EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

According to the findings of the Global Terrorism Index, the level of global terrorist activity has greatly increased in the last decade. Most of the public conversation about terrorism has focused on conventional counter-terrorism efforts: intelligence gathering, policing, and military force. However, such efforts are often ineffective, and even counterproductive. In this essay, Larry Attree from Saferworld and David Keen from the London School of Economics, outline six conventional approaches that should be scaled back and six constructive alternatives to conventional counter-terrorism that could help reverse the alarming rise in global terrorism.

ENVISAGING MORE CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES TO THE COUNTER-TERROR PARADIGM

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INTRODUCTION

'Terrorism' has come to dominate current affairs in the western world, and dealing with it is one of the foremost priorities on the domestic and foreign policy agendas of western nations. As IEP's valuable work has highlighted, the urgency surrounding the agenda has not always facilitated sober reflection on the available facts regarding the nature of the problem and what they show us.

The urgent priority afforded to counter-terror has impacted on the actions of practitioners in many walks of public life. Particularly affected by the imperatives of counter-terrorism and its conceptual framing have been stabilisation and statebuilding—those emerging fields poised at the intersection of defence, foreign affairs, intelligence, peacebuilding and development. Building on a forthcoming discussion paper prepared for

Saferworld by Prof. David Keen (LSE), this paper identifies some key questions about how counter-terrorism, and related stabilisation and statebuilding efforts, are being pursued, and suggests some constructive peacebuilding alternatives.

The public debate on how to respond to 'terrorist' threats tends to revolve around the most horrific outrages and sensational crises. Whether the option in question is to bomb a reviled spoiler, to arm those opposing an evil regime, or to sponsor a regional partner to take on the dangerous militants, public debate tends to focus minds on apparently simple choices between action and inaction. In this climate, the pressure on leaders to appear strong and act decisively—especially in the face of violent provocation—is very powerful. However, when the media directs its

fickle gaze to newer stories, the success or failure of policy responses to 'terrorism' threats overseas over the long term is rarely publicly discussed.

For this reason, it is perhaps not widely known that:

- In Somalia, thousands of weapons and hundreds of vehicles and high-frequency radios provided by the international community as security assistance during the 1990s ended up in the hands of local militias. In addition, from 2004 onwards over 14,000 Somali soldiers trained by Ethiopia reportedly defected or deserted with their weapons and uniforms, while UN-trained police were implicated in violent abuses against civilians;[1]

- In Iraq, heavy handed military action, such as the assault on Falluja in the wake of the

lynching of four American security contractors in April 2004, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people, including many women and children, and served to fuel further insurgency;[2]

- In Afghanistan, because of local codes of revenge in Pashtun areas, killing insurgents has often served 'to multiply enemies rather than subtract them'.[3] Studies have also 'found little evidence that aid projects are "winning hearts and minds"' in the country: 'instead of contributing to stability, in many cases aid is contributing to conflict and instability';[4]

- In Yemen, external counter terror support served to reduce the Saleh regime's need to be responsive to its own constituents and institute reforms.[5]

It is remarkable that such failures have led neither to detailed public debate on how peace can best be achieved in the wake of 'terrorist' violence, nor to any serious accountability for the leaders and officials that presided over them. But what is even more striking is that the mistakes of the present echo those of past decades: for example, the practice of bombing large swathes of the countryside and the diversion of aid to corrupt purposes that fed public support for the Viet Cong in Vietnam;[6] or the government emergency measures, including the attempt to use 'development' and forced relocation as instruments of counterinsurgency, that strongly fuelled the Mau Mau insurgency under British rule in Kenya during the 1950s.[7] While such problems are, tragically, familiar to scholars and experts working to document the track record of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding approaches around the world, attention to the lessons of the past is strikingly absent from the public debate on how to do better in future.

