries. The concept of deterrence goes back a long way. Even the Romans, Michael Quinlan reminds us, understood that ‘if you want peace, make ready for war’ (*si vis pacem, para bellum*).¹⁶ It was the nuclear revolution, however, that brought much of the logic of deterrence under the microscopic scholarship of international relations. Classical deterrence theory is a product of the Cold War – a conflict in which the vast nuclear armaments of the competing great powers necessitated that war avoidance take on new meaning. Thomas Schelling’s oft-cited definition presents deterrence as “persuading a

¹³ Cited in Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism*, (London: Sphere Books, 1987), 7-8.

¹⁴ Richard Betts, “The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 117:1 (2002), 31-32.

¹⁵ Government of the United States, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (September 2002).

¹⁶ Sir Michael Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 25:1, (April 2004), 11.

potential enemy that he should in his own interest avoid certain courses of activity.”¹⁷ Influencing behaviour through coercive threats, however, is multifaceted. Schelling conceives of two processes: *deterrence* – “inducing an adversary ... *not* to do something”, and *compellence* – “inducing a person *to do* something through fear, anxiety, doubt, etc.”¹⁸ While deterrence deals with the “don’ts” of inter-actor relations, compellence – as the root ‘compel’ suggests – deals with the “dos”, and requires that the deterrer further communicate what action he is expecting of the other, how much, for when, and so on. He must do so all the while credibly communicating how inaction relates to and will be met with coercive retaliation. Another useful way to distinguish between the two processes is to appreciate how they relate to a political status quo. Wyn Bowen suggests that deterrence is meant to “preserve the status quo; to prevent an ... adversary from initiating a course of action,” while the focus of compellence is “on altering the status quo.”¹⁹

Frank Harvey and David Carment further distinguish between the two by arguing that deterrence “is designed to prevent [an actor] from taking actions it is considering but has not already initiated,” while compellence attempts to force “by threat and/or application of sanctions” a target actor to “comply with the demands” imposed by the deterrer.²⁰ In either case, the objective is to “prevent undesired actions” from another actor, including those actions already taken and those contemplated but not taken.²¹

Measurable evidence of both compellence and deterrence varies in scope and availability. As Schelling illustrates, “acquiescence to a compellent threat is visibly responsive; doing nothing in face of a deterrent threat is not so obvious.”²² For the political scientist, this fact has (and will likely continue) to cause methodological heartache.²³ Measuring deterrent success is problematic because it is difficult to prove that a deterrent leverage was central, marginal, or irrelevant in explaining why an adversary decided not to act. Colin Gray adds colourfully that “history does not usually record the dirty deeds that were deterred; there is that awkward problem of an absence of evidence.”²⁴ It is difficult to see something not happening, but even if you could, it is even harder to show conclusively that you had something (anything) to do with the event not happening.

¹⁷ Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 9

¹⁸ Thomas Schelling, “Thinking about Nuclear Terrorism”, *International Security*, 6:4, (Summer 1982), 72.

¹⁹ Wyn Q. Bowen, “Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 25:1, (April 2004), 58.

²⁰ Frank Harvey and David Carment, *Using Force to Prevent Ethnic Violence: An Evaluation of Theory and Evidence*, (Praeger, 2001), 46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² Schelling, “Thinking about Nuclear Terrorism”, 72

²³ Lebow and Stein argue that testing deterrence theory is often problematic “because of the difficulties inherent in identifying deterrence successes, which leave few if any behavioural traces, and of inferring the intentions of would be challengers ... Intention to attack is never easy to establish ... To identify a case as one of deterrence, there must be evidence to indicate that the challenger considered an attack, as well as evidence that a defender attempted to deter.” See Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable”, *World Politics* 42, (April 1990), 336, 342, 343.

²⁴ Colin Gray, “The Reformation of Deterrence: Moving On”, *Comparative Strategy*, 22:4, (2003), 438.

Nonetheless, there is unwavering logic upon which deterrent theory rests: persuading a target that the costs of taking an undesirable action outweigh the possible benefits the action might provide. As a result, deterrence theory can be viewed as a “game of strategic interaction” where a “rational” actor assesses the benefits and costs of its action on expectations of the likely behaviour of its opponent.²⁵

A deterrent is effective when it produces a cost-benefit calculus on the part of the target in which the expected utility of pursuing a given action is less than the expected costs of enduring a punishment. Critics of rational deterrence theory note, however, that utility can be measured differently by varied – though equally rational – actors. Lebow and Stein, for instance, argue that some actors “may rationally minimize expected losses while others may maximize expected gains,” and that “subjective expected utility will vary depending” on whether actors are “risk-prone or risk-averse.”²⁶ If a political actor is willing to absorb very high costs in pursuit of an objective, it becomes far more difficult to deter his action. This and other related criticisms assume that deterrence is a psychological process, in which cognitive characteristics, fear, pressure, fatigue, and other human traits, influence the manner in which calculations are made and decisions taken.²⁷ In like fashion, other authors contend that an actor’s assessment of costs, benefits, probabilities and so on, is itself at risk of misperception.²⁸ In terms of evaluating the applicability of deterrence to terrorism, the question of rationality is a central critique. If a political actor is already willing to die and an organization’s *modus operandi* is based upon a deep-seated mythology of rational suicide, are cost-benefit calculations in the manner in which Western governments understand, likely or even possible?

Deterrence by Punishment vs. Deterrence by Denial

Having outlined the basic logical building blocks of deterrence theory, we must highlight the theory’s various delineations. Most importantly perhaps for our discussion on deterring terrorism is Glen Snyder’s distinction between deterrence by threat of punishment and deterrence by denial.²⁹ Deterrence by punishment, as has been elaborated upon already, relies on threatening to harm something an adversary values. During the Cold War, for instance, the United States threatened to attack Moscow (a cost to the Soviets) if Moscow were to attack Washington, and vice versa. A complicating

²⁵ Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980”, *World Politics*, 36:4 (1984), 499.

²⁶ Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Rational Deterrence Theory: I think, Therefore I Deter”, *World Politics*, 41:2, (1989), 208-209.

²⁷ See for instance, John Steinbrner, “Beyond Rational Deterrence: The Struggle for New Conceptions”, *World Politics*, 28:2 (January 1976), 223-245; Jeffrey D. Berejikian, “A Cognitive Theory of Deterrence”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 39:2, (2002), 165-183. For robust counter-arguments, see Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies”, *World Politics*, 41, (1989); and Frank P. Harvey, “Rigor Mortis or Rigor, More Test: Necessity, Sufficiency, and Deterrence”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 42, (1998), 675-707.

²⁸ See for instance, Robert Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception”, *International Security*, 7:3 (1982/83).

²⁹ Glen Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 13-19.

matter associated with the calculus of punishment is the potential costs of *inaction* on the part of the victim. That is, while pursuing an unwanted action may carry the cost of a retaliatory punishment, acquiescing to the deterrent and not carrying out the action might *also* carry various costs. As Gary Schaub argues, some actors do not view “inaction as a neutral outcome,” but rather as a second potential scenario that may or may not carry “some sort of loss.”³⁰ Thus, in order to be effective, the costs of punishment must carry more weight than the costs of inaction in the victim’s calculus.

Deterrence by punishment also assumes that inaction (acquiescence) on the part of the victim will be met with inaction on the part of the deterrent. That is, “If you act in manner A, I will punish in manner B; but if you *do not* act in manner A, I *will not* do B either.” If a victim expects some form of punishment *even after* having complied with the deterrent threat, the costs of inaction and action are nearly indistinguishable. As Brad Roberts submits, “in choosing not to act [a target accepts that he] will not be punished [and] that the threatening power will exercise some restraint.”³¹ With regards to counterterrorism, mutual inaction may yet prove problematic, especially when dual-track counterterrorism policies pursue both deterrent and coercive anti-terrorist operations. Anti-terrorism – while necessary – risks eliminating the credibility that inaction on the part of the deterrent is very likely at all. The United States has vowed to crush al-Qaeda, leaving the organization very little incentive to believe that a change in American policy would accompany a cessation of terrorist activity. If al-Qaeda were to acquiesce to Western demands and cease its campaign of terror, could its leadership credibly believe that American and allied forces would stop hunting them down?

