# 1 Counter-terrorism as counterinsurgency in the UK 'war on terror'

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## Introduction

1 In this Act 'terrorism' means the use or threat of action where –
   a the action falls within subsection (2),
   b the use or threat is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and
   c the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.
2 Action falls within this subsection if it –
   a involves serious violence against a person,
   b involves serious damage to property,
   c endangers a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action,
   d creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or
   e is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.

(HM Government 2000)

This definition of terrorism is taken from the UK Terrorism Act 2000 and is the definition currently in force, being referred to explicitly in both the Terrorism Act 2006 (where it was slightly augmented) and the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008. We use this definition to analyse counter-terrorism in the UK and its relationship to counterinsurgency. We focus on the extent to which UK government action in this area might be said to meet the definition.

While the UK government has provided troops and logistical support for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq it has also focused significant effort on the UK itself to combat what it says is a significant internal 'terrorist threat'. Rather than treat the threat as a matter of policing, successive governments have opted to treat it as a matter that requires exceptional powers which integrate the theory and practice of counterinsurgency. This is

noteworthy because counterinsurgency embodies a series of techniques for targeting 'insurgents' and the population within which they move as the enemy, undermining liberal democratic rhetoric about the existence of democratic politics. We argue that, in fact, the adoption of counterinsurgency doctrine and practice in counter-terrorism by the British state results in a series of measures and practices that bear more than a passing resemblance to 'terrorism' as officially defined by the UK government.

Since 9/11 and especially since the attacks in London in 2005 (7/7), the British government has introduced a series of counter-terrorism programmes and initiatives through its CONTEST strategy, which aims to '[r]educe the risk of international terrorism to the UK and its interests' (HM Government 2009: 12). CONTEST has been divided into four workstreams, or the 4 Ps as they are commonly known – *Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare*.[1]

We focus here on the domestic components of Pursue and Prevent – the latter of which was under review by the coalition government at the time of writing – as the main coercive and communicative elements of the policy. The Pursue workstream aims to confront the threat posed by terrorism through counter-terrorism initiatives including intelligence and investigation (HM Government 2009: 63), while Prevent aims to stop terrorism from taking place by 'winning the hearts and minds' of the Muslim community (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007b: 1).

Both these strands have faced intense criticism for practices that repress and discriminate against Muslims, and label them as 'suspect' (Pantazis and Pemberton 2008; Fekete 2001; Liberty 2004; Kundnani 2009). Notable examples include exceptional legislative measures being created specifically to target Islamic terrorism, extended pre-charge detention periods, intrusive surveillance programmes, newer and broader terrorism offences, securitised community projects and policies that legitimate the use of deadly force such as 'Operation Kratos' that, in certain circumstances, authorises the use of a 'head shot' – otherwise known as a policy of 'shoot-to-kill' (Metropolitan Police Authority 2005a, 2005b).

These measures, however, rather than successfully targeting terrorists have largely affected Muslims indiscriminately, meaning many innocent Muslims have been disproportionately affected. This is not an unpleasant by-product of mistakes, ignorance or arrogance, we argue: the laws and programmes that underpin these strategies have been created intentionally and purposefully to coerce and instil fear within the Muslim community and those who stand with it. This is because key components of the Pursue and Prevent strands are based on the theory and practice of counterinsurgency, which involve both 'coercion' (in the sense of using physical or 'kinetic' power, i.e. violence), and 'propaganda' and

'communication' (in the sense of using psychological warfare against a perceived enemy).

We use an investigative research approach to uncover the intellectual and practical antecedents of the policy and examine the way in which it has been put into practice. The chapter uncovers the hitherto little-known development of counterinsurgency doctrine in the UK, using documents released to the authors under the Freedom of Information Act; it examines how the doctrine utilises coercion and 'propaganda' and looks at the involvement of military officers in formulating key parts of the CONTEST strategy and their specific expertise in counterinsurgency and information operations (I-Ops). The practical implementation of the strategy is then examined by analysing the governmental bodies involved, namely the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office and the Home Office-based Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) and its key offshoot, the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU). We also look at one of the key civil society bodies set up and funded by the OSCT – the 'anti-extremist' Quilliam Foundation. But, before turning to analyse the role of those bodies, we commence our analysis by looking at the three fundamental counterinsurgency measures that have become deeply entrenched within Pursue and Prevent – exceptional legislation, pre-emptive incapacitation measures and intelligence and surveillance structures.

## Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency is a military doctrine developed in Western states, and mainly intended to deal with small wars and insurgency or guerrilla campaigns abroad. According to historical accounts of the development of British counterinsurgency, the important elements of the doctrine have – since the mid-1950s – consistently been the integration of civil and military power, the use of intelligence and the increasing role of communicative activities.