In recent months, Saferworld has attempted to take the long view on efforts to deal with conflicts related to rebel or 'terrorist' groups and their sponsors in past decades, considering contexts as diverse as Afghanistan, Cambodia, DRC, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Vietnam, and Yemen. Despite the investment of huge resources in such contexts by Western governments, the results have been mixed at best: the current long-term instability of the Middle East, North and East Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the spread of al-Qa'ida into multiple new regions, and the mushrooming of other transnational militant groups suggest that something is seriously

wrong with the Western response to such problems.

Long-standing problems appear to lie in three main areas. Firstly, by setting national security above human security objectives the West has – whether directly or through proxies— too frequently responded to the threat of 'terrorism' with the use of violence. Such violence has, all too often, been indiscriminate, and has had a tendency to exacerbate conflict dynamics rather than contribute to sustainable peace. Secondly, counter-terrorism efforts and related actions taken under the label of 'stabilisation' and 'statebuilding' have often failed to address drivers of conflict in meaningful ways. In fact, they often clumsily reinforce the most serious drivers of conflict – especially patterns of abusive and exclusive governance and corruption. Thirdly, the Western response has typically neglected to focus on sustainable solutions to conflict that involve and respond to the concerns, priorities and potentials of conflict-affected people in constructive ways.

There is much detail that could be added to this critique, and many examples that could be offered of these shortcomings in action and their impacts. If policy alternatives are to be brought to the fore, more thorough analysis is needed to examine why similar shortcomings are repeated from one decade to the next with diminishing public scrutiny. However, what is perhaps more challenging, and more useful, is to envisage what constructive alternatives are available.

One caveat before discussing these alternatives: all approaches to peacebuilding have shortcomings, and the challenges of conflict frequently present choices between a range of sub-ideal alternatives. The policy directions that are set out in this paper are neither a call to side with the 'enemy', nor to evade the imperatives to respond to conflict swiftly and effectively. Instead, they are a call for the lessons of the past and the available alternatives to be more carefully considered, with the overarching objective of working towards long term peace in mind.

SIX THINGS TO DO LESS OFTEN
1 THINKING SHORT TERM

There needs to be more effort to avoid investing in short-term reactions with no clear long-term solution in mind—especially when there are clear risks of contributing to long-term drivers of conflict through short-term action. Similarly, more thought needs to be put into whether approaches

require long-term commitment to be sustainable, and whether such commitment is feasible.

2 REINFORCING POOR GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION

Governance deficits are perhaps the single most significant factor in driving conflict. This means that support for repressive and corrupt actors and regimes needs, as a priority, to be avoided because of its potential to lessen accountability and worsen governance deficits. Governance deficits known to have a significant role in driving conflict include corruption, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and exclusive political systems. Importantly, where international actors support leaders, governments and security forces that are not committed to addressing these failures, they reduce the pressure on them to be inclusive, accountable, responsive and fair toward their own societies. This in turn tends to fuel conflict. The apparent strategic advantage to be gained from alliances with regimes not committed to inclusive, fair, responsive and accountable governance is often illusory—not least because such alliances typically stoke the grievances that fuel insecurity.

3 MISTAKING PARTNERS' MOTIVES

Past experience shows that assumptions about the motives and behaviours of apparent 'allies' in counter-terror, stabilisation and state-building endeavours need to be interrogated more deeply. The consequences of working with allies whose motives differ from one's own have included appalling abuses against civilian populations, the diversion of money, arms and other resources into fuelling conflict, and the reinforcement of corruption, bad governance and grievances. All of these are known drivers of conflict. One of the clearest lessons from past failures is that the motives of 'allies' are hard to understand clearly: they may differ between individuals and across institutions, and can shift over time. An expressed aim of defeating terrorism, for example, may differ dramatically from the actual aims of any given actor. Importantly, the actions of 'allies' are also affected by the resources on offer for counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding processes, which may even serve as an incentive for prolonging conflict. Conflict sensitivity requires much more careful monitoring of these issues

and more determination to minimise harm by factoring this better into decision-making.

