



## ISP/NSC Briefing Paper 05/01

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## Security, Terrorism and the UK



### Introduction

In 2002 the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) launched the comprehensive five-year New Security Challenges Programme (NSC) to try to offer fresh insight into the security challenges faced in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 globalized world. The Programme, directed by Professor Stuart Croft at the University of Birmingham, now funds almost 40 projects involving over 120 researchers. It adopts an expansive and multi-disciplinary approach that seeks to reach beyond war into other important areas of security.

Key issues being explored within the Programme fall within eight broad themes:

- the role of military force
- the role of international law, international organizations and security regimes
- economically-driven security challenges
- technological aspects of security
- gendered dimensions of security
- security and civil society
- the media and psychological dimensions
- human security.

In a collaborative venture, a series of briefing papers written by project leaders within the NSC Programme will be published by Chatham House (and posted on its International Security Programme web pages) over the next couple of years to summarize important research results and emerging discussion points. The theme of this initial set of briefing papers is *Security, Terrorism and the UK*. In the first paper, Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson reflect on the UK's performance in the war on terrorism. In the second, Bill Durodié argues that more emphasis should be placed on building and using community resources in responding to terrorism, rather than focusing on technical and professional approaches that leave communities excluded. In the third paper, Adrian Guelke reflects on developments in the Northern Ireland peace process. Finally, Sarah Oates analyses the implications of the way in which terrorism has been presented in elections in Russia, the US and the UK.

*Dr Christopher Browning* - Editor and ESRC Research Fellow, University of Birmingham

The International Security Programme at Chatham House has a long-established reputation for independent and timely analysis, and for its contribution to the public debate on security and defence. The Programme is committed to the idea that open discussion between the private sector, the media, academia and the world of public policy-making is not only possible but necessary, and rewarding. As a result, we are especially pleased to be associated with the ESRC's New Security Challenges Programme, in the publication of Briefing Papers by independent experts. The papers will address not only topics of the moment, but also the broader intellectual context in which national and international security policy is conceived and planned.

*Dr Paul Cornish* - Head, International Security Programme, Chatham House

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## 'Riding Pillion for Tackling Terrorism is a High-risk Policy'

**Frank Gregory**, University of Southampton  
**Paul Wilkinson**, University of St Andrews

The UK's armed forces and police have gained invaluable experience and expertise in counter-terrorism through three decades of involvement in the effort to suppress terrorism in Northern Ireland and its overspill into the British mainland. It is hardly surprising that this understandable preoccupation with terrorism related to Northern Ireland diverted the attention of Britain's intelligence agencies away from international terrorism. Until 7 July 2005 the only significant international terrorist attack on the UK homeland which MI5 and MI6 and the police had to deal with was the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in December 1988, but once the US and UK authorities had completed their investigation of the Lockerbie bombing and indicted two Libyan agents in 1991, British counter-terrorism efforts were almost entirely concentrated on the IRA's bombing campaign, and then, in the late 1990s, on combating the hard-line opponents of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement who continued to employ terrorism.

By the mid-1990s the UK's intelligence agencies and the police were well aware that London was increasingly being used as a base by individuals involved in promoting, funding and planning terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, these individuals were not viewed as a threat to the UK's national security, and so they were left to continue their activities with relative impunity, a policy which caused much anger among the foreign governments concerned. As a result of giving lower priority to international terrorism, the British authorities did not fully appreciate the threat from Al-Qaeda. The failure to gain any warning from existing information of the 9/11 attacks on the United States was an intelligence failure of the entire Western alliance, not only of the US intelligence community.

Al-Qaeda, which is best described as a movement or a network of networks and affiliates with a presence in at least 60 countries, confronts the US and its allies and the whole international system with the most dangerous form of terrorist threat ever posed by non-state actors. Unlike the more traditional terrorist groups formed in the 1970s and 1980s, Al-Qaeda explicitly promotes mass killing,<sup>1</sup> and the 9/11 attacks, together with their major assaults in Kenya, Bali, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Spain, prove that they remain committed to carrying out deadly and determined attacks wherever and whenever the opportunity arises.

