CHAPTER 15

CONTENTS

Terrorism

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Abstract

In this chapter, students will learn about the definitional debates surrounding the concept of terrorism and different types of terrorism, notably the difference between state terrorism and sub-state terrorism or terrorism from below. The chapter then analyses trends in state terrorism and sub-state terrorism in the context of other more substantive threats to security. It then examines the main responses to sub-state terrorism and assesses the response to the 9/11 attacks, the state of the 'global war on terror' after ten years and the likelihood of a reconsideration of the nature of the response.

Introduction

The 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington in 2001 brought the issue of terrorism to the forefront of Western security thinking and resulted in the declaration of a 'global war on terror' by the George W. Bush administration. Because of the suddenness of the attacks, the large numbers of people killed (*c.*3,000) and the targeting of two hugely important symbols of American life, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the reaction was both vigorous and extended, leading to the termination of regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

To some extent this concentration on the incidents and on retaliating against the al-Qa'ida movement has resulted in a concern with terrorism that may not be justified, given the many other problems of human and state security affecting the world. It therefore makes sense to seek a broader assessment of the phenomenon of terrorism, bearing in mind that it can be undertaken by states against their own populations as much as by sub-state actors, even if the latter forms of terrorism currently dominate the security agenda.

Terrorism in perspective

Excluding the very high levels of non-combatant casualties in Iraq since 2003, terrorist activities conducted by sub-state actors across the world result in the deaths of, at most, a few thousand people each year. While this is appalling for the victims and for their families and friends, it does mean that terrorism is one of the minor causes of human suffering in the world. Far more significant are the problems arising from poverty and underdevelopment, from natural disasters, from wars, from crime and even from automobile accidents. Even so, the 9/11 attacks have resulted in an extraordinary concentration on a particular form of transnational political violence, focusing mainly on the al-Qa'ida movement and associated Islamic jihadist groups.

The 9/11 attacks killed nearly 3,000 people in just one day, but at least that number of children die every day across the global South from avoidable intestinal diseases including diarrhoea and dysentery, brought on mainly by impure water supplies. In Iraq in the closing months of 2006, the monthly death toll of civilians in the insurgency and in sectarian violence was very nearly the same as the losses in the 9/11 attacks. In Rwanda in the mid-1990s, close to a million people died in genocidal attacks, and continuing conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa have since killed even more people. In the mid-1970s, it was estimated that over 400 million people suffered from malnutrition, but today this has risen to at least 700 million. Across the world, more than two billion people survive on the equivalent of two US dollars a day or less. The diseases of poverty are mostly avoidable yet kill millions of people each year (see Chapter 20 this volume).

In spite of this, the global war on terror was elevated in the early 2000s into the principal challenge to security. Two regimes were terminated, partly on claims of sponsoring terrorism, the US military budget rose to the level of the peak years of the Cold War and the term 'war on terror' was for some years transformed into the 'long war against Islamofascism'. In its most extreme representation in some influential US political circles, this war was understood as the 'Fourth World War,' and was just as much a matter of the survival of civilization as were the previous world wars, including the 'Third World War' against the Soviet Union.

Any dispassionate analysis would question the centrality of the war on terror, at least in terms of overall human well-being, but it is necessary to acknowledge this representation given its potency and centrality in inter-

national security thinking after 2001. There are three elements that together offer some degree of explanation for this concentration. One is that the 9/11 attacks were deeply shocking to the United States in that a small group armed only with parcel knives could use civil aircraft as flying bombs to destroy a world-class financial centre and attack the headquarters of the US military. Moreover, the attacks came as a complete surprise to most people and their effects were witnessed live on television.

The second element that helps explain the response is that the Bush administration in mid-2001 was beginning to pursue its vision of a New American Century with some success. Unilateral stances on some key issues were being developed and there seemed every prospect that the rest of the world would come to accept American leadership as being essential for international security – a 'benign imperium' was said to be no bad thing (Krauthammer 2001). Finally, the almost inevitable focus of state-centred security, given the status of the United States as the world's sole military superpower, was that it was essential to regain control by destroying a dangerous sub-state movement and any state sponsors, not least because the al-Qa'ida movement and its presumed sponsors were based in the Middle East and South West Asia. This was a region of long-term security interest to the United States because of the critical importance of its energy resources and the close American ties to the state of Israel.

