

bulletin

The Conflict, Security
& Development Group

Links between organised crime and terrorism

The attacks of 11 September have sharpened the focus on links between organised crime and terrorism—the use of indiscriminate violence by ideological and faith-based extremists bent on subversion. Both have been present in southern Europe, particularly the Balkans, and both have, over the past ten years, presented a serious threat to the security of Europe.

Faith-based extremist groups were present in Bosnia during the war of 1992–95. ‘Mujahideen’ Gulf Arabs, Afghan veterans and Muslim Albanians attached themselves to the Bosnian Muslim Army. The army itself was involved in a variety of black-market and smuggling activities, ranging from arms and fuel transfers to the trafficking of people. The defence of Sarajevo in the summer of 1992 was largely run by known criminal gangs that happily traded drugs and fuel with the besieging Serb army.

The irregular Muslim fighters had ties with colleagues in Afghanistan and Algeria. But it was only during the Kosovo campaign of the late 1990s that the focus shifted in Western intelligence agencies to possible links between insurgents of the National Liberation Army (UCK)/Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden.

Seven months after the attacks of 11 September the evidence of bin Laden/al Qaeda activity in the Balkans is scant. Yet there are indications of connections between political terrorism and organised crime. Criminality offers specific opportunities to idealistic subversives and access to target communities and locations. It is highly likely that subversives like al Qaeda and its affiliates will use the facilities offered by criminals in future.¹

Natural partners?

Criminals and ideological terrorists are not natural partners, and, in many cases, are extremely wary of each other. The amalgam of ideological terrorism and mainstream criminal activity in one organisation is a rarity. The prime example

In this issue . . . Robert Fox examines the links between crime and terrorism. Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi explores the implications and responses of what the US administration refers to as ‘educational outreach’, while Jake Lynch discusses journalistic ethics and the reporting of terrorism post-11 September. Finally, definitions of terrorism are assessed in *Policy Brief*.

is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—an Islamic militant group promoted by al Qaeda and the Taliban in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which has become one of the biggest drug-smuggling cartels in the world.²

Criminal organisations aim to create their own space to ensure immunity from interference by law agencies. They are by nature parasitical rather than directly subversive. In terms of ideology, criminal clan-based mafia organisations tend to be apolitical. According to Alison Jamieson, Italian mafia organisations aimed to establish an ‘area of reciprocal’ tolerance with corrupt political powers.³

Mafia organisations dislike the natural narcissism of terrorist organisations: they make too much noise and attract too much unwanted publicity and scrutiny.

However, terrorist or ideologically-based extremists use criminal networks to aid their activities. They use criminal organisations in the Balkans and across Western Europe to move and raise money through drugs and contraband, and help to supply arms. The channels of illegal migration, now almost totally controlled by mafias in Southeastern Europe, provide the means for moving personnel quickly and discreetly. Finally, criminal and terrorist organisations have easy access to funds and move through the plethora of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They have provided cover for a number of Arab faith-based organisations, and are the most likely entry point for al Qaeda to Muslim communities in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Parallel powers

In the Balkans criminal clans and mafias have come to be an almost parallel power, and much of the economy is dependent on their activities. The illegal tobacco trade is now believed to be worth \$4 billion a year to the economy of Montenegro—and, according to Italian intelligence services, 65% is based on criminal sources of

revenue.⁴ One of the clearest examples of ties between a political movement and international crime is the involvement of the new but powerful Mafia of Puglia in south-east Italy, *La Nuova Sacra Corona Unita* (NSCU), with the KLA/NLA of Kosovo and the Albanian community of northern Macedonia. One of the NSCU leaders, Francesco Prudentino, was a visitor at the bar of Xhavit Hasani in the northern Macedonian village of Tanuscevici. Hasani became involved in the insurrection by the KLA in Kosovo in 1998 and by the NLA in Macedonia in 2000–01. It was when the international authorities, including the governments of Macedonia and Serbia, decided to regulate trade at Tanuscevici by building an international customs post that, in January 2001, serious fighting erupted once more in northern Macedonia.⁵

