

Terrorism and Nation-State institutions: Actions and Inter-actions

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Globalization refers in general to the worldwide integration of humanity and the compression of both the temporal and spatial dimensions of planet wide human interaction¹. It has brought unprecedented change to the lives of people, society and countries. While globalization has brought unprecedented development and progress to people, it has also unleashed negative aspects such as facilitating international terrorism² and other forms of trans-national crimes. Trans-national terrorism is a global phenomenon, which is seen as one of the most destructive. The 9/11 terrorist attack against the United States of America illustrates the lethality of the new threat. Some argue that the nature of the threat renders traditional national security institutional arrangements inadequate to respond to the threat³. Hence, countries have been left to devise responses and counter-strategies to the new threats using pre-existing structures and institutions which are often found wanting

Scholars of security studies seek to understand why has nation-state institutions' failed to effectively respond to the new threat of trans-national terrorism? It may be easier to understand why the developing world, with stretched institutions and limited resources are having difficulties, but more interestingly, why developed countries like United States and United Kingdom, despite their sophisticated and developed institutions, have failed to meet the new threats and have been forced to reform and re-organized in response to the threat? In understanding this phenomenon, this article's thesis is penned on the notion that nation-state institutions, such as but not limited to military and police, are not adequately designed to response to this new threat to national security. The nature of the threat, its peculiar operational methodology, and varying contexts and environments renders the conventional warfare-weighted national security framework irresponsible in addressing the threat of trans-

national terrorism. These variables will be examined in the context of state capabilities and its implications to nation-state institutions behavioural change.

Nature of the threat

First, the most critical component of the “new threat” is the nature of violence, which is extreme, and does not discriminate between military and civilian. Unlike traditional terrorist who shared a similar desires for attention, the new terrorists have not adhered to the self constrains of the past. Traditional groups desired to attraction but limit casualties, a very different approach than that taken by Al-Qaeda.

Second, unlike traditional terrorist groups, who have hierarchical structures and were highly dependant on state sponsorship, the new threats are built around loosely linked cells that do not rely on a single leader or state sponsor. Al-Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, has come to exemplify this structure⁴. Hence, the Al-Qaeda strategic leadership is not involved in specific details of targeting, though the group is responsible for the most lethal terrorist attack in history and achieved the highest rate of lethality per attack.⁵

Al-Qaeda’s successful attack on symbols of US economic, military and political power on September 11 2001 (Twin Towers, Pentagon), highlighted the vulnerability and perhaps the misdirected institutional structures protecting the United States. Despite the overwhelming military and national security capability of the United States, the large and expensive system failed to effectively and immediately respond to the attack. Among reasons, United State military apparatus, which is designed primarily either to engage in expansionistic excursions or at least to be ready to deal with ever-possible military incursions of other states⁶ is not prepare to deal with non-state actors, an enemy, which has no strategic depth, which one can identify boundaries, battlefronts and strategic leadership.

Third, the new threat of terrorism is trans-national, originating from non-state actors, and has successfully co-opted local conflicts for its own ends. The classic examples are Al-

Qaeda and the Jemaah Islamiyah. Al-Qaeda is an organization with global ambitions and deploys its own operatives as well as co-opting pre-existing organizations. Jemaah Islamiyah an Indonesian terrorist organization was co-opted by Al-Qaeda to be its regional affiliate who in turn successfully managed to co-opt local ethno-nationalist liberation fronts, such as the secessionist movements in Southern Philippines and Thailand. This followed the model already developed in Chechnya, and later deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Its operators are trans-national, non-state actors who hold allegiance to a cause, not a state, which removes one of the inhibiting factors on extreme violence, where in the past a state sponsor could be held accountable for the actions of its proxies through traditional forms of state interactions—diplomatic, economic, and military. Clearly these tools are of very limited value against non-state actors. If trans-national, non-state actor like Bin Laden uses a weapon of Mass destruction against a state, which the state has to retaliate against?

Operational Methodology

Fourth, one of the critical support elements once provided by the state was financing. Government funds would be provided to the terrorist groups for either specific operations, or to sustain the organization. The current terrorist threat relies on either self-financing, or individual supporters, in either case it is reliant on the convenience of the modern international financial system and technology to transfer funds. Terrorist have income streams from legal and illegal sources and are not accountable to state sponsors—or anyone else. Al Qaeda is a wealthy, multi-national organization with numerous income streams. It has investment and concealed accounts worldwide, many in the Western societies Bin Laden most despises⁷. A case in point is the terrorist operations in the Philippines, wherein Al-Qaeda channelled funds through an International Islamic Relief Organization, a legally registered charity institution led by Osama Bin Laden's brother-in-law, Mohamad Jamal Khalifa, to fund terrorist bombing activities in the Philippines, such as the Rizal day bombing

in Manila. The legal framework provided by state democratic institutions facilitated terrorist operations, which regulators had very little control over.