The end result of these factors is a situation that, in the absence of fundamental changes in policy, is likely to remain a major feature of international security for some years to come. Yet terrorism is still a minor issue in terms of global human security, and an aim of this short contribution is to provide a wider perspective. This will involve a brief examination of definitions of terrorism, an analysis of state and sub-state terrorism, an overview of the main forms of terrorism in recent years and a discussion of the main responses to terrorism leading to a review of the counter-terrorism methods used specifically in response to 9/11.

Definitions

A succinct definition of terrorism is 'the threat of violence and the use of fear to coerce, persuade, and gain public attention' (NACCJSG 1976). A more complete definition, which brings in a political dimension and thereby excludes the use of terror in ordinary criminal activities such as protection rackets, is that:

> Political terrorism is the use, or threat of use, of violence by an individual or a group, whether acting for or in opposition to established authority, when such action is designed to create extreme anxiety and/or fear-inducing effects in a target group larger than the immediate victims with the purpose of coercing that group into acceding to the political demands of the perpetrators.
>
> (Wardlaw 1982: 16)

A definition used by the US government is 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience' (US Department of State 2001: 13).

Both of the latter definitions are concerned with the intention to have an effect on an audience that is larger than the group actually targeted. It follows that terrorism works through fear, but it is also the case that acts of terror may have distinct political aims rather than being, for example, acts of revenge. Moreover, the specific inducement of fear in a larger audience may be intended to ensure that a particular political response ensues, when it might not be stimulated by an act that does not elicit a wider response. The element of inducing fear in a larger population than that targeted is a key aspect of terrorism and is one explanation why it attracts so much attention compared with the many other forms of violence as well as suffering due to natural disasters or poverty and underdevelopment.

State and sub-state terror

There is one fundamental difference between the definition given by Wardlaw and that used by the United States government in that the latter is concerned with sub-state actors, even if they may be supported or sponsored by a state, whereas Wardlaw's definition embraces the actions of states against their own populations. In broad terms, state terrorism is actually far more widespread in its effects, both in terms of direct casualties and in the inducing of fear.

Some of the most grievous examples of state terrorism have been the purges of Stalin's Soviet Union in the 1930s and Mao's China in the 1950s, but most colonial powers have used terror tactics to maintain control of colonies, especially during the early phases of colonization but also in response to the demands for independence in the early post-war years. More recently, states have readily used a wide range of terror tactics against their own populations. These have ranged from detention without trial through to torture and summary execution, but have also involved disappearances and the use of death squads. In Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s frequent use was made of such tactics, with persistent claims that the United States was involved at least indirectly (George 1991).

Even within the restricted 'sub-state' definition, which is the main concern of this chapter, there will be many controversies over who is a terrorist. Two examples illustrate this. During the long period of violence in Northern Ireland, the British government and most British people regarded the Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provisional IRA or PIRA) as a terrorist organization seeking to achieve a united Ireland by a sustained campaign of violence. Against this, though, many political supporters of Irish unity, in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, saw the PIRA volunteers as freedom fighters trying to liberate Northern Ireland from British rule. Such support extended to many members of the Irish-American community in the

United States. Furthermore, when the peace process in Northern Ireland finally made progress in the period 1997–2007, some of those with close links with PIRA became senior members of a power-sharing system, transitioning from perceived terrorists to legitimate political figures in a matter of years.

A second example is the use of terror and violence against Black Americans across the Southern states by white supremacist organizations for more than a century, right up to the 1960s and even more recently. Such groups were not, at the time, considered to be terrorists by most Americans but they would fit in with any of the three definitions given above. By a combination of beatings, torture and lynching, a substantial sector of the American population was terrorized into accepting its inferior place in society.

