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*The Role of Anti-Terror Measures in the Development of 'Islamic'
Terrorism*

Keywords: Al-Qa'ida, Identity Formation, 'Islamic' Terrorism, Militant Islam, Unintended Consequences, War on Terror

Abstract

Post-September 11th 2001, academic attention on 'Islamic' terrorism is increasingly concentrating upon national and global security, political instability within majority-Muslim nation-states and perceived civilizational conflict between religio-cultural entities. Attempts to explain contemporary 'Islamic' terrorism within social science have tended to focus upon processes associated with increasing globalization and interlinked forms of cultural, economic, political and social changes. Clearly these are important, but many predate the emergence of the terror groups under investigation, failing to account for the prominent role of relatively highly educated and wealthy members. Underlying these accounts is an assumption that the rectification of poverty, introduction of democracy, universal education and improved proactive security arrangements will eradicate terrorism. However, the measures being implemented by national and international actors to improve security and address militancy and terrorism are contributing to an amplification of the beliefs and behaviour they are seeking to prevent and change. In other words, recent terrorism is in part an unintended

consequence of intentionally preventative measures.

This paper focuses on the impact of anti-terror measures on identity formation and in particular the relationship between such measures and the development of al-Qa'ida and associated groups. The impact of government policies designed to undermine the appeal of militant Islam within nation-states and actions undertaken in association with the American-led war on terror are assessed. The sociological concept of the 'unintended consequences' of intentional action is invoked here to help identify the social processes underlying recent terrorist activity. These processes are contributing to the ongoing creation and maintenance of 'Islamic' terrorism across a range of different nation-states.

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief and a not insignificant number of academic studies,¹ individuals involved in terrorism² are not inevitably poor, uneducated, unemployed or socially and economically dislocated. This is evident in the involvement of intellectuals, the relatively wealthy, non-threatened, highly skilled and educationally successful people in religious, secular, nationalist and transnational terrorist groups and networks. Rather than being driven by simple individualist or material motivations, group members' involvement has often been the result of unplanned encounters and experiences. In this paper the focus is upon trans-national groups associated with the Islamically oriented terrorist network of al-Qa'ida.³ Briefly, our argument is that the unintended consequences of certain nation-state policies and actions to reduce terrorism have actually contributed to the processes through which many people are becoming militant Muslims.

However, unlike earlier labelling perspectives, which suggested that social control measures ironically produce their own deviance, the paper argues for a careful dissection of particular policy positions and their impacts in order to avoid empirically unsustainable conclusions regarding the role of social control measures in society. Although it can be demonstrated that some social control measures have led to contradictory outcomes, this is by no means inevitable, nor is it the case that similar social controls will produce the same outcomes across

different societies. Our broad argument is that building towards a general sociological perspective on social control is best achieved by investigating particular cases with a view to comparing and contrasting the findings from these. This strategy should help to avoid overgeneralising from a weak evidence base and, hopefully, will lead to a better-balanced understanding of the role of social control measures within societies. In this paper, our specific attention will be focused on the demonstrable impacts of certain policy positions and state activities upon processes of identity formation, which underpin the movement of people into Islamic militant networks. This means that we will be looking for those policies and activities that can be shown to have unintentionally contributed to the strengthening of the militant groups they were meant to undermine.

The Scale and Scope of Unintended Consequences in Human Affairs

The concept of ‘unintended consequences’ has a long history in social science research, dating back to the eighteenth century European physiocrats, philosophers and economists (van Krieken 1998: 51). From Adam Smith’s version, based on his discovery of the so-called ‘hidden hand of the market’, to Robert Merton’s discussion of self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies, social scientists have been aware of some of the ironies and paradoxes of social processes. Nonetheless, much of the deliberation around the concept has centred on how we could better organise societies to *avoid* unintended consequences or at

least be better able to deal with them when they do arise. Merton (1967: 436) is a good example here, arguing that, 'The self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby fears are translated into reality, operates only in the absence of deliberate institutional controls'. The suggestion is clear, that with better institutional controls, self-fulfilling and defeating prophecies can be reduced or eliminated. But what if unintended consequences are more sociologically significant than such an optimistic conclusion suggests?

