War Against Terrorism: Fighting the Military Battle, Losing the Psychological War

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Part I: Introduction

> Nothing is easier than to denounce the evil doer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him. — Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky

Just a day after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, United States President George W Bush promised America that it would win the war against terrorism, a 'monumental struggle of good versus evil' (Bush 2001a). The US government's desire for retributive justice[1] was clear: '[j]ustice demands that those who helped or harbored the terrorists be punished — and punished severely. The enormity of their evil demands it' (Bush 2001b). On 7 October 2001, the Bush administration sent allied troops into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban and destroy the base of al-Qa'ida, the organisation thought responsible for the terrorist attacks, with the ostensible intention of preventing and deterring terrorism. Early 2003 saw US-led military operations in Iraq, also prosecuted under the umbrella of counter-terrorism. However, many have queried whether military retaliation is in fact likely to reduce the incidence of terrorism (see e.g. Price 2002). Terrorism, it has been said, is a species of 'psychological warfare' (Post 2001a, 2002; Sprinzak 2000:66, 72–3), which cannot be conquered with bombs and missiles. In order to comprehend the effect a military reaction is likely to have, an understanding of the psychological processes involved in terrorism is needed. With this in mind, this paper will seek to assess the effectiveness of military retaliation as a policy whose goal is to reduce the incidence or likelihood of Islamic-referenced terrorism.

The paper will begin by providing a conceptual background to terrorism, seeking to define the phenomenon and create a profile of radical Islamic terrorist recruits. It will proceed to examine three major psychological processes whereby an ordinary individual comes to engage in terrorist acts: recruitment; remaining in and indoctrination into the group; and the process of moral disengagement enabling an individual to commit violent acts, including killings. Anticipating that any military 'war on terror' will affect the psyche

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1 Retributive justice, a well-established idea in criminology, refers to the notion that whoever commits a crime must be punished in accordance with their desert and the punishment must be 'equal' to the crime (Hall 1996:397–8).

of millions of civilians and potential terrorists, it will then examine how military action will impact on the processes involved in terrorism, and whether it is indeed likely to reduce the probability of terrorism.

Part II: Background to Terrorism

a) The Intractable Problem of Defining Terrorism

There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. As Gearty (1996:xi) pointed out, '[t]errorism is a subject rife with moral certainty but shrouded in terminological confusion'. Most definitions of terrorism are said to be too wide and ultimately question-begging. To take an example, Primoratz (1996:23) suggested that terrorism is 'the deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating them, or other people, into a course of action they would otherwise not take'. While this definition is narrower than many, it still begs the question: who are innocent people? Although Primoratz attempted an objective definition of innocence,[2] one is nonetheless left to conclude that if we disapprove of the subversive's violent goals, we will insist that his or her victims are innocent or at least not plausibly guilty. If we approve of the aims, our minds will be more open concerning the moral status of any victims. Thus, as Gearty (1996:xiv) noted, even Primoratz's more narrow definition is more question-begging than conclusive.

It is often said that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'. While one state might label a rebel group 'terrorist', the group and its supporters would undoubtedly view themselves as freedom fighters. The protean nature of the term generally enables states, on the other hand, to avoid the appellation 'terrorist' for violent actions which they carry out or support. Having said this, many critics view certain foreign policy initiatives or practices as 'terrorism'. For example, while the US considers itself to be fighting for freedom and democracy, some (e.g. Chomsky 2003:20) have suggested the US and other major powers engage in terrorism, and that their current 'counter-terrorist' operations are no exception. In the words of Chomsky (2003:50), 'the current leader of the War on Terror is the only state in the world that's been condemned by the World Court for international terrorism and that has vetoed a resolution calling on all states to observe international law'. Further, according to Chomsky (2003:29), 'the entire commentary and discussion of the so-called War on Terror is pure hypocrisy, virtually without exception'. The US, on the other hand, alleges that its opposition supports or engages in terrorism.[3]

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2 By innocence, Primoratz (1996:19) suggested that the victims 'are not responsible, in any *plausible* sense of the word, for the (real or alleged) injustice, suffering, deprivation, which is inflicted on [the terrorist] or on any of those whose cause he has embraced, and which is so enormous that it could justify a violent response' (emphasis added).

3 For example, in addition to condemning recognised terrorist groups, the US also labelled Saddam Hussein a terrorist for invading Kuwait (see Gearty 1996:xiv), and some Palestinian groups have been labelled terrorists simply for opposing the US-sponsored peace process, despite renouncing terrorism and limiting their acts to legitimate targets. Successive US administrations have been criticized for using a narrow definition of terrorism to condemn individuals or small groups of irregulars, while ignoring the killings of equally innocent people by certain states (Zunes 2001:2).

Terrorism is a pejorative term which few organisations would be willing to adopt, for it may destroy the vital illusion that they represent the forces of good, fighting for freedom against evil[4] (Bandura 1998:171). The breadth of the new Australian terrorism legislation allows for such subjective judgments to be made on the part of those investigating and adjudicating.[5] These judgments are, of course, subject to judicial testing.

The fact that some violent acts against civilian targets, apparently committed with the intent of causing fear to achieve a certain goal, have attracted the appellation 'terrorist', while others have not, demonstrates the extent to which the search for a coherent definition of terrorism is removed from political reality (Gearty 1996:xiv). Ferracuti (1982:131) suggested, '[c]ynically, but perhaps truly, terrorism could be defined as "what the other person does." What we, or the state, do is "anti- or counter-terrorism", but obviously the positions can be reversed by shifting sides, or simply by the flow of history' (see also Chomsky 2003:61). In seeking to understand terrorism, it may be preferable to embrace the flexibility and value-laden elements of the word and accept the concept of terrorism which prevails in current affairs: 'a rhetorical insult whose content is determined not by any *a priori* academic test but rather by those wielding power in society' (Gearty 1996:xiv).

