# Conducting Field Research on Terrorism: a Brief Primer

**by Adam Dolnik**

***Abstract***

*This article focuses on the practical aspects of field research on terrorism. Firstly, it outlines some issues involved in the process of attaining a human research ethics/institutional review board clearance in order to be able to even begin the field research. It suggests some ways in which researchers can positively influence this review process in their favor. Secondly, the article focuses on the real and perceived dangers of field research, identifying practical steps and preparatory activities that can help researchers manage and reduce the risks involved. The article also covers the formalities and dilemmas involved in gaining access to the field. It then provides some insights into the topic of operating in conflict zones, followed by a section covering the ways of gaining access to sources, effective communication skills and influence techniques and addresses key issues involved in interviewing sources in the field. The final section focuses on identifying biases and interfering factors which researchers need to take into account when interpreting the data acquired through interviews. This article is a modest attempt to fill a gap in the literature on terrorism research by outlining some of the key issues involved in the process of doing field research. It incorporates insights from diverse disciplines as well as the author's personal experiences of conducting field research on terrorism in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Colombia, Mindanao, Uganda, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and India.*

***Introduction***

In the last 10 years arguably no other field in the social sciences has witnessed as great of an increase in academic output as the discipline known as Terrorism Studies. This has resulted in greatly enhanced understanding of specific contemporary topics such as Al-Qaeda, radical Islam, the radicalization process, terrorist uses of the internet, suicide terrorism, terrorist financing, home-grown terrorism, de-radicalisation and disengagement from terrorism, and the challenges non-state actors face in acquiring and weaponising chemical and biological agents. But while this exponential increase in terrorism literature has led to a welcome broadening of the scope of perspectives and approaches to studying the phenomenon, comparatively little attention has been devoted to attempts to systematically develop the quality of the Terrorism Studies discipline itself. For instance, while a new book on terrorism comes out roughly every 6 hours, only three books evaluating the state of the field and its future directions have been published in the last 10 years.[1] All three of these books as well as many recent panels of Terrorism Studies specialists tasked with evaluating the state of the discipline have unequivocally called for more historical

comparative research across different contexts, increased effort to incrementally build on past research conducted by other authors,[2] and above all, the need for more first hand research.[3]

Field research on terrorism has traditionally been surrounded by many myths, and has been called anything from "necessary" and "crucial" to "dangerous", "unethical" and "impossible". But despite common assumptions that such research is inherently difficult and dangerous, the fact is that many authors have over the years proven such assumptions to be unfounded. According to Silke, "the idea that terrorism research is inevitably highly dangerous and risky is mistaken."[4] The key, of course, is experience and a prior understanding of the issues involved, as well as the researcher's ability to anticipate likely developments and to adjust accordingly. But while there is an increasing interest among terrorism specialists in conducting field research, not a single volume that would provide prospective field researchers with a crucial starting point currently exists.[5] This article will attempt to address this critical gap by providing some preliminary practical insights into the challenges of such fieldwork, based on an interdisciplinary literature review as well the author's personal experiences of conducting field research on terrorism in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Colombia, southern Philippines, northern Uganda, Indonesia, northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, and southern Sudan. Obviously, it is impossible to cover all the issues in a journal-length article without sacrificing crucial details, country- and group-specific aspects ( particular cultural and gender concerns), while also avoiding the danger of slipping into an autobiographical mode and war-story telling when providing supporting evidence. To deal with these challenges, this article seeks to address only conceptual issues common to terrorism field research in general, and reserves concrete experiences and specific examples for the endnotes.[6] In addition, it is important to emphasize that it is not the ambition of this article to replace the wide body of relevant literature covering the theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks of qualitative research methods. Rather it is meant to supplement this literature with practical insights relevant to research on terrorism in conflict zones.

More specifically, the article will attempt to briefly address planning and preparation phases, Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) processes, formalities involved in getting into conflict zones, means of gaining access to sources and managing contacts, issues involved in interviewing militants in the field, a discussion on the risks involved, research ethics dilemmas, translation and interpretational issues, effective interviewing and rapport building steps, as well as other practical aspects such as the impact of such research on the researcher. The article will also attempt to help researchers set realistic expectations of how the process of interviewing militants and secretive government sources in conflict zones is organized, what the likely outcomes are, how to handle self-introduction among different interviewee audiences and how to navigate through challenges posed by government forces unsympathetic to researchers, how to reduce risk of physical harm when traveling in conflict zones, etc. The end product will be a preliminary "how to" guide to field research on terrorism, which will also serve as an invitation to the many highly experienced colleagues in the field to

share their fieldwork experiences, in order to assist the next generation of terrorism specialists in raising the standard of the Terrorism Studies discipline.[7]

***The Need for Field Research***

The field of Terrorism Studies has received considerable criticism for being overly event-driven, essentially descriptive in nature, relying on weak research methods,[8] focusing in isolation on individual groups (especially those that dominate the policy- and media discourse at the time), and for a very limited effort to build on past research conducted by other author.[9] In addition, considerable self-reflective criticism within the field has focused on the fact that much of the Terrorism Studies literature does not incorporate field research. According to Silke, "very few published attempts have been made to systematically study terrorists outside of a prison setting,"[10] confirming Crenshaw's observation that "the study of terrorism still lacks the foundation of extensive primary data based on interviews and life histories of individuals engaged in terrorism".[11] Silke concludes: "for a dramatic phenomenon of such intense interest to the media and wider world, such gapping hopes in the literature are nothing short of stunning."[12] This point has also become a lynchpin for the somewhat dubious discipline of "Critical Terrorism Studies", the proponents of which have also argued that "terrorism analysts rarely bother to interview or engage with those involved in 'terrorist activity' or spend any time on the ground in the areas most affected by conflict."[13] But the fact is that the relative lack of field research has long been recognized from *within* the Terrorism Studies discipline as well, and many terrorism analysts have in recent years made a significant effort to rectify this problem.[14]

Needless to say, while terrorism research does not easily lend itself to reliable, valid and systematic exploration in the field,[15] there are many ways through which field research on terrorism can contribute to our understanding of the causes, dynamics, and manifestations of terrorism and political violence. Firstly, given the highly emotional and subjective nature of the terrorism phenomenon, available data tends to be strongly politically manipulated by all sides, requiring a higher standard of verification to ensure the reliability and accuracy of findings. This is especially true for historical campaigns that had taken place in environments where the government possessed a virtual monopoly on the dissemination of information to the outside world. For researching such cases, field research becomes absolutely essential. This is especially true given the historical tendency of researchers to rely heavily on citing each other's work, which has led to the creation of a highly unreliable closed and circular research system, functioning in a constantly reinforcing feedback loop.[16] This then results in the common acceptance of various unsupported myths, which serve as foundations of "knowledge" in the field until proven otherwise.[17] The end product is the exponential proliferation and tacit validation of mistakes made by researchers, their assistants, interpreters, etc., which has led to recording of inaccurate data, including incorrect names, places, casualty figures, and even the creation of terrorist attack plots and case which *never happened*.[18] Today's terrorism research simply requires fieldwork in order to break this debilitating cycle.

Secondly, much of the current research relies on the government perspective, which brings its own biases. For instance, while effective governmental countermeasures are consistently cited as one of the key historical reasons leading to the decline of terrorist groups, effective tools for measuring success in counterterrorism remain largely nonexistent,[19] and contemporary research tends to be further skewed by factors such as comparatively easier access to government data and the one-sided nature of research funding[20] (in this respect terrorism research is sometimes reminiscent of lung cancer research funded by a tobacco company).[21] Unsurprisingly, this situation leads researchers to stress the role of government policies as the decisive factor in the decline of terrorist violence,[22] even though such a claim rarely takes the form of a testable proposition. As observed by A. K. Cronin, the extent to which terrorist campaigns transform independently of government countermeasures thus remains among a long list of questions we currently lack reliable answers to.[23] Field research and interviews with perpetrators and organizers of terrorist violence are crucial in providing at least some counterbalance to this inherent and largely unavoidable bias.