Norbert Elias argues that unintended consequences, unplanned social development and 'blind' social processes are in fact not unusual or exotic events, but essential and inescapable features of social life as such. In his own work on civilizing and decivilizing processes, Elias (2000: 367) explains that the process of civilization is,

not "reasonable"; not "rational", any more than it is "irrational." It is set in motion blindly and kept in motion by the autonomous dynamics of a web of relationships, by specific changes in the way people are bound to live together.

Nevertheless, Elias (1978: 146) argues that, 'Though it is unplanned and not immediately controllable, the overall process of development of a society is not in the least incomprehensible. There are no 'mysterious' social forces behind it'. What Elias means here is that what in the past have been described somewhat

mysteriously as ‘social forces’, are nothing other than the pressures and compulsions produced by the interaction of interdependent social groups, social movements, nation-states and individuals, all of which ‘act’ in intentional ways without any one of them being able to control the overall situation produced by them. Sometimes these actions produce the desired outcomes, sometimes not. But the overall pattern of social life produced by the interweaving of all of these remains largely unplanned. The dynamic of social group relations generates an order that is not under the control of any group or state, though of course, this does not mean that it is beyond understanding or explanation. Therefore, in Elias’s perspective, the phenomenon of unintended consequences is not a marginal one in the analysis of societies, but potentially takes us to the very heart of social life and social scientific knowledge.

Indeed, all sociological research should be alert to unintended consequences and this requires the tracing of intentional actions on a variety of levels. It also needs to follow the consequences of such actions. Of course, recently identified globalization processes add an extra dimension to the phenomenon of unintended consequences, making the tracing of the ripples from intentional actions much more complex. Decisions and actions taken in one part of the human world may have effects in geographically dispersed locations, which makes understanding the global level of human activity increasingly vital in social scientific work. Once we accept that unintended consequences are an active part of the warp and

weft of social life and social change, then we can stop viewing them as interesting but unusual events and start analysing their active role in the shaping of societies.

With this theoretical backdrop in mind, the paper now explores the unintended outcomes of some of the most powerful actors in social life, namely national state governments. We do this in relation to the rise of terrorist activity in recent years, particularly that claimed as ‘Islamic’⁴ in orientation by the perpetrators. We will argue that focusing on unintended consequences not only helps to explain the failure of certain states to eliminate or dilute the influence of militancy in their societies, but also helps to understand how some, but not all, state policies have produced self-defeating outcomes.

State-Sponsored Offensives, With and Against Militants

A range of state policies has been introduced to strengthen support for governments and to weaken or destroy Islamic militancy. One of the most widely used encourages particular forms of religious adherence in order to generate legitimacy for political regimes. Governments across Muslim societies have sought to utilise Islam to provide religious credibility for state policies and to emphasise the religiosity of regimes, whilst undermining the appeal of militancy and counteracting support for other discourses such as socialism and Arab nationalism (Abuza 2003, Gerges 2005, Vertigans 2003, Volpi 2003). Even the

most secular regimes, such as those in Turkey and Tunisia, have supported a large increase in the number of mosques and enhanced the religious content within school curricula as well as increasing the number of religious schools including *imam-hatips* and medressas. The growth of such schools has led many commentators to draw explicit links between religious schools and the rise in militancy and ultimately, terrorism. Such institutions are blamed for spreading radical ideas and recruiting younger militants. Particular attention has been focused on the emphasis upon radical concepts such as jihad within school curricula and textbooks (Byman and Green 1999; Kepel 2004; Rahman 1998; Stern 2003). Pakistan is one of the most prominent nation-states where the tremendous growth in religious schools is associated with thousands of medressa graduates who have subsequently joined militant training camps before leaving to fight for localised issues or to join international terrorist networks and groups.