This paper, concerned as it is with policies purportedly formulated to counter the type of violence embodied in the September 11 attacks, will deal predominantly with Islamic extremist groups adopting such violence as their main form of struggle.[6] While it is difficult to gauge trends in terrorism,[7] it is apparent from events such as September 11 and recent terrorist attacks worldwide that radical Islamic terrorists are responsible for a large part of terrorist-related fatalities in the early twenty-first century (see e.g. US State Department 2002). Much military action is undertaken in response to terrorism, cases in point being the current US-led war on terrorism and Israeli responses to the violent attacks by Palestinian militia groups.

b) The Relevance of Criminology to Terrorism

Given the highly political or ideological nature of most terrorism,[8] it could be argued that terrorism is not within the province of criminology. As Laqueur (1999:93) observed, one might question whether 'terrorist violence .. was a political phenomenon and thus essentially different from ordinary crime or psychopathology'. While this question might be legitimate in relation to certain types of terrorism in the past, it does not relate to more

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4 This may in turn mobilise support against them and hinder processes of justification of violent actions.

5 A terrorist act is defined in section 100.1(1) of the Commonwealth *Criminal Code* as an action or threat of action with the following three elements: (i) the action causes serious physical harm to a person or property, causes death, endangers a person's life, creates a serious risk to public health or safety, or seriously interferes with an electronic system; and (ii) the action is done or the threat made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause; and (iii) the action is done or threat is made with the intention of coercing, or influencing by intimidation, a Commonwealth, State, or foreign government, or intimidating the public or a section of the public.

6 Radical or quasi-religious terrorism, with its non-secular goals and framework, is seen by many to be the 'new terrorism' of the late twentieth century, representing a revival of religion as 'the only acceptable justifications for terror', which belief prevailed until the nineteenth century (Rapoport 1984:659).

7 Difficulties include the problem of defining terrorist acts, methodology of counting terrorist acts, the variables against which terrorism is measured (e.g. logging incidents by location, not perpetrator), and the difficulty in attributing blame to terrorist groups.

8 Contrary to the view that religious, political or ideological reasons drive terrorists. Mini contended that terrorism might have no reasons at all other than terror itself. The approach that links acts to gains is a typical western idea, and present day terrorism is global. Rather, he argued, '[t]error has become an end and not a tool' (2002:87). The accuracy of this assertion will not be assessed herein.

recent manifestations of terrorism (Laqueur 1999:93). In any event, the political or ideological nature of terrorism is not a bar to the applicability and utility of criminology. Rosenfeld contended that criminology is relevant to the aetiology of terrorist violence on the basis that terrorism is 'a form of interpersonal violence'. As criminologists study interpersonal violence, he argued, 'even in the absence of the events of September 11, the burden must be on those who would reject terrorism as an appropriate, if not necessary, subject for criminological theory and research' (Rosenfeld 2002:1). This is, in the view of the author, the correct approach.

Further, as almost all terrorism involves criminal acts, criminological wisdom can certainly be of benefit in reducing terrorism. While 'terrorism' itself has recently been criminalised in many jurisdictions, terrorists are often arrested and tried on 'common' crimes, including murder, assault and weapons charges, as well as mail fraud and illegal financial transactions (Rosenfeld 2002:1). The political or ideological nature of terrorism should not of itself constitute a deterrent to criminologists studying the phenomenon, when they otherwise would examine the crimes it embodies. As Rosenfeld (2002:4) put it, '[t]here is nothing sacred about terrorism'. Indeed, many criminologists view crime itself as a political or ideological construct, with critical criminologists arguing that power is largely reflected in the ability to effectively define certain acts as 'crimes'.

Notwithstanding the potential utility of criminological thought, there is a relative dearth of writing by criminologists in this area, particularly in relation to the causes of terrorism.[9] As terrorism lies on the interface of many academic disciplines, this paper employs not only criminological writings, but also political science and psychology texts in exploring the motivations of terrorists. It should be acknowledged that a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism would require contributions from all these disciplines. A useful understanding and investigation of terrorism challenges us to move beyond artificial confines sometimes associated with each discipline. We must seek to understand terrorism not only as the result of a decision by an individual responding to certain beliefs, attitudes and perhaps inducements, but also as political expression not reduced to a pathologised form of conduct. It is likely that an effective response to terrorism will need to incorporate actions that address various levels of analysis.

c) Profiling Terrorist Recruits

It is generally accepted that it is not possible to construct a single terrorist profile (Hudson 1999:43; Laqueur 1999:38–40, 79–80, 90–97). Moreover, difficulties abound in accessing and interviewing terrorists (Hudson 1999:23), making generalisations dangerous. As Ferracuti (1982:134) warned, '[t]he risk of overgeneralisation and overprediction remains large'. The following profiles reveal the diversity in terrorist recruits.

Research recently carried out on Palestinian suicide terrorists suggests a profile resembling that of the typical violent criminal in Australia (e.g. see Australian National Committee on Violence 1990:64–73, 96–102): mostly male, late teens to early 20s, uneducated, unemployed, and unmarried (Post 2001a; see also Hudson 1999:47) and suffering from low self-esteem (Israeli 1997:106). On the other hand, some of the more senior al-Qa'ida terrorists are older, better educated and hail from affluent backgrounds. For example, Mohammed Atta, the operational leader of September 11, was 33 years old and had received a master's degree from a university in Hamburg (Post 2002). This example poignantly illustrates the potential dangers in an approach that would assume a common terrorist profile.

