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Trends in Terrorism Series

How Terrorist Groups Decline

This article was written by the Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University.

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Summary

A seemingly clear problem for counter-terrorism is determining the factors which led to the downfall of another terrorist group and applying these to existing groups.

However, the scholarly and analytic literature generally neglects the specific question of how exactly terrorist groups decline. Preferred are retrospective accounts of how groups emerged.

Our research suggests that terrorist group decline is usually related to at least two of the following factors:

- Changes in support
- Coercive intervention
- Competition
- Institutionalization
- Environmental change
- Changes internal to the group
- Perceived success of terrorist actions

Despite these general conclusions, case-by-case studies of the decline of specific terrorist groups will not be especially helpful because each group declines due to a complex combination of elements. These elements will be nearly impossible to create for another group. Likewise, a list of terrorist groups that have disappeared, along with the often debatable reasons for their disappearance will provide little, that is, of use.

As a result, the problem of terrorism may be more usefully cast as one of "tactics" rather than as one of "groups" themselves; the question of "disappearance" may not be about the group itself, but rather the tactic (groups may persist but abandon terrorism, either in the short term or for good, and groups that have operated without terror may take it up).

"Success" may not then be defined by the complete elimination of a specific group and its members—which is rare and highly ambitious, as our experience with organized crime tells us, but rather by the group abandoning terrorism.

Introduction

Terrorist groups in general are relatively short-lived. In 1992, David Rapoport found that 90 percent of terrorist organizations have a life-span of less than one year, and of those that survive past one year, more than half disappear within the following decade: A great number of terrorist groups form, but relatively few persist. A seemingly clear problem for countering terrorism is determining the factors which led to the downfall of one or another terrorist group and using these to counter existing groups. For example, individual and group motivations and ideologies do appear related to terrorist group life span; Groups inspired by ethnonationalist or separatist causes have generally lasted the longest. This is perhaps due to the support derived from local populaces, which will often house and protect them. Unfortunately, this offers little that is relevant to countering contemporary religiously motivated groups such as Al Qaeda, which are of quite different organizational and ideological form, and require relatively little 'local' support.

The flexibility of contemporary religiously motivated groups, including the capability to splinter when required, appears to be the most problematic issue from a counter-terrorism perspective. Where ethnonationalist or separatist groups (such as the Puerto Rican FALN and Los Macheteros) could be countered by public campaigns to de-legitimize their activities in the eyes of constituent populations, and Marxist-communist groups such as the Red Army Faction in Italy could often be destabilized through leadership interdiction. Neither of these strategies is likely to have any effect on religiously motivated terror groups. This suggests that a trawl through the various historical reasons for terrorist group demise might provide little that is of use. The following overview of several of the analytical and scholarly approaches to terrorist group demise makes this point clear. Instead, as the paper later suggests, it may be both more important and fruitful to focus on terrorism as a particular type of political tactic: one which is taken up and dropped by very different groups for different reasons.

The Existing Literature on Terrorist Group Disappearance

Martha Crenshaw has noted two broad approaches to the study of terrorism: instrumental and organizational. Instrumental approaches perceive terrorism as a tactic deployed by rationally acting social groups, which are not defined by their acts of terrorism *per se*, but by wider political and social goals. Terrorism here is a tactic deployed by otherwise concerned political and social groups. Organizational approaches, on the other hand, conceive terrorism as stemming from specific organizational characteristics such as the need to enhance group cohesion, retain members, and so on, as part of group life cycles. In general, approaches which conceive of terrorism as the act of essentially 'bad' and 'terrorist' individuals have been discredited, as has the idea that certain ideologies, religions, or political persuasions implicitly lead to terrorist activities (though this latter point is currently being re-visited in some quarters). Crenshaw concludes that both instrumental and organizational approaches are necessary for understanding terrorism and for countering terrorist activity. That is, in order to explain why a certain group takes up terrorism in the first instance, it is important to pay attention to the group's instrumental reasons for doing so (i.e., why are they resorting to terrorism despite the obvious risks, and what do they think it will achieve?) and any organizational factors that may be contributory.

