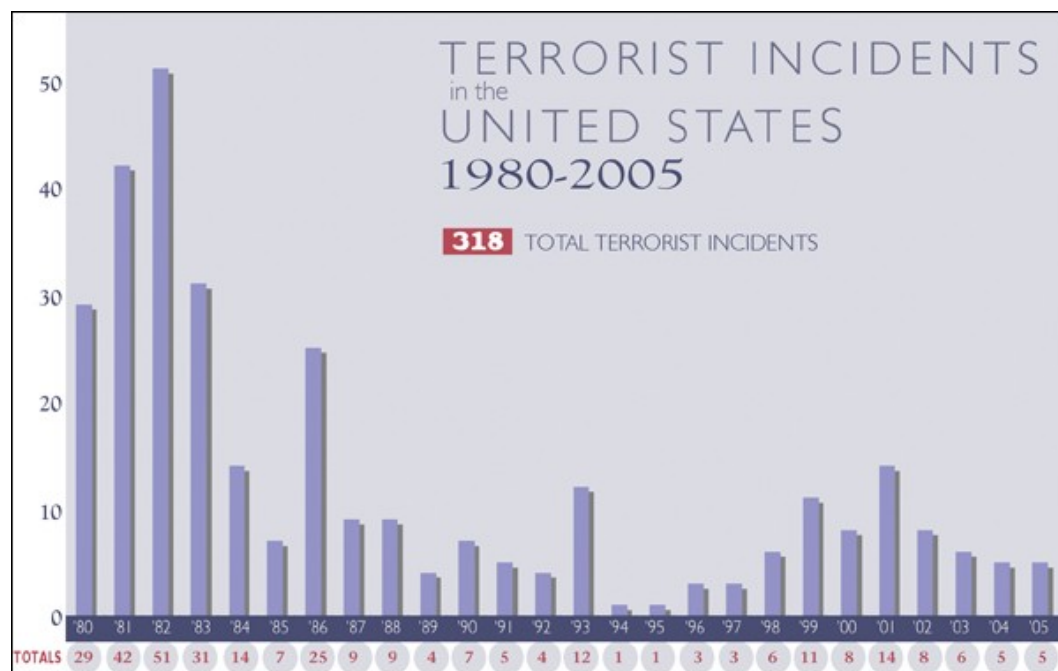
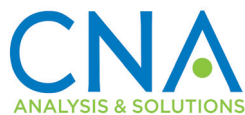


# Asking the Right Questions: A Framework for Assessing Counterterrorism Actions

Jonathan Schroden, William Rosenau, Emily Warner

February 2016





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**Approved by:**

**February 2016**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric V. Thompson".

Eric V. Thompson, Director  
Center for Strategic Studies  
CNA

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| <b>14. ABSTRACT</b><br>Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, money, and effort to countering terrorism, using a variety of approaches and tools. However, it has devoted comparatively little effort to developing rigorous and useful assessment frameworks to help policymakers and practitioners understand how effective these counterterrorism (CT) actions have been. To address this shortfall, in this paper we first identify and characterize today's prevailing theories of terrorism and their associated CT actions. For each theory, we then create an assessment framework—consisting of specific questions that need to be answered in order to gauge the success or failure of CT actions, and indicators that could be used to answer those questions. These assessment frameworks—which rigorously link policy to practice—should enable CT practitioners to provide policymakers and commanders direct and actionable feedback on whether the approaches they have chosen to countering terrorist groups are having the impacts they expect and desire. |                         |                                |                                   |                                                                            |                                                                            |
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## Abstract

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, money, and effort to countering terrorism, using a variety of approaches and tools. However, it has devoted comparatively little effort to developing rigorous and useful assessment frameworks to help policymakers and practitioners understand how effective these counterterrorism (CT) actions have been. To address this shortfall, in this paper we first identify and characterize today's prevailing theories of terrorism and their associated CT actions. For each theory, we then create an assessment framework—consisting of specific questions that need to be answered in order to gauge the success or failure of CT actions, and indicators that could be used to answer those questions. These assessment frameworks—which rigorously link policy to practice—should enable CT practitioners to provide policymakers and commanders direct and actionable feedback on whether the approaches they have chosen to countering terrorist groups are having the impacts they expect and desire.

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## Executive Summary

The United States has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, money, and effort to countering terrorism since the attacks on September 11, 2001, using a variety of approaches and tools. However, it has devoted comparatively little effort to developing rigorous and useful assessment frameworks to help policymakers and practitioners understand how effective these counterterrorism (CT) actions have been. To address this shortfall—and to enable CT practitioners to provide policymakers and commanders direct and actionable feedback on whether the approaches they have chosen to countering terrorist groups are having the impacts they expect and desire—we develop and present in this paper a set of comprehensive assessment frameworks for today’s five prevailing theories of terrorism:

- Ideology (specifically, jihadism)
- Root causes
- State sponsorship
- Rational choice
- Group dynamics

For each theory of terrorism, we first identify the CT actions most associated with that theory. We then identify specific questions that need to be answered in order to gauge the success or failure of those CT actions, along with indicators that could be gathered and analyzed to answer those questions. An example of what this looks like for a single CT action (countering the network) of one theory (group dynamics) is shown in the table on the next page. To our knowledge, this is the first time such a comprehensive mapping of terrorism theories to CT indicators has been performed.

Table. Mapping of a CT action to indicators for the group dynamics theory of terrorism

| Action                                                                                            | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                          | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Counter-network actions (direct action and targeted killings, use of informants, repentance laws) | To what extent have group members been effectively removed by counter-network actions?                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers of group members removed (captured or killed) over time, by broad "type" (e.g., senior leaders, mid-level leaders, facilitators)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions affected recruitment of new group members?                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estimates of the rate of recruitment of terrorist groups (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent has the group's cohesion been impacted by counter-network actions?                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports or announcements of terrorist splinter groups</li> <li>Reports or announcements of changes of leadership</li> <li>Reports or announcements of infighting or "red-on-red" violent events</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions impeded the ability of the group to effectively communicate?                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes in the quality, volume, or frequency of updates of terrorist group propaganda or other information products</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions degraded critical skills and capabilities of the group?                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) over time</li> <li>Intelligence reports of terrorist group attack plans not executed or attack actions not taken</li> <li>Level of popular support expressed for terrorist groups over time (e.g., in polls, ideally broken out into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.)</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have group members been willing to inform on or renounce the group (either of their free will or a result of some inducement)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of tips pertaining to terrorist group attack plans or actions over time</li> <li>Number of group members (and their broad "type") openly leaving the group over time</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                            |

Ultimately, it is our hope that providing a comprehensive mapping of terrorism theories to CT indicators will make it easier for policymakers to articulate (whether explicitly or implicitly) the theory of terrorism from which they derive CT programs and actions, and for CT practitioners to design an assessment framework that aligns logically to that theory. By providing a proof of concept assessment framework for today's theories of terrorism/CT, we hope to empower policymakers to ask the right questions about countering terrorism—and practitioners to answer them.

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## Glossary

|      |                                 |
|------|---------------------------------|
| AQ   | Al Qaeda                        |
| CT   | Counterterrorism                |
| CVE  | Countering violent extremism    |
| DoD  | Department of Defense           |
| DoS  | Department of State             |
| EU   | European Union                  |
| FBI  | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| FDI  | Foreign direct investment       |
| GDP  | Gross domestic product          |
| GWOT | Global War on Terror            |
| IRA  | Irish Republican Army           |
| M&E  | Monitoring and evaluation       |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |

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# Introduction

The United States has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, money, and effort to countering terrorism since the attacks on September 11, 2001.<sup>1</sup> Yet, for all the emphasis on counterterrorism (CT) operations and other U.S. government programs designed to prevent, deter, or counter terrorism worldwide, the U.S. has devoted comparatively little effort to *rigorously* linking its actions to theories of terrorism/CT or to *logically* deriving indicators that could be used to assess how effective those actions have been.<sup>2</sup> The literature on terrorism/CT theory is robust, but policymakers are often unclear as to which theories they believe in or which they are using to craft policy. The literature on CT assessment is much less robust, and many of the articles discussing specific metrics or means of assessing CT operations do so in the absence of a linkage to theories of terrorism and CT.

Because of the general absence of linkages between the “why” (theories) of terrorism/CT, the “how” (actions), and the “what to measure” (metrics), the latter are often ill suited to address questions of whether theories and their associated actions are achieving success in practice. For example, standard quantitative metrics—such as the number of terrorist incidents over time—are easy to compute but difficult to properly interpret for a number of reasons: they lack context; they lack an inherent baseline to allow for proper comparisons over time; and they lack clear, unambiguous linkages to specific theories of terrorism/CT.<sup>3</sup> This mismatch can and often does result in miscommunications between policymakers, practitioners, and broader audiences (e.g., the media and general public) as to why certain CT actions

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<sup>1</sup> Though, the history of U.S. counterterrorism actions extends back much further in time. See, for example: William Rosenau, *The “First War on Terrorism?” U.S. Domestic Counterterrorism During the 1970s and Early 1980s*, CNA Research Memorandum 2014-U-008836, October 2014.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we will use terms such as “assessment” and “evaluation” interchangeably, while acknowledging that different U.S. government agencies favor specific terms and may have definitions for them that vary somewhat from those of other agencies. See, for example: U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, 8 November 2010 (As Amended Through 15 June 2015), p. 17, or U.S. Department of State (DoS), *Department of State Evaluation Policy*, January 2015, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion on the shortfalls of using security incidents as a metric in: Jonathan Schroden, “Measures for Security in a Counterinsurgency,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 5 (2009): 715-744.

are being employed and whether they are achieving desired outcomes. Worse, it has the potential to result in ineffective or counterproductive decision-making by policymakers and practitioners, since the assessments they receive may not be linked to the (explicit or implicit) theories guiding their actions.

