

Editorial

Security Journal (2007) 20, 143–145. doi:10.1057/palgrave.sj.8350057

In this century, a new and unconventional enemy has appeared: a global terrorism, based on a thoroughly warped misinterpretation of Islam, which is fanatical and deadly. It was present for years but little noticed by us, before 9/11. Since 9/11, it has cast its shadow over the Western world (Tony Blair, 2006).

The advent of the so-called “new” or “super” terrorism post-9/11 has spawned a growing interest and concern with terrorism (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2001; Gearson, 2002). On 9/11 the attacks on New York and Washington DC left 2,973 dead, in Madrid in 2004 191 innocent commuters were killed, and on 7 July in London another 52 were murdered. These are the most infamous of the recent “new” terrorist attacks. There have been many other attacks and even more thwarted by the security forces for which we cannot reasonably calculate the likely death toll. Not surprisingly, governments have responded with often quite draconian legislation, the budgets of agencies focused upon terrorism have grown exponentially and many thousands of pages have been written about the terrorists, their plots, the agencies that deal with them and what might be done to combat them.

It would seem timely that a special edition of this journal is dedicated to this topic. Yet if we were to stand back and objectively assess the risks in the U.K., the only successful attack so far on 7 July resulted in 52 commuters losing their lives. In the agricultural sector alone in the reporting year 2005–2006, there were 59 fatal accidents in the U.K., and a total of 212 nationally across all sectors (Health and Safety Commission, 2006). And if we were to consider road deaths during 2005, a total of 3,201 people lost their lives including 141 children (Department of Transport, 2006). The figures for largely preventable health hazards, such as cardiac, strokes and cancer, make even more horrific reading. The statistics also show that fatal accidents at work and road deaths form a much greater risk than terrorism. There has not, however, been a proportionate interest in legislation, resources, papers to address these problems, etc. Indeed, a search of the U.K. Prime Minister’s websites and speeches made finds dozens on terrorism, but none on fatal accidents at work and only one on traffic accidents in the last 6 years. In terms of risk to personal safety, terrorism ranks pretty low after health and transport.

Public perceptions of the risk of death from terrorism may be grossly overestimated. The paper by Bill Durodié is pertinent in highlighting how misperceptions in risk arise. Durodié argues that we need to examine our own response to terrorism, not in terms of how dangerous terrorists are but in terms of looking at weaknesses in our own changing society. Western society for Durodié has undergone a loss of values, social structure and common belief

in something good. Using a clever analogy of the elephant and flea, he contrasts Western society and terrorists, respectively. He argues that we should spend more time analysing failures of the elephant than the capability of the flea. For example, the graphic failures in Abu Ghraib prison is portrayed on a backdrop of reality TV shows, with regular humiliation of contestants. Fundamentally, Durodié asks us to examine ourselves.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a major threat from “new” terrorism and that it is rising and their agenda of mass destruction and innocent fatalities makes it essential that governments do all they can to combat this risk. Indeed, on November the 9th Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, the Head of the British domestic intelligence service MI5, stated that her organization was monitoring over 200 groupings with some 1,600 people who are actively engaged in plotting terrorist attacks, illustrating the potential scale of the problem (MI5, 2006). One of the most frequent targets for terrorism has been transport systems, and not surprisingly there have been numerous initiatives to raise the standards of security in this area. George and Whatford’s paper provides a comprehensive overview of the extensive international regulatory and other notable initiatives that have been promulgated and pursued over the last 5 years. It shows that there has been a huge expansion in intervention, but that it has been unevenly applied with some sectors exposed to much tougher regulatory regimes than others. This could leave gaps in areas such as railway and maritime security that could be exploited by terrorists deflected from the better-protected aviation sector.

Inevitably in the future terrorists will succeed at some weak point, and resilience measures to ensure ordinary life in the targeted area must continue to be essential. Frank Furedi’s paper on resilience addresses this topic. Furedi considers the issue of resilience as a misunderstood theme to be theoretically developed further. Much of the approach to resilience is criticized for focussing too heavily on a top down methodology. Furedi argues that both governments and experts inform and direct resilience without sufficient recourse or understanding to community-based initiatives. Of importance to Furedi is the value of “emergent groups” and the value they can add to resilience through informal networks. Furedi illustrates this with a case study on “rural stress” following the failed management of the BSE and foot and mouth outbreaks in the U.K. There are some indirect links to the Durodié paper here. The former paper asks us to examine our social structures if we wish to understand the perception of risk from security failures, while the latter implies that much of our potential resilience as a society is latent within the new structures themselves. By taking stock of these new “informal” or “emergent” structures, we can facilitate, rather than direct community resilience.

The pursuit of “new terrorism”, although relatively cheap in comparison to the effects on society, still requires substantial resources. The 9/11 attacks were estimated to have cost the terrorists around \$400,000 to \$500,000 to perpetrate (CNN, 2004). Therefore, cracking down on the ability of terrorist groups to finance operations is another very important priority. Keene’s paper on Informal Value Transfer Methods or *Hawala*, which has been identified as a major tool in terrorist financing, dispels some of the myths concerning these types of mechanisms and offers policy-makers some clearer insights on more appropriate methods than mere regulation to address exploitation by terrorists.

Finally, the paper by Paul Norman reviews the likely effectiveness of the recent United Nations General Assembly “Global Counter Terrorism Strategy”. The paper considers the general assembly’s responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and

how this has developed since the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of plane hijackings and the Palestinian issues. The paper also briefly addresses the efficacy of the respective international maritime, and aviation, authorities.

Edward Borodzicz^a
and Mark Button^b

^aPortsmouth Business School, Richmond Building,
Portland Street, Portsmouth. PO1 3DE, UK.

E-mail: edward.borodzicz@port.ac.uk

^bInstitute of Criminal Justice Studies,
University of Portsmouth, St. George's Building,
Portsmouth. PO1 2HY.

E-mail: mark.button@port.ac.uk.

References

- Blair, T. (2006) PMs World Affairs Speech to Lord Mayor's Banquet on 13th November, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10409.asp>, on 19 November 2006.
- CNN (2004) 9/11 Panel: Al Qaeda Planned to Hijack 10 Planes. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/06/16/911.commission>, on 19 November 2006.
- Department of Transport (2006) Road Casualties Great Britain: 2005. Retrieved from http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/page/dft_transstats_612587.hcsp, on 19 November 2006.
- Gearson, J. (2002) The Nature of Modern Terrorism. In Freedman, L. (ed) *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*. London: Blackwell.
- Health and Safety Commission (2006) Statistics of fatal injuries 2005–06. Retrieved from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/fatI0506.pdf>, on 19 November 2006.
- House of Commons Defence Committee (2001) *The Threat from Terrorism*. HC 348-I. Vol I. London: The Stationery Office.
- MI5 (2006) The International Terrorist Threat to the UK. Retrieved from <http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page568.html>, on 19 November 2006.