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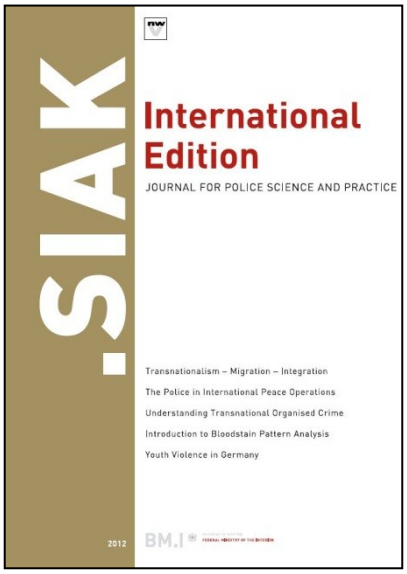

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Potential Risks of Politically Motivated Violence – A Comparative Analysis

"Old" and "New" Terrorism

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, there has been an upsurge of public interest in terrorism. In this context, observers have noted a formal change, with a distinction between "old" and "new" terrorism becoming more and more widely used. However, the question arises as to how these two forms are similar and how they differ. The present paper attempts to provide a differentiated analysis of this question, using the so-called "IOS model" to identify ideologies, organisations and strategies of "old" and "new" terrorism. These comparative observations serve primarily to define the main characteristics of contemporary terrorism, i.e. religious motives, decentralised organisation, and transnational orientation. The combination of these features results in an especially high level of risk, as, for ideological reasons, a high number of victims does not pose a problem of legitimacy; decentralised and independent structures allow for an autonomous organisation of attacks while transnational dimensions signify a global threat.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THESIS STATEMENT

When the attacks of 11 September 2001 brought the topic of terrorism back into the public eye, it became clear that terrorism is both an "old" and a "new" phenomenon. Islamist terrorism, as practiced by Al-Qaeda and related groups, displays both similarities with and differences from terrorism in previously known forms in terms of ideology, organisation and strategy. This gave rise to the use of expressions like "old" and "new" terrorism. In most cases, however, people did not specify what is "new" about "new" terrorism and how it is different from the "old" type. Problems related to this question will constitute the central theme of the present paper, which attempts to explore similarities and differences between earlier and Islamist forms of terrorism on the levels of ideology, organisation and strategy. The primary aim of this comparison is to define the main characteristics of the current forms of terrorism.

To this end, the perspective of terrorism studies will be used, i.e. the analysis will primarily leverage knowledge about similar forms of politically motivated violence in the past. For this reason, Islamist terrorism will be regarded in the context of the history of terrorism, and not as a specific mode of action within Islamism. I have chosen this approach – even though I realise that it is a one-dimensional one – because I believe that it promises a variety of new insights. As a further preliminary remark regarding methodology, it should be noted that the distinction between "old" and "new" terrorism is to be understood as

based on ideal types. For example, typical organisational structures of "new" terrorism had of course already existed in the times of "old" terrorism. The abstraction using ideal types aims here at highlighting typical "new" characteristics of contemporary terrorism (Weber 1973, 238 et seq.). The insights thus gained merit our consideration, in part because they enable us to develop appropriate counterstrategies.

Based on the above considerations, the paper will be organised as follows. Considering controversial debates regarding the understanding of terrorism, a working definition of terrorism will be established for use in the present paper (Chapter 2). This will be followed by observations and assessments of the "old" and "new" terrorism in terms of ideologies (Chapters 3 and 4), organisational structures displayed (Chapters 5 and 6) as well as strategies used (Chapters 7 and 8). In this context, special consideration will be given to highlighting the similarities and differences that indicate the special "quality" of contemporary terrorism. After independently analysing the levels of ideology, organisation, and strategy, a comprehensive assessment of potential risks will be conducted (Chapter 9). As part of this last step, combinations and interactions between the three levels mentioned above (i.e. the notion of terrorism with religious motives, decentralised organisation, and transnational modes of action) will be discussed in an exemplary manner.

