9. The resources and tactics of terrorism: a view from Russia

Vadim Volkov

I. Introduction

In the two years since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, several states have made huge efforts and allocated significant resources to eliminating international terrorism. Pursuing the goal of destroying terrorist bases, the US-led coalition of states has achieved important military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq. Russia has made military and political progress towards settlement of the Chechen conflict. Israel has overwhelming military superiority in the Middle East region and can boast an impressive list of counter-terrorist operations which eliminated their targets. However, these successes have not resulted in the decline of terrorist activities in the regions concerned, still less worldwide. On the contrary, terrorism has intensified and gained confidence.[1] It has also become more lethal, relying increasingly on suicide bombing and claiming a rapidly multiplying number of military and civilian lives. It is therefore justified to question the adequacy both of the aims and of the means of the war on terrorism. Certain counter-terrorist efforts seem to be producing unintended consequences that outweigh the positive effects. Are counter-terrorist activities and policies well-targeted and well-calculated? Is there a sufficient understanding of terrorism's specific resources, patterns of action and social infrastructure to allow it to be addressed in a systematic way?

  With these questions in view, but without any ambition to provide exhaustive answers, this chapter discusses Russia's experience with international terrorism as a background to understanding the threat. It assesses the extent to which the stock of knowledge about terrorism is confirmed by Russian experience; which views this experience does not support; and what new ideas can be distilled from Russia's treatment of the problem of terrorism. Focused on origins, action patterns and resources of terrorism, the chapter advances the following three main arguments.

  1. States that are now the primary targets of terrorist groups have in the past contributed to creating and mobilizing those groups.
  2. Terrorism is a weak enemy, but weak enemies are more dangerous than strong enemies.

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[1] In Russia, during the period 1997–2002, the number of terrorist acts increased by a factor of 11. Luneev, V., 'Terrorism I organizovannaya prestupnost' [Terrorism and organized crime], *Organizovannaya Prestupnost', Terrorism i Korruptsiya*, no. 2 (2003).

3. The social resources of terrorism are far more important than its technical resources.

II. The dual role of states

The first lesson which Russian experience confirms is both sad and alarming. As the major source of anti-state violence today, terrorism could not have become so strong without state sponsorship in the past. It is important to recognize that certain state policies, as well as the activities of state intelligence services of the kind that are now being mobilized to counter terrorism, have in the past contributed to the creation and support of nascent terrorist networks. The roots of this phenomenon originated in the period of the cold war when, for obvious reasons, direct warfare between the superpowers was not feasible. One of the major forms of the superpower competition was involvement in low-intensity conflicts at the margins of the global interstate confrontation. Tied by the constraints of the nuclear balance and held back by it from any direct challenge, the superpowers and their allies nonetheless provided support to various insurrectionist guerrilla forces in their efforts to limit their opponent's expansion.

The Soviet Union sponsored guerrilla groups in Central America and terrorists in the Middle East. The Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (KGB, or Committee for State Security) provided training and shelter for one of the world's leading terrorists—Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, or 'Carlos the Jackal', who organized the kidnapping of ministers attending the meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)[2] in Vienna, Austria, in 1975. The United States, through its secret services, supported the Afghan and Pakistani mujahedin Islamic guerrilla fighters in the war in Afghanistan in 1970s and in the process also supported Osama bin Laden, who would later become the USA's 'enemy no. 1'. The purely instrumental logic of supporting the enemies of one's enemies, whoever they might be, has also manifested itself in recent local conflicts and had similarly grave consequences. Shamil Basaev, the major Chechen terrorist in Russia, was trained in the breakaway republic of Abkhazia (Georgia) by Russian military instructors and successfully deployed against Georgian troops in the conflict in 1993. The group led by Ruslan Gelaev, another terrorist, who is now hiding in Georgia, was also trained and equipped by the Russian military in Abkhazia in 1993 for the same purpose as Basaev. When the first Chechen war began, in 1995, both turned against Russia.

Terrorism, as the major anti-state force today, could not have become so strong without past state sponsorship. The short-term pragmatism of states, whereby they created and supported outlaw groups to wage low-intensity wars against their opponents, tended to backfire. It fed international terrorism and made the citizens of these and other states the hostages of short-sighted poli-

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[2] On OPEC and for its membership see URL <http://www.opec.org>.

cies. The international business community and civil society need to take a more active stance, in the light of these lessons, in evaluating and possibly even demanding specific constraints on state policies, especially those dealing with military interventions and secret operations. How many would-be international terrorists have initially been discovered, trained and covered by state intelligence services for their own special purposes? The reliability and manageability of such terrorists are very low, and the risks are high.