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9 Criminological study has been undertaken in respect of other aspects of terrorism, e.g. the sentences given to perpetrators of politically-motivated crimes (e.g. Smith & Damphousse 1998).

While in the past it was thought that terrorists were mentally ill or had psychopathic personalities, there is now considerable evidence that terrorists are not discernibly different in psychological terms from the non-terrorist (Hudson 1999:31; Post 1998:379–99; Ferracuti & Bruno 1981; Ferracuti 1982:130; cf Laqueur 1999:93–4). We are clearly not able to dismiss terrorists as simply 'crazy'. We need to examine the particular social, situational, cultural and political processes that are involved in recruiting, 'grooming' and guiding certain individuals to conduct acts that most people most of the time would find unthinkable and unconscionable.

Part III: Pathway to Terrorism

Ross identified five interconnected processes involved in terrorism: joining the group; forming the activity; remaining in the campaign; leading the organisation; and engaging in acts of terrorism (Vanderhoof 2002a). While several of these processes overlap, it is useful to distinguish between the general phases. This paper is predominantly concerned with the recruitment and indoctrination of the 'operators', without whom terrorist groups would have less capability to commit terrorist acts, as opposed to the leaders who formulate the activities and lead the organisation. It will therefore focus on understanding the processes of: (i) joining the terrorist group; (ii) remaining in and being indoctrinated into the campaign; and (iii) engaging in acts of terrorism and the associated process of moral disengagement.

a) Joining a Terrorist Group

Just as there is no single terrorist profile, there is no one motive for joining a terrorist group. Terrorists have many different reasons or motives for their acts. Similarly, researchers have many theories, both culturally and individually focused, for explaining why individuals join terrorist groups.

The urge to dedicate oneself to a cause, a leader, an ideology, is thought to be a common motive in ideological terrorists (Ferracuti 1982:136). Ferracuti suggested that this urge can be a response to anomie,[10] or an existential vacuum, which may drive other alienated individuals to drifting or to entering the drug culture. This may explain terrorism's appeal for affluent or middle-class youth faced with value conflicts (Ferracuti 1982:136),[11] as is apparently the case with many al-Qa'ida terrorist recruits including Mohammed Atta and others involved in September 11 (Post 2001b).

One's culture may greatly influence the urge to dedicate oneself to a terrorist cause or leader. In this respect, it is instructive to examine the social circumstances of Palestinian 'suicide bombers'. Just as many communities glorify war and teach children at an early age to view military activity as prestigious and glamorous (e.g. Wessels 1997), so too some societies or religious traditions cultivate a culture that venerates martyrdom. Dr Ramadan Shalah, secretary-general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, described martyrdom as a weapon 'with which to repel killing and thuggery against us. It is easy and costs us only our lives ... human bombs cannot be defeated, not even by nuclear bombs' (Sprinzak 2000:68). When faced with suppression by an overwhelmingly greater military power, terrorism is

10 Ferracuti and Bruno (1981:211) describe anomie as 'a situation characterised by increasingly sharp dissent between the masses and state institutions, within a context of loose integration marked by the disappearance of basic values'. Alienation is seen to be a common consequence of anomie.

11 This may be particularly salient with respect to Islamic youth who are confronted by radical or fundamental Islamic ideas from, for example, religious leaders, while they have been raised with more liberal viewpoints.

seen by some as 'the poor man's atom bomb', and martyrdom helps to make sense of, and legitimise, the use of terrorism by suicide bombers (Kushner 1996:331). Martyrdom holds much appeal in sectors of the Palestinian community (see generally Kushner 1996; Hudson 1999:126–8). In the words of the father of a Palestinian suicide bomber, '[t]o put it simply, we love martyrdom, they (Israelis) love life' (Goldenberg 2002). The association of Palestinian religious scholars gave its sanction to 'martyrdom operations' in 2001, saying that suicide attacks were a legitimate part of jihad (Goldenberg 2002).

Another illustration that culture plays an important part in recruitment is the fact that al-Qa'ida and other Islamist[12] groups are thought to recruit operatives from amongst young men at mosques who have an urge to defend Islam from perceived attacks worldwide. Their perception that Islam is being persecuted, and the ensuing urge to defend it, is cultivated in a potential recruit's socio-political and cultural environment, including by the media, teachers and political and religious leaders[13] (Post 2001c). This appeal to the higher loyalties of the Islamic faith is, like other techniques of neutralisation, conducive to the commission of violent acts (see generally Sykes & Matza 1957).

Interviews conducted by Post and Sprinzak (Post et al 2003:173) in 2001 with 35 incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists[14] indicated that social environment was the major influence for Middle Eastern youths joining a terrorist group. As one of the people they interviewed remarked, '[e]veryone was joining' (Post et al 2003:173). Post et al (2003) suggested that the desire to belong to a group which is so admired, and the sense of self-importance and companionship it entails, motivates most recruits to join a terrorist group (see also Hudson 1999:13). Often, terrorists come from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds, and are isolated and alienated young people for whom the road to terrorism can seem to offer an heroic way out of an otherwise bleak future (Post et al 2003:175; Post 2001a). Many incarcerated Islamic terrorists grew up in villages or refugee camps that were extremely active in the Islamist struggle (Post et al 2003:173). That refugee camps are fertile ground for terrorist recruits is hardly surprising. As Braithwaite (2002) observed, many refugees would have good reason for feeling they are victims of profound injustice, and sentiments of hopelessness and anger within the camps spur people towards joining terrorist groups (see Kushner 1996:332).

