



Atlantic Council of the United Kingdom

Research Division Issue – May 2016

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Bethina Brath Kollungstad **pg. 1**

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Tom Morgan **pg. 9**

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Introduction

Since the twelve founding members ratified the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, NATO has mainly been a defence organization aimed at protecting its members against aggressive third party states. The organization's main purpose has been to "deter and defend against emerging security challenges where they threaten the fundamental security of individual Allies or the Alliance as a

whole”.¹ However, NATO has had to develop to meet the new emerging threats in the international security arena, and it has been one of the most important aspects of the survival of the organization. From the end of the Second World War, through the Cold War and to the beginning of the War on Terror (WoT) NATO has been under pressure to transform both its approach to new threats and its role in the changing fore front of international security policy.



Today one of the biggest challenges for NATO is the development of new processes and procedures to combat terrorism. Terrorism, often referred to as unconventional war, or new war, can seldom be successfully fought with traditional means. The reasons for this are many, but one important

factor is that terrorism often coincides with the use of asymmetric warfare, meaning that the opposing parties have greatly differing military capability (i.e. different tactics and weapons).² It is difficult to fight someone if you neither know their intentions, nor how they will fight you and with what means. In other words, the WoT requires a change in NATO’s approach to the emerging threats from terrorism, and the way in which it has to be fought.

This article seeks to highlight the importance of why terrorism constitutes a different and separate threat from conventional third-party threats. In other words, how does the emergence of large-scale terrorist groups, such as Al Qaida and ISIS, constitute a new threat towards both states and interstate cooperation? This article will lay down some basic concepts and arguments for why it is

¹ NATO, *NATO’s Policy Guidelines on Counter-terrorism: Aware, Capable and Engaged for a Safer Future* (2012) http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87905.htm

² Merriam-Webster, *Asymmetric Warfare* (2016) <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/asymmetric%20warfare>

important to consider terrorism as a fundamentally distinct and divergent threat. It will start off by discussing the rationalism of war, and then go on to discuss the concept of new wars, how terrorism can be classified within that group and why they need to be handled in a different way than the traditional *old wars*.

Rationality in War

When one asks the question ‘what is the difference between fighting against a state and fighting against ISIS?’ the first thing that comes to mind for many theorists, especially realists, is the concept of rationality, and how that differs in terms of the state and terrorist organisations. The state is seen as a



geographically defined, unitary and highly rational actor on the international arena. This means that when making decisions about foreign policy, the state is able to correctly identify challenges and find the best possible solutions in terms of cost and benefits, and also take into account the values and goals of the state.³ They are aware of their external environment and fully informed of the utility of each possible action. Therefore, it is possible for the state to maximize its prospects of survival, and in addition to calculate the actions of other states and how the state’s own behaviour affects other states actions.⁴ Consequently, when a state has to decide on an action they will assess the likelihood of success, the long-term effects and the cost and benefits of each one of them.

³ Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), pp. 261.

⁴ John Mearsheimer, *Reckless States and Realism* (Sage Publications 2009), pp. 244

In contrast to states, terrorist organizations are not seen as inherently rational actors. Applying the Rational Action Model to such groups has proved to be difficult for many reasons. First of all, one cannot assume that a terrorist group is a unitary actor with one holistic strategy centered on a specific political vision. Rather it can be seen as multiple layers of groups and individuals, or disparate actors, motivated by a number of different interests (e.g. young western Muslims dissatisfied with their current situation, local Sunni Arabs who are oppressed by their governments, misguided Christian fundamentalists, or any other disturbed and violent reactionary).⁵ Speaking to the spate of recent IS-related violence, it could be argued that all the different individuals and groups may contribute with something, but they are only loosely connected with each other through what seems to be a mutual distaste for the Western influence.

Secondly, terrorist groups are not always as informed about the external environment and the possible outcome of their actions on the same level as states. Even though one can argue that many people within groups, such as ISIS, are educated people, the individuals that carry out the attacks may often be motivated by emotion more than reason. So, could one say that terrorist groups are rational in the sense that they are utility maximisers that constantly pursue goals that are based on



consciously chosen stable preferences?⁶ Was it rational of ISIS to attack Paris and kill over 130 civilians, knowing that France is one of Europe's most capable militarily powers, and that it might provoke a big military retaliation against the caliphate ISIS is creating?⁷ These questions are hard to answer because what might seem rational to some might be irrational to

⁵ Robert Nalbadov Dr. "Irrational Rationality of Terrorism" in *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6,4 (2013): 93

