

Are military responses an effective solution to the threat posed by terrorism?

In answering this question this paper must first decide broadly on a definition, the level of the threat posed by terrorism and whether or not a military intervention provides an effective response to this threat. In considering this response this paper also looks to how terrorism has changed and continues to change, the extent to which military response was an adequate solution in the past and given how terrorism has changed and continues to change whether such a response will continue to be, if it ever was adequate. In order to explore the effectiveness of a military response this paper will compare and contrast the various established responses to terrorism.

The term terrorism remains contested and there is no clear universally accepted definition, there are more than 100 definitions (Goepner, 2016.) however a common aspect across many of the definitions seems to be that it is an inherently political act (Hoffman, 2006.) where the belligerents desire to wield some influence to bring about a desired change, For example, terrorism has been said to seek to coerce a group to accede to political demands (Williams, 2012.) and the US Department of state has said that terrorism is 'intended to influence an audience' and to 'seek a fundamental change in a state or in society.' or a particular change for an identifiable community (Williams, 2012.) These concepts of influence are wrapped up nicely by an FBI definition which states that terrorists aim to "coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof". (Phillips, 2015)

In addition, most definitions of terrorism include that the perpetrators either directly engage in or threaten the use of violent force. (Williams, 2012.) however in many cases it can be argued that the extent to which terrorism secures influence often outweighs both the actual or threatened impact to human security when compared with the threats inherent to other human security issues which create little or no influence over a state, society or part thereof. (Williams, 2012.) Therefore, when looking at whether a military response is warranted to combat terrorism this paper must look to other human security impacts as counter-terrorism is not the only objective for national governments especially given It has been argued that terrorism

is still a minor threat to human security when compared to other aspects. (Williams, 2012.)

There are currently many other plights which arguably offer a greater threat to humanity than does terrorism. For example The World Health Organisation considers climate change the biggest ongoing threat to human health security (WHO, 2015.) and between 2030 – 2050 this will contribute to an additional 250,000 deaths per year. (WHO, 2020.) Climate change may also lead toward potential conflicts due to resource scarcity and that this scarcity may contribute greater and increased levels of violent armed conflict. (Detraz, et al., 2009.) Some have suggested climate change led to The Dafur conflict, (Detraz, et al., 2009.) and a reduced access to water destabilised Syria. (Lister, 2019)

Despite the huge potential for catastrophic impacts to human security from other threats such as climate change, or hunger relative to the quantitatively low level of direct impact in terms of a toll in human life of terrorism (Williams, 2012.) national governments in recent years have been reluctant to declare a 'war on climate change' or 'war on hunger' but were ready to declare a 'war on terror' in response to the attacks on the United States of America on 11 September 2001. (Williams, 2012.)

The war on terror set the law enforcement and public policy approach of the US and its allies for over a decade, where traditionally they paid closest attention jihadi, and to a lesser extent far-right extremism (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.) However, the US and its allies including in Australia (Christodoulou 2020) are tracking an emerging form of home-grown terrorism which is challenging traditional views of both what terrorism is and how to combat it. (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.)

Despite those who would point out the disproportionate negative impacts on human security of the war on terror (Goepner, 2016.) scholars highlight that it was the 'most successful use of military force for counterterrorist purposes' (Williams, 2012.) This type of military response involved 'direct military action against paramilitary organizations [in or associated with] distinct physical locations' (Williams, 2012.) The

US led war on terror while very modestly increasing democratisation in the middle east (Goepner, 2016.) resulted in the death of 6,874 US military members, out of 2.5 million deployed to fight the war at cost near \$USA4.4 trillion. (Crawford, 2014.), and resulted in conditions which increased the number of terrorist attacks as well as crating conditions for further radicalisation and recruitment of terrorist members. (Goepner, 2016.)

Aside from this negative anecdotal evidence it has been said that the reliable metrics to measure the effectiveness of the war on terror are not available. (Johnson and Tierney, 2006.) Only a slim minority of scholarly articles provide an empirical assessment of counter terror responses. (Lum, Kennedy and Sherley, 2006.). This paper will then go on to focus on how the nature of terrorism is changing and guided by history determine whether a military response would be effective at dealing with emerging and modal threats.

Some have suggested that an emerging type of threat to western liberal democracy has come in the form of the spread of disinformation through conspiracy theories. (Schabes, 2020.). QAnon has been circulating since around 2017, and is effectively an amalgam of conspiracy theories, that at its heart believes there is an antagonistic global cabal of evil, against which President Trump is the protagonist. (Carter, 2018.) The FBI recently declared QAnon a terrorist organisation. (Winter, 2019) This form of terrorism takes advantage of new forms of media, in particular the internet and social media, and while this is not a new phenomenon (Williams, 2012.) the current reach of this groups disinformation has peaked during the global corona virus pandemic as large numbers of people spend more time online, and the pandemic continues to breed anti-government sentiment (Ackerman & Peterson, 2020.) and draws those disenfranchised by the governments repose toward radical groups on social media. (Basit, 2020.) Furthering this dilemma is that social media algorithms appear to be prone to serving up controversial content to reinforce the beliefs of those prone to seeking it out. (Sunstein, 2017.)

