**Intelligence Collection, Analysis and Reporting of Terrorist Groups: A Study on Effectiveness**

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**Introduction**

This article examines in what degree, the conduct of intelligence by paramilitary groups resemble or differ from national intelligence. Paramilitary is a militarised force whose function, is similar to a professional military but is not considered part of a state's formal armed forces. Specifically, this essay will focus on terrorist intelligence. It will trace different terrorist groups, examining the basic rational and doctrine that precedes its operational actions. The article will prove that the level of sophistication and meticulously planning of operations of a lot of sub-state groups can be compared with this of their state counterparts. While some “hostile reconnaissance” is amateurish, and easily detected, a significant amount is professional and very difficult to detect. It seems that a lot of sub state actors have learned that in order for an operation to be successful, good intelligence plays a vital role. The article will analyse and explore the doctrine, intentions and organization of well-known terrorist and paramilitary groups: Al-Qaeda, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), (Irish Republican Army) IRA, and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC).

Secondly, it will be shown that sub-state actors represent a dramatic change in intelligence environment and they need as much attention as the state adversaries. Even though they lack the enormous financial resources the adversary states have, they can potentially use ideological motives to recruit, or alternatively “ethnic recruiting”, in order to infiltrate national governments. Also, the terrorist threat, forced US government to cooperate and share information with not so reliable intelligence agencies, like the Pakistani ISI. Furthermore, with the shift of US politics towards the Middle East, US intelligence agencies had to hire additional native translators, analysts and operatives to fill the increasing demand. All these new “openings” were not without the threat of possible penetrations of terrorist sympathisers, or even terrorist elements into US intelligence.

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4. Ibid, p.223
5. Ibid, p.225
6. Ibid, p.223
community.\textsuperscript{7} A lot of recent examples can prove that terrorist groups like Hezbollah and al-Qaeda also conduct intelligence operations within the United States.\textsuperscript{8} Hence, not only non-state violent groups constitute a real threat, they also change the way the intelligence community operates.\textsuperscript{9}

**Terrorist vs State Intelligence Operations**

In the following paragraphs it will be shown, that terrorist operational intelligence is indeed thorough, detailed, well calculated and comparable with the way intelligence is generated in organized states. At the beginning, the basic intelligence doctrines that cover several insurgent organizations will be presented. After that, ways intelligence is produced in paramilitary structures will be described, and similarities and differences with the official state intelligence will be drawn. Specifically, case studies of Al Qaeda operations will be used to prove the sophistication of paramilitary operational intelligence.

For Al Qaeda, intelligence is a critical operational resource and a valuable input for decision making.\textsuperscript{10} Its vigorous collection, scrutiny, and dissemination within the organization have proven fundamental to its capacity to engage in carefully crafted acts of terrorism.\textsuperscript{11} For Al Qaeda, it is important to engage in symbolic successful attacks, because it is a great way to disseminate its philosophy and attract new followers. The conduct of successful attacks is necessary for Al Qaeda’s organization survival, and successful attacks can only happen after careful planning and detailed study of intelligence concerning the target. To this extent, Al Qaeda’s use of intelligence echoes Herman’s description of intelligence as “...a significant part of the modern state and a factor in government’s success and failure.”\textsuperscript{12} In the manual “Declaration of Jihad Against the country’s Tyrants”, intelligence is defined “...the covert search for and examination of the enemy’s news and information for the purpose of using them when a plan is devised.”\textsuperscript{13} Al Qaeda’s definitions of intelligence also reflect an organizational understanding of the relationship between intelligence and decision making. For instance, the volume on intelligence and security contained in the Encyclopaedia of the Afghan Jihad says, “Intelligence is providing the necessary information for policy making.”\textsuperscript{14} It can be easily inferred that intelligence in Al-Qaeda serves exactly the same purposes as intelligence in a state.