⁶ Nalbadov 2013, p. 93

⁷ Shadi Hamdi, *Is There a Method to ISIS Methods?* (The Atlantic 2015)

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/isis-rational-actor-paris-attacks/417312/>

others. In addition, and what is perhaps the case with ISIS, many irrational actions might collectively and ultimately prove to maximise their expected utility.⁸ An example of this is the suicide bomber; this might not seem rational to most people, but it stays a personal preference due to the set of values a person holds. In addition, even though one suicide bomber might not maximise any utility, a series of them might create the wanted effect that ultimately prove to maximise the group's gain in terms of the power of fear. The rationality of terrorism is hard to pinpoint. Even though the terrorist acts in themselves may not be rational, the way in which terrorism is used as a strategic means for war can be seen as rational as it is used for a specific purpose, it is instrumental.⁹

The rationality of terrorism is difficult due to the fact that terrorism often is done on an individual level. In contrast to on a state level - where states are more confined to actions that are centered on specific policy - rationality on an individual level is subject to imperfections. The reason for this is that individuals have less of an ability to calculate outcomes for different options than do states, often because they are not fully informed about the possible outcome or because they have a reduced set of options.¹⁰

So what does this mean for NATO's future policy? To start, the traditional sense of collective defence is not enough. Even though article V was invoked for the first time after the September 11th attacks on the U.S., it is no longer just about collective defence as the new threats to Western states now lies outside the borders of NATO.¹¹ Yet, this is not a new development. NATO has long been required to modify their policy to threats that are not "local", but perhaps not in the sense of shifting to a more individually focused policy that targets irrational actors that do not necessarily have a coherent unified political goal or a geographically defined territory. This article will not present any suggestions or examples of what should be done but only point out that fighting an unconventional

⁸ Nalbadov 2013, p 93

⁹ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organizes Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge 2013: Polity Press), pp. 217

¹⁰ Kristen R. Monroe and Kristen H. Maher, "Psychology and Rational Actor Theory," *Political Psychology* 16:1 (1995): 1-21.

¹¹ Jonathan Masters, *Everything You Need to Know About NATO*, (*Defence One*) retrieved from, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/02/everything-you-need-know-about-nato/85801/?oref=DefenseOneFB>

war with traditional means is a futile mission. What should be in focus is what makes terrorists do what they do, or what is the source of their grievance.

War and Terrorism: Mobilization

Another important factor when it comes to the fight against terrorist organizations is the way in which war is mobilized within said organizations. As opposed to “old wars”, terrorism is centred on identity, and can be classified as what Mary Kaldor calls a new war.¹²



A new war is mobilized around ethnicity, nationalism, race, religion etc. However it is not on the grounds of identity itself, but the intention of gaining power from the state for a specific group of people. Identity becomes a label that is used on politically based claims by groups.¹³ For instance, ISIS claims to use Islam to spread the idea of their Caliphate. In a different vein, the Hutu used ethnicity as an excuse to eradicate the Tutsi population in Rwanda when what they wanted was a greater political equality. The term identity politics emerges as a movement of politics that is based on exclusive identities and the demands of greater power for a specific ethnic group, rather than advancing the broader national interest.¹⁴ In other words, groups performing acts of terrorism in the name of race or religion use their identity as a label that they put on a political claim to achieve greater power for “their own people”. In this way identity can be used as a rallying point to attract more supporters that affiliate themselves with the specific character the groups advance. Political control is therefore established more through allegiance to a label than to a thought out idea.¹⁵

¹² Kaldor (2013), 2

¹³ Kaldor (2013), 79

¹⁴ Kaldor (2013), 80

¹⁵ Kaldor (2013), 103

It becomes clear that conflicts fought by ISIS terrorists are a type of new war where the politics of identity is constructed through violence, and the aim is the political mobilisation around identity so as to get more followers. As opposed to older forms of war, the aim behind terrorism is not about state building, but rather the dismantling of the state. For instance, the creation of ISIS in Syria and Iraq tares down the autonomy of the state by eroding the monopoly of the legitimate use of organised violence. This is done to make room for the interest of a smaller group of people. This erosion does not only happen from below, but can also be applied from above through the internationalisation of the monopoly of violence. Such an imposition was seen with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the toppling of Saddam's government.

