Linking Anti-Terrorism and Peace Operations: Specifics and Constraints

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Since the 11th September 2001, it has become almost commonplace to agree that there must be some link between anti-terrorism and peace operations. In practice, however, peace operations and the fight against terrorism have, by and large, continued to be implemented separately. This is hardly surprising as the 9/11 events led the world»s leading states to reassess terrorism as a security threat, but did not change the nature of and priorities for peace operations and tasks, from peacekeeping and peace enforcement to post-conflict peace-building (recovery, reconstruction, institution— and democracy-building etc.). A rather limited, cautious and reserved approach towards the fight against terrorism on the part of many participants involved in international peace operations has not been entirely unfounded. It may even be seen as a natural reaction to the post-9/11 global «war on terrorism» which has so far had rather mixed effects both in conflict and post-conflict areas and on international efforts to prevent conflicts and restore or build peace in those areas.

On the one hand, in the course of the global war on terrorism, direct military losses were inflicted on some groups involved in terrorist activities, some of them were also deprived of safe havens or had their financial channels blocked. That, in turn, might have temporarily improved the security environment in selected areas of concern (such as southern parts of Central Asia, bordering Afghanistan). On the other hand, there have been many adverse effects, such as serious disruption of economic activity in post-conflict areas (especially in the least developed areas, such as Somalia), as a result of the targeting of key local and regional business groups for their alleged terrorist links.

Moreover, an impression was created that the world»s leading states are now prioritising the need to fight terrorism over all other considerations. On the one hand, this «obsession» with anti-terrorism at a global level might have pushed some local participants in post-conflict and conflict areas to publicly denounce terrorism and distance themselves from terrorist connections. On the other hand, it has also provided room for endless attempts by local participants, involved in armed conflicts or operating in a post-conflict environment, to misuse the anti-terrorist agenda for their own purposes — for instance, by trying to label their political opponents and military rivals as terrorists (even in those areas where, prior to 9/11, terrorism as such had not been a major problem or a matter of primary security concern, especially compared to other forms of violence, no less brutal and deadly).

The same goes for the impact of the war on terrorism on international peace operations in war-torn areas, which unsurprisingly has also been very mixed. On the one hand, in selected cases (notably, in the case of Afghanistan), initial post-9/11 hopes that the «war on terrorism» would provide an opportunity to draw attention to long neglected conflicts and to launch new or more ambitious peace-building efforts, did materialize. On the other hand, there has been some diversion of political and financial resources from peace operations (which cannot be as easily tied to the vital national security interests of the world»s leading states) to anti-terrorism operations.

In this context, it is understandable why counter-terrorism and peace-building operations are not only treated separately, but generally do not seem to be easily reconcilable. Terrorism is viewed by many in the international «peace support» community as a threat to be considered, but primarily to the extent it might affect the security environment for their own operations. It is thus seen as a problem to be solved by someone else, either by the security component of the mission itself, or, preferably, by an ad hoc international security force, or by national security structures (if there are any). There have also been concerns that excessive emphasis on anti-terrorism might in some cases interfere with the longer-term, and ultimately, more fundamental peace-building tasks and operations.

While this «doing no harm» approach is not unfounded, it should not be interpreted as an excuse for «doing nothing» in the fight against terrorism and does not mean that some of the more fundamental links cannot be drawn between anti-terrorism and peace operations. After all, they both concern, while not necessarily in the same way, a) ***armed conflict*** and b) the *so-called* ***failed states***.

For all peace operations, from peacekeeping to peace-building, it goes without saying that they are related to conflict (as their goal is to prevent and stop conflict or build peace where there has been conflict). In contrast, not everything called terrorism is directly tied to violent conflict. Since 9/11 it has become particularly important to distinguish between at least two types of terrorism that have been too often confused in the course of the global anti-terrorist campaign. While these two types share some common characteristics and are not necessarily unrelated, there are also some important differences between them, including the way they relate to violent conflict.