4 USING AID IN THE SERVICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Casual assumptions about aid contributing to counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding objectives are called into question by the significant evidence that the use of aid to reinforce military action and stabilisation efforts has in many contexts proved either ineffective or harmful. In particular there is a need to revisit the assumption that local action to address socio-economic drivers of radicalisation can provide an adequate solution when wider structural drivers of conflict are not simultaneously addressed—including the role of international actors and their proxies in contributing to grievances and injustice. While development processes are likely part of the solution to the conflicts that are being defined as problems of 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism', the holistic pursuit of positive peace should include a wider range of measures, including avoidance of policies and actions that create the grievances that fuel conflict.

A related issue is the tendency to overlook the way in which aid and other resources (such as military equipment) provided to allies is diverted for harmful or corrupt purposes by conflict actors. Because corruption is known to be such a visible driver of conflict, and diversion of resources away from their intended purpose is such a common failing, corruption and diversion need to be more systematically prevented and monitored – even when they involve apparent 'allies' of the international community. Too often, declaring a particular government to be an 'ally' has given it a green light for corruption and abuse. In practice, there has often been much more concern about the way aid might be misused by 'terrorists' than the way it is being misused by governments.[8]

Attempts to co-opt aid agencies into support for any particular side in a conflict—as providers of intelligence, as offering relief and assistance only to one group or side – are also counterproductive: they compromise the principle of impartiality, render assistance ineffective, alienate the local population, and make aid agencies a target for attack.

5 USING FORCE

International actors should be much less ready to use force to resolve conflict. In particular, more caution is needed in designating any particular actor as a 'spoiler'. The staying power of 'spoilers' needs to be assessed much more realistically, and greater awareness is needed of the potential for conflict dynamics to spin out of control as a result of intervention. In particular, military force should not be used simply to demonstrate the resolve or power to retaliate in response to violent provocation—indeed, military responses of this kind often play into the intentions of 'terrorists'.[9]

6 LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ABUSES

Significant efforts are also needed to strengthen adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law by international actors and those they co-operate with: torture and indiscriminate use of violence are not only wrong in principle – they also deepen the grievances that can fuel violence and make sustainable peace much harder to achieve. Demonstrating full accountability for irresponsible use of force and abuses that have taken place is vital to efforts to minimise grievances.

SIX DIRECTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES

1 A DIFFERENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMING AND APPROACH

The first and most important shift in the pursuit of constructive alternatives to the counter-terrorism paradigm should be to reaffirm long-term sustained peace for all actors involved as the overall objective—rather than 'victory' over a particular enemy or 'national security' defined in narrow terms. To construct a strategy oriented towards lasting and positive peace it is then crucial – especially in relation to conflicts involving the most reviled of 'spoilers'—to develop an impartial picture of all dimensions of the conflict. One key starting point for achieving this is perhaps offered by developing a conflict analysis.

Conflict analysis can provide an important opportunity to avoid biased actor analysis and narrow analysis of the causes of a conflict. In the counter-terrorism paradigm, designating certain actors as 'spoilers', 'radicals', 'terrorists' or 'extremists' risks framing the problem from the outset as

lying with those actors alone – the solution being to change their wrong-thinking (or physically eliminate them) rather than seeking to identify what all relevant actors—including national, regional and international governments—can change to contribute towards lasting peace.

Similarly, approaching conflict as a problem of 'extremism' or 'radicalisation' has sometimes encouraged a focus on the socio-economic disadvantages experienced by the individuals who perpetrate acts of violence. Looking at local poverty or unemployment may be helpful, but it must not preclude a focus on other causes of conflict – including the actions of governments enjoying various degrees of immunity to international criticism. Grievances created by powerful political actors at national, regional or international levels may well prove especially important in driving conflicts defined as 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism'. Framing the problem impartially as one of 'conflict' may enable much more comprehensive identification of causes that require fresh approaches – not only by extremists and local actors but also by national, regional and international leaders, governments, security forces and so on.