The Need to Develop New Approaches

So what does this mean for NATO? Does it have any say how a war is mobilized? The answer is yes, it



is very much an important aspect of how one should fight a war. Assessing the threat, where it comes from and on what basis it is made is crucial because the most fruitful way to fight terrorism is by combating the source. The idea of counter-insurgency has been designed to fight terrorism with conventional measures, but it has been an almost universal failure. Bombing a specific

area will not help as long as the terrorist can move across borders and attack NATO's member states from within. Sanctions will not help either as terrorism is not a threat that emanates from a specific nation. Terrorism has become much more fluid than it used to be and the reach of terrorist groups such as ISIS is astonishing. Even though it only governs most of eastern Syria and the north-west of Iraq, ISIS has recruited groups from many counties who pledge their allegiance: Egypt (Ansar Bait al-Maqdis), Libya (Barka Province), Algeria (Jund al-Khilafah), Somalia (al-Shabab), Nigeria (Boko

Haram), Pakistan (Jundallah), and Malaysia (Abu Sayyaf).¹⁶ The fact that ISIS can easily spread their message and also attain more members shows that there is an underlying factor that should not be taken lightly. Even though one might be able to retrieve the lost lands in Syria and Iraq, the ideas behind it and the reason why it started might not have been addressed.

The fight against terrorism has long been fought with old methods. Even though there have been some changes, it is important that the development of new approaches and policy keep on so that the true source of terrorism is fought instead of the symptoms. Terrorism itself cannot be combated, as it is just a verb applied to a given set of actions, but the source of the grievance and greed that leads to its application can. This



is not easy as terrorists are neither rational in their actions, nor have the same motives as states. This article has tried to explain some basic arguments as to why the fight against terrorists presents NATO with a new set of variables and factors. These need to be taken into consideration when modernizing political and military procedures for tackling the emerging large-scale terrorist organizations.

¹⁶ Bruce Newsome, How to defeat ISIS (and why it probably won't happen) (US Berkley Blog) <http://blogs.berkeley.edu/2015/03/02/how-to-defeat-isis-and-why-it-probably-wont-happen/>

Conventional Military Power: A Discussion on its role as a tool of International Statecraft

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With the dissolution of the USSR and the emergence of a unipolar world order dominated by the United States, maintaining the enormous conventional military forces of the Cold War became less of a priority around the world. NATO was, in terms of military technology, well ahead of any of its rivals or any other military power at the end of the Cold War, demonstrated during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Since then almost

all NATO and European states have cut their defence budgets by as much as fifty percent over the following twenty years, assuming that they would be unopposed in the new world order as there was no opposing conventional power capable of challenging them.

Over the last twenty-five years, events have changed considerably so, while NATO is still the most powerful bloc in the world, is no longer unchallenged. The global political system established in 1989 finds itself endangered by a variety of threats including cyber warfare, terrorism, environmental security, and WMD proliferation. The West finds itself confronting these threats at a time when its activities are constrained by economic difficulties, a lack of public resolve for military action and the slashing of equipment and capabilities. The West also suffers from diverging mind-sets between the United States and Europe when it comes to employing conventional military power, further hampering a cohesive response to threats. Given these difficulties, does conventional military power still have a role to play as a response to security challenges?

One of the challenges to the current world order is the emergence of other actors or poles. Some of these emerging powers have regularly voiced and demonstrated opposition to a Unipolar World Order, especially one that is dominated by the United States. States such as China and Russia are spending increasing sums on their own conventional militaries. While perhaps unwilling to challenge the US or NATO militarily, they do want to challenge the Western-led world order and clearly see conventional military power as a means to this end. The Russian occupation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine demonstrate that geopolitics and hard power remain as one of the best currencies in today's world.

Realists will argue that there are only two absolute deterrents to conventional military power, nuclear weapons or strong conventional power, (at the very least enough to make any offensive action taken by an aggressor extremely costly). Hard military power is something that every global and regional actor both understands and respects. Despite significant budget cuts, conventional military forces remain one of the most potent tools available to NATO. In the last two years NATO has undertaken some of the largest exercises since the end of the Cold War. Exercise Trident Juncture, for example, involved 36,000 personnel. For the moment NATO's combined technological and military capabilities are still ahead of any other military power, although many analysts think this is gradually being eroded.



The conventional military strength of the West, and of the United States in particular, is perhaps partly responsible for the asymmetric tactics seen in some of the world's current hotspots. Russia's use of hybrid warfare is one example of this, as are the use of seaborne militias in the South China Sea or the Senkaku Islands disputes. Both of these examples highlight cases where an actor actively pursues its aims at the expense of another state while limiting the chances of escalation as far as possible. The use of local forces with limited Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine along with Russian denials of involvement have helped to limit European and American measures against Russia and aid to Ukraine. Similarly, by using fishing vessels instead of naval or coastguard ships, China has

been able to actively pursue its agenda while minimising the chances of escalation with another states military assets. Such tactics could be used against NATO while keeping hostilities below the threshold of armed conflict or war. Conrad Crane, a military historian and author of the Counter Insurgency manual for Iraq, has observed that "there are two types of warfare, asymmetric and stupid."