Thirdly, secondary source data is frequently incorrect on crucial details. This is especially true with respect to historical cases that occurred prior to the age of electronic media in countries where access to any reliable and independent sources was practically non-existent. For instance, in my research on terrorist innovation[24], I have relied on the meticulous chronological work of Mickolus and his colleagues, who have filled thousands of pages with detailed information on all terrorist incidents recorded since 1968.[25] After having had the chance to interview dozens of perpetrators, witnesses, victims and investigators of many of the historical attacks recorded in those chronologies, I found that many of the details were simply incorrect. Sometimes the dates were wrong, in most cases the casualty figures were uncertain or disputed, there would be at least 3 interpretations of who was behind any given attack and why (including multiple conspiracy theories), there would be multiple claims of responsibility, the details of the specific modus operandi were frequently subject to the guessing and imagination of the reporter, and my overall impression and understanding of practically any historical attack changed dramatically after researching it in the field. This is not to take anything away from the very helpful work of Mickolus and his colleagues; it simply highlights the fact that because of the inherent deficiencies in access to historical data, it is important to engage in more rigorous efforts of cross-checking the facts of specific cases via field research.

Importantly, there is a cultural element that is crucial in determining the level of trust with which one approaches government data. While during interviews with investigators of the 7/7 bombings in the UK, the researcher can have a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the details provided, it would be a mistake to extend the same level of trust to highly controversial cases such as the 1979 hostage takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca or the 2004 Beslan school siege, where existing versions are strongly politically manipulated by all sides. In investigating such cases, field research is simply unavoidable if the researcher is to have any confidence in his or her ability to describe what actually transpired. And since much of our analysis of the terrorist's intentions, tactics, strategy, and possible countermeasures depends on

the ability to accurately reconstruct specific events, the fact is that in most cases this cannot be accurately done from open sources alone.

Fourthly, although there is a considerable amount of data "from the horse's mouth" available through interviews with terrorists published in mainstream electronic and print media, the fact is that many of the questions asked in such media interviews are designed to trigger a "soundbite" response, as opposed to seeking deeper and more complex insights. In addition, when terrorists speak to the media they have a clear goal of spreading a particular type of message depending on the target audience. Needless to say, if given the chance, terrorism researchers would frequently ask different questions, in a different setting and in a different way, thus very likely triggering different responses. This, of course, depends on the given researcher's rapport and level of trust with the interviewee, but the point is that a deeper access to terrorists via in-depth interviews has a great deal to offer over the selective "plugging in" of quotes from media interviews we as analysts frequently engage in. This is especially true given the fact that most terrorists speak differently, based on the media outlet the interview is for, and the specific target audience they are trying to influence. This does not mean that in interviews conducted by researchers such problems do not exist; at the same time, conducting the interview personally allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions that help test the validity and reliability of the answers.

And finally, field research is about so much more than data collection. In fact, it could be argued that it is the *process itself* that plays the more crucial role of educating the researcher and deepening his or her knowledge about the context, and everyday realities in which the perpetrators, supporters, and victims of terrorism operate. This exposure to reality alone can rapidly change the researcher's perceptions on many different fronts. Quite simply, one can read all available books and sources on a particular terrorist campaign, but without field visits and exposure to the environment there is much tacit knowledge the researcher simply will not be aware of. In many ways it is the "just looking factor"[26] of field research that by itself justifies its benefits.

***Human Research Ethics Review Process***

The concept of human research ethics initially came to prominence in the aftermath of the Nuremburg trials, which uncovered the shocking nature of Nazi medical experiments. Over time, the issue received further attention due to specific controversial projects, such as Stanley Milgram's obedience/compliance experiment, Philip Zimbardo's infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, or the recently revisited 1940s National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded study, in which US public health researchers infected hundreds of people in Guatemala with syphilis and gonorrhea without their consent.[27] Today, most universities and public research institutions in Western countries have an internal human research ethics/institutional review body, which has to approve any research involving human subjects. By the very nature of the field of study, terrorism research raises many questions from the human research ethics perspective, and this frequently becomes the biggest challenge of the entire process of terrorism field research. For instance, some of the regulations (i.e.: all subjects should be treated as equally and as justly as

possible during the research) are practically impossible to fulfill, because terrorism is fundamentally about two groups that are in conflict with one another and as observed by Jackson, for some groups "maintaining beneficence for the population and protecting all the individuals involved seems absolutely impossible."[28] Also, given the nature of terrorism research, there is a frequent conflict between the interests of the research funders and the people who are being studied, and some research results are likely to assist in formulation of governmental counterterrorism efforts, which in essence seek to deliberately *undermine* the "well-being" of "participants".[29] How does one achieve a balance of risks and benefits in an environment in which "benefits" to the funders (states) in increasing their counterterrorism capability are achieved by causing "harm" to the research participants (terrorists)?

As a result of this core problem, practically no field activity in this area will fall into the category of 'low risk research' (defined as research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort)[30] and thus it is highly likely that researchers will have to go through the dreadful Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) process prior to commencing their project.[31] In most cases, the IRB/HREC members will have limited understanding of terrorism research so practically any project in this field will raise alarm. In addition, the members of such committees are rarely active researchers, and the dynamic is such that there is a premium on nitpicking and identifying problems with *any* proposal, so for a terrorism researcher this can be a highly frustrating exercise. This is especially the case when HREC/IRB members mechanically demand documents such as copies of letters of invitation to participate in research, sample questionnaires, participant information packages, copies of all documents and other material used to inform potential participants about the research including advertisements, consent forms, proxy/substitute consent forms, debriefing information, contact detail cards, etc.

When dealing with this process, there are several specific issues to consider. At the most basic level, the ethicality of research is determined by calculating whether the potential benefits of the research outweigh its risks.[32] As a result, the issue of a human research ethics clearance will require a great degree of interpretation of what constitutes risks and benefits of such research. Further, as cited in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the ethical guidelines outlined in the document "are not simply a set of rules. Their application should not be mechanical. It always requires, from each individual, deliberation on the values and principles, exercise of judgment, and an appreciation of context."[33] It remains a fact, however, that most IRB's/HRECs may not be in a position to appreciate the context of much of terrorism research, despite their unquestionable and sincerest effort to do so. Consequently, many clearance granting bodies tend to apply ethical research principles (initially designed to deal with ethical issues involved in clinical trials) rather mechanically, which in turn can make the research practically impossible, since the on-the-ground political realities of countries plagued by crime, corruption, conflict and terrorism are markedly different from the controlled laboratory settings that inform IRB/HREC requirements.

First of all, in many cases the interviews will be highly opportunistic, and the questions researchers will ask will be determined by the nature and expertise of each specific respondent they are able to get access to, which, in turn, is something that cannot be predicted before actually attempting to make contact in the field. In such situations, providing advance lists of persons to be interviewed and copies of sample questionnaires makes little sense, since the situation is often fluid and even meetings arranged in advance frequently do not materialize. Similarly, in conflict settings the concept of each interviewee signing a consent form or any other document is completely ludicrous, as it will not only ruin the researcher's credibility due to fears of espionage; being asked to sign documents will also automatically trigger fear of manipulation of the signature for fake confessions by government forces. Finally, in interviews with members of communities involved in political violence, it is in the best interest of the research participants that they be provided deniability of having had any substantial contact with the researcher, as this can lead to subsequent arrest, prolonged interrogation, and even torture in the hands of government troops. As such, the IRB/HRECs routine requirement of signed consent forms constitute an unjustifiable risk to the participants, which is somewhat ironic given that the stated purpose of human research ethics committees is to "protect the welfare and rights of participants involved in research."[34] As observed by Jackson, "standard application of [ethical] requirement across all terrorism research may risk producing some rather perverse outcomes, - some of which … go against fundamental intent of the regulations themselves."[35]

To assist researchers with the IRB/HREC review process, here are some of the ethical issues that are frequently raised by these bodies in relation to terrorism research. Firstly, when dealing with governmental sources, the one issue that always arises is secrecy and level of classification of the particular information being conveyed during an interview. In reality however, government sources are very well aware of what type of information they can provide, and typically abide by a "when in doubt do not disclose" policy. Occasionally, members of security services do choose to convey information that they deem to be sensitive – accompanied by the request not to be cited. Given ethical considerations as well as the importance of reputation, credibility and trustworthiness in the field, the researcher is naturally motivated to abide by such a request. Moreover, in most cases it is not difficult to fulfill such requests, as the information at hand can often be traced to an existing open source, which allows an academically viable citation of the data without resorting to attribution to a classified source. In fact, since it is frequently estimated that around 90 percent of all information possessed by intelligence agencies is available in open sources, the key challenge in Terrorism Studies is not so much acquiring the information, but rather navigation through the "noise" in order to distinguish which of the many versions of events available in the public domain are credible. This is where classified sources and interviews with investigators, witnesses and direct participants of specific events are exceptionally useful, as they can help the researcher navigate through the jungle of open sources.