This cocktail of influence appears to be creating an environment to radicalise 'an enemy among us' ordinary people living seemingly ordinary suburban lives being driven to spreading the messages of QAnon, or to undertake real world threats of, or

actual violence (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.), destruction of civic infrastructure (Taylor, 2020.) to otherwise coerce desired political change, of which one goal appears to be the erosion of democracy and the spread of anti-government rhetoric. (Ziblatt & Levitsky, 2018a)

While QAnon is used as a key example in this paper it should not be viewed as the only emerging threat of this type but rather, a trend in how misinformation bolstered by conspiracy theories is fed through social media and is being used to radicalise parts of the population towards violent extremism. (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.) To this end it is worth noting that there is a growing body of research by scholars and national security professionals aimed at examining a new type of belligerent that aims to exploit political divides amongst a population. (Cordesman, 2018.)

The US is also not alone in facing emerging threats of this nature Australian security professionals have been preparing for a threat that aims to exploit societal fissures in order to seed distrust among the population (Rubensztein-Dunlop, 2020.) Evidence suggests that these unconventional approaches could negate many benefits of conventional military planning (Cordesman, 2018.).

Data suggests that home-grown domestic radical extremist is now more of a quantitative and qualitative threat to the public security and peace of the USA. (Kurzman, 2001-2019) Domestic terrorism now accounts for the largest level in terms of fatally wounded victims. (Anti-Defamation League, 2018) For this reason this paper will turn its attention to this emerging threat. Despite the misgivings already outlined about the effectiveness of a military response to terrorism, a military response is also predicated on ability to be able to identify and target specific groups in specific areas preferably outside of the nation state seeking to eliminate the terrorist activity. (Williams, 2012.) and while there may be some evidence to suggest that this new form of conspiracy-theory led terrorism is being propagated from a foreign state actor, namely Russia (Four Corners, 2020.) the vast majority of terrorist attacks which are resulting in the death of victims are from domestic extremists (as contrasted with Islamic terrorism) (Anti-Defamation League, 2018) additionally, domestic extremists are radicalising each other (Formica, 2020.) using profit driven

bastions of American free speech in the form of social media platforms. (Formica, 2020.) Further, and perhaps most worrying is the complicity of the US Commander in Chief Donald Trump in promoting conspiracy theories, with analysis suggesting that he has tweeted content supporting conspiracy theories more than 1700 times (Shear et al., 2019).

Based on the evidence above, a military response, by the US or its allies, effectively against its own people, would not be practicable or effective. Not only are the terrorists operating within the nation state with the tacit approval of the highest-ranking military official in the world (President Trump) but the ideologies and anti-government rhetoric is being promoted with the legitimate use of American public companies social media companies. Not only wouldn't military intervention against these targets be effective, it would also be unlawful and likely would have an unintended but predictable adverse impact on the stated aims of any action, notably it would breed further contempt and mistrust similar to that exacerbated by the pandemic which allowed the radicalisation to occur in the first place (Ackerman & Peterson, 2020.) as was seen in countries occupied by the US during its war on terror.(Goepner, 2016.) Even if a military response was justified it is worth noting that only 7% of all terrorists groups have been ended in this manner with the vast majority ending where they accepted into the mainstream political process and cease to be terrorist groups. (Goepner, 2016.)

This paper has outlined that there is a growing domestic terrorist threat (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.) which is being radicalised with the assistance of American owned social media platforms, and that neither the Governments of America or the boards of these tech giants currently have any viable solutions to combat this. (Formica, 2020.) Some may suggest that a traditional counterterrorism response may be effective, to undertake surveillance and detain those who disseminate information, or intend to carry out attacks before they can take place. (Williams, 2012.) This approach has been used recently in Melbourne against those peddling conspiracy theories to flout covid-19 lockdown restrictions with law enforcement authorities monitoring social media activity and charging and arresting those involved. (Baxendale, 2020.) Others have gone a step further to suggest the entire 'supply chain' of online terrorist activity from recruitment to revenue raising

must be monitored, tracked and disrupted. (Cordesman, 2018.) There are those that suggest that this type of approach will not assist and may exacerbate the issue amongst a domestic target, particularly in America. American freedom of speech and corporate rights are held in such high regard that attempts to curtail them may be met with contempt.(Formica, 2020) Further there are severe limitations placed upon law enforcement in the USA as a direct result of the American Bill of Rights making it difficult to obtain a warrant to intervene with US citizens merely based on whom they like to associate online (Rangappa, 2017)

Given the broad context that this new wave of terrorism appears to be operating within some have suggested a social approach may be the most effective method (Cordesman, 2018.). This approach requires security professionals to identify the motivation of the given group, as well as the conditions and broader environment from which they draw support. (Williams, 2012.) It has been suggested and this may be particularly relevant given that the modal way in which a terrorist organisation ceases to be, is when it becomes part of the mainstream political process. (Goepner, 2016.) Perhaps than a path to understanding the motivations of the aggrieved groups and addressing the grievances and causes of anger, alienation, and indifference (Ackerman & Peterson, 2020.) and ensuring that divided cliques, have an equal voice in politics, governance, the economy. (Cordesman, 2018.) is recognise these dissenting anti-government voices which some believe can be good for democracy (Fenster, 1999.) as part of the political system, and by bringing these voices into the mainstream halt the alienation that has led to their need to take drastic and violent 'terrorist' actions.

Public policy makers must determine the balance to be struck between counter-terrorism and other human security threats. Where terrorism has presented a substantial enough threat to warrant a military response, even the most 'successful' military response in history, the war on terror, appears to be ineffective at best and counter-productive at worst. As emerging domestic threats fuelled by online extremism continue to proliferate security professionals must look further beyond even traditional counterterrorism approaches, the social approach and almost certainly beyond the military response.

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