The main doctrinal publications have emphasised 'civil–military cooperation'. Most notably, *Keeping the Peace* (British Army 1963) drew on the experience of the British role in Malaya, and contained 'some new wisdom: an awareness of the increasing role of the mass media and public opinion' (Mockaitis 1995, 135). These two themes have been present ever since. The next major doctrinal publication was the *Land Operations* series, first issued in three parts in 1969 and 1970, or just after British troops were deployed in Northern Ireland. It was revised in 1995, in July 2001 (before 9/11) and in 2009 (Ministry of Defence 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1995, 2001, 2009). All versions emphasised the two central themes of civil–military cooperation and the importance of communications, and also the 'vital role of intelligence' (Mockaitis 1995, 136). In addition, exceptional and emergency legislation and pre-emptive controls are considered essential (Hocking 1988).

This integrated conception of counterinsurgency is endorsed by today's most influential counterinsurgency thinkers such as David Kilcullen, the Australian counterinsurgency writer who has served as an official adviser to the US State Department, and David Petraeus, the architect of the 'Surge' in Iraq in 2007. This has brought the advocates of a 'hearts and minds' approach, specifically Kilcullen in the position of 'Senior Counter-insurgency Adviser, Multi-National Force – Iraq', to the centre of policy-making (Kilcullen 2007b; Miller and Mills 2010: 207). Kilcullen advocates a military strategy that draws on insights from the social sciences and is attentive to particular cultures and societies. 'War is a form of armed politics', he has written 'and politics is about influencing and controlling people and perceptions' (Kilcullen 2004a). Kilcullen has also been influential in the UK, being cited by both Gordon Brown (as Prime Minister) and David Miliband (as Foreign Secretary) (D'Ancona 2007). For example, in 2009, Miliband wrote in his Foreign Office blog, 'I think that some of the best thinking about terrorism has been done by David Kilcullen' (Miliband 2009).

In Kilcullen's view, the United States and its allies are involved in a global war which demands that they use an updated model of counterinsurgency theory rather than the conventional counter-terrorism paradigm. In an article in 2004, Kilcullen writes that 'the present conflict is actually a campaign to counter a globalised Islamist insurgency. Therefore, counter-insurgency theory is more relevant to this War than is traditional counter-terrorism'. A key aspect of this approach is 'improved cultural capability' (2004b: 1).

In other words, Kilcullen, seeks a more advanced understanding of particular cultures and societies to ensure that America and its allies can 'influence and control' them more efficiently. In another article (2006: 122) he writes: 'in modern counterinsurgency, where there is no single insurgent network to be penetrated but rather a cultural and demographic jungle of population groups to be navigated'. That being the case, 'the counterinsurgent must control the overall environment rather than defeat a specific enemy'. The overall environment, however, does not stop at the borders of the country in which the insurgency operates or indeed where the insurgency stops. Thus Kilcullen (2007a: 647) argues that 'Europe is both a source and a target of terrorist activity, and faces threats including Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism, extremist political parties, insurgent sympathizer networks, subversive movements, and the overlap between crime and terrorism'. The global war on terror is, therefore, just that – a global war that focuses on the territory of the West as well as that of the occupied or developing world. The 'primary threat', writes Kilcullen, is 'terrorist-linked subversion, which seeks to manipulate and exploit the sociological and ethnographic features of immigrant communities'. Counter-terrorism needs, therefore, to combine counterinsurgency and 'countersubversion' (Kilcullen 2007a: 647).

As Mockaitis notes, the tendency over the forty years from the mid-1950s has been 'the increasing emphasis on psychological operations, media briefing and propaganda in the official literature' (1995: 146). But it is more than that. The 2009 revision of British counterinsurgency doctrine makes this clear by opening its section on 'Information Operations' with a quote from David Kilcullen (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-2): 'Traditionally in the course of conventional operations we use information operations to explain what we are doing, but in COIN we should design operations to enact our influence campaign,' This distinction between explaining and enacting is absolutely critical to understanding the counterinsurgency approach to information. Information is seen as a weapon of war as opposed to a means of supporting weapons of war (Miller 2003). It is worth emphasising that this erodes the distinction between 'physical' or 'kinetic' operations (coercion and violence) and information operations (PSYOPS or strategic communication). It suggests that information operations are viewed as part of 'kinetic' operations. This impression is reinforced by the discussion of what is included in I-Ops: 'Information operations will on occasions require an aggressive and manipulative approach to delivering messages (usually through the PSYOPS tool). This is essential in order to attack, undermine and defeat the will, understanding and capability of insurgents' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-5).