The UK is at particular risk because it is the closest ally of the United States, has deployed armed forces in the military campaigns to topple the Taleban regime in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and has taken a leading role in international intelligence, police and judicial cooperation against Al-Qaeda and in efforts to

suppress its finances. Al-Qaeda's taped propaganda messages have repeatedly threatened attacks on the UK. Moreover, it is well known that extremists have been recruited and deployed within the UK's borders and that in an open society such as the UK it is notoriously difficult to prevent no-warning coordinated suicide attacks, the characteristic modus operandi of Al-Qaeda. The attacks on the transport system in London on 7 July 2005 represent precisely the nature of the threat from international terrorism that the UK authorities have been concerned about since 9/11. Furthermore, it is known that the Al-Qaeda network has been actively seeking the materials and expertise to acquire chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weaponry, and that their track record shows that they would have no compunction about using this type of weapon to cause large numbers of civilian deaths.

UK counter-terrorism policy is further complicated by the dangers of terrorism from hard-line opponents of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, and other indigenous groups such as Animal Rights extremists. However, it is the threat from the Al-Qaeda movement which has been the major preoccupation of the UK authorities. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw outlined the UK's objectives in the war against terrorism as follows: to prevent bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network from posing a continuing terrorist threat; and to ensure that Afghanistan ceased to give safe-haven support and protection to terrorists. To this end the government was prepared to take political and, if necessary, military action to bring about the required changes in Afghanistan, and it committed the UK to help build the widest possible international coalition, with maximum UN support, to provide economic and political support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, with the aim of bringing about a broad-based government there with the cooperation of the UN. However, as in the case of President George W. Bush's enunciation of US aims in the war on terrorism, the UK's stated aims extended well beyond the campaign against Al-Qaeda, promising a crackdown on all forms of state-sponsored terrorism and fresh efforts to suppress the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>2</sup> The government also recognized the vital importance of providing for a high level of domestic protection. To deal with the threat and to increase UK preparedness for future terrorist attacks clearly require a holistic, multilateral and multi-pronged strategy incorporating foreign and defence policy and 'homeland security' measures.

How has the UK performed in the War on Terrorism? There is no doubt that the foreign policy and military elements enjoyed considerable initial success. The Taleban regime was overthrown remarkably swiftly and was rapidly replaced, through UN-led negotiations, by the government headed by Hamid Karzai. Al-Qaeda suffered major disruption of its activities and lost many of its key personnel. The combined diplomatic efforts of the US and UK created

<sup>1</sup> See bin Laden's fatwa of February 1998, in which Muslims are urged to kill American citizens and their allies.

<sup>2</sup> For a wide-ranging statement of the British government's aims in the 'War on Terrorism', see the speech by the Foreign Secretary the Rt Hon Jack Straw, to the House of Commons, Hansard, 16 October 2001. See also Home Office briefing papers produced in support of changes to terrorism legislation in February 2005.

the biggest coalition in the history of international relations. The UN, the EU and other regional international governmental organizations (IGOs), and other governments rallied to cooperate against an international terrorist threat which they realized was a danger to international peace and security as well as their own national security.

The UK already had in place an impressive national structure of coordination to deal with terrorism, including the Home Office (the lead government department on terrorism matters), the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat, COBRA (the government emergency coordinating committee), the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy, the Ministerial Committee on Intelligence Services, the Joint Intelligence Committee, MI6, GCHQ, MI5, New Scotland Yard and many other elements. Decades of experience with terrorism relating to Northern Ireland has created an impressive capacity for inter-agency and inter-departmental collaboration.

Following 9/11 this was further strengthened by the establishment of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), which provides threat assessments for all departments and agencies concerned with preventing and combating terrorism and the protection of national critical infrastructure. Our researchers found JTAC's assessment work was regarded as a valuable innovation by its 'customers'.

The 9/11 attacks undoubtedly also acted as a spur to the UK authorities' efforts to update emergency legislation and to enhance emergency planning in partnership with local and regional authorities and the emergency services to deal with the possible consequences of terrorist attacks that caused mass fatality/mass destruction. The new Civil Contingences Act (2004) provides, in our view, a very comprehensive framework of emergency legislation, though we found some serious concerns about the level of resources available to meet all the needs for new protective equipment, decontamination units, antidotes and vaccines, and the training and exercises to prepare for the wide range of potential threats. Clearly much good work is being done, but there are many worrying gaps: for example, there is no immediate prospect of achieving interoperability of radio communications between the emergency services. We also observed a worrying discrepancy between the emergency planning capabilities and preparedness in the UK regions and the generally higher level of preparedness in the London region. Obviously London is a high-profile target zone, but it should be borne in mind that Al-Qaeda terrorists (and IRA terrorists) have never confined themselves to attacks on capital cities.