As part of CNA's self-initiated research program, in this paper we will—for the first time—develop and present a logical and comprehensive framework for linking theories of terrorism and their associated actions to indicators that could be used to assess U.S. government CT actions and programs. Specifically, we will answer the following questions as they pertain to the practice and assessment of countering terrorism:

- What are the predominant theories of terrorism today?
- What types of actions are most associated with each theory for countering terrorism?
- What questions would need to be answered in order to know whether these actions are successfully addressing terrorism as predicted by theory?
- What specific pieces of data and information (indicators) would need to be gathered and analyzed in order to answer those questions?<sup>4</sup>

These are difficult questions to answer, and doing so definitively is not possible in this report, given the limited scope and scale of our research effort. Here, we will provide an initial set of responses to these questions as a proof of concept of what a comprehensive, theory-derived assessment framework might look like for countering terrorism. By doing so, we hope to provide a starting point for CT policymakers and practitioners interested in more rigorous approaches to assessing their policies and actions. We also hope to stimulate a broader and more rigorous discussion of the theories, the actions, the questions, and the indicators for countering terrorism and assessing U.S. performance and outcomes in attempting to do so.

## Approach and organization

Our approach to answering the above questions parallels the organization of this paper:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the remainder of this paper, we will emphasize the use of the term “indicator” as opposed to “metric.” Because the former carries a less quantitative connotation, it allows for the broader inclusion of non-numerical pieces of data and information.

- First, we summarize bodies of research from both the academic and operational worlds in order to identify the most common theories of why groups or individuals engage in terrorism.
- Second, we identify what actions these theories suggest are most appropriate to countering terrorism in its various forms.
- Third, we use literature research, discussions with subject matter experts, and a logical reductionist approach to identify the questions that would need to be answered in order to know whether each theory's associated actions are effective in practice.
- Fourth, we use a similar approach to identify the indicators that would be used to answer these questions of effectiveness.

We conclude the paper with a brief discussion of how our preliminary CT assessment framework might be implemented and improved upon going forward. In the appendix, we present a survey of the current literature on CT assessment as supporting information and further justification for this effort.

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<sup>5</sup> This approach was selected because it has been used by the lead author effectively for assessing counterinsurgency operations in the past and because it aligns with recent changes in DoD doctrine. See: Schroden, "Measures for Security in a Counterinsurgency"; Jonathan Schroden et al., "A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency," *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (September 2013); U.S. DOD, *Operation Assessment*, Joint Doctrine Note 1-15, January 15, 2015; and Air Land Sea Application Center, *Operation Assessment*, August 2015.

# Theoretical Foundations of Counterterrorism

To elucidate how to assess the effectiveness of CT approaches, we need to first identify and make explicit prominent theories that have been advanced to explain the phenomenon of terrorism. We will focus on five theories of terrorism that are particularly predominant today:

- Ideology
- Root causes
- State sponsorship
- Rational choice
- Group dynamics

In this section, we will briefly summarize each of these theories, to include a discussion of key components, assumptions, illustrative examples, and activities that have been associated with each theory.

To be clear, this group of five theories is not intended to be historically comprehensive. Some theoretical approaches, such as psychopathology, were prominent in the 1970s when the field of “terrorism studies” was emerging, but have since fallen out of favor among specialists.<sup>6</sup> Over time, new theories are likely to be developed. As a result, the discussion below should be viewed as a snapshot of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ivan Sascha Sheehan, *When Terrorism and Counterterrorism Clash: The War on Terror and the Transformation of Terrorist Activity* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007), 44-45; and Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). Early terrorism research focused heavily on identifying terrorist “personalities.” Today, few specialists argue that such personalities exist, although some experts continue to search for a terrorist “profile” in the hopes of explaining why relatively few individuals from the same background living in similar circumstances become terrorists. John Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618 (July 2008): 83.

current state of thinking on terrorism and CT. As well, the boundaries between the five theories are necessarily fuzzy. For example, small-group dynamics and rational choice can overlap, and some state sponsorship and ideology adherents point to Baathist Iraq as a prime mover in both spheres. Therefore, it is possible (and reasonable) to subscribe to more than one theory simultaneously and there is a range of positions and viewpoints among proponents of each theory.

That said, we believe the logical approach that we use below to develop assessment frameworks for these five schools of thought could also be used for any new theories of terrorism in the future. Additionally, we do not see the assessment frameworks that we describe below as mutually exclusive. It may be possible to select questions and indicators from within each school of thought to generate a “blended framework” that spans multiple theories. The more important point when it comes to effective CT assessment is to *ensure that a theory (or theories) is chosen and made explicit before CT actions or programs begin*, so that appropriate questions can be asked and indicators can be gathered at the outset of new initiatives.

## Ideology (jihadism)

### Key elements and assumptions

At the foundation of this theoretical approach is the notion that certain systems of belief drive individuals to engage in terrorist activities. Specific ideologies that have been the focus of attention in the past include Communism (in the decades of the Cold War) and “ethno-nationalism” (in the 1970s and 80s). Today, a militant, militarized, and politicized Islam—also known as “jihadism”—is the ideological engine most commonly cited for powering the most dangerous terrorist threats to the United States and the West more generally. The view of those espousing a “jihadist” theory of terrorism is that jihadists are deeply and indeed inevitably opposed to Western civilization, as evidenced by their quest for the reestablishment of the caliphate, the imposition of sharia law, and the spread of a reformed and purified Islamic faith.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> More than 20 years ago, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington popularized the notion that the “West and the rest” (including Islam) were destined for inter-civilizational conflicts. Samuel P. Huntington, “A Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>, accessed July 10, 2015.

In the view of the writer Paul Berman, a leading proponent of the jihadist theory of terrorism, militant Islam is a form of totalitarianism that draws on an ideational wellspring shared by communism, fascism, and Nazism:

People throw themselves into campaigns of murder and suicide because they have come under the influence of malign doctrinal systems, which appear to address the most profound and pressing of human problems—and do so by openly rebelling against the gravest of moral considerations.<sup>8</sup>

Jihadists are engaged in a total, protracted war against those they consider the enemies of Islam—a Manichean struggle that will end only with the total Western withdrawal from “occupied” Muslim lands and the destruction of Israel.<sup>9</sup> As such, jihadism represents an “ideology of conquest” and a significant threat to America,” according to Richard Perle and David Frum, two prominent early advocates for the post-9/11 “War on Terror.”<sup>10</sup> Like Britain confronting the “armed doctrine” of the French Revolution, this school of thought argues that the West faces a comparable ideological challenge today.<sup>11</sup>

## Counterterrorism actions

For many who subscribe to the jihadist theory of terrorism, the use of military force, while not the only counterterrorist instrument in their repertoire, is first among equals. Countering extremist ideology, promoting the spread of democracy and human rights, and maintaining a broad political coalition against jihadism all have

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Berman, “Why is the Islamist Death Cult So Appealing?” *Tablet*, January 28, 2015, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/188549/islamist-death-cult>, accessed June 20, 2015. See also Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), “Jihadism as an Ideology of Violence: The Abuse of Islam for Terrorist Purposes,” 2015, <http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/fields-of-work/islamism-and-islamist-terrorism/what-is-islamism/jihadism-as-an-ideology-of-violence>, accessed June 15, 2015. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State, adds an apocalyptic dimension to jihadism—the return of the Caliphate and with it, the destruction of the world. See: William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> David Frum and Richard N. Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 238. See also Timothy J. Lynch, “Kristol Balls: Neoconservative Visions of Islam and the Middle East,” *International Politics* 45, no 2, March 1, 2008: 192.