Conflict analysis may also provide an opportunity to connect apparently local or national dynamics to transnational factors: it may be crucial to recognise that 'extremism' is not only driven by the transnational spread of problematic ideologies based on misperceptions, but also by the moral objection of conflict actors in one country to policies and actions taken in other countries, which are indeed unjust or unlawful and which they feel powerless to change through constructive means. Peacebuilding strategies in such contexts could valuably include the creation of effective channels for grievances to be constructively raised and addressed.

Given the need to avoid the common challenges of short-term thinking, failure to learn from past mistakes and incoherence between development, diplomatic, economic and military-security approaches, conflict analysis also provides opportunities to consider how different responses to conflict will play out through the development of forward-looking scenarios, examine lessons from past engagement, and facilitate diverse actors to recognise their roles and responsibilities within a shared long-term peacebuilding strategy.

2 CHANGING INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL POLICIES THAT HAVE FUELLED GRIEVANCES

If conflicts defined as stemming from 'extremism', 'radicalisation' or 'terrorism' are driven in part by moral objections to policies and actions which are unjust or unlawful, part of the strategy for achieving sustainable peace should be to reconsider those policies and actions. Just as apartheid needed to be brought to an end, and many former colonies were awarded their independence following struggles by rebel organisations now viewed as liberation movements, in the same way there is a need to examine the justice of policies that are the focus of rebellion and protest around the world.

Such unjust policies may be military (indiscriminate use of violence, military aid to actors who are perpetrating abuses), economic (sanctions perceived to be unjust, failure to regulate markets in goods and resources from conflict-affected countries, imposition of unequal trade rules, or prioritisation of natural resource access over other priorities), diplomatic (support for allies who are violating human rights and/or international law), or developmental (further support for such allies). A greater effort to demonstrate consistent support for international law and human rights is surely one of the most promising options for reducing the grievances of the victims of unjust international policies and practices, and those who claim to represent them.

3 SEEKING TO NEGOTIATE PEACE – AND BUILDING TOWARDS INCLUSIVE AND JUST POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

There are many challenges inherent in deciding whether and how to negotiate peace. Overall, however, negotiating solutions is currently a less favoured option than it was during the 1990s. Clearly it is neither desirable nor practical to welcome every militant or rebel group into a power-sharing deal. Both inviting and excluding rebel movements to the dialogue table has incentivised armed violence in the past. At the same time, long-term peace can of course be undermined when only a relatively narrow and elite group is accepted into negotiations and into the political settlement that results.

While the dilemmas involved are complex,

the counter-terrorism paradigm has in certain contexts ruled out the possibility of negotiation with (or even assistance to) large sections of whole societies (as in Somalia and Afghanistan). In this context, it seems important to reflect that long-term peace will eventually be sustainable only if those who survive the conflict are prepared to accept the eventual settlement that is made. Moreover, as Greenhill and Solomon argue, even an apparently 'implacable' spoiler may sometimes change – in new circumstances – into a less violent entity.[10] In this context, alongside the inclusion in peace processes of those who have not resorted to violence, and ongoing efforts to ensure broader inclusion in political settlements of the public, including women, youth and any marginalised groups, more effort is needed to pursue communication with and understand all actors involved in any given conflict – even those 'terrorists', 'violent extremists', 'radicalised groups' and 'spoilers' that are most reviled.

4 USING LEGAL-JUDICIAL RESPONSES AND TARGETED SANCTIONS

An important option for approaching conflict is to use the law (national or international) to punish and deter violence and to protect those who may otherwise feel marginalized and resort to violence as a last resort. Legal approaches to insecurity are complex, and only a few points can be made here. Prosecutions offer the prospect of reducing impunity, deterring violence (both within a particular country and more broadly), and of course incarcerating those responsible for violence (and thus taking them 'out of the game'). In many cases, a policing response to disorder (apprehending and trying criminal suspects) will be more appropriate than a military response. Sometimes, it is a heavy-handed military response that turns a small rebellion into a large one or gives life to a weakening 'terrorist' movement.