Snyder’s second distinction, deterrence by denial, functions by reducing the perceived benefits an action is expected to provide an actor. Hardening national or infrastructural defences, for instance, raises the costs of attacking by diminishing the probability that an adversary is very likely to acquire his objective. As a result, improving denial capabilities influences behaviour by diminishing the benefit and value of a particular action. While punishment seeks to influence an actor through fear, denial “depends on causing hopelessness” on the part of the target.³² Defence differs from deterrence by denial, contends Snyder, because it seeks to reduce the “costs and risks in the event deterrence fails,” rather than attempting to influence the behaviour of the actor.³³ Defence mitigates while denial influences. Nonetheless, the two processes – especially in a war on terrorism – are distinct by only the thinnest of margins. In the years since 9/11, governments have invested heavily in augmenting infrastructural, societal, and military defences to contend with terrorism. The question to ask is whether or not al-Qaeda and others have been positively influenced, persuaded, or deterred as a result, or whether increasing defences have merely forced them to shift tactics and change their target selections. After all, while it became nearly impossible to carry box cutters onto planes

³⁰ Gary Schaub, “Deterrence, Compellence, and Prospect Theory”, *Political Psychology*, 25:3 (2004), 406.

³¹ Brad Roberts, “Deterrence and WMD Terrorism: Calibrating its Potential Contributions to Risk Reduction”, Institute for Defense Analyses (Paper P-4231), (June 2007), 7.

³² David Johnson, Karl Mueller, William Taft, *Conventional Coercion across the Spectrum of Conventional Operations: The Utility of U.S. Military Forces in the Emerging Security Environment*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002), 17.

³³ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, 3.

after 9/11 and increasingly difficult to smuggle bombs past security checkpoints after Richard Reid (a.k.a. The Shoe Bomber) nearly destroyed American Airlines Flight 63 in December 2001, the next airline attack (the foiled 2006 *Bonjika II* plot) sought to blow up airplanes over the Atlantic Ocean using ‘liquid bombs’ hidden in baby bottles and other containers. Should this be considered positive influence?

Finally, a subset of the deterrence literature has focused on the various prerequisites that inform the logic behind coercive diplomacy, putting it into practice at the international stage, and theoretically evaluating its effect. As Harvey advances, deterrence theory stipulates that a potential attack can be prevented if a defender i) clearly “defines” the behaviour considered unacceptable, ii) “communicates” to the challenger a “commitment to punish violations”, iii) retains the “capability” to either follow through with the promised punishment or deny the “objectives sought through ... aggression”, and iv) demonstrate “resolve” to carry out the punitive action if compliance is not met.³⁴ Each prerequisite relates to the underlining logic of deterrence by serving as crucial elements of *communication* and *credibility*.³⁵ Deterrence is very rarely effective if done in secret. An actor must be told, often loudly and repeatedly, that it is the target of a deterrent policy; otherwise, unknowing and uncaring, there is little incentive for it to act any differently.

Finally, successful deterrent relations depend on there existing a preferred and mutually-shared state of affairs between adversaries. As Robert Trager and Dessimslava Zagorcheva argue, if actors prefer a “state of the world ... in which the deterrer takes action against the adversary and the adversary responds as best it can,” than deterrence in practice will fail.³⁶ If war is the only state of affairs that mutually overlaps – that is both sides see war as the best and only option – then deterrence cannot work. In contemplating deterring terrorists, this prescription might prove problematic. As we noted above, are bargains between Western governments and terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda ever possible? How far are the opposing actors willing to go in order to accommodate the other?

Ultimately, deterrence theory, as Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal argue conclusively, “is less brittle than sometimes thought. Its propositions are contingent: if the expected punishment exceeds the gain, then opponents will be deterred ... [T]he model implies that some conceivable punishment would deter, but not that any particular one will, nor even any feasible one.”³⁷ Put more forcefully, the model predicts cases *where deterrence will breakdown and fail*. Deterrence failure in practice, however, should not be confused with failure of deterrence theory. If retaliatory threats are absent, muddled, miscommunicated, or weak, or the prize of action outweighs the costs of punishment, deterrence in theatre may well fail all the while deterrence in theory analytically succeeds.

³⁴ See Frank Harvey, “Practicing Coercion”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43:6, (December 1999), 840-843.

³⁵ See Harvey and Carment, *Using Force to Prevent Ethnic Violence*, esp. Chapter 4.

³⁶ Robert R. Trager and Dessimslava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It can be Done”, *International Security*, 30:3, (Winter 2005/2006), 91-92.

³⁷ See Achen and Snidal, “Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies”, 152

Was 9/11 a deterrence failure?

A knee-jerk reaction to al-Qaeda's attack of September 2001 would have it that the felling of the Twin Towers and the strike on the Pentagon was a deterrence failure of grandest proportion. The general consensus following 9/11 was the growing irrelevance of deterrence. "Most of what we believed was true about deterrence during the Cold War," Keith Payne offered in his Testimony before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee in July 2007, "is now misleading because international conditions have changed so dramatically." He continues: "The painful truth is that ... deterrence is beset by irreducible uncertainties: no one truly knows what now constitutes a 'stabilizing' force structure, or whether or how deterrence will work across the wide spectrum of contemporary opponents, stakes, and circumstance."³⁸

And yet a more nuanced evaluation of that fateful day would have to ask i) whether or not the U.S. had been actively, openly, and credibly attempting to deter al-Qaeda in the first place and ii) whether or not al-Qaeda actually received and accurately interpreted the threat. I argue that the US did not issue credible deterrent threats to al-Qaeda before 2001 and concurrently, that al-Qaeda did not fully appreciate the consequences of its actions. Again, what is important is that the 9/11 attack should not be considered a deterrence failure because no deterrent had been issued or received.³⁹ Whether out of a "lack of strategic imagination" or as a result of leftover post-Cold War hubris, neither the Bush Administration nor the Clinton Administration before it had done much to dissuade al-Qaeda from attacking the United States. Time and time again, in his audio and written messages, Osama bin Laden paints the United States as a "paper tiger" while pointing out the "false courage" shared by all Western societies. Consider that following al-Qaeda's devastating attack on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, President Clinton ordered *Operation Infinite Reach* – a volley of cruise missiles launched against Taliban and al-Qaeda facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan. While the show of force was technologically impressive, its effect on al-Qaeda was minimal, its message one of general disinterest, its lasting deterrent impact, negligible, if not counterproductive.

³⁸ Keith B. Payne, Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee – Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, (July 18, 2007), 1.

³⁹ Shmuel Bar makes a similar point in his assessment of Israel's deterrent 'failure' against Hezbollah at the onset of Second Lebanon War of 2006. Bar writes: "Conventional wisdom following the "Second Lebanon War" ... has been that Israel failed to deter Hezbollah. However, a deeper observation of the history of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict shows that the failure were not due to Hezbollah's disregard of Israeli deterrent signals, but rather the absence of such signals. Israel had given no reason to believe, either by declarations or by previous actions, that a crossborder operation to kill and abduct soldiers would be a crossing of a red line and would incur a harsh response." See, Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Nonstate Terrorist Groups: The Case of Hezbollah", *Comparative Strategy*, 26:5 (2007), 472 (emphasis added).