Accounts of terrorism have generally followed these two lines, though they have rarely dealt with both aspects simultaneously. Furthermore, specific questions related to how exactly terrorist groups decline are rarely pursued. Much preferred are retrospective accounts of how individual groups emerged or were formed. Yet the historical and organizational specificity of these accounts make it difficult to generalize about conditions of emergence, or possible conditions of elimination. Even in what little work has been done on terrorist group decline, analysts focus most frequently on one particular group and the precise conditions which led to its demise, decline, disappearance, or defeat. Such studies tend to emphasize particular context and environment-specific factors which are difficult to

reduce to common principles or factors that can be applied across the board.

Organizational Approaches

A common theme in organizationally focused approaches is to analyse the internal organizational dynamics of specific groups in order to determine the means by which they can be broken up. This approach leads to interventions such as seeding discord within groups and cutting leaders off from operational nodes. Recently organizational approaches have been questioned on the grounds that modern-day loosely connected, decentralized, and cell-structured terrorist networks avoid many of the traditional problems of hierarchical organizations, and are thus immune to many of the strategies that might be implemented to destabilize them. Efforts at sowing discord and dissension within terrorist groups will probably be less effective on cells which are only very loosely connected with other cells and leadership through one member or another. In such instances, disagreement between cells and leadership nodes may lead to discord, but it is likely that individual cells will simply continue to operate on their own, work in tandem with another cell, or join up with another network.

There is a related counter-terrorism strategy which advocates separating out the more moderate elements of terrorist groups while disenfranchising the radicals. This strategy also has limited purchase insofar as radical elements can and will probably just start up on their own organization under a different name, or continue on as they were. This might even lead to increased terrorist violence as the moderating voices of the group have been separated out. For example, while the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is engaged in a ceasefire pending negotiations with the Turkish government, a more radical and violent group seems to have been spawned, which by its actions appears to be opposed to the PKK's softening stance toward negotiation (though the two groups share similar goals). The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (also known as the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks, Teyrebazen Azadiya Kurdistan, or TAK) have recently claimed responsibility for several violent and indiscriminate terrorist acts, placing in

serious jeopardy the negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government. Furthermore, mission-driven groups (those which gravitate toward one another for the purposes of a single attack) as well as "homegrown" terrorists may not fit traditional models of terrorist organization. Frequently, these groups are only connected loosely with extremist figures or facilitators and the broader extremist community via the Internet. It is therefore unlikely that they will be susceptible to counter-terrorism strategies designed to crumble hierarchical or proximity-based networked organizations.

Terrorist Group Life Cycles

Some analysts have found distinct temporal patterns in terrorist activity. For example, Enders and Sandler assert that transnational terrorist attacks run in cycles, with peaks about every two years. While such accounts may provide an accurate portrayal of terrorist incidents to date, they provide little specificity as to where and from what source attacks will come. Likewise, statistical modeling, which is regarded by some as mathematically predictive of terrorist activity, is usually by necessity based upon many assumptions about how individual cells in any group operate. As a result, they are rather unreliable. Even cells within the same organization do not always behave in the same way, often by intent, and deliberately chaotic and inconsistent behaviour by terrorist groups is often a strategy of choice.

Others in the life cycle tradition such as Albert Bandura, have focused on what appears to be developmental stages of terrorist group formation. In particular, this includes the psychological stages of growing alienation or moral disengagement of groups or individuals that contribute to the proclivity for terrorism and other forms of violence. Some research has also suggested that the evolution of terrorist groups can be understood in terms of typologies of social movements, for example, where terrorism is said to appear toward the end of large-scale movements of mass protest. Again, these studies focus on why and how terrorist groups and movements emerge, rather than on the factors that might be relevant to their decline. Moreover, such cyclical hypotheses that focus on producing broad

generalizations about terrorist movements from specific case studies are extremely difficult to prove because they depend upon significant generalizations (for instance, about the characteristics of terrorist groups). This washes over differences between groups and is ultimately harmful to the specificity required for counter-terrorism. As a consequence, such approaches have enjoyed only marginal favour.