The impulse to avenge an injustice that has been inflicted on a person or his or her loved ones, it appears, drives people to join extremist groups in the hope that they might achieve vengeance. In this respect, it is instructive that Palestinian suicide terrorists have often had at least one relative or close friend who has been killed, wounded or gaoled during Israeli occupation (Kushner 1996:332; Hudson 1999:126–7).

Merari (1998:206) argued that people are motivated by purely personal reasons to join terrorist groups, suggesting that culture and religion serve merely as a pretext for terrorist suicide, rather than the real drive. He said that like any other suicide, terrorist suicide 'is basically an individual rather than a group phenomenon: it is done by people who wish to die for personal reasons' (Merari 1986:206). However, while personal reasons may be the motivator for becoming a suicide bomber, or indeed a terrorist, the author suggests that

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12 Islamism refers to political Islam, broadly defined as the belief that the Qur'an and the *Hadith* (Traditions of the Prophet's Life) have an important role in the way society and governance should be ordered (Fuller 2002:49)

13 Post (2001c) focuses on the role of the mosque in providing a political education for individuals.

14 Post and Sprinzak interviewed 35 terrorists who were held in Israeli and Palestinian prisons. Twenty of the terrorists belonged to radical Islamic terrorist groups; Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, and were responsible for much anti-Israeli terrorism carried out over the preceding decade.

social and cultural circumstances can inform those reasons. Clearly the acceptability of any behaviour is informed by cultural beliefs and in particular the attitudes and beliefs of the immediate peer group and family. In this regard, the necessary cognitive 'equipment' for a terrorist includes the facilitating beliefs in the value of violent action, martyrdom and political or ideological action. These beliefs are transmitted through social groups that the individual identifies with and wishes to be accepted by. It is widely understood and accepted that these primary socialising groups might be the family, a religious group and significant others with whom the individual associates. As will be discussed further, it is instructive how, in preparing terrorists for their actions their supporters amplify the likely influence of those beliefs which glorify and support the benefits of the terrorist act. This is not dissimilar to the tactics used by the military to prepare soldiers for combat.

b) Remaining In, and Indoctrination Into, the Terrorist Campaign

Once in the terrorist campaign, it is necessary that new recruits, to be effective, remain in the campaign for long enough to be indoctrinated into the group. Terrorist groups are thought to use a variety of mutually reinforcing techniques to achieve this.

The belief that by fulfilling their assigned mission terrorists will achieve divine glory serves as an incentive to remain in the group. According to Merari (1998:199–200), suicide bombers undergo a two-step process of indoctrination. They are convinced of the importance of the cause and of the means necessary for its implementation, and then are blessed shortly before the time of the suicide mission and indoctrinated to believe that by carrying out a suicide bombing, they will find an honoured place in the corridor of martyrs (Post 2001a).

Peer pressure, group solidarity and the psychology of group dynamics help to pressure an individual member to remain in the terrorist group (Hudson 1999:36). Indeed, members of some groups which carry out suicide bombings pressure their new recruits into remaining in the group by never leaving their sides for the days preceding the bombing, giving them no opportunity to back down from their fatal choice (Post 2001a). Moreover, terrorists tend to submerge their own identities into the group (Hudson 1999:36; Post et al 2003:176). Many recruits start to resemble cult members, mentally isolated from their families and friends (Kushner 1996:333). Al-Qa'ida, Hamas and other Islamic groups are thought to use cult-like techniques such as long hours of ideological and physical training, and isolation from the outside world (Hudson 1999:127) to reduce resistance to the group's message and compel conformity and loyalty (Singer 1995:64–69).

Ferracuti favoured a subcultural approach to explaining terrorist groups. He argued that terrorists try to establish their own value systems and subcultures in which they learn to use violence (Ferracuti 1982; see further Wolfgang & Ferracuti 1967). Once integrated into the group, members can begin the process of moral disengagement which enables them to carry out heinous acts of violence.

c) The Terrorist Act: Moral Disengagement

The September 2001 terrorist attacks and the more recent bombings in Bali, generally caused people in the western world to shudder in horror and disbelief and ask: 'how could anyone do such a thing?'

Bandura suggested that the answer lies in mechanisms of moral disengagement. He said that terrorists must undergo 'intensive psychological training in moral disengagement ... to create the capacity to kill innocent human beings as a way of toppling rulers or regimes or of accomplishing other goals' (Bandura 1998:163). Moral disengagement serves to enable

individuals to engage in inhumane conduct from which they normally would refrain as it would violate their moral standards and bring self-condemnation. Bandura (1998:161) proposed that moral disengagement extricates moral reactions from conduct. These closely interlinked mechanisms of moral disengagement include *inter alia* reconstruing conduct as serving moral purposes, euphemistic labelling, obscuring personal agency in detrimental activities, or blaming and dehumanising the victims. These processes will be discussed in some detail as they are particularly relevant to understanding how terrorists are recruited and supported.

(i) Moral justification

Individuals are able to overcome the normal inhibitions against killing if they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions (Bandura 1998:163). By reconstruing destructive conduct to portray it as being in the service of moral purposes, the behaviour becomes more than personally and socially acceptable, it becomes honourable and perhaps even mandatory. Indeed, through moral sanction of violent means, people see themselves as 'fighting ruthless oppressors who have an unquenchable appetite for conquest, protecting their cherished values and way of life, preserving world peace, (and) saving humanity from subjugation to an evil ideology' (Bandura 1998:164). The well-reported statements of the Bali bombers at their respective trials reveal these beliefs quite directly.

