REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?

SUMMARY

• Among transnational actors and forces that undermine the state monopoly on the use of force, Terrorism and Violent Extremism are arguably the most *dramatic* in the twenty-first century.

• The threat of terrorism and violent extremism is real but it has been exaggerated and misdiagnosed. Many groups bundled under the terrorist label today originated as opposition or insurgency movements seeking greater political, economic and social justice.

• Security based approaches which the international community has mobilized to counter the many groups labeled as terrorist have caused the threat to change, disperse, and grow in unanticipated ways.

• The only durable antidote to terrorism and extremism is one which carefully calibrates the use of security forces with a primary emphasis on civilian support for local reform efforts to address the political grievances that spawned extremism.

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A Terminal Threat to State Monopoly on the Use of Force? The International Search for Answers to Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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State sovereignty and the state monopoly on the use of force have never been absolute. Nonetheless, the challenges that both are currently facing have become more potent thanks to globalization, technology and open markets. Intertwined financial markets, global climate change and international traffickers in drugs, weapons and persons are often discussed. Among transnational actors and forces that undermine the state monopoly on the use of force, Terrorism and Violent Extremism are arguably the most dramatic in the twenty-first century. Fear elevated terrorism to a top priority on the international security agenda following the September 2001 attacks in the USA. Other countries, including Pakistan, India, Turkey and Kenya, have experienced dramatic terror attacks both before and after. The immediate response emphasized a security-based strategy that relied on the military, Special Forces and intelligence—all of which have standing capabilities and are in a constant state of readiness. But a military response was never pursued in isolation. At the same time, but on a much smaller scale, the UN, the U. S. and European development agencies have applied their programs in a parallel effort to dry up the recruitment pool of terrorist and extremist groups.

Early counter-terrorism efforts failed to stop the multiplication of terrorist groups capable of expanding their geographic reach. In an effort to get ahead of the phenomenon, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has emerged as a broader but related priority in recent years. The international community is still searching for answers on how to effectively combat terrorism and counter violent extremism.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the threat that terrorism and violent extremism present to sovereignty and the state's monopoly on the use of force as well as international responses to both. In doing so, it will first examine what constitutes terrorism and violent extremism, the relationship between the two, and the dimensions of the threat that they pose. Next, international strategies and capabilities employed to counter these threats will be evaluated. In conclusion, the paper will offer recommendations for managing

terrorism and violent extremism more effectively.

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

To assess the threat posed by terrorism, it is necessary to specify some parameters for the use of the term. First, terrorism is a tactic; it is not an objective. Despite the »global strategy on counterterrorism« adopted by the UN General Assembly almost a decade ago, there is still no agreed-upon definition of terrorism.[1] A working definition describes terrorism as the use of violent acts to frighten people indiscriminately as a means to achieve a *political* goal. Terrorists seek maximum publicity and target civilians in order to magnify insecurity far beyond the geographic location of the act itself.

WHO ARE TERRORISTS?

Some movements, such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), are widely regarded as terrorist organizations, distinguishable by their brutality and deliberate attacks on innocent civilians in pursuit of absolute and idealized goals. Beyond these two, a growing array of groups, organizations and individuals who might otherwise be regarded as insurgents or oppositionists have been labeled as terrorists for political purposes.

WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

Here, too, there is no agreed-upon definition; however, some elements are standard in contemporary discussions. They include motivation by an extremist ideology and targeting of civilians. Whether to limit violent extremists to non-state actors or to include state actors is a matter of contention. The UN's Action Plan defers to individual states to determine what constitutes violent extremism, which opens the door to political manipulation.

What is clear in the ongoing muddle is that Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has become the cause *du jour*. The U.S. White House held a summit on the subject last year. U.S. Government agencies have formed task forces. The European Union, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the African Union are among the many governmental organizations actively engaged in CVE. International, regional and bilateral summits convene at regular intervals. The Secretary General of the UN presented an Action Plan in December 2015.[2] The media, think tanks and universities in many countries grapple with the issue. Meetings abound; policy papers and analytical pieces are published; strategies are tried. In sum, CVE is a growth industry.

HOW ARE CVE AND COUNTER TERRORISM (CT) RELATED?

A link between the two phenomena is widely accepted link, although the relationship is contested— unsurprisingly, given the lack of consensus over the definition of either term. UN Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) makes the link between the two explicit, noting that violent extremism can lead to terrorism, and emphasizing the need for a concerted prevention effort. Some regard CVE and CT efforts as sequential: CVE comes first, requiring a broad range of prevention activities. Others emphasize simultaneous engagement on both the CT and CVE fronts. However, the more realistic strategies of simultaneous engagement create enormous implementation problems, because CT and CVE differ importantly in their objectives, time lines and instruments.

WHAT ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF THE THREAT?