Across the region, parallel authorities and economies are powerful, and/or predominant, including in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina and the Republika Srpska enclave, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia. All of these state entities have difficulty in enforcing and establishing the legitimacy of basic law, the constitution and the judicial system. Perhaps the most blatant example of parallel authority taking over is in the two principal ports of Albania, Vlore and Durres. In both, the mafias dominate in the movement of contraband and people, and recently there are signs that the powerful Turkish mafias have taken over from the Italian gangs.⁶

International response

Some international initiatives to combat terrorism and organised crime have begun to yield results. The single European Union (EU) arrest warrant brought in after 11 September has helped speed up extradition and investigation. Italy’s schemes to register migrant labourers and its regime of return with Tunisia have helped to regulate illegal migration—although with Italy’s rapidly declining birthrate many

illegals are becoming absorbed profitably and peacefully into the economy, especially in the *Mezzogiorno*. The appointment of international monitors charged with assessing visa regimes and border flows—an initiative launched in 2000 by the respective prime ministers of Italy and the UK, Giuliano Amato and Tony Blair—has produced high quality analysis from relatively modest means. In the case of the UK, only 17 specialist police officers have been utilised. Similarly, the establishment of the South East Europe Co-operation Initiative (SEECI) centre for criminal intelligence exchange in Sofia, Bulgaria, is a novel step forward in international police co-operation.

However, the task of assessing and monitoring—let alone combating—the threat from organised crime, not to mention terrorist subversives, remains immense.

Three aspects of the problem now need to be addressed urgently. First, the changing nature of corruption and criminality needs to be understood clearly. ‘The organised criminal is no longer the guy in the sharp suit with the dark glasses’, said a senior police intelligence officer recently, ‘he’s quite often the guy in the white shirt sitting at the desk opposite you, representing a partner government in the region’.

The second priority is the need for a broader and more flexible interpretation of intelligence and analysis. Too often national and international security and justice organs are victims of the ‘stove-pipe’ approach or ‘tunnel-vision’ analysis. They must think more about the context and cultures they are dealing with—the approach exemplified by the two brilliant anti-mafia justices, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, murdered in Palermo in 1992.

The third priority is a robust and flexible policy on illegal migration across southern Europe—perhaps the greatest motor of organised criminality in the region now, and the most accessible conduit for terrorist subversives. In the opening



Photo: Associated Press

A Russian border guard carries packets of heroin, smuggled from Afghanistan, to be burnt near the Tajik village of Moskovsky, 200 kilometres south of Dushanbe, 2001.

months of 2002, thousands of migrants have been picked up at sea, or found shipwrecked around the southern coasts of the Italian peninsula and Sicily—most have come long distances, from Asia and the subcontinent and Sub-Saharan Africa. Thousands more have been making the perilous journey across the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain—now regarded as the most popular route for illegal migrants via North Africa—and many come from Sub-Saharan Africa and as far away as Malaysia and Sri Lanka. When a Mafia-operated freighter was towed by coastguard launches into Catania in March 2002 with 1,000 Kurds aboard—many paying more than \$2,000 a head for their miserable and uncertain passage to Europe—the Guardia di Finanza (customs police) estimated that there were a further 19 similar shiploads of migrants at sea in the eastern Mediterranean heading for Italy.⁷

Illegal migration

The link between migration and terrorism is complex and shadowy, while the link between illegal migration and organised crime is more clear and vivid. The connection between the three phenomena—illegal migration, organised crime and terrorism—needs extensive study and is beyond the scope of this article. The illegal movement of people across the Adriatic Sea is now almost exclusively the preserve of organised-crime groups.⁸ In turn, the illicit shipment of migrants across the central Mediterranean and the Adriatic has produced new crime cultures, such as the tight-knit Chinese crime families now operating in northern Italy.⁹

Illegal migration provides access and cover for terrorist groups, particularly that under the protection of heavily armed groups like *La Nuova Sacra Corona Unita*. This, however, is unlikely to be the chosen method for moving around key terrorists, such as the ‘shoe bomber’, Richard Reid.¹⁰ A potentially fascinating insight into how loose terrorist networks have moved personnel across Europe is provided by data on a personal computer found, in November 2001, by *Wall Street Journal* reporters in a house in Kabul used by al Qaeda. Thousands of names, profiles and operational details appeared to be on the hard drive, which has taken several months to analyse and decipher. For individual terrorists it is the methodology of organised-crime management of illegal migration that is important, rather than the use of the means themselves.