The second ethical question that is often raised in relation to interviewing perpetrators and victims of political violence is the issue of emotional distress caused to the interviewee during the process of recollecting specific violent events. The bottom line is that since extreme violence

is at the core of the research field itself, it is simply impossible to fully eliminate such a risk, no matter how sensitive the researcher may be in trying to avoid questions that could trigger painful memories. At the same time, the researcher can minimize the risks involved by acknowledging his or her understanding of the emotional difficulty of the interview process, and can offset the negative impact of emotional recollection by empathetic listening, and by providing the interviewee with the opportunity to recollect positive images associated with their grief (i.e. victims speaking about the death of their loved ones would be provided the opportunity to speak about happy memories of time together, etc.). Especially when dealing with people who feel victimized and neglected, the therapeutic effect of having been heard cannot be overemphasized, [36] and provides a much better alternative to the common HREC/IRB's requirement that the researcher should be responsible for offering psychological counseling services to interviewees that could potentially be traumatized. Though undoubtedly well intentioned, such a suggestion completely misses the mark, as in most countries the issue of "psychological health" is reserved for the mentally ill, and offering such services to an interviewee will frequently be perceived as calling the person "crazy". The point is that the importance of being sensitive to the frequently unimaginable psychological trauma experienced by interviewees, (whether they are on the giving or the receiving end of political violence, or both), is clear. This reality becomes immediately obvious to anyone once they are sitting face to face with former child soldiers who were forced to beat their own mothers or siblings to death as part of initiation, only to later engage in similar brutalities, including rape and forced cannibalism; or former hostages who saw their own children killed in heavy handed rescue operations; or villagers whose sons were brutally tortured to death by government troops; or terrorists who all too frequently crave attention and express cold blooded pride when talking about killing, while at the same time showing considerable emotion when talking about the deaths of their own loved ones. Perhaps it is not the HREC/IRB that is best positioned to issue theoretical advice on how to handle such situations, and it should be left to the researcher who has intimate knowledge of the conflict and the necessary experience.

The third frequently raised ethical issue concerns the risk of interviewees disclosing details about their involvement in illegal activity, which could later be used against them in a court of law. To what extent does the principle of confidentiality apply to such cases? What should the researcher do if in the course of research he or she uncovers specific information about an impeding attack? In this case again, there is no clear-cut answer. Fortunately, this scenario is rather hypothetical, since in most interviews terrorists tend to avoid this level of detail, frequently claiming to be falsely accused of involvement in "terrorism" by the state. In some cases, terrorists will talk about their involvement in "illegal activity", but this is typically in reference to activities of a political nature, which they see as justifiable or even admirable (or for which they have already been sentenced), and thus see no point in disguising their involvement. Further, if the interviewees are willing to share their involvement in illegal activities with a Western researcher, they are likely to be willing to share it with anyone. And since terrorism researchers will rarely speak to anyone who has not been already interviewed by local or international media, they are

extremely unlikely to end up in a situation where they have exclusive access to incriminating details about specific criminal activity that has occurred in the past, and absolutely unlikely to learn about any new specific threats for the future.

Fourthly, there is a somewhat curious tendency of IRB's/HRECs to focus on protecting an ethical norm, at the expense of focus on protecting the researcher.[37] It is often assumed that in the relationship to research participants the researcher has the upper hand, and since the ethics process is designed to protect "vulnerable research populations", much of the burden is placed on the researcher in a one-sided way. But is this really appropriate in the context of terrorism research? The notion that an academic sitting with gunmen in their stronghold is the more powerful figure in the relationship, and that the gunmen constitute a "vulnerable population" is somewhat bizarre. In this case the situation is reversed, or at the very least, both sides are "equally unsafe."[38] In addition to this lopsided view of the researcher-participant relationship, the IRB models also do not address the issue of potential exploitation of the researcher by the respondents, which is a major omission given the fact that research subjects frequently regard the research process as a *quid pro quo* relationship.[39]

This is associated with another ethical issue, and that is the possibility of interviewees gaining a false impression that agreeing to an interview will somehow lead to direct improvement of their *personal* situation. For example, villagers that have been subject to harsh treatment in the hands of the terrorists or the government troops may falsely hope that their participation in the project will result in the public exposition of their suffering, leading to possible material compensation from either government sources or the international community. Similarly, combatants often ask for favours directly, whether it is money, donation of computers or generators, assistance in immigration issues, passing gifts to family members living in the researcher's home country, or even university scholarships to study at the researcher's home institution. This puts the researcher in a highly uncomfortable position, as providing some of the requested assistance is not only time-consuming, difficult and costly, it can also be illegal if it is branded as providing assistance to a terrorist organization. Some reciprocal favors are naturally frequently needed to aid in establishing research access in the first place (e.g. buying the respondent tea or lunch, or bringing small toys for his kids), but it is a good idea for researchers to make it clear right in the beginning of the interview that "while the project cannot benefit [the respondent] personally, the knowledge gained can be useful in saving lives in the future." This has proven to be a generally persuasive approach, which motivates respondents to participate, while also pre-empting any false hopes for personal gain. This does not mean that attempts at eliciting reciprocal favors from the researcher will not be made, but the point is to reduce expectations from the start. Then with experience, researchers can expect to become conditioned and rather resilient to this reality, and will develop ways of pre-empting and turning down such requests in an elegant way that does not damage relationships.

Another ethical dilemma lies in the interview process itself. As emphasized later in this article, effective interviewing takes skill and practice, and involves active listening, a nonjudgmental attitude, and sometimes validating the respondents' core views in order to build rapport. This, of

course, takes discipline and training oneself to empathize with views of people that contradict or even deeply offend our own, and to refrain from trying to persuade them or challenge them.[40] At the same time, this approach potentially raises an ethical dilemma, in the possibility of the researcher being viewed as a "legitimizer" of terrorist violence.[41] One way out of this dilemma is to apply an approach commonly used by hostage negotiators, who look for empathetic ways to acknowledge or validate the legitimate grievances behind the militants' actions while carefully differentiating these from the actions themselves. [42] This process makes it harder for the terrorists to label the interviewer/negotiator as unreasonable, creates chances to de-escalate the situation emotionally, and can help create a wedge between their grievances and their actions, which, in turn, may help them to question the connection.[43] Not only is this approach useful in avoiding a potentially dangerous exchange of views, it can even build more respect for the interviewer than mechanically agreeing with everything that is said, which is an action the genuineness of which will likely be questioned. Still, it is a good idea to refrain from actively contributing one's own view on the matters of discussion unless the interviewee specifically asks for the researcher's opinion.