When due process is applied and the rights of defendants to fair trials are visibly upheld, legal approaches offer the considerable advantage of guaranteeing rights of defendants and their equal treatment before the law—thereby helping to dispel perceptions of discrimination against particular groups.

The option to deploy sanctions comes with certain drawbacks. Sanctions can be used by those targeted to shore up their

economic advantages and their political support base. They can also do great harm to the general population and create grievances among those they were intended to help. Yet, when they are carefully targeted, sanctions can offer an important option for pressurising conflict actors, including armed groups, to change their approach.

5 SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATIVE GOVERNANCE EFFORTS

Of course, governance reforms are explicitly part of the stabilisation and statebuilding policy agenda. However, this policy agenda is typically coloured by the imperatives provided by counter-terrorism to boost a counterinsurgency or a new political order with external aid or military support. Likewise, the international discourse on peacebuilding and statebuilding enshrines ownership of processes by nation states in a way that tends towards the exclusion of other actors and far-reaching reforms in practice. The 'mainstream' approach to all three (counter-terrorism, stabilisation and statebuilding) thus leans visibly towards aligning behind and reinforcing the capacities of the state as it is (including states recently installed by military action) rather than prioritising wider social empowerment models that seek to transform the state from within and foster lasting and positive peace.

Peace indeed cannot be built in the absence of institutional capacities, but these capacities also need to be oriented towards beneficial purposes. This makes the objective of achieving wider reform and the transformation of state-society relations (widely acknowledged in policy discourse but rarely pursued effectively in practice) absolutely central to efforts to respond to conflicts labelled as 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism'. After all, such conflicts often emerge from the grievances and injustice that are created by poor governance, and prove difficult to manage in the wake of institutional breakdown and civic unrest.

Past research by Saferworld[11] suggests that to support lasting peace, transformative governance reform should include significant efforts to:

- Ensure inclusive political dialogue and decision making

- Provide people-focused security and justice

- Reduce corruption and bribery in conflict-sensitive ways

- Offer fair access to social services, resources and opportunities to all social groups

- Resolve grievances and disputes constructively

An example of the shift that is needed can be found in the security sector. While much development work is oriented to social empowerment and community driven models, when it comes to responding to conflict and insecurity, bottom-up approaches are not pursued on the scale that is required to achieve a transformative effect. Thus 'Security Sector Reform' and efforts to negotiate peace settlements tend to be relatively top-down and exclusionary. Therefore, to a certain extent, they tend to lack the legitimacy to be both successful and sustainable. Application of 'community security' approaches at a greater scale has the potential to deliver a different kind of result.[12]

6 BRINGING A PEACEBUILDING PERSPECTIVE TO THE FORE IN PUBLIC DEBATE

One of the challenges inherent in trying to move beyond mainstream approaches is the way in which problems of 'rogue regimes', 'terrorism', 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' and relevant responses are presented in public debate. Leaders, journalists and news outlets are in some ways responsible for establishing prevailing notions of enmity, while at the same time public interest and public opinion has a role in shaping and underpinning policy directions that leaders come under pressure to adopt. Thus the success of peace efforts partly depends on much more systematic questioning of the fault-lines of conflict, the prevailing definitions of the enemy, and the impacts of potential policy responses. Demonising particular enemies too often serves as 'cover' for those claiming to confront them; but those making these claims may not only be failing to confront these enemies but even actively reinforcing them in various ways.

In many contexts, the declaration of a 'war on terror' remains a convenient banner to call for public unity in support of a common enemy, bolstering the power base of political leaders. When the status of an 'enemy' has been well established in public discourse, this seems to lead to journalistic failures to question the tactics to be used, the allies to be supported, and the coherence of longer term strategies.