Fifth, new terrorists are no longer as dependant on formal training camps, in part due to the wide availability of training materials. Al-Qaeda did of course operates camps and training centres even before 9/11 US attacks, and based on the materials captured in Al-Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan and from similar training materials of other Muslim extremist groups demonstrate the sophistication of these non-state actors. The access to high quality material in the military arts is critical, but the most important element in the self – training is the ideological fervour that permeates the network from the top to the grass roots. This mix of skill and commitment to fight to death have turned Al-Qaeda and its allies in to” a daunting foe⁸.

This mix of commitment and skill have another benefit, it does not require large numbers of fighters. This is a model typical of US and other special forces who use small number of trained and dedicated individuals to respond to highly unusual threats, at the grass-roots. While highly successful, special forces of nations such as the US and Philippines are in short supply.⁹

Threat Environment

Sixth, the new terrorist threat, particularly the religious extremists are more difficult to penetrate because of the level of fraternization involved. A case in point is the networked, cellular structure used by Al-Qaeda and its allies. Due to the close personal bonds found in the cells, as well as the non-hierarchical leadership, nation states security services are having difficult penetrating these networks. Conventional security services and militaries are designed to target hierarchical opponents, either state or non-state actors. And when these cells practice strict operational and communications security, it makes tracking and understanding the groups' intentions and capabilities even more difficult. The groups

understand the west, particularly the US, is dependant on technical intelligence capabilities at the expense of human sources. They have been able to turn a strength into a weakness, the sign of a worthy opponent.¹⁰. The new threat can't be bought, bribed, or even blackmailed.

Implications to Nation States Institutions

The Trans-national Terrorist threat immediate impact to nation-state institutions is the need to reorganise them into networks. There are four broad categories of the reorganization: can be categorized into four elements: inadequacy of Military and Police Solutions, the need for inter-agency coordination, the need for private Sector, Civil Society and Non-government Organizations cooperation and the need for international Cooperation.

Inadequacy of Military and Police Solutions

First, military and police solutions are not adequate to address the problem. The military apparatus of most nations-state is designed not to address this new threat. This is evidenced by the events of September 11, which the United States and its allies clarified the urgent need to refocus and re-structure the way they think about and plan for military campaigns. The Western armed forces are fundamentally flawed, because conceptually, the focus remains on conventional warfare, but the new war on terror is unconventional¹¹.

Due to the nature of violence, which primarily targets civilian and civilian infrastructure, it renders the human resources capability of the military and police ineffective. There are simply too many targets for the security services to protect. Hence, there is the need to employ the help of private sector and people's organization to fill-in this gap. This is of course controversial, companies such Blackwater, the private military contractor in Iraq demonstrate the benefits and perils of this approach. Other examples such as the one practice in the Philippines, including the used of the Special Civilian Active Auxiliary (SCAA) to secure critical infrastructures and village based citizens army (para-military) to serve as territorial defence forces are examples of involving the population in their own defence.

Inter-agency coordination

Second, there is need for an Inter-agency coordination and the whole-of-government approach in effectively responding to the threat. The indiscriminate nature of violence that the new terrorist is capable of doing requires different counter-strategy, involving a range of traditional and non-traditional security agencies. For instance, the 9/11 terrorist attacks immediate implications for the US government is the creations of the Homeland Security Department and the National Security Agency. DHS has built an integrated emergency response workforce—with FEMA, Coast Guard, Federal Air Marshals, Immigration & Customs Enforcement, and Secret Service being in one agency for the first time.¹². The idea of establishing the new mechanisms is to ensure high level of coordination among agencies from prevention to consequence management in case of a threat or actual terrorist attack. (NSA is the communications security and spy agency, it does not coordinate the FBI and CIA.). Other countries, such as Singapore, Philippines, Australia and UK have created similar mechanisms of coordination among agencies of government. The new threat of terrorism requires high level of coordination from strategic, operational and community level of government to effectively respond to the threat.

Private Sector, Civil Society and Non-government Organization Cooperation

Third, there is a need for non-government, civil society and religious sector cooperation. The new threat is a trans-national insurgency operation at all levels, right to the smallest unit of the nation-state system—the village or community. For instance, the London bombers were home grown terrorist motivated by their marginalization in the western societies, the Al-Qaeda is motivated by the failure of nation-state system in the Middle East. Others, like in Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Indonesia are motivated by poverty, political and civil rights, among others. Their common bond is their common ideological agenda. Hence, it requires an ideological response. In this nature of the threat,

government institution alone cannot solely address the issue, but it required the participation of non government entities, which are institutions outside of the government structure.