In April 2004 the government accepted the proposal that the UK's international counter-terrorism policy should be focused on four mission areas:

1. *Prevention* – addressing underlying causes of terrorism here and overseas. That means, among other things, ensuring that Muslim citizens enjoy the full protection of the law and are able to participate to the full in British society.
2. *Pursuit* – using intelligence effectively to disrupt and apprehend the terrorists.

The UK has increased joint working and intelligence-sharing between governments and law enforcement agencies across the world. At home, the government aims to make UK borders more secure, to make identity theft harder, and to curb terrorist access to financial sources.

3. *Protection* – ensuring that reasonable security precautions, including those needed to meet a CBRN threat, are in place, ranging from physical measures at airports to establishing Counter-Terrorism Security Advisers (CTSAs) in each police force.

4. *Preparedness* – making sure that the UK has the people and resources in place to respond effectively to the consequences of a terrorist attack.<sup>3</sup>

These broad principles seem eminently sensible, but their implementation is problematic in particular areas. A key problem with regard to implementing 'Prevention' and 'Pursuit' is that the UK government has been conducting counter-terrorism policy 'shoulder to shoulder' with the US, not in the sense of being an equal decision-maker, but rather as pillion passenger compelled to leave the steering to the ally in the driving seat. There is no doubt that the situation over Iraq has imposed particular difficulties for the UK, and for the wider coalition against terrorism. It gave a boost to the Al-Qaeda network's propaganda, recruitment and fundraising, caused a major split in the coalition, provided an ideal targeting and training area for Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists, and deflected resources and assistance that could have been deployed to assist the Karzai government and to bring bin Laden to justice. Riding pillion with a powerful ally has proved costly in terms of British and US military lives, Iraqi lives, military expenditure, and the damage caused to the counter-terrorism campaign.

Notwithstanding the attacks in London on 7 July 2005, the UK has rightly placed a major response emphasis on intelligence-led action to disrupt potential terrorists or terrorist networks. The recent convictions for possessing materials to cause an explosion and in the ricin case are examples of successful intelligence-led disruption. However, trained surveillance personnel are a scarce resource and maintaining an adequate pool of such expertise within the police and the security and intelligence services is a continuing challenge. This problem applies both within the UK and overseas for the protection of UK nationals and interests. Where the surveillance is platform-based, as in the case of UK naval deployments in the Gulf, it is also of concern when the planned deployment is to be reduced from two frigates/destroyers to one.

Achieving the goals of protection and preparedness in the UK is also not an easy task because of the wide dispersal of problem 'ownership' between the public and private sectors. The MI5-based National Security Advisory Centre (NSAC) and the establishment in all police forces of Counter-Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA) posts are key means of addressing

<sup>3</sup> Home Office, speech by Leigh Lewis, 'Terrorism – Policing the Unknown', 20/5/04, [http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/speech\\_policefed.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/speech_policefed.html), accessed 3/6/04; see also Sir David Omand, Keynote speech to RUSI Homeland Security and Resilience Programme, 1/7/04.

protection and preparedness. However, the scale of the challenge is significant. For example, providing enhanced security around stocks of ammonium nitrate, which is widely used in agriculture, is a major undertaking involving, among others, suppliers, storage site operators and the farming community. On a similar scale there is the problem of gaining adequate knowledge about the daily patterns present in the transport of hazardous materials by road haulage in the UK.

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## Terrorism and Community Resilience – A UK Perspective

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**Bill Durodié**, Cranfield University

This paper argues that policy-makers and emergency planners must learn from the literature examining human behaviour in disasters. The relevant research shows that professionals should incorporate community responses to particular crises within their actions, rather than seeking to supplant these because they consider them ill-informed or less productive. Emergencies offer society a means to reaffirm human bonds that have been corroded over recent times. Actions to enhance the benefits of spontaneous association, as well as to develop a sense of purpose and trust across society are, at such times, just as important as effective technical responses.

