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Trends. Commentary on “The Influence Component of Counterterrorism: A Systems Approach

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses the guiding principles for and challenges to a conceptual framework for deterring terrorism against the United States and its interests as presented by Paul Davis and Brian Jenkins in the Spring 2003 issue of Rand Review.

In the Spring 2003 issue of Rand Review, Paul Davis and Brian Jenkins have written a précis of their work on a conceptual framework for deterring terrorism against the United States (US) and its interests—work that was directed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and was carried out in conjunction with the Institute for Defense Analysis. The framework offers four guiding principles and three challenges.

The Principles

Principle #1. The goal of deterrence must go beyond the concept of deterrence and toward influence. Deterrence has usually been conceived as creating adversary perceptions that an adversary attack on a target would result in such noxious consequences to the adversary from the target and/or from other entities that the adversary decides not to attack. The authors of the Rand paper broaden deterrence to include anything that induces perceptions against the likelihood of an attack. This broadening immediately increases the armamentarium of potential influence techniques beyond those with military content and threat.

Principle #2. Terrorist groups are not single entities but systems. The authors identify a huge linguistic and rhetorical problem in discourse about terrorism wherein antiterrorist and counterterrorist authorities plan against an adversary much as an athletic team plans against a competitor. In actuality, many terrorist operations are the culmination of a myriad of permutations and combinations of individuals with witting and unwitting thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviors within and interacting with a myriad of ecological and environmental contextual phenomena from the most metaphysical through the most physical. And these individuals may be relatively isolated, in dyads, small groups, cells, shifting and fuzzy networks, as well as more commonly conceived organizations.

Principle #3. Antiterrorist and counterterrorist planning needs to be multi-targeted. Based on principles #1 and 2, the authors recommend a concurrent and multi-layered approach that is contrasted with “ordinary warfare.” In that the authors imply many potential targets and timelines for successful engagement of terrorism, principle #3 is an important one. However, the contrast with “ordinary warfare” seems to discount writings on warfare at least as far back as Sun Tzu and Kautilya that provide similar counsel. The authors may really mean that such counsel has often been ignored—and in this they would be correct.

Principle #4. Antiterrorist and counterterrorist planning must be consistent with US values (and, implicitly, of the entity seeking to engage terrorism—at least in a representative democracy). The authors’ rationale for this principle is based on antiterrorism and counterterrorism efforts being projected for many years, on domestic political support being necessary for multi-year efforts, on a

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conflict of values being part of the conflict between adversaries, and on the influence of values being the royal road to successful engagement of terrorism. The only quibble here would be that terrorism may be viewed as a permanent part of the world's ecological and environmental context—an even more significant rationale for living by one's values even as the means to do so may at times not isomorphically conform to these values.

The Challenges

Challenge #1. Deterring the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The authors advocate that the US should credibly announce that any political actor that “even tolerates the acquisition of WMD by terrorists within its borders will be subject to U.S. military action.” The authors also advocate that a public communication about how the consequences of terrorist biological warfare (BW) are more deleterious for the Mideast (putative home of the perpetrators) than for then US and most of its allies—even if targeted only against the US and its allies—is a worthwhile point of attack against Mideast terrorists and their allies through information warfare.

As to the communication of tolerance necessarily begetting US military action, one might note that the ongoing controversy about standards of evidence and preemption versus prevention in the context of Iraqi WMD suggests challenges with this approach. As to the differential threat of terrorist BW, a case can be made that the world as a whole is extremely vulnerable and that many terrorists and their supporters—especially of the apocalyptic, millennial, and psychotic varieties—would not be dissuaded even if they could be influenced to believe in differential threat. Moreover, a differential consequence of BW could easily enough be blown back onto the US given the ease with which disinformation about US Government (USG) AIDS activities was successfully promulgated by the Soviet Union during the 1980s.

Challenge #2. Persuading regional allies to act. The authors' underlining of this challenge is further reinforced by USG difficulties in engaging allies in the prosecution of a war on terrorism with global reach. In actuality, the authors' underlining of this challenge may even be textually subversive in the context of what opponents of the present US administration are claiming to be missteps leading to difficulties in engaging allies.

Challenge# 3. Maintaining American values at home and abroad. This underlining also may be viewed in a textually subversive manner in that it implies that such maintaining has not gone on or has not gone on well, and that the historical record suggests that such maintaining may not be possible without reinforcing the image of the US as crusading, imperialistic, and hegemonic in the most negative of senses.

Other observations of the authors merit close analysis before acceptance. For example, that of the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” being a crucial factor in Mideast-sourced antiterrorism and counterterrorism may be but a bogus Issue and may be non-bogus mostly through the self-reinforcement of its repetition and reassertion. Also, the assertion that the sources of moral and religious support for terrorism—i.e., what the participants in terrorism hold dear—are based largely on power, status, and personal and family welfare discount sincere theological and religious belief.

In conclusion, the authors offer a framework that should be carefully and profitably considered by strategic decision makers confronting terrorism and by terrorists confronting the confronters. (See Davis, P.K., & Jenkins, B.M. (2003). *The influence component of counterterrorism: A systems approach.*

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Rand Review, <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview>; Everly, G.S., Jr. Psychological counterterrorism. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 5, 57-59; Johnson, L. C. (2001). The future of terrorism. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44, 894-913; Ramaswamy, T.N. (1994). *Essentials of Indian statecraft Kautilya's Arthasastra*. South Asia Books; Sun Tzu. (1983.) *The art of war*. (Ed.), J. Clavell. Delacorte.) (Keywords: Deterrence, Terrorism.)