Embedded Experts in the 'War on Terror'

Embedded journalists have become notorious for partisan reportage in war, generally from the standpoint of the occupying forces. From their perspective, 'terrorist insurgents' undermine US-UK efforts to promote peace, democracy and economic development in Iraq. Less obvious are embedded experts in the wider agenda of 'war on terror'. Unlike journalists, many of those experts are able to conceal their partisan roles behind the façade and legitimacy of academic status. As policy analysts and commentators, they lend credence to scares about terrorist threats leading to mass public casualties in Britain. They reinforce US neoconservative propaganda about a global 'Al Qaeda' organisation, ever ready to carry out military operations.

Such exaggerations create a climate of fear, whereby the public mind links the terrorist 'Other' with vulnerable and oppressed communities resident in Britain, who then appear to threaten the very fabric of civil society (Fekete, 2004). Moreover, any radical resistance within Britain is portrayed as a contagion which will spread to entire communities and lead to violence: For example, 'This kind of terrorism has a kind of epidemiology that tends to lead back to various forms of extremist preaching or mentoring. It is generally practised by young men in their 20s', according to a former British intelligence agent (Black, 2004).

Embedded experts play a propaganda role which reinforces such exaggerations. This role can be illustrated by the 'ricin conspiracy' case, which started with high-profile arrests in north London in the run-up to the US-UK attack on Iraq, and then continued for two years with mass-media scares about the threat of public poisoning. During the trial the jury heard no evidence of useable ricin, nor credible plans to poison anyone, nor an Al Qaeda link. The jury was not persuaded of any conspiracy to murder, though one defendant was convicted of plotting to 'cause disruption, fear and injury'. He had no co-conspirators, except perhaps government Ministers who had encouraged public fears of poison attacks. The most specific evidence against him came from a detainee apparently tortured in Algeria.

Even though the prosecution case collapsed, acquitted defendants were widely portrayed as 'terror suspects'. Terrorism 'expert' Professor Paul Wilkinson commented:

> The police inquiry obviously showed up a much wider network of people who had been plotting to use poison in other parts of Europe. We should take the threat seriously (*Evening Standard*, 14 April 2005, p.5)

Likewise, after the Home Office withdrew a warning over 'dirty bombs', Wilkinson suggested that the warning should be heeded, thereby perpetuating public fear (BBC, 2002).

Such academic terrorism 'experts' – or terrorologists – are deeply embedded in the elite power structure. They conveniently blur distinctions between political dissent, resistance to oppressive regimes, and violent threats to populations. These experts advise governments on counter-terrorism, thus sanitising Western state terror as legitimate techniques for self-defence (George, 1991). Where did these terrorologists come from? How do they gain influence and credibility? How can they be countered?

Counter-insurgency school: 'total war'

In the 1960s and 1970s the 'counter-insurgency school', which dominated academic and policy research on terrorism, aimed at influencing military strategy. Writers such as Richard Clutterbuck and Frank Kitson drew on their extensive experience in counter-insurgency campaigns, which set out to eradicate any resistance to Britain's declining system of direct rule over its colonies. Backing up British rule, Clutterbuck and Kitson faced a sustained resistance which took the forms of both political and armed struggle. In response, their

writings described a 'continuum of insurgency' or 'spectrum of political conflict'. With such language, popular protest, industrial action and terrorism were located on various points along a continuum of political violence.

In his book, *Low Intensity Operations*, Kitson (1971) argued that military forces must recognise that subversion and insurgency were now a part of 'one total war'. Counter-insurgency theory provided a strategic framework for how a state should respond to insurgency, by treating political resistance as a military problem. According to Clutterbuck: 'history has shown that terrorism can be and has been eliminated by a ruthless response to it, for power does ultimately lie with the government and its security forces'.

These military theorists played a hands-on role in suppressing anti-colonial insurgency. Militantly anti-Communist, they shared a view that most anti-colonial resistance was funded by the KGB. They conflated labour disputes, popular protest movements and 'terrorist' activity. In particular they advocated greater support for special military forces. As Kevin Toolis has noted: 'The counter-terrorist solution to revolt was always the same: military repression, assassinations, torture programmes and state-licensed killing squads' (2004: 26).

According to Kitson and Clutterbuck, infiltration of the local population can be achieved by covert operations, normally conducted by special forces rather than regular military units. At the heart of this was the strategy of 'turning.' In the 1950s colonial war in Malaya, 'turning' was described as follows:

> The method of acquiring and using agents was to spy on the guerrilla's contacts with the people, identify who those were in touch with them, persuade a number of those to turn traitor, and so disrupt the rest of the organisation so that the guerrillas were fairly sure to go on relying on at least some of those people that would in the end betray them by giving 'advance precise information' (Clutterbuck, 1973: 212).

This technique would be used to facilitate the further surrender of enemy personnel and the murders of those who allied themselves with the insurgents. Local populations who did not conform could be manipulated by, for example, cutting off their food supplies until they withdrew support for insurgent groups. Influenced this strategy, British colonial campaigns were notoriously brutal, infringing the Geneva conventions (Curtis, 2003) – as does 'low-intensity warfare' today.

St Andrews-RAND nexus: redefining terrorism

Just as journalists who attach themselves to military units are now seen as 'embedded' with the military, the counter-insurgency theorists are embedded as experts in universities and think tanks. Today an analogous network connects academics with militarist agendas, especially through the RAND Corporation, which has held numerous contracts to advise the US military. In 1993 Bruce Hoffman temporarily left RAND to found the Centre for Studies in Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews. Hoffman is currently an Honorary Senior Research Associate at the CSTPV. Brian Jenkins, a Senior Analyst at RAND who founded the corporation's terrorism research programme in 1972, is currently a member of the CSTPV Advisory Council. The relationship is further strengthened through the collaborative establishment of the RAND-St Andrews database of 'international terrorism incidents'.