The link between migration and terrorism needs further investigation, as do the security risks of mass illegal migration into southern Europe. The volume is bound to increase over the coming decade, given the pressures on, and opportunities for, those willing to pay for the chance to get into Europe.

One of the biggest problems in this regard is identification. For the old maxim still applies: for every illegal migrant worker who can be

identified, at least three in the shadows cannot. The movement and trafficking of people is now one of the leading threats to stability across Europe, and a leading opportunity for crime syndicates, and, most likely, terrorists, too.

Summary

- The attacks of 11 September have focused attention on the links between organised crime and terrorism.
- There is evidence of these links in the Balkans, but it is scant. However, Osama bin Laden has assisted NGOs in the region.
- Criminals and terrorists are not natural partners: they operate differently and to different ends.
- Criminals try to establish a ‘space of reciprocal tolerance’ with authority.
- Terrorists do use criminal networks, especially in the trafficking of arms and the laundering of funds.
- Terrorists have used NGOs as fronts.
- Mafias have created parallel power and economic structures across the Balkans—some states, such as Montenegro, have become dependent on their revenue.
- Failed and failing states like Albania, and ‘black-hole’ areas like the ports of Durrës, Vlorë and Bar, are now a prime security concern.
- Clear links have been identified between crime syndicates and political insurgents, such as the United Holy Crown of Puglia and the KLA/NLA in south Serbia and northern Macedonia.
- Some international initiatives have had success in confronting this problem—the Blair/Amato frontier monitoring scheme, the European arrest warrant, and intelligence gathering centres, such as the SEECI.
- Illegal migration is hugely complex, and needs further study. There is a high degree of absorption of illegal migrants in southern Europe, often quite pacifically.
- Illegal migration is a threat to stability and

security, most of which is run by organised crime. The signs are that it is bound to increase.

- The channels of illegal migration established by organised crime provide methods as much as means for the movement of key individuals in terrorist groups (see the case of Richard Reid).

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Endnotes

¹ This article is based on papers presented by the author as part of the Centre for Defence Studies' submission on the additional chapter to the Strategic Defence Review, and to a seminar on organised crime at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in March 2002.

² See Rashid, A., *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*, (London: Pan Books, 2001), and Rashid, A., *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

³ On Mafia organisations, as opposed to bandit organisations and political subversives, see Hosbawm, E.J., *Primitive Rebels*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957). On reciprocal tolerance, see Jamieson, A., *The AntiMafia*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

⁴ This assessment was made in an excellent article by Ragusin, E., 'Montenegro, lo Stato delle bionde', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 9 February 2002.

⁵ Articles by Franz Gustincic *et al* in *Limes*, vol. 2, April 2001. (www.limesonline.com/doc/navigation)

⁶ The new dominance of the Turks was declared in several interviews in mid-March 2002 by Italy's anti-Mafia judge Pier Luigi Vigna.

⁷ To get a flavour of the scale of the influx, see the files of *La Repubblica* (www.repubblica.it), *Corriere della Sera* (www.corriere.it) for January–March 2002, and the references at http://uk.dir.yahoo.com/social_science/migration_and_ethnic_relations/.

⁸ See UN presentation at the The Global Forum for Law Enforcement and National Security (LENS) conference in Edinburgh, June 2001, and the latest research findings of Ferruccio Pastore, Centro Studi Problemi Internazionali (CESPI).

