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Publication date:
2006

Citation for published version (APA):

Jackson, R. D. W. (2006). *The State and terrorist Sanctuaries: A Critical Analysis*. 18-20.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2160/1948>

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The State and Terrorist Sanctuaries: A Critical Analysis

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Paper prepared for the British International Studies Association (BISA) Annual Conference, 18-20 December, 2006, University of Cork, Ireland.

¹ A version of this paper is being published as a chapter entitled: 'States, Hegemony and 'Terrorist Sanctuaries': Critical Reflections on Counterterrorism Discourse' in Michael Innes, (ed) *Denial of Sanctuary: Understanding Terrorist Safe Havens* (Praeger Security International, forthcoming 2007). Special thanks to Jenny Peterson for valuable research assistance and Michael Innes for excellent suggestions for improving the chapter. All opinions and remaining errors are solely my own.

Introduction

Together with human rights, global warming, poverty reduction and non-proliferation, terrorism has emerged as one of the most politically significant discourses of the modern era. Today, terrorism is a ubiquitous term of public discourse and its associated labels, assumptions and narratives are embedded within innumerable official, academic and cultural texts. It has, in fact, taken on the qualities of a negative ideograph and like ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’ and ‘justice’, now functions as a primary purpose term for the central narratives of the culture; although loaded with culturally-specific meanings, the term ‘terrorism’ is now widely understood and ubiquitous in political debate and daily conversation.² Central to the broader terrorism discourse is the sometimes controversial notion of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ or ‘terrorist havens’ – understood as the places and spaces where terrorists take refuge, receive support, train, plan, organise and launch their attacks from. It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of the language of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’, not least because it has been used by officials to justify three major wars in the past five years (Afghanistan, Iraq and South Lebanon) and numerous other military actions in places like Palestine, Pakistan, Georgia, Yemen, the Philippines, Chechnya, Somalia and elsewhere. In other words, speaking and writing about ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ is much more than simply an academic exercise. It has the potential to affect policy outcomes involving the use of military force and the resultant destruction of human life – not to mention expending vast human and material resources.

The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the academic and political language and understanding of ‘terrorist sanctuaries.’ Specifically, it aims to describe and dissect its central assumptions, labels, narratives and genealogical roots, and to reflect on its political and normative consequences. The central argument is fairly simple: the discourse of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ is deeply problematic in its current form, not least because it is vague and imprecise, selectively and politically applied, founded on a number of highly contested assumptions and narratives, and functions in part to obscure state sources of terror. Perhaps more importantly, the current ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse enables powerful states to pursue a range of hegemonic projects, including system maintenance, regime change, military expansion and the consolidation of domestic state power.

The methodological approach I employ in this study falls broadly under the mantle of critical discourse analysis.³ This approach is at once both a technique for analysing political language and specific texts, and a way of understanding the relationship between discourse and social and political practice.⁴ Discourses are related sets of ideas that are expressed in various kinds of written and spoken texts, and which employ a distinct arrangement of vocabularies, rules, symbols, labels, assumptions, narratives and forms of social action.

Discourses function ideologically because they dictate what it is possible to say or not say about a certain subject, what counts as normal, what is seen as commonsense and what can be accepted as legitimate ‘knowledge.’ This is not to suggest that discourses are always completely uniform, coherent or consistent; there are often exceptions and inconsistencies within and between texts. Many of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ experts quoted in this paper for example, upon a close reading, can be seen to express quite nuanced arguments that contain both supportive and

² Carol Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post-World War II Era* (State University of New York Press, 2006), 11-16.

³ See Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (Sage, 2002).

⁴ See Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Addison Wesley, 1995).

oppositional statements towards the overall discourse. Nor is it to say that discourses are always completely hegemonic; there are always areas of contestation and vulnerability. It is however, to stress that discourses are never neutral or objective. They are an exercise in social power – the power to ascribe right and wrong, knowledge and falsehood, and the limits of the reasonable. This is because they set the parameters of debate and establish the boundaries for possible action. In the public policy context, discourses establish the limits, possibilities and interests of policy formulation, primarily by making some options appear reasonable and others nonsensical. It is not that interests play no role in the formulation of policy, but that interests themselves are discursively constructed and reflect other discourses and narratives of national security, threats, identities, values, relationships and the like.⁵

The primary research for this paper entailed a discourse analysis of prominent academic and official texts that discussed ‘terrorist sanctuaries’, including speeches by senior policy-makers, the reports of governmental commissions, papers by important think-tanks and academic books and articles on the subject. Each text was examined for the labels, assumptions, symbols, rules and narratives it deployed, the kinds of existing cultural-political narratives it tapped into, and the ways in which the language functioned to structure the meanings, logic and potential policy responses to the described events. Lastly, it is important to note that for the purposes of this paper, terrorism is defined broadly as civilian-directed, politically-motivated violence designed to cause fear and intimidate. This conceptualisation incorporates both narrowly defined acts of sub-state terrorism and more broadly defined activities that harm civilians – regardless of whether they are perpetrated by states or sub-state actors

‘Terrorist Sanctuaries’ in Academic and Political Discourse

The current notion of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ is not new. It has been an important part of the terrorism discourse for many decades. In this section, I provide an overview of the genealogical roots and central narratives of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse.

The Genealogy of the ‘Terrorist Sanctuaries’ Discourse

It is important to note that discourses do not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, they build upon and are shaped by existing discourses and narratives. In this sense, discourses have discernible histories or genealogies and build upon the discursive foundations laid down by previous texts.

The genealogy of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse, unsurprisingly, lies first and foremost in the language and knowledge of terrorism studies – a field which has a long history and which has grown extremely large and gained genuine authority in recent years, particularly since the September 11 terrorist attacks.⁶ The terrorism studies literature provides a great many of the central assumptions, labels, concepts, terms and narratives of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse. Importantly, through processes like testifying before Congressional Commissions, publications and media appearances, the language and knowledge of terrorism studies has been transmitted

⁵ Sanjoy Bannerjee, ‘Narratives and Interaction: A Constitutive Theory of Interaction and the Case of the All-Indian Muslim League’, *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1998), 192.

⁶ For an excellent analysis of the academic and cultural discourse of terrorism over the past three decades, see Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (Routledge, 1996).

directly to policymakers.⁷ For example, notable terrorism studies scholars like Martha Crenshaw, Bruce Hoffman, Walter Laqueur, Jessica Stern, Paul Wilkinson, Brian Jenkins, Magnus Ranstorp, Rohan Gunaratna and Daniel Byman have given testimony on terrorist activities and ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ to the recent Bremer and 9-11 Commissions.⁸

A second genealogical root of the discourse lies in Western counter-insurgency doctrine during the cold war, which in turn exhibited clear discursive continuities with colonial ‘pacification’ doctrines.⁹ During this phase, terrorism and insurgency were treated largely as being synonymous,¹⁰ and a great many countries experiencing civil war such as Vietnam, Guatemala and the Philippines were described by western policymakers as ‘terrorist havens.’ Furthermore, it was frequently argued that communism itself provided ideological support and justification for terrorism, thereby acting as an ‘ideological haven.’¹¹ A number of terrorism scholars at this time suggested that the Soviet Union was the primary sponsor and supporter of a global ‘terrorist network.’ Claire Sterling’s popular and deeply alarmist book, *The Terror Network*,¹² promoted this view, and was highly praised by Reagan, Alexander Haig, William Casey, and other senior Administration officials, who frequently used Sterling’s narratives in their own speeches.¹³

It was in the 1980s however, that the language and assumptions of the broader terrorism discourse really took root in Western policy circles. President Reagan frequently referred to ‘state-sponsored terrorism’ and along with other Western allies, employed the language of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ to justify a range of aggressive foreign policies. For example, Reagan justified the invasion of Grenada on the grounds that ‘It was a Soviet-Cuban colony, being readied as a major military bastion to export terror and undermine democracy.’¹⁴ Following Reagan, George Bush Sr and Bill Clinton continued to employ the language of ‘international terrorism’, ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ and ‘state sponsors of terrorism’ to justify a range of foreign policies, including the 1991 Gulf War, sanctions against Iraq and Iran, the ‘war on drugs’ in Latin America and the missile attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998.¹⁵

⁷ For an analysis of the links between terrorism scholars and government officials and agencies, see: Jonny Burnett and Dave Whyte, ‘Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism’, *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media* Vol. 1, No. 4 (2005), 1-18; Alexander George, ‘The Discipline of Terrorology’, in Alexander George, (ed.) *Western State Terrorism* (Polity Press, 1991); and Edward Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape our View of Terror* (Pantheon Books, 1989).

⁸ Expert witnesses are listed in the appendixes of *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, Report of the National Commission on Terrorism, June 2000, available online at: <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/commission.html>; and *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2004).

⁹ An informative analysis of the intellectual ties between counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism through bridging scholars like Richard Clutterbuck and Frank Kitson is given in Burnett and Whyte, ‘Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism’, 11-13.

¹⁰ See Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, and Counterterrorism, 1940-1990* (Pantheon, 1992).

¹¹ See Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism* and Herman and O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*.

¹² Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (Holt, Ronehart, and Winston, 1981).

¹³ Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, 14; Edward Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (South End Press, 1982), 49-62.

¹⁴ Ronald W. Reagan, ‘Address to the Nation on Events in Lebanon and Grenada’, October 27, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, accessed online at: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/102783b.htm>.

¹⁵ See Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*.

In short, by the time of the 11 September 2001 attacks, the discursive foundations of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse were well established: policymakers and the wider public were well-versed in, and fully understood, the language of ‘terrorist sanctuaries,’ ‘terrorist havens’ and ‘state sponsors of terrorism.’ Since then, senior policymakers and academics have elaborated a whole series of specific narratives about the nature of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’, the states and groups that support them, the kinds of regions they inhabit, the financial systems they exploit, the extremist ideologies they depend on and the threat they pose to the world.

The Central Narratives of the ‘Terrorist Sanctuaries’ Discourse

A review of many of the primary ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ texts reveal a number of common narratives, many of which are linked to, and embedded within, the broader ‘war on terrorism’ discourse.¹⁶ Due to the sheer size of the discourse – there are literally thousands of academic and political texts on terrorism and ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ – the following discussion is merely illustrative of the primary narratives and discursive constructions. The important point is not that each author or text uniformly expresses all the main narratives in the same way, or even that they necessarily agree with all of them; it is rather, that taken together as a broad body of work that has political and cultural influence, the narratives function to construct and maintain a specific understanding of, and approach to, ‘terrorist sanctuaries’.

One of the most common narratives of the discourse is that weak or failed states are primary locations for ‘terrorist sanctuaries.’ More specifically, it is argued that lawless, geographically remote regions beyond the control of ineffectual states can function as a staging ground or ‘haven’ for terrorism. The 9/11 Commission for example, stated:

To find sanctuary, terrorist organizations have fled to some of the least governed, most lawless places in the world. The intelligence community has prepared a world map that highlights possible terrorist havens, using no secret intelligence – just indicating areas that combine rugged terrain, weak governance, room to hide or receive supplies, and low population density with a town or city near enough to allow interaction with the outside world. Large areas scattered around the world meet these criteria.¹⁷

Within the logic of this particular narrative, regions like the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, the Arabian Peninsular, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, among others, automatically become probable ‘terrorist sanctuaries.’ A report by the International Crisis Group for example, concluded that Somalia remained a real concern due to the possibility of terrorists ‘using the environment of the Somali collapsed state as a safe haven to operate with impunity.’¹⁸ Similarly, a recent book on terrorism in the Horn of Africa argues that the combination of its rugged terrain, Muslim population and weak governance make it a potential ‘reservoir of terror.’¹⁹

¹⁶ There is an increasingly large and sophisticated literature on the discourse of the war on terrorism. See, for example: Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism* (Manchester University Press, 2005); John Collins and Ross Glover, (eds.) *Collateral Language: A User’s Guide to America’s New War* (New York University Press, 2002); and Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America’s War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 366.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, Africa Report No. 45 (Nairobi/Brussels, 23 May, 2002), 1.

¹⁹ Robert Rotberg, ‘The Horn of Africa and Yemen: Diminishing the Threat of Terrorism’, in Robert Rotberg, (ed.) *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa* (Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 2.

A related narrative is that poverty, unemployment and conditions of underdevelopment are ‘breeding grounds’ of terrorism, which is another way of saying that they are a kind of ‘terrorist sanctuary’ or ‘haven.’ A British government report for example, argues that deprivation and alienation are key variables in the radicalisation process. It states: ‘Some young Muslims who join extremist groups or are targeted by them are poorly educated and from deprived backgrounds.’²⁰ Similarly, the 9/11 Commission argues that ‘endemic poverty, widespread corruption, and often ineffective government create opportunities for Islamist recruitment.’ It goes on to opine that ‘when people lose hope, when societies break down, when countries fragment, the breeding grounds for terrorism are created.’²¹ In short, drawing on sociological theories of relative deprivation and revolution, this narrative identifies conditions of poverty as an ‘incubator’ of terrorist violence.

A recent narrative is that ‘passive state sponsorship’ provides a haven for terrorists – that inaction is just as significant as action. Daniel Byman for example, argues that ‘For many terrorist groups, a state’s tolerance of or passivity towards their activities is often as important to their success as any deliberate assistance they receive’, and that ‘At times, the greatest contribution a state can make to a terrorist’s cause is by not policing a border, turning a blind eye to fundraising, or even tolerating terrorist efforts to build their organizations, conduct operations, and survive.’²² Interestingly, such a construction of state sponsorship is broadly reflective of the Bush administration’s oft-quoted and much more extreme assertion that there is no neutral ground in the war on terrorism. As President Bush put it, ‘... we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are either with us, or you are with the terrorists.’²³ The implication is that any state that fails to rigorously pursue terrorists within its borders is by definition providing a ‘terrorist sanctuary.’

Perhaps the most common narrative however, is that terrorist groups depend upon significant state support to survive and active ‘sponsors’ provide a range of positive and permissive forms of assistance. A prominent terrorism textbook for suggests that state sponsorship of terrorism can consist of: ‘ideological support’, ‘financial support’, ‘military support’, operational support’, ‘initiating terrorist attacks’, or ‘direct involvement in terrorist attacks.’²⁴ Additionally, it is commonly argued that weak, totalitarian or so-called ‘rogue states’ are predisposed to sponsoring terrorism because:

[F]or aggressive regimes, state terrorism in the international domain is advantageous in several respects: *State terrorism is inexpensive...* Even poor nations can strike at and injure a prosperous adversary... *State terrorism has limited consequences.* State assisters that are clever can distance themselves from culpability for a terrorist incident... and thereby escape possible reprisals or other penalties. *State terrorism can be successful.* Weaker states can raise the stakes beyond what a stronger adversary is

²⁰ ‘Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism’, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Home Office, April 2004, available online at:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2004/muslimext-uk.htm>.

²¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 367, 378.

²² Daniel Byman, *Confronting Passive Sponsors of Terrorism* Analysis Paper, No. 4 (The Saban Center for Middle East Policy, The Brookings Institution, February 2005), III.

²³ George W. Bush Jr, ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People’, September 20, 2001, accessed online at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/>.

²⁴ Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* (Sage, 2003), 91.

willing to bear... [and] successfully destabilize an adversary through the use of a proxy movement.²⁵

In fact, much of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ literature is devoted to analysing and describing those states viewed as the main sponsors of terrorism, the groups they support and the kinds of assistance they provide. The state sponsors identified in the literature more often than not coincide with the U.S. State Department’s annual list of ‘state sponsors of international terrorism,’ which typically includes countries with which the U.S. has had serious conflicts, such as Iran, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Libya and Iraq.

A narrative that has become virtually ubiquitous in contemporary terrorism texts suggests that Islam, particularly militant forms of political Islam or what is often called ‘Islamism’, also function as a ‘terrorist sanctuary.’ In this narrative, Islamic doctrines and practices provide ideological or religious support for terrorist activities. A great many texts for example, assert an ‘inherent, even organic connection that has always existed between *Political Islam* and violence’ due to the fact that ‘Islam does not separate the realms of religion and politics.’²⁶ Similarly, it is often argued that ‘in the Islamic world one cannot differentiate between the political violence of Islamic groups and their popular support derived from religion... the present terrorism on the part of the Arab and Muslim world is Islamic in nature.’²⁷ In particular, it is considered axiomatic that ‘Islamist’, ‘Wahabist’ and ‘Salafist’ groups are linked to, directly involved in or provide support for terrorism. Magnus Ranstorp for example, refers to ‘the Islamist movements and their respective armed “terrorist” wings’²⁸ – as if all Islamist groups support terrorists. The terrorism-Islamism association contained in these discursive formations works to construct the widely-accepted ‘knowledge’ that certain forms of Islam provide an ideological sanctuary or ‘breeding ground’ for terrorism and violence.²⁹

Within the broader narrative of the dangers posed by radical Islam, it is often argued that Islamic charities, associations and nongovernmental organisations can also provide support for ‘Islamic terrorists’, either intentionally or inadvertently. Paul Pillar for example, identifies ‘certain nongovernmental organizations that facilitate, wittingly or unwittingly, the activities of terrorists.’³⁰ Similarly, Byman argues that ‘NGOs are a means of raising money, but they also are valuable for giving activists jobs, channelling money, and acquiring necessary documents.’³¹ Directly related to this, there is a frequently expressed narrative that identifies diasporas, particularly Muslim communities, as potential ‘terrorist sanctuaries.’ In a variation of the ‘enemy within’ or ‘fifth column’ narrative, it is suggested that diasporic communities provide terrorists with places to hide, jobs, contacts, finance and logistical and ideological

²⁵ Ibid, 90-91, original emphasis.

²⁶ Habib Malik, ‘Political Islam and the Roots of Violence’, in Elliott Abrams, (ed.), *The Influence of Faith: Religious Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), author’s emphasis.

²⁷ Reuven Paz, ‘Is There an “Islamic Terrorism”?’ International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) Publication, Herzilya, Israel, September 7, 1998, available online at: <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleId=46>.

²⁸ Magnus Ranstorp, ‘Terrorism in the Name of Religion’, *Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 50, No. 1 (1996), 58.

²⁹ This argument is also made in: Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, ‘Radical Islam: The Death of an Ideology?’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No.4 (2004), 86-95.

³⁰ Paul Pillar, ‘Terrorism Goes Global: Extremist Groups Extend their reach Worldwide’, *The Brookings Review* Vol. 19, No. 4 (2001), 36.

³¹ Daniel Byman, ‘Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?’, *World Politics*, Vol. 56 (2003), 151.

support. Specifically, a large number of recent texts identify Muslim communities living in Western countries as potential and actual terrorist havens. The widely-quoted term, ‘Londonistan,’ is a pertinent example of this particular narrative,³² as is Robert Leiken’s description of ‘Europe’s Angry Muslims’ in *Foreign Affairs*: ‘In smoky coffeehouses in Rotterdam and Copenhagen, makeshift prayer halls in Hamburg and Brussels, Islamic bookstalls in Birmingham and “Londonistan,” and the prisons of Madrid, Milan, and Marseilles, immigrants or their descendents are volunteering for jihad against the West.’³³ In short, virtually any significant population of immigrants, particularly those of Muslim origin, are viewed within these texts as ‘havens’ for terrorism.

Another popular narrative is that democracy and freedom in liberal states provides a ‘haven’ or ‘sanctuary’ for terrorists, as it allows them to move about, organise and generally operate without interference from the authorities. Byman for example, notes that ‘Many activities related to terrorism – proselytizing, fundraising, and even recruiting – are at times protected by laws governing free speech and free association.’³⁴ Politically, this narrative has been used as a reason for restricting civil liberties. The British Home Secretary, John Reid, stated: ‘Sometimes we may have to modify some of our own freedoms in the short term in order to prevent their misuse and abuse by those who oppose our fundamental values and would destroy all of our freedoms in the modern world.’³⁵ Implicit here is the notion that freedom itself can be exploited by terrorists as a ‘sanctuary.’

Other common narratives of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse include: the frequently heard notion that information technology, and in particular, the internet, functions as a ‘virtual haven’ for terrorists because it allows them to communicate, organise, gather information, recruit and proselytise;³⁶ the claim that media coverage of terrorism is a kind of ‘media support’ because it allows terrorists to reach a much bigger audience than they could reach by themselves;³⁷ and the important notion that dealing with terrorist sanctuaries involves both diplomatic and coercive instruments, including sanctions and military intervention. In much of the literature, the use of military force as a means of dealing with ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ is uncritically assumed to be both legal and effective.³⁸

³² This term has been popularised in part by Melanie Phillips’ deeply alarmist book, *Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within* (Gibson Square books, 2006), which argues that London has become a hotbed of radical Islamist activity.

³³ Robert Leiken, ‘Europe’s Angry Muslims’, *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 84, No. 4 (2005), 120.

³⁴ Byman, *Confronting Passive Sponsors of Terrorism*, 28.

³⁵ John Reid, quoted in Alan Travis, ‘Anti-terror critics just don’t get it, says Reid’, *The Guardian* August 10, 2006.

³⁶ For an example of this narrative, see John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Michele Zanini, ‘Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism’, in Ian Lesser et al, (eds.) *Countering the New Terrorism* (Rand Corporation Publications, 1999).

³⁷ For an example of this narrative, see David Long, *The Anatomy of Terrorism* (The Free Press, 1990), 105.

³⁸ See for example, Richard Shultz and Andreas Vogt, ‘It’s War! Fighting Post-11 September Global Terrorism through a Doctrine of Preemption’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.15, No.1 (2003), 1-30; and Greg Travalio and John Altenburg, ‘Terrorism, State Responsibility, and the Use of Force’, *Chicago Journal of International Law* Vol.4, No.1 (2003), 97-119. Without a hint of irony, Travalio and Altenburg argue that since the *Nicaragua* case in the ICJ – in which the U.S. was sanctioned for supporting terrorist actions against Nicaragua – the principle of state responsibility for terrorism committed by sponsored groups is now an accepted part of international law.

Critical Reflections on the ‘Terrorist Sanctuaries’ Discourse

There are several criticisms that can be levelled at the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse as it is currently expressed in academic and official texts. They fall under three main headings: analytical shortcomings, political bias and ineffectual policies.

Analytical Shortcomings

An initial analytical shortcoming of the discourse is that very few academic texts take the time to define or conceptualise the notion of ‘terrorist havens’ or ‘sanctuaries.’³⁹ Instead, the term is normally used uncritically and unreflectively, but in ways that impose a restricted meaning. Most often, it is deployed in discussions about the role of commonly agreed ‘rogue states’ or ‘state sponsors’ in supporting commonly agreed ‘terrorist organisations.’ Moreover, texts that do attempt to define ‘terrorist sanctuaries’, ‘havens’ or ‘state sponsorship’, frequently do so using highly subjective measures, such as notions of ‘ideological support’ which often assumes that because actors share a similar ideology, they are therefore allies. The problem is further compounded by texts that argue that ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ also lie in extra-geographically defined realms such as religion, rhetoric, the internet or civil liberties. In the end, the term is so broadly applied that every country in the world is transformed into a potential ‘terrorist haven’ (either through action or inaction), as is virtually every aspect of modern life. Clearly, in order to retain analytical value, the term needs to distinguish between what a ‘terrorist sanctuary’ is and what it is not, and employ a set of criterion and a threshold of evidence to determine when a particular state or social arena has become a ‘terrorist sanctuary.’

Related to this, the literature is characterised by an extremely poor level of empirical documentation, a great deal of innuendo and an over-reliance on official sources. For example, a surprising number of ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ texts discussed official Iraqi support for international terrorism in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion, despite the lack of any hard evidence.⁴⁰ The primary reason for this is that state sponsorship of terrorism is rarely openly admitted and reliable information may be difficult to come by; thus, scholars tend to over-rely on information provided to them by officials. However, there are two compelling reasons why official sources of information on state sponsorship of terrorism should be viewed with caution. First, states are often willing to make political judgements on the basis of very thin evidence, particularly if there are strategic interests in designating a state as a ‘sponsor of terrorism.’ A U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence argued that ‘It is not necessary to prove “beyond a reasonable doubt” that a state has supported terrorism... reliance can be placed on circumstantial, as opposed to direct, evidence.’⁴¹ A careful examination of the actual evidence of state support for terrorism in most ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ texts reveals that in fact, a great deal of it is circumstantial and open to a variety of interpretations. A partial solution to this problem would be to follow the

³⁹ See Michael Innes, *Terrorist Sanctuaries and Bosnia-Herzegovina: Challenging Conventional Assumptions*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* Vol. 28 (2005), 296.

⁴⁰ The following paper for example, describes Iraq’s sponsorship of al Qaeda-linked terrorist groups as if it were proven fact, but without providing any empirical evidence whatsoever. See Nicholas Berry, *Eliminating Terrorist Sanctuaries: The Case of Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Sudan*, December 10, 2001, Centre for Defense Information, Washington, available online at: <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/rogues-pr.cfm>. Similarly, an article in a major terrorism studies journal relied on official evidence provided to the media to prove that there was ‘extensive interaction between Al-Qaeda and Iraq’s intelligence officers’, a claim now known to be official misinformation. See Shultz and Vogt, ‘It’s War!’, 15.

⁴¹ Quoted in John Murphy, *State Support of International Terrorism: Legal, Political, & Economic Dimensions* (Westview Press, 1989), 40.

lead of Byman in carefully distinguishing between strong, weak, lukewarm, antagonistic, passive and unwilling state supporters of terrorism.⁴²

A second reason to be wary of official information is that where foreign policy is concerned governments frequently have an incentive to employ disinformation as an instrument of influence. This is clearly what occurred in the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion and in a great many other cases, including Clare Sterling's widely-quoted book about the global, Soviet-directed 'terror network'.⁴³ From this perspective, the continual over-reliance on official sources of information, and in particular, the use of unnamed security officials, actually undermines the credibility of many 'terrorist sanctuaries' texts and creates a closed system of discourse vulnerable to manipulation, error and distortion.

Another analytical shortcoming is that the 'terrorist sanctuaries' discourse rests on a series of prior labels, assumptions and narratives that are themselves highly contested. Fundamentally, it takes for granted an unproblematic understanding of what 'terrorism' is and which groups are 'terrorists' – as opposed to 'insurgents', for example. Seldom is it acknowledged that 'terrorism' is a pejorative label designed to de-legitimise specific groups or acts of political violence rather than a social scientific category, that no widely accepted definition of terrorism currently exists and that the distinction between 'terrorist' and 'insurgent' is hardly ever clear-cut. The 'terrorist sanctuaries' discourse also rests on a series of contested neo-realist understandings regarding the centrality of states, the competitive nature of international politics and the indivisibility of international security.⁴⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the discourse assumes that 'terrorism' poses a serious threat to the security of nations and the wider international system – despite significant evidence to the contrary.⁴⁵ Other implicit assumptions in the broader terrorism discourse which are equally contestable or dubious include the assumption that 'terrorist' groups such as al Qaeda are cohesive, organised and hierarchical in nature,⁴⁶ that terrorists and 'rogue states' have a natural

⁴² Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

⁴³ Clare Sterling relied primarily on CIA sources, only to later find that the documents were forgeries, probably made for the CIA's cold war disinformation campaign. See Herman and O'Sullivan, *The "Terrorism" Industry*, 181.

⁴⁴ Criticisms of the limitations of neo-realist conceptions of 'terrorist sanctuaries' are made in Innes, 'Terrorist Sanctuaries and Bosnia-Herzegovina', 300-302.

⁴⁵ Annually, terrorism results on average in 1,000 – 7,000 fatalities, which is less than half the number of people murdered every year by handguns in the U.S. alone. As a threat to individual or national security, terrorism ranks far below state repression, war, small arms proliferation, organised crime, illegal narcotics, poverty, disease and global warming. For a critique of the terrorist threat narrative, see among others: Richard Jackson, 'Playing the Politics of Fear: Writing the Terrorist Threat in the War on Terrorism', in George Kassimeris, (ed.), *Playing Politics With Terrorism* (New York University Press, 2007); John Mueller, 'Six Rather Unusual Propositions about Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.17 (2005), 487-505; and Ehud Sprinzak, 'The Great Superterrorism Scare', *Foreign Policy* Vol.112 (1998), 110-24.

⁴⁶ This view is surprisingly persistent, particularly among officials who continue to attribute virtually every terrorist attack to al Qaeda and accuse certain countries of harbouring the organisation. However, a growing number of scholars and journalists dispute this view of al Qaeda. They argue that any rudimentary organisation al Qaeda might have had was destroyed in Operation Enduring Freedom, and that it now exists more as a series of temporary cross-national alliances of national liberation groups and an ideological symbol than a coherent organisation. See, among others, Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005); Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (Penguin, 2003); and Thomas Hegghammer, 'Global Jihadism after the Iraq War', *The Middle East Journal* Vol.60, No.1 (2006), 11-22.

coincidence of interests and that terrorists could not operate effectively without the assistance or acquiescence of states.⁴⁷

Third, and most importantly, the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse itself consists of a series of narratives which are in fact, largely unsupported by empirical research, or at the very least, open to debate. For example, the notion that failed states provide natural sanctuaries or havens for terrorists is far from established; in fact, such environments more often pose major difficulties for terrorists.⁴⁸ Related to this, all the major empirical studies thus far suggest that there is no direct link between poverty, unemployment and alienation, and terrorism.⁴⁹ The same studies also suggest that narratives of ‘Islamic terrorism’ and the sanctuary that so-called ‘Islamic extremism’ provides to terrorists are similarly contestable – not least because a large proportion of political Islamic or ‘Islamist’ movements are in fact, non-violent.⁵⁰ Marc Sageman for example, argues that the vast majority of radical mosques are generally conservative institutions and just as likely to constraint as to facilitate terrorist activities.⁵¹ There are also powerful arguments to be made against the narrative that so-called ‘rogue states’ are eager to sponsor terrorists and provide them with weapons of mass destruction – not least because such actions would invite overwhelming retaliation.⁵² The assertion that freedom in western states can provide a ‘haven’ or ‘sanctuary’ is also arguable, not least because western states usually have well-resourced capacity for tracking and responding to terrorists; it is actually states with limited institutional capacity that face the greatest challenges in dealing with terrorist campaigns. Related to this, studies demonstrate that, far from being terrorist supporters, media coverage of terrorist acts is usually heavily dominated by official views and a focus on victims.⁵³ Lastly, the argument that the internet provides a kind of virtual ‘terrorist sanctuary’ is not nearly as straightforward as its proponents suggest. Information technology can be both an asset and vulnerability for terrorists – to penetration by the

⁴⁷ This assumption is based on a neo-realist view of the world which privileges states and lacks credibility; Timothy McVeigh required no state assistance to commit one of the worst acts of terrorism in U.S. history.

⁴⁸ Some scholars have argued that not only are terrorists far more vulnerable to military counter-terrorism measures in collapsed states, but such environments also tend to be inhospitable and dangerous for foreigners. See, among others: Kenneth Menkhaus ‘Somalia and Somaliland: Terrorism, Political Islam, and State Collapse’, in Rotberg, (ed), *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, 39-40.

⁴⁹ Major empirical studies by Robert Pape and Marc Sageman for example, show that the overwhelming majority of ‘terrorists’ are middle or upper class, of above average educational standing, professionally employed, often married or in relationships, are well integrated into their communities and generally have good future prospects. See Pape, *Dying to Win*, and Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ This argument is made in detail in Richard Jackson, ‘Constructing Enemies: “Islamic Terrorism” in Academic and Political Discourse’, *Government & Opposition* (forthcoming). See also, among others: Pape, *Dying to Win*; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; and Henry Munson, ‘Islam, Nationalism and Resentment of Foreign Domination’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol.X, No.2 (2003), 40-53.

⁵¹ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 143-4.

⁵² A great many scholars, former counter-terrorism officials and even a number of U.S. Commissions on Terrorism have concluded that the likelihood of terrorist groups acquiring weapons of mass destruction, particularly from state sponsors, is highly unlikely. See, example: Brian Jenkins, ‘Will Terrorists go Nuclear? A Reappraisal’, in Harvey Kushner, (ed.) *The Future of Terrorism: Violence in the New Millennium* (Sage, 1998), 244-5; and David Long, *The Anatomy of Terrorism* (The Free Press, 1990), 131-2. Both the Bremer and Gilmore Commissions adopted a similar conclusion. See *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, 6; and the Gilmore Commission quoted in Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamic Terrorism and Global Response* (Routledge, 2002), 391.

⁵³ Herman and O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*, 43. See also, Steven Livingston, *The Terrorism Spectacle* (Westview Press, 1994).

authorities, for example. There is furthermore, no evidence that any terrorist has ever been recruited solely via the internet,⁵⁴ although individuals with extremist ideas clearly do communicate with each other online.

Finally, a major analytical shortcoming of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse is that it fails to adequately address the problem of state terror and the way state institutions and doctrines and modes of governance, provide a ‘sanctuary’ or ‘haven’ for terrorism. This is a significant omission that undermines the overall credibility of the discourse somewhat. The fact is that if terrorism refers to violence directed towards or threatened against civilians which is designed to instil terror or intimidate a population for political reasons – an entirely uncontroversial definition of terrorism fully accepted by terrorism experts such as Byman⁵⁵ – then state terrorism is arguably a much greater problem than dissident or non-state terrorism. States after all, have killed, tortured and intimidated hundreds of millions of people⁵⁶ over the past few decades, and a great many continue to do so today in places like Colombia, Haiti, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Uzbekistan,⁵⁷ Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya, Tibet, North Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere.

More controversially, it can be argued that certain state military practices can be considered terroristic, if not terrorism, particularly if we define terrorist acts according to their *effects* on civilians rather than their purported *intentions*. The physical results of such activities carry a much heavier moral weight than alleged – and notoriously difficult to prove in law – criminal intent, and bear much more heavily on the legitimacy and capital of a political leadership ultimately responsible for decisions that impact on the safety and human rights of non-combatants. The use of airpower to intimidate and terrorise civilian populations for example, central to doctrines of ‘shock and awe’ and strategic bombing, could be considered terrorism, as it clearly falls within the definition of civilian-directed violence designed to intimidate a population for political purposes.⁵⁸ Similarly, counter-insurgency and low-intensity conflict practices and pacification campaigns – such as Operation Phoenix in Vietnam, Algerian counter-insurgency in the 1990s and arguably, Colombian counter-insurgency today – are frequently oriented towards intimidating civilian populations with state violence to undermine their support for insurgents. A common theme in discussions among U.S. low-intensity conflict theorists during the 1980s was how ‘any means’ were justified in conducting counterrevolutionary warfare, including torture, assassination and other forms of civilian-directed brutality.⁵⁹ Some would argue that U.S. counter-insurgency training in institutions like the School of the

⁵⁴ Brachman and Forest in this volume discuss the limits and forms of online recruitment. See also Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 163.

⁵⁵ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 8.

⁵⁶ A conservative estimate of state-instigated mass murder, forcible starvations and genocide against civilians suggests that states have been responsible for 170-200 millions deaths in the twentieth century alone – more than all other forms of deadly conflict, including war, combined. See R.J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (Transaction Books, 1994). For other statistics on state terror, see Jeffrey Sluka, ‘Introduction: State Terror and Anthropology’, in Jeffrey Sluka, (ed.), *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ The former British ambassador to Uzbekistan reveals the nature and extent of Uzbek state terror and western complicity in Craig Murray, *Murder in Samarkland: A British Ambassador’s Controversial Defiance of Tyranny in the War on Terror* (Mainstream Publishing, 2006).

⁵⁸ This argument is powerfully made in Beau Grosscup, *Strategic Terror: The Politics and Ethics of Aerial Bombardment* (Zed, 2006).

⁵⁹ Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh, ‘The New Interventionism: Low-Intensity Warfare in the 1980s and Beyond’, in Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh, (eds.), *Low-Intensity Warfare: Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency and Antiterrorism in the Eighties* (Pantheon Books, 1988), 15.

Americas (since renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) constitutes a form of state terrorism sponsorship.⁶⁰

In effect, there is a pressing analytical question here of why and how so many states provide ideological justification for the practice of state terror through doctrines of ‘counter-insurgency’, ‘low-intensity conflict’, ‘counter-terrorism’, ‘national security’, ‘aerial warfare’, ‘coercive diplomacy’,⁶¹ ‘constructive engagement’,⁶² and the like (forms of ideological and rhetorical support for terrorism), and why they ‘harbour’ and protect so many ‘terrorists’ (the individuals who engage in bombing, murdering, disappearing, torturing and intimidating civilians). Corey Robin has convincingly argued that the production of fear lies at the heart of liberal doctrines of the state,⁶³ suggesting that perhaps the state itself is predisposed to a reliance on violence and coercion. Certainly, anthropological studies have shown how the state is *experienced* as a source of terror for ordinary people living under regimes who employ terror as a mode of governance, particularly through the extensive use of death squads.⁶⁴ At the very least, it can be argued that state terrorism is as important as dissident terrorism because it is frequently rooted in relatively permanent structures that allow the use of terror to become institutionalised.⁶⁵ From this perspective, directing so much academic attention towards the support provided to dissident terrorists whilst ignoring the equally serious problem of state terrorism involves a considerable loss of analytical focus and intellectual credibility.

Political Bias

A related problem for the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse is that it has always been plagued by a certain political bias and selectivity. For example, an analysis of the mainstream terrorism literature during the cold war demonstrates that terrorism experts regularly identified Iran, Libya, Cuba, the Soviet Union and many other mainly communist countries as ‘state sponsors’ of ‘international terrorism’, but failed to include countries like Israel or South Africa – despite the fact that South Africa, for example, not only engaged in numerous acts of terrorism against dissidents in neighbouring states but also sponsored movements like Unita and Renamo who engaged in extensive terrorism. Similarly, Israeli support for various Christian militants in Lebanon is rarely discussed as state sponsorship of terrorism, despite the widely accepted evidence of Israeli involvement in the Sabra and Shatilla massacres, for example. The ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ literature from this period also focused heavily on the assistance provided by states like Libya and Syria to groups like the PLO, but

⁶⁰ This argument is made in: Jonathan Barker, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Terrorism* (New Internationalist, 2002), 67-8; Frederick Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States: From Counterinsurgency to the War on Terrorism* (Zed, 2004), 22-30; and McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft*.

⁶¹ See Michael Stohl, ‘States, Terrorism and State Terrorism: The Role of the Superpowers’, in Robert Slater and Michael Stohl, (eds.), *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism* (Macmillan, 1988).

⁶² This doctrine guided U.S. policy towards South Africa at a time when it directly sponsored and supported massive civilian-directed proinsurgency terror by Renamo in Mozambique and Unita in Angola. It can be argued that South Africa could not have continued to prop up Renamo terror with impunity for more than a decade without U.S. support. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Three Leaves Press, 2004), 87-95.

⁶³ Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ See, for example: Ali Mahmud, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal War in South Asia* (Zed Books, 1993); Juan Corradi, Patricia Fagen and Manuel Garreton, (eds.), *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America* (University of California Press, 1992); and the contributions in Sluka, (ed.), *Death Squad*.

⁶⁵ Herman, *The Real Terror Network*, 83.

failed to discuss U.S. support for groups like Unita, the Afghan mujahaddin, anti-Castro groups and the Contras, despite the fact these groups engaged in numerous acts of terrorism, including planting car-bombs in markets, kidnappings, civilian massacres and blowing up civilian airliners.⁶⁶

Many would argue that from this perspective, the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse has functioned ideologically to distract from and deny the long history of the West’s direct involvement in state terrorism and its support and sanctuary for a number of mainly anti-communist terrorist groups. Western involvement in terrorism has a long but generally ignored history, which includes: the extensive use of official terror by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, the U.S. and other colonial powers in numerous countries throughout the colonial period;⁶⁷ U.S. support and sanctuary for a range of right-wing insurgent groups like the Contras and the Mujahideen during the cold war, many of whom regularly committed terrorist acts;⁶⁸ U.S. tolerance of Irish Republican terrorist activity in the U.S.;⁶⁹ U.S. support for systematic state terror by numerous right-wing regimes across the world, perhaps most notoriously El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Indonesia and Iran;⁷⁰ British support for Loyalist terrorism in Northern Ireland⁷¹ and various other ‘Islamist’ groups in Libya and Bosnia, among others;⁷² Spanish state terror during the ‘dirty war’ against ETA;⁷³ French support for terror in Algeria and against Greenpeace in the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing; Italian

⁶⁶ Michael Stohl quotes CIA data that shows that Cuban exile groups engaged in 89 separate terrorist incidents from 1969-79 alone. See Stohl, ‘States, Terrorism and State Terrorism’, 189; and Herman, *The Real Terror Network*, 63. See also the documented evidence of numerous terrorist attacks by the Mujahideen and Unita in Livingston, *The Terrorism Spectacle*, 48-58

⁶⁷ Evidence of the use of terror by the colonial authorities is contained in an extremely large literature on the history and nature of colonialism, as well as the large post-colonialism literature. For more immediately accessible summaries of colonial terror, see among others: Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (Routledge, 2001); Barker, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Terrorism*, 61-86; and Herman and O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*, 3-7.

⁶⁸ See, among others: Herman and O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*; Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States*; and Livingston, *The Terrorism Spectacle*. U.S. officials admitted as early as 1983 that the Contras were engaged in the killing of civilians, kidnapping, torture and indiscriminate attacks. It later emerged that a CIA Contra training manual, *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare*, advocated exactly these kinds of civilian-directed proinsurgency tactics. Similar forms of training were provided through proxies to the Afghan insurgents. Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 102, 116.

⁶⁹ U.S. official toleration of IRA activity is described in Byman, *Confronting Passive Sponsors of Terrorism*, 21-7.

⁷⁰ Ironically, and in a deliberate attempt to subvert the idea of U.S. support for state terror, many of these regimes received U.S. military assistance under the auspices of ‘counter-terrorism’ programmes. See among others: Alexander George, (ed.), *Western State Terrorism* (Polity Press, 1991); Herman, *The Real Terror Network*; Herman and O’Sullivan, *The ‘Terrorism’ Industry*; and Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States*.

⁷¹ See Jeffrey Sluka, “‘For God and Ulster’: The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland”, in Sluka, (ed.), *Death Squad*.

⁷² For example, evidence from former British and French intelligence officers suggests that MI6 paid large sums of money to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, a terrorist group associated with al Qaeda, to assassinate Colonel Gadafy in 1996. It is alleged that British intelligence provided sanctuary to members of the group in Britain and subsequently thwarted attempts by Libya to bring Osama bin Laden to justice. See ‘MI6 “halted” Bin Laden Arrest’, *Guardian Weekly* November 14-20, 2002. There is also evidence that British and American intelligence agencies provided a green light to various purported ‘Islamist’ groups training insurgents to fight in Bosnia. See Michael Meacher, ‘Britain now faces its own blowback. Intelligence interests may thwart the July bombings investigation’, *The Guardian* September 10, 2005.

⁷³ See Begona Aretxaga, ‘A Fictional Reality: Paramilitary Death Squads and the Construction of State Terror in Spain’, in Sluka, (ed.), *Death Squad*; Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*.

sponsorship of right-wing terrorists; and Western support for accommodation with terrorists following the end of several high profile wars⁷⁴ – among many other examples.

In short, there is no denying that the discourse has often been used in a highly selective and hypocritical manner to highlight some acts of terror whilst selectively ignoring others. Arguably, this political bias continues today: the Taliban forces in Afghanistan are more often described as terrorists than insurgents, while various warlords, including General Rashid Dostum, are rarely called terrorists, despite overwhelming evidence of the use of terror and intimidation against civilians by many Afghan warlords.⁷⁵ This situation is mirrored in Somalia, where the Islamist Al Itihad Al Islamiya group is typically described as a terrorist organisation with links to al Qaeda, while U.S.-supported Somali warlords who also use violence against civilians are exempted from the terrorist label.⁷⁶ Similarly, Cuba remains on the State Department's list of 'state sponsors of terrorism' largely because it hosts a few former ETA members, but continued U.S. sanctuary and support of anti-Castro terrorists,⁷⁷ former Latin American state terrorists⁷⁸ and other assorted Asian anticommunist groups⁷⁹ is completely ignored. And Iran and Syria's sponsorship of Palestinian terrorist groups is the subject of substantial academic analysis, while Pakistan's support for Kashmiri militants rarely featured in the first few years of the 'war on terror' – although it is now an increasingly prominent point of contention.⁸⁰ Most glaringly, and as already mentioned, the state terror of countries like Uzbekistan, Colombia and Indonesia – and continued tolerance and support for it from the U.S.⁸¹ – is simply never discussed in the mainstream 'terrorist sanctuaries' literature. The result of these omissions is a discourse that for whatever reasons appears to many outside observers as biased towards official U.S. views.

⁷⁴ Mamdani makes the pertinent point that in places like Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique governments were compelled to reconcile with terrorist movements. In this context, reconciliation became a codeword for impunity and may have functioned to sustain an international atmosphere of tolerance towards terror. Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 250-51.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of terror by the Afghan warlord, General Dostum, see Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States*, 199-200. Gareau cites a number of reports by the UN and several human rights organisations documenting the use of violence against prisoners and civilians. Disturbingly, U.S. military scholars accept that the Afghan warlords employ 'violent operating methods', but argue that 'antagonizing them or calling them to account under Western legal structures is completely counterproductive to the reconstitution of Afghanistan. We must resist the inclination to be judgemental.' Sean Maloney, 'Afghanistan: From here to Eternity?', *Parameters* (Spring 2004), 13.

⁷⁶ See Menkhous, 'Somalia and Somaliland' and International Crisis Group, *Somalia*.

⁷⁷ U.S. sanctuary for anti-Castro terrorists goes back to before the Bay of Pigs and continues today. See Barker, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Terrorism*, 75; and Marcela Sanchez, 'Moral Misstep: Some Terrorists Get a Hero's Welcome', *Washington Post* September 3, 2004, available online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57838-2004Sept2.html>.

⁷⁸ For example, Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant, a notorious former death squad commander from Haiti with suspected links to the CIA, has been given sanctuary in the U.S. since the 1994 invasion. See David Grann, 'Giving "The Devil" His Due', *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 287, No. 6 (June 2001), 55-75.

⁷⁹ The U.S. continues to harbour groups such as Government of Free Vietnam (GFVN), the Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF) and other Vietnamese and Laotian dissident groups who have been involved in a number of terrorist attacks over the past few years. See Joshua Kurlantzick, 'Guerillas in Our Midst: Is the United States harbouring terrorists?', *The American Prospect* June 3, 2002, 14-16.

⁸⁰ For analysis of Pakistan's continued engagement in 'state-sanctioned terrorism in the Kashmir region', see Melissa Dell, 'Learning Curve: The United States and the Future of Pakistan', *Harvard International Review* (Spring 2002), 37; and Byman, *Deadly Connections*.

⁸¹ Continued U.S. support for state terrorism in Colombia is detailed in Doug Stokes, *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (Zed Books, 2004).

From a discourse analytic perspective, it can be argued that the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse is always in danger of promoting a narrow set of partisan interests and discrete political projects. For example, the discourse describes an almost infinite number of potential ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ or ‘havens’, each of which then logically becomes a legitimate target for various kinds of counter-terrorism measures. As noted above, the literature identifies a large list of potential ‘terrorist havens’, including: all failed, weak or poor states; the widely accepted list of state sponsors of terrorism; a much longer list of passive state sponsors of terrorism; states with significant Muslim populations; Islamic charities and NGOs; informal, unregulated banking and economic systems; the media; the internet; diasporas in western countries; groups and regions characterised by poverty and unemployment; the criminal world; radical Islamist organisations; mosques and Islamic schools; insurgent and revolutionary movements; and ‘extremist’ ideologies – among others. The identification of these groups and domains as ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ or ‘havens’ consequently functions to permit a range of restrictive and coercive actions against them – all in the name of counter-terrorism. That is, the discourse can be deployed politically in a variety of ways: domestically for example, it can be used to discipline society, demonise dissent, control the media, enhance the powers of the security services, centralise executive power, create a surveillance society and expand state regulation of social life.

In addition to this broad legitimating function, the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse can also support a range of discrete political projects and partisan interests, including: re-targeting the focus of military force from dissident groups and individuals (which privileges law enforcement) to states (which privileges the powerful military-industrial complex); legitimating broader counter-insurgency programmes where the real aims lie in the maintenance of a particular political-economic order;⁸² de-legitimising all forms of counter-hegemonic or revolutionary struggle, thereby functioning as a means of maintaining the liberal international order; and selectively justifying projects of regime change,⁸³ economic sanctions, military base expansion, military occupation, military assistance for strategic partners, and the isolation of disapproved political movements. In the end, the discourse functions – in its present form – to permit the extension of state hegemony both internationally and domestically. Far from being an objective academic analysis therefore, it may serve a number of distinctly ideological purposes.

Ineffectual Policies

A final criticism of the ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ discourse is that it has proved in its prescriptions to be largely ineffectual and in many cases, counter-productive. In particular, the policy of employing military force against ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ or ‘havens’, a reasonable policy within the confines of the discourse, actually has an astonishing record of failure. For example, Israel has mounted military strikes and targeted assassination against ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ in the Palestinian territories and surrounding states for over fifty years without any significant reduction in the overall

⁸² This argument is powerfully made in relation to Colombia, where the U.S. has long employed counter-insurgency warfare to preserve social formations conducive to its political and economic interests, in Doug Stokes, “‘Iron Fists in Iron Gloves’: The Political Economy of US Terrorocracy Promotion in Colombia”, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* Vol.8, No.3 (2006), 368-87.

⁸³ As Carol Winkler has noted, official claims of providing a terrorist sanctuary have preceded virtually every U.S. military intervention since the Reagan era. See Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism*.

level of terrorism. The apartheid regime in South Africa adopted a similarly futile policy against its neighbours during the 1980s, carrying out numerous raids, bombings and assassinations. U.S. military strikes on Libya in 1986, Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998 and the use of force in the current war on terror against Afghanistan and Iraq, have all failed to noticeably reduce the overall number of terrorist attacks against U.S. interests. More broadly, the use of military force against ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ in Colombia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Turkey, Spain and elsewhere has in every case failed to appreciably affect the level of terrorist violence.

It could even be argued that the attempts since September 11 to eliminate ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ in Afghanistan, Iraq, and South Lebanon in particular, have had the opposite effect – despite premature claims of success in Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban. In reality, these military interventions have solidified and greatly strengthened various Middle Eastern insurgent and ‘terrorist’ groups, reinforced new militant movements and coalitions in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, provided new regions of conflict where dissident groups can gain military experience, and greatly increased overall levels of anti-Western sentiment across the region.⁸⁴ It is probable that the price of these policies will be many more years of insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, and an ongoing terrorist campaign against U.S. interests (and those of its close allies) which will in turn, demand further military actions against ‘terrorist sanctuaries’; such is the circular logic of the discourse. The main problem of course, is that the discourse focuses on the symptoms and enablers of dissident terrorism, rather than its underlying causes and poses a palliative remedy rather than a curative one. From one perspective, it is actually an impediment to dealing with terrorism because it functions as a closed system of discourse, preventing discussion of the political grievances which cause individuals and groups to seek out places of sanctuary from where they can launch attacks in the first place.

Conclusion

There is a need for researchers and public officials to be far more reflective and critical of the language they employ and the ‘knowledge’ they produce, because discourse and knowledge is never neutral; it always works for someone and for something. In this case, the language and knowledge of the ‘terrorism sanctuaries’ discourse frequently works to maintain the hegemony of certain powerful states and a particular international order which is beneficial to a few but violent and unjust to many more. It also works to obscure the much greater violence and suffering caused by current Western counter-terrorism policies (which have cost the lives of well over 40,000 civilians⁸⁵ and caused incalculable material destruction since September 11, 2001), the double standards and selectivity of Western approaches to terrorism and the ongoing problem of civilian-directed state terror.

A more humanistic and intellectually honest approach to ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ would begin with an exploration of the ways in which states and their accompanying doctrines of ‘national security’, ‘counter-insurgency’ and ‘counter-terrorism’ frequently provide a ‘haven’ for the wholesale terror inflicted on civilian populations around the globe. It would also involve an honest appraisal of the ways in which

⁸⁴ See Paul Rogers, *International Security Monthly Briefings*, Oxford Research Group, available online at: <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/paulrogers.htm>.

⁸⁵ This is the most conservative estimate based on the *Iraq Body Count* project, which as of 28 August 2006, estimated between 40,833 and 45,399 civilians had been killed in Iraq alone. Other studies such as *The Lancet* study put the figure at over 100,000. See <http://www.antiwar.com/casualties/>.

many modern democracies have sponsored, supported, tolerated and given sanctuary to some forms of terrorism while simultaneously demonising others. It has been argued that the level of terrorism in the international system is directly related to the extent that the great powers – who set the standards of acceptable conduct in the international system – practice, condone and support terrorist behaviour themselves.⁸⁶ Moreover, dissident terrorism can sometimes be a reaction to prior state terror; certainly, a number of contemporary terrorist groups have their origins in the ‘environment of impunity created by state terror during the late Cold War.’⁸⁷ From this perspective, all forms of terrorism – ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’, dissident and state-directed – can be understood as part of a single historical-political process. The issue of how to deal with ‘terrorist sanctuaries’ therefore, goes far beyond narrow conceptions of national security, deterrence or pre-emption. Instead, it calls for a profound re-evaluation of both the theory and practice of counter-terrorism and an appreciation of the need to construct a more just and equitable international order based on a morally consistent notion of human security.

⁸⁶ This argument is elegantly made in Stohl, ‘States, Terrorism and State Terrorism’.

⁸⁷ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 256.