The RAND-St Andrews nexus skews understandings of 'terrorism', especially through its pivotal role in the peer review and publishing of research. Members of the Centre and of RAND hold key editorial positions on the two foremost academic journals in the field: *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Those journals emphasise political violence directed against states, while largely ignoring violence by states, except those not allied to US or Western European countries – i.e., those described as 'rogue states' by the US government (Burnett and Whyte, 2005).

Embedded experts define 'terrorism' selectively, with a bias towards US-led alliances and against any resistance. According to Prof. Paul Wilkinson, Director of the CSTPV, extra-judicial assassinations by Israel are 'ruthless acts of counter-terror', i.e. self defence (Wilkinson, 2002: 68). Within this perspective the USA, the UK and their client states never carry out 'terrorism'.

In a mid-1990s government inquiry on terrorism, Wilkinson emphasised violence by oppressed groups, while ignoring state violence against them. In particular he problematised trans-national support for 'the weak':

> … almost any prolonged and significant terrorist campaign is likely to have an international dimension: almost every terrorist group tends to look across the borders of the state where it is based, and further afield, not only for weapons, funds, training and safe-haven, but for any ideological, political or diplomatic support it can manage to obtain; sub-state terrorism is typically the weapon of the weak (Wilkinson, 1996: 4).

Such diagnoses justified permanent anti-terrorist legislation to target the weak.

That report led to the Terrorism Act 2000, which broadened the definition of terrorism. It blurred any distinction between political protest and organised violence, as well as any distinction between ideological and material support. This law redefined terrorism to include simply 'the threat' of 'serious damage to property', in ways 'designed to influence the government' for a 'political cause'. Moreover, it banned organisations on the basis that their activities abroad fit that broad definition, and criminalised any 'association' with such organisations in Britain. After the September 11 attacks, the EU Council redefined terrorism in even broader ways. Predictably, such powers have been used to intimidate (and sometimes prosecute) political opponents of oppressive regimes allied to the UK. These developments ominously bring home to Britain the counter-insurgency theory that was deployed in its colonies, and in Northern Ireland during the 1970s, to counter political revolt.

An associate of the CSTPV, Rohan Gunaratna (2003), has offered expert testimony in UK prosecutions for supposed membership in 'terrorist' groups. In the court case of Meziane, several refugees in Leicester were accused of fund-raising for terrorist activities abroad. After Gunaratna claimed that they were Al Qaeda members, he was challenged by the defence to provide documentation, but he did not. Consequently, the allegations were dropped and he was not recalled as a witness. Neither did the prosecution take up his similar offer in another case against refugees for alleged membership of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Nevertheless Gunaratna is still quoted as an expert by journalists.

Embedded in the Iraq occupation

Beyond its academic roles, the RAND-St Andrews nexus has close professional links with key political and corporate players in the 'war against terror'. An important example is Bruce Hoffman, founder member of the CSTPV and currently RAND Corporation's key expert on terrorism. In 2004 he was appointed as senior advisor on counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency to the Constitutional Provisional Authority in Iraq. Hoffman argued that the occupation strategy can be successful only if it adopts a British colonial model of counter-insurgency, comparable to perspectives in Kitson's Low Intensity Operations.

The CSTPV also has institutional ties to the private military industry. One example involves founder member of the CSTPV and current Honorary Senior Research Fellow, David Claridge. In 2001 Claridge established Janusian Security Risk Management Limited, a private military intelligence and security company, as a subsidiary of the political risk firm The Risk Advisory Group. The company claimed to be the first Western security firm with an independent operational office and a country manager permanently based in Iraq. In the press statement accompanying its launch, Janusian acknowledges their link with the CSTPV in this collaboration, which 'includes shared access to research, intelligence sources and

databases, and the expertise of the Centre's staff, as well as the development of sector-specific studies into areas of political risk'.

Like their antecedents in counter-insurgency theory, present-day embedded experts emphasise techniques for total war against both political and military resistance. Hoffman blames the USA's inadequate planning for the 'insurgency' problem in Iraq. According to him, 'a critical window of opportunity was lost because we failed to anticipate the widespread civil disorder and looting that followed the capture of Baghdad'; this key mistake 'breathed life into the insurgency.' In his analysis, the insurgency originated independently of the invasion; it has no link with the occupiers' activities there.

Conclusion: the threat of terrorology

Terrorology is the theoretical arm of counter-insurgency, both at home and abroad. Counter-insurgency theory provides a basis for homogenising all resistance, protest and dissent as 'terror' threats. Subversion is understood as all tactics that attempt to force governments to take a particular course of action (or to refrain from some action). Such a broad definition could include political and economic pressure, strikes, protest marches and counter-hegemonic propaganda.

Moreover, by locating 'terrorist threats' within entire communities, today's counter-insurgency theory legitimises a low-intensity total war at home and abroad. Strategies for 'containing' terrorist threats involve counter-insurgency methods against entire populations, which then conveniently become targets for state persecution in their own right. Its 'anti-terror' weapons include bans on organisations, exemplary prosecutions, stop-and-search powers, freezing the bank accounts of Muslim charities, blackmail against refugees to act as police informers, etc. (CAMPACC, 2003).

Terrorology has become a political basis for anti-democratic agendas built into 'anti-terror' laws. In response, we can systematically challenge terrorology – its neutral façade and claim to independence. Still better, critical voices should be heard in their own right as terrorism experts, emphasising the role of multinational companies and occupation forces (e.g. in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, etc.) as obstacles to a peaceful world. In countering the partisan expertise of terrorology, we all have a role to play – political activists, academics, lawyers, journalists and many others – especially by supporting each other and working together.

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