Another of the challenges that the West faces concerns 'failing' and 'failed' states. There are examples of these scattered around the world, some of which are right on Europe's doorstep such as Libya and Syria. State failure causes a number of problems for the West. First of all there are usually humanitarian concerns as state structures break down. As the authority of the central government wanes, other forces aim to fill the vacuum, often exacerbating the situation on the ground. These factions often include groups that are hostile to Western influence such as Islamic extremists. The emergence of Al Shabaab in Somalia and more recently Daesh in Syria and Iraq are both examples of this. A lack of a functioning government also provides a safe haven for existing groups. Afghanistan was used by Al Qaeda in this manner during the nineties. The question for Western states is often "to intervene or not to intervene".

Humanitarian operations are problematic. Military interventions in small countries, as in Sierra Leone in 2000, have often been successful but are less so in larger states, such as Sudan. Humanitarian forces seek to be impartial and tend to be smaller than those tasked with combat operations. However this may only succeed in prolonging the fighting as a small impartial force may only be effective when it takes sides. It could tip the balance decisively. If neutrality has to be maintained then a larger force would be required and it would likely have to be deployed for a lengthy period of time; never a popular option. This suggests that even in a humanitarian setting, there is a place for conventional military force. It is often not enough simply to keep two warring sides apart as various factions frequently terrorise the local population and often need to be forcibly disarmed and disbanded for true peace. Again this task is often beyond the capabilities of a small force. When it comes to deploying conventional military forces for humanitarian purposes, states have three main options; to send a large force for a long period of time and face the domestic

repercussions at home, send a small force that may or may not be able to make a difference, or not send anything and essentially do nothing.

Of course, the costs of doing nothing can be extreme. No action was taken by the West in Rwanda in 1994. This came as a direct result of the Battle of Mogadishu during Operation Gothic Serpent in Somalia the previous year. What resulted was the worst genocide since the Second World War. The Rwandan Genocide along with the Srebrenica Massacre in Bosnia the following year, where peacekeepers failed to take action despite being present should have provided a lesson that non-intervention can often lead to catastrophic human and moral costs that far exceeds the price of taking meaningful action in the first place. Unfortunately it seems as though this lesson may have been forgotten. A lack of meaningful action directed towards halting the Syrian conflict has led to consequences that have reverberated throughout the region and beyond. The anarchy has created a humanitarian catastrophe contributing to a massive migration of people into Europe, with the EU struggling to find a solution. The lack of authority has also allowed groups such as ISIS to thrive. They now threaten to tear the entire state system in the region apart, while also threatening to export their terror further afield.

It must be remembered, of course, that conventional military forces are flexible and can accomplish more than the execution of combat operations. They are capable of carrying out a number of tasks such as stabilisation, reconstruction, investment and negotiation.



Since the end of the Cold War, one of the main security goals of Western states has been to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). Particular concern is that nuclear weapons may find their way to rogue states, and although they may be deterred through conventional means,

non-state actors, who might be equally interested in acquiring WMD, could be more difficult to deter due to their unconventional structures and presence as global players. Nuclear arsenals are effective at deterring some actions such as largescale conventional warfare but not others, especially the minor activities that are likely to trouble the NATO members on a day to day basis such as cyber-attacks, espionage and terrorist attacks threats against citizens. Rivals are capable of causing plenty of trouble while staying well below the nuclear threshold through the use of such tactics. For example, Estonia has been the victim of a major cyber-attack, had members of its intelligence service kidnapped and regularly faces Russian attempts to create tensions with its large Russian minority. While it is true that conventional forces from NATO allies deployed may not deter some of these methods, they will provide some assurance to the Estonian people and government and make them feel more secure. Powerful conventional capabilities may sometimes contain and control certain international conflicts. That is not to say that military force is the only answer to these issues, but it should always be taken into account.

Although a more in depth examination of the issues would be useful, it is clear from the above examples that conventional military forces are useful and provide Western governments with valuable tools and options when confronting security threats. They also serve as an unmistakable marker of intent demonstrating a nation's will to act. Maintaining inadequate conventional military forces may have domestic and economic advantages but it creates limitations on what a state can achieve when defending or pursuing its interests both in its immediate neighbourhood and far from home.