However, there is a danger that the general role of religious schools is being overstated, with little evidence to support the widespread explicit role of educational institutions in drawing people into terrorist activity. Whilst these institutions are not causally responsible for the increase in numbers of people joining terror groups, they are intentionally contributing to greater levels of individual piety and, unintentionally, to greater levels of militancy and anti-Western ideologies. Paz (2003: 58) argues that this 'Islamic atmosphere' provides a greenhouse effect, 'for violent groups as well as the preservation of worldviews where hostility towards the West or Western culture dominates'.

These conflicting concepts and challenging ideologies have become immersed and frequently adapted or accepted, within many local cultures.

The use of religious groups and ideology can also be seen within the military strategies of nation-states. Militant Islamic groups have been supported by various governments to covertly undertake military activities on their behalf. For example, in Indonesia militants have been used to fight communists and national separatists, Pakistan uses *mujahideen* (mainly schooled in *medrassas*) to fight the proxy war with India over Kashmir (Stern 2003) and the Turkish armed forces had strong links with Hizbollah, (which was distinct from the Lebanese organization) which undertook attacks against Kurds (Vertigans 2003). These groups have been schooled in militant ideologies and trained in military tactics and provided with resources. Such training and resources have subsequently and unintentionally contributed to Islamic groups acting within and often against the sponsoring nation-states. Other pragmatic factors must also be taken into account when explaining the growth of militant Islam. These include the increase in organisational, financial, intellectual and technical resources allied to technological and weaponry advancements, which have provided terrorists with the means, skills, experience and capability to build support and oppose nation-states within global relationships. All of these factors have combined to provide terror groups with growing support, legitimacy and opportunities. It must be stressed that, with some notable exceptions, generally nation-states have not intentionally sought to support Islamic terrorism. But their actions and policies in

the areas of religion, education and internal social control measures have unintentionally contributed to raising levels of religiosity and increasing the popularity of a more radical religious discourse. In circumstances which provide, at best, limited opportunities for political participation and socio-economic conditions which legitimise militant ideology, many people are internalising radical views to form or join terror groups.

Terrorism in International Relations

The unintended consequences of government actions are not restricted to internal attempts at controlling religion and other ideologies. There have been a series of decisions made by nation-states that have contributed to the Islamic resurgence in general and militancy in particular within some national societies. Examples include a mixture of American, Pakistani and Saudi training, military equipment, financial and logistical support, and in the latter two cases, recruits, for the Afghan mujahideen during their war against the Soviet Union (Burke 2003, Gerges 2005, Vertigans and Sutton 2001). Many Muslim governments saw the war in Afghanistan (1979-89) as an opportunity both to show their own Islamic credentials, by providing support and to resolve the problem of internal radical dissent with many militants leaving to fight the Soviet Union. The implications of support for the Afghan *mujahideen* did not become apparent until long after the Soviet Union had been defeated. It is important to distinguish between the groups

involved in the war against the Soviet Union and those that became part of global terrorist networks. As Sageman (2004) has identified, the pre-1989 fighters in Afghanistan supported a traditional *jihad* based on defensive commitments that were in support of Muslim lands and lost territories. The adoption of the aggressive *jihad* by a minority of those who had been involved against the West in Afghanistan occurred during the 1990s, for a variety of reasons. The latter include the repression of important militant groups such as Islamic Jihad in Egypt, limited popular support for their religious doctrine which meant that popular coups against national governments were not feasible and growing levels of repulsion amongst Muslims to the high profile attacks on tourists and Muslims. This is exemplified by suspension of the armed struggle within Egypt by Islamic Jihad's leader (and al-Qa'ida's deputy), Ayman al-Zawahiri. Gerges (2005: 129) suggests that the suspension showed the group was 'no longer logistically capable of sustaining its confrontation with the regime.' At a national level, this period marked a watershed as groups debated how to react to these setbacks. Many militants across Muslim societies chose to suspend activities, changed their approach to proselytising or waited for opportunities to unfold, whilst some continued to target 'near enemies.' In a major shift in approach, some groups, largely comprising Afghan veterans associated with bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, adopted very different strategies based on aggressive jihad and internationalised conflict.⁵

