



Fighting Fire with Water: NGO and Counter-Terrorism Policy Tools

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“Fighting terrorism will not be a clean or pleasant contest, but we have no choice but to play it.” – US Secretary of State George Shultz, cited in *Terrorism: Fighting Fire with Fire*, Time Magazine, 5 November 1984

Abstract

The policy tools of counter-terrorism reflect both the nature of the terrorist group in question and the strategies of the actors that engage in counter-terrorism. Historically governments have perceived terrorism primarily as a crime, a threat to the state’s security, or part of a broader political campaign. Accordingly, states have adopted counter-terrorism policies based on law enforcement, military or diplomatic strategies, or a combination of these. While international organisations have played a supplementary role in terms of law enforcement and diplomacy, NGOs have, until recently, played a much smaller role in this field. Over the last couple of decades, however, with the rise of ‘sacred terror’ and as many states have accorded more weight to the

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propaganda element in terrorists campaigns, containment strategies that aim at managing and marginalising the threat have become more prominent. The present article explores the increasing role of NGOs in this changing context, and suggests that the policy tools of NGOs are particularly well-suited to combating network-type terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and its franchises because such groups depend on complicit society, a convincing narrative and information asymmetry vis-à-vis their supporters. Here NGOs have distinct advantages because of their potential to credibly challenge terrorist narratives on the ground.

Keywords

Terrorism, counter-terrorism, Non-Government Organisations, public policy

Policy Implications

- NGOs have access to a set of policy tools that complements those of states and international organisations and is very pertinent in the age of 'network' or 'franchise' terrorism.
- Armed groups pose a unique challenge for human rights organisations. NGOs efforts to hold corporations to account on human rights standards offer important lessons for counter-terrorism strategy.
- Terrorist organisations depend on complicit society, a convincing narrative and information asymmetry. NGOs can develop policy tools to weaken all three elements.
- If they wish to remain relevant, human rights defenders must engage narratives as well as actions that address terrorist groups.

The policy tools that actors and organisations deploy to combat terrorism have varied widely across time and place, depending on the nature of terrorism, the type of organisations charged with combating it and how the threat is perceived. The Nineteenth Century picture of the terrorist as an anarchist prompted law enforcement responses by states that assigned this problem to police forces (secret or otherwise). Nationalist or anti-colonial terrorism was usually interpreted more as a military challenge, and assigned to the armed forces. To the extent that it became perceived as a problem that also had a political dimension, the tools of diplomacy came to play a significant role. In the second half of the Twentieth Century all three approaches were widely used, often in combination and sometimes by rival agencies from the same state. However, more recently many academics and practitioners have turned their focus to a fourth approach to counter-terrorism: one that treats terrorism

as challenge of ideology and propaganda. The counter-terrorist's new tool-box includes a range of measures taken not only to prevent terrorism, protect targets and prosecute terrorists, but also to reduce the political impact or salience of terrorism and to undermine the ideology and legitimacy of terrorist groups. This in turn entails a potentially more important and salient role for human rights oriented NGOs, but it also represents a challenge that they such organisations cannot afford to ignore if they want to remain relevant.

The academic literature on counter-terrorism has established a distinction between four types of counter-terrorism strategy: law enforcement, military, diplomacy and containment (Wilkinson, 1977, 2006; Schmid and Crelinsten, 1983; Cronin and Ludes, 2004; Heymann and Kayyem, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). Most of this debate has centred on states' policy tools, and to a lesser extent the role of international organisations like United Nations or the European Union (Spence, 2007; Blum and Heymann, 2010). The present article extends this literature to the question of how NGOs can address terrorism, by exploring the policy tools available to voluntary organisations concerned with human rights. The most relevant aspect of the literature on how states respond to terrorism is that which explores efforts to marginalise and undermine terrorist groups (Charters, 1987; Crelinsten and Schmid, 1992; Parker, 2007; Cronin, 2009; Pedahzur, 2009). Many of the policy tools discussed in this literature are, if anything, even more appropriate to non-state actors, because NGOs are often in a position to reach audiences that states are not able to (credibly) reach. The observation that NGOs possess certain advantages over states and international organisations with respect to 'soft' policy tools in general and credible information and expertise in particular (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Stone 2002; Nye 2004) is hardly news, but its application to counter-terrorism policy has been limited (Parker, 2011).

