



**The McLeod Group**



## TERRORISM AND DEVELOPMENT

In order to address the issue of links between terrorism and development, subject, the McLeod Group organized a roundtable discussion in September 2015 at the University of Ottawa, bringing together representatives of academia, civil society, a former Canadian diplomat and a senior foreign diplomat assigned to Canada. Although informed by that discussion, this paper is not a record of it, but rather the McLeod Group's own views on the subject.

### Defining Terrorism

Terrorism is difficult to define. The criminal codes of most countries have definitions, often as contentious as they are extensive. The Canadian Criminal Code has a lengthy definition, although the Justice Department itself notes that 'the term is highly malleable and is hence open to many different definitions and interpretations'.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we start from the basic Oxford dictionary definition: 'the unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims'.

Canadian concerns today have largely to do with *transnational* rather than *national* terrorism: the use of violence and intimidation employed in one place in the pursuit of political aims in another.

This myopic perspective fails to notice that internal political violence in places like South Sudan or the

Democratic Republic of the Congo is much worse than any transnational terrorism seen to date. Such a viewpoint also exaggerates the scale. The 2014 *Global Terrorism Index* puts the numbers into perspective: 'Although terrorism is on the increase and a major concern compared to other forms of violence, it is relatively small when compared to the 437,000 people killed by homicides in 2012, this being 40 times greater'.<sup>2</sup>

### Understanding Modern Terrorism

Terrorism today is highly concentrated in five countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria – but it also occurs in another 55 countries around the world. The 2014 *Global Terrorism Index* identifies 13 countries at risk of a substantial increase in terrorism; seven of these are in Africa.

The roots of many modern terrorist movements can be found in longstanding inequalities of power and wealth, many related to the breakup of the Russian and Ottoman empires, colonial expansion, the rearrangement of national borders following World War II, and the end of the stasis that prevailed during the Cold War. Artificial borders were scored across ethnicity, history and common sense, breaking some peoples apart and forcing others together – in many areas creating a profound sense of grievance, marginalization and injustice.

**The McLeod Group works to strengthen Canada's contribution to a better world.**

The McLeod Group is made up of professionals with many years of experience in government, civil society and academia, working across the fields of international development, diplomacy and foreign policy. We work with others who value human rights, inclusion, equality and sustainable development to advance Canadian policy and action on international cooperation and foreign affairs.

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### Understanding Terrorism

The Canadian public and political understanding of terrorism today is viewed very much through an American lens, one that came into sharp focus with the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington. Before he became prime minister, Justin Trudeau spoke of the need to understand the 'root causes' of terrorism following the April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. 'There is no question that this happened because there is someone who feels completely excluded', Trudeau said.

Without an understanding of the root causes of terrorism, governments are left with limited and often ineffective tools for dealing with the complex reality of terrorism.

Ideology or religion may be a factor, although the grievances expressed by groups as widely disparate in their stated views as ISIL, Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army or the Shining Path of Peru are usually as numerous and as varied as they are unachievable. During the civil and trans-border wars that wracked West and Central Africa during the 1990s, scholars delved into questions about the relevant importance of greed and grievance. Was Sierra Leonean rebel Foday Sankoh fighting for diamonds, democracy, or to resolve one of half a dozen other vaguely articulated grievances?<sup>3</sup>

The truth is that all armies, whether formal or informal, whether uniformed or working underground, need motivation. And motivation often comes from a sense of grievance, whether it is legitimate or not. Adolf Hitler was a master at using grievance as a motivator. The rank and file – the cannon fodder – for both civil and transnational violence may be uneducated, disempowered, aggrieved and/or idealistic young men, but the movements they populate are often, if not usually, devised and led by an ideological elite. The ideology might be a religious fundamentalism that transcends national borders, looking in some cases – as with ISIL and Al-Qaeda – to create a geographic space for itself.

There is nothing particularly new in this. The Third Communist International, which lasted between 1919 and 1943, advocated world communism 'by all available means, including armed force, for the overturn of the international bourgeoisie'.<sup>4</sup> In cases like these, an ideological elite becomes the vanguard of a 'movement' or a 'revolution' or the terrorism *du jour*. In some cases the leaders are little more than criminal activists – like Charles Taylor in Liberia or a dozen warlords across Central Africa.

### Incubating Terrorism

There is no clear *causal* link between violence and poverty, or between terrorism and underdevelopment. In other words, poverty does not directly lead to violence and underdevelopment does not inevitably lead to terrorism. But a *correlation* can certainly be made. Brian Atwood, former diplomat, past head of USAID and Dean of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota makes a compelling case:

There is... a significant link between poverty and violent conflict, one that has been largely underestimated by national security analysts... A strong correlation exists between conditions of underdevelopment and the various forms of conflict. This suggests that the failure to recognize the link between security and development has reduced the effectiveness of the more traditional methods of preventing or mitigating conflict, that is, the use of military force, diplomacy, intelligence sharing, and international law.<sup>6</sup>

In fact the use of military force, most notably the Western military interventions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq, with inattention to combatting poverty and inequality, not only failed to quell conflict and terrorism, it exacerbated, expanded and deepened it. You don't need a subscription to *Time* magazine to know that most terrorist acts occur or are planned in poor countries.

Part of the difficulty in accepting a correlation between terrorism and development is the narrow preoccupation that Western governments have with their own immediate security, the proclivity to see counter-violence as the solution, and their failure to see how decades of deep-seated poverty, bad governance and violence affecting *other* people have a bearing on the future peace and security of the West. Western policymakers, for example, forgot the botched military intervention in Somalia until the country became a hotbed of costly shipping piracy. They failed to deal seriously with conflict and poverty in Africa and the Middle East and now hundreds of thousands of refugees have found a way to cross the Mediterranean and the Dardanelles. Western officials seem paralysed with inaction as Boko Haram and Al-Shabab wreak havoc across West and East Africa.

Large-scale, Western-led military interventions (notably in Iraq and Libya) by and large only contribute to amplifying and worsening the conditions that contribute to terrorism.

### What to Do

What follows is not an alternative to the military force that may be required to deal with terrorism. It is a set of recommendations aimed at dealing with some of the conditions that produce it:

- Shift focus from fear-generating, counterproductive immediate concerns ('How can we make it safer for Canadians?') to broader considerations ('How can Canada contribute to making the world a safer place?').
- Much, *much* greater attention needs to be paid to increased and more effective development cooperation, especially in the poorest and most fragile states, the 'ungoverned spaces' that are so attractive to transnational terrorism. A billion people live in absolute poverty, and almost three

billion live on less than \$2 a day. This represents a series of increasingly dangerous, ticking time bombs, some of which have already exploded at great cost, including to the West.

- The instrumentalization of development assistance for commercial and military purposes should end. It is wasteful, counterproductive and usually ineffective. Other vehicles exist for commercial and military advancement.
- 'Capacity building' can be an important Canadian contribution to better governance and improved security in many countries (e.g., Mali, Ukraine, Iraq), but such efforts require objective evaluation, transparency and competent public oversight.
- Soft power (diplomacy, elements of Canada's erstwhile 'human security agenda', the Responsibility to Protect) has an important complementary role to play in a coordinated and coherent approach to security.
- Counterterrorism measures present civil society with new and counterproductive problems. The Women Peacemakers Program could have been speaking for many development and humanitarian organizations when it said that women peace activists 'are facing new restrictive legislative requirements, suffocating financial regulations, intimidating surveillance policies and exhaustive reporting requirements, all this in an already challenging environment'.<sup>7</sup> Ease up on the increasingly draconian regulations and restrictions that make humanitarian response in conflict zones much more difficult and more dangerous than necessary.
- Time is an important factor in all of this. Reactions to immediate security threats can obscure the need for historical perspective, long-term partnerships and a steady commitment to an improvement in the climates that incubate insecurity, violence and terrorism.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Criminal Code of Canada, 1985, Section 83.01, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/page-29.html#h-25>; Department of Justice, 'Memorializing the Victims of Terrorism', January 7, 2015, [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-ipc/victim/rr09\\_6/p3.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-ipc/victim/rr09_6/p3.html).

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2014*, p. 3, [www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014\\_0.pdf](http://www.visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Terrorism%20Index%20Report%202014_0.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Mats Berdal and David Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> "Comintern", Spartacus Educational, August 2014, <http://spartacus-educational.com/RUScomintern.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> J. Brian Atwood, 'The Link Between Poverty and Violent Conflict', *New England Journal of Public Policy*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2003, pp. 159-165.

<sup>7</sup> Women Peacemakers Program, 'Press Release: Counterterrorism Measures and Their Effects on the Implementation of the WPS Agenda', March 25, 2015, [www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/news/press-release-counterterrorism-measures-and-their-effects-on-the-implementation-of-the-wps-agenda-2/](http://www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/news/press-release-counterterrorism-measures-and-their-effects-on-the-implementation-of-the-wps-agenda-2/).