Overall, the two key issues of human research ethics involve "informed consent" and "confidentiality". The problem is that in the field of terrorism research, these issues can frequently be in conflict with one another, as insistence on signed consent forms to satisfy the former can endanger the fulfillment of the latter (confidentiality), in the scenario that the researcher is detained by government forces and all his or her belongings are searched and confiscated. And while informed consent is undeniably important, the assumption that the researcher or the IRB/HREC will be more aware of the risks to potential research participants than the participants themselves is hardly justified. Quite simply, people engaged in everyday survival in conflict zones have an acute awareness of the risks posed by talking to journalists or researchers, and when in doubt they tend to decline participation. In some cases, the approached candidates are willing to talk, often agreeing to take significant risks to tell their story, simply because they think that it is important. In such cases, should it not be up to them, rather than an ivory tower ethics committee, to make the cost-benefit calculation? The case for this argument is especially strong in relation to militants actively engaging in armed conflict. Since these men and women willingly take extraordinary risks in their daily "occupation", and since their mission is defined by inflicting bodily harm, should the issue of their own "safety" during participation in research not be treated with greater leniency than in cases involving other vulnerable and disadvantaged researched populations? This is especially the case when the research complies with a strict security protocol dictated by the research participants themselves, often forcing the researcher to put him or herself in potentially dangerous situations in order to protect the participants.

Another issue is: what actually constitutes *informed* consent, and how much specific information should the researcher be obligated to disclose in order to establish this principle? Should the researcher, for instance, be obligated to disclose the source of funding? As Fair points out, in places like Afghanistan or Pakistan, disclosing that the research is funded by "US government"

will almost universally trigger the perception that the researcher is a spy funded by the CIA, and this can of course be detrimental not only to the research project, but to the well-being of the researcher as well.[44] Along the same lines, there is a practical need to negotiate different trust relationships with the state actor who needs to be persuaded about the harmless or even beneficial role of the researcher's activities in the conflict zone in order to allow access, and completely different trust relationships with the research participants who are at war with this state actor. This can pose a serious dilemma to researchers, as self-introduction and rapport building with these disparate actors requires different approaches and even different versions.[45] Do such rhetorical gymnastics involving slight changes in vocabulary and disclosed "opinions" on the conflict depending on the audience constitute deception, or is this just necessary political maneuvering without which no research is possible? And finally, if informed consent is established by providing the participants with a long list of reasons for why participation is dangerous and potentially harmful to them, why in the world would anyone want to participate at all? This is especially the case when any potential outcomes of the research are much more likely to benefit only the funders of the study who seek the knowledge on how to undermine the "well being" of the participants themselves through effective counterterrorism. Are researchers really expected to attempt to talk willing interviewees *out of* speaking to them by presenting an exhaustive list of possible dangers of participation?

In conclusion, dealing with IRB/HREC processes can be a frustrating exercise, and despite the insistence of such bodies that their job is not to make the research impossible but rather to raise awareness of the ethical issues involved, the impression researchers sometimes get after going through the ethics review process is quite the opposite. This is unfortunate because ethical considerations are important, and the whole exercise could potentially be a good opportunity for researchers to genuinely consider the possible implications of their actions in dilemmatic situations that they may encounter in the course of research. Unfortunately, the frequently unqualified micromanagement from the side of ethical review bodies often forces researchers to avoid the process at all costs,[46] creating a lose-lose situation for everyone, including the research participants.

A more productive approach would be for IRB/HRECs to use their experience to alert the researchers to issues they may have not considered, while simultaneously placing greater trust in the conscience and ability of researchers to make decisions on the ground, and being less skeptical of the capacity of potential respondents to make their own decisions about the risks of participation. For their part, terrorism researchers can help their own case by communicating with their institution's IRB/HREC *prior* to applying for clearances, in order to familiarize its members with the specifics of the research field, asking for their feedback and inviting them to a joint problem solving discussion about how potential ethical obstacles could usefully be overcome. This can create a blueprint protocol for handling specific issues in the future, and given the review board members' active participation in the constructive debate in advance, they will likely feel greater ownership of such a protocol, and will in turn be more likely to approach the project constructively, as opposed to playing their not uncommon role of spoilers.[47] This

approach may in some cases not be successful, of course, depending on the dynamics and nature of the review board, personality characteristics of its members, and the institutional influence of the individual researcher applying for an ethics clearance. In addition, the dynamics are likely to be different based on the academic culture of the country where the researcher is applying. Because of these differences, an urgent need exists for terrorism researchers to share individual experiences and learn from each other's experience in overcoming the IRB/HREC trap.

***Dangers***

Any researcher who has ever gone into the field to interview militants has encountered the common perception that such work is by definition highly dangerous. As stated in the introduction, this is a popular misconception, and the fact is that fieldwork on terrorism can be done rather safely, assuming good preparation, knowledge and prior experience. By the same token, such fieldwork can be incredibly dangerous for the naive and the unprepared, and conducting "risk free" research on terrorism is in some contexts (i.e. Somalia, Chechnya) practically impossible. Either way, the fact is that terrorism researchers frequently face the assumption that terrorism research is dangerous and thus need to have a thorough understanding of what the actual risks are in order to be able to address the issue when dealing with HREC/ IRB's or University Occupational Health and Safety Units, which are more likely to be supportive of the research if the researcher demonstrates an understanding of the risks, as opposed to when he or she simply argues that the danger does not exist. While space limitations do not allow a comprehensive treatment of this crucial issue, the following paragraphs will attempt to at least briefly cover some of the most important risks that researchers encounter during field research. Some of the more common risks such as disease and street crime are not covered here, as these are outlined in the widely available general travel advisories.

The first risk that comes to the mind of most people is the danger of being kidnapped or murdered. Despite the fact that instances of this happening to researchers have historically been very rare, the threat is clearly growing. While it would be inaccurate to claim that reporters and academics interviewing terrorists in the 1960s through 1990s were perfectly safe, terrorist groups in the past typically did not see it as advantageous to harm the people whom they depended on to positively influence the public views of themselves and their activities by providing favorable coverage. However, as terrorists gained the capacity to independently access their target audiences and international media via the use of e-mail, designated websites, chat rooms and *Youtube*, there has been a decline in the terrorists' dependence on journalists and researchers to get their "story out", turning the activity of interviewing terrorists increasingly dangerous. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 801 journalists have been killed since 1992, out of which 142 were killed in crossfire/combat and 581 had been murdered.[48] In this regard, it was especially the videotaped beheading of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan and the subsequent adoption of this tactic by Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq that forever changed the perceptions of researchers around the world about the dangers of interviewing terrorists. And while "only" 76 of the total 801 journalists' deaths occurred on what has been assessed as "dangerous assignments",[49] the fact that Daniel Pearl was lured in under the

pretext of conducting an interview only to be kidnapped and brutally beheaded on video, also lingers in the heads of most researchers heading into the field. While accepting a certain level of personal risk comes with field research, it is one thing getting killed in a car accident, crossfire or by an IED, and quite another to die like Daniel Pearl - the prospect of the researcher's family seeing the videotape is truly frightening. Nevertheless, kidnapping and murder of (especially Western) researchers by terrorist groups has been extremely rare, and researchers can manage this risk by proper preparation and planning. Most of the journalists who are murdered in the field are not killed by terrorists, but rather assassinated at the order of different power figures personally threatened by the individual's reporting.

A comparatively greater threat to researchers is kidnapping for ransom. Including unreported cases (which constitute up to 90% of all kidnappings[50]), it is estimated that annually 10,000-15,000 kidnapping incidents occur worldwide[51] though the number of (expatriate) *Westerners* kidnapped annually is "only" around 200-300. The currently most prevalent locations for kidnapping foreigners for ransom include Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Philippines, Nigeria, Iraq, Brazil, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Nepal, India and Russia.[52] A more recent trend in some of these countries (i.e. Colombia and Philippines) has been the use of so called "express-kidnappings" in which the hostage is periodically taken to an ATM and forced to withdraw maximum daily limit from all his or her credit cards until the accounts run dry. Other than the moment of kidnapping itself, the most threatening part is being rescued, with 40-70% of all fatalities among hostages occurring during rescue attempts. Researchers planning to go into the field should remember to budget for kidnap and ransom (K&R) insurance and kidnap survival training (discussed below) in grant applications.