The October 2002 terrorist hostage crisis at the Dubrovka Theatrical Centre in Moscow provides another example. After the special operation, in which all the terrorists were killed and their identities established, it became clear that two of the participant terrorists were Russian Federal Security Service informers who had a record of previous cooperation and were considered reliable. They had not, however, divulged any information whatsoever to the authorities about the preparation of this major terrorist act.[3]

III. Asymmetric warfare

With respect to quantity, firepower and technical equipment, terrorist networks are much weaker than states and state organizations, just as guerrillas are much weaker than regular armies. The sheer fact of their relative weakness determines their pattern of action: the choice of asymmetric tactics, which compensates for the imbalance in strength. However strong states may be, they remain vulnerable to asymmetric warfare—not only because they suffer human and material losses, but also because terrorists constantly threaten to undermine state authority, which rests on the ability to protect the state's citizens.

The asymmetry implied in this type of warfare transcends purely military features, extending into the realm of social organization and behaviour. What does this asymmetry imply? Strong agencies such as states (or even large corporations or media agencies) typically base their strategic action on the following fundamental methods and principles.[4]

1. *The delineation of spatial frontiers that separate the internal domain from the external.* The building of a castle, the creation of a business office, the delimitation of the territorial frontiers of the state and the deployment of the headquarters of an army are all examples of the practice of spatial fixation and delimitation. The possession of one's own place is a precondition for objectifying, knowing and controlling what lies outside it.

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[3] Author's interview with 'Vladimir', an officer of the Anti-terrorist Division of the St Petersburg Division of the FSB.

[4] The following is based on the work of James Scott and Michel de Certeau: Scott, J., *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press: New Haven, Conn., 1985); Scott, J., *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Nature Have Failed* (Yale University Press: New Haven, Conn., 1998); and de Certeau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press: London, 1988).

2. *The hierarchical organization of the internal domain.* Hand in hand with the creation of an internal space of one's own (or even a national or corporate space) goes the formal differentiation of functions and capacities and the creation of a hierarchical organization suited for the particular realm in which the subject of strategy operates.

3. *The sustaining of a fixed identity.* The production of identity is a vital component of domination and requires dominant authority to have its own name, emblem (a flag or a logo), uniform, slogan, and so on. The specific material symbols to which identity is attached are arbitrary; what is crucial is that it must be fixed and permanent.

4. *The production of a plan or a scheme of action.* Strategic action requires future-oriented representations, or plans. Schemes and diagrams constitute the recurrent moment of domination. There are many sub-types of this key instrument: for a company, figures and diagrams of production and sales; construction schemes; city plans, military maps; grammar books; legal codes and so on—everything that gives ideal, abstract or abridged form to the reality that is to be known, conquered, controlled and transformed by the owner of the strategy.

Conventional types of rivalry between parties or coalitions with comparable strength and chances of success, such as wars between states or competition between large firms in a market, unfolded in a symmetric fashion whereby both parties adopted principles of strategic action, as outlined above. Today the pattern of rivalry is changing. The new global conflict that manifests itself in terrorism, as well as in the rapid growth of various forms of 'shadow economy' and semi-legal markets, is asymmetric in its core features. Asymmetry, in this context, is what gives the weak a chance to survive and sometimes to prevail in a competition with the strong that would otherwise be fatal.

What are the tactics of the weak? The pattern of action of weak and subordinate groups can be understood in terms of an asymmetric response to or reflection of the domination strategy of the strong.

1. *Mobility and rejection of place.* Subjects of tactics avoid spatial fixation, visibility and concentration in one place. They do not have a territory or headquarters of their own. Because they are constantly on the move, weak rivals, such as shuttle traders or guerrillas, do not have a place of their own. 'The space of the tactics is the space of the other . . . Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power'.[5] The weak are those who have to act on the other's territory, including 'territory' in the more abstract sense of rules laid down by the dominant power. Tactics, then, is the art of circumventing, reinterpreting and exploiting the rules without being able openly to overthrow their authority.

2. *Flexible network organization.* The users of such of tactics, especially terrorists or criminal groups, favour short-lived assemblages for concrete pur-

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[5] de Certeau (note 4), p. 37.

poses or networks composed of small cells. In such entities all ties are highly personified and particularized, offering opportunities for open-ended recruitment and making it difficult to identify and destroy the whole. Organized crime or terrorist organizations are in fact social forms that deny organization in the conventional sense. Terrorists as well as other outlaw groups, including organized criminals and entrepreneurs in the shadow economy, rely on ways of action and forms of organization that are very different from those of states or legitimate businesses.