I-Ops are also said to include 'PSYOPS, electronic warfare, presence posture profile, computer network operations, deception, physical destruction, information security, Key Leader Engagement (KLE) and the handling of visitors' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-3). KLE is a strategy which suggests cultivating and/or managing the 'leaders' in local communities. A US manual (also distributed by the UK government's Stabilisation Unit) notes that KLE is a long-term means of 'building relationships to the point of effective engagement and influence' that 'usually takes time'. 'KLE is not', it notes, 'about engaging key leaders when a crisis arises', but over time with 'enough strength and depth', so that 'they can then support our interests during times of crisis' (Joint Forces Command Joint Warfighting Center 2010: iii–8).

The Ministry of Defence *Manual* (2009: 5-11) notes that there is a 'requirement for intelligence staffs to support KLE'. 'At battlegroup level', it says, 'the commander should focus on KLE and the use of tactical PSYOPS to influence the local population and affect the will and understanding of the insurgent' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-3). This is accomplished by a variety of means including 'deception'. 'The primary aim of deception', the *Manual* notes, 'is to mislead the adversary, guard our real intentions and thus persuade him to adopt a disadvantageous course of action. Deception has great utility in tactical counterinsurgency operations and requires effective OPSEC in order to succeed' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-5).

The integration of all material on 'influence activities' (Ministry of Defence 2009: iii) into a single chapter in 2009 is one key indication of the

move towards a model of strategic communication in counterinsurgency thinking. The move is not without its dangers for the military as it might lead critics to imagine that media, information and psychological operations are simply differing elements of an overall 'propaganda machine'. This possibility is specifically raised in the *Manual* especially in relation to the 'aggressive and manipulative' approach noted above.

> When this is the information operations focus, great care must be taken to maintain the integrity and credibility of the media operations organisation. At other times, the activities conducted by formation information operations cells will require more delicate approaches to influencing target audiences in different ways, such as through neutral or uncommitted groups (third parties)…. To avoid giving the impression that the media are being manipulated in any way, which would undermine media operations activity, a distinction must be maintained between the two. Essentially, they must remain separate but closely related activities. For example the information operations officer cannot be double-hatted as the media operations officer/spokesman. However, they both serve the commander in his attempt to dominate the information and cognitive domain by being proactive and staying 'on message'. The headquarters layout needs to reflect this rather complicated arrangement and encourage close cooperation.
>
> (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-5)

Sceptical observers may conclude that the 'impression' of media manipulation is unlikely to be expunged by taking 'great care' to suggest that differing elements of a unified influence operations strategy are actually separate.

Though the phrase 'strategic communication' is not used in the 2009 *Manual*, it is apparent that strategic communication has evidently been influential. The Ministry of Defence 'lead' on strategic communication is Steve Tatham, an experienced military media handler. He was a public spokesman for the British Military in Sierra Leone (2000), Afghanistan (2001–2) and Iraq (2003) (Powerbase 2011a). From 2007 to 2009 he was the Director of 'Communication Research' at the UK Defence Academy's Advanced Research and Assessment Group (ARAG).

Tatham argues that the term 'strategic communication' is widely misunderstood and misconstrued because it is understood as a replacement term for 'spin', media and information operations, or propaganda. Tatham describes these as 'emotive and often inaccurate terms'. This is, he writes, 'unhelpful and mires understanding' (Tatham 2008: 5). Strategic communication is, he argues, 'an extremely powerful tool that may hold the key to the dilemma of 21st century conflict, the power of information and opinion and its ability to enable behavioural change' (Tatham 2008: 20).

He suggests that any definition of the concept must 'recognise that the success of non-kinetic effect is amplified by threats of kinetic activity' (Tatham 2008, 15). In other words, strategic communication is integrated with an overall kinetic strategy and is itself part of a coercive strategy. As Tatham himself puts it: 'Influence does not mean the exclusion of hard power', nor is it only directed at 'external' audiences or at an 'enemy' (Tatham 2008: 15), but it is also directed at 'internal' audiences, meaning sections, or all, of the general public (Tatham, 2008: 4).