Another important threat in conflict and post conflict areas is constituted by landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnance. According to some sources, there are an estimated 110 million active mines scattered in over 70 countries and about 2,000 people are involved in landmine accidents every month, translating into one victim every 20 minutes. At the current rate of some 100,000 mines being removed each year it would take 1,100 years to rid the world of mines, but with nearly 2 million new mines being planted each year, the end to the threat is nowhere in sight.[53] When moving around in conflict or post conflict areas such as Angola, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mozambique, the danger from land mines is very real and researchers should seek mine and unexploded ordnance recognition and response training prior to travel.

Probably the riskiest activity researchers will ever engage in during fieldwork is simply traveling on roads in third world countries. According to the World Health Organization, over 1.2 million people worldwide are annually killed in traffic accidents and between 20-50 million suffer non-fatal injuries.[54] No one who has traveled in the developing world will be surprised that over 90% of the deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries; the likelihood of being involved in a traffic accident while traveling in these environments is relatively high. It is advisable, though sometimes very costly, to hire a four-wheel drive with a reliable driver (see section on Getting Around). Riding motorcycle taxis (boda boda) is naturally a faster way to get

through congested city traffic, but it is also the most dangerous activity a terrorism researcher will engage in on a field trip. In such situations, it is a good idea to look for the oldest driver in the crowd, whose driving skill and style are proven by time and are certainly likely to be superior to that of his 12-year-old competitors. Spending a minute or two casually chatting to the driver to determine whether or not he is intoxicated by alcohol or under the influence of drugs is a good time investment. The same is true for paying attention to the general condition of the breaks and tires.

To conclude, functioning in conflict and post conflict zones has its risks, ranging from high profile threats like kidnapping or landmines to common threats such as disease, street crime and traffic accidents. A traveler's ability to manage these risks increases rapidly with experience and training. Closely following the situation on the ground from local sources is key, as is paying attention to preventive security measures. The best source of knowledge on how to survive in conflict zones can be found in Robert Young Pelton's now slightly dated yet absolutely brilliant book *The World's Most Dangerous Places,*[55] which provides a humorous and very useful and practice- oriented guide to the world's hotspots. It is also important to point out that contrary to popular perception, research on terrorism does not necessarily have to involve travel to conflict areas. There are many former terrorists who live in exile or are in hiding in Western and Middle-Eastern countries. Sometimes the researcher is much better off traveling to destinations like London, Istanbul or Dubai, where interviews can be arranged in a safe environment. In addition, the interviewees there are frequently more relaxed and more open than in their home countries.

***Training***

As mentioned above, one of the keys to managing risks during field research is experience and training. Traveling through the developing world with a backpack provides excellent opportunity to acquire the basic instincts, know-how, and etiquette in a less threatening environment where one can still learn from mistakes. In addition, undergoing one of the pre-deployment hostile environment survival training courses that are available for journalists and humanitarian aid workers is an excellent investment.

Like most researchers with incrementally growing field experience in conflict zones, I did not give much importance to survival training until realizing my vulnerability in a highly volatile situation I had encountered in Chechnya. Two years later I underwent a 9-day specialized war-zone survival course annually organized by the Czech army for journalists, diplomats, and NGO workers on war-zone assignments. The course, which included prior psychological and physical testing, combined classroom instruction on weapons, IED dangers, outdoor orientation and radio communication skills, basic emergency trauma medicine, common insurgent ambush tactics, essentials of traveling under armed escort, CBRN awareness, practical aspects of war-zone survival, kidnap for ransom trends, and practical lessons on hostage survival (i.e. self-humanization, building rapport, inducing Stockholm Syndrome etc.). Most of the course took place in the outdoors in the cold and rainy autumn season. It included vertical and horizontal repelling, rock climbing, improvised first aid, improvised hunting and trapping, CS gas

chambers, unarmed movement in the battlefield under fire, highly challenging obstacle courses and boot camp type activities - all designed to completely exhaust the participants. In the next stage the parameters of a simulated conflict zone were introduced, and the participants, assuming the role of a UN peace delegation, were moved into a field base. After facing repeated rocket fire in the middle of the night forcing multiple relocations to a shelter, the team eventually embarked on a long march in full gear in challenging terrain under pursuit. Facing ambushes, violent checkpoints, simulated serious injuries to members of the team, and sleeping in the forest with practically nothing, the participants reach a stage of complete physical exhaustion, starvation, sleep deprivation, and mental fatigue. This is where the exercise moved into the final stage, when one of the night ambushes against "government troops" was successful, and the participants were kidnapped by a group of armed rebels. Having been transported to a remote location, the participants are subject to repeated and diverse "enhanced interrogations methods", including water boarding, physical and psychological pressure, prolonged periods of immersion in cold water and forced stress positions, attacks by fighter dogs, mock executions, "the hole", simulated sexual assaults, constantly changing temperatures, and more physical abuse and sleep deprivation designed to completely wear the trainees down. The participants also experienced the mental pressure of being told that a ransom has been paid and that they are being released, only to have their hopes crushed by being transported to another location and "sold" to another group for slave labor, where the ordeal begins again. The whole course ended after the hostages were freed in an armed rescue operation.

Skeptics can point to the fact that participants in such a course consciously know that they will not be killed, and thus do not get a good enough experience to prepare them for a real situation. While that is certainly true, having been stripped down, beaten, attacked by dogs, dragged in an arm lock on knees downhill into a stream, only to have the wind purposefully knocked out for the purposes of getting cold muddy water into one's lungs, creates a situation in which the sensation of imminent harm becomes very real, triggering primary physical responses that are completely out of conscious control. The course is designed to have a highly functional purpose: to make each participant reach their physical and psychological limit, in order to give them an insight into their own reactions in extreme situations. The key to surviving prolonged captivity is to maintain a positive attitude and determination to survive no matter what. Having reached one's limits in a course like this is supposed to create a mental blueprint for real situations in the future, where the history of having experienced and "survived" the same mental and physical sensation results in some level of familiarity with the situation, yielding a more positive and determined attitude. It also has many positive side effects: participants who were previously skeptical about potential threats become more careful, and some novices who had naïve ideas about war journalism or NGO work realize their lack of preparedness to deal with the challenges and quit the chosen career path. Overall, researchers are well advised to undergo such a course, which even in the less extreme commercially available versions[56] brings many valuable experiences that will increase the researcher's survivability and resilience.

***Getting In***

One of the crucial parts of conducting field research is proper planning, which involves not only establishing initial contacts and arranging visas and travel schedules, but also includes preparation of questions and establishing realistic expectations as to what is achievable, and developing a thorough understanding of the limitations of the selected approach. It is admittedly difficult to do this for contexts where the researcher has no prior experience, and in such cases, it is useful to set modest goals and to conduct an initial scouting trip, in order to get acquainted with the environment and refine one's own expectations and research approach. Such scouting trips can also assist in the IRB/HREC process discussed above, as having previously been in the country of research can be a powerful persuasive criterion when advocating the feasibility and safety of the project. In addition, it is very difficult to actually describe the research plan in any significant detail prior to actually visiting the location, as many interviews are highly opportunistic, and availability and willingness of interviewees to participate changes from hour to hour, depending on external conditions and latest developments.

Going into some terrorism-ridden countries requires little more than a visa and a plane ticket, while some specific areas are impossible to access without violating local laws and regulations (which are sometimes designed specifically with that purpose in mind). The first question that arises is how to address the issue of filling in the "purpose of journey" column on the visa applications. Since researchers are not journalists, obtaining a journalistic accreditation is difficult, and filing in "research" is a highly risky exercise which can result in denial of entry, especially in cases where local security culture views "research" as being equivalent to "spying". Even if this is not the case, the researcher can subsequently be required to provide an official document outlining the purpose of research, sources of funding etc., which can be a time-consuming exercise without any guarantee of success.