Post-September 11th 2001, the role of American logistical and financial support for Afghan resistance during the war with the Soviet Union has attracted considerable attention. However, it is important to avoid overstating the American contribution. Certainly America was on the same side as people who were later to become significant within anti-American transnationalism. But these Afghan veterans were foreign fighters known collectively as the ‘Arab Afghans’ who were not directly supported by the United States during the war. By contrast, major participation in *salafi jihad* groups by native Afghans, who did receive American assistance, has been limited (Burke 2003; Sageman 2004).

Consequently the popular ‘blowback’ thesis, which considers the 11 September attacks to be the unintended consequence of American support in the Afghan-Soviet war, is only partially correct. The development of global Islamic terrorism since 1989, and in particular from the mid 1990s, has meant that it is more accurate to say that *salafi jihad* groups ‘were an indirect consequence of U.S involvement’ (Sageman 2004: 56). So instead of focusing on a single conflict, a range of different actions by the United States that has unintentionally strengthened the appeal of the militant ideology it sought to undermine, need to be identified. Collectively, these activities have contributed to the overall unintended consequence that has seen America designated as the ‘far enemy’ by militant Muslims.

In retaliation for the 1998 attacks on American embassies in East Africa, cruise missiles were fired at what were believed to be bin Laden’s premises

manufacturing chemical weapons. As de Waal (2004: 226) remarks, the bombings were ‘technologically “smart” but politically dumb’, turning the attacks into a propaganda coup for the Islamist Sudanese government and beginning the process through which bin Laden became a lauded oppositional figure, appealing to other militant groups to become part of the al-Qa’ida alliance. Similarly, the initially exaggerated close association between bin Laden and Zarqawi in Iraq, as claimed by American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, amid claims that Zarqawi was a terrorist mastermind, actually provided Zarqawi with an endorsement for the militant movement that his actions at that stage had not justified (Brisard and Martinez 2005). Crucially, Powell’s views became a self-fulfilling prophecy as the previously anonymous Zarqawi became an international figure and a focal point for opposition in Iraq to unite around. Conversely the decision to disband the Iraqi army created massive unemployment and led to many trained personnel joining the violent opposition. It also contributed to the state of lawlessness which has created the freedom for militant Islamists and Baathists to operate. These factors have strengthened anti-American feeling, fed the appeal of militant Islam and provided groups associated with *al-Qa’ida* with contemporary ‘evidence’ which can be used to justify their violent terrorist campaign against the West.

Policy-Making for Terrorism Control

Muslim societies, and more recently Western governments, have become increasingly aware of the threat that radical Islam, and terrorism in particular, is posing. Nation-states have taken different approaches to suppress the religious opposition including authoritarian secularism in places like Turkey, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia. This approach tended to be 'dual track', aimed at repressing militants while promoting Islam as a means of social control designed to appeal to moderates. It is a very difficult balancing act. For example, in post-independent Central Asia, Islam was initially used as a component of national identity. But when it became apparent that religion was becoming a powerful political ideology, both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan implemented repressive measures. These led to militant groups becoming particularly active against the nation-states (Esposito 2002). North African and the Gulf states have also frequently sought to repress radical Islam through mass imprisonment while cultivating what is considered to be more moderate Islam. These governments utilise religion to legitimise state policies and institutions and focus attention upon individual piety.