⁹ 'Il fenomeno criminale cinese in Italia' in *Mafie nostre, mafie loro. Criminalità organizzata italiana e straniera nel Centro-Nord*, Becucci, S. and Massari, M. (eds), Le edizioni di Comunità, Torino, Italy, 2001, p. 68.

¹⁰ See Elliott, M., 'The Shoe Bomber's World', *Time* (European edition), 25 February 2002, p. 22.

Educational outreach in Muslim states: implications and responses

In a speech on 19 February 2002, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz warned, 'The emergency is upon us'. He was encapsulating the sentiments expressed by US President Ronald Reagan in 1982, of a changing world and the need to protect American ideals. These notions form the ideological basis of strategies to combat the post-11 September 'emergency', including what US President George Bush's administration refers to as 'educational outreach' in Muslim countries.

Quite what educational outreach means remains unclear. However, in his attempts to *reach out* to Muslim communities in the US, Bush has made some very positive remarks during speeches at Islamic centres, mosques and Muslim conferences, recognising Islam as a religion of peace, for example. Aside from the useful verbal reassurances made in the US itself, one can only conjecture on the intentions of, and indeed the need for, educational outreach in Muslim countries.

In its simplest form, educational outreach might encompass further support for, and promotion of, Muslim education, such as the girl-child educational programmes already in existence in Afghanistan. However, the Bush administration is also talking about 'transformation'. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recently argued that this is about 'an awful lot more than bombs and bullets and dollars and cents. It's about new approaches. It's about culture. It's about mindsets and ways of thinking about old things in new ways'.

More than words

Thinking about old things in new ways is not necessarily the same as *adopting* fresh approaches to challenge fixed mindsets constructively. Educational outreach across cultural, geographic, ethnic and religious boundaries must begin by understanding the dynamics of those societies and their systems. Educational outreach will only prove useful if it engages the Islamic world in a dialogue. Simply dressing up propa-

Transformation is about changing our understanding of each other and opening minds to new possibilities of co-operation

ganda under the banner of educational outreach will not solve the problems confronting most of the Islamic world today—poverty, illiteracy, corruption and underdevelopment—problems that much of the Islamic world shares with the developing world. Educational outreach needs to encourage the Islamic world to fulfil its long-term commitments to address the economic, social and political problems that have stagnated development. Furthermore, it must be based on an understanding that the us is an international stakeholder in the future of the Islamic world, and acknowledgment of the connections between globalisation, modernisation and development.

Educational outreach must also be initiated in the us itself, where the Muslim community is not only the largest religious minority (approximately seven million), but also one of the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Muslim communities in the us—and, indeed, in Europe—need to be better understood and their representatives must be consulted at all levels of policymaking. It is important to strike the correct balance in terms of perceptions on

all sides. The authorities have to ensure that Muslims are not seen as fifth columnists and that the civil and political rights of citizens are respected. At the same time, Muslim communities and individuals have to steer clear of falling into the trap of seeing themselves as victims, which can have devastating effects on future generations. Furthermore, Muslim communities must be allowed equal access to the political, social and economic arenas in order to influence policy and decision-making. They must be encouraged to work with the democratic system, its institutions and authorities. Finally, they must be allowed to develop intellectually without fear of suspicion or their loyalties being put to the test.

US outreach

The us is still reeling from the fallout of 11 September. But its response continues to be based on a fatalistic notion of ‘now or never’, exemplified by Bush when he stated ‘you are either with us or against us’. It is a form of fatalism expressed through growing isolation from the rest of the world, reflecting impatience and immaturity in foreign policy, and a clear failure to understand international dynamics.

The Bush administration must not only listen to domestic public opinion but also to global public opinion, particularly that of the Islamic world. In the context of fighting terrorism, there may be a case to be made in regard to warning those who harbour terrorist groups and individuals of the dire consequences they will face if they continue to aid and abet them. Yet the fight against terrorism needs to be fought at all levels.