The practice of labeling a variety of movements and organizations in addition to al-Qaeda and ISIS, as terrorist has magnified the scope of the threat beyond its true dimensions. Bundling such diverse groups as opponents of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, Chechen separatists in Russia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and proponents of Kurdish autonomy under the terrorist umbrella illustrates the problem. While not exhaustive, this list highlights the practice of applying the terrorist label for political purposes in order to discredit the grievances and goals of the groups in question. The point is not that terrorism and violent extremism do not pose a threat, but that the excessively broad and often arbitrary application of the terms, which has become commonplace, closes doors to possible negotiated solutions while at the same time exaggerating the scale of the threat.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The international community has mobilized around a security-based approach to countering the many

1 Naureen Chowdhury Fink »Countering Violent Extremism: What are the Key Challenges for the UN?« IPI Global Observatory, 3 November 2015, p. 2

2 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General, 24 December 2015. https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism (last accessed on 10.06.2016).

groups identified as terrorist, an approach directed at killing or capturing as many members of these groups as possible. Such actions are reflexive and narrow, emphasizing military means to counter real and perceived threats to security and order. This approach has produced some important short-term gains in reducing al-Qaeda's strength as well as reducing the territory controlled by ISIS ; nonetheless, the threat has spread by franchises joining forces with traditional insurgencies in Mali, Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia, for example, and through the recruitment of alienated second generation immigrants in Europe (and to a lesser degree in the U.S.). The threat has changed, dispersed, and grown in ways that security institutions have not anticipated or countered effectively. More recent strategies focused on degrading ISIS's oil and finance infrastructure and on cutting off channels of finance to other groups show greater promise.

CVE efforts to prevent terrorism are a relatively recent development; a positive accompaniment has been the acknowledgement that the problem is not well understood. That said, early diagnoses missed the mark. The focus on agents of extremism, variously understood to be the religion of Islam itself or particular religious or political leaders inspired by an extreme interpretation of Islam, conflates underlying causes with expressions of rage. In some cases, poverty and/or extremist education are cited as contributing factors. Ironically, politics is seldom factored into the equation despite the definition of terrorism as seeking a political objective. Efforts at a more holistic attempt to counter extremism bear a remarkable resemblance to standard development assistance, which underscores the inability of the international community to clearly define or delineate clear parameters around violent extremism. As a result, the grievances voiced by leaders of designated terrorist groups, which are rooted primarily in politics and ineffective governance, are seldom accorded much attention or credence. The Tuareg in northern Mali, for example, have been long excluded from political and economic opportunity as well as government jobs by the power elites in Bamako despite promises of reform. Muslims in northern Nigeria have experienced similar forms of marginalization. In Somalia, the Islamic Courts brought a degree of stability and order after years of clan warfare, but were ousted by Ethiopian forces backed by the U.S. which feared the creation of a safe haven for al-Qaeda. As a result, Al Shabaab emerged as a more radical off-shoot of the Islamic Courts. These cases are emblematic of the fertile ground for franchises of al-Qaeda or ISIS to gain a foothold when political problems such as corruption, injustice and the marginalization of disadvantaged populations are not addressed.

The Global Terrorism Index (2015) confirmed the political roots of extremism. It identified political violence committed by the state and as part of broader armed conflict as the two strongest drivers of extremism. Indeed, its research showed that 92 per cent of attacks identified as terrorist in the last 25 years were linked to the state, while 88 per cent were linked to broader armed conflict. Low levels of respect for human rights and policies that undermine religious and political freedoms are common. In addition to these factors common to all cases, the Index noted some variation between non-OECD and OECD countries. In the former, ongoing conflict, corruption and its companion—a weak business environment—stood out. In OECD countries, by contrast, youth unemployment; attitudes towards the media, democracy and immigration; and drug crime were statistically significant.[3]

Young people attracted to extremist groups are motivated by numerous factors: alienation, marginalization, injustice and idealism are common. In Europe, the appeal is similar to that of a gang. The recruiting group provides a sense of belonging that young people miss in their community and society at large. Second generation immigrants are particularly vulnerable. Extremist groups have been adept at using social media to build relationships with individuals, appealing in one-on-one conversations to their grievances as well as their aspirations. It is often forgotten that some recruits, as well as leaders, are motivated by a high sense of purpose: they see themselves as idealists in the service of a greater cause framed in terms of justice. The role of Islam as a religion is marginal. Although recruiters may cloak their rhetoric in an extreme interpretation of Islam, al-Qaeda and ISIS recruits are often barely conversant with the tenets of Islam. Other groups mobilize adherents in predominantly Muslim communities because of political, economic and social injustice, not because of the religion as such. In this complex environment, Western attempts to discredit extremist groups and their leaders have largely fallen flat.

Injustice, alienation and marginalization among individuals and groups are found across the spectrum of countries—from unstable, fragile states, apparently stable authoritarian states, to democratic countries. Although these factors are more acute in authoritarian and fragile states, the successful recruitment of young Westerners by al-Qaeda and ISIS has shaken core assumptions regarding the inclusiveness and promise of market democracy.

