



TTSRL – Policy Brief

Number 5 – December 2008

Concepts of Terrorism: Analysis of the rise, decline, trends and risk

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMISSION:

- When analyzing factors of decline, emphasis should be placed on the uniqueness of each situation and terrorist organization. While clear links between root and trigger causes and causes for decline exist, we have concluded that no single comprehensive model can account for these interactions.
- The event-driven nature of terrorism research results in limited knowledge of causes of terrorism decline. We strongly advise the EC to continue to invest in research on this matter in order to expand in counter-terrorism capabilities.
- Member states need to better understand how to counter terrorism at the individual level. Some root and trigger causes can be addressed by considering the grievances and situations of individuals and/or social groups that are particularly vulnerable to violent behaviour.
- Invest into an official EU-terrorism database to enhance analysis of terrorism trends within Europe.
- Continue to investigate how changing trends in terrorism affect the risk it poses to civil society.
- Recognize the increased lethality of tactics in the current wave of terrorism characterized by religion. This especially pertains to the goals and intentions associated with this trend.
- Refrain from stigmatizing religion as a driving force of terrorism. Rather, it usually serves as a justification for more politically-driven goals.

Introduction

In deliverable 5, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, we aimed to establish links between certain aspects of terrorism and related threat perception. First, a link is established and explained between the root causes, trigger causes and causes for decline of terrorism. The theoretical correlation





between these factors is assessed using case studies of terrorist organizations from a number of European Countries. Furthermore, the connection between terrorism trends and the related threat and risk is assessed.

Root and Trigger Causes

Using a qualitative literature research, we have created a scholarly overview on the subject of root and trigger causes and have been able to distil a top-5 list for both. This list ranks specific causes within the categories 'root' and 'trigger' from the most general or broad aspects, to the more specific underlying factors. Deliverable 5 which includes the model and detailed explanation is available on our [website](#).

Causes for Decline

Another top-5 list was developed for causes for decline of terrorism, distinguishing between internal and external factors. Internal factors include group dynamics among others, while external factors are comprised of government action or police intervention. Government activity can further be divided into 'sticks' (hard approaches) and 'carrots' (soft incentives). One of our main conclusions in this deliverable is that both methods, either stick or carrot, can only be used when state legitimacy is high. When this is not the case, the use of violence against a terrorist group (sticks) will result in a rise in support for the terrorist' cause. The same holds for diplomatic intentions (carrots) aimed to curb terrorist activity. If a government decides to negotiate with terrorist groups when their own legitimacy or influence over this group is limited, publicly it could be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

Case studies

The case studies underline our conclusions from the literature research into the interrelatedness of root and trigger causes and causes for decline. When fighting terrorism, it is tempting to use the past as a guideline for the future. Categorization allows us to historically assess and group various forms of terrorism, making it easier to generalize and learn from specific cases. However,





the most important lesson to be learned from the case studies as from the theoretic approach is not the importance of similarities, but the necessary emphasis that should be placed on differences between them.

Establish an EU terrorism database

In the field of terrorism research, database use is a surprisingly under-explored method. Unlike qualitative studies, quantitative research provides hard figures. At the moment the problem is that there is no universal database for terrorism research. There are several databanks, but all have inherent flaws, especially when research is focused on Europe. In order to be able to conduct quantitative terrorism research on a level guaranteeing EU and academic standards it is advisable to start an EU terrorism database. Such a database can be very useful in order to spot trends in for example method of attack, lethality and use of weapons. This will help monitor the risk terrorism poses and will stimulate further research.

Trend & Risk

In this deliverable we argue that trends in terrorism and risk are linked. Changes in trends affect the risk terrorism poses. In the following we will elaborate on this relation between trends and risk.

Trends in Terrorism

In this study we have elaborated on the four waves of modern terrorism as sighted by Prof. Rapoport (figure 1).

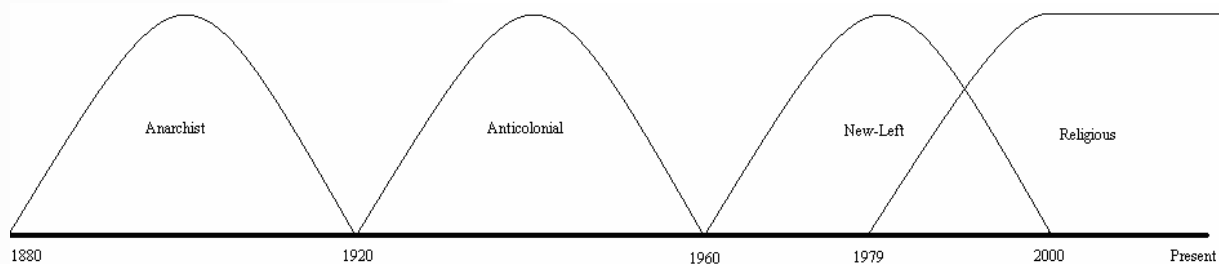


Figure 1: Rapoport's four waves of modern terrorism





These four waves signify four general ideological trends that have been apparent in the last century. Within these ideological trends more specific trends occur (for instance in the methods/weapons used/target). Together these specific trends shape the characteristics of a wave. For instance currently the fourth wave is most prominent. In this wave the ideological trend is religion. Specific trends that occur within this religious wave are for example the use of suicide terrorism and the targeting of soft (unprotected) targets. We argue that these two specific trends within the current running fourth wave contribute to the increasing lethality of terrorism, and thus to the risk terrorism poses.

Risk of Terrorism

How does this link between trends and risk work? We have designed a model in order to show this. In the model we explain the characteristics of risk using three variables: *intentions*, *capabilities* and *consequences*, together these variables determine the risk of terrorism. The model can be used to show the effect of a trend

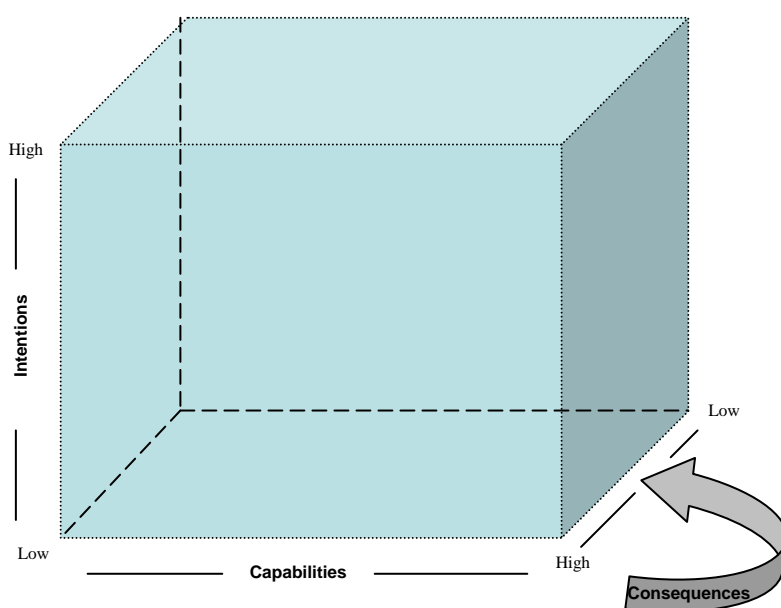


Figure 2: Understanding Characteristics of Risk

on risk in general or on the risk of a specific group. The trend makes terrorism or a group move within the cube, because a trend affects either the intentions, capabilities or consequences of terrorism and terrorist groups. Take for instance the trend of suicide terrorism. In the study we have shown that suicide terrorism is four times as lethal as other terrorism, thus the consequences of the use of suicide terrorism are severe. In the model when a group employs suicide terrorism, the capabilities and intentions of the group remain the same. This is due to the fact that suicide terrorism does not require high capabilities. However, the group would move toward the front of the 3D model on the consequences axis signifying the amplified consequences of its actions. The model can thus be used to show how changing trends affect the risk terrorism pose to society.





The TTSRL project

The project entitled Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law (TTSRL) is a research project, conducted by a consortium of research institutes for the European Commission in Brussels. The project is part of the 6th framework program specifically that of priority 7 entitled: 'Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society'. More information about this program can be found [here](#).

TTSRL

Transnational terrorism is one of the most substantial threats to security and the Rule of Law within the European Union. Approaches towards this problem, however, diverge. As Member States implement different policies based on differing basic assumptions, a structured, univocal strategy towards transnational terrorism is absent. Considering the continuing integration within the European Union, a Union-level strategy with regards to terrorism is imperative. In order to support the formulation of such a strategy, this project will study both the conceptual nature of the problems identified here, and the possible measures flowing from these assumptions.

This project will entail the conducting of a structured, well-founded survey into the various response options towards transnational terrorism and the theoretical assumptions on which they are based. A holistic approach has been chosen in which policy-areas specifically dealing with terrorism as well as affected policy-fields are taken into account. In this respect, this project is unique in that it integrates diverse aspects of the issue into one comprehensive and multidisciplinary project.

The TTSRL project proposes to start bridging the gap between the new daunting challenges posed by transnational terrorism and our current conceptual and policy deficiencies. It addresses what we see as the key issues involved: new notions of security and the role played in it by transnational terrorism; the definition and etiology of terrorism; the societal impact of terrorism; its economic impact; and - last but not least - the policy options available to deal with it.





The main added value of the project will lie in the benchmarking of approaches and policy-options in use in the various Member States. Combined with the conceptual underpinnings of this benchmarking exercise, the project will yield insights into the appropriateness and effectiveness of various approaches and measures from a national and a European perspective, the ethical issues related to this field, and cost-benefit considerations.

For more information on the recommendations in this policy brief of the TTSRL project at large, visit our [website](#) or contact the COT:

COT, Institute for safety, security and crisis management B.V. *an Aon company*
Koninginnegracht 26
2514AB The Hague
The Netherlands
@ ttsrl@cot.nl
T (+31) (0)70 312 2020