### ***Cultural meaning and social resilience***

How society responds to a crisis is only partly dependent on the nature of that crisis, or the agent causing it. There are cultural and social dimensions that explain our varied, and evolving, attitudes to disaster across time and in different societies. Why is it that at certain times and in certain cultures widespread losses of life – such as during the London smog of 1952 or everyday road fatalities – fail to become a point of discussion, while at others even limited losses – such as the loss of seven lives aboard the Challenger spacecraft in 1986 or the four lives lost as a consequence of the Hatfield train crash in the UK in 2000 – become key cultural reference points?

Evolving social contexts and frameworks of cultural meaning can explain such variation. Emergencies take on a different role depending upon what they represent to particular societies at particular times, rather than solely on the basis of objective indicators, such as real costs and lives lost. The loss of the Challenger spacecraft symbolized a low point in our assessment of human technological capabilities. It was a blow to assumptions of steady scientific progress that no number of car accidents could replicate. Hatfield was interpreted as evidence of why not to trust politicians and ‘profit-seeking’ corporations. Both examples suggest a growing disconnection between ordinary people and professional elites – whether political, corporate or scientific – in the world today. This reveals the extent to which social bonds and affiliations, once taken for granted, have been eroded in the course of little more than a generation.

An incoherent cultural outlook is a significant problem in developing responses to the possibility of terrorist attacks and other disasters. How the public respond to events can be shaped far more by underlying assumptions and allegiances prior to an emergency than by the specific aspects of the emergency itself. Yet the standard way of dealing with disaster is one that prioritizes pushing the public out, beyond the yellow perimeter-tape, and subsuming their initial actions to those of professionally trained emergency responders. This is despite the fact that the public themselves are the true first responders in such situations. Effectively, people are denied the opportunity to assume responsibility over their own situation at such times. Yet an examination of the literature on human behaviour in disasters points to the central importance of ordinary human actions. People tend to be at their most cooperative and focused in a crisis. This should be encouraged and developed rather than discouraged and undermined.

Disasters – including terrorist attacks – destroy physical and economic capital. On the other hand, they present a rare, if unfortunate, opportunity to create and enhance social capital. It is this that the authorities and professionals should be alert to and wary of displacing in their haste to put forward what they consider to be more meticulous and technically competent solutions.

In the aftermath of the Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995, many of those affected were ferried to hospital in private cars. As it was a chemical attack, professionals might argue that this presented a risk of further contamination, but in the event it did not, and only eleven people lost their lives. This was thanks, in part, to the spontaneous actions of concerned citizens who acted when ambulances were not available. A similar scenario occurred at the end of the hostage crisis in Beslan in 2004. When the siege was eventually broken, the authorities were largely unprepared. Many survivors were taken to hospital by car. After a recent episode of flooding in Boscastle, Cornwall – as with the Lynmouth flood disaster in Devon of 1952 – it was ordinary people who inevitably were first on the scene and first to take appropriate and supportive action.

After the Bali bombing of October 2002, many steps were taken by local responders to deal with the injured and to begin the process of having them flown to special burns units in Australian hospitals. When the professional emergency responders arrived much of this work was well in hand. In fact, the disaster plan actually created problems as many of the injured were then ferried to hospitals where there were no specialist units. Similar stories of ordinary human action, courage, cooperation and even sacrifice can readily be found in relation to the Southeast Asian tsunami of December 2004. Hence, immediate human responses at such times remain largely admirable, although the contemporary mood of alienation is readily re-manifested.

The point to note is the extent to which pushing people out at such times may appear logical and professional but in actuality is counter-productive and

fails to capitalize upon the spontaneous social bonds and behaviour that emerge in such situations.

### **Technical focus vs cultural resilience**

Research shows that – in addition to the need for technical means to protect oneself in an emergency – by far the most useful tool is to have a clear sense of mission, purpose and direction. If we were to caricature resilience as the ability to pick oneself up after a shock or emergency and to keep on going, then the primary task is to have some clarity as to who we are, what we stand for and where we were heading in the first place.

Yet a political debate as to cultural values and social direction is noticeable by its absence. Instead, counter-terrorist measures put in place since 2001 can at best be described as technical in character. These include more surveillance, better intelligence, new protective clothing for so-called ‘first responders’, along with gadgets to detect chemical, biological or radiological agents, concrete blocks and fences around public buildings, endless checks at airports and stockpiles of vaccines.

The problem with these is that, in seeking to secure society from the outside, we fail simultaneously to engage society from the inside with a view to winning a debate as to what we actually stand for. Ironically, the purported solutions – for we have yet to see whether many of these truly work – can end up encouraging a sense of social suspicion and mistrust. We are asked to be ‘alert’ as to the activity of our neighbours, or those seated opposite us on public transport. Rather than bringing people together as the times demand, this serves to push people further apart. In that sense at least, we truly are ‘doing the terrorists’ job for them’.

### **Solutions**

Handling social concerns as to the possibility of a terrorist attack is no easy feat. In part, this is because social fears today have little to do with the actuality, or even possibility, of the presumed threats that confront us. Rather, they are often a reflection of social isolation, political cynicism and mistrust. Hence any purported solution must be conscious of the need to build up social bonds, rather than undermining them. The public need to be included and engaged. But they need to be included and engaged well before any particular crisis, and they need to be included and engaged in matters pertaining to far broader strategic social issues than mere tactical measures for responding to terrorism.

The starting point to developing an effective solution is to put the actual threat posed by terrorism into an appropriate context. We should remind ourselves that there have been few significant terrorist attacks in the developed world. To suggest otherwise is both alarmist and disingenuous. Moreover, what attacks and supposed plots there have been consistently fail to point to any serious threat by terrorists in the areas of chemical, biological and radiological weaponry the public fear most. Yet to read the debate over the last three years one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Some terrorists might

wish to develop and deploy such weapons but, given their current capabilities, this remains very much an aspiration rather than a possibility.

Above all, if as a society we are to ascribe an appropriate meaning to the events of 2001 – one that does not enhance fear domestically or encourage us to become dependent on professional experts who tell us how to lead our lives at such times – then we need to promote a political debate as to our aims and purposes as a society. Surely, those who risk their lives fighting fires or fighting wars do so not so that their children can grow up to do the same, but rather because they believe that there is something more important to life worth fighting for. It is that ‘something more’ that contemporary society appears to have lost sight of. And it is a loss we ignore at our peril.

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## **Whither the peace process in Northern Ireland?**

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**Adrian Guelke**, Queen’s University Belfast

More than a decade has passed since ceasefires by Northern Ireland’s principal Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organizations in 1994 ended the province’s longest continuous period of inter-communal and political violence since partition. This paper looks at the configuration of factors that explain the relative calm thereafter but that have yet to gel into a coherent basis for a fully secure peace.

At the outset, it was assumed that the peace would need to be cemented by a political settlement. That was achieved in April 1998. At the time, the Good Friday Agreement seemed little short of a miracle and prompted wide debate among scholars as to the sources of change in Northern Ireland. Considerable weight was put on factors beyond the confines of the political process within Northern Ireland. They included the role of civil society within the province in creating a groundswell of opinion in favour of a negotiated settlement to underwrite the ceasefires, and, even more significantly, a favourable combination of external circumstances.

Thus the large parliamentary majority enjoyed by the Labour government meant that Unionists could not bank on an early change of government in London in their calculations as to the consequences of the failure of negotiations. Their fear was that in the absence of a settlement London might opt for a system of joint sovereignty with Dublin. Another external factor was the warmth of relations between Washington and Dublin, which acted as a counterbalance to the old special relationship between London and Washington, giving the Clinton administration both the incentive and the leverage to press for a settlement. Further, to exercise such influence required little pressure on the administration’s part as the British government itself appeared intent on seeking a resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict in the context of its perception of Britain’s role in the world as a post-imperial country integrating into the European Union.

The euphoria surrounding the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 did not last. The Agreement failed

to live up to expectations that it would usher in a new era of political accommodation in Northern Ireland. Disagreement over its interpretation and implementation delayed the establishment of devolved government for eighteen months. It lasted less than three months before suspension. While devolved government was re-established after an initiative by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) to allow inspections of some of its arms dumps, for most of the period of its operation the issue of decommissioning cast a shadow over the survival of the power-sharing Executive. That was reflected in further one-day suspensions of the operation of devolution in the course of 2001. Initially, it seemed that Al-Qaeda's assault on the United States on 11 September 2001 had indirectly boosted the peace process. This was because in its wake the IRA carried out its first real act of decommissioning. However, while this prevented the immediate collapse of devolved government, it did not safeguard the political process for long. A year later, in October 2002, the institutions were once again suspended. The immediate cause was not decommissioning but the allegation that the IRA had been engaged in systematic spying on the government in Northern Ireland.

The institutions have remained suspended ever since. There have been two major efforts by the British and Irish governments to resolve the difficulties of the political process. The first preceded fresh elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in November 2003. A series of choreographed steps was agreed, but the sequence was abruptly ended by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) as a result of the refusal of the IRA to permit disclosure of how many of its weapons had been destroyed in a third act of decommissioning. In the Assembly elections there was further polarization of opinion in Northern Ireland, with the anti-Agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) winning a majority of Unionist votes and Sinn Féin a majority of nationalist votes. However, despite the political deadlock, no breakdown of the peace occurred. Indeed, fatalities as a result of political violence fell to their lowest level since 1969 in 2004, when only four people died in political violence. But paramilitary organizations continued to operate on both sides of the sectarian divide.

In 2004 there was another major push by the two governments to bridge the gulf in the positions of the two largest parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, culminating in talks at Leeds Castle in Kent in September 2004. While these talks failed to achieve agreement, sufficient progress was made to encourage the two governments to continue their efforts. These reached a conclusion in the first week of December. The main issue dividing the parties that prevented a deal from being reached was the DUP's insistence on photographic evidence of decommissioning and the refusal of the IRA to accede to this demand. A secondary issue, but one that subsequently became a much larger obstacle to political progress, was evidence of the IRA's continuing involvement in crime. A major bank robbery in Belfast on 20 December 2004, attributed by the Chief Constable of the Police Service

of Northern Ireland to the IRA, put the issue of criminality at the top of the political agenda. Another factor affecting the political atmosphere was the murder of a young man, Robert McCartney, following a bar brawl in January 2005 involving members of the Republican movement.

On 6 April 2005, the President of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, made an appeal to the IRA to commit itself to pursue its aims by purely political and democratic activity. He made it clear that he anticipated that such a decision would require intense internal consultation. The effect of this initiative was to reduce the negative impact that the bank robbery and the murder of Robert McCartney had had on Sinn Féin's popularity ahead of Westminster and local elections on 5 May. In these elections Sinn Féin increased both its share of the vote and its number of seats compared to its performance in similar elections in 2001. However, its advance did not match that of the DUP, which made large gains in both seats and votes at the expense of the UUP. A critical issue is the significance of the polarization of opinion during the peace process. Should it be seen as a prelude to the breakdown of the political settlement embodied in the Good Friday Agreement? Or are there grounds for hoping that the radical parties can deliver a durable peace precisely because of their position in the political spectrum? In this context it can be argued that the radical parties cannot be outflanked in the manner in which they displaced the UUP and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). Optimists see signs of hope in the moderation of the outlook of the radical parties, while pessimists insist that the success of the radical parties stems from their rejection of compromise and accommodation.

In 2004 two conferences were held in Belfast under the auspices of the ESRC's new security challenges programme on the theme of 'Interpreting ongoing crises in the Northern Ireland peace process'. The first of these, in June, examined the international dimension, while the second, in September, explored the issue from the perspective of the role of civil society.<sup>1</sup> Preparation for the conference included interviews with relevant people in politics and civil society in Northern Ireland on their view of these aspects of the province's ongoing political impasse. A conclusion of speakers was that the influence of international factors had diminished. In part, this was because of the disconnection that had occurred between the political and peace processes, so that the impasse in negotiations among the political parties in Northern Ireland had ceased to present any immediate threat to the province's relative peace. At the same time, there was acceptance that the events of 9/11 and the war on terrorism had narrowed the options available to the Republican movement by underlining the very high political price that Sinn Féin would have to pay, were the IRA to repudiate its ceasefire.

At the September conference there was recognition that the role initially played by civil society in the peace process had also diminished. A major

<sup>1</sup> For a selection of the papers from both these conferences, see <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cseclcrisesconference.htm>.

concern of speakers was that fixing the political process would prove insufficient to move the province beyond its present, cold peace. In particular, the conference reflected the fact that the hopes prevalent in the early 1990s of a lessening of the sectarian divide and a coming together of the communities had all but dissipated. The lack of any element of political accommodation in the negotiations being conducted indirectly between the two main parties was seen as a prelude either to no deal being reached or to one that was based on a division of spoils rather than a willing sharing of power. The trend towards ever more extensive residential segregation was seen as undermining the role of civil society as a bridge between the communities. This could be regarded as the social counterpart of the trend towards political polarization reflected in the dominance of radical parties on either side of the sectarian divide.

Much of the optimism that greeted the Good Friday Agreement has dissipated. However, fear that continuing political instability might propel the province back towards violent conflict has also diminished. The concern prevalent in 2004 that the two governments might turn a blind eye to continuing criminal activities by paramilitaries and low-level violence has been partly reduced as a result of the attention the issue of criminality has received since December 2004. But that has also resulted in lower expectations of a political deal that will permit the restoration of devolved government and an end to direct rule from Westminster. Much will depend on the full nature of the IRA's response to Adams's April appeal and how it is received.

The focus of further research on the peace process should be on understanding in greater depth the reasons for the polarization of opinion that has occurred since the peace process began and that has accelerated since the Good Friday Agreement. There is also a need to consider the impact on political attitudes in the two communities of the trend towards more complete social segregation, as well as what measures might be put in place to arrest and then to reverse this trend. Another area requiring exploration is how far external parties might be able to exercise their influence to advance political progress, as they did with considerable success in 1998.

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## Selling Fear? The Framing of Terrorist Threat in Elections

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**Sarah Oates**, University of Glasgow

Terrorism and elections both make compelling television. With the growth in global attention to terrorism in the wake of 9/11, political imagery and terrorism have become more intertwined. Yet it is not particularly clear what political players, the media and voters make of terrorism when it comes to polling day. To address this gap, studies supported by the Economic and Social Research Council's New Security Challenges Programme are currently examining the role of

terrorism and security concerns in recent elections in Russia, the United States and Great Britain.

At issue is how contenders for political office talk about terrorism as a domestic and international concern. If terrorism and security concerns are mentioned during elections, are the voters offered a set of rational policy alternatives or does the discussion merely focus on fear? Which groups are discussed as threats and how is this linked to the concerns of voters in certain countries? Does the television news really inform viewers about the issues surrounding terrorism and security? Finally, how do the voters themselves react to the manner in which the issues are framed by politicians and the news media?

The project has completed its analysis of the Russian elections. Work is currently ongoing to analyse results from the US presidential elections and the May 2005 British parliamentary elections. The results from Russia suggest that concerns over terrorism and international security can affect the trade-offs voters are prepared to accept between order and democracy as well as between censorship and freedom of speech. This happens in the interchange among politicians, the media and a frightened audience. In the United States, Americans in focus groups emerge as more uncertain and frustrated about security issues than the hard line articulated by President Bush and even his victory in 2004 might suggest. Finally, the British campaign was perhaps noteworthy for how little it discussed terrorism and international security, but the issues of immigration and asylum seemed to step in to serve as electoral fear factors.

In *Russia*, the project looked primarily at the December 2003 parliamentary campaign, as the 2004 presidential campaign provided no real competition for President Vladimir Putin. While the centrist parties supported by Kremlin bureaucrats dominated the parliamentary elections, there was still articulate opposition from the more socialist Left and the more liberal Right. What emerges from the Russian study is that while the prime-time news shows on state-run and commercial television covered terrorism differently, neither provided in-depth or meaningful analysis of the background of the events. The study looked at a month of nightly news coverage on *Vremya* (Time) on the state-run First Channel and on *Sevodnya* (Today) on the commercial NTV network. (Although NTV is not state-run, the selective application of financial laws has made it clear the media organization must toe Putin's line.) Terrorism was one of the leading topics on the Russian election news. This should not be surprising given both strong public interest in the problem and a terrorist attack on a train in southern Russia that left more than 40 people dead just two days before the 2003 parliamentary elections. Altogether, the research found that nine per cent of the news was devoted to terrorism during the 2003 parliamentary campaign. During the campaign, *Vremya* focused more on international terrorism while *Sevodnya* featured more reporting on terrorism related to Chechnya and news on the war in Chechnya in general. State-run news tended to use terrorist threats or acts as a reason to emphasize a need for strong, centralized power.

Commercial television news tended to focus more on the event and its gruesome outcome. With *Vremya's* keenness to underline the state's authority and *Sevodnya* interested in the more sensational elements, little was done to really reassure or inform the citizenry. Rather than competing with each other – as is seen in the US and Britain – the state-run and commercial stations appeared to ignore each other to a large degree. Sometimes the story selection and order were so different it was hard to believe this was news about the same country on the same day.

In turn, focus-group research in Russia in spring 2004 found little link between terrorism and voter choice, although the notion of a strong, stable Russia was a compelling reason why many voters supported Putin. Many Russian viewers said that they sought solace and comfort from television in times of national crisis, especially after terrorist attacks. Many reported being distressed, however, by the repetition of grisly scenes of destruction and found interviews with victims both upsetting and a violation of good taste. At the same time, many respondents admitted that this sort of coverage makes for compelling viewing. After all, they are concerned about terrorism. In a 2003–4 survey of 2,000 Russians commissioned by Stephen White at the University of Glasgow, 95 per cent of the respondents felt that terrorism was a serious threat to Russian security.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the fact that Chechen groups have claimed recent terrorist acts, Russians were far more worried about the Americans. In the survey, 23 per cent cited the US as the major threat to Russia; only three per cent said the same for Chechnya.

What is clear is that terrorism is affecting the way in which these respondents analyse the political situation in Russia. There was a tendency to blame democracy for terrorism, both in the global and the Russian contexts. For example, many of the focus-group participants perceived the expansionist ambitions of the capitalist US as responsible for much of world terrorism. Many Russian respondents commented that too much democracy was to blame for the lack of law and order.

It is not clear how concerns about terrorism translated into votes for specific parties in the Russian 2003 elections as the parties were not particularly articulate on this issue. In the presidential election in 2004, the role of terrorism and security concerns were not the same. While the focus-group participants did not feel that these issues *per se* played a role in that campaign, they made it clear that they expected their president to be 'effective', particularly in the sphere of

security. By effective, Russians meant they were more concerned with order than democracy. Several times the focus groups praised the effectiveness of Stalin's policies.

In the *United States* the 2004 elections were distinguished by a polarized electorate, but that does not mean that either side was particularly happy with the policy direction of President Bush or contender John Kerry. In focus groups just after the elections, even self-professed Republicans and Democrats raised concerns over how 'their' side had handled the issue of terrorism. Though often patriotic, the American respondents were concerned that no current policy – including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq – seemed particularly effective against terrorist groups. They were concerned about unemployment and other economic issues. Like the Russians, they often felt shocked and upset by the coverage of terrorist acts, particularly in the days following 9/11. Much like the Russians, Americans appeared to be a dispirited and disillusioned electorate, grappling with the demise of a feeling of security in their world.

The initial analysis of *UK* news coverage suggests two key points about the parties and their coverage on BBC and the key commercial channel ITV during the 2005 campaign. First, there was relatively little discussion of terrorism and threats to national security. The only element of the campaign that could be said to deal with basic fears about security occurred more in the economic sphere, as the Conservatives criticized what they claimed were deficiencies in the immigration and asylum system. This argument, however, focused more on the strain on or abuse of the benefits system than fears of a terrorist attack.

Most of the time, the public are merely spectators to foreign affairs, with the right to protest but with little opportunity to change the course of policy direction. At elections, there is an opportunity for the critical issues of terrorism and security policy to be thrown open for debate. This research suggests, however, that the politics of fear can often overshadow a more informed discussion about the causes and potential policy prescriptions for dealing with the issue. As a result, it is easy to slip into prejudices and assumptions about the 'enemy' rather than focusing on any erosion of citizens' rights resulting from the 'war on terror'. Terrorism and the shadow of fear it casts can be used all too easily to obscure repressive government measures. While that may not be a particularly surprising finding given Russia's autocratic tendencies, it is a disturbing comment if these critical issues are not discussed meaningfully during campaigns in the US or the UK.

<sup>1</sup> See Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe* (Royal Institute of International Affairs/Blackwell, Chatham House Paper, forthcoming 2006).