This article is organised in three parts. The first section explores the relationship between terrorism, perceptions of the challenge and the type of organisations and strategies adopted to respond to terrorism. Terrorism, as Walter Laqueur (1977) observed, tends to come in waves. The four waves of terrorism identified by Rapoport (1990, 2004) – Nineteenth Century anarchism, early Twentieth Century anti-colonialism and independence movements; Marxist terrorism in the 1960s and 1970s; and religious fundamentalist terrorism in the last few decades – provide the starting point for an exploration of the counter-terrorism strategies. The second section extends this analysis to the role that international organisations and non-state actors have played in counter-terrorism, and provides a brief assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of different types of organisations with respect to different strategies. The third and final section turns to the role of NGOs, and argues that such organisations possess policy tools – discourse, the use of language and credible information – that are particularly well-suited to combating

terrorist groups that rely on a complicit society, a convincing narrative and information asymmetry vis-à-vis their supporters.

The Historical Evolution of the Counter-Terrorism Tool Box

The strategies and policy tools that states use deal with terrorism depend not only on the nature of the threat, but also on how the threat is perceived and which agency is assigned the tasks of dealing with it. If terrorism is defined so as to include politically motivated acts that feature an element of violence and threats of repeated violence and a pursuit of publicity with the intent to intimidate (see e.g. Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004), then terrorism per se involves a direct challenge to the state's claim to monopoly of violence. However, whether such challenges have been cast primarily in terms of criminal, military or political challenge has depended very much on circumstance. Because it is based on a combination of the terrorist groups and their ideology and the historical context in which they operate, Rapoport's (2004) 'four waves of terrorism' typology provides a useful starting point. His organising principle is four historical waves of terrorism: anti-authoritarian, national liberation movements, Marxist, and religious. Each wave includes a distinct set of organisational and tactical features on the part of the terrorist organisations, and a different political context. More to the point, however, each wave drew somewhat similar responses from many of the states that faced these terrorist challenges. The literature on comparative counter-terrorism (Crelinsten and Schmid, 1992; Cronin and Ludes, 2004; Parker, 2007; Shapiro, 2007; Cronin, 2009; and Pedahzur, 2009) provides the basis for our four-fold typology of (ideal-type) responses: law enforcement, military, diplomacy and containment. Below, these four strategies are reviewed briefly, with a focus on the context in which they were elaborated as state policy responses to terrorism.

First, terrorism can be perceived primarily as crime, meriting a law enforcement-based response. Such was the reaction of the states and empires that were confronted with the first wave of modern terrorism in the late Nineteenth Century. Most of the groups involved cast themselves as anti-authoritarian, left-wing revolutionaries (Laqueur 1977, 2004). Their core tactics were captured in the terms 'propaganda by the deed' and 'philosophy of the bomb', i.e. efforts to use spectacular acts to shock and to provide a catalyst for broader political change. Assassinations included Tsar Alexander II of Russia, French President Carnot, Spanish Prime Minister Canovas, Empress Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary, King Umberto of Italy and US President McKinley in the two decades up to 1901. London suffered its first coordinated terrorist campaign between 1883 and 1885, when members of the Irish nationalist group Clan Na Gael attacked high-profile targets like

Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace and the new Underground transit system (Short, 1979). In addition to the regular police, domestic clandestine agencies came to play an increasingly important role: the Tsarist secret police was reorganised as the Okhrana and went well beyond the ordinary rule of law to engage in provocation, infiltration and mass arrests, legitimized by emergency counter-terrorist legislation (Daly, 1995; Lauchlan, 2005); in Britain the Special Irish Branch of the Metropolitan Police, was created in March (Allason, 1983). In time it evolved into the modern day Counter Terrorist Command. Indeed, terrorist suspects in the UK are still often charged under the Explosive Substances Act of 1883, another legacy of the so-called Dynamite Campaign (Berwick, 1996). The first systematic international cooperation against terrorism followed: the 1889 Rome Anti-Anarchist Conference established important precedents such as extradition procedures, common definitions of crimes and forensic cooperation, which would form the basis for Interpol in 1923 (Jensen, 1981; Romaniuk, 2010).