Lastly, we should note that just as Kilcullen has supported counter-subversion in combating terrorism, so too has Tatham. His argument undermines his own suggestion that strategic communication is new and perhaps puts it closer to the classic definitions of propaganda than he would like. He notes that:

> for all the sophistication of the current information environment, paradoxically these are not new skills, merely ones that we must relearn. The Political Warfare Executive (PWE) of World War 2 employed academics, journalists, scientists, housewives, misfits and reprobates – all possessing a common thread of innovation and an ability to think – to harness their eclectic skills and personalities to fight the Allies' information battle against Nazi Germany. Was it because it was a war of national survival that PWE was accepted, even congratulated, whilst the 2007 announcement by the British government of the establishment of the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) was met with such public derision and scorn?
>
> (Tatham 2008: 20)

The fact of a war of national survival certainly has something to do with it, but Tatham appears to forget that the UK is not 'at war' in any similar way with 'radical Islam'. Tatham seems to be urging a campaign of political warfare à la PWE on Britain's Muslims and other dissenters and appears to suggest that RICU is part of such an endeavour.

To summarise, the ideas set out in counterinsurgency theory emphasise four key elements:

1 the integrated nature of strategy and co-ordination between civil and military powers;
2 the key role of intelligence and surveillance;
3 exceptional legislation, allowing for pre-emptive controls;
4 the crucial importance of strategic communication.

Our characterisation draws on previous research in this area (Hocking 1988, 1993), but it is important to note several differences. The first is the closer integration of counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism in theory

and practice since 2001, the second is the closer strategic integration of the various elements. The integration is such that 'the correct balance of kinetic and non-kinetic effect' is used 'to influence the will and ultimately positively affect the behaviour of a target group' (Tatham 2008: 15). Finally, we should note that Hocking in 1988 listed 'media management' as a key element. This was characterised by the integration of the news media into a national security model and 'voluntary' self-restraint by the news media. Since then, as we saw above, the development of the doctrine of strategic communication has moved some considerable way in treating communication and media as instruments of war fighting.

Taken together, these four elements form a highly coercive strategy intended to manage the consciousness and behaviour of the British public. It is a declaration of war on the public mind and on the will to dissent or resist. This does not sit well with liberal notions that the government is accountable to the people. Nor does it seem to easily fit with official pronouncements such as the following:

> This is not about a clash of civilisations or a struggle between Islam and 'the West'. It is about standing up to a small fringe of terrorists and their extremist supporters. Indeed, Government is committed to working in partnership with the vast majority of Muslims who reject violence and who share core British values in doing this.
>
> (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007b)

So it is to explicating the parallels between counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism in the UK that we now turn.

## Pursue: hard power

The counterinsurgency theorists Robert Thompson (1966: 52–5) and Frank Kitson (1971: 69) wrote after the end of British and French counterinsurgency campaigns in Malaya, Cyprus and Algeria that the state's response to terrorism and insurgencies must be 'in accordance with the law' but emergency legislation should be carefully drafted to ensure simplicity. It should also, they argued, favour 'preventive detention' of suspected insurgents or terrorists. During the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', this was the exact approach taken by the UK under the auspices of emergency legislation that was enacted, notably through the use of internment.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 (PTA) lasted for twenty-six years and was replaced (prior to the attacks of 9/11) with the Terrorism Act 2000. The 'temporary' status of the Prevention of Terrorism Act meant that it was considered exceptional legislation and was thus subjected to regular parliamentary scrutiny and debate. However, as Walker (2009: 23) notes, although the 2000 Act is very similar to the PTA, it differs in the sense of its permanent status, which means that it is not subjected to the

same oversight or scrutiny as its predecessor. 'There is [no] … serious chance', writes Walker, 'that any part of the legislation will be struck down or seriously analysed in an hour and a half of [a parliamentary] debate' (2009, 25).

Thompson's and Kitson's prescriptions also fed into the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001, which was passed in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This law was fundamentally based on the use of pre-emptive action to incapacitate foreign nationals suspected of being terrorists by the state. It was, essentially, the first manifestation of a counterinsurgency approach in the post-9/11 world because it was based on using 'exceptional legislation' to legitimise the use of 'pre-emptive' measures before any 'terrorist' act had occurred.

In 2004, the House of Lords ruled that internment of foreign nationals contravened human rights, was discriminatory and thus had to be repealed (BBC News 2004). However, it was immediately replaced with the equally illiberal Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005.

The PTA 2005 replaced internment with indefinite house arrest, in what became known as 'control orders'. Under a control order, the Home Secretary makes an executive order (i.e. not subject to judicial review) to place an unlimited range of restrictions on any 'suspected' terrorist where the 'evidence' is held but considered too sensitive and thus kept secret (Liberty 2009). Secrecy is of the essence because the evidence may have been acquired by foreign intelligence services that employ torture, with the connivance of MI5 (Hewitt 2008: 38). 'Controlees' are denied the right to see the evidence against them and are therefore unable to mount a defence in court. These powers use 'exceptional legislation' to legitimise the use of 'pre-emptive' measures – principles that are highly consistent with counterinsurgency approaches.