<sup>11</sup> John M. Owen, IV, *Confronting Political Islam: Six Lessons from the West’s Past* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014): 72.

their place, but these are secondary. Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and other military campaigns, both named and unnamed, have had two objectives. The first is to degrade and destroy Islamist armed groups (and in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, the regimes that supported them). The second aim is to produce a powerful demonstration effect designed to signal to potential aggressors, both state and non-state, that the United States will commit its overwhelming military might to eliminating anti-Western terrorism.<sup>12</sup>

## Root causes

### Key elements and assumptions

Central to the “root causes” theory is the tenet that economic, social, political, and environmental conditions enable, contribute to, and perhaps have a causal relationship with, terrorism. At the very least, social-political conditions such as poverty, inequality (both relative and absolute), and the lack of political freedom create a climate amenable to exploitation by terrorists. President Barak Obama, in a February 2015 speech, highlighted links between terrorism and various social, political, and economic ills:

The link is undeniable. When people are oppressed and human rights are denied—particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic lines—when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism. It creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit.”<sup>13</sup>

For their part, terrorism theorists generally argue that such conditions are insufficient to lead to terrorism. Terrorism also requires grievances (political or otherwise) and what one specialist refers to as “precipitant factors—such as leadership, funding, state sponsorship, [and] political upheaval [that] form essential

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the purported demonstration effect of the application of U.S. military power, see James Phillips, “Iraq: One Year Later,” Heritage Foundation, March 24, 2004, <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/hl825nbsp-iraq-one-year-later>, accessed June 10, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Acosta, “Obama Calls on World to Focus on Roots of ISIS, Al Qaeda Extremism,” *CNN Politics*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/politics/obama-isis-extremism-speech/index.html>, accessed June 5, 2015. See also White House, National Strategy for Counterterrorism, July 2011, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf), accessed May 12, 2015.

intervening variables.”<sup>14</sup> Scholars also point to so-called trigger causes—that is, “those immediate circumstances and events that provoke people to have recourse to terrorist action.” An example is Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon’s visit in 2000 to the Temple Mount/al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, which helped ignite the Second Intifada.<sup>15</sup>

## Counterterrorism actions

Adherents of the root causes theory argue that addressing the underlying causes of terrorism is essential for suppressing it on a long-term basis. Like adherents of other theories, they believe that the use of military force and other repressive instruments necessarily have a role in combating terrorism—but that, given the nature of the “engines” of terrorism (such as poverty, weak states, and demographic pressures), it is critical to rely on more than the short-term use of military power.<sup>16</sup> In this school of thought, relevant counterterrorism approaches include the promotion of economic development, the rule of law, good governance, education, and social justice more generally.<sup>17</sup> Without such systemic approaches, adherents argue, counterterrorism becomes an exercise in “mowing the grass” rather than performing the “weeding and landscaping” aimed at reducing if not eliminating the threat.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Newman, “Exploring the ‘Root Causes’ of Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 751.

<sup>15</sup> Tore Bjørgo, “Introduction,” in Tore Bjørgo (ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Martha Crenshaw, “The Long View of Terrorism,” *Current History* (January 2014): 42.

<sup>17</sup> Alex P. Schmid, “Prevention of Terrorism: Toward a Multi-Pronged Approach,” in Bjørgo (ed.), *Root Causes of Terrorism*, p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> “Former CIA Director Hayden: ‘We’re Going to See More of What We Saw in Texas Last Week,’” May 10, 2015, <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2015/05/10/fmr-cia-director-hayden-were-going-to-see-more-of-what-we-saw-in-texas-last-week/>, accessed May 20, 2015; and Daniel Byman, “Mowing the Grass and Taking Out the Trash,” *Foreign Policy*, August 25, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/25/mowing-the-grass-and-taking-out-the-trash/>, accessed May 13, 2015.

## State sponsorship

### Key elements and assumptions

As noted above, the boundaries between the five theories discussed in this paper are blurry, and it is possible to subscribe to one or more of them simultaneously. Adherents of the “state sponsorship” framework do not necessarily rule out ideology, small-group dynamics, or rational choice as contributors to the phenomenon of terrorism. Rather, they are seeking to highlight the idea that terrorism is not always a non-state phenomenon, and that regimes (for various *raisons d’Etat*) support terrorist groups. That assistance can be relatively passive (e.g., allowing terrorists sanctuary or safe passage), or more active (e.g., giving direct financing, providing weapons and travel documents, and offering support through intelligence and propaganda).<sup>19</sup>

During the Cold War, U.S. presidents such as Ronald Reagan and his senior advisors advanced the notion that the Soviet Union was the wellspring of international terror in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean.<sup>20</sup> Since 1979, the U.S. Department of State has designated state sponsors of terrorism. That list once included Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Syria, and North Korea (though interestingly, never the Soviet Union), but has dwindled to three (Iran, Syria, and Sudan).<sup>21</sup>

### Counterterrorism actions

The United States and its international partners apply a full spectrum of instruments against countries they deem to be sponsors of terrorism. These include: unilateral

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 15. Before the emergence of modern terrorism in the late 1960s, scholars generally used the term “terrorism” to denote specific forms of violence carried out by states (such as France during the Revolution, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin) against noncombatants—to “terrorize” them into obedience. Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government,” *The Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (July 1953).

<sup>20</sup> Policymakers embraced the ideas advanced in journalist Claire Sterling’s book *The Terror Network* (1981), in which she detected Moscow’s hand behind terrorist groups in the Middle East and Western Europe—in effect, the existence of a Soviet proxy war against the United States and its allies. Claire Sterling, *Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of State (DoS), “State Sponsors of Terrorism,” <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>, accessed July 20, 2015.

and multilateral sanctions; capacity-building and foreign assistance programs; and intelligence and law enforcement cooperation.<sup>22</sup> Since the 1980s, the United States has also used military force against a variety of state sponsors, including Libya, Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan, in order to compel them to abandon terrorism, turn over terrorist suspects, and (as in Iraq and Afghanistan) depose troublesome regimes.<sup>23</sup>

## Rational choice

### Key elements and assumptions

Politicians and policymakers frequently use terms such as “senseless” and “mindless” to describe attacks by terrorists. The U.S. embassy in Kuwait decried the “senseless terrorist attack” on worshippers that took place on June 26, 2015, at the Al-Imam Mosque in Kuwait City.<sup>24</sup> But within terrorism studies, there is near-consensus that terrorism is not the work of madmen but rather is a rational (if deplorable) strategic choice.<sup>25</sup> This theoretical stance is neatly summarized by the economists Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks:

The average terrorist behaves more or less as a *homo economicus* . . . . As rational actors terrorists act violently to maximize their utility, given certain benefits, costs and constraints that are linked to these actions . . . . The utility-maximizing level of terrorism is the level at which the marginal costs equal the marginal benefits of terrorism.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> DoS, “Programs and Initiatives,” <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/programs/index.htm>, accessed July 5, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “Coercive Diplomacy and the Response to Terrorism,” in Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> DoS, “Embassy of the United States Condemns the Senseless Terrorist Attack on Worshippers,” June 26, 2015, [http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/embassy\\_news/press-releases/2015-press-releases/-embassy-of-the-united-states-condemns-the-senseless-terrorist-attack-on-worshippers-june-26-2015.html](http://kuwait.usembassy.gov/embassy_news/press-releases/2015-press-releases/-embassy-of-the-united-states-condemns-the-senseless-terrorist-attack-on-worshippers-june-26-2015.html), accessed July 20, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, “The Rationality of Terrorism and Other Forms of Political Violence: Lessons from the Jewish Campaign in Palestine, 1939-1947,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 2 (May 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks, “What Causes Terrorism?” *Public Choice* 147, no. 1-2 (2011): 4-5.

Although derived from microeconomics, this theory—at least in the way it is typically employed by terrorism specialists—offers explanations that are based on more than narrow considerations of monetary costs and benefits.<sup>27</sup> In this paradigm, terrorism is instrumental and can be employed as a cost-effective strategy for broader political, religious, and social aims, as well as personal gain.<sup>28</sup>

## Counterterrorism actions

If terrorists are indeed rational actors, it follows that manipulating their cost-benefit calculations may be an effective tool for deterring terrorism. Toward that end, counterterrorism policies can be directed in two ways: *raising the costs* of terrorism or *reducing the benefits*, political or otherwise. Increasing the cost could include both defensive measures (such as hardening potential targets) and offensive steps (such as direct military action or a “no-concessions” policy with respect to negotiations).<sup>29</sup> Reducing the benefits of terrorism could be achieved by granting concessions to aggrieved groups on whose behalf terrorists claim to be acting, or by promoting democracy as a nonviolent forum for redressing political problems.<sup>30</sup>

## Group dynamics

### Key elements and assumptions

Although so-called lone wolves have been responsible for major acts of terrorism in North America and Western Europe, terrorism is fundamentally a group or social activity. Writing in 1968, one French right-wing extremist described the internal social demands of the terrorist underground in vivid terms:

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<sup>27</sup> Claude Berrebi, “The Economics of Terrorism and Counterterrorism: What Matters and Is Rational-Choice Theory Helpful?” in Paul K. Davis and Kim Cragin, eds., *Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2009), p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence A. Kuzner, “Rationality Wars and the War on Terror: Explaining Terrorism and Social Unrest,” *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 2 (June 2007): 320.

<sup>29</sup> Eric van Um, *Discussing Concepts of Terrorist Rationality: Implications for Counter-Terrorism Policy*, Economics of Security Working Paper 22, German Institute for Economic Research, December 2009, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> James A. Piazza, “Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure, and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern Countries,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (2007).