The US has significantly invested in dialogue with the Islamic World. Singapore for instance, emerged to be one of the pioneers in successfully establishing the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) for terrorist detainees and in engaging its Muslim constituencies. The Philippines has the non-government Interfaith Dialogue Forum of the Ulama-Bishop Conference and the civil-society led National Interfaith Commission. This infusion of new institutional arrangement in the national security framework is brought in part by the threat of terrorism, and is critical to addressing both the symptoms of the problem, terrorist violence, and the cause of the problem, grievances and extremist ideology.

International Cooperation

Finally, there is a need for an international cooperation to effectively respond to the new threat of terrorism. The age of globalization is characterized by permissive government systems especially the Western societies, global communications, and easy travel, all of this facilitated the formation of global network of terrorist¹³. As a case in point, the Islamist inspired terrorist has been allowed to move from one Islamic country, where they have traditionally assimilated and found employment, to the long established Islamic Diasporas in other countries where they can network through religious and social systems. Al Qaeda for example, has inspired groups such as Abusayaf in the Philippines and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia to become franchises by sharing resources, information, people, and ideology¹⁴. This capability to co-opt local terrorist and create independent home grown terrorists requires cross-border cooperation, or else the threat will just simply shift its operations to a neighbouring state when threatened, and will not be fully addressed. This collaboration involves creating a mechanism wherein nation-states institutions will be provided mechanisms of cooperation. The current global coalition of the war against terror,

seen in Iraq and Afghanistan and the cross border patrol agreements among Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines are few of the examples of the need to draw inter-state coordinative infrastructure to address this threat.

Conclusion

The above discussion illustrates the failings and some of the emerging remedies to the failures of current nation states and their institutions. The United States military apparatus as any other country in the post cold war era is designed for conventional warfare projected to meet state actors, but the new threat is a non-state actor. Al-Qaeda as a case in point of an organization that rarely engages in conventional military confrontation, as then is acutely aware that they will lose. Thus they exploit the vulnerabilities with in the open global system, and they seem to have successfully conducted their operations between the existing state and institutional structures to great effect. Security services designed to identify, infiltrate and destroy hierarchal state and state like organizations are ill equipped to address threats that do not conform to this structure.

The state has difficulty addressing the wide array of issues underlying the current threat, which run from poverty to marginalization, but linked by the opponent to a common ideology. Hence, government and society have to recognize the strengths and limitation of each partner be it public, private or charitable, and link together to maximize each participants strengths. It requires an approach that requires the whole of government mechanisms, including the non-government organization and the private sector.

The whole-of-government approach requires the integration, synchronization and coordination of all organs of the government, and this change affects both the structure and conduct of government. This hinges on the understanding the states are living organisms that have to adapt to a changing environment or perish.

In conclusion, the nature of trans-national terrorism, a dimension of globalization, has significantly altered the nation-state institutional arrangements and national security strategies. If a new threat evolved, so should the nation-state security infrastructure.

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² Cronin, Audrey K "Behind the curve, Globalization and international terrorism, cited in *Defeating Terrorism* by Howard , et.al, (, USA : McGraw Hill, 2002), p29

³Rob de Wijk, "The Limits of Military Power", cited in Howard and etal," *Defeating Terrorism*", (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), p 482

⁴ Brian Murphy, "The shape of terrorism," *Fayetteville Observer*, Aug 21,2002, p.94

⁵ Bruce Newcome, "Executive Summary," *Mass casualty Terrorism: Second Quarterly Forecast*, http://www.rdg.ac.uk/GSEIS/University_of_Reading_Terrorism-Forecast_2003Q2.pdf

⁶ John Keegan, *a History of Warfare* (New York:Knorpf, 1993.)

⁷ Brian Murphy p95.

⁸ Ann Tyson, "Al Qaeda, resilient and Organized," *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar 7, 2002, p1

⁹ Wijk Rob de, "the limits of military power cited in Howard, et al "terrorism and counter terrorism" (USA: McGraw Hills, 2002) p 483.

¹⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, "Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) p.76.

¹¹ Rob de Wijk, "The Limits of Military Power", cited in Howard and etal," *Defeating Terrorism*", (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), p 482

¹²Department of Homeland Security", http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/history/gc_1172594004145.shtm, accessed 27 January 2008,

¹³ Downing, Wayne, "Global War on Terrorism", cited by Sawyer, and et.al "Defeating terrorism", (USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002).p 151

¹⁴ Gunaratna, *Inside Alqaeda*, pp167-220

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