A further problem is that, especially within conflict-affected contexts, those who oppose an officially-approved persecution or question the approved 'fault-lines' in a conflict, risk themselves being labelled as 'enemies', 'terrorists' and so on—and sometimes face intimidation, violence or prosecution as a result. This affects the willingness to speak out not only of journalists, the public and local activists but also international aid agencies and multilateral bodies. Particular definitions of the enemy have often been 'policed' in this way, and those who are in a position to question these definitions have a particular responsibility to do so.

While politicians, diplomats and human rights organisations tend to remain vigilant and critical regarding human rights in conflict situations, much more systematic efforts are needed to question the definitions of enmity that create—and recreate—mass violence, as well as to challenge the methods that are justified through this discourse at different levels.

CONCLUSION

This paper has offered a summary of constructive alternatives to the counter-terrorism paradigm and to some of the approaches taken to stabilisation and statebuilding under the influence of this paradigm. Alongside these, it is important to mention one further option, noting: that in some cases 'terrorist' atrocities frequently produce a sense of revulsion even among those the terrorists claim to represent; that if conflict resolution demands reform (as suggested above), the best way to encourage this may in some circumstances be not to provide support to the current leadership and institutions in conflict-affected contexts; and that international actors may not be able to influence the dynamics of each and every conflict effectively. Given these points, in some contexts choosing not to engage should be considered a valid option.

These issues will be discussed in more detail in Saferworld's forthcoming research studies on constructive alternatives to counter-terrorism in a range of different country contexts.

NOTES

1. Bryden M, 'Somalia Redux', (CSIS, August 2013), pp 9-10, citing M Bryden et al, ''Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1811 (2008)', (New York, UN Security Council, 10 Dec 2008), p.12.

2. Hills, Alice, 'Fear and Loathing in Falluja', Armed Forces and Society, 32 (2006), 623-639; Barnard A, 'Death toll near 500 in Fallujah, Baghdad', Boston Globe, 22 April 2004; Dodge, Toby, testimony to US Committee on Foreign Relations on 'The Iraq Transition' (20 April 2004).

3. The words are those of Major General Michael Flynn, United States' deputy chief of staff for intelligence in Afghanistan: see Flynn, Major Gen. Michael, Captain Matt Pottinger and Paul Batchelor, 'Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan', Center for a New American Security, Washington DC (2010), p.8.

4. Wilder, Andrew, 'A "weapons system" based on wishful thinking', Boston Globe (16 September 2009); Thompson, Edwina, Report on Wilton Park Conference 1022, Winning 'Hearts and Minds' in Afghanistan: Assessing the Effectiveness of Development Aid in COIN Operations, 11–14 March 2010 (1 April 2010).

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6. Sheehan, Neil, A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam, New York: Picador (1990); Bilton, Michael and Kevin Sim, Four Hours in My Lai, London: Penguin (1993); Hunt, David, 'Dirty Wars: Counterinsurgency in Vietnam and Today', Politics and Society, 38:1 (2010), pp. 35–66, p.36; Corson, William, The Betrayal, New York: W. W. Norton and Co. (1968).

7. Berman, Bruce, 'Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence: Colonial Administration and the Origins of the "Mau Mau" Emergency in Kenya', British Journal of Political Science, 6:2 (April 1976), pp. 143–75.

8. See, for example, D Keen, When 'Do No Harm' Hurts, 6 November 2013.

9. Just as, according to Osama Bin Laden's son it was 'my father's dream was to get America to invade Afghanistan' (BBC2, Afghanistan: War Without End (22 June 2011), it is clear that Islamic State militants intended to provoke further direct military action in Iraq by Western powers through their beheading of Western citizens in 2014.

10. See Greenhill, Kelly and Soloman Major, 'The Perils of Profiling: Civil War Spoilers and the Collapse of Intrastate Peace Accords', International Security, 31, 3, (winter 2006/7), 7-40; Stedman, Stephen, 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes', International Security, 22, 2, 5-53 (1997).

11. See Saferworld, 'Addressing conflict and violence from 2015 – Issue Paper 2: What are the key challenges? What works in addressing them?', (November 2012).

12. See Saferworld, 'Community Security Handbook', (Saferworld, 2014).