The second wave of terrorism, centred on nationalist and anti-colonial movements, drew a very different response. Although there was some overlap between revolutionary and nationalist organisations, the latter's goal and tactics differed fundamentally from the anarchist terrorism of the first wave. The common theme was nationalism and the pursuit of independence, and in some cases democratic mobilisation (Tilly, 2004) and the republican turn in European constitutional politics (Kissane and Sitter, 2010; Kissane 2011). Terrorism was but a part of wider strategies that included 'ordinary' politics and guerrilla warfare (Kilcullen, 2009). To the extent that such groups were seen as a military threat, the task of combating them was assigned to the armed forces or the colonial administration. This involved direct military operations that often blurred the border between counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency (Newsinger, 2002; Hoyt, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006). Perhaps the clearest case of the military approach as the dominant strategy is Israeli policy since 1948 (Pedhazur, 2009). To the extent that second-wave terrorism was perceived as part of a broader political question, however, the tools of diplomacy and negotiation were invoked. Irish Home Rule had been debated in parliament for three decades by the time of 1916 Easter Rising (the Home Rule bill adopted in 1914 was suspended upon the outbreak of war); terrorism in the British-administered Palestinian Mandate in the 1930s and 1940s took place in a political context that owed much to agreements and promises dating back to the First World War; and terrorism in Cyprus and Algeria after the Second World War was cast in the context of decolonisation. The end of these campaigns, as well as the modern terrorist campaigns in Northern Ireland and Spain, included a broader political settlement. Hence the notion of a political counter-terrorism strategy, when terrorism seen as part of a much bigger political problem (Cronin, 2009).

The third wave of terrorism elicited a refined law-enforcement response. Innovations on the terrorist side included the 'urban guerrilla' tactics that characterised the Italian Red Brigades and the West German Red Army Faction, inspired by left-wing Latin American militias like the *Tupamaros* in Uruguay and the *Aliança Libertadora Nacional* in Brazil. ALN leader Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (1969) was particularly influential. Most European states responded by strengthening criminal law and adapting it through new rules for detention, interrogation and prosecution (Della Porta, 1992; Groenvold 1992). New counterterrorism units included the General Inspectorate for Action against Terrorism and the Special Group of the Judiciary Police in Italy (Stortoni-Wortmann, 2000) and the Stammheim special court and prison complex in Germany (Merkl, 1995). Increased cross-border cooperation came in the form of the TREVI group for European police cooperation and the Club of Berne forum for senior European intelligence and security officials. In 1977 the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism eliminated the political offense exemption often used by terrorist defendants to avoid extradition. However, this was also accompanied by a new emphasis on public discourse, which prompted Schmid and Crelinsten (1983) to investigate how states speak to their own audiences – the 'propaganda' dimension of counter-terrorism. The Italian 'collaboration' law of 1982 should be seen as much in this context as for the operational intelligence it generated. In 1986 it was extended to allow former members of the Red Brigades reduced sentences simply by disassociating themselves from their former colleagues; the spectacle of committed revolutionaries opting to take up the political exit was a profound blow to the morale of those still at liberty. The counter-terrorist's tool-box was thus increased to include a range of measures designed to reduce the political impact or salience of terrorism and to undermine its ideology and legitimacy.

Because of the nature of the 'sacred terrorism' that defines Rapoport's (1990) fourth wave, the propaganda dimension of counter-terrorism has become increasingly prominent (Barrett, 2009). Although this wave ranges from Jewish terrorism in Israel and abortion clinic bombings in the USA, it is Islamic terrorism that has shaped new counter-terrorism policies. The first prominent example was Islamic Jihad's assassination of Egyptian president Sadat 1981, but the subsequent emergence of Hamas, Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda consolidated this new form of terrorism sanctioned by divinity, organised as radical cells of broader social and political movements, and embraced new tactics in the form of suicide terrorism (Gambetta, 2005; Pape, 2005). The combination of sacred terror and local motivations linked to second-wave independence goals and the sense of anomie that accompanies state failure made this a particularly difficult challenge (Passas, 2000; Williams, 2009). Intervention risks backlash from the ranks of what Kilcullen (2009) memorably labelled 'accidental guerrillas' – local men and women radicalized not primarily