Ferracuti (1982:138) suggested that terrorists live in a state of fantasy war, in which they represent the forces of good fighting an evil aggressor. 'Cosmic warfare' between the forces of good and evil is another description for the struggle in which terrorists perceive themselves (Young 2002). Young (2002) contended that fundamentalist terrorists believe they are 'engaged in a conflict with enemies whose secularist policies and beliefs seem inimical to religion itself'.[15] These theories find resonance in the observation that much terrorism is pursued in the name of *jihad,* whose modern interpretation entails the struggle for justice or Islam, carried out in self-defence against persecution, aggression or oppression (Wuthnow 1998:425–426).

It is apparent from Osama bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa* (religious ruling) that destruction of Americans is portrayed as a moral duty:

> The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies — civilians and military — is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Asqa Mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim...

The language used in this *fatwa* intimates that the ideological duty is justified because it responds to a threat to Muslims. Justifications for violence are most easily found when the act is construed as a means of defending oneself or as direct revenge for an act of violence visited upon someone the potential terrorist wishes to venerate or defend.

The moral glorification of killing is often facilitated by reference to authorities that are supernatural, cosmic and otherworldly. Allowing a person to swim in such an alternate reality makes actions that seem bizarre and wrong in this world sensible and meaningful in

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15 This belief (and the associated moral justification) is not necessarily limited to Islamic fundamentalists. Ali (2002:281) argued that the 'war against terror' itself involves a clash of fundamentalisms, Islamic versus American imperial, American imperialism being the 'mother of all fundamentalisms'. In this respect, many readers will be struck by how aptly the elements of moral disengagement discussed herein accord with the rhetoric and stance of the countries engaged (particularly the US) in the war on terror. I am grateful for the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer on this point.

the alternate world. Consider, for example, how cults can persuade members to commit suicide, the most notable example being the 1978 Jonestown tragedy, another being that which took place at Waco in 1993. These events of mass violence depended on the use of techniques of indoctrination and isolation not unlike those used in training terrorists. They also share some similarity to the psychic worlds into which violent paranoid schizophrenics drift, where their actions are viewed as necessary against forces construed as all-powerful and evil.

(ii) Euphemistic labelling

Because language not only reflects but also shapes the way we are able to construct reality, euphemistic labelling can serve as a mechanism of disengagement from the repulsion normally evoked by certain acts. 'Through convoluted verbiage, destructive conduct is made benign and people who engage in it are relieved of a sense of personal agency' (Bandura 1998:170).

The interviews conducted by Post and Sprinzak (Post et al 2003) with imprisoned Middle Eastern terrorists revealed the use of euphemisms. When asked to explain his attitude toward suicide, one terrorist took offence at the term 'suicide', stating '[t]his is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, reflects mental weakness. This is *istishad*' (Post et al 2003:179). *Istishad* is martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah. In the same study (Post et al 2003:179), when asked how they could justify murdering innocent victims, another interviewee responded with indignation:

> I am not a murderer. A murderer is someone with a psychological problem; armed actions have a goal ... [T]he group doesn't do it because it wants to kill civilians, but because the *jihad* must go on.

The language adopted in these responses -- such as '*istishad*', 'armed actions' and '*jihad*' — lends an aura of honour and piety to an otherwise reprehensible act. The same processes are used by those engaging in genocide (where the genocidal acts are seen as 'ethnic cleansing'), espionage agents (not a killing but a 'liquidation') and underworld killers (not a killing but a 'hit' or a 'whack').

(iii) Displacement of responsibility

Obscuring or distorting the relationship between actions and the effects they cause is another technique of dissociation. People behave in injurious ways they might normally renounce if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility for the consequences of their conduct (Bandura 1998:173). Under circumstances of displaced responsibility, people view their actions as springing from the dictates of authorities rather than from their own volition.[16] Because they are not the actual agents of their actions, self-prohibiting reactions are not activated. Displacement of responsibility also diminishes social concern over the well-being of people mistreated by others (Bandura 1998:173).

For the religious terrorist, violence is said to be first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative, conveyed by sacred text or imparted via clerical authorities claiming to speak for the divine (Hoffman 1998–1999). For example, it is apparently not bin Laden who has ordered Muslims to kill all Americans, but rather God for whom bin Laden speaks with authority. His 1998 *fatwa* demonstrates this:

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16 Thus, this mechanism resembles Sykes and Matza's (1957:664–670) technique of denying responsibility.

> We, with God's help — call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it …

Post (2001a) notes that there is not an action that bin Laden orders that is not couched and justified in language from the Qur'an.

Displacement of responsibility from oneself to the Islamic faith is apparent from interviews with incarcerated terrorists. In particular, *jihad* is often invoked as a pretext for violent acts. As one former terrorist commander of anti-Israeli suicide bombers said in 2001, '[a] martyrdom operation is the highest level of *jihad*, and highlights the depth of our faith. The bombers are holy fighters who carry out one of the more important articles of faith' (Post et al 2003:179).

(iv) Dehumanisation

Dehumanisation of people is perhaps the most fundamental psychological preparation for killing; it allows us to overcome the inhibitions against harming others that most societies inculcate at an early age. Bandura (1998:180–182) discusses at some length the way that the processes of dehumanisation facilitate and allow violence. The strength of self-censuring reactions to violent conduct depends in part upon how the perpetrator views the people toward whom the harmful behaviour is directed. It is more difficult to mistreat humanised or personalised persons without risking self-condemnation (Bandura 1998:182). By divesting people of human qualities, self-sanctions against cruel conduct can be disengaged or dulled (Bandura 1998:180). Once dehumanised, the potential victims are viewed as subhuman, insensitive to maltreatment, and therefore capable of being influenced only by harsh methods.[17] The same processes as described here are routinely used by the military to prepare young men to kill.