Sub-state terrorism can originate in very different societies and with highly variable motivations and underlying drivers. Although firm categorization is not easy, terrorism can be loosely divided into two orientations. One is terrorism that seeks fundamental change in a state or in society. Such revolutionary terrorism might be based on a political ideology of a radical persuasion that may be either left or right wing in nature, or it might be based on religious commitment. It may even combine the two. Either way, it aims for fundamental change, usually within a particular state but with this quite commonly being seen as a prelude to an international transformation. Baader Meinhof, Action Direct, Brigate Rossi and other European groups would be examples in the 1970s. More recently, the al-Qa'ida movement combines revolutionary change with religious belief.

The other form of terrorism seeks particular change for an identifiable community. This rarely has international ambitions but may link up with similar groups elsewhere. It is frequently separatist in nature but may have elements of revolutionary politics embedded in its thought. ETA in Spain and the LTTE Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka are examples. Radical groups of this nature often arise in response to substantial political change that has damaged the prospects of the community from which they arise. Many radical Palestinian factions, for example, developed in direct response to the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel in the Six Day War of June 1967, even if the Palestinian communities had previously been under the control of Egypt or Jordan.

Responding to terrorism

There are three broad approaches to responding to sub-state terrorism (see also Chapter 30 this volume). The approach most commonly used might best be described as traditional counter-terrorism rooted principally in policing, intelligence and security. Paramilitary groups are identified and taken into custody before they can carry out attacks, or if this fails then those responsible for attacks are detected, detained and subsequently brought to justice. In addition, improved security is directed at providing increasing levels of protection for perceived targets. The second approach is more overtly military

and involves direct military action against paramilitary organizations, especially when they have distinct physical locations. If they are clearly seen to be sponsored by a state, then that state may itself be targeted for punitive action or even regime termination.

The third approach concentrates on the underlying motivations of terrorist groups and the environment from which they draw support. While there may be a belief that the leaders and the most dedicated cadres of a paramilitary organization may have a degree of motivation and determination that is difficult to undermine, this approach is rooted in the idea that most paramilitary groups have evolved and are operating within a much wider context. They do not exist in isolation but depend for support on a sector of a particular society that shares their aims and approves, to an extent, of their methods. This approach also recognizes that there are conditions in which negotiations with paramilitary leaders may become possible, often with the utilization of mediators acceptable to both parties.

Most responses to terrorist campaigns utilize a combination of these methods, but the balance may vary widely. Many of the middle-class left-wing revolutionaries in 1970s Europe that included the Baader Meinhof Gang in West Germany and Brigate Rossi in Italy believed that their violent actions would provoke an uprising of the masses leading to a working class revolution. Even so, their campaigns did nothing to persuade the authorities to make any major changes in wage agreements or working conditions. The authorities did not see such movements as presaging a wider revolution and in this assessment they were correct. Instead, the response was very much one of intensive policing and intelligence gathering, coupled with some degree of increased security for potential targets, especially senior politicians and industry leaders.

Between 1968 and 1972 there were widespread activities by a number of radical Palestinian groups, some of them working in association with paramilitary movements in Western Europe and Japan. While Israeli security forces sought to kill some of those responsible, the greatest concern for most Western states was the development of aircraft hijacking as a means of gaining attention and, on some occasions, attempting to negotiate prisoner release. Although there were intensive efforts to identify and detain those responsible, the most substantial response was to invest in a massive increase in security measures for air travel.

In the long-running Northern Ireland conflict, all three approaches to counter-terrorism were adopted by the British authorities. Intensive policing and intelligence-gathering, in Northern Ireland and also in Britain, were accompanied by new legal regulations, including courts that sat without juries and, for one period, internment without trial. These methods were paralleled by an intensive counter-insurgency posture by the British Army and local Northern Ireland forces, mainly in Northern Ireland itself but sometimes in cooperation with the Republic of Ireland. Even as these methods were being used, not always with success, there was a recognition that much of the support for the republican movement came from within the Catholic nationalist

minority community in Northern Ireland, largely because it had been in an inferior socio-economic position and had had little political power for generations. Indeed, the origins of the violence in the 1960s came largely from a robust response from the Protestant unionist government to a civil rights movement from within the nationalist community that was partly modelled on the US civil rights movement.