September 11 was not a deterrence failure but rather a failure to apply deterrence.⁴⁰ In the global response to 9/11, however, things have begun to turn around. The United States, along with all of its NATO partners and several dozen non-NATO allies, have carried out a sustained global campaign to root out and eliminate terrorist infrastructure worldwide. Thousands of al-Qaeda fighters have been killed and captured; terrorist financing has been substantially reduced; terrorist leaders and facilitators have been eliminated; and homeland defences have been augmented. U.S. policy on the matter of deterring terrorism has had a few reversals as well. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* argues emphatically that “deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy,” but just four years later, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* rightly suggests that “a new deterrence calculus combines the need to deter terrorists and supporters from contemplating a WMD attack and, failing that, to dissuade them from actually conducting an attack.” What is needed, the document reads, is “a range of deterrence strategies that are tailored to the situation and the adversary.”⁴¹ Post-9/11 counterterrorism has begun a process of transformation that includes a diversification of strategies, tactics, and plans that speak to a great number of potential scenarios. The exact role deterrence will take in shaping the future of counterterrorism has yet to be properly mapped out.

Expanding Deterrence and Unpacking Terrorism

Deterrence when applied to terrorism takes many shapes and sizes. While critics like Davis and Jenkins might have initially argued that “deterrence is the wrong concept” – because it is both “too limiting and too naïve” – to properly contend with terrorism, they nonetheless eventually concede that a counterterrorism “strategy with an *influence* component” to it is the way forward.⁴² What they call for is a “broadening [of] the concept of deterrence to encompass influence,” that does not solely rely on the issuance of coercive deterrent threats but on other non-kinetic strategies as well.⁴³ However, the authors’ distinction between influence and deterrence is a little disingenuous – and a lot misleading.

Deterrence, as our theoretical discussion noted, is *all about* influencing opponents (broadly speaking) and not merely based on levying threats and blows. To set deterrence up in minimalist garb and then conclude that the approach cannot be applied to counterterrorism because it is too narrow in theory and practice is a bit of a red herring.

⁴⁰ Robert Anthony suggests that the 9/11 terrorists themselves were “cautious and risk averse” yet the U.S. Government “failed to challenge them at the threshold levels necessary to deter their attack.” See Robert Anthony, “Deterrence and the 9-11 Terrorists”, Institute for Defense Analyses (Document 2802), May 2003, 2 (emphasis added)

⁴¹ See, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (2002), 15; and Government of the United States, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, (September 2006), 14.

⁴² Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002), 61. (Italics in original). It is interesting to note that the authors seemingly contradict their initial pessimism two years later. See, Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, “A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 21 (1), 2004.

⁴³ Davis and Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism*, 9, 10-13.

As David E. Johnson and colleagues concede, “the most useful definitions of deterrence are broad ones, which acknowledge that aggression may be deterred by many means.”⁴⁴ Most scholars evaluating terrorism and deterrence agree, basing their own investigations on a methodological position that expands the meaning of deterrence.⁴⁵

To that end, Michael Quinlan offers a solid starting point. His position is based on a simple paradigmatic understanding of deterrence logic. He writes:

Deterrence arises from basic and permanent facts about human behaviour: that in our decision-making we customarily seek ... to take into account the probable consequences of our actions; that we refrain from actions whose adverse consequences seem to us likely to outweigh the beneficial ones; and that we exploit these universal realities as one means of helping to influence others against taking action that would be damaging to ourselves.”⁴⁶

It is not so much, then, that deterrence theory as an approach has proven useless in informing strategies for dealing with terrorism, but rather that more limited, specifically defined notions of the theory, like deterrence by punishment for instance, may have.

This is a critical distinction – between throwing out deterrence theory *in toto* and expanding its logical boundaries in order to challenge certain aspects of the theory while developing, testing, and championing other theoretically related components. It is worth reiterating that deterrence works by imposing costs on the “values prized” by the target group. A broader interpretation of deterrence, however, expands the laundry list of potential “prizes” from the conventional state-based context. As Quinlan rightly notes, very few political units in history have measured their values singularly as territorial control or physical and tangible assets. Other values exist too – economic wealth, prestige, social cohesiveness, ideological and religious legitimacy, etcetera. Because some of these values rest outside the realm punishable by coercive force and destruction, non-kinetic deterrent instruments that target these non-physical assets should (theoretically speaking) also exist. Once discovered, deterrent leverages might be used to influence a target’s behaviour. “Political, economic, social, judicial, and even religious or similar [deterrent instruments],” Quinlan asserts, “can ... sometimes make a contribution.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Johnson, Mueller, and Taft, *Conventional Coercion*, 11.

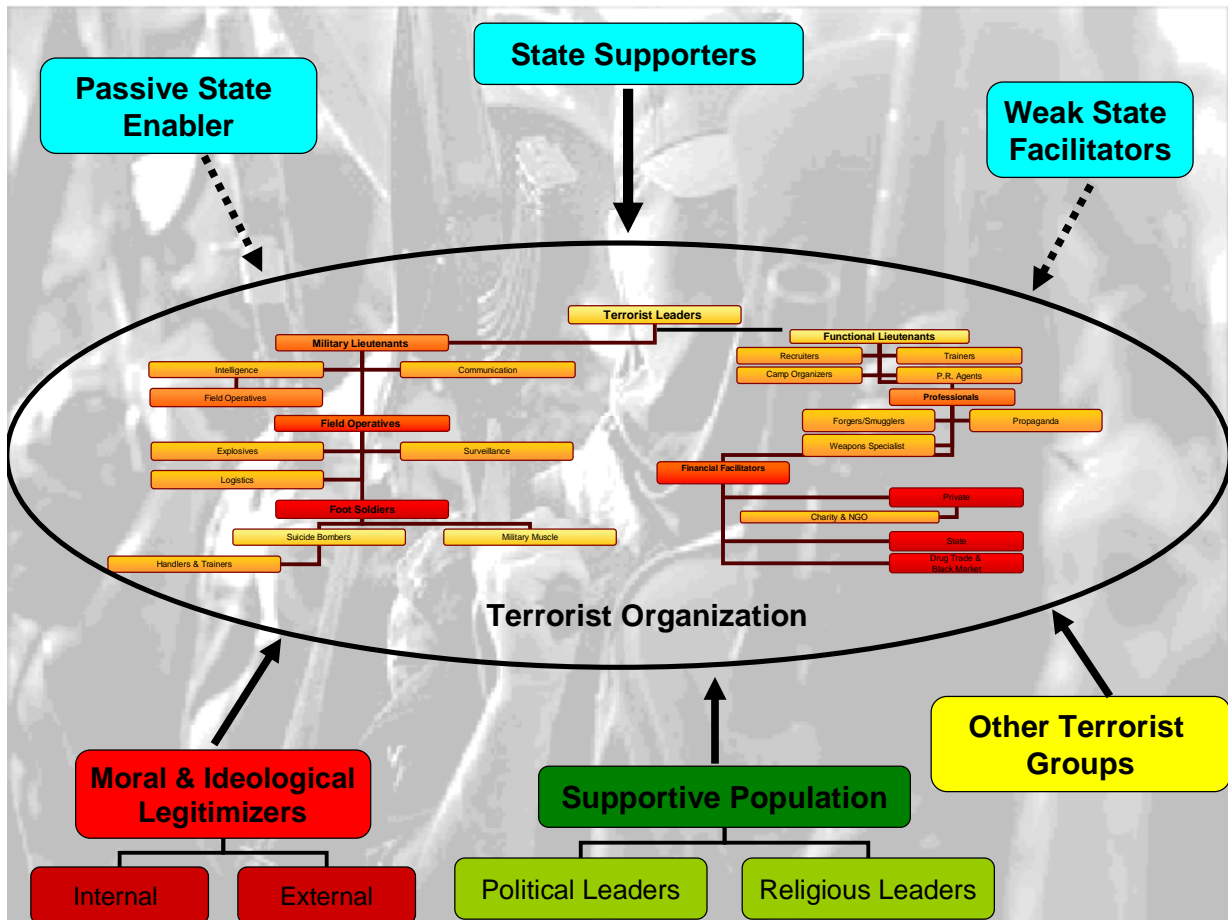
⁴⁵ See for instance the concept of “detercion”, introduced by Major A. R. Knott (British Army). Though Knott’s arguments are a bit confused (and the addition of yet *another* concept to the lexicon of deterrence theory (especially a neologism that combines two existing words) is not needed and unwelcome), the idea of broadening deterrence in order to apply its logic to counterterrorism is a fruitful theoretical path. Major A. R. Knott, “Does 9/11 Mark the End of Deterrence and the Birth of ‘Detercion’?”, *Defence Studies*, 4:1 (2004).