However, moderate Muslims have often also been enmeshed within the blanket arrests of those Muslims seen as a threat to nation-states. These innocent Muslims have been imprisoned alongside militant Muslims and often become radicalised due to their experiences. For instance, following the cancellation of the 1992 elections in Algeria which the FIS (Front of Islamic Salvation) looked certain to win, the military clamped down on people associated with the party and ordinary members were arrested and interned in camps in the Sahara. This action

‘transformed many thousands of activists into embittered outlaws at a stroke and helped ensure that the armed rebellion then gestating would be massive’ (ICG 2004: 8). To a lesser extent, legislation introduced and public reaction across Western nation-states following the 2001 attacks on America, have contributed to more restraint, scrutiny and suspicion of Muslims generally. In turn many Muslims have reassessed their relationship with the wider societies: an outcome that is likely to have been hoped for within the terror groups’ strategic approach.

Saddam Hussein also tried to utilise religion when in power, particularly post-1991 when the consequences of the UN-imposed sanctions became apparent. Both Sunni and Shi’ite groups were encouraged. Sunni groups adopted similar arrangements to the Muslim Brotherhood in other parts of the Middle East and developed strong networks, providing public services to local communities. To help offset the influence of Ayatollah Sistani, now believed to be the main influence behind the leading Shi’ite and coalition party, United Iraqi Alliance, the Shi’ite al-Sadr faction was also supported by the Iraqi government.⁶ Community groups were established, again providing services to local neighbourhoods, and mullahs became more noticeable and influential. Crowds at prayer sessions rose and gradually became more hostile to Saddam’s regime, ultimately leading to Sadiq al-Sadr, the leader following the death of Baqir, and two of his sons being killed by Saddam’s assassins in 1999 (Kepel 2004). The last remaining son, Moktada, was to be subsequently instrumental in the Shi’ite uprising against the American invasion.

The dual track approach has a number of effects. It gives militants' ideology greater significance and a higher profile than they might otherwise achieve and drives them underground where they use clandestine tactics. As such they are harder to detect. For example, in Egypt the threat posed by enhancing Islamic influence was belatedly realised by Sadat who clamped down on dissent and opponents' activities. However, this contributed to opponents being forced underground, where their actions were harder to monitor and led to further anger and an escalation of actions. Terror groups that became *al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya* and *al-Jihad* were mobilised to take more radical action against the state, culminating in the assassination of Sadat in 1981 (al-Zayyat 2004, Gerges 2005, Milton-Edwards 2005).

The policy of using Islam as a mechanism for social control and to weaken support for militancy contributes to undermining the *ulema* who are increasingly considered to be part of the establishment. As Enhali and Adda (2003:2) explain, in respect to Algeria post independence but which can be applied many Muslim societies, 'the *ulema*... were turned into civil servants who contributed to strengthening the state and following its policies.' A breach has formed between considerable numbers of *ulema* and more radical groups and weakened the potential for broader Muslim challenges to nation-states. In this respect, governments can be seen to be more secure but this outcome has also created space for militants to provide theological advice and religious edicts that they are

generally not qualified to make. However it is this lack of institutionalisation that provides part of the legitimacy for people like bin Laden, Zawahiri and until his recent death, Zarqawi. It should be stressed however that this does not apply to all *ulema*. In Egypt, the secular regime's frequent reliance upon the *ulema* to provide theological legitimacy for its policies has enabled some to promote more radical interpretations than would be otherwise anticipated with secular patronage. As Kepel (2004) points out, within Saudi Arabia, the Saudi regime's growing reliance on religious institutions for social control has enabled the *ulema* to negotiate stricter enforcement of their perceptions of Islamic morality which has had a particularly restrictive impact on women. Following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and subsequent stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia (which contributed to the further radicalisation of bin Laden (Bergen 2001, Burke 2003, Saikal 2003) tremendous pressure was placed upon the relationship between the Saudi government and *ulema*. The need for the *ulema* to sanction the government's decision placed religious figures in a strong bargaining position that they used to secure greater Islamification of society in return for the supportive *fatwa*. Subsequent indirect support, resources and freedom provided by the Saudi government have contributed to the growth of militancy and ultimately international terrorism that the regime has struggled to contain.