First and foremost, there is a more traditional type of terrorism (referred to as ***conflict-related terrorism***), directly and immediately tied to the concrete agenda of concrete local or regional conflicts and used (in some cases, for decades) as one of the modes of operation by groups in conflict areas and openly identify themselves with a certain political cause in that conflict. This cause may be quite ambitious (to seize power in a state, to create a new state, to fight against foreign occupation), but normally *does not go beyond the local or regional context*. While these armed groups' fund-raising, logistical, propaganda or even planning activities may be *internationalized* (in the sense of being conducted in and from outside the territory of several states beyond the conflict area, as in the case of the Tamil Tigers), their goals and agenda, by and large, remain localized. Thus, terrorist activities are carried out by these armed non-state participants for political goals, limited to the local or regional context, and by limited means (the weapons, explosives, delivery means and other materials employed do not have to be very advanced and are normally standard, readily available and sometimes are even quite primitive, such as the unstable bombs used by Palestinian

suicide bombers). As conflict-related terrorism is used in the context of a broader armed confrontation, it is likely to be practiced by groups that might enjoy some level of local popular support within a conflict area, ranging from a very limited to quite substantial one (as in the case of Hamas that enjoys 30–40% of public support among the Palestinians).. For most of these groups, terrorism is not their only method of operation or type of violence employed and is often combined with other forms of violence (such as guerrilla warfare) and sometimes even with non-violent (social, religious, political and other) activities. While groups engaged in conflict-related terrorism are commonly referred to as "terrorist organizations", it might be more accurate, at least from the academic point of view, to refer to them as *"groups involved in terrorist activities"* (as terrorism is not necessarily the only violent tactics they employ).

A more recent phenomenon of the so-called super-terrorism was generated primarily by the 9/11 events and has manifested itself in a number of more recent cases (such as Bali). Super-terrorism is by definition global or at least seeks to create a global influence and, as such, does not have to be tied to any particular armed conflict. Al-Qaeda's goals, strategies, logistical and financial networks, and operations are truly global and as extensive in areas of peace, areas of conflict and in the developed world (in the global «West» and global «North»), as anywhere else. While Sudan and then Afghanistan were used as safe havens, London was used as an important recruitment centre. Several operational cells were set up in Western Europe, and it was not in a suburb of Mogadishu that Al-Qaeda pilots learnt how to fly Boeing airliners. Super-terrorism is focused on targets in the developed world or directly associated with it. In order to hit targets in the developed world, a terrorist group or network needs to set up an operational presence and to undergo at least some training in the developed world. In other words, it needs to, to a certain extent, become «part» of the developed world. Finally, super-terrorism has unlimited and non-negotiable goals (to challenge the world order and the West, as in the case of Al-Qaeda, or to achieve global dominance, as in the case of the Japanese religious sect Aym Shinrikyo). Unlimited goals require the use of more advanced

technical means and may even imply the use of unlimited means, including weapons of mass destruction.

Conflict-related and super-terrorism may share some common characteristics (such as their asymmetrical nature), demonstrate some structural and ideological parallels and even maintain some direct contacts and links. Al-Qaeda's own origin, for instance, may be traced to the anti-Soviet Jihad in Afghanistan and its super-terrorist network has served as one of the donors to several local groups engaged in conflict-related terrorism throughout the 1990s. But all actual and potential financial, ideological and other links, and their parallels and connections between ***super-terrorism*** and the more traditional ***conflict-related terrorism*** still do not make them entirely similar or fully conditional or dependant on one another. Each of these two types of terrorism retains a great degree of autonomy and its own logic and dynamics.

While triggered by clear acts of «super-terrorism», the US-led «war on terrorism», perhaps inevitably, has turned into the fight against all forms of terrorism (which in itself is a positive development). At the same time, however, the «war on terrorism» has led to increasing confusion between different forms and types of terrorism, and attempts to make them all fit one uniform pattern and to bring them all under a common denominator, with insufficient attention paid to their specifics and nuances. Meanwhile, the tools used against clandestine terrorist networks with global influence and non-negotiable agenda, such as Al-Qaeda, should at least be some extent modified and refocused when dealing with locally and regionally based groups involved in more traditional conflict-related terrorism, so that these anti-terrorism tools and operations complement and reinforce the longer-term conflict resolution and peace-building tasks.

There are several key defining characteristics of conflict-related terrorism that help distinguish it from other forms of violence that maybe used in an armed conflict.

First, it is the presence of a political goal that distinguishes terrorism from plain crime. While an act of terrorism is certainly a crime, it is always more than a crime due to its political goal (that is interpreted very broadly, ranging from a very concrete to a more

abstract one, and can be formulated in ideological, religious or other categories). Terrorism is a tactic to achieve a political goal, which is an end in itself and not just a secondary instrument or a "cover" for advancement of other interests such as illegal economic gains, as it is for some organized criminal groups.

Secondly, *civilians* are the main and the most immediate target which distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla warfare which implies the use of force primarily against governmental military and security forces (although various Kashmiri, Chechen, Palestinian or Iraqi armed groups often combine these two different tactics).

The third key defining characteristic is the asymmetric nature of terrorism as "the weapon of the weak" which implies not merely a gap in capabilities, but, more importantly, an asymmetry of level and status of the main protagonists. The most basic and classic form of such in *status asymmetry* is when terrorist means are used by a sub-state or non-state participant in an asymmetrical confrontation with an established, functional or at least identifiable state. This asymmetry, not just in military capabilities, but, more importantly, in the status and level of participants, is a defining characteristic of terrorism, distinguishing it from some other forms of violence, such as «symmetric» inter-communal/sectarian violence (between several non-state parties), inter-state violence or the use of violence by the state itself. It is in this way that status asymmetry is the most common method used by terrorists in conflicts, whether by various extremist Palestinian groups, or by the most radical groups of Kashmiri or Chechen separatists. It also implies that terrorism may be used as a method of operation, not just in any armed conflict, but only in an armed conflict which is either asymmetrical or at least has an important asymmetrical aspect.

No state is completely safe from conflict-related terrorism, as any state might find itself fighting an asymmetrical conflict, whether domestically (such as the UK involvement in Northern Ireland) or far away from home (such as the UK military involvement in Iraq since the end of the combat stage of the 2003 war). In any case, however, for an armed conflict to qualify as an asymmetrical one (in terms of the level and status of the parties), the

state as one of the parties to an armed confrontation has to be identifiable, i.e. at least more or less functional.

It could be argued, however, that that such «asymmetric conditions» (a confrontation between one or more non-state participants and domestic or foreign states) while most favourable for conflict-related terrorism, are not necessarily the most typical circumstances in which international peace operations are carried out. In an asymmetrical conflict between state (particularly a relatively powerful state, such as the United Kingdom, Israel, Russia or India) and non-state participants (such as the Irish Republican Army prior to 1997 and a number of the more radical «splinter» groups, such as the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA or various armed groups involved in terrorist activities in Chechnya, Middle East, Kashmir or in other conflict areas), as long as the state itself remains more or less in control of the situation and combines anti-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations with attempts to build peace and with some form of recovery and reconstruction activities, it is unlikely that any international involvement in the peace process and conflict management efforts will take the form of peace support operations on the ground.

In contrast, in an absence of a functional state, there seems to be little room for asymmetrical warfare in general and for terrorism in particular in the local context, as there is no state to serve as an ultimate target for non-state participants to pressure by hurting or threatening civilians. Why then are we talking about terrorist threats posed by a number of conflicts in the last decade (from Afghanistan to Somalia), where the local context has been characterized not in terms of *functional* states, but in terms of *failed* and *dysfunctional* states? From the counter-terrorist perspective, *failed* or collapsed states can pose even more complex challenges of two types.

First, while the use of terrorist means do not make much sense within the local context, as there is not much place for asymmetrical warfare, they can still be employed by local groups against neighbouring «functional» states (especially if perceived as occupying or meddling powers) or, in the case of a foreign or international diplomatic, humanitarian or business presence in the conflict area or in a wider region, employed against foreign or international targets (as, most recently, in «post-war» Iraq).

Secondly, *failed* states offer opportunities for external groups or illegal trans-national networks (including terrorist networks) for relocation, sanctuary or transportation of arms and people.

In both cases, the impact of terrorism is not confined within the failed state and has wider regional and international implications.

No need to say that it is particularly problematic to apply counter-terrorist measures to weak or failed states, as they are intersections of homegrown and international terrorism, where the line between them can be very blurred, and have no effective national/local state capacity to fight terrorism. In the absence or weakness of such capacity, it is the international community, led by the U.S, that in the aftermath of 9/11 has found itself increasingly pressed to take upon itself certain counter-terrorist tasks in failed states; tasks that otherwise would be the responsibility of and associated with functional national authorities. This problem seems to have poor prospects for being solved simply by applying counter-terrorist measures from the outside, unless a workable and legitimate local state capacity and internal defenses are rebuilt, which in most cases would require some form of external/international assistance. In summary, it is the phenomenon of the *failed* states that most strongly link anti-terrorism to international peace operations, particularly to peace-building and, more specifically, state-building activities and it is in this context that counter-terrorist concerns could and should be used to reaffirm the rationale for conducting international peace operations in *failed* states. Even from the purely counter-terrorist perspective ***the significance of international peace operations, particularly in their most ambitious peace-building form, is that they are literally aimed at rebuilding one of the most effective tools to combat terrorism i.e. a state that is both functional and legitimate***.*

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* These notes are a follow-up to a more detailed report published within the framework of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) research project on "Terrorism and Armed Conflict". See Stepanova, E., Anti-terrorism and Peace-Building During and After Conflict (Stockholm: SIPRI, June 2003), 54 p.; *http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/Stepanova.pdf*