Because of this underlying support for the republican paramilitaries, the British authorities worked towards the greater emancipation of the nationalist community, not least through a number of economic and social measures. This was a difficult process considering the suspicions of the unionist majority, itself vulnerable through seeing itself as a minority in the island of Ireland as a whole, even if it was the controlling majority in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the position of the nationalist community did improve over more than

BOX 15.1 ECONOMIC TARGETING

Paramilitary organizations tend to be relatively conservative in their tactics, staying with particular methods that have been tried and tested. These may involve bombings, assassination, kidnappings, punishment beatings or combinations of these. This conservatism is often a reflection of the difficult environment in which they are operating and which makes it necessary to rely on those methods in which they are most practised. On occasions, changes in strategy and tactics can be significant in the effectiveness of an organization, and one of the developments of the two decades after 1990 was a tendency for a number of paramilitary groups to engage in the targeting of the economy of a target state in addition to more traditional targets such as the police and military forces and the political leadership.

Economic targeting has been practised to some extent by many paramilitary groups, with recent examples being the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka, the persistent attacks on Iraqi oil pipelines since 2003 and parallel attacks on Saudi facilities, most notably the attempt to disrupt the Abqaiq oil processing plant in Saudi Arabia, the world's largest, in February 2006.

Economic targeting was developed, in particular, by the Provisional IRA in Britain between 1992 and 1997 at a time when there was a stalemate in the long-lasting violence in Northern Ireland. The campaign was not designed to cause mass casualties but rather to attack the financial centre of the UK, the City of London, which was then competing with Frankfurt to be the financial hub of Europe. Two large truck bombs were used to cause substantial damage in the heart of the city in 1992 and 1993 with another targeting a major road interchange. At least three other bombs were intercepted but the impact of the bombing was such that rigorous counter-measures were put in place in the City while the British government looked more favourably on the possibility of negotiations.

Apart from a temporary ceasefire, the period 1992–1997 saw many more attacks, some of them large as in Canary Wharf and Manchester in 1996, with other small attacks causing substantial disruption to roads, railways and airports. PIRA tended to target facilities away from the centre of London because of improved security there, but still had a substantial impact on UK government attitudes. While other factors were involved, this change of tactics was influential in encouraging the Labour government from 1997 to devote considerable effort to resolving the conflict.

two decades and was one of the main reasons why a peace process became possible in the mid-1990s, even if particular tactics from the Provisional IRA directed at economic targeting in Britain almost certainly increased the British government's commitment to such a process (see Box 15.1).

The 9/11 response and the War on Terror

The response to the 9/11 atrocities was unusual in that it placed far greater emphasis on military action compared with other forms of counter-terrorism. Other approaches such as improved homeland defence were utilized, but the primary focus was on the military with the main response being developed over the first decade into a global War on Terror. It was a particularly robust response for reasons already discussed above – major military campaigns were mounted against presumed state-sponsors of the al-Qa'ida movement in Afghanistan and Iraq leading to regime termination in both cases, and military operations were undertaken in a number of other countries, including Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Since the post-9/11 response has become a dominant feature of international security in general, and terrorism in particular, and is likely to remain so for some years to come, it is appropriate to examine this in some depth.

The group responsible for the 9/11 attacks, the al-Qa'ida movement, is a dispersed and very broadly based movement that is not narrowly hierarchical but does have clear aims and intentions. It is not a nihilistic collection of insane extremists, even if that impression is frequently given, but a rational movement involving an unusual combination of revolutionary political fervour rooted in a fundamentalist orientation of a major religion – Islam – rather than in a political ideology or nationalist or ethnic base. The movement has its theoretical origins in the writings of a number of radical Islamic thinkers, notably the Egyptian Sayidd Qutb, who was tortured and executed by his own government in 1966. In more practical terms, al-Qa'ida can be traced back to the success of the *Mujahiddin* fighters in Afghanistan and their opposition to Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Aided by the US Central Intelligence Agency and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence organization, the paramilitary and guerrilla fighters were eventually able to force the Soviet Union to withdraw from the country, and many within the movement see this as leading to the collapse of the Soviet system.