The National Rifle Association remains the largest non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the us and the rule of law, including security



Photo: Associated Press

US President George W. Bush meets with Muslim and Arab–American community leaders, Dr Yahyah Basha (left) from the American Muslim Council and Imam Muzammil H. Siddiqi (right) of the Islamic Society of North America, at the White House, September 2001.

against terrorism, is threatened by the constitutional right to bear arms and the internal proliferation of weapons. The international fight against terrorism is set against an image of America with the ‘book’ in one hand and the rifle in the other. These contradictions are not missed by the international community and will have an impact on the willingness of Muslim countries to engage with the us.

Bush can expect his plans for educational outreach to fall on deaf ears if there is no end to ‘military outreach’. Words, like bombs, can be devastating if used without understanding or an appreciation of their social and political ramifications. The question of a proportionate response is important, involving practical steps towards resolving conflict and preventing further warfare. This would presuppose that, with an increased emphasis on educational outreach, there is a decrease in militarism and a constructive resolve to promote universal standards of peace, justice and human rights. Any successful programme has to respect international law and universal standards of behaviour. One of the consistent criticisms of the us emanating from the Muslim world relates to its selectivity in regard to human rights. This undermines us credibility at the start of any proposed campaign for educational outreach and the need for it to be underpinned by moral consistency.

Muslim communities need to rethink the misconceived notion that the us is on a mission to corrupt or conquer the Muslim world and must be open to the genuine goodwill of the international community and the opportunities that international co-operation can offer. However, the American mindset also needs to be targeted, notably the offensive notion of superiority based on material wealth or the macho use of fire-power. The idea that something as abstract and anachronistic as the ‘American Dream’ is suitable for the rest of humankind needs to be addressed with equal urgency.

‘Transformation’ is about changing our understanding of each other and opening minds to new possibilities of co-operation, rather than the fear of polarisation or isolation. The us is not an isolated entity but part of an organic whole—an international community linked in the economic, social, cultural, political, and even philosophical, religious and legal spheres. The fundamental contradiction of the us is that the ‘smaller melting pot’ ignores the ‘greater melting pot’, failing or refusing to grasp the larger international context.

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Definitions of terrorism

The longstanding debate of how to define terrorism and its relevance for informing policy-making has been exacerbated by the events of 11 September. Below are some of these definitions and the issues that surround this quagmire.

Terrorists or freedom fighters?

There is no universally agreed definition of what constitutes terrorism and this, in itself, is problematic. Different definitions of terrorism form the basis of different political responses. Furthermore, this lack of clarity ensures that the political debate on what is or is not an appropriate response is obscured. A critique of the more simplistic and mainstream definitions of terrorism is based on the notion that one state's 'terrorist' is another state's 'freedom fighter'. Thus the definition of terrorism is applied according to state- or group-specific political objectives and perspectives. It has been suggested that the notion of terrorists and freedom fighters fall into different categories. Terrorism describes a *method or means of fighting*, whereas liberation struggles describe a *cause or end*.

Criminal acts

At the League of Nations Convention in 1937 a universally accepted definition of terrorism was drafted: 'all criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public'. This was never ratified and since then UN member

states, whilst agreeing on 12 conventions and protocols, have yet to define terrorism. An agreed definition would be the lynchpin of a comprehensive treaty against terrorism.

A form of political violence

One way of describing terrorism is a form of political violence with five major characteristics:

- it is premeditated and aims to create a climate of extreme fear and terror;
- it is directed at a wider audience or target than the immediate victims of violence;
- it inherently involves attacks on random and symbolic targets, including civilians;
- it is seen by the society in which it occurs as extra-normal, breaching social norms and causing a sense of outrage; and
- it is generally used to influence political behaviour.

As a form of political violence used by states (although 'state-sanctioned terrorism' is a matter of some debate) and non-state organisations, it is often motivated by nationalism, separatism, racism, vigilantism, ultra-Left/Right and/or religious ideology. While usually based on extreme ideological positions, terrorism should not be viewed as the pathological act of an individual. Rather, the root of terrorist killing stems from the same motivation that has driven people to kill each other for centuries.