In a different way, the American-led invasion of Iraq in support of 'freedom' and 'democracy' and the subsequent military control has also produced the reported humiliation and degradation of Iraqi prisoners and the death of thousands of

civilians. Some of the most prominent images of the ‘war on terrorism’ have been the incarceration without trial of Muslims, the denial of human rights at the Guantanamo detention centre, destruction of houses, killing of civilians and the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. These actions and images have had two significant outcomes. Firstly, they have undermined the appeal of the values that America sought to promote. Secondly, legitimacy for terrorism has been strengthened, as militants have been able to justify their attacks with reference to American actions and policies.

Globalisation of ‘Islamic’ Terrorism

Contrary to widespread opinion (Robertson 1992, Waters 1998), which suggests that radical Muslim organisations are opposed to globalisation, many groups have utilised modern forms of transport and information communications technologies (ICT) (Turner 1994). Indeed, it could be argued that al-Qa’ida and related groups’ international focus and strategic approach would be impossible without contemporary media, particularly uncensored satellite television, Internet and mobile communications (Bunt 2003, Kurzman 2002; Sutton and Vertigans 2005). Images and information are being transmitted about incidents and policies at a much faster rate, quickly raising levels of awareness among Muslims about international affairs (Aouragh 2003, Burke 2006, Sakr 2001). The often graphic and disturbing representations help to arouse anger at the perceived instigators

and mobilise opposition against those held responsible, such as Israel in the case of Lebanese and Palestinian nationalists and secular Muslim regimes or Western nation-states or institutions for other militant nationalist and transnational groups.

Islamic terror groups' ideologies and approaches to conflict have become globalised. Certainly some groups remain loyal to local and national concerns, such as *Hamas* and *Hizbollah*, which are predominantly linked to Palestinian and Lebanese issues respectively. Some groups in South Asia also remain dedicated to national struggles, though their actions can also be interpreted within the wider agenda of al-Qa'ida. Groups associated with *al-Qa'ida* are very much the product of transnational influences. Al-Qa'ida's brand of *jihadi salafism* is a fusion of different international, theological influences that incorporates Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia, Qutbism from Egypt and Deobandis from the Indian sub continent, with local variations in beliefs and behaviour. The development of contemporary terrorism has also been influenced by ideological transformations following the Iranian revolution, the expropriation of the military victory in Afghanistan for militant Islam and the ultimate success of Hizbollah's terror campaign against the Israeli army in Lebanon. Different events contributed to a growing confidence in the ability of militant Islam to tackle opposing ideologies and institutions. Until recently, conflict has been maintained or facilitated by veteran Afghan *mujahideen* who remained instrumental within different groups associated with al-Qa'ida.⁷

There has been an increasing perception of a global challenge provided by these groups that crosscuts international barriers. Ideologically the groups are far from united and disagree about the emphasis to be placed upon attacking Muslim and / or Western targets. Generally there is a shared perception that Muslim nation-states (the “near enemy”) have to be changed and the West, in particular the United States (the “far enemy”), has to be confronted by groups associated with al-Qa’ida. Consequently the strategic approach has broadened.⁸ This can be witnessed in the attacks on Western targets by indigenous peoples and other nationalities and by migrants who have been radicalised by their experiences in the West, exposure to militant ideologies in mosques, universities and through friends and who have witnessed the unintended consequences of Muslims and Western nation-states’ actions via the mass media (Bennett 2004, Burke 2003, Sutton and Vertigans 2005). The threat to these nation-states is obviously very real and is readily promoted when seeking to justify the increasingly repressive actions and restrictions of individual liberties. However, there are questions regarding the extent to which government concerns unintentionally contribute to strengthening perceptions of the notoriety and capability of the terror groups, which in turn adds to their profile and hence appeal amongst some Muslims.