It was in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings that the biggest change to the UK's counter-terrorism apparatus emerged, notably when Tony Blair declared that in the war against terrorism, 'the rules of the game are changing' (Brown and Woolfe 2005). The 'new rules' meant the adoption of further policies drawing on counterinsurgency theory and practice.

A campaign to increase the pre-charge detention to ninety days was launched, allegedly to equip the police to investigate complex, often internationally connected, terror cases. It also permitted the police to investigate any person who was considered by them to be involved in terrorism. The government, however, failed to secure the ninety-day extension and settled, instead, for twenty-eight days. The current pre-charge detention limit has, at the time of writing, reverted to fourteen days after the coalition government refused to renew the clause that authorised twenty-eight days.

Other examples of the adoption of counterinsurgency practice came through the 2006 Terrorism Act, notably through the 'new' offences of 'encouragement of terrorism' and 'dissemination of terrorist publications',

which essentially criminalise certain types of free speech, but without any test for actual incitement. This is because the law outlaws both direct and indirect encouragement. For example, if a person fails to realise that their words or dissemination may 'indirectly' encourage another person to commit terrorism through their 'recklessness', they could be guilty of an offence (Sabir 2010a, 2010b).

This power is exceptionally, but purposefully, broad because it has been founded on the counterinsurgency principle of taking pre-emptive and premeditated action against potential insurgents and their alleged supporters. Schlesinger (1978: 115) notes that a key concept within counterinsurgency theory is based on premeditating, anticipating and taking pre-emptive action against those who may perpetrate violence before it is undertaken.

One of the consequences of counterinsurgency-infused counter-terrorism is the feeling of siege and of suspicion within the 'suspect' community (Sabir 2010a, 2010b; House of Commons 2007: 15; Muslim Council of Britain 2005; Kundnani 2006).

These are the predictable consequence of official policy, whether or not they are deliberate. But rather than take measures to mitigate such problems by curtailing such approaches, the official policy has been to adopt the Prevent programme – a 'hearts and minds' campaign directed at the Muslim community – which was launched in 2006. However, as the next section now discusses, the fundamental premise of this programme is also seated deep in counterinsurgency assumptions and practice.

## Prevent: hearts and minds

The Prevent programme is the second strand of CONTEST and aims to win the 'hearts and minds' of British Muslims who 'reject violence' and 'share core British values' by equipping them with the ability to 'stand up to terrorists and their extremist supporters' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007a: 4). The overarching objectives of Prevent are to stop 'radicalisation', reduce support for terrorism and discourage people from becoming terrorists (HM Government 2009: 14). In other words, the counterinsurgency principles of pre-emption, prevention and communication are at the core of this strategy. In a bid to ensure that prevention work is successful, 'intelligence gathering', another of the key counterinsurgency components, forms an essential part of Prevent.

The Prevent strategy can be traced back to 2003, the year when CONTEST was launched. At this time, Prevent was the least developed component of CONTEST, but after the 7/7 attacks, in a bid to prevent similar attacks, the Prevent strand aimed to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Muslim community (Department for Communities and Local Government 2007a: 4). The Prevent policy essentially became a focal point of UK counter-terrorism (HM Government 2009: 82–3).

The bulk of the practical responsibility for this programme fell to the Home Office's OSCT, its strategic communications wing RICU and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG).

The CLG was responsible for delivering the Prevent strategy on a local level through community-based projects and local partnerships. The OSCT was created specially in 2007 as an overarching body that was responsible for co-ordinating the entire cross-governmental approach to CONTEST (HM Government 2009: 9) whilst its key off-shoot, RICU, became responsible for offering communication advice to governmental and local agencies involved in counter-terrorism work (House of Commons 2010: Ev. 203). It also works towards 'exposing the weaknesses of violent extremist ideologies and brands' (House of Commons 2010: Ev. 203).

Muslim community and human rights organisations have claimed that Prevent targets Muslims in general and reinforces their image as a fifth column or an enemy within (House of Commons 2010: Ev. 91). But such criticisms only add up if they are viewed through the lens of counterinsurgency which intends to take 'collective preventive action' against the community that allegedly 'hosts' the 'insurgent', or 'terrorist', or in this case, the Muslim community and those who stand with it.

This approach was best summarised by the head of the OSCT, Charles Farr, when he said that because 'al-Qaeda tends to focus its recruitment operations on people in Muslim communities … [therefore] it would be best to look at … Muslim communities' (House of Commons 2010: Ev. 72). This claim explains why the government in 2006–7 compelled all local authorities with 2,000 or more Muslims to accept funding under Prevent (Kundnani 2009: 12). This suggests that Muslims as a whole have been targeted under Prevent (i.e. they are viewed as the problem). Targeting Muslims has also been undertaken via intelligence gathering, another core component of Prevent and counterinsurgency.