Terrorism Case Studies

A method which sets out to address such problems of specificity is the "case study" approach. These accounts draw lessons for countering existing terrorist organizations by reviewing the decline of another group. Some of the problems with this seem obvious: temporal, geographical, and other contextual and organizationally relevant distinctions between terrorist groups—not to mention cultural, social context and political differences—will disturb any easy comparisons. Furthermore, what worked on one terrorist group, say in terms of law enforcement (even if it is commonly agreed that this particular condition led to the group's demise), will not necessarily work on another, even where there are close resemblances between the two. Likewise, the political affiliations and demands upon analysts often encourage them to place undue emphasis on the role of one factor, such as military or law enforcement techniques. This can lead to major and unanticipated problems when mimicking previously 'successful' enforcement patterns produces no positive results. For instance, the successful removal and elimination of leaders of major drug cartels in South America, military intervention in places such as Somalia, and constriction of financial support for militant groups in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal, can all be held up as counter-terrorism tactics which have not had similar success elsewhere (e.g. in Iraq, and with Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and the LTTE).

A new approach by Audrey Kurth Cronin acknowledges these problems, and instead tries to draw together historical commonalities across different terrorist groups' decline—including both internal and external variables—in order to determine which of these factors might be relevant

to countering a particular contemporary group (such as Al Qaeda). While Cronin's conclusions regarding what may or may not work with Al Qaeda are quite astute, the approach, nevertheless, focuses too much on the role of traditional "counter-terrorism" in group demise ('leadership interdiction', military intervention, etc.). "Counter-terrorism" strategies are not, however, always relevant, and are rarely the only factor at work. It is the unfortunate case that political, bureaucratic and institutional pressures to hold up something that 'worked' in one case or another can often mask more than they reveal.

In fact, there are a number of elements that might be important in terrorist group demise, which are not traditionally placed in the "counter-terrorism" box. For example, substantial reductions in state support (both monetary and otherwise) may not result from international political pressure but from some other source. For instance, Iran is now thought to be increasingly supportive of Al Qaeda, which corroborates reports from within Iran that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is trying to persuade Al Qaeda to promote a pro-Iranian activist to a senior position within its leadership. This may come at a cost in support for other terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, two long-time recipients of Iranian aid. Likewise, changes in organizational sponsorship (e.g., support of other terrorist groups); competition between and among terrorist groups, whether overt or implicit (for resources, state support, recruits, and so on); the development of new surveillance technologies; and environmental changes (involving, for example, broad changes in political, social or other sorts of environments that render the activities of the group redundant) are other factors which may relate to terrorist group demise. Yet these are not traditionally considered "manageable" and thus within the scope of "counter-terrorism".

Reasons for Terrorist Group Disappearance

As suggested, terrorist group decline is usually related to more than one factor, and any conclusions are often subject to disagreement. However, the following elements seem to be most relevant:

- changes in support
- coercive intervention
- competition
- institutionalization
- environmental change
- changes internal to the group
- perceived success of terrorist actions

Changes in Support

This might include such things as shifts in active and passive forms of support, which may be financial or in kind (food, concealment, information, shelter, toleration, etc). There are several subcategories to this.

Popular support is common with ethnonationalist or separatist groups and contemporary religious extremist groups (though not necessary in the latter case). It is difficult to distinguish here between where this is given voluntarily or out of fear (as is the case with the extortion of internationally displaced Tamils). In some cases popular support is undermined, and in others it recedes for other reasons (activities which turn wider audiences against a group, such as targeting or hitting supporting populations either by intent or by accident, exhaustion in the host population, fear of counter-terrorist policies and actions, and so on). For example, while the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA) received wide popular support for its anti-colonialist terror campaigns—indeed, they were perceived by the majority of Cypriots as "freedom fighters"—their successors, EOKA-B, who operated in the 1970s, did not enjoy the same support. This lack of community and popular support eventually led to the irrelevance of the EOKA-B to the vast majority of Cypriots, who did not wish to exchange newly acquired independence for rule from Greece.

Government support is usually covert and difficult to prove. International politics plays a large role in which types of support are tolerated, and which are not. For example, Iran's support of Hezbollah is often subject to international enforcement efforts, while Pakistan's toleration of—and negotiation with—

Taliban leaders within its borders is often ignored. Nevertheless, terrorist groups denied support by previously encouraging states can often dissipate or lose popularity. Libya's expulsion of Abu Nidal and its cutting off of support for other Palestinian terrorist groups (such as the PFLP-GC) are examples.

Organizational support may include the group operating under the sponsorship of some other organization or group, as several groups who have pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda now do. This might take the form of alliance, direct incorporation, or clientism. For example, in a relationship which appears to be based on some form of alliance or perhaps clientism, there are reports that Al Qaeda now seems to be making use of the LTTE's extensive international logistical network to further its own financial and commercial needs.