Under the rigorous precautions of underground life, his only society is that of his brothers in arms. These ties are very strong, but they are limited to a handful of men who are bound together by danger and secrecy.<sup>31</sup>

Proponents of organizational or group dynamics approaches to terrorism point to considerable theoretical and empirical evidence to argue that individuals join and remain in violent underground groups in order to develop or maintain affective ties.<sup>32</sup> Scholars such as Marc Sageman have advanced the “bunch of guys” approach to explain the entry of young Western men into jihadist groups.<sup>33</sup> In the view of these theorists, radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization are better understood as collective rather than as individual activities.<sup>34</sup>

Given the collective nature of terrorism, it follows that organizations—their structures, internal dynamics, and leadership—are of paramount importance. The sociologist Donatella della Porta, in her studies of the Red Brigades and other European terrorists, has highlighted the “totalitarian” nature of underground armed groups, where total commitment is required. According to della Porta, “The very fact of being in an underground group requires commitment to it to become the absolute priority with respect to the other roles an individual plays.”<sup>35</sup> The group itself shapes the “cognitive dynamics” and perceptions of the outside world among its members by functioning as a filter—all external information is sorted and processed by the group.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in William F. May, “Terrorism as Strategy and Ecstasy,” *Social Research* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1974): 291. See also Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Max Abrams, “What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 94.

<sup>33</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> In this view, terrorist organizations have much in common with other “deviant” groups, particularly juvenile gangs. Simon Cottee, “Jihadism as a Subcultural Response to Social Strain: Extending Marc Sageman’s ‘Bunch of Guys’ Thesis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23 (2011): 730.

<sup>35</sup> Donatella della Porta, “Leaving Underground Organizations: A Sociological Analysis of the Italian Case,” in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 179.

## Counterterrorism actions

Law enforcement and intelligence operations designed to erode group cohesion have a prominent place in campaigns designed to counter terrorism at the organizational level. Such measures could include: direct action and targeted killings; the widespread use of informants; and repentance laws intended to encourage members to renounce violence and provide information in exchange for shorter prison sentences. Programs to counter violent extremism would have an obvious role, as would information operations intended to highlight the grim, dangerous, and futile nature of life inside a terrorist group. Given the importance of leadership, such operations could also convey messages designed to undercut the authority and standing of senior figures—for example, criminal behavior for personal gain, sexual abuse of members, or deviation from the group’s stated goals.

# Questions for Counterterrorism Assessment

With an understanding of the five theories of terrorism and their associated actions, we will next develop the questions that must be answered in order to know whether each theory's actions are having their intended effects. We generated these questions by reviewing the CT literature, discussing the theories with CNA subject matter experts, and using a reductionist approach to parse the theories' CT actions into assessable components. However, we do not claim to have captured the universe of possible questions that could be asked. This step of developing an assessment framework is inherently a blend of art and science; therefore, the questions we present below should be viewed as a starting point for further iteration by practitioners.

## Ideology (jihadism)

Table 1 presents the actions for countering jihadist terrorism that we identified from the literature, along with the assessment questions that we created for each action.

Table 1. Actions and assessment questions for the ideology (jihadism) theory of terrorism

| Actions                       | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Use of military force         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent have military operations directly degraded terrorist groups' capabilities?</li> <li>To what extent have military operations indirectly degraded terrorist groups' capabilities?</li> <li>To what extent can military operations be conducted independently by partner nations? With U.S. assistance?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  |
| Countering extremist ideology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent are terrorist groups' messages reaching target audiences (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?</li> <li>To what extent do terrorist groups' messages resonate with target audiences (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?</li> <li>To what extent are terrorist groups' messages leading to desired actions by the target audience (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?</li> <li>Are there "moderate" groups competing in the messaging</li> </ul> |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                              | space with extremist groups? If so, how do their messages compete (in terms of importance, credibility, resonance) with those of extremist groups?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Promoting spread of democracy and human rights <sup>37</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the political community sovereign?</li> <li>• Who is allowed to vote and who votes? Who is eligible for public office and who actually attains it? To what extent does the legislature reflect population characteristics?</li> <li>• To what extent are elections free and fair?</li> <li>• Who is the head of the government? How is the chief executive (s) selected? To what extent is the executive constrained? How frequent is executive turnover? To what extent is the executive accountable?</li> <li>• How independent and empowered is the legislature?</li> <li>• How independent, empowered, and effective is the judiciary?</li> <li>• To what extent are political parties institutionalized? Does the party system offer a variety of meaningful choices to voters?</li> <li>• To what extent are media outlets independent, representative of diverse interests/points of view, and able to reach the citizenry?</li> <li>• To what extent is civil society independent and organized?</li> <li>• How possible is the use of citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy?</li> <li>• How democratic is the country sub-nationally? To what extent are subnational formal institutions and processes democratic in design and operation? To what extent do national institutions and processes operate democratically in subnational territorial units?</li> <li>• To what extent do citizens enjoy freedom of speech and freedom from politically motivated persecution by the government?</li> <li>• What societal factors might impact the goal of political equality?</li> <li>• To what extent are political decisions the product of public deliberation?</li> </ul> |
| Maintaining broad political coalition                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the strength of the CT political coalition?</li> <li>• How sensitive is the coalition to political conditions in each member country?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

<sup>37</sup> The assessment questions for this action are directed at the level of specific “countries of concern” and are taken or derived from: Michael Coppedge et al., “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach,” *Perspective on Politics* 9, no. 2 (June 2011): 247-267; and Seva Gunitsky, “How Do You Measure ‘Democracy?’” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2015.

## Root causes

Table 2 presents the actions for addressing root causes that we identified from the literature, along with the assessment questions that we created for each action.

Table 2. Actions and assessment questions for the root causes theory of terrorism

| Actions                                         | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promotion of economic development <sup>38</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the level of wealth?</li> <li>• What is the level of production?</li> <li>• What is the quality of life?</li> <li>• What is the level of employment/unemployment?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Promotion of the rule of law <sup>38,39</sup>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are government powers limited and subject to the rule of law?</li> <li>• How pervasive is corruption in the government?</li> <li>• How well does the government assure the security of persons and property?</li> <li>• How well protected are basic/fundamental human rights?</li> <li>• How open and transparent is the government?</li> <li>• How effective is the government's enforcement of regulatory statutes?</li> <li>• What is the level of access to civil, criminal, and/or informal/traditional justice systems?</li> </ul> |
| Promotion of social justice <sup>38,40</sup>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is wealth distributed among the population?</li> <li>• How are goods and services distributed among the population?</li> <li>• How is employment distributed among the population?</li> <li>• What is the level of access to health care?</li> <li>• What is the level of access to consumer information?</li> <li>• What is the level of access to education?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                            |

<sup>38</sup> The assessment questions for these actions are directed at specific "countries of concern."

<sup>39</sup> Assessment questions for this action are derived or taken from: Juan Carlos Botero and Alejandro Ponce, *Measuring the Rule of Law*, The World Justice Project – Working Paper Series, WPS No. 001, available at <http://worldjusticeproject.org/publication/working-papers/measuring-rule-law>, accessed 9 October 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Assessment questions for this action derived or taken from the European Union (EU) Social Justice Index. See: <http://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu/social-justice-index>, accessed October 9, 2015.

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promotion of good governance <sup>38,41</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the level of participation in the economic, social, civic, and political life of society?</li> <li>• What is the level of citizens' voice?</li> <li>• What is the level of accountability of public officials?</li> <li>• What is the level of political instability and violence?</li> <li>• What is the level of government effectiveness?</li> <li>• What is the regulatory burden?</li> <li>• What is the level of rule of law?</li> <li>• What is the level of corruption?</li> </ul> |
| Promotion of education <sup>38</sup>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How educated is the population?</li> <li>• To what extent is education being provided by the state? Private organizations? Religious organizations?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## State sponsorship

Table 3 presents the actions for addressing state-sponsored terrorism that we identified from the literature, along with the assessment questions that we created for each action.

Table 3. Actions and assessment questions for the state sponsorship theory of terrorism

| Actions                                           | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unilateral and multilateral sanctions             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the United States designated the country a state sponsor of terrorism?</li> <li>• What is the level of congressional support for unilateral sanctions?</li> <li>• What is the level of international support for multilateral sanctions?</li> <li>• What is the impact of sanctions to the economy of the state sponsor?</li> <li>• What is the impact of sanctions to the U.S. economy and/or to the economies of partner nations?</li> </ul> |
| Capacity-building and foreign assistance programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How capable are partner nations of securing themselves against terrorist threats emanating from the state sponsor?</li> <li>• What is the impact of U.S. security assistance to partner nations as it pertains to the prevention of, and response to, state-sponsored terrorism?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |

<sup>41</sup> Assessment questions for this action derived or taken from: Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Pablo Zoido-Lobaton, *Governance Matters*, Policy Research Working Paper 2196, The World Bank, October 1999, available at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/pdf/govmatters1.pdf>, accessed October 9, 2015.

Intelligence and law enforcement cooperation

- To what extent are we able to gather intelligence and information pertaining to the actions of the state sponsor of terrorism?
- To what extent do we have adequate extradition agreements with partner nations?
- To what extent do we have other mechanisms of effective law enforcement cooperation with partner nations?

## Rational choice

Table 4 presents the actions for the “rational choice” school of thought that we identified from the literature, along with the assessment questions that we created for each action.