In 2009, a series of allegations were made by the *Guardian* and the Institute of Race Relations, arguing that Prevent was collating information on the (non-violent) political opinions of Muslims within the UK, and other personal and private information, such as health, sexual behaviours and theological outlooks (Kundnani 2009; Dodd 2009a, 2009b; Sabir 2009).

Agencies and ministers involved have constantly denied that Prevent is, or has ever been, about spying or intelligence gathering (Hanson and Malik 2010; Johnson *et al.* 2010), but the CONTEST strategy categorically states that one of the overarching objectives of Prevent is to develop 'intelligence, analysis and information' (HM Government 2009: 84). Indeed, CONTEST states that this objective 'supports' the five primary objectives of Prevent (HM Government 2009: 84).

A leaked 'restricted' police document seems to confirm such an approach. The document categorically states that the police, through the Prevent programme, are collating intelligence and information on 'all

members of the [Muslim] community', 'priority groups' and those who are have not perpetrated violence but are 'moving toward extremism' (Association of Chief Police Officers (TAM) 2008: 11).

The collation of low-grade information that may not be particularly accurate or useful is a counterinsurgency technique that Kitson (1971: 131) recommends. He writes that 'the system for developing background information only works if there is a lot of [information] to develop. It is not important that [the information] should be immensely reliable because all that is needed is something on which to build' (Kitson 1971: 131).

In the context of Prevent, this information is collated through a range of different avenues such as neighbourhood policing (HM Government 2009: 85), 'community intelligence' (Powerbase 2011f) or, as is the case in the West Midlands for example, through Security and Partnership Officers (SPOs). SPOs are a series of specially selected uniformed counter-terrorism police officers who liaise with the Muslim community and develop information (i.e. local intelligence) regarding it in 'key community locations' such as 'mosques' and 'community centres' (West Midlands Police Authority 2010: 1). This, along with community intelligence and neighbourhood policing information, is then fed into a collaborative MI5 and police programme entitled 'Rich Picture' (West Midlands Police Authority 2010: 1) which processes it to 'provide a wider understanding of … terrorist activity and radicalisation in this country' (HM Government 2009: 65; Powerbase 2011e). Developing a 'Rich Picture' understanding of the 'enemy' and its 'supporting community' is one of the fundamental connections that Prevent has with counterinsurgency theory. Such a 'picture' is essentially what Kitson calls 'background information', that is, information which is irrelevant in isolation, but useful when accompanied with supporting information.

Further connections with counterinsurgency can be seen in the institutions set up to take CONTEST forward, in the personnel involved and in the activities they undertake. We examine these next.

## Counterinsurgents in government

The main new organisations set up to tackle the alleged terrorist threat are the OSCT and, within that, RICU. The Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) and Strategic Horizons Unit (SHU) are also heavily involved in the domestic counter-terrorism field. Former military officers or individuals linked to the military establishment have played a significant role in devising domestic counter-terror strategies. Ideas derived from counterinsurgency have, in this way, been applied to domestic counter-terror policy. Two of the key figures who have been involved in this have been Commander Steve Tatham, whose ideas we have already discussed, and Dr Jamie Macintosh.

Tatham, a military officer, was, in 2009, seconded to the SHU – a unit created in September 2008 and housed in the Cabinet Office (Powerbase 2011a; Maude 2009). This fact reinforces our case on the influence of counterinsurgency theorists in the domestic counter-terrorism arena. The fact that the SHU is part of the Joint Intelligence Organisation (which fits with the counterinsurgency priority of close intelligence co-operation) also displays a deeper level of military involvement.

Tatham was previously situated at the Defence Academy, where his boss was Dr Jamie Macintosh. Prior to becoming Ministry of Defence research scientist, Macintosh 'served in the British Army for ten years. His final operational tour was in Bosnia during most of 1993' (Powerbase 2011d). Macintosh joined the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in 1993, moving on to the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) which replaced it in 2001. During his time there, he made 'strategic and operational contributions in the emerging fields of Information Superiority and Information Operations (IS-IO)' (Defence Academy 2009).

Macintosh collaborated with the head of the Government Information and Communication Service, Mike Granatt, in co-authoring the White Paper 'and conceptual research design' 'at the direction of the Prime Minister' that led to the creation of the CCS in 2001. The CCS was the body involved in issuing information about the alleged threat to Heathrow Airport and on the 'ricin plot', which turned out not to involve any ricin (Miller 2004). Indeed, according to Archer and Bawdon (2010), the jurors in the ricin trial, there was never any so-called ricin 'plot'. In this case, as in others, official information can seem as if it embodies the tactics described in UK counterinsurgency doctrine as 'manipulation' and 'deception' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-5, 6-E-1).