by religious or ideological commitment but by the arrival of a foreign expeditionary force on their territory. Although the war paradigm remains dominant in the Israeli and Russian approaches, and has driven US counterterrorism policy since the September 11th attacks, terrorism is therefore increasingly widely seen as a problem to be contained and eliminated in the long term through a strategy that combined perseverance, hardening targets, addressing propaganda, dealing with the social context in which terrorism emerges rather than focusing on more immediate solutions (De Kerchove, 2010). The British, French and Spanish strategies continue to owe much to the law enforcement approach, but like the overall European Union strategy they include important elements of containment (Monar, 2007; Shapiro, 2007; Bock, 2009; Guild, 2010). Indeed, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (UN General Assembly, 2006) emphasises this aspect of counter-terrorism, as well as the importance of law and human rights.

In short, the last century and a half has seen the development of four broad strategies of counter-terrorism, which are partially linked to and driven by the four waves of terrorism. These four sets of tools are clearly not mutually exclusive, in fact they are usually employed in combination but with one type of strategy more dominant than the rest. However, each entails a distinct set of policy tools, not all of which are available to the state or are equally effective when applied by states against terrorist groups. The next section therefore turns to the role of states and non-state actors in combating terrorism with respect to each of these four strategies and the policy tools associated with them.

States, Non-State Actors and the Counter-Terrorism Tool-Box

Until quite recently, counter-terrorism has been the purview primarily of states and international organisations. States have played the key role in developing the strategies and tools reviewed above, and international cooperation dates back to the very origins of modern terrorism. Civil society organisations have traditionally played a less prominent role in counter-terrorism. Although NGOs, and particularly human rights oriented NGOs, have a strong track-record of holding governments to account for their counter-terrorism policy, they have kept a lower profile when it comes to criticising terrorist organisations and other armed groups that pose a clear and unique challenge in terms of human rights. However, a number of factors have combined to change this. The growth in size and influence of the civil society sector itself has changed the impact of NGOs on global governance (Willetts, 2010), and the emergence of specific victims rights groups such as the Global Survivors Network and the Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace have

begun to address non-state armed groups. The development of new social media has made both terrorist and governmental narratives more accessible to public contestation, and increased the importance of what Crelinsten (2009) labels 'persuasive counter-terrorism'. Finally, the mass casualty aspirations of religious extremist groups have invested the search for solutions with even greater urgency, and consequently greater gravitational and financial pull, drawing in actors outside government (Neumann, 2009; Parker, 2011). In short, changes in the role of NGOs, the new terrorism associated with the fourth wave, and the accompanying increased importance of containment as a counter-terrorism strategy add up to an increased potential role for human rights NGOs in this policy area. By way of illustration Table 1 sets out a brief overview of the comparative advantages of states, international organisations and NGOs in terms of approaches to counter-terrorism and policy tools, but by no means constitutes an exhaustive list of policy tools.

Table 1 – the comparative advantages of states, international organisations and NGOs in terms of approaches to counter-terrorism and policy tools

Actors	States	International organisations	NGOs
Approaches			
Law enforcement	Legislate, monitor, prosecute, disrupt	Harmonise law, exchange information, extradition	Support victims, monitor law enforcement
War	Intelligence, combat operations, covert operations, foreign intervention	Coordination, legitimisation, use of force.	Limited role
Diplomacy	Negotiations, political change, amnesties	Arenas for negotiation, mediation, monitor agreements	Supporting role: public policy implementation
Containment	Local government, hard targets, crisis management, undermine support, propaganda	Policy coordination, EU law, direct expenditure, crisis management	Ideational role: dominant discourse, use of language, credible information

First, the law enforcement approach involves a series of policy tools associated with organisations and services that lie at the very core of the Weberian state and its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Nevertheless,