Al Qaeda’s training material routinely emphasizes the need for operatives to adopt a rational approach to the planning and execution of operations, in which a professional and scientific approach is required.\textsuperscript{15} For example, Sayf Al-Adel defines “planning” as, “...the scientific pre-examination of targets to identify the right target and the best means to work on him.”\textsuperscript{16} This is done by putting together a set of special coherent, comprehensive, and firm measures aimed at misleading and surprising the enemy and reducing as much as possible the losses from the act if it is uncovered.”\textsuperscript{17} As a result, for Al Qaeda, intelligence serves as a tool to enhance operational

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\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, p.223  
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, p.223  
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, p.222  
\textsuperscript{10} Al Qaeda’s Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism , 31:1072–1102, 2008. p.1072  
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p. 1072  
\textsuperscript{13} Al Qaeda’s Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 31:1072–1102, 2008. p.1073  
\textsuperscript{14} Al Qaeda’s Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 31:1072–1102, 2008. p.1073  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid
certainty, a key prerequisite to action and a mean to increase confidence levels.\textsuperscript{18} Another important mention is that Al Qaeda did not produce only tactical assessments but strategic ones as well. According to what Khalid Sheikh Mohammed said, primary operational goal of Al-Qaeda was to provoke the US into futile, expensive and bloody wars, thereby advancing a strategic aim of forcing US and western retrenchment from Islamic lands.\textsuperscript{19}

FARC also produce short, doctrinal manuals on the conduct of intelligence.\textsuperscript{20} Some elements of the ‘doctrine’ are unique to FARC.\textsuperscript{21} Others feature widely held concepts like the ‘intelligence cycle’ and even the US military intelligence concept of ‘Essential Elements of Information’ (EEI), which identifies important tactical military collection priorities.\textsuperscript{22} The important difference between FARC and Al-Qaeda as well as national intelligence is that ‘intelligence analysis’ is defined very narrowly as supporting the ‘tactical’ needs of small-unit military commanders, and not the strategic-level political and other non-military information needs of senior leaders.\textsuperscript{23}

LTTE has developed a sophisticated, professional intelligence division, with a distinct division of roles and responsibilities over the intelligence enterprise (collection, analysis, operations planning and execution) within that division and the group as a whole.\textsuperscript{24} “Tiger Organization Security Intelligence Service” abbreviated as “TOSIS”, formed in December 1983, was the intelligence service of LTTE.\textsuperscript{25} It was run by Pottu Amman.\textsuperscript{26} The group supported independent intelligence units tasked from the high command with generating both tactical and strategic intelligence to support both operations and long-term planning and assessment.\textsuperscript{27} It retained a formally trained cadre of intelligence operatives, whose only responsibility was long-term intelligence collection and analysis of potential and real targets. LTTE terrorists then use table-top models and maps constructed by the intelligence department for immediate training purposes.\textsuperscript{28} TOSIS had been instrumental in all of the attacks of LTTE, especially the Black Tiger suicide attacks. TOSIS had also played a crucial role in identifying that Gopalaswamy Mahendraraja, with the alias Mahattaya, had been leaking secrets to India’s Research and Analysis Wing.\textsuperscript{29} LTTE’s military intelligence was separate from TOSIS and was headed by Shanmuganathan Ravishankar with the alias Charles. We can observe that LTTE intelligence was undertaking exactly the same operations as an official state intelligence organization, that is collection, analysis, dissemination, operation planning and counter intelligence.

The terrorist and paramilitary intelligence is generated through a variety of means, from basic research through reconnaissance and surveillance of their potential targets, to undertaking dry-runs and response-testing of security measures in anticipation of their attack.\textsuperscript{30} As the information

\textsuperscript{18} Ilardi, Gaetano. ‘Al-Qaeda’s Counterintelligence Doctrine: the Pursuit of Operational Certainty and Control’ IJIC 22:2 (Summer 2009), p.252
\textsuperscript{19} The Guardian, Link: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/17/khalid-sheikh-mohammed-al-qaida
\textsuperscript{20} Gentry, John & Spencer David E. ‘Colombia’s FARC: a Portrait of Insurgent intelligence’ INS 235:4 (August 2010) , p.462
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid
\textsuperscript{25} Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) International Organization and Operations: A Preliminary Analysis, Peter Chalk, Canadian Security Intelligence Service
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid
\textsuperscript{29} Dwight Hamilton, Kostas Rimsa,Terror Threat: International and Home-grown Terrorists and Their Threat to Canada,2007, p.212
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 34-39
required to support their operations is collected, it often undergoes a limited or basic ‘processing’ to assess its utility and value in planning and conducting operations. In this sense, some terrorist ‘intelligence’ is the result of a process of refining openly-available or overtly-obtained information, such as open-source research on a target, while other pieces of ‘intelligence’ are specific leads generated through covert means – such as the use of insiders within a target. Some terrorist groups, notably the PIRA, the LTTE, Hezbollah, FARC, and Al-Qa’ida, have extremely formalised intelligence practices, while others, such as a variety of Palestinian and European left-wing groups of the past, or Jemaah Islamiya in Indonesia, have far less structured or developed ones.