⁴⁶ Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability”, 11.

⁴⁷ Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability”, 12.

Breaking terrorism down – from an otherwise complex phenomenon into a comprehensible system – allows for a broadened conception of deterrence to be applied against a multitude of distinctive terrorist units.

Internal and External Constitutes of a Terrorist System



Generally, terrorist groups share a number of characteristics: they have evident, though fuzzy, functional borders delineating internal and external environments; they are constructed by internal processes and held together by ideational bonds, roles, and goals; they react to inputs (tactical, monetary, and political support, local and global perceptions) and produces outputs (attacks, fear, political upheaval); and they constitute functional units – the strategic and religious leaders, the financiers, recruiters, bomb-makers, foot soldiers, etcetera. By the same logic, terrorist acts can also be interpreted as a series of processes (planning, recruiting, training, scouting), each a necessary step leading to an attack. Like all social groups then, terrorist organizations are human organizations with very real vulnerabilities.

Unpacking terrorism provides much more than simply opening the phenomenon's black box. It offers ways to identify precisely how various deterrent and influencing strategies might be specifically tailored and applied against distinctive parts of the system. Simply put, if *each unit actor* involved in a terrorist organization and *each phase of a plot* is open to deterrent logic, the possibilities for applying deterrence to counterterrorism expand exponentially. All along the system, influences can be applied.

What follows is an exploration of a number of counterterrorism deterrent strategies.

Targeting what Terrorists Value: Deterrence by Punishment

When a broadened conception of deterrence is applied to an atomized terrorist entity, different deterrent leverages can be employed against various aspects of the terrorist system. That is not to say, however, that classic, punishment-based deterrent threats are altogether useless in dealing with terrorism. In some regards they remain the most robust strategy. To that end, conventional, coercive threats will continue to work well in some cases.

State sponsors of terrorism can be threatened with traditional forms of military intervention and punishment. The removal of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan in the weeks following 9/11 proved a remarkable strengthening of international resolve to combat the sponsorship of global terrorism. Since then, states implicitly or explicitly supporting terrorism have a much clearer understanding of the very real risks they run. Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, even Syria, seem to have understood the message.

In terms of WMD terrorism, deterrence can be issued against potential WMD-lending states. In general, most authors agree that deterring WMD use by terror networks is more straightforward than deterring conventional terrorism because groups are likely to require state assistance in acquiring WMD. Thus, traditional deterrents of threat and punishment can be employed against potential state suppliers. Accordingly, Caitlin Talmadge argues that targeting passive and active state sponsors of WMD terrorism with nuclear retaliation is likely to deter the transfer of WMD technology to sub-state groups.⁴⁸ In one sense, the risks associated with covertly assisting terrorists in organizing a WMD attack *are the same* as if the state had carried out the attack *itself*. Culpability can lead to the source of the weapon and traditional forms of retaliation can follow. It is telling, then, that the day North Korea successfully detonated a nuclear test, President Bush responded with a warning to President Kim Jong-il that the "transfer of nuclear weapons or material" to other countries or terrorist organizations, "would be considered a grave threat to the United States," and that North Korea would be held "fully accountable."⁴⁹ Considering

⁴⁸ Caitlin Talmadge, "Deterring a Nuclear 9/11", *The Washington Quarterly*, 30:2, (2007), 24-25.

⁴⁹ David Sanger and Thom Shanker, "U.S. Debates Deterrence for Nuclear Terrorism", *The New York Times* (May 8, 2007).

that the transfer WMD for terrorist use carries with it probable retaliatory devastation, few incentives actually exist for a proliferating regime to share its WMD.

Paradoxically, a WMD-seeking, terrorism-sponsoring state might find it in its best interest to *limit* its rhetorical fervor in support of terrorism lest it suffer retaliation in response to someone *else's* anonymous WMD attack. An act of WMD terrorism followed by an issuance of state sponsorship offers a clear return address for retaliation. If, however, a WMD terrorist attack remains truly anonymous, the victim's ensuing investigation could very well lay blame on a state's doorstep regardless of actual culpability. In both scenarios, a state sponsor of terror suffers a crippling retaliatory attack for either directly supplying terrorists with WMD or for talking as though it might supply terrorists with WMD.

The logic of deterring state sponsorship runs aground, however, with weak, failing, or collapsed states. Not only are these actors potentially willing to support terrorists in exchange for financial or security gains, but in truly dysfunctional political environments, they may have no other choice than to accept terrorist predation on their territory. What is critical for state-based deterrent strategies is the degree of control states have over territory, and by association, over parasitic organizations. In a failed political environment – like Gaza, southern Lebanon, Sudan, parts of Iraq and Afghanistan, and Somalia – leveraging deterrent threats against terrorism will work only poorly. Terror networks understand this and have proven more than willing to utilize the domestic chaos borne of state weakness to their benefit. When threatening a state-based sponsor become impractical, targeting other elements of the terrorist system will have to be pursued.

To that effect, coercive threats might be useful in pursuing and implementing a “limited war strategy” with terrorist organizations – a process that seeks, Whiteneck explains, to deter “the most egregious acts [of terror].”⁵⁰ In that manner, coercive threats might prove useful in delimiting the degree of violence inherent to a protracted conflict with terrorist systems. Drawing and communicating redlines that outline what type of violence is and is not acceptable might prove feasible. To a certain degree, Israel was able to fashion just such an influencing relationship with Hezbollah in the 1990s, delimiting the terrorist group's selection of targets to Israeli soldiers inside and alongside the Lebanese border while avoiding the targeting of Israeli citizens within Israel proper and Jews internationally. That it failed to communicate how these redlines had evolved in the months before the 2006 conflict partly explains why Hezbollah believed it could kidnap and kill soldiers on Israel's border with near impunity. It is important to note, then, that Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, showed more than a little surprise as Israel began its month-long invasion of southern Lebanon. He had not expected Israeli reaction to be so fierce. “We did not think that there was a 1% chance that the kidnapping [of Israeli soldiers] would lead to a war of this scale and magnitude,” he argued, continuing that had Hezbollah known, it “would definitely not have done it.”⁵¹ What this suggests in practice, is that states might need to accept some forms of terrorism as manageable – the low-

⁵⁰ Whiteneck, “Deterring Terrorists: Thoughts on a Framework”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 28:3, (2005), 195; 188-191; 193-194.

⁵¹ BBC News, “Nasrallah Sorry for Scale of War”, (August 27, 2006).

intensity, less devastating, conventional type – while signalling that especially nefarious acts of terror and certainly the use of WMD, surpasses a distinctive threshold that results in massive and prolonged retaliation.

Finally, coercive threats can always be employed against individuals. All socio-political organizations require some form of leadership. While pundits talk about modern terrorism as having “hydra-like” centres of gravity, even highly diffuse groups require some form of leadership if they are to pose a serious threat. Likewise, terrorist groups have middle-management positions (the operational and field-level coordinators, recruiters, propagandists, web-specialist, surveillance experts, logisticians, PR officers, intelligence officers, explosives experts, forgers, and other task-based officers) that present potential targets of influence. As a rule, the greater the diffusion of roles in a terrorist group, the higher the number of exploitable deterrent targets. Unlike suicide operatives, most of these individuals will be unwilling to die for their jobs. As Brad Roberts explains, “the leaders of al Qaeda, like the *jihadi* recruits, are inspired by martyrdom – but not their own.”⁵² These differences are exploitable. For deterrent strategies, each leadership and bureaucratic position represents a potential target to influence whereby, the individuals filling these roles can be specifically targeted. Once they are removed or contained, finding qualified replacements willing to join a terrorist organization might be difficult to do. Accordingly, terrorist leaders can be targeted with sanctions, death, and other forms of punishment.