Protecting human rights

Following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September, the European Union has attempted to provide a definition of terrorism. It is defined as an offence which seriously damages a country or an international organisation with the objective of:

- seriously intimidating a population;
- unduly compelling a government or

- ▶ international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or
 - seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structure of a country or an international organisation.

This definition has met with strong criticism from human-rights organisations. Their main concern is that this definition could refer to trade unions, campaigns by environmentalists, such as Greenpeace, and anti-globalisation protesters. In response to this concern, the European Commission included a 'Recital' and a 'Declaration' in which it explicitly states that '[N]othing in the Framework Decision may be interpreted to reduce or restrict fundamental rights or freedoms such as the freedom of assembly or association or of expression'. Whilst significant, this amendment does not carry any legal weight and the controversial debate on definitions of terrorism continues.

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Journalist ethics and reporting terrorism

At a time when the debate on terrorism has become increasingly polarised, what is the role of the media? To what extent does the reporting of terrorism influence how readers and viewers understand events? What influence does it exert on the course of the events themselves? These questions need to be addressed in the context of existing approaches, ethics and expectations of the media.

Journalists observe reality, select the elements they consider important, draw conclusions and organise them into a narrative, in a similar way to physicists, social scientists or even literary critics. However, compared with practitioners in these fields, journalists operate within limited boundaries in regard to critical self-awareness and responsibility. Instead, most adopt a rough-and-ready empiricist orthodoxy, namely 'objectivity', embodied in the phrase, 'we just report the facts'. Increasingly, though, journalists find this framework for analysis inadequate as an explanation of the complex relationship between reporting and the occurrence of events.

In a world saturated with information, readers, listeners and viewers are eminently aware of the impact of media. They realise that news is not a natural window on the world, but that it is cultural, something made. Furthermore, many now understand how news is made. Significantly, people are increasingly able and willing to present, shape or even create facts to be reported.

The globalisation of media means that these insights are widely shared. Ali Ahmeti, leader of the ethnic-Albanian National Liberation Army in Macedonia, when asked on BBC television in July 2001 what he and his group had

gained by taking up arms, replied, 'The whole of Europe now knows about our situation'. Nik Gowing, former Diplomatic Editor of Channel Four News and now anchor-man of BBC World, sounded a resonant warning after the Great Lakes crisis of 1996–97: 'even if their soldiers wear gum-boots' armies around the world are now capable of waging sophisticated information campaigns.

People's actions may not result from conscious and deliberate planning about the response they are likely to elicit from journalists, but any understanding of these actions is incomplete without allowing for the extent to which behaviour and experiences are structured by internalised narratives. And news is one of the most important narratives.

The feedback loop

In 2001, at a Reporting the World seminar on coverage of the Arab–Israeli conflict, Bob Jobbins, then head of news at BBC World Service, said 'Conflict resolution may become harder or easier as a result of my reporting, but that's a judgement that is made *after* our reporting'. This is a key underlying proposition in the theory of objectivity, a version of what the sociologist Max Weber once called an 'ethic of conviction'. News is reported 'without fear or favour' and the world presented, as Walter Cronkite used to reiterate every night to US TV audiences, 'the way it is'. Yet the reality of today's media is that it is 'the way someone would like us to see it'.

For journalists to see themselves as objective, in the sense of being detached from the events that they cover, is to overlook the role of news as a process in shaping human behaviour. The process leads people to create facts that will be reported in a way that, in their view, will bring some advantage to their cause, career or bank balance. Furthermore, 'media manipulation' is successfully achieved through watching, reading or listening to previous reporting. Every news-

paper, newscast or webcast adds another layer to the collective understanding of how the process works. The way the facts are covered today unavoidably influences the calculations or instincts that inform the behaviour of people creating 'facts' to be reported tomorrow.