That being said, this official approach can be very useful if the nature of the researcher's enquiry requires assistance of government sources only, as in many cases the approval to conduct research will be coupled with the appointment of a contact person who helps in organizing the interviews within government circles.[57] However, if the research design incorporates speaking to militants, terrorists, or people highly critical of the government, alerting the consular officers about the purpose of one's visit can be detrimental. Another risk of the official approach is that since the authorities have been alerted to the intention to conduct research, a rejection leaves the researcher with very little in the way of a backup plan, since conducting research regardless of explicit rejection of an application to do so is certainly seen as a worse case of misconduct than going on a tourist visa and dealing with any potential problems later. The safest option may be to apply for a generic business visa, which covers the researcher for a "work trip" and allows him or her to make the case that conducting research is their "business", and thus does not technically constitute a violation of the visa regime. Yet another useful way of getting around the issue is contacting a local academic institution with an offer to deliver a free lecture, and in exchange to get an invitation letter from that institution for the purposes of obtaining the visa. And given the fact that most visa applications and immigration arrival forms ask about the "primary" objective of the trip, filling in "lecture" does not constitute deceit, especially if the research activity is

framed as an opportunistic secondary purpose of the trip. In any case, it makes sense to be on the safe side, because incorrect visas leave the researcher highly vulnerable to exploitation, blackmail and deportation, which can only complicate attainment of visas in the future.

In many countries getting the entry visa is just the first step, and in order to enter a conflict-ridden area it is necessary to obtain a special permission. This requires a lot of paperwork, time, and money - all without any guarantee of success. Again, disclosing one's research plans can be dangerous, and offering too many details can preclude the researcher from doing any work in the field at all. One such case is Chechnya, which until recently was practically impossible for researchers to enter legally. Yes, if the researcher has been patient and endured enough bureaucratic abuse, passed all the security screenings designed to check how sympathetic his or her previous work had been to the official version of events (that means the only acceptable -- and typically untruthful-- version of events) one may have a chance to go on a guided bus tour to "Potemkin villages" where people are well-off, happy, singing, and all universally love the Russian government. If the researcher, however, wants to conduct serious research, these official trips are essentially useless. In such cases legal options are limited, and it is up to the researcher to determine how far they are willing to go in pursuit of their research objectives. The bottom line is that in most conflict zones, visas and official permissions are useful in getting the initial access to the area, but can become practically worthless pieces of paper once the researcher is on the ground. In fact, during a document check at a militant checkpoint such official documentation in the possession of the researcher can result in accusations of being a spy for the enemy, potentially creating a life-threatening situation.[58] As a result, there are no clear-cut answers and "do's" and "don'ts" to follow. Obviously, having official permissions to conduct research is (sometimes) advantageous. Still if local security services perceive the researcher to be a threat at any point, they will find a way to rid themselves of the problem, whether official permission exists or not. In such cases, a "deportation due to violation of the visa regime" constitutes a rather mild outcome.

***Getting Around***

Day-to-day operation in conflict areas poses specific challenges, and can be handled in different ways, depending on a number of factors such as the level of funding, personal threshold for discomfort and perceived risk, as well as Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations of one's employer or insurer, etc. Some employers or insurers can make a researcher's life very difficult, especially during travel to countries listed by most foreign ministries on a "do not travel to" list (i.e. Afghanistan, Sudan, Burundi, Iraq, Central African Republic, Somalia, Chad, Niger, Guinea etc.) For instance, on one of my trips to Afghanistan the university generously arranged additional coverage with an insurer, who, however, specified the following conditions for coverage:

- Keep a low profile
- Meet and greet/ drop off & pick up at the airport with armed escort in B6 armoured vehicle

- Daily transport in Kabul with low-profile soft skin vehicle and armed escort
- Movement outside of Kabul with armed escort in B6 armoured vehicle and Satellite Communications morning and evening communications schedule
- Avoid security forces installations, locations that are frequented by police and army personnel and government buildings in Kabul
- Emergency response and communications to be provided via local security provider
- Adhere to strict journey management planning and issue a daily movements plan to HQ (e.g. local security provider)
- Register with home nation embassy to receive current threat update and alerts
- Use approved accommodation only – secure guest-houses or internationally branded hotel such as the Serena Hotel.

Overall, this list is not so unreasonable, at least not for a businessman who wants to hold a few meetings with business partners in Kabul and get out as quickly as possible. But for a researcher on terrorism, whose interest focuses specifically on the sources of the threat, following these rules would make any meaningful research activity impossible.[59] Moreover, in addition to prohibitive costs, following many of the other regulations actually turns the researcher into a high profile target, as driving around in an easily identifiable Toyota landcruiser and an entourage runs somewhat contrary to the instruction to "keep a low profile." Staying in hotels like the Kabul Serena poses additional risks, as confirmed by the January 14th 2008 twin suicide attack in which Taliban militants penetrated the Serena and killed 6 people in the hotel's gym, [60] or the January 18th 2010 attack on the Serena, several shopping malls and the presidential palace, in which 5 people died and 71 were wounded.[61]

I opted for a compromise solution, by choosing a hotel in a less high-profile part of town which housed few foreigners and practically no westerners, was almost 80% cheaper and still had several guards at the front door. And while this hotel was not as well protected against a possible vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack as the Serena due to its closeness to the road and absence of blast mitigating barriers, it was at the same time a much less likely target for such a tactic due to its low profile and the close proximity to a Sunni mosque, which at the time still provided some deterrent to the employment of a large scale VBIED in the area.[62] Another option is staying with locals, which besides cost effectiveness can also be very useful in improving the researcher's credibility with the local population, as well as access to new sources.[63] When considering this choice it is vital to assess the security situation and the researcher's ability to reasonably fit in. The downside of this approach is the practical impossibility of sufficient rest, which can lead to complete exhaustion due to social activities, the local population's hospitality and the all-important process of actively communicating with people for 20 hours per day, especially in a foreign language.

In terms of travel, a similar range of options exists - using local buses and taxis, hiring a car with a driver, or traveling with armed escort. Each of these options presents specific challenges and

risks. For local transportation within cities, local taxis are usually sufficient, though in areas where kidnapping is prevalent, several rules should be followed. First of all, it is generally a good idea for the researcher to be the one selecting the taxi driver (as opposed to being the one selected), in order to avoid drivers that are potentially fishing for a prospective kidnap victim. In addition, it is important to rely on instinct, which is something that Westerners are not used to doing on a daily basis, because our lives are more or less straightforward and follow certain predictable rules and regulations. Quite simply, if driving into the mountains with a specific person does not feel right, for whatever reason, then do not do it. Even if the driver is a friend of a friend and even if turning him down will create a slightly socially uncomfortable situation, going against one's instincts is simply not worth the risk. Even among drivers that do "feel right", it is a good idea to go with experienced people who are preferably from the area to be visited, know the roads and have local contacts. Do not feel bad about "shopping around", as experienced drivers also assess the risk factors involved in the trip before deciding whether to accept the business. Admittedly, for some destinations there are not many drivers to choose from. In any case, it is prudent to be kind to drivers and to treat them like brothers, as they will be the ones on whom the researcher's life may depend on in moments of crisis.[64]

The same general rule applies to travel with armed escort, even in situations where the escort consists of soldiers or policemen assigned by the local government. For someone who is getting paid US $3 per day, protecting the researcher may be a very low priority if the situation gets messy, unless the former takes active steps toward giving them a personal stake in the matter. Giving guards cigarettes (depending on context and religious prohibitions), treating them for a meal or drink, remembering their names, asking about their families, sharing one's own food, or giving them small presents for their children will go a long way in increasing their loyalty. Creating bonds based on similarity and showing a sense of humor is key. The same goes for the many checkpoints researchers will encounter along the way. Here are a few rules to follow:

- Be patient, friendly, smile a lot.
- Do not give the impression of being in a hurry; this only drives the price up.
- Even if you have written permission to enter, do not be surprised if you are told that it is "not valid".
- Just because the checkpoint is manned by "the good guys" do not expect them to be friendly. The guards are frequently on edge, suspicious, traumatized, and facing constant danger of ambush, while being underpaid (if paid at all).
- Engage in small talk, share food and cigarettes, pass on souvenirs. Even small friendly gestures go a long way.
- Do not pay bribes. Making a personal bribe will leave you exposed and vulnerable to exploitation. If making a payment is unavoidable, ask the driver to negotiate and make the payment on your behalf, and reimburse him later.
- Leave a trail to make it easier for people to look for you.[65]

***Making Contact***

Making contact with terrorists is not as difficult as most people imagine. In practically any country it is possible to find people (usually journalists) who have studied the respective conflict for many years, speak the language and have had extensive prior dealings with the militant groups; they also often possess all the necessary phone numbers and contacts. These journalists never get the credit in the Western world they deserve for their expertise. The fact is that they are frequently extremely knowledgeable and helpful, taking serious risks in the field without any protection, insurance coverage, or reasonable remuneration. Many get kidnapped or killed in the line of duty (92 percent of all journalists killed on duty are local journalists)[66] without coming even close to the recognition granted to their Western colleagues.

It is specifically the generous help of local journalists that can provide a researcher with the all-important introduction to initial contacts.[67] And while many journalists may not logically be rushing to share such details with people that might be deemed as potential competition, being a researcher (as opposed to member of press) eases the situation, and many journalists are genuinely happy to assist without asking for anything in return. In other cases, cooperation can be incentivized, especially when the journalists realize that the researcher's expertise and network of contacts in other places around the world can be very useful to them as well. Similarly, agreeing to be interviewed for their articles or talk shows can constitute a useful *quid pro quo* gesture. In some cases, local journalists can benefit from arranging an interview with high-level officials themselves, as these figures can sometimes be persuaded to talk to a Western professor at a time when they would be reluctant to find the time to meet a local journalist.[68] And finally, many local correspondents in conflict areas also make a living as fixers for their Western colleagues; their services can be hired for a payment. Such an option can be attractive at many levels, as it is time efficient, fair, and can help the researcher maintain a professional distance and reduce feelings of obligation, which in turn can help the researcher to be more assertive in asking for what he or she wants. Further, a fixer can sometimes also serve as an interpreter and a driver in one person, reducing the overall expenditure.

When working with fixers, there are several things to keep in mind. First of all, it is typically better to pay fixers on the basis of meetings arranged, as opposed to a daily basis, as this encourages greater efficiency. Secondly, in some cases it is advisable to enlist the assistance of multiple fixers, as it is not infrequent for fixers to grossly overstate their reach and connections. By relying on one fixer the researcher risks wasting valuable time only to discover that the particular person cannot deliver. Also, each fixer will have a different network of contacts, which results in greater diversity of potential interviewees. Thirdly, as a responsibility to other researchers who will come in the future and who may not have a great deal of research funding, it is important to always negotiate the price for these services down as much as possible, in order to prevent the inflation of fixer/interpreter prices to unaffordable levels. In media attractive conflicts, the prices for these services quickly skyrocket, as resource abundant media companies move in and inflate the market. Skillful negotiation based on the argument that researchers are not journalists and do not have that kind of money can, in some cases, bring the price down by

50 percent.[69] Fourthly, it is not necessary to use fixers for interviews that researchers can easily arrange by themselves or via existing contacts. In most cases, when working in a new context where the researcher has no prior experience, fixers can be useful for establishing the initial "foot in the door", after which the researcher can use the snowball technique to significantly expand and build up his or her own network. Fifthly, researchers should be aware of the possibility of fixers (or interpreters and drivers) doubling as informants for the security services, resulting in a direct threat to the researcher and his interviewees.[70] On a final note, it should be noted that paying for access to sources can result in various scams, especially in media popular conflicts where the lucrative nature of the fixing business does not escape many creative minds. It is not unheard of for journalists in Peshawar to pay large sums of money for a phone interview with a "senior Taliban leader," who happens to be the fixer's cousin calling from a house next door.[71] In other cases, genuine terrorists agree to being interviewed but ask for money to "cover their expenses", stating a completely inflated figure in anticipation of making a profit. Researchers can prevent these situations by doing their homework, knowing which specific people are most relevant to the research question at hand, and doing a background check on the individuals the fixer is trying to set up interviews with out of their own initiative. Above all, it pays off to use common sense - if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

At the same time this is not to suggest that researchers should not be ambitious about pursuing meetings with persons crucial in their research, and should not *a priori* assume that something is impossible. Interviewing government ministers, generals and other high officials is in most countries surprisingly easy. High-level leaders of terrorist groups who are hiding in mountains and jungles with large sums of money offered as a reward on their head are naturally much more difficult to get to, but there is typically also a large number of lower level leaders, commanders, sympathizers, financiers, ideologues etc., who can usefully be interviewed. Expressing repeated and persistent interest to speak with them, accompanied by a consistently logical narrative can bear fruit. Also, just because the researcher is rejected the first time he or she asks for an interview, does not mean that the situation is unchangeable. In fact, a blanket rejection is often part of the game, which helps militants separate the casually interested from those who are really interested. So even when rejected, calling back and asking specifically about the reason for rejection, (safety issues, sensitivity of topic etc.) and asking for ways that these concerns could be addressed is a very useful way of going about it. In short, keep coming back and make it hard to say "no". [72] At the very least, researchers should strive to elicit a verbal commitment to an interview "next time" – since "commitment and consistency" is one of the key elements that drive human behaviour, an initial promise can be effectively leveraged in the future.[73]

On a final note, researchers should also be aware of the fact that interviews with terrorists almost never yield any ground-breaking information, especially when this is the first encounter between the researcher and the interviewee. Researchers should thus prepare themselves for a painstaking process of building trust, listening to very basic lectures on the "evil nature" of the West or the enemy government, standard ideological proclamations, and many conspiracy theories and twisted facts. This can, of course, be a highly frustrating process for a researcher who has

traveled a very long distance and spent a lot of time and resources on arranging the meeting in the first place, only to walk away with little new information. A somewhat classical example is the experience of Pakistani journalist Hasnain Kazim, who in a commendably honest article described the process of conducting an interview with a Pakistani Taliban commander in Islamabad. After spending a whole day changing locations and worrying about his safety, Kazim ended up with a thirty minute interview in which he learned absolutely nothing new.[74] Many interviews with "terrorists" take exactly this form, although it should be pointed out that Kazim's interview can still be considered comparatively successful, since he did not spend two weeks in a ridiculously overpriced container accommodation at a campsite located in a malaria infested swamp waiting for a phone call providing instructions for a meeting that never materialized.[75] But while many interviews with "terrorists" reveal little new information it does not necessarily mean that getting any useful insights is impossible. It is all about building relationships, establishing trust, trying to progress further over time, coming back, and asking the right questions.

***The Encounter***

As mentioned above, it is unlikely that the researcher will acquire exceptional pieces of information when meeting the research subject for the first time. This is usually due to the limited level of rapport and trust existing at the beginning. It is thus a good idea to focus the first few encounters primarily on rapport-building, with the objective of developing rapport and trust in order to gain better access in future interviews. Importantly, years of research have shown that first impressions are absolutely key - people form 60 to 80 percent of their initial opinion about a person in less than 4 minutes.[76] In most contexts then, the researcher has very little time to make a good impression, and even less time to do so by talking, especially in the absence of local language capabilities and working through an interpreter. Given these limitations, it is important to make the most of the opportunity through as many additional factors as possible. And while in most cases simply being polite and respectful is enough for the researcher; to be accepted, there are certain steps that researchers can take to develop their access even further.