Coercive Intervention

This factor relevant to terrorist group decline includes violence or the threat of violence against a group. Agencies applying pressure may vary from military through law enforcement, but also include other illegal groups (e.g. organized criminal groups or other terrorist groups). For example, sustained pressure by the FBI and the US Government in the 1980s led to the downfall of the Las Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (or the FALN) and Los Macheteros, two Puerto Rican nationalist groups pursuing separation from the United States. In terms of military force, this has hastened or caused the dissipation of several groups, including late 19th century terrorist and anarchist groups such as Narodnaya Volya, and the more recent Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), though the latter has not completely disappeared).

The extent to which military intervention causes the demise of any particular group is often difficult to determine. This is because military involvement is often associated with fear and loss of support from local populations, withdrawal of other government support, and many other factors which can themselves lead to group decline. Strong military repression can also lead to displacing terrorist groups to other regions, as happened with Chechen rebel

groups who were dispersed to other parts of Russia following sustained military pressure. Likewise, it can result in exporting the problem to another country. As many commentators have noted, the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States in 2001 helped push Al Qaeda operatives into Pakistan and other nearby states. Such outcomes cannot be unambiguously considered "successful".

Coercive intervention also includes the capture or killing of terrorist group leaders. This has had varied success. For example, although the Red Army Faction (previously the Baader-Meinhof Gang) survived several leadership interdictions in the form of arrest and detention, the killing of group leaders was relevant to the downfall of other groups such as Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), Japan's Aum Shinrikyo, and the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA). Groups that end largely because their leaders have been captured or killed are often based in the first instance on highly charismatic or compelling leadership, rather than ideological solidarity or total group commitment to a cause.

At the same time, leadership interdiction is also more likely to be successful for groups which are more hierarchically organized than networked. Current Middle Eastern terrorist groups and Islamist extremist organizations can sustain operations in the face of leadership interdiction because their organizational character is diffuse. Many newer illicit organizations are networked rather than hierarchically organized (though recently there has been some reversal of this shift) and the elimination of one node in the network—or even of the leadership hub—will not paralyze the organization. Indeed if a shared ideology is placed above any individual or cell, this appears key to the successful continued activities of such groups. Where leadership interdiction has worked, this has been due to the highly individualistic leadership style of particular groups, and the binding of the groups' organizational ideology to specific individual leaders within the group: once those leaders are removed, the group will likely fall apart. There is some indication in this that the arrest of leaders is more beneficial than having them killed: the demoralization that accompanies seeing a leader captive and under control of the enemy appears highly relevant to group perseverance.

Competition

Insofar as we define terrorists according to their deployment of violence for political ends, groups may come into competitive relations with other terrorist and criminal organizations (such as the Mafia). Clashes may result from competition over resources and criminal markets, recruits, territory, and so on, particularly in an international political arena which is increasingly hostile to terrorism and terrorism finance. In Turkey, while the PKK and TAK are tolerant of one another and do not directly compete, it is likely that they will continue to implicitly compete for popular and constituent support, especially considering the PKK's softening stance toward the Turkish government. Terrorist organizations may also come into implicit or overt competition with non-terrorist, non-criminal organizations. For example, in a London prison at present there is a potentially explosive standoff between militant Muslims from Asia and moderate non-violent North African and Afro-Caribbean Muslims, where the latter have impeded the radicalization of inmates by the former.

Violent competition: While competition may create alliances or at least a mutual tolerance, "gang warfare" is a possible outcome. Here, violent relations between conflicting "warlords" may be difficult to differentiate from terrorism, both empirically and conceptually. Such armed struggles may be resolved by killing, scattering or co-opting members of the defeated groups. Recent edicts from Al Qaeda suggest that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is an agent of the "anti-Christ" (the Bush-led Americans). The same proclamation suggests that war between the two groups is imminent ("Let the Rafidi (Shiites) know that we are ready to fight them with Allah's help and let it be a war. We are more eager for it than they").

Other competition: Relationships may exist where rival groups overtly or implicitly compete for members, resources, political legitimacy, or social support. If Iran is now supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al Qaeda, it is likely that such groups will begin to compete in some way, if they are not already, for Iranian favour.