Table 4. Actions and assessment questions for the rational choice theory of terrorism

| Actions                                                                      | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Raising the costs of terrorism: Hardening targets                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have the strategic aims of the group/individual(s) been analyzed and understood?</li> <li>• To what extent do we understand the likely targets of terrorism from various groups/individuals?</li> <li>• To what extent have vulnerability assessments of at-risk countries been conducted or acted upon?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                            |
| Raising the costs of terrorism: Offensive steps                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have military operations deterred the actions of terrorist groups?</li> <li>• To what extent have terrorist groups' revenue streams and funding sources been impacted?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Reducing the benefits of terrorism: Granting concessions to aggrieved groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone or susceptible to terrorism understood?</li> <li>• To what extent have such grievances and desires been addressed previously?</li> <li>• What is the level of government support for addressing the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone to terrorism?</li> <li>• What is the level of popular support for addressing the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone to terrorism?</li> </ul> |
| Reducing the benefits of terrorism: Promoting democracy                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See questions pertaining to spread of democracy in Table 1.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Group dynamics

Table 5 presents the actions for the “group dynamics” theory of terrorism that we identified from the literature, along with the assessment questions that we created for each action.

Table 5. Actions and assessment questions for the group dynamics theory of terrorism

| Actions                                                                                           | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Counter-network actions (direct action and targeted killings, use of informants, repentance laws) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent have group members been effectively removed by counter-network actions?</li> <li>• To what extent have counter-network actions affected recruitment of new group members?</li> <li>• To what extent has the group's cohesion been impacted by counter-network actions?</li> <li>• To what extent have counter-network actions impeded the ability of the group to effectively communicate?</li> <li>• To what extent have counter-network actions degraded critical skills and capabilities of the group?</li> <li>• To what extent have group members been willing to inform on or renounce the group (either of their free will or a result of some inducement)?</li> </ul> |
| Information operations                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do group members respect and abide by the authority of the group's senior figures?</li> <li>• To what extent are former group members willing to speak out against the group?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Countering violent extremism                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the view of the group among populations vulnerable to group recruitment or radicalization? How do these views vary within the demographics of the vulnerable population (e.g., by gender, age, social standing, etc.)?</li> <li>• To what extent can the group communicate its ideologies, beliefs, goals, and results to vulnerable populations? To what extent can members of the vulnerable population communicate back?</li> <li>• To what extent are individuals in vulnerable populations providing support to the group (overtly or covertly)?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                     |

In the next section, we will develop indicators that accompany the questions of effectiveness to complete the assessment framework for each theory.

# Indicators for Counterterrorism Assessment

The last step in deriving an assessment framework for the various theories of terrorism and their associated CT actions is to compile indicators that could be used to answer the assessment questions. As practitioners of assessment will quickly point out, this is the most difficult and often most contentious step in creating an assessment framework. In doing so, an assessor is truly working at the interface of policy and the effects of policy—the seam in which ideas (and potentially the individuals who originated them) are tested and held accountable.

In the tables that follow, we present (for each theory) indicators tied to specific assessment questions from the previous section. As with the assessment questions, we generated these indicators largely by reviewing the literature, discussing the theories with CNA subject matter experts, and using logical reasoning to further deconstruct the assessment questions into “discernible bits.” Therefore, we invoke the same caveat as before—these indicators should be viewed as a place for practitioners to begin and we envision their continued evolution. Last, in some cases (e.g., for assessing the promotion of democracy and human rights), we identified existing sets of indicators at significant levels of detail. Rather than duplicating those efforts here, we will refer the reader to those resources as an extension of this assessment framework.

## Ideology (jihadism)

Table 6 presents the actions, assessment questions, and associated indicators that could be used for assessing progress in countering jihadist terrorism.

Table 6. Actions, assessment questions, and indicators for the ideology (jihadism) theory of terrorism

| Actions               | Assessment Questions                                                                                        | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Use of military force | To what extent have military operations directly degraded terrorist groups' capabilities?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) over time</li> <li>• Estimates of the size of terrorist groups (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Estimates of the rate of recruitment of terrorist groups (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)</li> <li>◦ Numbers of terrorist group members killed or captured</li> <li>◦ Estimates of the rate of desertion by terrorist group members (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Estimates of terrorist group financing over time (total and by source)</li> <li>• Estimates of terrorist group resupply capabilities over time               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Estimates of ease of access to critical supplies</li> <li>◦ Estimates of critical supply prices</li> <li>◦ Changes in terrorist group resupply means or routes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|                       | To what extent have military operations indirectly degraded terrorist groups' capabilities?                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in terrorist group tactics over time</li> <li>• Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) over time</li> <li>• Intelligence reports of terrorist group attack plans not executed or attack actions not taken</li> <li>• Number of tips pertaining to terrorist group attack plans or actions over time</li> <li>• Level of popular support expressed for terrorist groups over time (e.g., in polls, ideally broken out into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                       | To what extent can military operations be conducted independently by partner nations? With U.S. assistance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessments of partner nations' military capabilities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Orders of battle</li> <li>◦ Subject matter expert assessments of force size, structure, capabilities, posture, and performance</li> <li>◦ Subject matter expert assessments of capability gaps</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Countering extremist ideology                | To what extent are terrorist group's messages reaching target audiences (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent of distribution of terrorist group printed media</li> <li>• Number of terrorist group website views over time</li> <li>• Number of social media linkages to group or member accounts (e.g., Facebook friends, Twitter followers)</li> <li>• Number of members of terrorist group "chat rooms" and other online fora</li> <li>• Level of popular support expressed for terrorist groups over time (e.g., in polls, ideally broken out into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.)</li> <li>• Level of target audience consumption of terrorist group media (e.g., number of hours individuals spend per week reading/watching terrorist group media)</li> <li>• Level of terrorist group social media following (e.g., Facebook "likes," Twitter re-tweets)</li> </ul> |
|                                              | To what extent do terrorist groups' messages resonate with target audiences (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of attacks (or attempted attacks) inspired by terrorist groups over time</li> <li>• Estimates of the rate of recruitment of terrorist groups (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                              | To what extent are terrorist groups' messages leading to desired actions by the target audience (cf. to counter-terrorist messages)?<br>Are there "moderate" groups competing in the messaging space with extremist groups? If so, how do their messages compete (in terms of importance, credibility, resonance) with those of extremist groups? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent of distribution of moderate group printed media</li> <li>• Number of moderate group website views over time</li> <li>• Number of social media linkages to group or member accounts (e.g., Facebook friends, Twitter followers)</li> <li>• Number of members of moderate group "chat rooms" and other online fora</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Promoting spread of democracy & human rights | See assessment questions in Table 1.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The "V-Dem" project includes nearly 400 indicators as part of an aggregate index of democracy (with disaggregates available). See: <a href="http://www.v-dem.net">www.v-dem.net</a>.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Maintaining broad political coalition        | What is the strength of the counter-terrorism political coalition?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of countries (or international organizations) involved</li> <li>• Rate of members joining / leaving the coalition over time</li> <li>• Level of coalition members' involvement/commitment over time (numbers of troops, other personnel, monetary support, diplomatic support)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

How sensitive is the coalition to political conditions in each member country?

- Number of elections or other political transitions of coalition members scheduled over time
- Level of popular support of coalition members' political leadership (heads of state and ruling political parties)
- Level of political party support for counter/anti-terrorist policies
- Level of popular support for counter/anti-terrorist policies

## Root causes

Table 7 presents the actions, assessment questions, and associated indicators that could be used for assessing progress in addressing root causes.

Table 7. Actions, assessment questions, and indicators for the root causes theory of terrorism

| Actions                           | Assessment Questions                          | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promotion of economic development | What is the level of wealth?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Net National Wealth (see: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_wealth">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_wealth</a>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                   | What is the level of production?              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDP, both absolute and per capita. See: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product#Nominal_GDP_and_adjustments_to_GDP">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product#Nominal_GDP_and_adjustments_to_GDP</a></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                   | What is the quality of life?                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Development Index (see: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index</a>)</li> <li>• World Happiness Report (see: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Happiness_Report">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Happiness_Report</a>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                             |
|                                   | What is the level of employment/unemployment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment statistics from the country or subnational region of interest over time</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Promotion of the rule of law      | See assessment questions in Table 2.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (see: <a href="http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index">http://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index</a>)</li> <li>• The United Nations' Rule of Law Indicators (see: <a href="http://www.un.org/en/events/peacekeepersday/2011/publications/un_rule_of_law_indicators.pdf">http://www.un.org/en/events/peacekeepersday/2011/publications/un_rule_of_law_indicators.pdf</a>)</li> </ul> |

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| Promotion of social justice  | See assessment questions in Table 2.                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>European Union's Social Justice Index (see: <a href="http://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu/social-justice-index/">http://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu/social-justice-index/</a>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Promotion of good governance | See assessment questions in Table 2.                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (see: <a href="http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home">http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home</a>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Promotion of education       | <p>How educated is the population?</p> <p>To what extent is education being provided by the state? Private organizations? Religious organizations?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fraction of the population that has received / is receiving basic (primary) education; secondary education; and post-secondary education</li> <li>Graduation rates from primary and secondary schools</li> <li>Literacy rates</li> <li>Disparities in education (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status)</li> <li>Percentage of education funding provided by the government, private sector, religious organizations, etc.</li> </ul> |

## State sponsorship

Table 8 presents the actions, assessment questions, and associated indicators that could be used for assessing progress in countering state-sponsored terrorism.