there are some exceptions: most European states have delegated power 'upwards' to the EU through its security and justice policy. Ordinary criminal law and extraordinary or emergency legislation is of course a core state function, but even this policy has an international dimension in the shape of police cooperation, intelligence exchange, extradition treaties and similar arrangements, such as the introduction of the European Arrest Warrant in 2001. International cooperation includes UN conventions and Security Council resolutions that provide legal definitions and define legitimate action by states in certain circumstances. Preventive police action aimed at disrupting terrorist groups - something that might involve an augmented police presence, intelligence source recruitment, or even non-judicial intervention - is likewise primarily a state activity, but one that often involves considerable cross-border cooperation. Intelligence-led policing is increasingly a matter both of domestic tactics and international cooperation, for example in the shape of the EU's Schengen Information System for sharing material in law enforcement databases and transnational police operations like the United Kingdom's Operation Samnite conducted entirely overseas with the cooperation of the Irish, Austrian, Slovakian and Hungarian governments (Parker, 2010). The key agents are thus the police, intelligence agencies and the criminal justice system, both national and international, whereas the role of human-rights NGOs has been largely limited to the investigation of abuses of power by state agencies – for example, the assistance provided to Central Intelligence Agency's post 9/11 'black site' programme by senior intelligence officials in Poland, Romania and Lithuania.

Second, the military approach to counter-terrorism is, if anything, even further from the world of NGOs and international organisations. Again this is a matter of the policy tools that lie at the core of the modern state. Key policy tools include military intelligence playing a supporting role in civilian counter-terrorism policy (much debated in Sweden after the 11 December 2010 bombing); direct military action, by using the military in a police function (which caused much debate in Northern Ireland); assigning the military counter-insurgency tasks (Algeria, Malaya, Cyprus); targeting state sponsors (Libya) or safe havens (Afghanistan); and covert military action including targeted killings such as those practised by Israel against Black September and Hamas, and by the United States with its unmanned drone campaign against Al Qaeda and its affiliates. As in the case of law enforcement, state actors have the comparative advantage for obvious reasons, with international organisations playing subsidiary roles linked to coordination and legitimation. Again NGOs have assumed some responsibility for criticising counter-terrorist tactics as and when they threaten civil rights, or when agents of the state or states or state-sponsored actors engage in illegal activities. Examples range from the exposure of illegal counterterrorist operations in Spain (Woodworth,

2001) to critique of the US' use of drones (Stanford Clinic and NYU Clinic, 2012).

Third, when political or diplomatic approaches to counter-terrorism dominate, and terrorism is seen as just one of many symptoms of a much broader political conflict, the potential role of non-state actors increases dramatically. Policy tools include both short-term measures, such as efforts to negotiate the release of hostages, and diplomatic measures designed to address a military stalemate or long-term political problem. Whereas some elements of the diplomatic approach may be applied by states more or less unilaterally from a position of strength, such as the amnesties granted in successful law enforcement campaigns against terrorism in Germany and Italy, others potentially benefit from the involvement of a third party. Examples include mediating conflicts and facilitating peace processes, from the Middle East to Northern Ireland. Whereas the key actors on the non-terrorist side are agents of the state, there are numerous examples of third countries or international organisations mediating or providing venues for negotiations (e.g. the Oslo Accords, the UN in Cyprus,). Human rights NGOs have played a more substantial role here than with respect to law enforcement and military strategies, for example by supporting peace processes and post-conflict settlement or reconciliation.

In this context NGOs can play a multiplicity of roles from go-between to educator, more often than not operating at the leadership level, like The Elders group established by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2007, a delegation from which met with Hamas leaders in Syria in 2010 to promote Arab-Israeli peace. However, further scope for engagement remains for NGOs to put pressure on terrorist groups to pursue political goals by non-violent means. One organization pointing the way is the not-for-profit group Geneva Call, which works to educate armed non-state actors on international humanitarian law and human rights law standards, and then seeks to persuade them to comply with these international standards. In 2011 Geneva Call worked with *inter alia* Palestinian internal camp security forces, senior military officials of the Polisario Front, armed groups in Myanmar, the armed wing of the PPK and indigenous peoples in Colombia. The organization's *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action* has been signed by forty-one different armed groups. Geneva Call's engagement in Niger graphically illustrates the gains that can result on the ground. In 2008 the organization began working to educate the rebel Niger Justice Movement about international norms on the use of anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines and, after the cessation of hostilities in 2009, it was able to leverage this relationship to bring former rebels together with government representatives to share information on mined areas.