Institutionalization

Terrorist groups may renounce violence and become enlisted in politically legitimate activities. This creates difficulties in determining whether such groups disappeared or transformed. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for example, changed names and shifted to a peaceful agenda on the advice of captured leader Abdullah Ocalan. Similarly, after achieving an autonomous state, the EOKA in Cyprus formed regional associations which turned away from anti-colonial terrorism in order to participate in commemorations, and museum construction and maintenance. In one form or another, institutionalization has been the most common factor relating to decreases in terrorist attacks (as well as to permanent cessation of armed hostilities). Rather than "aging-out" of terrorism, which was more common to left-wing and radical terrorist groups of the 1960s and 1970s, in political terms "growing out" of terrorist activity is a more plausible scenario for contemporary terrorist groups, including those which are religiously motivated and ethnonationalist or separatist groups (though this is deserving of further study).

Terrorist groups may also be displaced by institutionalized politics that plausibly promise to deliver either the goals of the terrorist groups or some other goal that renders these redundant. This can in fact be an effective counter-terrorism strategy. In some cases, more moderate factions of terrorist groups can be split off from radical elements, and brought within the fold of legitimate political activity. This helps marginalize the radical terrorist factions of the group, but has its own dangers. Radical sub-factions can form as a result of institutionalization, and can be more violent than the original organization as the moderating voices have been removed. The result can actually be an increase in terrorist activities. In such cases, the most effective strategy may be offering amnesty to members of a group who are willing to come forward with information about other members. This strategy may be most effective when an organization is facing defeat or strenuous opposition (or is in competition with another group) and its members have an incentive to come forward.

Environmental Change

This is a broad category that may not be helpful for countering terrorism, as results are often unpredictable. It is, however, important in a broader political sense. Environmental change refers to transformations in the political, social or other environment that render the activities of a group redundant. For example, changes linked to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the wider delegitimation of communism as an ideology served to bankrupt the organizing frameworks of several socialist and ethnonationalist terrorist groups.

Changes within the Group

This may involve the transition of the terrorist group to other strategies (such as formal military engagement) or to another *modus operandi* (e.g. criminal enterprise). Examples of the former include the Kashmiri separatist groups, the Khmer Rouge, and the Uruguayan Tupamaros. Such transitions are likely among ethnonationalist or separatist groups who have a connection to a particular territory and population. In other cases, politically motivated groups may have to engage in criminal activity in order to sustain operations. At one extreme, this might involve the group taking profit as its central organizing goal, what Schmid has referred to as a process of "gangsterization". Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines is one example. Since 2000, the group has shifted its focus from bombings and executions to kidnapping for ransom.

Internal change might also be the effect of captured leaders' pleas to groups to discontinue violence. This was the case with both the PKK and the Shining Path, where jailed leaders denounced violent resistance and communicated messages commanding ceasefires from their constituent groups. It is difficult to determine the reasons why such changes in commitment arise, yet the effect on the group is often significant. As a result, this is an area which is deserving of further research.

Also relevant to this factor in group decline are internal elements such as a group's ability to persist into the next generation. This would relate to the

inability to recruit new members to take on the cause, or the failure to outline clear ideological principles and goals which can be smoothly and completely passed on to the next generation. Anarchist and left-wing groups in the 1970s were known for their inability to identify a clear and transmissible vision of their goals and orientation, as they often emerged from small, close-knit cadres of friends and acquaintances. When members of the cadre were arrested or killed, the group often fell apart. Examples include the Weather Underground, the Japanese Red Army, and the Italian Red Brigades. Fascist and racist groups also have difficulty persisting through generations and over long periods of time: although the ideology that inspires such groups often remains, the specific groups themselves are quick to rise and fall.

In general, this process by which an organizing ideology is passed on from the first to the second generation is very sensitive. (However this is likely more so for smaller groups than larger scale organizations which might include several generational cohorts in their membership at any given moment.) Fissures in this transference can provide opportunities for countering a specific group ideology, for example through the placement of agents, informers, and provocateurs. New religiously extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda seem well aware of this fact, and focus recruiting on younger members to spread this process out over many years. With religious extremism, in particular, the ideological premise for group activity is often located in powerful religious leaders and clerics external to the group: in contrast to anarchist and right-wing groups, should the leadership cadre of religious extremist terrorist groups be captured or killed, the ideological premise of the movement is sustained through relatively autonomous religious authorities.