Following the eviction of Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, substantial US military forces remained in the region, including Saudi Arabia – the Kingdom of the Two Holy Places (Mecca and Medina). This resulted in a revitalization of elements of the anti-Soviet movement of the 1980s, with the main focus being on evicting such 'crusader' forces, especially from Saudi Arabia. Central to this were two individuals. One was Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi of Yemeni extraction, who had been active in Afghanistan. The other was the Egyptian-born strategist Ayman al-Zawahiri. During the 1990s, the movement developed a more comprehensive strategy, rooted largely in

Qutb's ideas of a revival of 'true' Islam following its corruption by Western culture. By the end of the twentieth century, al-Qa'ida had developed a number of short-term aims together with an over-arching long-term vision.

There were six short-term aims. One was the eviction of US military forces from Saudi Arabia, an aim that the movement claimed to have achieved by 2005 when the last of the major US bases in the Kingdom was evacuated because of concern of the Saudi authorities over the US presence, and a second was the eviction of foreign forces from the Islamic world. A third was the replacement of the House of Saud by a 'genuine' Islamist regime, the Saudi royal family being seen as corrupt, elitist and excessively linked to the United States. The fourth aim was the replacement of other corrupt, elitist and pro-Western regimes across the region, with an initial focus on Egypt and Pakistan but extending later to Iraq and Afghanistan. Fifth, there was deep antagonism to the Zionist state of Israel and support for the Palestinian cause and, finally, there was support for other Islamist movements such as the Chechen rebels and the Southern Thailand separatists. Beyond this lay the long-term aim of establishing a pan-Islamic Caliphate, developing in the Middle East but extending eventually to other parts of the world.

In the context of these aims there is a broad distinction between the 'near enemy' which comprises the unacceptable regimes and their supporters across the Middle East and the 'far enemy,' this being the United States and its coalition partners such as the United Kingdom. A further core aspect of the strategy of the movement is the question of timescales. The short-term aims are seen as being achieved progressively over a period of several decades and the long-term aim of establishing Islamist governance through a Caliphate may take fifty to a hundred years. This is a fundamental issue as it differs so markedly from the typical timescales of Western political and economic institutions.

The 9/11 attacks were designed to demonstrate an ability to attack the far enemy of the United States, not least to increase support for the movement. It would also serve to attract US forces into Afghanistan in large numbers, enabling a guerrilla war to develop over a number of years with a similar effect on US resilience to that on the Soviet Union two decades earlier. Al-Qa'ida failed initially in this second aim in that the United States initially used a combination of air power, Special Forces and a re-arming of the Northern Alliance to terminate the Taliban regime. Even so, by mid-2011 a Taliban revival was continuing and was tying down 140,000 US and coalition forces in an entrenched insurgency.

After the apparent success in Afghanistan the Bush administration developed the war on terror to encompass pre-emptive military action against what it called an 'axis of evil' of states believed to be developing weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring terrorist organizations. The principal members of the axis were declared to be Iraq, Iran and North Korea, with Iraq being the first candidate state for regime termination in 2003. While the Saddam Hussein regime was ended within three weeks, a complex insurgency then developed which eventually combined with a degree of sectarian conflict

to produce a highly unstable and violent country. Eight years after regime termination, at least 120,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed and close to four million were refugees. The United States lost over 4,000 troops killed and 25,000 wounded; many of the latter maimed for life. In spite of using a wide range of tactics, the US-led forces were unable to contain the violence and there was abundant evidence that the insurgents were able to develop techniques at a rate at least as fast as they could be countered. A marked tendency of US forces to use their overwhelming fire power against urban insurgents might be understandable from their own perspective but could be seen by opponents as little short of terror (see Box 15.2).