3. *Improvisation and manipulation of identity.* Avoiding direct and open warfare with regular army and police units, which would be self-defeating, terrorists rely on opportunism and shifting identity. This involves unforeseeable recombinations, unexpected and surprise timing, exploitation of one-time opportunities, creative adaptations, and so on. Terrorists are masterful in the art of mimicry, taking over many different identities—aircraft or bus passengers, shoppers, orthodox believers, and so on. The Chechen terrorists who took hostages in the Moscow theatre incident transported over 100 kilograms of high explosives inside two of the four high-pressure air containers normally used in the hydraulic system of Kamaz trucks and then used these steel containers as bombs. Suicide bombers are an extreme case and have so far constituted the most powerful weapons of the weak. They exemplify the pure type of asymmetric warfare. Suicide bombers invert the normal human motivation where life and survival are matters of both instinct and value; they exactly personify the tactics of the ever-shifting identity, network organization, and the creative adaptation for their purposes of an array of technical devices, including trucks and aircraft.

A close examination of the asymmetric relationship between states and terrorist networks shows that, when states try to define this type of enemy in terms that reflect their own image, they are likely to fail or waste resources. In asymmetric warfare, the B-52 bomber aircraft is the least efficient weapon. Regular troops can achieve initial success in destroying terrorist regimes in the republic of Chechnya, or in Afghanistan or Iraq, but they are unable to counter guerrilla warfare and to bring sustainable peace. Warfare often helps terrorist networks to recruit new members, while social and economic measures—such as job creation, social services and infrastructure, the local mass media and the preservation of other features of normal life—can produce anti-terrorist effects by blocking the 'reproduction' of terrorist groups and facilitating the social reintegration of their former members.

IV. The social resources of terrorism

Terrorists rely on two types of resource: technical and social. The technical resources include weapons, explosives, transport, means of communication and so on; and the means for acquiring them, namely, money. The social resources include existing social structures—institutions, networks, organiza-

tions, and so on—that are instrumentally employed by terrorists for their own purposes. Foundations, banks, organized crime groups and other networks as well as the mass media can temporarily but unexpectedly become vital resources for international terrorism. Social resources complicate counter-terrorist activity, for they make the task of externalizing the enemy—differentiating it from civil society—very difficult.

Much has been written about the drug trade as the source of financial support for terrorists. Russian experience highlights another aspect of the relationship between terrorism and organized crime. Organized crime supplies hiding places, covert channels for mobility, and a pre-existing system of contacts with bribed officials and individuals who are ready to perform certain criminal tasks. It provides a convenient infrastructure that can be adapted for a variety of purposes. Most countries have 'black' and 'grey' labour markets where jobs are provided to illegal migrants, mainly from adjoining or more distant developing countries. In turn, the illegal labour market relies on established migration networks and channels that allow the illegal cross-border trafficking of potential workers and that can be used by international terrorism. Thus, in 1999 the Russian law enforcement authorities uncovered a channel of illegal migration through southern Russia that was being used by members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ilama terrorist organization. Consequently, 34 citizens of Sri Lanka—members of the terrorist organization—were arrested and deported on their way to Western Europe. Another 33 'Tamil Tigers' were prevented from entering Russia on its eastern frontiers.[6]

Apart from providing material and infrastructural support to terrorism, organized crime can act as a subcontractor, as the following example illustrates. In October 2002 the leading Chechen terrorist, Shamil Basaev, set out to organize the kidnapping of a close relative of Yuri Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow. By so doing he hoped to receive a huge ransom and publicity. Basaev gave the task of organizing the kidnapping to a member of his *teip* (clan), Ruslan Murzabekov, who was residing in Kharkov, Ukraine. In late 2002 Murzabekov travelled to St Petersburg, Russia, to meet Said-Magomed Akhmadov, a Chechen who was a leading member of a local organized crime group specializing in racketeering and robberies. Akhmadov and five other members of the criminal group, who were ethnic Russians, agreed to carry out the kidnapping. According to the plan, having kidnapped the relative of the mayor of Moscow, they would transport him to Novgorod, where the local criminal group was subcontracted to provide a hiding place and a specially equipped truck in which the victim could be transported to the mountain region of Chechnya. The terrorist plan did not work out because all the partic-