Fourth, and finally, NGOs have a strong comparative advantage over both states and international organisations with respect to some of the policy tools involved in the containment approach to counter-terrorism. The term is borrowed from the Cold War strategy advocated by George F. Kennan (1947), and the analogy rests on the central aim of containing terrorist groups and undermining their medium- to long-term viability, with a view to securing the kind of end to terrorism that Cronin (2009, p.94) categorises as “failure: imploding, provoking a backlash or becoming marginalised.” Policy tools associated with this approach include measures to establish local control and legitimacy, including for example building the capacity of police and security forces and functioning services in post-Saddam Iraq; target hardening; putting crisis response and management measures in place to ensure resilience; victim support (the government cannot always be relied upon to prioritize victims’ interests, and NGOs like Anfasep and the Pro-Human Rights Association in Peru keep the pressure on); social initiatives aimed at countering violent extremism, such as Youth Action Northern Ireland’s ‘Champions for Change’ initiative aims to address the legacy of the conflict for young women, or the Institute for Multicultural Development in the Netherlands that helps young people from marginalized communities resist radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups by encouraging them to express their frustrations “in peaceful and democratic ways” and “positive social action”; and last, but not least, shaping a communications strategy that addresses and refutes terrorist narratives (Cilluffo and Kimmage, 2009).

Crenlisten and Schmid (1992) distinguish between ‘defensive measures’ that address terrorist narratives and ‘offensive’ measures that present and promote alternative narratives; as well as between addressing supporters and neutral/hostile audiences. The latter is not an area in which governments tend to excel. Indeed, the policy tools related to controlling and shaping public discourse are becoming ever more problematic from a government perspective. Much was made in terrorism research in the 1980s and 1990s of role of the print and broadcast media, but even before the arrival of the internet and satellite broadcasting governments had at best modest success in limiting terrorist groups’ access to the media. The British government’s introduction of a broadcasting ban in 1988 on interviews with members of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein was a notable debacle (Moloney, 1991). It is precisely in the areas of the greatest government weakness that human rights-orientated civil society organisations can make their most significant contribution to counter-terrorism. The third and final section therefore turns to NGOs and the policy tools for containment through discourse, the use of language and credible information.

NGOs and the Fight against Terrorism: Complicit Surround, Semantic Infiltration and Information Symmetry

Although human rights-oriented NGOs rarely have the capacity to contribute much to military, law enforcement or diplomatic strategies to address terrorism, they have some distinct advantages in terms of the tools of containment. They have access to a set of policy tools that complements those of states and international organisations, which derive from the credibility and independence that NGOs bring to counter-terrorism. As Abdul Haqq Baker (2012) has noted, the relationship between marginalized communities and law enforcement and security officials tends to be tainted by the perception that community engagement programs are ultimately a cover for intelligence gathering. NGOs by contrast can build on pre-existing trust-based relationships. This is particularly pertinent to so-called 'franchise terrorism', loose networks that invoke a common goal and narrative but rely on local resources and the sympathy, if not necessarily the active support, of the population.

This insight calls into question the wisdom of the June 2010 United States Supreme Court decision, in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, to uphold the interpretation of legislation criminalizing the provision of material support to designated terrorist organizations to include conflict mediation and peace-building activities designed to encourage armed groups to renounce violence. The US-based Humanitarian Law Project had worked with the PKK and Tamil Tigers (LTTE) to promote non-violent conflict resolution strategies but the court upheld the U.S. government's contention that this amounted to material support, jeopardizing a range of NGO activities aimed at reducing terrorist violence. As Elisabeth Decrey-Warner of Geneva Call observed of the Supreme Court's decision: "How can you start peace talks or negotiations if you don't have the right to speak to both parties?"

Three social science concepts come together to uniquely empower civil society groups to have an impact within a containment framework: complicit surround, semantic infiltration and information symmetry. The term 'complicit surround' was coined by Louise Richardson (2006). Terrorist groups are political entities dependent on the complicit support of at least a section of the population and, like any other political actor, they have to pay close attention to the views of their constituents, a reality acknowledged by terrorist leaders from EOKA's George Grivas and Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams to the current head of Al Qaeda, Ayman Al Zawahiri (Nye, 2004; Parker, 2011). Civil society groups are often in direct competition with extremist elements for the hearts and minds of marginalized and disadvantaged elements of society. The universal human rights norms articulated by civil society groups can clash

powerfully with the legitimizing frames of religion, Marxist orthodoxy or national pride used by terrorist groups to justify their actions.