The first stage of a paramilitary intelligence operation is the target identification. At this stage intelligence aids by providing the basic information needed to assess a given person or object as a preferred target, separating it from the tens of thousands of others that are theoretically available. This step reveals also the probabilities of mission success through the identification of vulnerabilities. To assist in target identification Al Qaeda uses a globalized intelligence network. The case of Australian Muslim convert Jack Thomas is a typical example. In 2001, Thomas received broad instructions and US$3,500 from senior Al Qaeda figures, including Khalid bin Attash, to conduct surveillance of military installations in Australia. Another Australian convert, Jack Roche, also received instructions in 2000 to conduct surveillance on Israeli targets in Australia. Roche’s instructions were similarly broad, with Al Qaeda’s military operations chief, Mohammed Atef, directing Roche to collect as much intelligence as he could on any target he considered viable. This intelligence would be communicated to the Al Qaeda leadership to assess if the target was suitable. These examples indicate that Al Qaeda hoped to use assets like Thomas and Roche to keep the organization informed of a range of potential targets throughout the world. Al Qaeda recruits “agents” that have participated in training camps. The whole recruitment procedure, reminds exactly the way government agencies recruit key people able to provide critical information. Al Qaeda uses mainly ideological motives to attract and use agents. Governments may also use a variety of means in order to recruit agents, by providing to them financial or ideological motives.

The second phase of the operational intelligence, after the target identification, is the planning stage. Intelligence during the planning phase, seeks to identify vulnerabilities that would facilitate the preferred method of attack. In the case of 9/11, within months of receiving permission to proceed with the attack, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed took the first steps in assembling the body of intelligence that would make the attacks possible. Relying on open source intelligence, Khalid

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32 Ibid, 36
33 Al Qaeda’s Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 31:1072–1102, 2008. p.1078
34 Ibid
36 Ibid
37 Ibid
38 Ibid
39 Ibid
40 Ibid. p.1079
41 Ibid
42 Ibid, p.1085
43 Ilardi, Gaetano, "The 9/11 Attacks—A Study of Al Qaeda's Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence". 2009. p.181
44 Ibid, p.175
45 Ibid, p.175
compiled data from Western aviation magazines, telephone directories for U.S. cities, airline timetables, and conducted Internet searches on U.S. flight schools. This intelligence was supplemented by flight simulator software and information gleaned from movies depicting hijackings. Some of these early intelligence efforts may have been an attempt to generate ideas and identify possible vulnerabilities. Familiarity with the enemy’s methods and culture was also deemed important at this early stage, as was the need to provide the suicide operatives the basic skills and knowledge to function in an unfamiliar and hostile environment. Khalid, therefore, organized a short course for the operatives in Karachi, which included techniques on how to conduct reconnaissance on flights. Although rudimentary in nature, these instructions proved critical in bringing the attack to fruition by encouraging the operatives to probe for vulnerabilities in the routine behaviour of the flight crew. These instructions included the need to observe cabin doors during take-off and landing, whether the captain exited the cockpit during the flight, and at what stage, and using what methods, flight attendants brought food into the cockpit. The hijackers engaged in reconnaissance flights in order to detect potential problems to the hijacking method of attack. In this regard, intelligence fulfilled its intended function by identifying circumstances that could be expected to impact on the likelihood of operational success. By replicating conditions most likely to be encountered on the day of the operation, the hijackers’ intelligence collection efforts were successful in identifying impediments not anticipated by the Al Qaeda leadership at the time of target selection.