Macintosh spent over a year as the personal adviser on 'Transformation and National Security' to Home Secretary John Reid. A biographical note claims that 'he catalysed the use of a "war room" facility to begin building the capacity needed to transform the Home Office'. His advice, the Ministry of Defence claims, 'was instrumental' in the creation of the OSCT and its strategic communications division, RICU (Defence Academy 2009), more evidence of military involvement in domestic counter-terrorism.

## Research, Information and Communications Unit

RICU is a 'strategic communications unit' within the OSCT. Based in the Home Office, it is also funded by and answerable to the Foreign Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government. Latterly the Ministry of Defence has also become involved in funding RICU. In 2009/10, RICU's budget was £5.7 million (Powerbase 2011c). On its launch, the *Sunday Times* reported that 'officials deny this is in any way a propaganda department, although one conceded: "It does sound horribly cold war" ' (Correra 2007).

RICU's history suggests that it does more than propaganda in the sense that strategic communications must be strongly integrated with the wider elements of CONTEST, in particular integration with repressive measures by the state and a close connection with intelligence – both cardinal principles of counterinsurgency. Indeed, it is clear that RICU is itself an intelligence-connected body, notably because of its connections with the OSCT which is currently led by Charles Farr, a former career MI6 officer. The *Guardian* recently reported that the OSCT was 'widely regarded in Whitehall as being an intelligence agency' (Dodd 2009a).

Furthermore, the role of Prevent in gathering intelligence on Muslim communities is complemented by RICU's focus on commissioning research on Muslim communities. Between 2007 and 2010, for example, RICU concentrated on research projects relating to how 'young British Muslims felt about their identity and sense of belonging', 'how young British Muslims use the internet', 'media consumption among British Muslims', 'how Government messages are perceived by Muslim communities', 'Islamic Blogs', 'The Language of Terrorism', 'why some voices are more credible than others to Muslim communities, understandings of "Britishness" and terrorism and where these feelings come from within the British population' (Home Office 2009).

The basic details of some of the research conducted by RICU has had to be dragged out of the Home Office through a series of repeated freedom of information requests, though significant details, including copies of research, even the titles of some projects, remain secret. Nevertheless, we can take one project to examine the type of material it has been responsible for producing.

The report was the product of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant given to Dr David Stevens of the University of Nottingham to study 'radical blogs' in a secondment to RICU (see Powerbase 2011b). This is, of course, what RICU was interested in. However, when the research came to be published after a two-year delay, the title referred only to 'Islamic' blogs. The lack of differentiation between 'radical' and 'Islamic' is carried all the way through the report. 'The purpose of this project', writes Stevens, 'is to study the link patterns and discussions of Islamic bloggers with particular reference to the UK' (Powerbase 2011b).

The report published a list of the top twenty 'Islamic' blogs with the inference that these were in some sense 'radical'. Among those on the list were a number of blogs which can be described as 'radical', as 'Islamic' or even as 'blogs' only tenuously or by distortion. The *Guardian* noted a number of examples:

> the man identified in the report as Britain's third most influential 'pro-Islamic' blogger is actually an atheist based in the United States. As'ad Abukhalil, a Lebanese-American professor of political science at California State University who blogs as 'The Angry Arab' is furious

> about it. 'How ignorant are the researchers of the Home Office?' he writes. 'How many times does one have to espouse atheist, anarchist, and secular principles before they realise that their categorisation is screwed up?'
>
> …Top spot in the league table of Britain's most influential 'pro-Islamic' bloggers goes to Ali Eteraz, a Cif ['Comment is free', *Guardian*] contributor. Back in 2007, he wrote a series of articles for Cif, from a liberal perspective, about reforming Islam.
>
> (Whitaker 2010)

At least five of the top ten 'Islamic' blogs are questionable (Powerbase 2011b). To describe these blogs and websites as in some way related to 'radicalisation' suggests a sleight of hand that smears opponents of UK government foreign policy as supporters of terrorism. If the evidence of this report – published by the Home Office – is anything to go by, the notion that the government carefully targets the terrorist threat as opposed to targeting critics or indeed all Muslims or even perceived Muslims is at least open to question.

For this brief overview of its activities, it is clear that RICU is more than a simple 'propaganda' body in that it is closely integrated with the overall strategy (including the coercive elements), is intelligence-linked, and engages in a form of propaganda which is simply part of a wider coercive strategy directed at managing behaviour and activity as opposed to being solely focused on 'winning hearts and minds'.