Concluding Comments

Terrorist groups associated with al-Qa'ida have been influenced by a series of factors. These include economic exclusion and cultural dislocation, identified in other studies. However these factors predate contemporary Islamic terrorism and therefore cannot provide a sufficient explanation. In many ways *al-Qa'ida* and related groups can be seen as a reaction to, and consequence of, Western and secular actions that have unintentionally heightened economic inequalities, cultural concerns, perceived political injustices and conflicts. The role of counter-terrorism measures within nation-states alongside the international 'war on terror', have unintentionally contributed to the phenomena they are seeking to destroy, with local conditions and global events helping to legitimise acts of terror and attract support.

Different approaches have been adopted to make use of, control and repress militant Islam, which have contributed both to the broad Islamic resurgence and support for terrorist organisations. Repression, weak civil societies and restricted levels of political participation within many Muslim societies have resulted in very limited opportunities for societal debate, discussions and the airing of disagreements. It is therefore easy with hindsight to attribute blame and criticise the inability of nation-states to consider the potential longer-term unintended consequences of their policies and actions. In turn, this has resulted in oppositional groups feeling that Islamic networks and militant approaches are the only viable methods for mobilising. However, as argued above, this criticism should be tempered by the recognition that, not only governments and their

advisers, but also social scientific knowledge more generally, has not reached such high levels of predictive power. Once the phenomenon of the unintended consequences of intentional activity is recognised in its widest sociological sense, as operative at all levels of social relations including the global, then sociological work not only becomes more complex, but over the longer-term perhaps more reality congruent and potentially useful. In the short-term, the underlying political, economic, cultural and social factors behind the appeal of terrorism and the penetration of militancy across both Muslim majority and minority nation-states suggest that it will be much harder to address the problems these actions have helped to bring about.

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¹ For example: Ayubi (1991), Butko (2004), Mortimer (1982), Roy (1994).

² The use of terrorism to describe acts of political violence is also contentious. There is no universal agreement on what terrorism means, highlighted by Schmid's (1993) study of over 100 definitions. Schmid concluded that none of the examined definitions were acceptable to the range of interested parties. But while acknowledging the inherent difficulties in using a definition it is important to establish the range of behaviour that is being described. In this paper terrorism is defined as the targeted and intentional use of violence for political purposes (Vertigans 2006). This definition can be applied to both non-governmental and governmental actions, although in this paper there is a concentration upon the former.

³ 'Groups associated with al-Qa'ida' refers to collections of people who are either part of al-Qa'ida or belong to groups that are part of a loose association who share

some similar ideological interpretations, aims and tactics (Sutton and Vertigans 2005). Burke (2006: 175) suggests that many groups are ‘neither part of a single global jihad... nor dedicated merely to a local group, but... a hybrid of the two.’

⁴ The extent to which the groups can legitimately be described as Islamic is the source of considerable debate. The groups’ discourse and actions are widely considered to be against religious teachings. However the famous W.I. Thomas (1928) adage is adopted, that if people think something is real then it is real *in its consequences*. From this perspective, if the attackers *think* they are Muslims, then we argue it is not the responsibility of social scientists to prove otherwise

⁵ Gerges (2005) points out that this decision further fragmented Islamic militancy between those wanting to instigate global jihad and groups concentrating on national insurgence.

⁶ The relationship was always tense, not least because Saddam had arranged the assassination of the earlier leader Baqir al-Sadr in 1980.

⁷ Since 2001, a range of attacks on Western targets have been undertaken by groups in Pakistan, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Britain with little or no direct identifiable links to the al-Qa’ida hardcore. These attacks indicate that autonomous terror cells are adopting concepts, ideas and techniques in the style of al-Qa’ida without necessarily being part of the group (Burke 2003, Sutton and Vertigans 2006).

⁸ Despite the broadening of strategic focus, individuals and groups associated with al-Qa’ida retain interests in the countries of their origins. For example,

publications by both bin Laden (quoted verbatim in Lawrence 2005) and al-Zawahiri (2001) tend to place disproportionately greater attention upon events in Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively.