Terrorism Studies: Theoretically Under-developed?

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Terrorism studies, bogged down by a definitional morass and research largely 'exist[ing] on a diet of fast food,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[1]<!–[endif]–> remains critically under-developed. Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman note that 'satisfactory solutions to the definition and data problems would have to be found first, before much [theoretical] progress is possible.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[2]<!–[endif]–> Greater understanding and knowledge are the foundations on which theory must be built. In other words, a baby must learn to walk before it can run. Andrew Silke contends that 'the ultimate aim for any research field is to progress from one level of understanding to the next'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[3]<!–[endif]–>in order to reach the explanatory level. Terrorism studies, which only truly emerged as a genre in the early 1970s, has failed to move on to the explanatory level. Thus, the major focus of this essay will be an analysis of this failure.

This essay will critically examine research trends in terrorism studies from 2000-2007<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[4]<!–[endif]–> by systematically evaluating the articles that appear in the two foremost journals in the field, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (TPV) and *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (SICAT). In doing so, it will attempt to update Schmid and Jongman's Political Terrorism, last revised in 1988, and Silke's 'The Road Less Travelled,' which surveyed terrorism research from 1990-1999. This study will begin by assessing terrorism's lack of a definition, and ask whether the field can move forward or develop theoretically without any universally agreed upon definition. In 1977 for example, Walter Laqueur argued that 'a comprehensive definition of terrorism…does not exist nor will it be found in the foreseeable future,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[5]<!–[endif]–> and nor will it make a 'noticeable contribution towards the understanding of terrorism.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[6]<!–[endif]–> The main body of the essay will concentrate on research trends, using the data gleaned from the TPV and SICAT journal articles, and specifically looking at the major focus of each article, the type of analysis each author utilises, the academic discipline of each author, and the number of articles contributed by each author. In effect, the study will attempt to determine how terrorism researchers obtain their raw data, and how they then analyse it. The essay will conclude with a case study of the role of interviewing and its suitability as a vehicle for greater understanding in terrorism studies.

The Definitional Dilemma

Schmid and Jongman's groundbreaking Political Terrorism, published in 1984, developed a broad, long-winded definition of over two hundred words as its starting point.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[7]<!–[endif]–> In the revised 1985 edition, Schmid and Jongman invited more than two hundred members of the research community to comment on the all-encompassing 1984 definition. Only 33% found the definition acceptable,<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[8]<!–[endif]–> and Laqueur replied that 'ten years of debates on typologies and definitions have not enhanced our knowledge of the subject to a significant degree…[and] the study of terrorism can manage with a minimum of theory.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[9]<!–[endif]–> This essay, however, views Laqueur's observations as short-sighted. As Schmid and Jongman retort, even a "minimum of theory" 'requires some consensus about what to theorize about.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[10]<!–[endif]–>Moreover, how can efficient data collection and analysis take place if researchers have different interpretations of what constitutes terrorism? Indeed, terrorism incident databases such as the Terrorism Chronology Database and the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident Database at the RAND Corporation, the RAND-St. Andrews database formerly housed at the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, and the Global PathFinder database at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research all use a different definition of terrorism, calling into question the consistency of their research.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[11]<!–[endif]–> For instance, Edna Reid describes how the Central Intelligence Agency, due to political expediency, subtly modified their definition of terrorism under the Ford, Carter and Reagan administrations. The CIA's annual statistical reports thus contained different categorisations of terrorism 'so that no meaningful comparison of "statistics" is possible.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[12]<!–[endif]–>

Further, the lack of a universal definition of terrorism acts as an obstacle to international counter-terrorism strategies, which require an 'unambiguous, unifying, autonomic, and compelling definition of what terrorism is,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[13]<!–[endif]–> for effective cooperation and coordination. Additionally, individual countries use individual definitions, and the United Nations has thus far been unable to break the impasse. Thomas Badley notes that the UN has 'resigned itself to the fact that it is impossible to reach agreement on a common definition,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[14]<!–[endif]–> and the finalisation of the UN Ad Hoc Commission on Terrorism's draft treaties on Comprehensive Convention and Nuclear Terrorism have both been 'held up by,*inter alia*, the question of definition.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[15]<!–[endif]–>In the United Kingdom, as in the United States,<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[16]<!–[endif]–> more than one definition of terrorism exists. The Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993 section 2(2) suggests that '"acts of terrorism" means acts of persons acting on behalf of, or in connection with, any organisation which carries out activities directed towards the overthrowing or influencing, by force or violence, of Her Majesty's government in the United Kingdom…'<!–[if

!supportFootnotes]->[17]<!-[endif]-> Meanwhile, the Terrorism Act 2000 extends to situations where 'the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public,' and when 'the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[18]<!-[endif]->

In the academic community, Michel Wieviorka jumps the gun in stating that 'the first obstacle to opening the field to research by social or political scientists, historians, or psychologists was getting around a popular, and generally confusing, definition of terrorism so as to reach a scientific one.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[19]<!-[endif]->This scientific definition, acceptable to all, has clearly not yet been achieved. In an effort to move past pejorative sentiment, and escape the oft-cited falsehood that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter,' Ayla Schbley has advocated a change in focus, seeking to define terrorism in terms of the methods used, 'constructed not around the *mens rea* of terrorism but based on its *actus reus*.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[20]<!-[endif]-> In this sense, Schmid construes terrorism as the 'peacetime equivalent of war crimes,' which fits in with Kofi Annan's views on 'moral clarity.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[21]<!-[endif]-> Schmid's belief reflects the view of Paul Wilkinson, writing in 1987, that 'terrorism is not a philosophy or a movement: it is a method of struggle.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[22]<!-[endif]-> The definition of terrorism must therefore centre on a 'corpus delicti of irrefutable and uncontroverted facts that constitute its spirit and parameters,'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[23]<!-[endif]->eliminating room for interpretation or conjecture, and which can only be achieved using a method-focused definition. In this sense, justification or legitimacy of thought can have no bearing on the classification of an act as a 'terrorist' act, or an indefinite semantic quagmire will remain. The definitional problem is vital if 'guidelines are to be established by which social scientists collect and evaluate data on strife incidents…[and] is central to an understanding of the phenomenon and to the success of any rational measures directed against it.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[24]<!-[endif]->

However, Silke's review of terrorism research from 1990-1999 ascertains that just 1.6% of research output addressed the debate over definitional and conceptual issues. He gives two possible reasons for this oversight. First he supposes a 'war-weariness' among established terrorism researchers, whose energy has been drained by the 'struggle for the nebulous goal of an agreed framework.'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[25]<!-[endif]-> This essay's 2000-2007 analysis shows an almost identical trend, finding that only seven, or 1.62% of articles were primarily concerned with definitional or conceptual issues.<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[26]<!-[endif]->Second, Silke builds on the analysis of Schmid and Jongman, who charge that 'real specialists in academia are still few,'<!-[if !supportFootnotes]->[27]<!-[endif]-> and points to the low proportion of writers contributing multiple articles to the journals. It is only the more established writers who attempt to tackle the definitional morass, as 'those researchers

most concerned about the conceptual state of the field are going to be those with the greater research commitment to the area.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[28]<!–[endif]–> The essay's research, presented in Table 1 below provides an analysis of trends in publishing from 2000-2007:

Table 1: Basic Trends in Publishing, 2000-2007<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[29]<!–[endif]–>

Journal	One-time contributors	Contributors of two or more articles	Total number of contributions	Number of articles written	Percentage of articles from one-timers
TPV	205	29	285	220	72%
SICAT	174	33	257		

211

68%

Combined

379

62

542

431

70%

Table 2: Basic Trends in Publishing, 1990-1999<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[30]<!–[endif]–>

Journal

Individual contributors

Contributors of two or more articles

Articles

Percentage of articles from one-timers

TPV

232

50

295

78%

Ter/SICAT

187

18

195

90%

Combined

403

69

490

83%

Table 1 demonstrates a significant fall in the percentage of 'one-timers' publishing articles in TPV and particularly in SICAT since 1990-1999 (figures shown in Table 2). Ariel Merari has previously noted the lack of devoted students of terrorism studies, where most research remains purely cosmetic, and results in a 'superficial treatment of a singular aspect of the problem, ignorant of the complex and heterogeneous nature of terrorism, at times suffering from factual errors.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[31]<!–[endif]–> This essay's research suggests that the trend of one-time publishers is declining. However, this is not to say that terrorism research has necessarily improved, as Table 1 is a purely quantitative approach to research trends, and cannot account for the quality of writing. Thus, a qualitative approach is needed to supplement the findings in Table 1. First, a comparison will be made between the top ten contributors (in terms of volume) to TPV and SICAT 2000-2007, and the qualitative list of top researchers provided

by Edna Reid and Hsinchun Chen, in their article 'Mapping the contemporary terrorism research domain.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[32]<!–[endif]–>

Table 3: Frequent Contributors to TPV and SICAT, 2000-2007

Ranking	Author	Articles
Silke's list of contributors, 1990-1999<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[33]<!–[endif]–>		
Schmid and Jongman's list of contributors, 1988<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[34]<!–[endif]–>		
1	Andrew Silke	7
	Weinberg	
	Jenkins	
	–	
	Ami Pedahzur	
		7(3)*
	Hoffman	

Wilkinson

3

Bruce Hoffman

6

Eubank

Bell

–

Leonard Weinberg

6(4)

Wilkinson

Alexander

5

Peter Chalk

4

Bowyer Bell

Crenshaw

–

Avishag Gordon

4

Chalk

Laqueur

–

Mohammed Hafez

4

Jamieson

Schmid

–

Jerrold Post

4

Kaplan

Clutterbuck

–

Ayla Schbley

4

Pluchinsky

Mickolus

–

Max Taylor

4(1)

Silke

Friedlander

–

Eric Shaw

4(3)

Schmid

* Brackets indicate articles where writer was listed as second author (thus, Ami Pedahzur wrote four articles as the lead author, and was listed as second author in three others, giving a total of seven)

These quantitative figures can now be compared with those of Reid and Chen. Their data uses the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) citation database, which tracks citation frequency and acts as a '[tool] for indicating the impact of research papers, institutions, and authors.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[35]<!–[endif]–> In effect, the ISI can be seen as a peer-review mechanism, although its results should probably be seen as useful rather than definitive, and Garfield and Welljams-Dorof have highlighted its weakness as a 'lagging indicator.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[3]

Table 4: Reid and Chen's core terrorism researchers (based on ISI score), 1965-2003<!–[if

!supportFootnotes]–>[37]<!–[endif]–>

Author

Number of publications

No. of times his/her publications were cited

Wilkinson

87

229

Gurr

51

214

Laqueur

37

191

Alexander

88

169

Bell

47

138

Stohl

30

136

Hoffman

121

100

Jenkins

38

96

Ronfeldt

20

95

Crenshaw

40

90

A comparison of Table 3 and Table 4 shows that only Bruce Hoffman has managed to make both lists. An ISI citation index score fell outside the parameters of this study, but Reid and Chen's 1965-2003 data set, which lists forty-two core researchers in all, still provides useful food for thought. For instance, Peter Chalk and Jerrold Post do feature in the top forty-two researchers (along with Hoffman) provided by Reid and Chen, while the other eight researchers who make up this essay's top ten quantitative writers do not. The presence of younger researchers such as Rohan Gunaratna and John Horgan on Reid and Chen's list denotes that more recent researchers have been able to bridge the inherent historical bias of Reid and Chen's survey. Thus, a disconnect seems to be present between qualitative and quantitative terrorism research, which supports Magnus Ranstorp's description of the post-9/11 research community, in which 'retrained academic cold warriors and war correspondents competed to translate anything on al-Qaeda into a commercial success often without regard for quality, sources or other sound academic praxis.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[38]<!–[endif]–>

The State of the Art: Research Focus and the Role of the Researcher

The following section evaluates trends in the research focus of terrorism writers. Ranstorp's critique of the post-9/11 boom in al Qaeda research supports this essay's hypothesis that research trends tend to closely follow real-time events. In this sense, terrorism researchers are likely to be drawn towards the 'aura of perversely tragic glamour'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[39]<!–[endif]–>that modern mass-casualty terrorism provides. One respondent to Schmid and Jongman's 1985 questionnaire went so far as to claim that 'too many authors create the impression that they are merely using the "popularity" of the phenomenon [of terrorism] as a means to promote their own image.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[40]<!–[endif]–> Moreover, terrorism's "need" for an urgent solution 'has led to poorly defined, ideologically biased, conceptually skewed research…[and] policy-oriented research tends to impede sound theoretical work.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[41]<!–[endif]–> Thus, in the clamour for policy relevance, the rarity of historical longitudinal research was exposed in Silke's 1990-1999 study, which found only seven articles that analysed terrorism prior to 1960.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[42]<!–[endif]–> As Reid pointedly argues, the terrorism research community can be seen as an 'invisible college' who share work, have informal contact, and continually meet and present at the same conferences. Research on terrorism, 'shaped by the interests of its most productive members, who in this case are concerned primarily with policy-oriented research,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[43]<!–[endif]–> has tended to exclude historical context and comparison, as well as theoretical and conceptual issues.

This essay's evaluation of trends in the research focus of journal articles from 2000-2007 illuminates Reid's and Silke's findings:

Table 5: Research focus, 2000-2007

Ranking	Focus	Number of articles
1	Al Qaeda	28
2	Militant Islam/jihadism (non-AQ)	25
3	Suicide bombing	20
4	Weapons of Mass Destruction	14
5		

Provisional IRA

11

6

Loyalists (Northern Ireland)

9

7

Internet/cyber-terrorism

8

8

Definition

7

9

History, prior to 1960

6

–

State-sponsored terrorism

6

11

LTTE

5

12

‘New terrorism’

4

–

ETA

4

The criteria used in Table 5 is derived from Silke’s 1990-1999 study, in which Silke states that ‘it was not sufficient that a group [or issue] was briefly mentioned or received discussion of a page or two. The group [or issue] had to be clearly the major focus of the article.’<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[44]<!–[endif]–> As expected, Table 5 demonstrates a research bias towards ‘current’ terrorism phenomenon. Post-9/11, the terrorism research community has been drawn towards al Qaeda, militant Islam, suicide bombing and the fear of a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In comparison to this essay’s study, Silke’s 1990-99 data shows that al Qaeda and militant Islam were the source of two articles each,<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[45]<!–[endif]–> compared to twenty-eight and twenty-five articles respectively in the data set for 2000-2007. For instance, when discussing South East Asia (which served as a focus for a large proportion of the articles on militant Islam), Jones, Smith and Weeding contend that even after 9/11 ‘academic opinion had, until Bali [October 2002], either neglected or discountenanced the extent to which an Islamic terror network had taken root across the region.’<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[46]<!–[endif]–> The academic response to the Bali bombing thus created a glut of articles on terrorism in South East Asia. The breadth of articles concerning WMD reflects the view that academic focus ‘has been largely driven by policy concerns of the U.S. administrations [amongst others] in charge, which could lead to faddish trends in research.’<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[47]<!–[endif]–> Indeed, Gary Ackerman has found that in a survey of all WMD publications, the

field shows signs that it has 'reached something of an "interpretative impasse,"'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[48]<!–[endif]–> with the regurgitation of the same material among a small group of academics (akin to Reid's aforementioned 'invisible college'). Meanwhile, interest in the Provisional IRA has remained stable. Eleven articles focused on the PIRA in both the 1990-1999 and the 2000-2007 periods. Although Crenshaw has warned that 'there are commonalities among instances of terrorism, but each case is unique,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[49]<!–[endif]–> the importance of historical context and analysis is nevertheless salient, but remains relatively rare in terrorism studies research. Gaddis notes that 'visions of the future have to proceed from an awareness of some kind of past, otherwise there can be no conceptual frame of reference.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[50]<!–[endif]–> From 2000-2007 only six articles discuss, in depth, terrorism prior to 1960, a point Silke condemns in his assessment that 'this wider context is almost entirely ignored as terrorism research is driven by a need to provide a short-term, immediate assessment of current groups and threats. Efforts to establish coherent and stable guiding principles have been almost entirely side-lined.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[51]<!–[endif]–>

The precise role of the researcher *vis-á-vis* governmental policy-making circles is also contentious in terrorism studies. Schmid and Jongman famously warned researchers not to confuse their roles –'his role is not to "fight" the terrorist fire; rather than a "firefighter," he should be a "student of combustion."'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[52]<!–[endif]–> Further, research output is 'too often narrative, condemnatory, and prescriptive.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[53]<!–[endif]–>To this extent, the absence of any real analysis or research into state-sponsored terrorism is most worrying.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[54]<!–[endif]–> As Table 5 showed, only six articles were written on state-sponsored terrorism in the period 2000-2007. Reid's 1997 survey attempts to shed light on this oversight. She finds that in a sample of 65 institutions and 160 acknowledged sources of terrorism research funding, the United States government was the most frequently cited financial contributor, and was the source of 32% of research grants.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[55]<!–[endif]–>Additionally, Reid posits that the U.S. government 'had major impacts on the definitions of terrorism, the types of data used in analysis, the selection of research problems, the dissemination of research findings, and the marketing of ideas.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[56]<!–[endif]–> As a result, studies such as Kupperman and Trent's Terrorism: Threat, Reality, Response,<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[57]<!–[endif]–>'are based on preconceived government policies and programs,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[58]<!–[endif]–> and not academic rigour. Further, policy-related research 'has sometimes opted to conceal totally or partially the identity of the sponsor or the aim of the research.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[59]<!–[endif]–> With this in mind, the absence of any significant body of work on state-sponsored terrorism is, perhaps, not surprising.

In addition, it is interesting to note that every single article from 2000-2007 was written by a writer pre-disposed to at least containing terrorism. Schmid and Jongman comment that 'most of us would find it strange if all books on war were written by pacifists.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[60]<!–[endif]–> Reid's categorisation of terrorism studies as a static environment builds from Schmid and Jongman's observation. She describes the research process below:

'the flow of terrorism information such as researchers' publications, government documents and media reports constitute a closed system in which information is created, processed, published, and disseminated. Later the information feeds back into the circular system to stimulate further creation, processing, publishing, and dissemination.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[61]<!–[endif]–>

In this sense researcher-policy maker relations often devolve into 'slightly incestuous echo-talk.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[62]<!–[endif]–>This explains Merari's belief in the 'inadequate contribution of academic research on terrorism to governmental policy-making.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[63]<!–[endif]–>In a report presented to the UK Parliament on the 7/7 London bombings, the Intelligence and Security Committee commented that 'we remain concerned that, across the whole of the counter-terrorism community, the development of the home-grown threat and the radicalisation of British citizens were not fully understood or applied to strategic thinking.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[64]<!–[endif]–>This can at least partially be seen as a failure of the research community. The role of the researcher can only be in trying to understand those who participate in acts of terror, for 'it is not our job to condemn, to condone, or to find some objective 'truth'.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[65]<!–[endif]–>Thus, terrorism studies should be 'apolitical and amoral. The research should not take a "top-down" perspective, looking at the phenomenon of terrorism through the eyes of the power holders.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[66]<!–[endif]–> For this reason, the next section of this essay will be devoted to 'understanding,' and the method of analysis used by terrorism researchers.

Data Analysis and the Dearth of Primary Research

In her research on the effect of 9/11 on the academic community, Avishag Gordon remarks that the 'opportunity to create a new academic research subject area has so far been missed.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[67]<!–[endif]–> She uses the example of University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), where as many as fifty new terrorism courses were developed in response to 9/11 but were all absorbed into existing subject disciplines. However, the inter-disciplinary nature of terrorism studies, its theoretical development, and each discipline's distinct role in terrorism studies has not yet been worked out. Indeed Ranstorp has compared current

terrorism research efforts to a game of football, where 'all the players are rushing after the ball without a strategy rather than marking different players or utilising different areas of the pitch.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[68]<!–[endif]–> Until this inter-disciplinary confusion has been addressed, the lack of an autonomous terrorism studies subject may not necessarily be a problem. Table 6 below presents a delineation of contributors to TPV and SICAT 2000-2007 according to their academic or professional background:

Table 6: Backgrounds of authors

Background	Number of contributors	Percentage share, 2000-2007 (%)	Percentage share, 1990-1999 (%)<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[69]<!–[endif]–>
Political Science	107	33.7	48.7
Consultancy	49	15.5	6.1
Psychology			

36

11.4

5.4

Sociology

26

8.2

5.9

Religious Studies

13

4.1

1.7

Government departments

12

3.8

9.7

History

11

3.5

3.9

Academic law

10

3.2

1.9

Economists

6

1.9

1.7

Anthropology

6

1.9

0.9

Military personnel

5

1.6

3.4

IGOs

5

1.6

N/A

Media studies

3

0.9

0.9

Journalists

2

0.6

1.2

Law enforcement

1

0.3

2.0

Lawyers	
1	
0.3	
2.0	
Others	
16	
5.0	
4.6	
Unknown	
8	
2.5	
N/A	
Total	
317	
100	
100	

As Table 6 illustrates, both consultancy and religious studies have secured notable rises in publishing share

since 1990-1999, while surprisingly, government departments and even political science experienced a fall. Indeed, the decline in literature written by government departments is a trend that Silke uncovered in his 2004 survey of the 1990-1999 data set. He posited that 'the decline could be an indication that the government members (and especially the US administration) were becoming disenfranchised from the research effort. Is this the case? Hopefully not.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[70]<!–[endif]–> It is most difficult to try to generalise or uncover or explain any of the trends regarding author backgrounds uncovered in the 2000-2007 research, which in itself is a rather small time period. However, the large rise in consultancy output may reflect a government policy of outsourcing, although verification of this is certainly outside the realms of this essay, and the increase enjoyed by religious studies could potentially be a result of the prominence of religio-terrorism, embodied by al Qaeda and militant Islam. Finally, it is encouraging to see healthy percentage increases in psychology, sociology, and even anthropology, all of which have much to offer the inter-disciplinary nature of terrorism studies.

Schmid and Jongman's critique of the state of terrorism research centres particularly on academic reliance on secondary data analysis. They describe much of the writing on terrorism as 'impressionistic, superficial, and at the same time often also pretentious, venturing far-reaching generalizations on the basis of episodal evidence.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[71]<!–[endif]–> Moreover, even the most experienced and well-regarded terrorism researchers have not escaped criticism. For example, Robert White has discredited Paul Wilkinson's description of the IRA and Sinn Fein leadership. Wilkinson argues that

'the 'godfathers' who control these organizations take care not to be directly involved in the execution of terrorist crimes, and thus appear able to move and organize freely and openly. They have not been compelled to go underground.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[72]<!–[endif]–>

White notes that Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, then President of Sinn Fein, was imprisoned for six months in December 1972, then Vice-President of Sinn Fein Gerry Adams was imprisoned for seven months in 1978, while the IRA's Quartermaster Jack McCabe died mixing explosives in 1971 and Sean McIlvenna, the IRA's Director of Operations was shot dead by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in 1988.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[73]<!–[endif]–> These examples would seem to disprove Wilkinson's thesis. Moreover, J. Bowyer Bell critiques 'those focused on the spectacular and novel, the violent, the news of the day…' who 'miss as irrelevant the dynamics of the underground world.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[74]<!–[endif]–> Indeed, White further counters that Wilkinson's quote 'implies some kind of neutral government, manipulated by a wily opponent who uses the system to its advantage,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[75]<!–[endif]–> reminiscent of the discussion on political bias mentioned earlier in the essay. Brian Jenkins, whose famous phrase that 'terrorists want a lot a people watching and not a lot of people dead,'<!–[if

!supportFootnotes]–>[76]<!–[endif]–>has also fallen foul of generalisation and speculation, and the rise to prominence of al Qaeda and the *jihadist* movement makes Jenkins' claim inaccurate.

Thus, Schmid and Jongman allege that 'there are probably few areas in the social science literature in which so much is written on the basis of so little research. Perhaps as much as 80 percent of the literature is not research-based in any rigorous sense.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[77]<!–[endif]–> A respondent to Schmid and Jongman's questionnaire surmises that there are 'about 5 [authors who] really know what they are talking about—[the] rest are integrators of literature.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[78]<!–[endif]–>Silke furthers these accusations, suggesting that 80 percent of the literature is based solely on secondary data analysis,<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[79]<!–[endif]–> with researchers 'largely ensconced in the ivory tower,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[80]<!–[endif]–> rather than creating new data through, for example, interviews (Crenshaw also notes this<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[81]<!–[endif]–>). In addition, Horgan claimed in 2005 that Schmid and Jongman's conclusion is still an 'accurate depiction' of the state of terrorism research now.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[82]<!–[endif]–> While secondary data analysis is undoubtedly useful, its role in furthering understanding of terrorism is finite. As such, this essay's final section emphasises the importance of primary data collection.

The Interview Process and the Deepening of Understanding: A Case Study

In his critique of Wilkinson's portrayal of the IRA and Sinn Fein, White points out that Wilkinson has not 'entered the violent field.' White comments that 'research in the violent field is likely to yield better data, and an increased understanding of this kind of political behaviour.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[83]<!–[endif]–> Moreover, a continual reliance on secondary data prevents the challenging of the 'received view,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[84]<!–[endif]–> which as the Wilkinson example highlights, may not always be correct. This section of the essay will therefore be dedicated to the role of interviewing in augmenting our comprehension of individual terrorists and of terrorism studies, leading to possible theoretical development in the field.

The interviewing of those involved in terrorism and political violence is one of the foremost means of accruing primary data. In his 1990-1999 survey, Silke found that in 22 per cent of articles researchers had used interviewing as a means of obtaining new information. However, of those 22 per cent of articles, roughly half of them used interviews as only a 'minor feature', and the bulk of information came through secondary data analysis.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[85]<!–[endif]–>

Table 7: Primary Research—Interviewing

Time period	Interview as major feature	Interview as minor feature	No interview
1990-1999<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[86]<!–[endif]–>	13%	9%	78%
2000-2007<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[87]<!–[endif]–>	11%	9%	80%

Although a smaller sample was used in collecting the data for the 2000-2007 statistics, the results found in Table 7 demonstrate a strikingly similar trend to that found by Silke. This seems to confirm Silke's belief that 'researchers remain heavily dependent on easily accessible sources of data.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[88]<!–[endif]–>This essay maintains that the profound reluctance of researchers to engage in dialogue with 'terrorists' impedes the furtherance of knowledge in terrorism studies. One possible reason for this is the lack of dedicated researchers in the terrorism field, which often causes authors to work alone, making time-consuming activities such as interviewing less appealing. Silke's 1990-1999 data shows that over 90 per cent of published literature on terrorism was completed by a single researcher working alone, while only 9.4 per cent of literature was the result of collaboration amongst two or more researchers.<!–[if

!supportFootnotes]–>[89]<!–[endif]–> However, this essay's 2000-2007 data set shows a fall in single-authored articles, yet interviewing rates were largely unmoved:

Table 8: Single author vs. Multiple author*

Number of articles

Percentage (%)

Single author

341

79

Multiple author

88

21

***** Two articles written by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, both featured in TPV in 2002, 14:1, were discounted for the purposes of this table.

Additionally, another explanation for a lack of primary research lies in the propensity for one-time contributors, mentioned earlier in the essay, whose perceived lack of commitment to the topic area may make the collection of primary data less likely. Again though, a significant fall in 'one-timers' from the 1990-1999 period to this essay's 2000-2007 data was recorded earlier in the essay, clearly with little effect on interviewing rates. More research is thus necessary in order to suitably interpret the lack of researchers willing to use interviewing as a tool of understanding.

Interviews provide the terrorism research field with a unique opportunity to interact with terrorists, former terrorists, and members of the security forces. Horgan claims that interviewing, in particular, is 'pivotal to

progression'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[90]<!–[endif]–> in terrorism studies. Additional information, as long as it can be triangulated, is vital for theoretical development in the field. Interviews not only provide descriptive information (such as how an attack was planned), but they also give a window into the interviewee's mind and the meaning that he/she ascribes to certain events and issues. Thus, the following quote taken from an interview gives a remarkable insight into the mind of a Palestinian terrorist, and his justifications for his actions:

'You Israelis are Nazis in your souls and in your conduct. In your occupation you never distinguish between men and women, or between old people and children. You adopted methods of collective punishment, you uprooted people from their homeland and from their homes and chased them into exile. You fired live ammunition at women and children. You smashed the skulls of defenceless civilians…'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[91]<!–[endif]–>

Silke also notes the sense of control interviews can give the researcher because they 'can ensure full answers are provided to specific questions.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[92]<!–[endif]–> For example, in an attempt to learn more about the potentiality of WMD terrorism, Post, Sprinzak and Denny state that 'the best way to find out the interest of terrorists in using weapons of mass destruction was to ask them.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[93]<!–[endif]–> Likewise (and in contrast to Wilkinson's secondary analysis of the IRA) Horgan hypothesised prior to his interview of over 300 alleged members of the IRA, Sinn Fein and other republican terror groups that 'I could probably gather a great deal of information on how personal relationships worked and, with luck, I might be able to arrive at a picture of how the IRA's command and function structure is operated.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[94]<!–[endif]–>

Without speaking, engaging and interacting with terrorists, thereby accumulating first-hand information, it is hard to see how an acceptable level of understanding can be reached. Merari argues that without primary information, academic perceptions terrorists and terrorist groups are 'often largely speculative.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[95]<!–[endif]–> Indeed, this could partially explain why other sectors of the social sciences 'regard terrorism studies as shallow and void of intellectual credibility.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[96]<!–[endif]–> Indeed, it is hard to envision much of the circular dependence on secondary data enhancing our knowledge or understanding of the subject area, or leading to theoretical development. White thus suggests that 'without talking to those involved in the violence, without in-depth information on *why* they are involved in violence we will never know which explanation [as to why people joined the IRA in the 1970s] holds.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[97]<!–[endif]–>

However, it is also necessary to look into the problems of interviewing. White's proclamation that 'we need to interact with those who are violent'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[98]<!–[endif]–> both encourages the use of

interviewing, but at the same time gives a small insight into the potential dangers involved. Moreover, Bowyer Bell, famous for his interaction with terrorists in Northern Ireland, warns that 'it is not how do you meet these people but rather not to worry for they may come to get you.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[99]<!–[endif]–> Nevertheless, there may be a hint of exaggeration in Bowyer Bell's words, and academic consensus seems to suggest a relative safety to research field-work.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[100]<!–[endif]–> In his account of research into the IRA's funding sources, Horgan comments that he 'received very little intimidation from IRA members' and his most serious chastisement came courtesy of the Gardai.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[101]<!–[endif]–> Horgan does recall the example of a phone call he received advising him that 'you can be sure that if you pose a threat in any way you're going to be executed,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[102]<!–[endif]–> which serves 'as a reminder to always be careful when making approaches.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[103]<!–[endif]–>

Further, Merari observes the unique difficulty of primary research in terrorism studies, as 'for obvious reasons, terrorists are inaccessible to scientific research as long as they maintain their clandestine activity,'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[104]<!–[endif]–>and much of the data collected struggles to meet commonly accepted academic standards due to the ways and means of obtaining it. Further, interviewing will never be able to secure the truth *per se*. White correctly remarks that 'actors may understand themselves differently when compared to the perception that victims have of them. This does not invalidate the actor's, or the victim's, perspective, though it may complicate the observer's 'understanding'.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[105]<!–[endif]–> It is thus the role of the interviewer to understand the meaning that the interviewee attaches to each specific event or issue. For maximal success, White encourages in-depth 'prolonged interaction in the 'violent' field.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[106]<!–[endif]–> This is especially relevant when interviewing current 'terrorists' who may initially begin by peddling the organisation's official line. Horgan refers to these interviewees as the 'under the influence' interviewees.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[107]<!–[endif]–> In addition, the interviewing process is open to problems of validity and reliability, due to deceit, forgetfulness and divergent meanings, amongst others. However, increasingly, the opportunity now exists to speak with 'former' terrorists, especially those involved in the Troubles in Northern Ireland. This work has the potential to lessen the problems of reliability mentioned above, particularly in relation to organisational propaganda, and the intelligence issues that many terrorists fear interaction may bring. Both Horgan's recent and forthcoming work on disengagement<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[108]<!–[endif]–> are examples of this new field in interviewing. Nevertheless, this essay's earlier diagnosis of the importance of policy relevance over historical context is clearly pertinent here, and only time will tell if researchers choose to take advantage of these new possibilities.

Finally, past information shows that only 1 per cent of data is obtained through structured systematic

interviews, which may call into question interviewing's scientific credibility. Far more common is the unstructured non-systematic interview, which accounts for 9 per cent of research data.<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[109]<!–[endif]–> Horgan describes his own experiences of interviewing, and observes that systematic, semi-formal interviews proved 'difficult in practice and quite a lot of flexibility had to be employed with most interviewees.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[110]<!–[endif]–> In this regard, the terrorism research community has been relatively silent regarding best-practice, and few articles have been written specifically concerning issues in interviewing. White remarks that 'scholars must be able to document the rigor of their research, even qualitative research. Who was interviewed, and why, and how, should be discussed, as any good qualitative textbook will note.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[111]<!–[endif]–> These procedural aspects warrant further investigation by academics. As with secondary data, interviewing can still give rise to generalised and reductionist theories. For example, interview-informed interpretations such as Adolphe Jonas' assertion that inconsistent mothering makes a terrorist<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[112]<!–[endif]–> can clearly be flawed. Therefore, perhaps this brief case study has shown that a more equal mix of the primary and secondary data analysis is required. A rise in primary research such as interviewing and, importantly, a concomitant improvement in interview techniques and standards are critical if theoretical development in terrorism studies is to be achieved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paucity of qualitative primary research on terrorism studies has seriously hindered theoretical development in the field. Jenkins has acknowledged that 'unless we try to think like terrorists we are liable to miss the point.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[113]<!–[endif]–> In this sense, 'to know the "why" of religious terrorism is to know the "how" to preempt and contain it.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[114]<!–[endif]–> This essay has demonstrated that terrorism research has largely attempted to 'jump' one stage of its evolution, and has focused on a prescriptive and policy-oriented counter-terrorism approach before it has fully understood the 'terrorist'. This has caused a 'spiralling of the literature that in the end adds little to our overall understanding of terrorism.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[115]<!–[endif]–> To be sure, even the analysis of some of the more prominent authors has at times come 'dangerously close to "counterinsurgency masquerading as political science."'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[116]<!–[endif]–> An evaluation of research patterns in the period 2000-2007 has highlighted some useful trends, not least the decline of 'one-time' contributions to the field, the predictable post-9/11 sharp rise in focus on al Qaeda and militant Islam, the levelling off of the dominant political science approach to terrorism, and a continued reliance on secondary data analysis. This essay has emphasised that theoretical and conceptual development in the field is likely to be slow as long as policy-oriented research, often heavily subsidised by politicised government, remains in the ascendancy. Ranstorp cautions that 'it is critical that the terrorism researcher is

cognisant of the necessity to remain independent and academically authoritative rather than becoming closely embedded with the intelligence community to the extent one's credibility is in danger or may become undermined.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[117]<!–[endif]–> Theoretical development can only take place with sound, impartial research that builds towards a 'body of knowledge'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[118]<!–[endif]–> that reinforces our understanding of the nature of terrorism.

Appendix 1

Schmid and Jongman's 1984 definition of terrorism:

'Terrorism is a method of combat in which random or symbolic victims serve as an instrumental *target of violence*. These instrumental victims share class characteristics which form the basis for their selection for victimization. Through previous use of violence or the credible threat of violence other members of that group or class are put in a *state of chronic (fear)*. This group or class, whose members' sense of security is purposefully undermined, is the *target of terror*. The victimization of the target of violence is considered extranormal by most observers from the witnessing audience on the basis of its atrocity, the time (e.g., peacetime) or place (not a battlefield) of victimization, or the disregard for rules of combat accepted in conventional warfare. The norm violation creates an attentive audience beyond the target of terror; sectors of this audience might in turn form the main object of manipulation. The purpose of this indirect method of combat is either to immobilize the target of terror in order to produce disorientation and/or compliance, or to mobilize secondary *targets of demand* (e.g., a government) or *targets of attention* (e.g., public opinion) to changes of attitude or behaviour favouring the short or long-term interests of the users of this method of combat.'<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[119

Appendix 2: Research methods

Below are notes on the methods used in this essay to acquire data on the research trends in the 2000-2007 period:

1. In researching the number of journal articles which focused on definitional issues, the method was fairly simple. Many articles included a brief first paragraph on the definition of terrorism. However, only articles in which the definition was the main focus, i.e. the debate spanned the majority or the whole of the article, were included.

2. The method for researching the basic trends in publishing and the most frequent contributors to the journals was also straightforward. Each contributor to each journal article was recorded and fed into an overall table, the results of which are detailed in Tables 1 and 3. See also the '*' under Table 3 for an explanation of joint article contributions.

3. As highlighted in the essay, data for Table 5 on research focus derived its method from Silke's 1990-1999 survey. For example, if an article focused on more than two groups (say, al Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiah and the Muslim Brotherhood), then no research focus was recorded. Once again, a focus on a group or issue had to span the majority of, or the entire article, for inclusion.

4. For the data displayed in Table 6 on the backgrounds of authors, the research was more complicated. Each contributor to each article was searched for on an online search engine (primarily Google). For most of the contributors, especially those employed by a university, identifying a background was straightforward. Other contributors were harder to track down, and if an author's background could not be located then they appear in the 'unknown' category found in the table. Further, some authors appeared to have more than one background. For instance, Andrew Silke is described as 'Professor Andrew Silke (BSc Hons, AFBPsS, PhD) is the Field Leader for Criminology and the Director of Terrorism Studies at the University of East London . He has a background in forensic psychology and has worked both in academia and for government (see http://www.uel.ac.uk/law/staff/andrewsilke.htm).' In cases such as these, if a definite focus was not evident then their count of '1' was split between whichever disciplines were noted. One final note on political science: an author was placed in the political science field if he/she was identified as teaching in university departments such as political science, international relations, government, policy studies, conflict studies etc.

5. Research methods for Table 7's data on interviewing are dealt with briefly in footnote 83. A more detailed analysis of every article published was outside the scope of this essay. However, a sample of 54 articles was conducted. A specific method was used in order to try and guarantee the random nature of the sample. Thus, beginning with the first journal issue of TPV and SICAT, one article per issue for TPV, and one article every other issue for SICAT was evaluated. The method was quite simple. The first article of the first issue (so for TPV this was the first article in 12:1), then the second article of the following issue (12:2), the third article of the following issue (12:3) and so on were analysed. For an article to be adjudged to have used interviewing, some evidence of interviewing had to be found. If the article was based around these interviews, then interviewing was said to be a major feature of the article. If maybe one or two interviews were used and footnoted in order to give greater understanding of an issue, supplemented by further secondary data analysis, then interviewing was said to be only a

minor feature of the article.

6. The findings for Table 8 were again, fairly straightforward. If an article was written by only a single author, then that article went in the single author column. If two or more contributors were listed, then the article went into the multiple authors column. See the '*' under Table 8 for information on two articles not included.

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<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[3]<!–[endif]–> Op.cit. Silke (2004): p.58.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[4]<!–[endif]–> The survey ran up to and including the last issue available at the time of research. For SICAT, this was 30:4, and for TPV the last issue was 19:1.

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<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[6]<!–[endif]–> Walter Laqueur, The Age of Terrorism, London, 1987, p.72.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[7]<!–[endif]–> See Appendix 1 for full quote.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[8]<!–[endif]–> Op.cit. Schmid and Jongman (1988): p.2.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[9]<!–[endif]–> Laqueur in ibid. p.3.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[10]<!–[endif]–> ibid. p.3.

<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[11]<!–[endif]–> The RAND Corporation argues that 'terrorism is violence calculated to create an atmosphere of fear and alarm to coerce others into actions they would not otherwise undertake, or refrain from actions they desired to take. Acts of terrorism are generally directed against civilian targets. The motives of all terrorists are political, and terrorist actions are generally carried out in a way that will achieve maximum publicity,' see http://www.rand.org/ise/projects/terrorismdatabase/.

The ICPVTR defines terrorism as 'the threat or an act of politically motivated violence directed against non combatants,' personal correspondence via email with Dr. Rohan Gunaratna.

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<!–[if !supportFootnotes]–>[16]<!–[endif]–> The FBI defines terrorism as 'a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, in violation of the criminal laws of the United States, or of any state, to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives,' see http://www.fbi.gov/publications/terror/terror2000_2001.htm.

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