## Quilliam Foundation

Another key element of Prevent that is closely modelled on counterinsurgency and strategic communication theory is the Quilliam Foundation, the London-based think-tank that claims to challenge Islamic extremism in the UK. We noted that earlier counterinsurgency doctrine emphasises 'Key Leader Engagement' (KLE) in the wider management of populations. Quilliam is arguably an attempt by government to use an ostensibly unofficial think-tank to engage with the Muslim community in a bid to win influence. KLE is intended to operate alongside PSYOPS 'to influence the local population and affect the will and understanding of the insurgent' (Ministry of Defence 2009: 6-3). Quilliam functions as a classic 'front group' for government, appearing to be an independent Muslim-led initiative. It was set up by self-styled ex-extremists Maajid Nawaaz and Ed Husain, both former members of the political Islamic group, Hizb ut-Tahrir. It was launched on 22 April 2008, and between 2008 and 2011 received almost £2 million from the government in funding (Fanshaw 2010; Hughes 2010). The Quilliam Foundation does not disclose the extent of its government funding on its website, but a comparison of our data from freedom of information requests with funding disclosures that

have been made public through its progress report (Quilliam Foundation 2010b: 21) shows that government funding accounted for over 92 per cent of its entire income for 2009/10. This suggests that it is little more than a semi-covert element of government strategy.

The organisation says it aims to 'counter the Islamist ideology behind terrorism, whilst simultaneously providing evidence-based recommendations to governments for related policy measures' (Quilliam Foundation 2010a) and provides 'a counter narrative to the al-Qaeda mindset' (Fanshaw 2010). Quilliam, in other words, is a key part of the strategic communication component of Prevent. Since its establishment, the think-tank has been embroiled in several controversies for encouraging domestic spying and preparing secret blacklists of citizens and groups that it alleges share the 'ideology of terrorists' (Dodd 2009b, 2010).

What seems to be clear from the work carried out by RICU and the Quilliam Foundation is that they are both integral elements of a highly coercive counter-terrorism strategy. Viewed in isolation, their activities may appear to be simply about the management of information and communicative strategy. Viewed from the point of view of the counterinsurgency theorists, they are essential to the efficacy of coercion and the generation of fear. They are thus core to coercive counter-terrorism, having the aim of curtailing dissent, sometimes using direct force and sometimes maintain the legal scope of civil liberties – in other words, indirect force. As evidence for this we would point to the words of the British government leader on strategic communication: Commander Tatham insists that any definition of the concept must 'recognise that the success of non-kinetic effect is amplified by threats of kinetic activity' (Tatham 2008: 15).

## Conclusions

British counter-terrorist policy draws heavily on counterinsurgency doctrine. This has been developed mostly in circumstances where 'normal' liberal democratic rules did not apply and thus higher levels of coercion, violence and discrimination were possible. In fact, we can see that in order for such policies and strategies to be implemented in the UK, many of these defining liberal democratic rules have had to be suspended, especially under the 'Pursue' strand of CONTEST. The ideas and practices promoted by counterinsurgency theorists are profoundly inimical to liberal democratic principles such as the free circulation of information and the importance of the democratic role of information and media in creating the possibility of a democratic polis. The denizens of strategic communication are profoundly opposed to such notions, seeing information and communication as part of the armoury of coercion leading to 'behaviour change'. PSYOPS, information operations and especially strategic communication are means to subvert the possibility of any kind of free and open debate and indeed are conceived directly as coercive.

This is why information collection, for example, plays a key role in the Prevent strategy. This is also why, for example, possession and distribution of so-called 'terrorist' information is unlawful, even though such offences undermine the historic principles of the common law. The use of direct coercion through highly militarised policing programmes such as shoot-to-kill and detention of 'suspected' terrorists for what was until recently twenty-eight days, has led to the dissemination of systematic fear and mistrust within the 'suspect' community. Such policies, viewed through the lens of counterinsurgency theory, amount to the conscious planning of a campaign of coercion against dissent in general and Muslims in particular.

It is our argument that because of counterinsurgency influences on domestic counter-terrorism, mistrust, intimidation and fear have been deliberately implemented under the CONTEST strategy. In other words, because counterinsurgency doctrine explicitly attempts to coerce populations (indirectly) by intimidating and spreading fear among a section of the population as well as (directly) by the use of 'kinetic force', the policies adopted under CONTEST fit neatly within the official definition of 'terrorism'.

## Note

1 The latter two Ps are premised on increasing resilience of the UK through enhanced protective security measures (Protect) and working towards mitigating the effects of a terrorist attack, lest it cannot be thwarted (Prepare).

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