The contention that terrorist organisations use intelligence and undertake surveillance and reconnaissance to support their intelligence missions is based on reports of its use in actual attack-planning, alongside its existence in written training material and doctrine devoted to instructing terrorist personnel in how to conduct intelligence-led activities of research, surveillance and reconnaissance. A few great examples include documents captured by counterterrorist groups worldwide, in particular, the Manchester Document, a descriptive training manual captured in England from an active Al Qaeda cell. Alongside the Manchester Document, International Security and Assistance Forces in Afghanistan conducted a raid in the Sangin Valley on 15 July 2009 thus seizing a manual titled Taliban 2009 Rules and Regulations Booklet. With all of these increasingly complex documents and manuals found throughout the hands of the Jihadist, it can only be determined that the level of sophistication in regards to intelligence gathering and overall capabilities has grown substantially post 9/11.

As it has been shown, Al Qaeda uses intelligence in order to reduce operational uncertainty. Al Qaeda’s intelligence philosophy emphasizes a detailed knowledge of the enemy not only to allow for the exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities, but also to demonstrate that its enemies can be defeated. Publications such as The Declaration, and al-Hakaymah’s, The Myth of Delusion, with

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46 Ibid, p.176  
47 Ibid, p.176  
48 Ibid, p.176  
49 Ibid, p.176  
50 Ibid, p.176  
51 Ibid, p.176  
52 Ibid, p.177  
53 Ibid, p.177  
56 Nicholas Laramee, David H. Gray, Intelligence Capabilities of Al-Qaeda and Taliban Fighters, Global Security Studies, Spring 2013, Volume 4, Issue 2, p.61  
57 Al Qaeda’s Operational Intelligence—A Key Prerequisite to Action, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 31:1072–1102, 2008, p.1073
their detailed descriptions of the enemies’ security capabilities, methods of operation, and vulnerabilities, are intended to provide the jihadi a sense of empowerment. This psychological dimension to intelligence is consistent with, and supplementary to, Al Qaeda’s other attempts to broadcast its own omnipotence, especially in the face of what seem to be overwhelming forces and odds.

Non-State Actor Counterintelligence Threat Assessment

In the next paragraphs, it will be assessed the level of threat that not state actors represent to official governments. Also, it will be shown that non state actors represent a significant challenge, which forces the intelligence agencies to adapt and change the way they traditionally operated.

At first glance, NSAs make unlikely candidates as spies to infiltrate the official state governments.\(^58\) Dissimilar from their state-level counterparts, they are significantly less capable of mustering the enormous financial, technical, and training resources necessary to infiltrate the national security architecture of foreign powers. \(^59\) Traditional state-level adversaries seem to constitute a more plausible CI threat.\(^60\) They have whole ministries with burgeoning bureaucracies and a dedicated cadre of intelligence officials willing to commit millions of dollars to collect intelligence on, whereas the collection capabilities of non-state actors are largely relegated to gathering intelligence for operational purposes, such as downloading information on aerial spraying for biological or chemical agents, or casing potential bomb targets.\(^61\)

But even though, non-state actors face financial constraints, they can enable a whole other range of means in order to infiltrate state organizations. For example Islamist non state actors may employ other inducements—namely a sense of kinship or a common religious identity—to persuade potential recruits which work for state governments.\(^62\) For example US intelligence agencies are in need of overseas personnel, with Arabic language credentials as well as Islamic culture knowledge.\(^63\) These overseas personnel may be vulnerable to be recruited by extreme Islamist groups. These Islamist groups may employ techniques that emphasize the common religion, the common national identity, and perhaps the common disregard towards middle-eastern and African corrupted politicians or dictators supported by US, in order to attract recruits from inside government agencies.\(^64\) One infiltration that proves the reach of Hezbollah’s intelligence network in US intelligence agencies came to light with the arrests and trials in December 2006 of Nada Nadim Prouty and her sister in law US Marine Corps Captain Samar Spinelli, both Lebanese nationals who came to the United States under student visas and who had obtained U.S. citizenship through fraudulent marriages.\(^65\)\(^66\) Prouty became a FBI agent during 1997-2003 and a CIA case officer during 2003-2005 and was assigned to the US embassy in Baghdad, handling sensitive intelligence regarding the insurgency and Shi’ite parties and militias there. Spinelli had assisted Prouty in accessing classified information about Hezbollah, and both were charged with attempting to defraud the U.S government.\(^67\) Another known example came to light during 2004 anti-terrorist operation CREVICE, where a London cell of bombers were exposed and it has been found that these bombers approached a fellow Muslim London tube driver to help them in their attack.\(^68\) These examples