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[6] Vorontsov, S., 'Organizovannaya prestupnost' v Yuzhnom federal'nom okruge kak geopoliticheskii factor, stimuliruiushchii separatism' [Organized crime in the Southern Federal District as a geopolitical factor that stimulates separatism], *Sovremennye Problemy Geopolitiki Kavkaza*, vol. 5 ([no publisher]: Rostov-na-Donu, 2001), p. 166.

ipants in Russia and Ukraine were revealed and arrested by the law enforcement authorities.[7]

The tactics of terrorists involve creative and on-the-spot exploitation of existing social organizations, networks and connections, often without the other individuals involved being aware of the true purpose. The preparation of the terrorist hostage taking in the Moscow theatre involved using bribed state officials who issued false passports to certain members of the Chechen group. The transport of explosives and extensive use of truck-bombs in Chechnya over the past two years would not have been possible without the cooperation of individuals from the Russian military who, for a bribe, let those trucks pass without inspection. Through bribery, organized crime, channels of covert mobility and legal as well as informal money transfer systems, terrorism has infiltrated itself into existing social structures.

Finally, one of the most painful issues in Russia's recent experience with terrorism is the role of the mass media. Terrorist acts are acts of violence that cannot achieve their effects without publicity, which communicates their message to the widest possible audience. For the media, a terrorist act is a sensational, headline-making event. Preparations for a terrorist act therefore often take into account the role of the mass media and the potential reaction. Simultaneously with the hostage taking in the Moscow theatre, the group of Movsar Baraev passed a video tape with a prerecorded public statement to an al-Jazeera news agency correspondent in Moscow, so that the world could get a first-hand message from the terrorists together with reports from the scene. In this way the terrorists hoped to gain control over the way their act would be reported, to determine the public interpretation of the hostage taking and to win the information war. One could even argue that the public relations campaign which the terrorists aspired to launch by making themselves the focus of the world media was the primary goal of the hostage taking, while the actual form of the latter was secondary and instrumental.

In the heat of the crisis, Russian television reported live on the developments in and around the theatre, including the movements of the police force. Terrorists who were inside and watching television had the opportunity to follow developments in close proximity to the theatre. This gave rise subsequently to intense public debate about the need to restrict media coverage, touching on one of the most sensitive democratic freedoms, the freedom of information. Subsequently, the Russian Government initiated amendments to the Law on the Mass Media[8] that provided for restrictions on the coverage and circulation of information in times of crisis.

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[7] The story is based on a report in *Vash Tainyi Sovetnik*, no. 8 (2003), p. 6, and confirmed by the interview with 'Vladimir' (note 3).

[8] The amendments were passed by the State Duma on 1 Nov. 2002. They specify cases in which the government can withdraw licences for media outlets, such as cases involving the dissemination of information that impedes a counter-terrorist operation or information that threatens the life and health of people. It is also prohibited to reveal special technical details or tactics of operations against terrorists or to spread information that can serve to propagate and justify terrorism and extremism.

V. Conclusions

A successful counter-terrorist strategy must take into account two circumstances: that terrorism constitutes an asymmetric threat; and that terrorist networks are not only hidden in the mountains or forests, but are also embedded in social structures. What are the implications of these features of terrorism for business and civil society? Asymmetric conflict is not new, but it has now become global. Conflict between states and terrorist networks poses a greater challenge than conflict between states, which was the prevalent type of conflict until the end of the cold war. The dividing line in world politics is being redrawn: states find themselves on one side of the divide, facing asymmetric challenges from various disorganized anti-state forces on the other. Business and civil society should therefore influence governments to encourage closer alliances with other governments against terrorism and, more importantly, urge governments and their secret services to abstain from attempts to use or manipulate terrorists as part of their policies against rival states.

The assumption that terrorism is embedded in and produced by social structures means both that societies produce people who are prepared to engage in terrorist activities, including suicide bombings, and that terrorist networks are intertwined with existing social networks and establishments. This implies that long-term social and economic policies are likely to be more efficient anti-terrorist instruments than military interventions, however successful they may be in the short term. Investments in modernizing education, in communications and in labour markets in terrorist-ridden areas should produce greater effects than huge sums spent on military operations. The business community and civil society should undertake to change government policies accordingly. Finally, anti-terrorist measures should be aimed not just at terrorists themselves, but at their social support infrastructure, since corruption, the shadow economy and other forms of tacitly accepted and tolerated non-transparency can be used by terrorists.