Religious terrorists often describe persons outside their community in denigrating terms such as 'infidels', 'non-believers' and 'mud people' (Hoffman 1998–1999). Osama bin Laden's *fatwa* (1998) reveals the use of dehumanisation, referring to Americans as 'Satan's US troops' and US allies as 'the devil's supporters'. As will be seen in the next part, military warfare tends to polarise opinion against the enemy, facilitating this and other mechanisms of disengagement.

Part IV: The Effectiveness of Military Retaliation as a Policy to Reduce Terrorism

In order to maximise the likelihood of reducing terrorism, a counter-terrorist policy should seek to impede each of the psychological processes involved in terrorism. Part IV will assess the effectiveness of military retaliation as a counter-terrorism policy in terms of those categories mentioned above: joining a terrorist group; remaining in and indoctrination into the terrorist campaign; and morally disengaging so as to justify carrying out terrorist acts.

a) A Military Reaction: Facilitating Recruitment

Hindering recruitment is a particularly important aspect of present day counter-terrorist policy. The worldwide appeal of Islam means that leaders of religious terrorist groups can recruit followers from all over the world and can strike back anywhere on the globe (Howard 2002:12; Gunaratna 2002; cf Thayer 2003:20).[18] In addition, given the widespread concern that appropriately trained individuals[19] may be capable of creating, and

17 This mechanism entails the victim being denied, as in Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralisation technique.

terrorist groups capable of using, weapons of mass destruction, it is vital that counter-terrorist policy reduces, rather than increases, the incentive of such individuals to join terrorist groups.

Military reactions to terrorism are likely to generate support for the terrorists' cause, strengthening sentiment against the attacker and making it easier for the terrorist leaders to recruit new members and sympathisers. As Braithwaite (2002) noted, military remedies such as bombing in Afghanistan are dangerous in the sense that they create new cycles of people being hurt and afflicted by injustice, which in turn facilitates recruitment. History is replete with examples whereby an occupying force acting with increased force against a subjugated people mobilised resistance. Among the many recent examples are the ruptures in the Balkans over the past decade or so, and the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Recent re-examinations of the psychological effects of the mass bombing campaigns waged against Nazi Germany in the Second World War suggest that rather than demoralising the populace as intended, they may have had the opposite effect; strengthening social solidarity, building support for Hitler and strengthening resistance against an identifiable enemy (Lindqvist 2003).

Finding themselves, or their beliefs, under threat, people who have experienced war (either directly or by identification with the victims) are more likely to be driven to unite with other targets of the warfare (including terrorists), against a shared enemy. This facilitates the recruitment of terrorists, as it provides a means of forging a personal connection to the terrorist group (Hudson 1999:25). An analogy may be drawn with the recruitment of child soldiers. In war-stricken states such as Chechnya and Ethiopia, families have encouraged sons to join opposition military groups as a means of avenging the deaths of family members (Wessels 1997).

In many countries wracked by ethnic, political or religious violence in the developing world, such as Algeria, Colombia and Sri Lanka and the Middle East, new members of terrorist organisations are recruited at younger and younger ages (Hudson 1999:25,48). Hudson (1999:48) suggested that adolescents and preteens in these countries are often receptive to terrorist recruitment because they have witnessed killings first-hand and thus see violence as the only way to deal with grievances and problems. As Wessels (1997) observed, '[p]sychologically, people who have been victims of violence are at great risk of becoming perpetrators of violence'. Sadly, the pliability and obedience of children make them ideal subjects for psychological manipulation by commanders in the government armed forces and militias.[20]

18 Gunaratna has documented what he calls the 'global reach' of al-Qa'ida (2002:1; cf Thayer 2003). He described the organisation as 'an unprecedented transnational phenomenon' (Gunaratna 2002:54), which 'can draw on the support of some six to seven million radical Muslims worldwide, of which 120 000 are willing to take up arms' (Gunaratna 2002:95). Moreover, al-Qa'ida has 'a broad-based ideology, a novel structure, a robust capacity for regeneration and a very diverse membership that cuts across ethnic, class and national boundaries' (Gunaratna 2002:54), making it all the more vital that recruitment is prevented or at least hindered.

19 The case of the Aum Shinri Kyo group releasing sarin gas in the Tokyo underground train network in 1995 demonstrates the ability of such groups to create weapons of mass destruction. It is said that people with rudimentary scientific understanding could create crude weapons of mass destruction (Hoffman 1998–1999; Laqueur 1999:5, 59–78). According to Laqueur (1999:59–60), '[e]xperts agree that the technical knowledge and experience needed to produce a chemical weapon is ... probably on the level of a moderately conscientious graduate student'.

20 For an outline of the widespread use of child soldiers in combat, see Garcia (2003). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing the analogy between the recruitment of terrorists and child soldiers.

War is unlikely to prove an effective counter-terrorist policy in terms of reducing recruitment of new terrorists. Rather, as Vanderhoof (2002b) commented, reflecting a common insight, 'for every one (terrorist) we kill or confine, we create another hundred to take their place'.

b) A Military Reaction: Engendering Group Cohesion

Individuals are likely to remain in a terrorist campaign where there are strong bonds holding them together. Group cohesion increases or decreases depending on the degree of outside danger perceived to be facing a terrorist group (Hudson 1999:36). Post (quoted in Hudson 1999:67) explained that,

> [w]hen the autonomous cell comes under external threat, the external danger has the consequence of reducing internal divisiveness and uniting the group against the outside enemy. ... Violent societal counteractions reaffirm terrorists' belief that they are persecuted by the enemy, and can transform a tiny band of insignificant persons into a major opponent of society, making their 'fantasy war', to use Ferracuti's apt term, a reality.

Where war is waged in response to terrorism, the group is in supreme danger, both real and perceived, and is likely to band together more strongly, rather than disintegrate. Left to their own devices, on the other hand, Post (1998) suggested these inherently unstable groups might well self-destruct.

The less opposition there is to the terrorist groups within their host society, the less likely it is that strong efforts will be made to disband the group. If, for example, the group is seen to be playing an important role in the fight against evil, there will be less community, religious and government pressure calling for the group's termination. Military responses could well be seen by millions of Muslims as attacks against Islam and by people in many countries as superpower bullying and a violation of a country's sovereignty (Hudson 1999:68). US counter-terrorist military attacks against elusive terrorists might serve only to radicalise large sectors of the Muslim population and further denigrate the US image worldwide. War fosters a psychological divide between 'us' (good), and 'them' (evil). If communities believe that an organisation is fighting for the good of their society against an evil threat, they are likely to support that group and their methods. Consequently, there will be fewer, if any, moral barriers preventing terrorists from engaging in violent methods of protest from which they might desist if community approval were lacking.[21]

A struggle against terrorism is fundamentally a 'battle for hearts and minds' (Howard 2002:10). Terrorists can be successfully destroyed only if public opinion, both at home and abroad, supports the authorities in regarding them as criminals rather than heroes. As Howard noted, without hearts and minds one cannot obtain intelligence, and without intelligence terrorists can never be defeated (2002:10). Further, if a terrorist group can be dissociated from, and lose influence over, the popular masses, the task of authorities in dismantling the organisation will be greatly facilitated (see Bonanate 2002:20).[22]

Where terrorists can provoke the authorities into using military action against them, they will be in a 'win-win' situation: either they will escape to fight another day, or will be defeated and celebrated as martyrs (Howard 2002:10). Therefore there is a distinct logic to a counter-terrorist policy that would avoid making leaders like Osama bin Laden heroes or martyrs for Muslims. Indeed, a retributive eye-for-an-eye policy of striking back for each

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21 The importance of community approval is apparent in the observation that organisations are thought to systematically implement suicide terrorism only if their community approves of its use (Sprinzak 2000).

22 Bonanate (2002:20) observes that the Red Brigades in Italy were defeated not so much because the police force managed to dismantle them, but because 'the fish no longer had the water in which to swim'.

terrorist act might therefore be highly counterproductive when applied by a superpower against Islamic terrorists and their strategic bases (Hudson 1999:68). Using military force against poverty-stricken Islamic nations accused of supporting terrorism such as Afghanistan and Iraq magnifies the perceived injustice, and creates idols of those fighting against the wrongdoer. The killing of innocent and powerless men, women and children provides positive proof for some of the necessity of armed struggle, as well as endless propaganda opportunities for terrorist organisations.[23]

c) A Military Reaction and Moral Disengagement

Bandura proposed that research on the different mechanisms of moral disengagement suggests that it requires conducive social conditions rather than monstrous people to produce heinous deeds. Given appropriate social conditions, 'decent, ordinary people can be led to do extraordinarily cruel things' (Bandura 1998:182). As will be discussed, a military response to terrorism creates conditions conducive to terrorism; where war is a reality, people more readily dissociate and are able to justify injurious behaviour.

War enables people, in particular those from, or who identify with, persecuted communities, to believe in the moral justification of the terrorist cause; that is, fighting to liberate their people from the enemy's destructive grip. Indeed, Howard (2002) argued that the mere declaration of war on terrorists, or on terrorism, accords terrorists a status and dignity that they seek and do not deserve. Rather than isolating terrorists from the rest of the community as criminals, it confers on them a kind of legitimacy as combatants (Howard 2002:8), indeed as heroes. Without this recognition and vindication the 'oxygen' that terrorists need to breathe would be cut off. Moreover, the use of force erodes the moral authority of the perpetrator (Howard 2002:10), shifting sympathy and support towards the 'victim' of the force. By inducing social consensus about the morality of a terrorist enterprise, war, and the declaration thereof, facilitates the relinquishment of personal control for violent acts (Bandura 1998:174).

In addition, where terrorists and supporting countries are targeted by a vastly more powerful nation such as the US, it is easier to feel vindicated in retaliating with violence. As Bandura (1998:164) observed, the task of making violence morally defensible is facilitated when 'utilitarian justifications portray the suffering caused by violent terrorist counterattacks as greatly outweighed by the human suffering inflicted by the foe'. Reinforcing the sense of the evil 'other', war dehumanises members of the enemy as brutal killing machines with scant regard for the suffering they cause (see Fisk 2002).

By imputing blame to one's antagonist, one's own violent conduct can be viewed as compelled by forcible provocation (Bandura 1998:185). In destructive interactions involving a series of reciprocally escalating actions, a party can often select from the chain of events an instance of the adversary's defensive behaviour and view it as the original instigation (Bandura 1998:185). Thus, rather than being viewed by terrorists as retaliatory, military responses to terrorism are likely to be viewed as pre-emptive violence. By blaming others or circumstances, argued Bandura (1998:185), terrorists not only can excuse their own actions, but can even feel self-righteous in the process. An al-Qa'ida statement in October 2001, for example, referred to its violent acts not as terrorist attacks, but as 'the

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23 A link could also be drawn here to Sherman's (1993) defiance theory which suggests that our interventions will often backfire when we take a more aggressive response tactic with offenders who feel that the response is unfair and unjustified. In these circumstances, rather than having a deterrent effect, aggressive interventions result in a feeling of greater indignation and defiance in the offender(s), resulting in more violence, not less.

victim taking revenge' for President Bush's 'crusade' against the Islamic nation (Sulamain Abu Ghaith 2001). Likewise, in the wake of September 11 and as a precursor to the military response that would follow, President Bush stated that the terrorists' 'deadly attacks ... were acts of war' against 'freedom and democracy' (Bush 2001a). As is evident from both statements, belligerent actions can be exploited to justify injurious defensive reactions (Bandura 1998:185), and may even serve to displace responsibility from oneself to the enemy.

Thus, military warfare might be said to create an ideal condition for engaging in acts of terrorism. In situations of warfare, 'every soldier can legitimately engage in murder,' as '[w]ar permits the rule of death over life and the legitimisation of terror' (Ferracuti 1982:136). Rather than deter terrorism,[24] 'to fight terror with terror often spawns new terrorists and provides new justifications for violence that are more likely to escalate terrorism than diminish it' (Bandura 1998:169).

Part V: Conclusion
Fighting Psychological Warfare

> We are all determined to fight terrorism and to do our utmost to banish it from the face of the earth. But the force we use to fight it should always be proportional and focused on the actual terrorists. We cannot and must not fight them by using their own methods — by inflicting indiscriminate violence and terror on innocent civilians, including children.
>
> — Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General

While military retaliation for terrorist acts might fulfil a government's domestic and international political goals, and might serve a cathartic purpose for some direct and indirect victims of terrorism,[25] it is unlikely to deter or decrease the incidence and probability of terrorism.[26] In analysing why a nation might use military force in response to terrorism we clearly need to look beyond its likely or actual effectiveness in stopping or reducing terrorist acts. Indeed, the evidence discussed in this paper must be well-known to those who care to examine the prospects and develop a meaningful strategy. A more relevant performance measure of an effective 'counter-terrorism' campaign is likely found in terms of the approval rating of the political leader, and it is quite reasonable to suppose that this is a conscious or unconscious guiding concern of the decision makers. Further, based on our understanding of what guides crime policy, it is reasonable to suspect that much foreign policy is influenced by principles of populism, which involve exploitation of public fears and alarms. As 'terrorism' and 'counter-terrorism' are such amorphous concepts, they provide fertile grounds for governments to pursue a variety of policies that can be justified as counter-terrorism, regardless of the actual purposes underlying them or indeed their effectiveness in actually reducing terrorist violence.

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24 The notion that military strikes deter terrorism is doubtful at best. History indicates that rather than deterring terrorism, forceful retaliation appears to fuel further terrorist acts. Escalating violence between Libya and the US in the 1980s is a case in point (Lesser 1999:112–113). Further, for religious terrorists, terrorism assumes a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators are consequently undeterred by political, moral or practical constraints (Hoffman 1998–1999).

25 Direct victims are those people physically involved in the terrorist act, while indirect victims are those who are intimidated by the act (Primoratz 1996:19).

26 For an alternative (American) view on the utility and success of military responses to terrorism, see Roche (2002) and Bush (2003).

The psychological processes involved in terrorism are likely to be assisted by military retaliation. Widespread retaliatory death and destruction may arouse a backlash of sympathy for innocent victims and moral condemnation of the brutal nature of the counter-reactions. Moreover, retaliation is likely to stimulate a sense of injustice among its victims. This serves terrorists' purposes, facilitating the recruitment of new terrorists and engendering support. Moreover, the extreme external threat posed by a military reaction to terrorism engenders terrorist group cohesion. Finally, military retaliation assists the process of moral disengagement which individuals undergo in order to commit violent acts; indeed, it may even provide additional justifications for engaging in terrorism. As Braithwaite (2002) said of retributive justice, fighting pain with pain 'often turns out not to be a sensible response, because you get into a vicious spiral of hurt begetting hurt' the same may be said of military retaliation.

The October 2002 terrorist bombing at the Sari Club in Bali demonstrates both Australia's vulnerability to terrorism as well as its apparent status as a terrorist target (see Sheridan 2002). Perhaps more than ever, therefore, it is crucial that Australia formulate prudent counter-terrorism policy. It has been said that the only way to counter terrorism, a form of psychological warfare, is with psychological warfare (Post 2002). Rather than waging military war on terrorism and Islamic nations, non-Muslim governments should focus on forging positive relations with Islamic governments, leaders and media, with a view to hindering the psychological processes whereby an ordinary individual comes to engage in terrorist acts. These Islamic institutions wield informational power over their people and could mould public opinion, firstly to regard terrorists not as heroes but as criminals, thus directing support away from terrorists, and secondly to decrease anti-Western propaganda and so reduce support for the terrorist cause. Moreover, pursuit of a non-military policy, coupled with rhetoric of Islamic religious and political leaders discouraging terrorism, might propel Islamic terrorists to follow the directive of the Qur'an: '[i]f the enemy incline towards peace / Do thou also incline towards peace, and trust / in Allah' (the Holy Qur'an:8:61). Conceivably, through earnest and sustained diplomatic efforts, recruitment of Islamic international terrorists could be hindered and mechanisms of moral disengagement impeded to the point that fewer people are prepared to engage in or support terrorist acts.

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