Table 8. Actions, assessment questions, and indicators for the state sponsorship theory of terrorism

| Actions                               | Assessment Questions                                                                                                                                          | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unilateral and multilateral sanctions | <p>Has the United States designated the country a state sponsor of terrorism?</p> <p>What is the level of congressional support for unilateral sanctions?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The State Department's state sponsor of terrorism list</li> <li>Number of members of Congress openly for/against unilateral sanctions</li> </ul> |

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|                                                   | What is the level of international support for multilateral sanctions?                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of UN Security Council members for/against multilateral sanctions (emphasis on UNSC permanent members)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                   | What is the impact of sanctions to the economy of the state sponsor?                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gross Domestic Product (absolute and per capita)</li> <li>• Sales trends by economic sector</li> <li>• Import/export trends by economic sector</li> <li>• Level of foreign direct investment (FDI)</li> <li>• Amount of national currency reserves</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                   | What is the impact of sanctions to the U.S. economy and/or to the economies of partner nations?                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gross Domestic Product (absolute and per capita)</li> <li>• Sales trends by economic sector</li> <li>• Import/export trends by economic sector</li> <li>• Price of critical commodities (e.g., oil and other energy sources)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Capacity-building and foreign assistance programs | How capable are partner nations of securing themselves against terrorist threats emanating from the state sponsor?                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) in the partner nation</li> <li>• Subject matter expert assessments of internal and border security forces' size, structure, capabilities, posture, and performance</li> <li>• Subject matter expert assessments of internal and border security forces' capability gaps</li> <li>• Existence and size of populations that might support terrorist group activities</li> <li>• Level of popular support to terrorist groups in those populations (e.g., via polls)</li> </ul> |
|                                                   | What is the impact of U.S. security assistance to partner nations as it pertains to the prevention of, and response to, state-sponsored terrorism? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment of U.S. security assistance with subject matter expert assessments of internal and border security forces' capability gaps</li> <li>• Evaluations of internal and border security forces' use of U.S.-provided equipment and training</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Intelligence and law enforcement cooperation      | To what extent are we able to gather intelligence and information pertaining to the actions of the state sponsor of terrorism?                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of intelligence/information-sharing agreements with vulnerable and partner nations</li> <li>• Rate of usage of such agreements</li> <li>• Quality of intelligence/information received (e.g., timeliness, relevance, originality)</li> <li>• Permissions to base/use ISR assets in vulnerable and partner nations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                       |

To what extent do we have adequate extradition agreements with partner nations?

- Existence of extradition agreements
- Rate of use of such agreements

To what extent do we have other mechanisms of effective law enforcement cooperation with partner nations?

- Permissions for U.S. law enforcement (e.g., FBI) presence in vulnerable and partner nations

## Rational choice

Table 9 presents the actions, assessment questions, and associated indicators that could be used for assessing progress in countering terrorism according to the rational choice school of thought.

Table 9. Actions, assessment questions, and indicators for the rational choice theory of terrorism

| Actions                                              | Assessment Questions                                                                             | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Raising the costs of terrorism:<br>Hardening targets | To what extent have the strategic aims of the group/individual(s) been analyzed and understood?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of intelligence and open source reporting on group strategic and operational goals</li> <li>• Degree of confidence of intelligence and other assessments of group strategic and operational goals</li> </ul>     |
|                                                      | To what extent do we understand the likely targets of terrorism from various groups/individuals? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of intelligence and open source reporting on group strategic and operational targets</li> <li>• Degree of confidence in intelligence and other assessments of group strategic and operational targets</li> </ul> |
|                                                      | To what extent have vulnerability assessments of at-risk countries been conducted or acted upon? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fraction of vulnerability assessments of at-risk countries completed in the last two years</li> <li>• Status of recommendations of vulnerability assessments conducted in the last two years</li> </ul>                |

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Raising the costs of terrorism:<br>Offensive steps                              | To what extent have military operations deterred the actions of terrorist groups?                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) over time</li> <li>• Intelligence reports of terrorist group attack actions not taken</li> <li>• Intelligence assessments of terrorist group views on the effectiveness of military CT operations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                 | To what extent have terrorist groups' revenue streams and funding sources been impacted?                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated monthly/quarterly terrorist group revenue</li> <li>• Number of sources of terrorist group revenue</li> <li>• Distribution of terrorist group revenue by source</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Reducing the benefits of terrorism:<br>Granting concessions to aggrieved groups | To what extent are the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone or susceptible to terrorism understood?           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of conflict assessments focused on vulnerable groups/individuals</li> <li>• Level of engagement between CT actors (civilian and military) and leaders of vulnerable groups/communities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                 | To what extent have such grievances and desires been addressed previously?                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current status of programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> <li>• Level of effort (e.g., funding, man-years) dedicated to programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> <li>• Formal evaluations of programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                 | What is the level of government support for addressing the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone to terrorism? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of legislators openly expressing support for (or opposition to) programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> <li>• Voting records of legislators on bills to support programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> </ul>                                                                |
|                                                                                 | What is the level of popular support for addressing the grievances and desires of groups/individuals prone to terrorism?    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of the population expressing support for (or opposition to) programs/initiatives designed to address group/individual grievances and desires</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Reducing the benefits of terrorism:<br>Promoting democracy                      | See questions pertaining to spread of democracy in Table 1.                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The "V-Dem" project includes nearly 400 indicators as part an aggregate index of democracy (with disaggregates available). See: <a href="http://www.v-dem.net">www.v-dem.net</a>.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Group dynamics

Table 10 presents the actions, assessment questions, and associated indicators that could be used for assessing progress in countering terrorism according to the group dynamics school of thought.

Table 10. Actions, assessment questions, and indicators for the group dynamics theory of terrorism

| Actions                                                                                           | Assessment Questions                                                                                     | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Counter-network actions (direct action and targeted killings, use of informants, repentance laws) | To what extent have group members been effectively removed by counter-network actions?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers of group members removed (captured or killed) over time, by broad "type" (e.g., senior leaders, mid-level leaders, facilitators)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions affected recruitment of new group members?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estimates of the rate of recruitment of terrorist groups (can be numerical ranges or relative changes over time)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent has the group's cohesion been impacted by counter-network actions?                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports or announcements of terrorist splinter groups</li> <li>Reports or announcements of changes of leadership</li> <li>Reports or announcements of infighting or "red-on-red" violent events</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions impeded the ability of the group to effectively communicate? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes in the quality, volume, or frequency of updates of terrorist group propaganda or other information products</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have counter-network actions degraded critical skills and capabilities of the group?      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of terrorist group attacks (or attempts) over time</li> <li>Intelligence reports of terrorist group attack plans not executed or attack actions not taken</li> <li>Level of popular support expressed for terrorist groups over time (e.g., in polls, ideally broken out into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.)</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                                   | To what extent have group members been willing to inform on or renounce the group?                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of tips pertaining to terrorist group attack plans or actions over time</li> <li>Number of group members (and their broad "type") openly leaving the group over time</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                            |

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|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Information operations       | <p>To what extent do group members respect and abide by the authority of the group's senior figures?</p> <p>To what extent are former group members willing to speak out against the group?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree to which group members behave in accordance with specific leadership proclamations (e.g., to restrict civilian casualties, behave certain ways, etc.)</li> <li>• Level of dissent over time in terrorist group online fora</li> <li>• Number of former group members actively engaged in countering terrorist group messaging</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Countering violent extremism | <p>What is the view of the group among populations vulnerable to group recruitment or radicalization? How do these views vary within the demographics of the vulnerable population (e.g., by gender, age, social standing, etc.)?</p> <p>To what extent can the group communicate its ideologies, beliefs, goals, and results to vulnerable populations? To what extent can members of the vulnerable population communicate back?</p> <p>To what extent are individuals in vulnerable populations providing support to the group (overtly or covertly)?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of popular support expressed for terrorist groups over time (e.g., in polls, ideally broken out into categories of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.)</li> <li>• Extent of distribution of terrorist group printed media</li> <li>• Number of terrorist group website views over time</li> <li>• Number of social media linkages to group or member accounts (e.g., Facebook friends, Twitter followers)</li> <li>• Level of target audience consumption of terrorist group media (e.g., number of hours individuals spend per week reading/watching terrorist group media)</li> <li>• Estimates of funding provided by individuals in the target population to terrorist groups over time</li> <li>• Number of individuals in the target population who are attempting to join the terrorist group over time</li> <li>• Level of terrorist group social media following within the target population (e.g., Facebook "likes," Twitter re-tweets)</li> </ul> |

## Conclusion

In our experience, debates over whether the U.S. is successfully countering terrorism tend to focus on actions the U.S. has taken and whether those actions by themselves have had their intended effects. Lost in those debates is the bigger picture of whether those actions are appropriate for the theories of terrorism/CT that are guiding policy, or whether those theories are the “right” ones. In the absence of this bigger picture, assessments and specific indicators being used as part of the debate are often ambiguous and unhelpful to those trying to make decisions pertaining to the allocation of resources, designation of priorities, or communications to various audiences. We conclude that the failure of the U.S. to *rigorously* and *effectively* assess its CT actions to date is the result of the general absence of linkages between the theories of terrorism guiding U.S. policy and their associated CT actions, the questions that need to be answered in order to assess those actions, and the indicators that need to be gathered and analyzed in order to answer those questions.