Perception of Success

Whether terrorism is successful or not is subject to wide debate, often influenced by political allegiances. Moreover, the goals of any one group are often ambiguous and changing, and thus success is often difficult to judge, either in a group's own view or by external criteria. It has even been suggested

that it is highly unethical to confirm that terrorism ever 'works', so to speak. Some commentators have thus strongly argued that terrorism rarely succeeds. Moreover, it may be a matter of conjecture or contest to determine whether any political, military, social or economic changes resulted specifically from the activities of any terrorist group. Yet groups have often perceived and publicized changes this way. For example, the 2006 confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel in Southern Lebanon was claimed by both sides as a victory. Other commentators have thus agreed that terrorism actually does work in many cases. As this argument goes, active groups such as Al Qaeda, HAMAS, and the Tamil Tigers take up terrorism because it often provides the desired response; otherwise they would not take the risk. For example, the suicide attack on the US Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 was widely perceived as having convinced the US to withdraw from Lebanon—or at the least the attack precipitated the withdrawal. Indeed, as Robert Pape has found, between 1980 and 2003, half of all suicide terrorist campaigns were closely followed by substantial concessions by the targeted governments. Some obvious historical cases include the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization, or ETZEL, or Irgun) which operated in the 1930s to advance the cause of a Jewish state. The group disbanded when Israel was created. Another anti-colonial group was the EOKA, a group which fought British rule for a free Cyprus in the mid to late 1950s. EOKA disbanded in 1960 after Cyprus achieved independence. Another clear example is the African National Congress' successful defeat of apartheid under leader Nelson Mandela. More recently, Middle Eastern extremist groups and *mujahideen* are known to rely heavily upon and draw inspiration from the idea that popular *jihads* throughout the 1980s in Afghanistan led to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, precipitating the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As can be seen from all of this, terrorist groups decline, disappear, die off, or disband for a host of very different reasons. The context and confluence of specific factors which led to the decline of one group will be almost impossible to create for another group. For instance, while leadership interdiction worked with Aum Shinrikyo and RIRA, it will not

necessarily work with Al Qaeda—indeed, it probably won't. Killing Usama bin Laden will not disband the Islamic extremist movement, and in fact, it might bolster their activities. Bin Laden is seen as a heroic figure, and his death would be considered martyrdom by his followers. Rather, each of the above factors will have different relevance depending on the group one is concerned with. Blanket counter-terrorism strategies are thus highly problematic.

Problems in Studying Terrorist Group Decline

As all of this also suggests, there are numerous difficulties in studying the decline of terrorist groups, and in even defining terrorism, as is well known. There are literally hundreds of definitions of what terrorism is, and this reflects the deficiencies of a notion which is necessary for legal categorization, but is essentially a political label rather than a watertight analytical concept. The problem is especially troubling across wide-ranging temporal and geopolitical contexts. This makes historical and geographical comparisons very difficult (despite hypothesized 'waves' in terrorism). Likewise, similar activities may have quite diverse meanings in different cultures. It now also seems obvious that despite the West's depiction of Hezbollah as a 'terrorist organization', the people living in southern Lebanon are little concerned with this characterization, widely regarding the group as an heroic post-conflict infrastructure re-builder, and long-time social welfare provider. These are important contextual factors that need to be taken into consideration. Not doing so leads to misunderstandings of how particular policies will play out in geographically distant and culturally dissimilar regions.

Explanations of what exactly caused certain terrorist groups to decline are also subject to debate. A similarly problematic issue is untangling what exactly constitutes the decline or the disappearance of a terrorist group as opposed to its transformation into another group with a different name, its (re)modification into another organizational form with the same name, or its accommodation within a different or larger group. For some terrorist groups, name change or disbandment, with or without

later recombination, may be a planned strategy in response to various contextual factors. For example, racist neo-Nazi groups in the United States and elsewhere commonly perform this manoeuvre with the intended result of throwing off law enforcement, or in response to wider community rejection. Some terrorist groups have even been known to change their names for specific attacks, just as some terrorist and religious leaders will change their names in order to avoid detection. This is problematic for determining when a specific group has 'declined' (i.e. what exactly do we mean by 'decline'?). Moreover, it is difficult to determine when such a tactic was a planned operation or when it was the result of external pressures, such as law enforcement, and conclusions about successful counter terrorism strategies can thus be misleading. The effectiveness of any particular factor in eliminating a terrorist group is thus difficult to disentangle from the equally important question of which factors constrain groups.