In response, fear has dominated reason and fear is

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3 Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.   http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf   (last accessed on 10.06.2016), p. 3

seldom a wise advisor. It has shaped international efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism heavily which are reliant on military responses, on the one hand, while linking terrorist actions to Islam, on the other—the very rhetoric that al-Qaeda and ISIS leaders use to legitimize their actions. Fear has driven political leaders and publics alike to support broad-brush and harsh measures to control the threat—just the opposite of the tailored recruitment of individuals practiced by extremist groups. In predominantly Muslim countries, animosities between Shia and Sunni have been stoked. Fault lines in Iraq and Syria as well as Saudi-led attacks in Yemen are prime examples. In the West, fear has created space for politicians to invoke identity politics in order to scapegoat the Islamic faith and Muslim communities at large for the acts of a few. In the process, policies of discrimination and exclusion and hate speech directed against Muslims have taken center stage. Anti-Muslim prejudice has been incorporated into national security policies, depriving some of the most vulnerable Muslim populations fleeing violence a safe haven. The ugly face of populism cloaked by a thin veil of democracy has spread with remarkable speed. This facile and reflexive reaction has inadvertently reinforced and legitimized the message of terrorist and extremist leaders who claim to represent the true Islam.

As noted above, authoritarian leaders in many parts of the world have been given virtual *carte blanche* to label and suppress any opposition as »terrorist« while democratic governments frequently use the term »war« to describe the terrorist threat. This is a short-sighted, dangerous and counter-productive response to terrorism and violent extremism. An authoritarian »solution« will only strengthen extremist appeals because the measures taken in the name of security will only increase basic injustices, marginalization and feelings of helplessness. As such, the option of supporting authoritarian governments as an antidote to terrorism or extremism is ultimately condemned to failure.

CONCLUSIONS

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism is real but it has been exaggerated and misdiagnosed. Many groups bundled under the terrorist label today originated as opposition or insurgency movements seeking greater political, economic and social justice. They became more radical and willing to partner with terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS when the local political leaders and authorities failed to address their grievances. Despite enormous attention, energy and resources, the international community still does not know what works and what does not to effectively

counter terrorism and violent extremism. Sidelining politics and reform in favor of technical efforts to address a myriad of symptoms will not help. Of course, not all problems can be resolved by negotiation and reform; but as long as the international community fails to recognize root causes, its actions will not only fail to eliminate the threat, but will continue to exacerbate it.

That said, the challenge that most groups present to the state and its monopoly on the use of force is not to eliminate either but rather to replace current arrangements with a version that includes justice and opportunity for their community. The alleged link to Islam is largely a distraction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The only durable antidote to terrorism and extremism is one which begins by paying careful attention to the political grievances voiced by leaders and followers. The bundle of organizations labeled terrorist or extremist must be disaggregated. In order to do this in a responsible way, international actors must have detailed knowledge of the local or regional situation, the key players and their agendas. International responses must be based on this knowledge in order to effectively prevent terrorism and counter violent extremism. Effective engagement requires a long-term time horizon and strong partnerships with local actors who enjoy credibility with a broad swath of the local population and are committed to redressing legitimate grievances. Individualized attention to those vulnerable to extremist appeals must begin early and international actors must develop a corresponding capability.

At the same time, a long-term, nuanced approach embedded in local culture and dynamics does not exclude the need for security based actions. No »either-or« formula will succeed. After all, building security that is reasonably equitable and fair is the cornerstone for any functioning society capable of resolving conflicts using non-violent means. Therefore, military and police must be employed at times to contain spoilers who are committed to violence at all costs. The key to progress, however, is to rebalance the approach to emphasize non-kinetic (holistic) approaches to addressing underlying causes, while employing security instruments when necessary to create a platform for progress. Calibration, finesse and nuance are not the strong suits of large bureaucracies; but these are the qualities that must be developed and employed to successfully reduce the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

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REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE

The Reflection Group »Monopoly on the use of force 2.0?« is a global dialogue initiative to raise awareness and discuss policy options for the concept of the monopoly for the use of force. Far from being a merely academic concern, this concept, at least theoretically and legally remains at the heart of the current international security order. However it is faced with a variety of grave challenges and hardly seems to reflect realities on the ground in various regions around the globe anymore. For more information about the work of the reflection group and its members please visit: http://www.fes.de/GPol/en/security_policy.htm

THINK PIECES OF THE »REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?«

The Think Pieces serve a dual purpose: On the one hand they provide points of reference for the deliberations of the reflection group and feed into the final report of the group in 2016. On the other hand they are made available publicly to provide interested scholars, politicians and practitioners with an insight into the different positions and debates of the group and provide food for thought for related discussions and initiatives worldwide. In this sense, they reflect how the group and selected additional experts »think« about the topic and hopefully stimulate further engagement with it.

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