Perhaps most important of all was the status of Iraq as providing a jihadist combat training zone, an aspect of huge advantage to the al-Qa'ida movement and its associates. Moreover, Iraq represented a combat training zone that was far superior to Afghanistan in the 1980s in that young paramilitaries could gain experience against well-armed and well-trained US soldiers and Marines in an urban environment – far superior in paramilitary terms than poorly trained Soviet conscripts in rural Afghanistan two decades earlier. Given al-Qa'ida's decades-long timescale and its concern with terminating unacceptable

BOX 15.2 WHOSE TERRORISM?

The difficult issue of who is the terrorist is well illustrated by the US military action in the Iraqi city of Fallujah in November 2004. Seven months earlier there had been a US attempt to gain control of the city following a particularly brutal paramilitary action when four American security guards were killed, mutilated and their bodies burnt before being hung from a bridge. The first assault failed but Fallujah was then seen as a centre of terrorism. The November assault was covered in detail by TV channels operating with US forces, and there was stark footage of the very heavy use of ordnance against the city. This was seen as an utterly just cause in the United States, and there was great satisfaction when the city was brought fully under control by the US Army and Marine Corps.

Across the Middle East, on the other hand, regional TV news stations (see Box 15.3) were reporting the effects within the city, where several thousand people were killed in the assault, many of them civilians, and most of the public buildings and more than half of all the private houses in the city were destroyed or severely damaged. Fallujah was known as the City of Mosques and the damage done to many of the mosques was a particular affront. For the US forces, though, mosques were often used by the insurgents and represented legitimate targets.

For the United States, the taking of Fallujah was an essential and fully justified military operation against a dangerously evolving insurgency that was already killing and injuring hundreds of American troops. Across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world, Fallujah was nothing less than an act of state terrorism conducted by an occupying power that was on a par with the 9/11 attacks. American opinion would be almost entirely unable to comprehend such a view, just as Arab opinion would find it extraordinary that the assault could in any sense be justified.

regimes in the Middle East, eight years or more of combat experience against US forces in Iraq seemed likely to provide a new generation of jihadists. In that sense, the US decision to occupy Iraq can be seen as an historic error of quite extraordinary magnitude. Furthermore, the extensive coverage of the carnage in Iraq, both by regional satellite TV news channels and through propagandistic outlets did much to increase support for radical Islamist movements (see Box 15.3).

In the global war on terror as a whole, ten years into the war well over 100,000 people had been detained without trial, for various periods, with at least 25,000 detained at any one time. Prisoner abuse, torture and rendition had been used and the detention centre at the US military base at Guantanamo in Cuba was still open and widely criticized. There were some significant changes in policy with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and these included a speeding up of the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and a willingness

BOX 15.3 TERROR AND THE NEW MEDIA

One of the most striking developments in paramilitary movements has been the use of new media to publicize their actions, promote their cause and air their grievances. New versions of old media such as television in combination with new media and communications systems such as the internet, broadband, smart-phones and DVDs have all made these aspects more effective. While the major changes have come since the mid-1990s, they are not entirely new – television coverage of aircraft hijackings in the late 1960s and early 1970s was influential in bringing the activities of Palestinian paramilitary movements to world attention.

For television, the main change has been the development of new 24-hour regional satellite TV news stations. While these may be financed or owned by local elite rulers, as in the case of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, they portray a news agenda from a strongly regional perspective rather than an Atlanticist outlook as is the case with CNN and other US and European-owned outlets. Stations such as Al-Jazeera maintain high professional standards and are exceptionally popular across the Middle East for their independence from narrowly focused and often propagandistic state broadcasting networks. Prime time news bulletins attract viewing audiences in the tens of millions, a level that is far higher than the main channels in countries such as Britain, France or Germany. They are increasingly available world-wide to diaspora audiences and are notable for their coverage of the effects of conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. As such, they illustrate the effects of Western interventions with persistence and with little self-censoring of the impacts.

Beyond this extensive conventional TV coverage, many jihadist groups have become adept at videoing their activities and using them as part of highly propagandistic packages distributed by CD, DVD and, in particular, the internet. The widespread availability of broadband makes it possible to distribute detailed coverage of paramilitary actions within hours of the events. Furthermore, statements by leaders are distributed by all the major means. Some of the outputs are in the form of extensive lectures that demonstrate a thorough familiarity with Western policies and attitudes and are attuned to have a maximum effect among target audiences.

to engage with Taliban elements as a prelude to an eventual negotiated withdrawal from Afghanistan. The killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 aided this change in policy but the onset of the Arab Spring seemed likely to damage the movement more, since it stemmed from popular protests and mass demonstrations rather than actions by Islamist revolutionaries. Even so, if the Arab Spring failed, then the al-Qa'ida movement could regain some impetus. Furthermore, the importance of the Persian Gulf oil resources would ensure a long-term US military presence in the region (Kubursi 2006) sustaining the al-Qa'ida propaganda message of the 'far enemy' as a persistent threat.

Trends in terrorism

In the years after 1990 there were a number of developments in terrorism and political violence that are likely to be significant in the longer term.

Terrorism and insurgency

The practice of employing regime termination as a major response to terrorism produced a complex reaction that effectively mixes terrorism and insurgency. This evolved in Afghanistan and Iraq into a form of warfare that may be concentrated in the two countries concerned but has a much wider impact, not least in Pakistan and in terms of support for the al-Qa'ida movement and its associates.

Internationalism

Although there has long been an element of transnational capabilities in paramilitary movements, this has evolved rapidly in recent years. In the first six years of the war on terror, for example, the al-Qa'ida movement and its loose affiliates were able to carry out attacks in Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Yemen, quite apart from Iraq and Afghanistan, with attacks prevented in a number of other countries including France, Italy, Singapore and the United States.

Suicide terrorism

As with internationalism, suicide attacks as a facet of terrorism are not new, but the intensity of the attacks in many countries, and the willingness of so many people to engage in martyrdom is novel. Suicide attacks are intrinsically more difficult to counter as an aspect of any form of political violence. Moreover, while most of the relatively rare incidents of suicide attacks until 2001 were by people with deep political or ethnic motives, such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the more recent trend is for suicide attacks to draw on religious motivation, especially within Islam, and for there to be a substantial increase

in the numbers of motivated individuals who embrace an eschatological dimension to their aspirations.

Speed of learning

Most paramilitary groups in the past have been relatively conservative in their operations, tending to stay with methods that they have developed and have become experienced in using. The intense environments of the insurgencies in Afghanistan and especially Iraq forced paramilitary groups to learn fast in order to survive and thrive. There is abundant evidence that these learning environments have combined with the internationalization of terrorism to allow the far more rapid spread of tactics than in the past – advanced fusing for improvised explosive devices and the production of explosively formed anti-armour projectiles being just two examples.

Media developments

Regional satellite TV news channels, the use of the internet, CDs, DVDs and mobile phones have all increased the ability of paramilitary groups to promote their causes (see Box 15.3).

Economic targeting

The development of sophisticated economic targeting strategies by groups such as the Provisional IRA (see Box 15.1) and insurgents in Iraq has provided a new avenue of influence and effect. Given the numerous nodes of power and economic activity in urban/industrialized societies, it is probable that this development is still in its early stages.

Mass casualty attacks and weapons of mass destruction

Although there has been no single instance of the large-scale use of nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons, the increased use of mass casualty attacks has raised fears that weapons of mass destruction will ultimately be used by some terrorist organizations. While there is clearly a risk, it remains the case that conventional forms of destruction can readily lead to casualties on a very substantial scale, as in the 9/11 attacks.

Conclusion

The war on terror as a response to the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington came to dominate international security, not least by embracing robust military operations as the principal responses to the attacks. Given the failure of such responses to have the intended effects, it is possible that there will be a re-balancing of counter-terrorism strategies, although the long

timescale of radical Islamist strategies and the long-term importance of the Persian Gulf region to the United States might militate against this. Given the developments in terrorist tactics and the factors aiding movements such as al-Qa'ida discussed above, it would appear that it would be wise to embrace a fairly fundamental re-thinking of Western policies in general, and US policies in particular.

Further reading

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