As a means of addressing this issue, we created a comprehensive assessment framework for each of the five predominant theories of terrorism and their associated actions for CT. To our knowledge, this is the first time such a comprehensive mapping of terrorism theories to CT indicators has been performed. As is likely apparent in the body of this paper, creating an assessment framework of this type is an inherently difficult exercise, requiring a blend of art, science, and subject matter expertise. Therefore, we do not intend for the framework as presented to be prescriptive; nor do we believe it should be the final word on this subject.

So how then should this framework be used? In an ideal world, policymakers would: choose from among the prominent theories of terrorism which ones they believe are best; implement CT actions that align with those theories; and receive assessments of those actions that answer questions and provide supporting information (e.g., indicators) that are clearly and logically linked to their theories. Ultimately, those assessments might indicate that the chosen theory and its associated actions are not leading to desired results, at which time policymakers would have clear and compelling evidence for a change in policy (and actions).

Of course, we acknowledge that in the real world this ideal linkage of theory to assessment may not always be possible. Policymakers are often political actors, and may therefore be reticent to stake their political futures on a specific theory of terrorism/CT that may turn out to be less effective than others. In this instance, it

may still be possible to *infer* the dominant theory being employed by policymakers in their policy guidance and to use the rest of our assessment framework to tailor actions, assessment questions, and indicators appropriately to that theory. If even this is not feasible, it may be incumbent upon senior implementers to question the ambiguity of the policy provided.

Ultimately, it is our hope that providing a comprehensive mapping of terrorism theories to CT indicators will make it easier for policymakers to articulate (whether explicitly or implicitly) the theory of terrorism from which they derive CT programs and actions, and for CT practitioners to design an assessment framework that aligns logically to that theory. By providing an initial assessment framework for today's theories of terrorism/CT, we hope to empower policymakers to ask the right questions about countering terrorism—and practitioners to answer them.

## Appendix: The State of Counterterrorism Assessment

As supporting information and as justification for the study of improving the means of assessing U.S. government actions and programs to counter terrorism, we present the following review of the literature on CT assessment. Our intent in summarizing this body of work is to make clear where prior thinking on how to gauge the effectiveness of CT actions is robust and where it is less so.

To consider the body of literature on CT assessment, it is helpful to begin by identifying the underlying motivation or starting point for each author's approach. A relatively small number of authors examine and assess specific CT operations that have taken place in the past. The indicators that they use to do so may be explicitly stated or implied, but these authors typically conclude their discussions with a final determination of the specific operation's success or failure. The rest—and vast majority—of the literature examines the topic of CT assessment itself and typically highlights faults in past approaches. These publications roughly fall into one or two of three broad categories, depending on whether they see CT assessments as being based on (1) method or process; (2) political dynamics or policy; or (3) theory or concept.

The first category dominates the literature, as most authors approach CT assessment with the intent to improve the effectiveness of CT methods. The most common manifestation of this type of work includes an identification of past errors in CT assessment, followed by an original (or at least partially original) set of metrics, measures, indicators, or approaches. Other authors point to political dynamics and policy decisions as the origins of faulty CT assessments. These writers often cite a lack of clear policy goals or shifting strategies to account for deficiencies in assessment. Some of these authors offer recommendations for improvements, but not all do so. Finally, there are those who identify a more fundamental issue: one cannot conduct a CT assessment with integrity without first articulating an understanding of what terrorism is on a theoretical or conceptual basis. This final category is less common than work that emphasizes methods and metrics alone. Consequently, CT assessment methods often begin with a series of unidentified or unarticulated assumptions that drive the focus and development of the method. We will explore specific examples in each of these categories below.

## Assessments of past CT efforts

The literature on CT assessment includes several examples of assessments that examine a specific CT operation and offer analysis and commentary on how effective it was. These assessments are useful because they *implement* the process of CT assessment, rather than simply *describing* it. Some are stronger than others in offering the explicit criteria and methods used in their assessments, but all benefit from being confined to a specific instance of CT actions, which helps bound the problem. These examples tend to argue that CT assessment has no “one size fits all” approach. Rather, they suggest that it must be tailored to the specific operation of interest.

For example, CT operations against the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland are the subject of one CT assessment that uses the number of attacks as a primary indicator for success or failure. Authors Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan, and Raven Korte understand these numbers in terms of deterrence or backlash, where CT operations that reduce the risk of future terrorist acts represent deterrence and those that increase that risk correspond to a backlash.<sup>42</sup> They ultimately conclude that terrorist interventions in Northern Ireland more often resulted in backlash than in deterrence, highlighting that CT operations have the potential to decrease or *increase* terrorist activity, depending on specific conditions.

Author Nadav Morag examines a common subject of CT assessment: Israel and its neighbors. He uses seven parameters—human life, economic impact, political impact, internal stability, international standing, economic power, and the ethical component—to study the effectiveness of Israeli CT efforts.<sup>43</sup> Of note in Morag’s method is his acknowledgment that “a truly scientific and unassailable analysis” of CT effectiveness is unachievable, so he offers a general idea of Israeli success.<sup>44</sup> This balance between the “art” and “science” of CT assessment is a fairly common theme, with many authors emphasizing a balance between qualitative and quantitative methods in approaching the complex problem of gauging the effectiveness of CT operations.

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<sup>42</sup> Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan, and Raven Korte, “The Impact of British Counterterrorism Strategies on Political Violence in Northern Ireland: Comparing Deterrence and Backlash Models,” *Criminology* 47, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>43</sup> Nadav Morag, “Measuring Success in Coping with Terrorism: The Israeli Case,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

A final example of this type examines a tactic, rather than a specific case. In her work, Michele Malvesti looks at the effectiveness of air strikes as a CT tool.<sup>45</sup> She focuses on a few examples—Libya, Iraq, and Osama bin Laden—and attempts to determine whether air strikes resulted in or contributed to the achievement of the desired outcome. Malvesti asks three questions to build her conclusions: Was terrorism prevented? Were the perpetrators held accountable? And were critical nodes destroyed? Based on this loose set of criteria, Malvesti concludes that air strikes generally are not effective as a tool for countering terrorism.<sup>46</sup>

## Method focused

Most of the literature on CT assessment focuses on methods or processes used to build evaluations of CT actions. Authors often acknowledge the insufficiency of current methods, pointing to pervasive issues such as problematic metrics (e.g., body counts), data challenges, and the lack of clear objectives. The most comprehensive review of past methods comes from authors Cynthia Lum, Leslie Kennedy, and Alison Sherley in their 2006 publication, “The Effectiveness of Counter-Terrorism Strategies.”<sup>47</sup> Lum et al. conducted a systematic review of over 20,000 studies on the subject and found that only seven studies had CT assessments with “moderately strong evaluation designs.”<sup>48</sup> Most of these (five of the seven) related to measuring the effectiveness of ensuring the safety of airline passengers from would-be terrorist attacks (e.g., preventing skyjackings, providing airport security) and used data that were more easily quantifiable than data sets found in other CT assessments. Despite the comprehensiveness of this study, Lum et al. do not offer concrete alternative methods that avoid the pitfalls of past approaches.

Similarly, Teun Walter van Dongen lays out the myriad problems with current approaches to CT assessment in two publications, one in 2009 and one in 2015. The earlier paper identifies problems with metrics such as the number of terrorist attacks or victims, pointing out that attributing those numbers to the correct cause is difficult and that reduced numbers ultimately may not reflect progress.<sup>49</sup> Instead, van

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<sup>45</sup> Michele L. Malvesti, “Bombing bin Laden: Assessing the Effectiveness of Air Strikes as a Counter-terrorism Strategy,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 26: 1 (Winter/Spring 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Cynthia Lum, Leslie W. Kennedy, Alison J. Sherley, “The Effectiveness of Counterterrorism Strategies,” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* (October 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Lum et al., p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Teun Walter van Dongen, *Break it Down: An Alternative Approach to Measuring Effectiveness in Counterterrorism*, Economics of Security Working Paper Series, No. 23 (December 2009).

Dongen recommends breaking down success into its components—what he calls “success factors”—and establishing a causal chain for each component. He lists a number of success factors, including international cooperation, intelligence gathering, and offering a counter-narrative to terrorism.<sup>50</sup> His later paper also identifies problematic metrics, failure to account for second- and third-order effects or counterbalancing setbacks that occur concurrent with progress, and general challenges associated with establishing causality in CT assessment.<sup>51</sup> Van Dongen’s 2015 work does not, however, provide a defense of a viable alternative approach.