Likewise, terrorist groups do not fall into a single form of organization, but range from the ephemeral to the more organized, from "outlaw bands" to formal militias with government support. A factor which may contribute to the demise of an entrenched, revolutionary terrorist militia will probably be of little value in countering, for example, the activities of an ephemeral, religiously driven, networked terrorist cell. Likewise, terrorist groups—even some contemporary ones which seem to orbit around similar religiously extreme ideologies—do not follow the exact same doctrine or group logic. Thus, there are several different forms of radical Islam (for example, Wahhabi and Salafi) preached by a host of clerics, some of which do not entail the necessary use of violence for political change. As a consequence, generalizations which span across "terrorists", as if this were a homogeneous category, are of dubious value and inherently dangerous: the specific differences between terrorist group forms, types of action undertaken, group organization, and terrorist ideologies are extremely important. Furthermore, counter-terrorist tactics that affect certain organizations may also have negative effects on benign organizations, potentially creating a more favourable environment for new terrorist groups to emerge.

As suggested already, case-by-case studies of the decline of specific terrorist groups may not be helpful to counter-terrorism efforts because each group declines due to a complex combination of factors specific to a particular group, context, or environment. For example, environment (the decline of the Soviet Union and communism), enforcement and repression (military and police pressure), and lack of popular support stemming from overt brutality all seem to have been related to the decline of the Red Army Faction in Germany. Likewise, fleshing out a list of terrorist groups which have declined along with the reasons for their decline will provide little that is useful for countering other terrorist groups: there will be little in each instance which is reliably generalizable to other cases. As a result, the problem of terrorism may be more usefully cast as one of "tactics" rather than one of "groups". This separates out the question of the elimination of any specific group from the problem of countering terrorism as a phenomenon and convincing groups to abandon terrorism or avoid taking it up in the first instance.

Terrorism as a Political Tactic

Terrorism can thus be usefully cast as a tactic that is used by all sorts of groups for all sorts of different reasons, from small religiously motivated cells, to animal rights groups and anti-abortion organizations, to states and large-scale revolutionary militias. Furthermore,

Groups using the tactics of terrorism choose it as one among a number of alternative means of pursuing political ends. It is part of a repertoire of actions, a tool that can be picked up and later set down or used in conjunction with others.

The question of "decline" is perhaps not then about the group itself, but rather the tactic. Groups may persist, but abandon terrorism, either in the short term or for good (e.g. HAMAS, PLO, IRA), and groups that have operated without terrorism may take it up (e.g. American anti-abortion groups). "Success" may not be defined as the complete elimination of a specific group and its members—which is rare and highly ambitious—but rather by the group

abandoning terrorism. It is indeed quite likely that law enforcement and military action will have as much difficulty in completely eliminating terrorist organizations and upstart cells as they have had in eliminating organized crime groups and upstart criminal cadres. Assuming that such interventions will be able to eliminate terrorist groups completely is an unreasonable expectation which places undue stress and strain on police forces, intelligence agencies, and military units.

The elimination of terrorism in the broader sense of eradicating all of its varied forms is very likely impossible. Rather we might suggest building bit by bit a strategic knowledge of the conditions that appear to lead to the abandonment of such tactics and/or their eschewal in the first instance—accepting at the outset that we might never suppress such activities completely. This will usher us toward strategies that aim to mitigate the effects of terrorist violence and reduce its usage as much as possible; that is, with managing the problem of terrorism rather than setting out to 'solve' or 'eliminate' it. Unrealistic expectations about any particular policy or interventionist effort to 'eradicate' terrorism have already caused great harm and confusion in our understanding of the problem. Much like crime, terrorism has been around for a very long time and doesn't appear to be going anywhere anytime soon. To suggest otherwise, as happens more frequently than one might expect on the basis of the evidence supporting the proposition, might be viewed as politically motivated at best, and historically naïve at worst. ■

Steven Hutchinson,
Pat O'Malley

Carleton University,
Ottawa