Terrorist leaders are well aware of the potential threat posed by alternate narratives. During the 2011 raid on Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan, US Navy SEALs recovered an illuminating briefing note prepared for the Al Qaeda leader by a leading member of his inner circle, US-born Adam Gadahn. Gadahn's memo contained a powerful critique of the 'black reputation' indiscriminate attacks on 'innocent Muslims' had earned the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and suggested that Al Qaeda issue an unequivocal denunciation of such actions lest it be tainted with the same brush (Dodwell, 2012). Gadahn even expressed concern that the 'sharp tone' and 'bigotry' of Islamic extremist Internet forums was alienating potential supporters. When a terrorist group loses touch with the values of its supporters – as when the TTP attempted to kill schoolgirl women's rights activist Malala Yousufzai in October 2012 – civil society organisations can be there on the ground to offer an alternate path. One such example is The Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace, named after two young children killed in a 1993 Provisional IRA bombing in the Northern English town of Warrington, which was approached by Leeds City Council in the aftermath of the 7/7 London bombings to de-escalate growing tensions between the local Asian community and recruiters from the right-wing British National Party at South Leeds High School, *alma mater* of one of the 7/7 bombers. A successful three-year project focused on students attending the school reduced friction in a divided neighbourhood. Similar projects, from the Youth Theater for Peace Program in Kyrgyzstan to the Movimiento Contra la Intolerancia in Spain, abound throughout the NGO world.

The term 'semantic infiltration' was coined by Fred Charles Iklé to describe the process in which US State Department officials had found themselves using the language introduced by their communist counterparts to describe points of contention in such a way that their own talking points were undermined (Waller 2007; Moynihan, 1979). The Soviets used terms like 'national liberation movement' and 'peace movement' to describe sympathetic actors in debates over decolonization and nuclear disarmament in such a way as to invest their own policy positions with moral force. Out-manoeuvred US officials found themselves constrained by their opponents' use of totemic language. Similarly by promoting human rights language and values in communities from which terrorists seek to draw support, civil society groups can reshape the linguistic and political landscape in which terrorist groups operate. Some terrorist groups have already engaged in human rights-based dialogues with civil society actors and, while these have not always led to change, there have been some tangible successes. One instructive example comes from Columbia where the Marxist terror group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias

de Colombia (FARC) was drawn into dialogue about the use of child soldiers by the international NGO Human Rights Watch. Within a decade a FARC commander was justifying the group's continued use of youth cadres to a western reporter as being in compliance with Article 38 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Leech, 2009). Once groups reference international legal standards they have entered into a legitimizing narrative that it is difficult to depart from without paying a political cost.

Finally, the dehumanization of 'the other' is an essential precursor to the sustained use of lethal force against a foe – states typically seek to dehumanize enemy forces by developing caricatured stereotypes that shape public attitudes and build support for violent conflict, and terror groups are no different (Montagu and Mason, 1983; Keen, 1991; Zimbardo, 2007). As Ulrike Meinhof memorably put it: "Of course we say the cops are pigs. We say the guy in uniform is a pig, not a human being. And that's how we have to deal with him" (Bauer, 2008). Such a process relies on information asymmetry: propaganda works best when it is left largely unchallenged by competing narratives. Just as in wartime one is unlikely to read stories of the suffering of those trapped on the other side, terror groups seek to feed their constituents an unremitting diet of in-group suffering and out-group perfidy. As this messaging frequently veers into byzantine conspiracy theory and outright fantasy, silencing dissonant voices is vital for the men of violence.

Civil society organisations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch have credibility, derived from years or even decades of advocacy in the community, that governments often lack. They are therefore well placed to address the information deficit under which terrorist narratives thrive, by promoting universal values to which they themselves have long adhered (unlike many states) and putting a human face on the victims of terrorist violence. NGOs also have a great deal of experience at public education and of raising awareness of out-group suffering. The 'victimhood' narratives presented by many terrorist groups may be a powerful trope, but they also open up space for contesting perspectives. Advocacy organisations like the Global Survivors Network and SOS Terrorism have exploited this opening by funding documentaries, publishing witness testimonies online, and building coalitions with terror victims from around the world – including from within the communities out of which many Al Qaeda supporters come. The 'Kony 2012' campaign mounted against the eponymous Lord's Resistance Army warlord by the US-based NGO Invisible Children offers a graphic illustration of the viral power of emerging online advocacy tools.

Conclusion

The shift during the fourth wave of terrorism away from state-centred organisations in favour of more diffuse, often self-tasking rather than directed, franchise operations has opened up space for non-state actors to play a more significant role in the struggle against terrorist violence than in previous waves. Precisely because NGOs operate in a space outside state control they have access to a set of policy tools that complements, albeit without design, those of states and international organisations. Of more importance still is the fact that these NGO tools are nevertheless distinct from state action and are imbued with a credibility born of an established track record of impartiality, consistency and independence. The fact that NGOs have been denounced in Western capitals for their frequently strident criticism of US, European or Israeli counterterrorism policies – one thinks of the media backlash in 2005 against Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan after she described the US detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as ‘the gulag of our time’ – only helps to burnish this reputation. While not every actor will view a given NGO in such terms, it is more likely than not that at least some members of an out-group will. For instance, persistent advocacy against the Obama administration’s use of drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen by the American anti-war group Code Pink resulted in the NGO being invited to Pakistan to join cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan’s protest ‘peace march’ as it set off for the Taliban stronghold of South Waziristan in October 2012. These are the kind of bridges governments cannot build.

Terrorist organisations do pose both normative and practical challenges that NGOs need to grapple with in order to engage with them effectively. For human rights organisations a major hurdle is the legal provenance of human rights themselves – as a matter of international law human rights are derived from treaties signed by states. States agree to observe and guarantee certain rights, but there is no role envisaged in such treaties for non-state actors. As a result, most human rights organisations are reluctant to criticize terrorist groups using the language of human rights, preferring instead to identify potential breaches of international criminal law – a much less expansive and more negative frame of reference, mostly limited perforce to instances of armed conflict, and which looks to states for its enforcement. However, these same organisations have broken out of this normative framework in seeking to hold Transnational Corporations (TNCs) – typically operating in the field of mineral extraction – and Private Military Contractors (PMCs) accountable for human rights abuses. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the realms of international legal theory, but suffice it to say that there are many commonalities between TNCs, PMCs and terrorist groups, and there are precedents on which to predicate meaningful action within a human rights framework.

The practical challenges human rights campaigners must overcome are the physical threat to their security that might arise from a decision to engage terrorist narratives, and the elusiveness of terrorist group members as a target of dynamic engagement. In truth, many human rights campaigners are not strangers to threats and intimidation and are well practised at managing and reducing the risks. As for locating meaningful interlocutors, it is the complicit community rather than the terrorists themselves that are the more productive targets for NGO messaging and these supporters can be reached through social media tools like Twitter and Facebook, as well through more traditional mechanisms such as teach-ins and public protests. In short, neither the normative nor the operational obstacles are insurmountable.

The human rights narrative is a powerful one – it can inspire a fourteen-year-old girl like Malala Yousafzai to stand up to the Taliban in Pakistan or students in Tiananmen Square to stand up to the might of the Chinese Communist Party; it was able to inspire a former member of the extremist group Hizb al-Tahrir imprisoned in Egypt, Maajid Nawaz, to found the anti-radicalization Think Tank the Quilliam Foundation in part because his values were challenged when Amnesty International took up his cause in 2004. During the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa banners extolling human rights were a common sight at demonstrations, and NGOs are better standard-bearers for these values than governments. By offering an alternate narrative of hope and change NGOs can chip away at the complicit surround that terror groups require for their survival. By addressing information asymmetry and restoring a human face to the victims of terrorist violence NGOs can reverse the process of dehumanization that is a necessary prerequisite for the casual support of violent action.

In the past decade human rights groups, and NGOs more generally, have failed to engage effectively on the issue of terrorism – in stark contrast to their activism against the excesses of state counter-terrorism policies in the post 9/11 world. This in part reflects normative and practical challenges but, much more importantly, it also reflects a failure of imagination. The containment approach to counterterrorism opens up a space for human rights NGOs to use rights-based narratives, and the tools that they excel in using against states, to influence armed groups and their supporters. This is not an approach that can, or even should, be easily coordinated with governments but it is an approach that stands a greater chance of reducing the threat of terrorist violence than government action alone.

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