Other treatments of CT assessment do focus on offering alternatives to current methods and defending their validity and value. Some of these authors emphasize the merits of borrowing from other fields where similar work has been done. Anthony Ellis et al., for example, point to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools used in the development arena as having potential application in CT assessment. The approach they propose would bring in qualitative inputs, including the results of interviews and focus groups, and quantitative inputs that are the result of applied new technologies.<sup>52</sup> Other authors, including Gentry White et al., highlight the potential uniquely found in quantitative approaches. They propose a self-exciting model, which posits that the occurrence of an event increases the probability of another event in the future, with the rate of increase diminishing over time.<sup>53</sup> The authors use this model to study responses to terrorist events in Southeast Asia, with results that reveal varying levels of CT effectiveness across the region. The authors recommend that these results be compared with expert assessments to help validate the method, making the implicit acknowledgment that quantitative methods alone do not suffice in building CT assessments.<sup>54</sup>

Some of the literature that is critical of current approaches to CT assessment does focus on offering alternative metrics. For example, Edward Mickolus compares the merits of event- and group-based approaches to measuring CT effectiveness,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Teun Walter van Dongen, *The science of fighting terrorism: the relation between terrorist actor type and counterterrorism effectiveness*, Leiden University (November 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Ellis, Andrew Cleary, Michael Innes, and Martine Zeuthen, *Monitoring and Evaluation Tools for Counterterrorism Program Effectiveness*, policy brief from Center on Global Counterterrorism (September 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Gentry White, Lorraine Mazerolle, Michael D. Porter, and Peter Chalk, “Modelling the effectiveness of counter-terrorism interventions,” *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 475 (June 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

ultimately encouraging the use of the latter.<sup>55</sup> Event-based approaches measure things such as numbers of terrorist incidents, whereas group-based methods emphasize the importance of terrorist behavior and include metrics such as the size of the group, its leadership and ties to other groups, its ideology, and the weapons and tactics it uses.<sup>56</sup>

A few authors on CT assessment bridge the gap between method-focused and policy-focused approaches, dedicating time to discussing the value and failings of both. For example, Alex Schmid and Rashmi Singh offer a wide-ranging set of indicators, divided into hard and soft, which focus on the post-9/11 effort to counter Al Qaeda (AQ). Hard and soft indicators roughly align with quantitative and qualitative metrics (respectively), with hard indicators focused on increases or decreases of various factors (e.g., number of AQ affiliate groups, sophistication of attacks, or AQ recruits compared with losses), and soft indicators focused on perceptions. They base this need for better indicators on problems with past metrics, and policy problems such as the lack of clear objectives.<sup>57</sup>

## Policy focused

Another grouping of work on CT assessment takes a more political approach, emphasizing the values or, more often, the shortcomings of CT strategy and policies. In one examination of the U.S. strategy for the Global War on Terror (GWOT), author Harlan Ullman lists five shortfalls—what he calls “unfinished business”—that reveal the lack of progress in the GWOT effort.<sup>58</sup> These five items, which Ullman refers to as “metrics,” are: U.S. failures in understanding the threat; dysfunctional organizations; the shift from a threat of massive destruction to one of massive disruption; the failure to modernize and build alliances; and the absence of a strategy that addresses underlying causes.

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<sup>55</sup> Edward F. Mickolus, “How do we know we’re winning the war against terrorists? Issues in measurement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2002).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Alex P. Schmid and Rashmi Singh, “Measuring Success and Failure in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: US Government Metrics of the Global War on Terror,” in *After the War on Terror: Regional and Multilateral Perspectives on Counter-terrorism Strategy*, Alex P. Schmid and Garry F. Hindle, eds. (London: Rusi Books, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Harlan Ullman, “Is the US winning or losing the global war on terror and how do we know?” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2006).

Daniel Byman has written fairly consistently on the topic of CT assessment since 2001. While his work touches on all three categories—method, policy, and theory—he dedicates significant focus to the political underpinnings that influence measures of whether CT efforts are successful. His proposed metrics often include factors such as cost, policy impact, and domestic and international support for CT efforts.<sup>59</sup> Byman also points to the inflation that can occur when the U.S. government touts its CT successes, in part due to the weakness of metrics used.<sup>60</sup>

## Theory focused

Publications that fall into this category identify a more fundamental problem in conducting CT assessments: the lack of a theoretical or conceptual grounding of CT policies and actions on which an assessment can be built. Michael Stohl expresses this problem succinctly in his work, highlighting the “failure to ground metrics in a theoretical understanding of the problem.”<sup>61</sup> He points to the over-politicization of CT, which has resulted in far more political—rather than scholarly—approaches to assessment. Stohl offers metrics that move away from quantitative measures such as the number of incidents; instead, he emphasizes how an audience reacts to a terrorist act and how that act affects dynamics such as human rights. Alexander Spencer takes a similar tack by highlighting the inherent weaknesses of a rationalist approach to measuring CT, including an overreliance on quantitative measures. Instead, he recommends a constructivist approach that accounts for fear, consumer confidence, domestic and international support, and public opinion.<sup>62</sup>

Eric van Um and Daniela Pisoïu also identify problems in CT assessment at a more conceptual level.<sup>63</sup> They identify a “theoretical underdevelopment” in the way analysts have approached CT assessment in the past, particularly when it comes to

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<sup>59</sup> Daniel Byman, “Are We Winning the War on Terrorism?” *Brookings* (May 23, 2003); Daniel Byman, “Measuring the War on Terrorism: A First Appraisal,” *Current History* (December 2003). Daniel Byman, “Scoring the War on Terrorism,” *The National Interest* (Summer 2003); Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Michael Stohl, “Winners and Losers in the War on Terrorism: The Problem of Metrics,” in *Coping with Terrorism: Origins, Escalation, Counterstrategies, and Responses*, Rafael Rueveny and William R. Thompson, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Spencer, *The Problems of Evaluating Counter-Terrorism*, UNISCI Discussion Papers, No. 12 (October 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Eric van Um and Daniela Pisoïu, *Effective Counterterrorism: What have we learned so far?* Economics of Security Working Paper Series, No. 55 (September 2011).

determining attribution or causation.<sup>64</sup> To mitigate this problem, the authors propose making explicit which of three categories an assessment falls into. These categories include studies that measure output effectiveness (the behavior of those doing CT); outcome effectiveness (the behavior of policymakers and the targeted group); or impact effectiveness (the impact on a target audience).<sup>65</sup>

Because relatively few examinations of CT assessment begin by identifying the CT theories that underpin the approach, much of the literature presupposes or infers that a particular theory is true. This tendency often leaves the assessment unbounded and ungrounded. The proposed indicators that many authors present may indeed be worthy of consideration, but their validity as representations of a thorough and deliberate examination of CT assessment comes into question if they are derived from an unclear—or at least unarticulated—theoretical starting point.

## Emergence of CVE evaluation

Over the past several years, there has been a shift in the discourse on counterterrorism, with increased use of the term “countering violent extremism” (CVE) to refer to broader efforts to address the causes of terrorism, and prevent and respond to terrorist attacks. One definition states that “CVE encompasses the preventative aspects of counterterrorism as well as interventions to undermine the attraction of extremist movements and ideologies that seek to promote violence.”<sup>66</sup> A White House publication on the topic states, “Our central goal in this [CVE] effort is to prevent violent extremists and their supporters from inspiring, radicalizing, financing, or recruiting individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence.”<sup>67</sup> With this recent transition to a greater emphasis on CVE, the topic of CVE evaluation is emerging as an area of consideration as well. Given the nascence of the CVE concept, it is not surprising that CVE evaluation has received limited attention to date in academic and policy literature.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “FACT SHEET: The White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism,” February 18, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism>.

<sup>67</sup> “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States,” The White House, August 1, 2011, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering\\_local\\_partners.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf).

While still a new subject area, the literature that does exist on CVE evaluation has illustrated some tendencies that overlap with CT assessments, and some that do not. The persistent problems associated with measuring impact remain (e.g., attribution, causation, and unreliable or incomplete data). However, there does appear to be greater emphasis on understanding these limitations at the outset of CVE activity, which has the potential to make CVE evaluation more grounded than CT assessments have been in the past. Also, CVE programs emphasize a more targeted approach, allowing for evaluations that are similarly bounded. However, the distinction between CVE and CT also poses challenges for examining effectiveness. CVE emphasizes preventing the development of violent extremism, in addition to countering extremism that already exists. An evaluator of CVE efforts, therefore, must at times “measure a negative,” or attempt to prove effectiveness by what did *not* occur.<sup>68</sup>

CVE evaluation is also distinct from its CT parallel because CVE in general takes a more holistic approach that encompasses many elements of national power and influence, whereas CT tends to emphasize a military response. Because of this tendency, CVE evaluation draws more on M&E methods developed in sectors such as international aid and development. The balance of the “art” and “science” or qualitative and quantitative approaches seems to resonate in the emerging literature on CVE evaluation as well.<sup>69</sup> There is also an acknowledgment, whether explicit or implicit, of the shortfalls in CT assessment that influence approaches to CVE evaluation, which may allow for improvements in methods as evaluators build on lessons learned in the past.

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, and Rafia Barakat, *Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming*, paper produced following the Global Counterterrorism Forum meeting, September 2013; Laura Dawson, Charlie Edwards, and Calum Jeffray, *Learning and Adapting: The use of monitoring and evaluation in countering violent extremism*, Royal United Services Institute, 2014; USAID, *Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects*, February 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

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