The production of news is not a linear process, with a clearly defined beginning and end, but is more accurately described as a dynamic 'feedback loop', connecting journalists and their sources in a seamless sequence of cause and effect. The question remains: to what extent can one gauge the impact of particular decisions made by journalists in selecting the facts to report and organising these facts into narratives?

Reporting 'terrorism'

It is the policymaker's lament that so many policies have to be made as solutions to unexpected problems. The suicide hijackings of 11 September are perhaps the ultimate example. As any policy is being formulated, a calculation will be made as to whether and how it can be credibly presented to reporters and the public as a feasible solution. This calculation, and therefore the policy, depends, in part, on how the problem has been diagnosed on the front pages and evening bulletins.

How were the attacks on New York and Washington, DC, diagnosed? *New York Magazine* media writer Michael Wolff immediately detected a state of 'notionlessness' in mainstream US news. A retreat, over a period of years, from consistent, in-depth coverage of world affairs left journalists, readers and audiences to 'identify the villain as some pure spasm of all-powerful, far-reaching apocalyptic irrationality'. Yet there was a good deal of intelligent reporting, which illuminated the strategic nature of the atrocity. Richard Falk of Princeton University called this 'the work of dark genius, a penetrating tactical insight that endangers our future in funda-

mental respects that we are only beginning to apprehend’.

This entails reporting terrorism as a dysfunctional but, crucially, intelligible response to an identifiable set of conditions. For example, *Time* and *Newsweek* explored ‘why they hate us’ and ‘the roots of rage’, tracing the links with issues of structural violence, from Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories to the impoverishment of millions from the Maghreb to Central Asia, and cultural violence, including the historic failure of religious and political reform movements in Islamic societies.

The cumulative influence of patterns in reporting can be highly significant. To diagnose violence as autistic—mad, bad and irrational—helps to make more violence appear to be a logical remedy. Diagnose it as arising from, or constructed by, underlying issues of political, economic and social development and it makes more sense to apply a remedy, as European Union Commissioner Chris Patten suggested, consisting of ‘smart development assistance [rather than] smart bombs’.

Shared assumptions

Objectivity is seldom *articulated* as a theory of journalism, and when it is, its defenders usually admit that the journalist’s role cannot be reduced to that of a mere cipher of information. One suggestion is that the nearest one can get to ‘objective journalism’ is to work on the basis of ‘shared language and assumptions’. Yet modern global communication systems, and the fragmentation of domestic audiences, make this an increasingly unconvincing claim, which has been exposed particularly by coverage of the ‘War on Terrorism’.

Shortly after the attacks of 11 September, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of opinion leaders around the world, asking whether they thought people in their countries saw the atrocity as ‘blowback’—a response to

us foreign policy. In the us, scarcely any respondents did, in sharp contrast to respondents in the rest of the world. The Center’s findings have subsequently been echoed in a mass of empirical and anecdotal evidence. Rightly or wrongly, the assumption that, to some extent, the us brought the attack on itself is shared globally. But this is not the underlying assumption in much of the reporting of the War on Terrorism, which presents itself as objective.

The coverage in London-based media of the complex maneuverings that may lead to another us-led attack on Iraq has generally been presented in terms of how it would strike a blow against terrorism. What is rarer is reporting from the opposite perspective, questioning what such a move would do, through ‘blowback’, to *increase* the danger from terrorism, and whether such an escalation was, in fact, the ‘tactical insight’ behind the events of 11 September.

What is needed is for journalists to help identify the assumptions behind the way events and processes are presented to us, who shares them and who does not. This is the only way we can inspect and assess them for ourselves, itself a necessary step in reaching an informed judgement about the wisdom and likely effectiveness of our leaders’ responses.

The liberal theory of journalism based on objectivity is supposed to equip readers and audiences to do this and thus to contribute to the health of a democracy. But events of recent months have underscored the need for a new conceptual framework if journalism is to perform this essential role. The first casualty of the War on Terrorism may be the complacency of journalists. Judgements about the impact of their reporting, and the responsibilities that this brings, can no longer be deferred until after the event.

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