2. A WORKING DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

Nearly every longer paper on terrorism starts off by discussing problems related to defining the notion of terrorism – a process fraught with difficulties because of the lack of consensus regarding the understanding of the word and because it is often used as a catch phrase, in a manipulative manner (Hoffman 2006, 21–80). The latter tendency could be exemplified by the aphorism "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". However, there are also some more objective aspects that make it so difficult to create a distinct definition. Many definitions with different – or sometimes also conflicting – content have been offered during the course of definitional debates; however, most of them contain, as an agreed minimum, the following features. Firstly, terrorism is the use of violence with political motives. Secondly, it originates from social groups and not from public institutions. Thirdly, the attacks are embedded in a longer-term political strategy. And, in the fourth place, the perpetrators act as part of a small illegal group. Some other characteristics could also be added, although they might not be generally accepted as part of the definition of terrorism. In the fifth place, for example, we might mention the intended psychological effect of attacks as a "communication strategy" (Waldmann 1998, 12 et seq.). As a sixth point, terrorists ignore possibilities to engage in peaceful negotiations as well as the disproportionate consequences of their violent acts (Backes 2003, 162 et seq.).

Based on the above considerations, the following working definition will be used for the purposes of further discussion in the present paper. Terrorism will be understood to mean politically motivated and systematically planned acts of violence by non-governmental groups that are directed against the political order and that have the objective of producing psychological effects on the population. In doing so, these groups reject the possibility of performing non-violent and lawful acts to achieve their aims, ignoring the question of appropriateness, consequences and proportionality of the means that they use (Pfahl-Traughber 2008, 33).

The general IOS model, with a focus on the ideology, organisation and strategy of terrorist groups, may be used for both independent and comparative analyses of such actors. "Ideology" covers the substantial justification and, in relation to that, the objectives of any terrorist group. With respect to "organisation", special emphasis is laid on the internal structure of relevant groups of people, while in our examination of "strategy", we will turn our attention to modes of action and procedures chosen. In order to identify special characteristics of currently acting terrorist organisations, the following comparative analysis of "old" and "new' terrorism will leverage the IOS model, as outlined above. We should add to the above one more special trait of this form of violent behaviour, namely that terrorism is an expression of political weakness, as the actors using terrorist methods are unable to fight a guerrilla war or to trigger a mass revolution.

3. IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS OF "OLD" TERRORISM

When considering the overall historical development of terrorism (Laqueur 1977) up until the end of the 20th century, two dominant forms of ideological legitimation can be identified, namely autonomist and social-revolutionary terrorism. The first category includes groups that aspire to change the political status of a certain geographical region. In most cases, their aim is complete secession or a higher degree of independence from an existing nation-state. Some typical examples include Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland. The former intends to establish an independent state for the Basque, while the latter seeks a united Ireland (Waldmann 1989). At times, terrorist organisations with autonomist or separatist objectives have enjoyed considerable support from the segments of the population concerned.

In most cases, such support has not been seen in the case of social-revolutionary terrorism (Straßner 2008), which may also be referred to as left-wing or left-wing extremist terrorism. On an ideological level, these organisations are related to anarchism or communism and their political objective is to overthrow the existing political and economic order to create a classless society without any authority. In the Russian Empire, organisations of this kind had been up and coming by the second half of the 19th century, aiming to pave the way for a revolutionary process by launching attacks against senior officials of the regime. However, social-revolutionary terrorism reached its peak in Europe in the 1970s and 80s when organisations such as the Action Directe (AD), Italy's Brigate Rosse (BR) or Germany's Red Army Fraction (RAF), which, pursuing similar objectives, were involved in attacks, kidnappings and murders.

And finally, the third possible ideological background of "old" terrorism is nationalism, with this kind of terrorism called right-wing or extreme right-wing terrorism. This form of politically motivated use of violence has its ideological roots in the right-wing dictatorships of the 20th century, i.e. Italian Fascism and Nazi Germany. These actors worked towards the revival of such authoritarian political systems. In Italy, terror attacks were committed in public places in order to place the blame on the political left, thus paving the way to an authoritarian state in the ensuing public outrage (Igel 2006, 97–160). Right-wing terror attacks in Germany were directed against US military facilities, shops owned by non-German citizens as well as asylum seekers' homes (Pfahl-Traughber 2007). However, the overall significance of this kind of terrorism cannot be com-

pared to that of the two other kinds mentioned above.

4. IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS OF "NEW" TERRORISM

Until the middle of the 1990s, researchers had restricted their ideological typology of terrorism to the three types mentioned above (Waldmann 1995). Although Islamist attacks could already have been identified at that time, the focus remained largely on secularly motivated forms of political violence. This has undergone radical changes since 11 September 2001, with Islamist terrorism becoming the main focus of attention ever since. At the same time, two aspects have been largely ignored: Not all Islamists engage in terrorist activities; according to their mode of action chosen, they might try to achieve their objectives within the institutional framework or by cultural means (Kepel 2002). Terrorism with religious legitimation can also be found in non-Islamist circles, e.g. the Aum Shinrikyo movement in Japan or US-based Christian militia groups. The "new" feature of "new" terrorism is that its orientation is both religious and non-secular. However what we have is, in the strict sense of the word, only the revival of the historically-evolved connection between religion and terrorism, considering the fact that politically motivated acts of violence with a secular ideological background were only observed as late as the 19th century. Earlier types of terrorism with a religious dimension have left their mark on words and expressions that we use today. A good example of this is the English word "assassin", which originally referred to the members of an Islamic splinter group that carried out targeted killings in the 12th and 13th centuries (Lewis 1989). Parallel to the global revival of religion, we seem to be witnessing a comeback of religious terrorism as well. Taking a look at the most significant attacks of the last years (including the ones before 11 September 2001), it is evident that the most devastating acts of violence have been committed by organisations operating in the name of religion, mostly Islam (Hoffman 2006, 143–149).

What are, however, the characteristics of the "globalisation of religious violence" (Juergensmeyer 2009) associated to this development in the area of terrorism? To legitimise themselves, these actors primarily refer to some kind of divine entity instead of social reality, which might explain their excessive dogmatism and fanaticism and the claim that they are acting in the name of the "only true religion". Accordingly, moral judgement of their actions in their own political environment or the broader society is essentially irrelevant to them and they have barely any scruples about extending the group of victims to a high number of persons who are – for the most part – randomly chosen. In addition, terrorism with religious legitimation provides a broader justification to carry out suicide attacks than its secular counterpart (Croitoru 2003). And, lastly, engaging in religious types of violent acts with political motives always requires approval by religious authorities.

5. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES OF "OLD" TERRORISM

When dealing with the inner life of terrorist groups, the first consideration must be that these groups of people always act in a particular situation because as members of an illegal organisation, activists tend to operate in the underground. The security authorities of any country will put significant pressure on such groups by prosecuting them, which thus compels the terrorists to a high degree of internal cohesion and personal reliability. This creates a special kind of peer pressure within the group,

frequently also enforced by the character structure of the persons acting. Accordingly, terrorist groups are in most cases shaped by authoritarian and hierarchical principles, although this generally does not manifest itself in formal hierarchies or structures. Exceptions to this rule are terrorist groups that have emerged from military-like structures with definite framework conditions, such as the IRA during the Troubles (Kandel 2005). However, most terrorist groups are made up of former political activists, which means that a highly developed apparatus is more of an exception than a rule in such organisations. In some cases, the media, security authorities and researchers have painted a different picture of this in order to be able to better demonstrate the functions and structures within terrorist groups (cf. Waldmann 1998, 61–68). Nevertheless, as "intellectual constructs" imposed from the outside, they did not correspond to the actual inner life of such organisations. At the same time, the internal dynamics and the composition of the group would generate certain functions and role patterns, resulting in informal hierarchies and structures, which, although corresponding to bureaucratic apparatuses, were based on other sources of legitimacy. Accordingly, leaders were neither appointed nor elected-instead, they gradually gained acceptance as part of internal developments. This process might be exemplified by left-wing terrorism in Germany of the 1970s, where the Red Army Fraction emerged as an association of the more violent members of the declining '68 protest movement.

Although intellectually less gifted but particularly ready to take action, Andreas Baader soon became the unchallenged leader of the movement. The reason for this was not, as we may assume, separate legitimation within the group, but rather his actionist behaviour. A group of leaders gathered around him, determining the organisation's course of action using instructions that were informal but in practice mandatory. This elitist self-concept and centralised mode of organisation gave rise to criticism in the environment of the RAF and led to the establishment of other left-wing terrorist groups, such as the Movement 2 June or Revolutionary Cells. In addition, it was easier for the security authorities to dismantle a terrorist group with this type of structure (Peters 2004).

6. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES OF "NEW" TERRORISM

Such insights prompted the development of new organisational structures, which, perhaps not quite appropriately, are now called structures of "new" terrorism; characterised by a turning away from hierarchical and centralised structures towards individual models consisting of cells. The associated process of development demonstrates that terrorist groups can be very much able to learn both in terms of conceiving their actions and on the level of organisation. The existence of a small group of leaders with centralised competences may indicate efficient and stringent planning procedures. However, such a structure may also make it relatively easy for security authorities to get hold of members, which in general also entails the destruction of existing organisational structures. It is obvious in any case that such a model makes terrorist groups more vulnerable and can limit their scope of action.

To circumvent this problem, concepts regarding alternative forms of organisation have emerged in terrorist groups with a wide range of different ideological backgrounds. The central element of this concept is the implementation of small groups acting on a regional level and loosely connected to each other through a

network, with only some individuals linked to one other individual from another group. This model does not include a transnational group of leaders, or this group does not play a major role. Accordingly, in the event that the group of leaders is neutralised or arrested, this does not necessarily result in a crisis or the destruction of the given terrorist group. The activities of each cell are planned and carried out regionally, with only a few contacts and connections outside the group, limited to logistical aspects like the supply of arms and explosives. Apart from personal contacts, the identity and cohesion of such terrorist organisations are primarily based on a common ideology.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the German left-wing terrorist organisation Revolutionary Cells operated on the basis of the principles described above (Rabert 1995, 197–221). Accordingly, this organisational model is not a distinctive feature of "new terrorism" either. Currently, it can be very clearly observed in the case of Al-Qaeda, which had acted increasingly on the basis of a hierarchical and centralised structure before the attacks of 11 September 2001 and then switched to operations through groups acting individually and regionally after the military destruction of their training camp in Afghanistan and the intensified global persecution against them (Burke 2004). When restructuring the organisation, the writings of Abu Musab al-Suri, a major Islamist ideologist, played a major role in promoting the idea of turning away from hierarchical forms of organisation and of establishing decentralised cells in their stead (Baehr 2009, 86–116). The series of recent attacks did not originate from this kind of structures.

7. STRATEGIES OF "OLD" TERRORISM

As already emphasised, terrorism also implies the perpetrators' political weakness, which should not be understood as a relativisation or belittlement of the consequences of terrorist attacks. Rather, the point is that in order to achieve fundamental changes in the existing social and political order, guerrilla wars and revolutions have historically and politically proved to be far more effective modes of action. However, as these activists lack political power (i.e. influence on wider segments of the population), their weakness compels them to resort to terrorism. In most cases, the actors are aware of the fact that a single attack against a building or the murder of a person will not overthrow the existing political or economic order. In this context, terrorist acts have more of a symbolic significance, as their aim is to send out a political message and to produce psychological effects.

This characteristic is highlighted in the aforementioned interpretation of terrorism as a "communication strategy", i.e. as a means or signal to convey a certain political message to wider segments of society (Waldmann 1998, 12 et seq.). Activists of such groups generally think that their acts serve the objective interests of the population or at least those of some parts of it. Terrorists believe themselves to be liberators or saviours of (parts of) the population in the face of dangers and oppression, even if the actual target group does not share any of their related assumptions. Sometimes, terrorist acts are, as part of a long-term process, designed to raise or create awareness for the activists' political ideals in the population. In this context, a distinction should be made between two different approaches. In the first case, perpetrators think that by an act of violence, they can prove the weakness or vulnerability

of an institution or a State official and the terrorist attack is thus intended to provoke a mass uprising. In the other case, another kind of calculation can be identified. Here the terrorists are very much aware that most of the population takes a loyal, or at least indifferent, position towards the allegedly exploitatory and repressive system. Operating on this basic assumption, attacks are expected to provoke the State machinery, which, particularly in democracies, should prompt authoritarian overreactions, leading first to irritation, then to resentment and finally to social change. In other words, terrorist actors expect the attacks to cause the population to renounce their loyalty to the State and to adopt the terrorists' objectives. Both strategic approaches make it clear that when carrying out terrorist acts, public perception is of utmost importance, according also a central role to the terrorists' media strategy. And, last but not least, it should be noted that the primary site of action of "old" terrorism is the perpetrators' own nation state.

