Historical approaches to the relationship between terrorism and armed conflict

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Definition

We do not intend at this seminar to discuss the difficult question of how to define 'terrorism'. Focus should be on the linkages between such acts or movements that each of us clearly identify as 'terrorist' and another phenomenon called 'war' or 'armed conflict'. I will follow Bruce Hoffman's definition of terrorism as 'the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change'.[1] I will not, hovever, accept his proposition that only violence perpetrated by 'a subnational group or non-state entity' should be considered as terrorist. That would exclude from consideration multiple terrorist acts perpetrated by regimes against their own populations (such as during the French Revolutionary Wars), and also against enemy populations in international warfare (such as the utilisation by Napoleon of terrorist attacks against Britain during the British blocade).

The need for systematic inquiries

I myself am a post-September 11 novice in the study of terrorism, and have not even made a systematic survey of the literature. It seems to me, however, that there are few systematic inquiries into the relationship between terrorism and war. If this is the case, then it is high time to undertake such inquires, from multiple angles, and try to establish patterns of when andhow wars do or do not lead to terrorism, and when and how terrorism does or does not lead to war. To start such an inquiry is the aim of the seminar, as Alyson Bailes said in her introduction.

I will try to look briefly at some historical cases where war and terrorism have occurred together or in sequence, and see if I can find patterns of interlinkage. Instead of first establishing a sample of patterns, and then seek out cases, I will try to induce patterns from each case. The cases I've chosen are the ones I know a little about.

The French Revolutionary Wars

The French National Assembly declared war against the Habsburg Empire on 20 April 1792. The Prussian monarchy joined up with the Habsburgs, but French forces won a major victory against the invading Prussian forces at Valmy on 20 September 1792. This victory provided the immediate background for the abolition of the French monary and adoption of a Republican constitution in the two following days. On 1 February 1793, after the French Republic had invaded Belgium and less than two weeks after the execution of Louis XVI, France also declared war on Great Britain and the Netherlands. And in March it went to war against Spain. That same month, a civil war broke out in Vendée between monarchist and republican forces. In 23 August came the famous 'levée en masse', mobilizing the population against external and internal enemies, and this provided the immediate background for putting 'terror' on the agenda of the National Convent in September. Capital punishment had already

[1] Bruce Hoffman, 1998. *Inside Terrorism.* (London: Victor Gollancz): 43.

been widely used since the outbreak of the Vendée uprising and war with Britain and Spain in March, but it was not till September 1793 that it became part of a revolutionary programme.

There are evident linkages between the widespread use of capital punishment by the Republic during 'the terror' ('la terreur') and the external and internal wars. Although the utilisation of capital punishment by a revolutionary regime is very different from the utilisation of assassinations or bombs by sub-national groups, it may still be possible to discern interesting parallels in the linkages with war. In my view, the terror during the French Revolutionary Wars should be considered when discussing linkages between terrorism and war. There are also evident similarities between the use of terror in the French Revolution and the use of terror by later revolutionary regimes.

If one looks at the statistics of French revolutionary terror, for quite some time after it started in March 1793, it reflects the external and internal warfare. Public capital punishment was a way of enforcing national and revolutionary discipline and punishing those who supported the external and internal enemy. And the internal and external wars were part of the same struggle. The Habsburg Emperor was the brother of the French queen, who was executed, and the Vendée revolt was pro-monarchist. France became a Republic in the same month it won the first major battle at Valmy. The revolutionary terror in the period until the end of 1793 was used throughout the areas controlled by the revolutionary forces, and particularly in the areas of civil war. However, the terror was also used as a part of the factional infighting in the Convent, and after the Vendée uprising had suffered a major defeat in December 1793, this aspect of the Terror became predominant. On a national level, the number of executions reached its apex in January 1794, just after the Vendée armies had suffered their great defeat, and then it fell abruptly. From March to July 1794, however, the number of executions increased significantly again, with a great number of executions in the revolutionary capital itself, Paris. This did not reflect renewed warfare, but a radicalisation of the revolutionary regime, and factional fighting inside it.[2] The Terror more or less ended after these factional struggles ended with the execution of Robespierre in late July 1794. The following year saw the French Republic reach several peace agreements: a ceasefire in Vendée on 17 February 1795, a peace agreement with Prussia in April, with the Netherlands in May, and with Spain in July. The revolution had now reached its period of consolidation.

The incidence of the French revolutionary terror is hardly imaginable without the background in the external and internal wars. War between states became mixed up with a larger European war between revolutionary movement and the monarchies and nobilities representing the old order. Even before the wars started, a radical discourse of nationalist warfare was introduced in the French National Assembly, with Brissot as the main orator, and this became mixed with more and more frenzied attacks against traitors. Already in January 1792, the National Assembly introduced in replacement of the crime of 'lèse majesté' the new term 'lèse nation', thus providing a part of the conceptual and legal basis for the Terror.[3]

The mechanism leading from war to terror was therefore one where a) external and internal war became mixed up with each other, b) a new nationalist and revolutionary language provided a conceptual basis for Terror in the name of the People, and c)

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[2] See table in Donald Greer, 1935. *The Indidence of the Terror during the French Revolution. A Statistical Interpretation.* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press): 113.

[3] TCW Blanning 1986. *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars.* (London: Longman): 107.

capital punishment became a tool used in factional struggles within the revolutionary regime.

Similar patterns may be recognized in several later cases: the Russian Civil War 1917-21, the Chinese Civil War 1927-49, the Cambodian genocide after 1975, and perhaps the Iranian Islamic terror during the war with Iraq 1980-88.

The First and Second World Wars

If we now move to the European War 1914-18 (generally known as the 'First World War' although it was not really a World War), it had its origin in a terrorist act, the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand, but the rest of the First World War is not normally associated with terrorism. It rather marked the end of a period with multiple political assassinations carried out both by anarchist and nationalist groups. These assassinations did not have their background in wars, but led to much fear and to international conferences trying to establish international cooperation in surveillance and repression of anarchist terrorism. This terrorism, however, did not cost many lives. It was feared by the governments because so many kings, princes, presidents and ministers were killed. This kind of terrorism bear some resemblance to the kind of terrorism that happened in Italy, Germany and Japan during the 1970s, a subject that will be discussed in the following talk by Ola Tunander.

During the First and also the Second World War terrorist acts more or less drowned in the tragedies of military warfare. The worst tragedies during the First World War happened in the trenches. In the Second World War, the ratio of civilian victims was much higher, and genocide and terrorist bombing from the air (Dresden, Hiroshima) became significant parts of international warfare. Many civil wars took place 'inside' the two world wars, and terrorist methods were widely used both by states and by subnational armies. This fact has not drawn much attention, however, in studies either of terrorism or of the two world wars. In times of general warfare, the threshold of 'acceptable' atrocities tends to be high. The encyclopedial *Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (1995) does not even contain an article on 'terror' or 'terrorism'.

One significant aspect of the two world wars is the effect they had in following years on some of the countries whose civil wars were part and parcel of the world wars. The First World War led to the breakup of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, and to the fall of the Russian Empire. Out of the war experience came two momentous political movements: Communism and Fascism. Communism was a kind of revolt against war, and the communist leaders marked a distance to the irrational terrorism used by anarchist groups. Communist violence was supposed to be rational, and target real class enemies. As we know this soon degenerated into terror even worse than the French revolutionary one. Fascism arose as a continuation of frustrated nationalist sentiments during the First World War, and fascist groups made massive use of terrorist attacks on labour movements and ethnic minorities in the 1920s and 30s. Neither communist terror nor fascist terrorism is conceivable without their background in the First World War.

One very obvious reason for this after-effect is that so many young men learned how to use small arms and also acquired weapons. The World Wars generated cultures of violence in the countries most deeply affected. Here we may discern what could be called a 'blowback effect'. ('Blowback' is the pressure back against the shoulder from a gun when it is fired. In the Norwegian language the term for this is 'boomerang effect'. Germany helped the Bolsheviks in order to destroy the warring capacity of Tsarist Russia. This contributed to the spread of international communism,

to revolts in parts of Germany and to the creation of a strong German Communist Party.

Such 'blowback' effects were also significant in the aftermath of the Second World War, notably in Southeast Asia, where Britain and the United States had sustained local groups, including communist groups, who were fighting against Japan. Weapons and training provided to groups in Burma and Malaya would be used in several decades of internal warfare after 1945.

The Wars of Decolonisation in Southeast Asia

The Second World War destroyed the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia. After the war, France and the Netherlands were unable to reestablish the colonial order in Indochina and Indonesia. Britain decided to let Burma have independence, but also decided to keep control of the far more significant Malaya and Singapore until it could manage a controlled decolonisation. In all of these colonial territories the wars of decolonisation also contained elements of civil war, and some groups used terrorist means.

Indochina and Indonesia both started out, just after the Japanese surrender in August 1945, with the proclamation of new national regimes, in Indonesia led by Sukarno, in Indochina by Ho Chi Minh. The wars of decolonisation in these two countries became primarily a conflict between new quickly constructed national armies and the returning forces of France and the Netherlands and their local allies. The two main antagonists in these wars did not primarily use terrorist means, but fought their struggle in the manner of insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare, and at the same time diplomatically. Indonesia won its independence diplomatically in 1949, whereas the Indochinese communists had to hold out militarily, and obtain Chinese support before they could win major military victories in 1950 and 1954.

However, in both countries there were also other more marginal nationalist groups who were squeezed between the colonial forces and the national army, and found that terrorist means was the only way to draw attention to themselves. Their utilisation of terrorist methods was also a way to try and prevent a political compromise between the colonial power and the national government. These groups most likely calculated that they would have a better chance of becoming influential in the future if the forces of the dominant local movement were weakened in war with the colonial power. At first, however, this did not produce the desired results.

In Indonesia there was throughout the 1945-49 period a widespread dissatisfaction among radical youth movements with the moderation of Sukarno's nationalist regime. This led some groups to collaborate with gangsters, launch terrorist attacks against Dutch civilians and Indonesian collaborators, and also gain influence in parts of the national army.[4] This established a lasting pattern in Indonesian politics, with gangsters and various kinds of youth groups being employed by certain factions of the regime whenever a need was felt to frighten certain political groups through political assassinations. This is a different kind of terror from the French revolutionary kind. The French Terror was open and public, with the merciless and effective guillotine as the main tool and symbol. Indonesian, just as Latin American terrorism, has instead happened in the dark. Some victims have simply disappeared. Others have been found at dawn with severed heads or otherwise mutilated.

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[4] Robert Cribb, 1991. *Gangsters and Revolutionaries. The Jakarta People's Militia and the Indonesian Revolution 1945-1949.* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin): 57-69.

In Indochina the communist-dominated government of Ho Chi Minh managed in March 1946 to both establish a national coalition government with leading members of the anti-communist nationalist parties, and get a preliminary diplomatic agreement with France. In the Summer, while the Vietnamese and French governments were negotiating, these groups conducted terrorist attacks on French civilians, clearly with the aim of preventing any agreement between France and Vietnam. In the short run, the effect was the opposite, since the local French and Vietnamese authorities collaborated in repressing not only the terrorist groups, but the anti-communist parties more generally. However, for other reasons the French government decided not to make any further concessions to the Vietnamese government. War broke out on 19 December 1946, and amidst the turmoil of the outbreak of military fighting, gangs of released convicts murdered 30-40 French civilians. French media held the Vietnamese government responsible for these murders, and this did much to prevent renewed negotiations and perpetuate warfare. What we see here is thus how a terrorist attack can draw a wedge between two parties and force them to wage war against each other.

During the war against France and the local collaborator regimes in Saigon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane, the Indochinese communists at first used guerrilla warfare and, from 1950, more conventional military operations. The main targets of military operations were the French and its auxiliary military forces, but the communist forces also made systematic use of targetted political assassinations to eliminate village leaders who collaborated with the enemy, and intimidate villages so they would cooperate only with the Viet Minh forces. The Diem regime would in the late 1950s and early 1960s use even more radical methods to eradicate communist influence in the South Vietnamese countryside. In the Vietnam War from 1959, the communists took up again the same tactics again, and won control of South Vietnam in the end although the USA decided, after some hesitation, to also use targetted assassinations as part of its Phoenix campaign.

The Malayan Emergency is a different story. Malaya is, firstly, a clear example of 'blowback'. Britain had supplied the communist-led ethnic Chinese Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) during the Second World War, and had also infiltrated the Malayan Communist Party. (It's top leader was actually a British agent.) After their return to Malaya and Singapore, Britain sought to establish a new constitution where the ethnic Chinese would have citizen rights. This failed because of ethnic Malay opposition. A political compromise between Britain, the local Malay states, and conservative ethnic Chinese was established in 1948 with the creation of the Malayan Federation. However, this alienated the left-wing Chinese. The Communist Party reformed itself, and in 1948 the communists assassinated some British plantation owners. This terrorist act provided Britain with a reason for turning openly against its former allies. Britain did not call this a war, but an Emergency. The way the British and Malays gradually defeated the communist guerrilla forces became a counter-insurgency model that the Americans would try to emulate in Vietnam.

In the wars of decolonisation in Southeast Asia we thus find at least two patterns of interlinkage between armed conflict and terrorism. First there is the 'blowback pattern'. And secondly, there is the pattern where third parties, squeezed between the two main antagonists when they are either fighting or negotiating, use terrorist methods to draw attention to themselves and prevent the two antagonists from making peace. This is terrorism used by 'spoilers'.

The Wars in Cambodia and Afghanistan

Let me now move up to the two wars that spelled the end of 20th century communist expansion: the wars in Cambodia and Afghanistan. (The latter will be discussed in much more detail by Odd Arne Westad and Torbjørn Knutsen tomorrow, so here I will be very brief.) Both the Cambodian and Afghanistan wars were a combination of liberation wars from foreign communist domination and civil war, and in both cases there were also extremely hostile relations between the partners who formed a coalition to fight against the communist regime and its external helpers. In both countries the most extreme faction of the anti-communist movement also tended to be militarily the most effective (Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Mujaheddin), and therefore received substantial aid from the United States. The Islamist forces in Afghanistan also received substantial aid from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and similarly the Khmer Rouge and its coalition partners were supported by China and Thailand.

However, the two wars ended very differently. After more than ten years of counter-insurgency warfare, Vietnam withdrew its forces from Cambodia in 1989 (the same year as the Malayan communist party finally gave up its guerrilla struggle). The war in Cambodia then ended in a political settlement that marginalised the Khmer Rouge and deprived it of international support. Over the next few years the Khmer Rouge succumbed to factional infighting and defections, and finally died out. Many of its fighters were integrated in Cambodian society. Terrorist methods continued to be used from time to time in internal political struggles between the main Cambodian political factions, and against the small remaining Vietnamese ethnic minority, but it did not spread, did not internationalise. Continental Southeast Asia instead entered a period of political and economic integration, with Singapore and China as significant motors. The death of the Khmer Rouge of course also had to do with the fact that its ideology now seemed to belong to the past.

In Afghanistan, the Soviet withdrawal in 1988 did not lead to a political settlement, but to many more years of civil war, and to the establishment in 1995 of a radical Islamist regime with support from Pakistan. In the same way as the Spanish Civil War had once done, the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan also drew support from international brigades who later became involved also in the civil war between the Afghani factions. A marriage of destiny was established between the Taliban regime and an international group led by Saudis, Jemenis and Egyptians, the now extremely infamous Al-Qaeda. The formation of Al-Qaeda as an international terrorist organisation had its background in the wars in Afghanistan. It therefore represents a 'blowback pattern', one where groups supported by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States turn their weapons against their former mentors. The 'blowback pattern' is most clear in the case of Saudi Arabia, since the very origin of Osama bin Laden's decision to launch an international terrorist war to liberate the holy places was the Saudi kingdom's decision to invite US assistance in the war to liberate Kuwait from Iraq rather than accepting Osama bin Laden's offer of liberating Kuwait with a guerrilla army of veterans from Afghanistan. Thus we see how the Al-Qaeda phenomenon grew out both of the war in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. It also benefitted from internal warfare in Yemen, and there is little doubt that Al-Qaeda must today be seeking to establish new bases in areas of civil warfare where it can sustain one of the local parties in return for training facilities.

Conclusion

From the above cases I would like to suggest that two patterns of interlinkage between terrorism and war are particularly worthy of further inquiry. The first is a pattern where a combination of external and internal war leads to the marginalisation of certain groups who get *squeezed* between the main warring parties. These marginalised groups may ethnically or religiously identify themselves with one of the parties, and ideologically with another. They are militarily weaker than both parties in the war, and hence find terrorism the only useful means to manifest themselves and prevent political solutions that would further marginalise them.

The second pattern is related to the first. This is the 'blowback' pattern, where a state engaged in war or serious rivalry with another state provides support to rebellious groups within areas controlled by the enemy, and these groups later turn their organisation and weapons in terrorist attacks against their original beneficiary, and act as spoilers of a peace settlement after a war is over.

If these patterns are as prevalent as I think they are, then this implies that the best way of preventing or reducing the incidence of terrorist acts is to prevent armed conflict in general. 'War against terrorism' is a misnomer since war tends to create terrorism. To prevent the 'blowback pattern' one must be extremely careful about supplying arms and equipment to groups that are your friends merely because they are your current enemy's enemy. To prevent the 'marginalisation' pattern, one must seek to accommodate third parties in negotiated settlements, or find effective ways of preventing them from acting as spoilers.