58 Justin R. Harber, Unconventional Spies: The Counterintelligence Threat from Non-State Actors, 2009, p. 222
59 Ibid
60 Ibid
61 Ibid
62 Ibid, p 224
63 Ibid, p.221
64 Ibid, p 224
66 Justin R. Harber, Unconventional Spies: The Counterintelligence Threat from Non-State Actors, 2009, p. 221
67 Ibid
68 Kevin A O'Brien, Assessing Hostile Reconnaissance and Terrorist Intelligence Activities, The Case for a
illustrate the power of common ethic, religious or ideological backgrounds in the terrorist recruitment. And given that United States need a whole new bunch of operatives, from all over Middle East, in order to fight terrorism, new vulnerabilities and possible security gaps emerge.

The “Global War Terror”, also forced US government to cooperate and share information with foreign intelligence agencies and governments, which are not traditional allies of the United States. While these “strange alliances” may fill in gaps in human intelligence collection, some of them also jeopardize the integrity of U.S. operations through porous foreign intelligence services. It is possible parochial interests within these intelligence services may collude with groups hostile to the U.S. In 2008, CIA officials confronted Pakistani officials with evidence of ties between Inter Services Intelligence (SIS) and Jalaluddin Haqqani but the ISI denied the allegations. CIA and military officers commented that ISI takes U.S. intelligence and pass it along to U.S. enemies in the Haqqani network. But U.S. officials have continued the funding because the ISI's assistance is considered crucial: Almost every major terrorist plot this decade has originated in Pakistan's tribal belt, where ISI informant networks are a primary source of intelligence. These “new openings” of US intelligence agencies to new partners, may be beneficial for US because gaps in human intelligence are filled. On the other hand, critical intelligence may be exposed to violent new state actors. Another example is that senior military leaders in Colombia have come under suspicion for supplying intelligence to the narco-trafficking Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), as well as to the Norte del Valle drug cartel. The leaked intelligence included “the secret positioning of U.S. naval vessels and aircraft in the Caribbean early, part of a part of a carefully coordinated web designed to stop cocaine from reaching the United States. As a result, the cooperation of the United States with foreign intelligent agencies, and the corresponding intelligence exchange, may result in critical US intelligence leaking to violent sub state actors.

Another very important problem that makes the combating of terrorism very difficult it’s the expansion of Internet. Now, for example jihadist ideas can be distributed via jihadist forums, and cells can be created all around the world, using the trade name Al-Qaeda. As, a result state authorities, do not have the problem of fighting the organization Al-Qaeda, but the “idea” of Al-Qaeda. Today, It is really easy to find, details over internet how to create bombs, suicide vests etc. The relatively difficulty on monitoring the internet, and the high technical skills of a lot of Al-Qaeda members, make the job of counter-terrorists increasingly difficult. The story of Younis Tsouli, or “Terrorist 007” as he styled himself, reveals how virtual terrorist networks can emerge out of sight of the authorities and not only radicalise the young online but also help them carry out terrorist attacks. As Iraq descended into violence, al-Qaeda’s leaders there contacted Tsouli. They asked him to build websites and run web forums for them and soon he became the main distributor of video material from al-Qaeda in Iraq. He also became first a moderator and then the administrator of one of the most important extremist websites which facilitated contacts between...
thousands of individuals. A new generation of highly skilled, educated people attracted by an ideology, are indeed a challenging threat for counter-terrorist units.

**Conclusion**

From the analysis above, we observe that the level of sophistication on the conduct of intelligence of a lot of terrorists groups can be compared to that of the states. Terrorist groups use intelligence trade craft used by states, conduct open source intelligence and clandestine operations as well. Also, lot of paramilitary structures have specifics organs that are responsible for the intelligence operations. The use of Internet, the interconnected world, and the advances of commercial tools can help terrorists be very successful, even though they do not have the budget of the state intelligent agencies. The “World on Terror” changed drastically the way states, conduct intelligence, because terrorist threat, is different from adverse state terrorist threat.

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81 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7191248.stm