8. STRATEGIES OF "NEW" TERRORISM

In this respect, "new terrorism" has an important distinguishing feature, namely its transnational dimension. To demonstrate what this means, some definitional remarks will be required. The term "national terrorism" can be used when the actors, victims and target groups are all located within the territory of a single state. This had generally applied to all terrorist groups until the end of the 1960s, regardless of their ideological orientation. Since then, the phenomenon of "international terrorism" has been widely cited. This term covers groups that intentionally and continuously carry out their actions across national borders. Palestinian terrorism can be regarded as a typical example of this, as over the last forty years, related organisations like Black September or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine have also conducted attacks in Europe. From the 1970s on, many left-wing terrorist groups like Action Directe and Red Army Fraction also engaged in international cooperation (Schneckener 2006, 40–48).

However, in these cases, there was not yet any question of "transnational terrorism", which entails international dimensions in a wide variety of fields. The prototype of transnational terrorism is Al-Qaeda, which, after initially restricting its activities to the region of Afghanistan, went on to continuously broaden its efforts. Step by step, the "enemy nearby", i.e. various regimes in the Arab world, was replaced by the "enemy far away", i.e. states of the Western world (Steinberg 2005). This is complemented by other characteristics, namely that, on the ideological level, a universalistic worldview associated with Islamism and the claims for change in the international order derived from it. On the organisational level, the transnational dimension of Al-Qaeda is reflected in its multinational membership as well as in its network structures acting on a transnational level (Schneckener 2006, 49–100).

Apart from the transnational dimension, no fundamental difference can be identified between the strategy of "old" and "new" terrorism. At most, we could cite the fact that the communication strategy has become even more important for the main actors carrying out these types of politically motivated violent acts, given the potentials of new media. The existence of television news channels allows for the communication of current images and news to a broader audience, also exemplified by the media coverage of the attacks of 11 September 2001. However, the Internet could play an even more important role, allowing terrorist actors themselves to

address messages to the general public, and especially to their supporters, on a transnational scale (Ramelsberger 2008, 194–212). These possibilities even exceed the effect of the media strategy of former terrorist groups (Elter 2008).

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS, SUMMARY

Given the foregoing, what conclusive insights emerge from the assessment of potential dangers associated with politically motivated violence in the context of "new" terrorism? Before discussing this question, reference should be made to the importance of a differentiated consideration of the issue using the IOS model. In order to gain new insights, it is certainly useful to consider and compare the areas of ideology, organisation and strategy separately, because this is the only way to ensure that the characteristics of each phenomenon connected to terrorism become apparent. However, as ideology, organisation and strategy are intertwined, we also need to look at them in their respective contexts. For example, the transnational dimension of ideology creates a transnational dimension of strategy, and without existing forms of organisations, certain modes of actions could not be implemented at all. In addition, there are specific ways in which ideological legitimation may be used to determine specific justifications of the practice of attacks.

However, let us now consider the potential threats associated with the respective aspects. Within Islam, the religious orientation of "new" terrorism provides a widely accepted basis of identification both in recruiting new activists and in legitimising violent acts. Unless the Muslim community clearly objects to their arguments, this provides a beneficial structure of opportunities for the perpetrators' communication strategy. The diminished importance of secular levels of thinking and acting can also be closely associated with the religious legitimation of terrorism. While terrorists with a secular background need to consider more seriously the reactions of society when designing their actions in terms of their communication strategy, this does not play such an important role in terrorism with a religious orientation. This also explains why their attacks are especially brutal and why the use of suicide attacks is particularly widespread.

One potential risk arises from organisational changes is that groups acting individually (in the sense of cells described above) generally do not have the "terrorist professionalism" of organisations with hierarchical leadership and centralised structure. This might also explain why some attempted attacks do not succeed due to the actors' lack of skill. At the same time, the autonomy of groups in "new" terrorism – connected to each other primarily via the Internet or based on their religious legitimation – also signals a high degree of unpredictability and arbitrariness. The developments associated with this make it more difficult for security authorities to carry out early detection of planned attacks. In this context, the special risks associated with "new" terrorism (in addition to its ideological orientation and the fact that it does not have any consideration for civilian victims) lie in the consequences of individualisation, as manifested the establishment of independent cells.

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