While the thought of democratic governments sending soldier-spies to hunt and kill terrorists might strike some as repugnant, the tactic is nonetheless a given of modern counterterrorism. Selectively targeting, capturing and killing terrorist leaders, operators, facilitators, bomb-makers, fundraisers, recruiters, and the like – while normatively, legally, and politically contentious – is proving a robust and prudent offensive strategy and well-worn policy applied by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, their NATO allies, Israel, Russia, and countless others.⁵³ The tactic has had some measurable successes. As Daniel Byman writes: “After Israel killed [Hamas co-founder Ahmed] Yassin [in 2004], Hamas appointed [Abdel Aziz] Rantisi as his successor. Israel promptly killed Rantisi. Hamas then announced that it had appointed a new leader but would not name him publicly: a necessary step for his survival perhaps but hardly a way to inspire the group’s followers or win new converts with a show of bravery.”⁵⁴

In the global war on terror, selectively targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders and operators is taking place at an increasing tempo. In October 2007, American and Afghan forces began a formal “most-wanted” campaign in Afghanistan, offering cash rewards for information leading to the capture or death of a dozen local insurgent leaders suspected of conducting and organizing suicide attacks and planting road-side bombs. These were not

⁵² Roberts, “Deterrence and WMD Terrorism”, 13.

⁵³ Targeted killing involves intentionally pursuing, and capturing or killing terrorists with deliberate and pinpoint strikes or coercive operations. As Steven David writes, targeted killing is the “intentionally slaying of ... individuals ... undertaken with explicit governmental approval.” See, Steven David, “Fatal Choices: Israel’s Policy of Targeted Killing”, *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No.51, (2002), 2.

⁵⁴ Daniel Byman, “Do Targeted Killings Work?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (2), 104.

the top-rung terrorist leaders, like bin Laden, Mullah Omar, or Ayman al-Zawahiri, but rather mid-level planners and operators active in Afghanistan and Pakistan. All over the country, up to 300,000 posters and several hundred billboards have gone up with the names and pictures of the wanted individuals. Rewards range from US\$ 20,000 to US\$ 200,000.

The tactic seems to have had its successes. Abu Laith al-Libi, who rounded off the top half of the list, was killed in an air strike in Pakistan in January 2008. Al-Libi (“the Libyan”) was considered a prominent al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan and was implicated in the February 2007 suicide attack at Bagram Air Base during U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney’s Afghan visit. Other high profile targets have included, Mullah Dadullah, at one time considered the “backbone of the Taliban insurgency” and his brother, Mansoor Dadullah (who replaced him at the head of Afghanistan’s Taliban). Abdullah Mehsud, a powerful leader of Pakistan’s Taliban was killed in a raid on his compound by Pakistani troops July 2007 and Qari Kabir, a bomb-making expert, was caught by Afghan security forces in January 2007. According to open-sourced data, another 30 Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders and lieutenants have been successfully targeted in Afghanistan over the past six months, while the U.S. military has disclosed that over 50 mid-level facilitators have been killed or captured over the past year.⁵⁵

Besides the recent campaign in Afghanistan, the U.S. has successfully targeted other high-profile terrorists around the globe since 2001: Muhammad Atef was killed in a Kabul air-strike in 2001; Abu Ali al-Harithi was killed by a CIA drone in Yemen in 2002; Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) was caught in Pakistan in 2003; Hamza Rabia was killed by a guided missile in Pakistan in 2005; al-Qaeda in Iraq’s Abu Musab Zarqawi was killed in an American strike in Iraq in 2006; Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Osmani was killed in an Air strike in Afghanistan in 2006, and in Somalia, Abu Taha al Sudani and Fazul Mohammed were killed in a joint Ethiopian-American strike in 2007, Hassan Turki was killed in 2008, and most recently, Aden Hashi Ayro (head of the al-Qaeda linked Shabaab) was eliminated in May 2008.

The cumulative effect of a sustained strategy of targeted killing on a terrorist group’s operational ability is multi-fold.⁵⁶ Constant elimination of leadership leaves an organization in general disarray – replacement takes time, power struggles and bloody purges can develop, and command and control apparatuses becomes confused.⁵⁷ For smaller terrorist groups and cells – where leadership, knowledge, and power are centralized – targeted elimination can have the dramatic effect of completely destroying a specific menace.⁵⁸ Groups with particularly charismatic leaders are also especially susceptible to decapitating strikes. Consider the regression of the Shinning Path following the 1992 capture of its leader Dr. Abimael Guzman in Peru, the PKK’s demise,

⁵⁵ Jason Straziuso, “U.S. Offers \$200,000 reward in new “most wanted” Campaign”, *Associated Press*, (October 1, 2007).

⁵⁶ See Alex Wilner, “The Best Defence is a Terrific Offence: Four Approaches to Countering Modern Terrorism”, *AIMS Commentary*, (2007), 5-7.

⁵⁷ Gal Luft, “The Logic of Israel’s Targeted Killing”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, 10:1 (2003).

⁵⁸ Michael Eisenstadt, “Pre-Emptive Targeted Killings as a Counter-Terror Tool: An Assessment of Israel’s Approach”, *Washington Institute for Near East Studies*, (August 28, 2001).

from a 30,000 strong army under Abdullah Ocalan to today's much less formidable organization after his arrest in Kenya by Turkish agents in 1999, the decade long setback for Palestinian Islamic Jihad following Israel's 1995 strike against its leader, Fathi Shikaki, in Malta, and so on and so forth.

The threat of assassination forces terrorist leaders to worry about their safety, hinders their freedom of movement, throws them off-balance, and forces them to spend time and resources in avoiding their own death rather than planning the death of others. Leaders in hiding also face the related problem of "motivating their followers". Finally, by eliminating the top echelons of a terrorist group, a policy of targeted killing has the related effect of *de-professionalizing* an organization. By forcing the hasty replacement of important leadership positions with less-well-trained individuals, targeted eliminations make a terrorist organization less effective. The number of skilled operators is finite, so that while a group might attract recruits over the long run, its overall ability to inflict harm in the short term is diminished.⁵⁹

The logic of introducing the strategy in Afghanistan is in keeping with these findings. "You disrupt the network when you take out the leadership. It has an effect," offered Army Spokesman Lt. Col Rob Pollack, in discussing the strategy. "Those mid and high-level leaders are coordinating the action across Afghanistan. By taking them out there's at least a temporary disruption in the ability of the subordinates to continue coordinated operations."⁶⁰ It is hoped, that a sustained attack on the Taliban's operational leadership will not only eliminate the functional echelons of the insurgency (and thereby disrupt day-to-day planning), but, more generally, deter Afghan *fedayeen* from wanting to move up the ranks. The elimination of operational leaders, writes Gal Luft, is a "traumatic event in the lives of ... organizations, often leading to a change in organizational behaviour."⁶¹ If being on top requires a (potentially short) life of constant hiding, perhaps fewer foot soldiers will see the value of acquiring greater leadership roles.

Already, recent studies suggest that though suicide attacks in Afghanistan are on the rise, their success rates remain poor. Brian Glyn Williams has found that nearly half of the suicide bombings in Afghanistan have killed the bombers alone. His figures do not include failed attacks, where bombers are intercepted, captured, or killed before they can detonate their payloads, or the cases where bombers kill only one other aside from themselves. Williams contends, that for all their bluster, the "kill average for Afghan suicide bombers [is] far below that of suicide bombers in other theatres of action in the area (Israel, Chechnya, Iraq and the Kurdish areas of Turkey)." He attributes some of

⁵⁹ Consider Hamas' de-professionalization in the years between 2002 and 2005. While the terror organization carried out four times as many attacks on Israelis in 2005 than it did in 2002, its general effectiveness (measured by the number of victim deaths) decreased by a similar factor. The attacks became altogether less successful. While other variables (the West Bank security barrier, Israeli mobilization, checkpoints, domestic vigilance, and Palestinian infighting) impacted Hamas' efficiency, it appears, as Byman suggests, that the "drop-off occurred partly because [of] Israel's targeted killings," which "shattered" Hamas' ability to train, equip, and send out the 'best' suicide bombers. See Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?", 103.

⁶⁰ BBC News, "US Issues Afghan Most Wanted List", October 1, 2007.

⁶¹ Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing".

that failure to ineptitude, hasty preparation, poor planning, and weak leadership. The Taliban seem to regularly employ “deranged, retarded, mentally unstable” individuals to carry out bombing missions.⁶² As Waheed Muzhda, an Afghan political analyst suggests further, “the suicide bombers don’t have enough knowledge of how and exactly when to detonate themselves.”⁶³ Afghan bombers are simply badly trained and poorly equipped.

One possible interpretation of all of this is that Afghan insurgent groups lack the sophistication and know-how needed to launch meticulously-planned suicide missions. That a large subset of the insurgency’s leadership, including many involved in the building of human bombs, has been killed and incarcerated over the past year cannot help the insurgency’s cause. That remaining facilitators operate in an increasingly volatile environment, where the threat of death and capture is an ever-present fact of life, further dampens operational success.

Targeting what Terrorists Believe: Non-Kinetic Influences

In attempting to deter terrorism with non-coercive tools, deciphering what terror organizations value – besides their training camps, control and command facilities, and leadership circles – and constructing methods with which to deter behaviour – besides threatening these tangible assets – needs to be evaluated. Recall, as Quinlan argued, that “it is hard to think of any instance in history of a state or similar power grouping that had no assets which it wished to retain, no collective concern for the lives of its members and no interest in the survival of its ruling regime.” In cases where “potential leverages of this kind exist – that is, everywhere,” he continues, “it must in principle be possible to construct penalty systems.”⁶⁴ To that end, Davis and Jenkins conceive of a “portfolio of influences” to apply in counterterrorism, including both coercive and positive inducements on behaviour.⁶⁵

Besides the obvious tangibles, other potential values have been identified. For instance, Brad Roberts suggests that deterrent strategies might seek to influence the “many sources of self-restraint [that exist] within the network/movement of militant Islamic extremists.”⁶⁶ Self-restraints might be based on a desire for tactical and operational success, a yearning for long-term fundamental goals, an avoidance of capture, loss of religious justification or public support, and so on. The notion of terrorist self-constraint is further evaluated upon by John Parachini in his sober analysis of WMD terrorism. He notes, for instance, that WMD is in fact considered an illegitimate weapon by some terror groups. Understanding why is critical. Citing a Hamas leader, Abu Shannab, who explained to his followers that “the use of poison was contrary to Islamic teachings,” Parachini contends that deterrent leverages might seek to further delegitimize and stigmatize certain

⁶² Brian Blyn Williams, “The Taliban Fedayeen: The World’s Worst Suicide Bombers?” *Terrorism Monitor*, 5:14, (July 2007).

⁶³ Simon Robinson, “The World’s Worst Suicide Bombers?”, *TIME*, (July 28, 2007).

⁶⁴ Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability”, 14

⁶⁵ Davis and Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence*, 11.

⁶⁶ Roberts, “Deterrence and WMD Terrorism”, 8-17

behaviour.⁶⁷ Though Hamas is a fanatically dogmatic religious terrorist group, its struggle with Israel and other moderate Palestinian factions is bound by some form of self-restriction. Consider further revelations made by George J. Tenet, former director of the CIA, in his autobiography that American officials were concerned that al-Qaeda had organized to attack New York City's subway system using cyanide devices in 2003. Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command, reportedly called off the attack, fearing that it "was not sufficiently inspiring to serve Al Qaeda's ambitions" and would be considered a weak, even humiliating, follow-up to 9/11.⁶⁸ Might there be other forms of terrorist violence susceptible to influences of de-legitimization?

In an essay on al-Qaeda's "strategic culture", Jerry M. Long argues that although bin Laden "functions as a kind of lay *mujtahid*, one who gives independent interpretation to Islamic text ... [he] is not free to give just any interpretation, or else he would have no legitimacy."⁶⁹ The point is that Islam, in whose name al-Qaeda and others purport to act, is itself multidimensional, with the al-Qaeda brand representing but one, very minor slice of what is deemed religiously authentic. There is room for debate, then, as to what actions are considered legitimate in life and marriage, in governance and industry, and yes, even in war and conflict. Bin Laden's Holy War is certainly considered illegitimate by millions of Muslims. Al-Qaeda understands this limitation. Though it might call for the removal of *kuffar* (unbelievers) individuals and governments in the Arab and Muslim world, it does so while very carefully gauging reactions from its broader audience. There is much debate and scepticism regarding bin Laden's legitimate ability to do so.⁷⁰ If targeting Muslim regimes continues to be deemed religiously illegitimate by a large percentage of the broader community, bin Laden and others might think twice before they again plant bombs that target Muslims in Yemen, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, and elsewhere. Tapping into ways that delegitimize extremist variants of Islam – which will take the obvious help of Muslim leaders, intellectuals, and communities – might inform broader deterrent strategies. Historically, as Long notes, Islam's religious evolution "was not a monolithic formulation ... there was a great deal of debate among Muslim scholars," concerning the use of aggression, the type and degree of violence that was justifiable, against whom violence could be used, and so on.⁷¹ Spurring debate today might help influence behaviour tomorrow.

Because leaders concern themselves with the "fundamental goals" rather than the "operational goals" of the terrorist system – long-term strategic change, for instance, as opposed to tactical successes – they may be open to influences that retard the achievement of these goals. Besides the threat of death and capture, leaders might be challenged with non-coercive influence. Saudi Arabia, for instance, revoked bin Laden's citizenship and froze his financial assets in February 1994 and induced his brother, Bakr,

⁶⁷ John Parachini, "Putting WMD Terrorism into Perspective", *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:4, (Autumn 2003), 45

⁶⁸ Quoted in Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "US Adapts Cold-War Idea to Fight Terrorists", *The New York Times* (March 18, 2008).

⁶⁹ Long, "Strategic Culture, Al-Qaida, and Weapons of Mass Destruction", 9.

⁷⁰ See for instance, Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better War to Fight Global Jihad*, (New Jersey: Wiley & Sons: 2008). 40-42.

⁷¹ Long, "Strategic Culture, Al-Qaida, 9.

to denounce him on the behalf of the bin Laden clan. Developments like these not only make it harder for leaders to operate, but it strips away some of their veneer. A loss of legitimacy or popular outrage among once supportive communities might induce a leader to shift his group's behaviour. Consider that al-Qaeda in Iraq's Zarqawi earned a rare (and sharp) rebuke from Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command for his exceedingly barbaric acts of violence against Iraqi Muslims and non-Muslims. Zawahiri censured Zarqawi because his masochistic leadership alienated Muslim communities and damaged al-Qaeda's long-term, strategic goals.⁷² Zarqawi had become a terrorist liability and a PR disaster. Even for al-Qaeda, violence has its functional limitation. Its leadership understands this. Delegitimizing a group's behaviour might induce self-restraint and persuade leaders to shift tactics. Today, al-Qaeda in Iraq is a shell of what it was only two years ago.

Terrorism's financiers can be targeted too. Perhaps more than any other factor, financial security is a lynchpin to sustainable activity. *The 9/11 Commission Report* suggests that before 2001, al-Qaeda's annual operating budget was US\$ 30 million. With that, the organization planned acts of terror, "funded salaries for *jihadists*, training camps, airfields, vehicles, arms, and the development of training manuals." Al-Qaeda also paid the Taliban US\$ 20 million in return for safe haven and provided "start-up funds" to allied Islamists in Tajikistan, Kashmir, Bosnia, Dagestan, Xinjiang, Yemen, the Philippines, Chechnya, Indonesia, Soviet Georgia, Algeria, and elsewhere.⁷³ Clearly, it takes money to run a global organization.

The largest organizations have a number of financial sources, from oil-rich ideological sponsors to local charitable fronts. While influencing a wide array of financiers will require a number of nimble strategies, the underlining logic of deterrence applies to all. Since 2001, global counter-financing operations tailored specifically towards tracking and eliminating the flow of resources has become a priority. The obvious intent is to stymie and deter the recruitment, training, and equipping of terrorist systems. Besides the obvious costs of infrastructure and equipment, consider further that most professional terrorists are paid for their services. Cutting off an organization's funding literally starves the people working for it. Demonstrating an ability and commitment to locate and punish (legally or otherwise) financiers exemplifies the risks associated with financially sponsoring terrorism. Likewise, because financiers are likely the least fanatically motivated elements of the terrorist system with the most to lose, they may be the easiest to influence non-kinetically.

A subset of scholarship has focused on influencing the social enablers of terrorist organizations. To function effectively, a terrorist organization must have some form of societal support. Surrounding each organization is a concentric circle of followers. It is this community – for which terrorists purport to act – that has the power to give and take

⁷² See, Shmuel Bar and Yair Minzili, "The Zawahiri Letter and the Strategy of Al-Qaeda", *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol.3, (Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, Eric Brown, (eds.)), (Washington: Hudson Institute, 2006).

⁷³ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, U.S. Government (2004), 171-172 and Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better War to Fight Global Jihad*, (New Jersey: Wiley & Sons: 2008).

away legitimacy. Influencing the degree of societal support will influence a group's ability to function. Kim Cragin and Scott Gerwehr, in their evaluation of the societal bases of support that strengthen terrorist groups, contend that widespread cognitive and attitudinal leverages can be used to modify the behaviour – usually over the long-run – of the terrorists' enabling audience. This is an important finding that tackles some of the notions of the (often misplaced) 'root cause' literature on terrorism. The authors contend that "strategic influence campaigns could help to disrupt ... the confluence of anti-Americanism, radical Islam, and general support for political violence" in certain geographic locations at risk of nurturing terrorism.⁷⁴ Generally speaking, Cragin and Gerwehr's strategy is about *winning the middle*, the masses caught along the continuum between absolute support for and absolute rejection of al-Qaeda's mantra. As Long suggests, "the critical answer to al Qaeda and its franchises is to enfeeble them by delegitimizing them," so that if the West can "win the middle, [it] can reduce al Qaeda's recruitment pool and funding sources while at the same time robbing it of legitimacy."⁷⁵

Consider then the societal rejection that met al-Qaeda in Iraq following its 2005 Hotel Bombing in Amman, Jordan. As an attack that killed over 60 mostly Muslim Jordanians, it was wholly counter-productive to the organization's stated objectives. Likewise, actively channelling global and indigenous anti-terrorism norms might prove useful in de-legitimizing terrorism. Steven Simon and Jeff Martini agree, arguing that denying terrorist groups the constituent support they require demands a "marshalling [of] international norms to stigmatize terrorism," which might help push "the terrorists' tactics farther towards the margins" of acceptable behaviour. Such a process, they continue, requires both top-down stimulus – defining what actions are justified at the international level and shaming non-compliance – and bottom-up action – whereby "norm entrepreneurs" and community leaders help enforce "habitual compliance" within society. They conclude that normative influences in counterterrorism has already had some success: "the compulsion of norm-breakers to offer ex post facto justifications of their actions [like Zarqawi did following the Aman bombings] provides evidence that a threshold has been crossed and ... that the boundary is becoming more well defined."⁷⁶ If so, soft strategies might have the effect of draining a terrorist organization's support from the bottom, up.

Finally, terrorism's ideological or religious legitimizers can be challenged, debated, and even ridiculed. As Bruce Hoffman instructs, "religious terrorism demands vastly revised national and international diplomatic and cultural strategies that aim to strike at its root causes."⁷⁷ The focus today is on the role played by fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, particularly its *Wahhabi* and *Salafi* strains. Islamic terrorism's legitimizers operate within these religious traditions, commenting on how particular actions correspond to the dictates of religious jurisprudence. But Islam is expansive and

⁷⁴ Kim Cragin and Scott Gerwehr, *Dissuading Terror: Strategic Influence and the Struggle Against Terrorism*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005), xi-xii.

⁷⁵ Long, "Confronting an Army", 84

⁷⁶ Steve Simon and Jeff Martini, "Terrorism: Denying Al Qaeda its Popular Support", *Washington Quarterly* 28:1, (2004), 135-141.

⁷⁷ Hoffman, "Old Madness, New Methods", (1998/99), 15.

multidimensional. Al-Qaeda's version will never represent Islam in its totality. Because diverging interpretations exist, religion itself can inform influencing strategies. Consider, then, that immediately following 9/11, bin Laden was rebuked by Islamist scholars for failing to fulfill several theological requirements pertaining to *jihad*. He had not offered sufficient warning of the attacks, presented Americans with an opportunity to convert to Islam, or prepared adequate religious authorization to kill so wantonly.⁷⁸ Counter-cultural influences might seek to embolden these religious debates with decrees and *fatwas* that stigmatize al-Qaeda, its leaders, and followers. If Islamic terrorists perceive their war as just, moral, and defensive, promoting religious views that contend otherwise might influence their behaviour. The process has already begun. In April 2007, two senior (and usually rabble-rousing) Saudi religious scholars, Sheikh Khalid bin Su'ud Al-Rushud (an Islamic Judge in the Saudi Bureau of Complaints) and Sheikh Dr. Abd Al-Aziz al-Askar (a lecturer and preacher) came out against al-Qaeda's use of "religious edicts permitting suicide attacks in general, and the use of explosive belts in particular." The religious scholars concluded that "the act of 'killing the soul' sanctified by Allah will bring upon the individual committing suicide suffering from Allah."⁷⁹ Condemnations of this calibre will have an influence on both the communities once supportive of al-Qaeda's behaviour and on religious individuals contemplating terrorism but fearful eternal damnation.

Targeting what Terrorists Seek: Deterrence by Denial

While certain elements of the terrorist system might be deterred with traditional forms of punishment other aspects of the system might be deterred by denying them the things they seek. M. Elaine Bunn argues, convincingly, that "even terrorists with suicidal inclinations want to die to accomplish something ... defensive deterrence ... may over time, be the more effective way to think about deterring terrorists."⁸⁰ Denying terrorist groups the goals they pursue can work by either augmenting defensive structures – making it harder to attack successfully – or, more broadly, mitigating the consequences of successful terrorist attacks – diminishing the effects attacks have. There are two, and perhaps more, processes at work here. As Anthony Powers explains, "if denial measures deter potential terrorists by underpinning the message of "it's too hard," then defenses underpin a message that "the impact of using these weapons will be minimal."⁸¹ Mitigation, then, is critical. Gray argues further: "if we are to perform competently in deterrence we need to address empathetically the issue of how, by our policies, we can negate the political effects of tactically successful terrorism."⁸² Thus, while deterrence by punishment influences an actor through fear, deterrence by denial does so by creating

⁷⁸ Michael Scheuer, "Al-Qaeda's Complete Warning Cycle: Ready to Attack?", *Terrorism Focus*, 2:5 (2005), 4.

⁷⁹ Asaf Maliach, "Saudi religious scholars come out against Al-Qaeda's use of religious edicts permitting suicide attacks against Muslims", *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, (July 8, 2007).

⁸⁰ M. Elaine Bunn, "Can Deterrence be Tailored?", *Strategic Forum*, No. 225, Institute for Strategic Studies (NDU), (January 2007), 3.

⁸¹ Anthony Powers, "Deterring Terrorism with CBRN Weapons: Developing a Conceptual Framework", CBACI, *Occasional Paper 2*, (February 2001), 15.

⁸² Colin S. Gray, "Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror", *Parameters*, (Spring 2002), 8.11.

a sense of despondency. When the immediate and long-term odds of success approach zero, a terrorists' cost-benefit calculus will change.

Others, like R.P. Eddy, Director of the Center for Policing Terrorism suggests that defensive counterterrorism should seek to match terrorism's unpredictability by "inject[ing] randomness" into defensive tactics. This sentiment is reflected in a recent report by the U.S. Department of Homeland Defence, which argues that "both variability and unpredictability must be consciously injected into flexible prevention measures."⁸³ As an illustration, Eddy suggests that "the random bag search" utilized in New York City's subway system, can deter would-be terrorists in a cost-effective and efficient manner. "If you're a terrorist," Eddy argues, "you have a limited amount of resources [and] you don't want to deploy them if you have an increased chance of ... not being successful."⁸⁴ Likewise, terrorists are generally risk-averse while preparing for an attack; they obey the law diligently, are less likely to steal, speed, or do drugs, and generally avoid attracting undue attention lest they get caught before carrying out their long-term goals. If so, even a very minor probability of getting caught (by a random bag search, for instance) will have a disproportionately large deterrent impact.⁸⁵ The principal intent of the search itself is to give the impression to would-be bombers that their plans will not easily succeed.⁸⁶ Randomness can be utilized in other ways too. For instance, several dozen police officers in squad cars converge twice daily at randomly selected times and locations throughout New York City. The idea is to keep extremists "guessing as to when and where a large police presence may materialize at any hour."⁸⁷ Unpredictability impedes terrorist planning by introducing greater levels of uncertainty.

Accordingly, terrorist foot soldiers and even suicide operatives might be influenced in a manner of ways. While suicide bombers occupy the media's attention, they constitute a small fraction of an organization's overall muscle. In fact, of the approximately 11,000 acts of terror in 2005, only 360 were suicide bombings – merely 3 percent.⁸⁸ A far greater number of foot soldiers are involved in training recruits, planting IEDs and other bombs, lobbing rudimentary missiles, attacking targets with gun and mortar fire, kidnapping civilians, and carrying out executions and assassinations. Most foot soldiers may be willing terrorist fighters, but unwilling suicide terrorists; they may risk their lives for terror, but nevertheless value living more than dying. If so, they might respond to a number of coercive and non-coercive influences. Establishing a robust track-record of uncovering and foiling terrorist plots and of imprisoning individuals sends a message to future would-be terrorists.

Even the suicide bomber willing to give – not merely risk – his life might be influenced. As Michael Quinlan explains, "these individuals ... are not simply insane; they have their value-systems. They prize the respect of their families, their communities and their co-

⁸³ Department of Homeland Security, *Report of the Future of Terrorism Task Force*, (2007), 6.

⁸⁴ E.P. Eddy, in "Making New York Safer", Council on Foreign Relations Policy Symposium: The Terrorist Threat in New York, (September 8, 2006).

⁸⁵ See Anthony, "Deterrence and the 9-11 Terrorists", (2003).

⁸⁶ John Kifner, "What's in a Bag Check? Deterrence, and Comfort", *The New York Times*, (July 23, 2005).

⁸⁷ Schmitt and Shanker, "U.S. Adapts Cold-War Idea to Fight Terrorists", (2008).

⁸⁸ Roberts, "Deterrence and WMD Terrorism", 8.

religionists.”⁸⁹ To that end, social responses to terrorism might be translated into costs rather than rewards. If, for instance, a suicide bomber were characterized by family and friends as a monstrous coward (instead of being lionized as a warrior), those contemplating future suicide operations might think twice. Consider further that a suicide terrorist may be less than willing to give his/her life in a futile attack. Denying bombers easy access to a target or communicating an ability to mitigate the consequences, as we discussed above, might influence their behaviour. As Anthony suggests, “successfully stopping a suicide attack ... require[s] either challenging the terrorists’ underlying motivations for the attack or undermining their confidence in its expected success.”⁹⁰

If terrorism doesn’t pay, it won’t be employed. Denying terrorist successes can work by mitigating the broader consequences of attacks by limiting the social, political, and economic effect of terrorism. Almog, has noted the importance of other, inherently innate, denial factors, like a productive and robust economy that can withstand the shocks of terror, socio-political cohesion that can give a government an effective mandate to properly respond to a terrorist threat, and societal resilience that challenges the utility of a terrorist campaign.⁹¹ Thus, while critics lambasted President Bush for calling on Americans to “get back to work, to go shopping, going to the theatre [sic], to help get the country back on a sounder financial footing” and British Prime Minister Tony Blair for stating that citizens “should go about their daily lives: to work, to live, to travel and to shop – to do things in the same way as they did before September 11”, there might have been at least *some* validity to their pleas.⁹²

The terrorists *do lose* if you and I act as if it is business as usual. If the terrorists’ impact is proven to be very limited, they may ponder the value of painstakingly planning another series of attacks that might very well result in little at all. A cautiously casual response to terror may prove useful in deterring its future use simply because it increases the seeming futility of preparing for future acts. If terrorism’s impact is perceived to be limited, those planning it may ponder the value of painstakingly organizing future attacks that might result in little at all. If terrorist failures can be augmented and the few successes shown to have limited effect, terrorist groups may very well be deterred.

Conclusion

The task of influencing terrorism is a daunting one and will prove much more difficult than deterring the Soviet Politburo. Nonetheless, the challenge can be met by conceptually tailoring a multitude of deterrent and influencing strategies that speak directly to various elements of the terrorist system. Unpacking terrorism into its pieces

⁸⁹ Quinlan, “Deterrence and Deterrability”, 15.

⁹⁰ Anthony, “Deterrence and the 9-11 Terrorist”, 1.

⁹¹ Doron Almog, “Cumulative Deterrence and the War on Terrorism”, *Parameters*, (Winter 2004/5), 12-14.

⁹² George W. Bush quoted in Robert Zieger, “Uncle Sam Wants You...to Go Shopping?": A Consumer Society Responds to National Crisis, 1957:2001”, *Canadian Review of American Studies* 34:1, (2004), 94; George Jones and Michael Smith, “Britain Needs you to Shop, Says Blair”, *Telegraph*, (September, 28, 2001).

and processes reveals a number of exploitable strategic opportunities. What results is a multi-layered and complex web of deterrence applied to various elements of the terrorist threat simultaneously.

In combination with one another, these various counterterrorism strategies and tactics might well impact the way terrorists behave. Michael Vickers, a policy analyst at the Pentagon, suggests that the “hard-core terrorists will be the hardest to deter ... but if we can deter the support network – recruiters, financial supporters, local security providers, and states who provide sanctuary – then we can start achieving a deterrent effect on the whole terrorist network and constrain terrorists’ ability to operate.”⁹³ In sum, deterring terrorists will look remarkably different than deterring the Soviets, but the logic and rationale behind deterrence theory might yet prove invaluable in winning the war on terrorism. What is needed is a “family of plans” or, as Davis and Jenkins put it, a “portfolio of influence”, that includes both coercive and positive inducements on behaviour. Thus, deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial are weaved together with other processes of positive reinforcement and norm diffusion. The result is the establishment of a thick web of potential deterrents – each focused principally on a particular terrorist element – with which to apply against terrorist systems as a whole.

⁹³ Quoted in Schmitt and Shanker, “US Adapts Cold-War Idea to Fight Terrorists”, (2008).