The first such factor is the initial greeting. Obviously, the ability of the researcher to greet people in their own language is the first natural step. Strict observance of local cultural practices, insightful handshakes and traditional hugs can also be very effective, as is local attire.[77] And while on a rare occasion suspicious questions about the reasons behind wearing the local dress sometimes arise, this can be quickly diffused by an explanation that as a visitor in their country, the researcher is trying to show respect to local custom, which also presents a good opportunity to express disapproval of the way in which Western culture is often forcibly imposing itself on the locals. The initial encounter alone typically gets the interview off on the right foot. Of course, when interviewing officials and members of the security forces, the researcher is well advised to wear a suit and tie instead, because traditional clothing can be seen by power elites as backward, and when worn by foreigners, a bit tacky. This does not mean of course, that researchers in field conditions will always be expected to have a neatly pressed suit for official meetings. The point is to understand what sort of influence one can gain by indirect factors, and to maximize these to

his or her advantage. Obviously, age and gender also play an important role, but these are factors the researcher can rarely influence.

As suggested above, the second important factor is body language, and training oneself to be aware of what signals one sends and how these are likely to be perceived by the other side, is a core skill of any effective communicator. This is especially true during interviews with terrorists and their ideologues, whose logic and statements may quickly offend the researcher, who can inadvertently give this negative internal reaction away by sending dismissive or defensive signals. Having the ability to quickly identify one's own posture and quickly substituting negative or defensive signals for more friendly and open ones, can be the key difference between success and failure in terms of creating a bond.

Similarly, in the initial encounter with a shady character it pays off to consciously assume confident but open and non-threatening body language, with open palms up and frequent smiles, and a periodic but non-continuous eye contact.[78] In addition, knowledge of body language can also help researchers in basic orientation while spending time among people whose language they do not speak, and in gauging attitudes at checkpoints. Further, body language research has shown that not only is body language reflective of our emotions, changes in body posture can also influence the way we feel. When encountering negative postures at checkpoints, the researcher can use knowledge of body language not only to detect the attitudes, but also to find the appropriate opportunity to initiate a level of bonding, e.g. by sharing food and drink with the fighters. Not only is sharing a natural social lubricant,[79] handing an unfriendly combatant a bottle to hold can break his defensive posture, which in turn can make him feel less defensive.[80] While there is no space in this article to elaborate on all the benefits and caveats of analyzing body language, a wealth of literature exists that can help prospective researchers in their effort to learn this important skill.[81] It is also important to emphasize that body language is notoriously cultural, and that reading signals accurately takes time, practice and deep knowledge of cultural variations.[82]

Thirdly, language matters, and if the researcher can communicate directly with the locals and conduct interviews without relying on an interpreter, this introduces a much faster rapport building process and overall a more effective approach.[83] This does not mean that working in environments where the researcher does not speak a foreign language is impossible. But it is certainly more difficult and researchers will have to adjust their expectations accordingly. But even here a caveat is in place; despite the clear benefits of knowing the local language it is not always advantageous to disclose this ability, for the sake of clarity and safety.[84]

To conclude, there are many specific steps a researcher can take in the initial encounter to make a favorable impression, and to begin to earn trust with the research population, and to build it further up over time. *Trust* of course, is absolutely key - without trust any meaningful research is unlikely. As observed by Norman, "the cognitive dimension of trust has been analyzed through rational choice methodologies such as game theory in which trusting relationships are defined by an implicit assumption that one person will not deliberately hurt the other to satisfy his own

needs."[85] But as Norman also points out, it is emotional trust (one based not so much on reason or rationale, but rather on personal relationships) that is even more important. Both cognitive trust and emotional trust then reinforce each other and combine into behavioral trust. This is essentially based on reciprocity; it grows with time and observed actions.[86] This suggests that in-depth field research is highly dependent on building trust over time, and reinforcing it with one's actions. It is therefore advisable to make several trips into the same area, and initially focus on rapport-building by engaging in communal activities, active listening, avoiding difficult or controversial questions, and spending social time with research participants.[87] Knowledge of, or at least an observable desire to learn about local culture, history, religion etc., openness and friendliness will go a long way, as will making people feel that they really matter to you. Learning at least a few phrases in the local language, knowing how to accept hospitality, eating enthusiastically with locals regardless of how unappetizing or unhygienic the meal,[88] offering to help with work, paying a visit without asking for anything at all, playing football with children, and being pleasant company – all of these steps can make a crucial difference.

***The Interview***

Effective interviewing is a skill, which needs to be developed and practiced. Unfortunately, this skill is taught at universities only superficially (if at all), and there is a prevailing assumption that interviewing is something all academics know how to do. However, effective interviewing is not just about asking from a list of questions; the manner in which the questions are asked, and the reactions of the interviewer to the answers both directly influence how much relevant data he or she will get. In addition, academics are not a population widely known for strong communication skills, which may be the reason why we are frequently stereotyped as being somewhat socially awkward. On the one hand, academics are used to lecturing and conveying complex concepts through presentations, so speaking and expressing one's ideas is rarely the problem. On the downside (and perhaps as a direct result of the former), most academics are generally not very good listeners, which is a major obstacle to being an effective communicator for purposes of collecting interviews in the field. This is especially the case in interactions with the "common folk", which typically entails engaging in politically incorrect, simple, and highly opinionated and biased conversations with lay people about subjects that academics either know very little about, or in contrast, have an excessively more complex and qualified view of. Whether it is a product of social elitism or a simple lack of confidence, the fact is that such situations do make most academics uncomfortable.[89] The problem is that during field interviews with combatants of *any* kind, academics will typically find themselves talking precisely to simple, not very educated men (and sometimes women), who tend to have a very one-dimensional view of the world, and to whom they will find it very difficult to relate. This can constitute a crucial obstacle in the effort to capitalize on the opportunity to acquire valuable insights through interviews, which is a pity given the fact that the researcher has invested valuable time and resources to gain access to interviewees in the first place.[90]

The good news for those of us who are not so lucky as to have a natural talent for effortlessly building instant rapport with just about anyone, this is a skill that *can* be acquired. The key is realizing one's own deficiency in this area in the first place, and then pro-actively train oneself in acquiring the necessary tools. There is a wide variety of excellent literature on effective communication and its principles that can be consulted and training for dealing everyday situations is possible without much additional effort. Forcing ourselves into making contact with strangers, building conversations with people we would not normally talk to, and acquiring the discipline to actively listen to views that we strongly disagree with - these are all good opportunities to train.

The key principle in effective interviewing is the use of active listening, a loose system of style, manner and technique that demonstrates the listener's caring, concern, and attentiveness.[91] Useful communication techniques in this regard include paraphrasing, reflection, asking clarifying questions, open-ended probing, interpretation, and self-disclosure.[92] The purpose is to make the subject feel "heard", satisfying one of the core needs we all have as people.[93] Not only does the interviewer's attentive style encourage a greater sharing of information, it can also have a positive rapport-building effect; especially with people who see themselves as self-defending victims who frame their involvement in terrorism as the "only way to be *heard*". An essential part of this effort is to maintain the mindset in which the interviewer is not talking to a "terrorist," but rather to a rational human being who, for some set of reasons, has chosen – or felt forced into - an extreme, violent course of action.[94] Militants rarely dispute the observation that their actions are extreme; they do however see them as justified. This acknowledged extremity of terrorism is one of the possible reasons why militants have a tendency to passionately explain and rationalize their actions, especially when speaking to a Westerner whom they perceive, (at least initially) as someone who is judging them and who does not understand the true drivers and "root causes" of their actions. This is where actively listening to their grievances and validating some of their frustrations helps contradict many of the terrorists' demonized perceptions of "Westerners", and makes it harder for them to label the researcher as unreasonable, creating chances to build rapport and increase trust.

A specific challenge is then posed by interviews conducted through an interpreter, since in many cases the interpretation process constitutes the single greatest obstacle to a successful interview. First of all, most interpreters willing to work in conflict zones have a less than perfect knowledge of the English language and have no formal interpretation training, which creates considerable room for error. Secondly, interpreters are frequently difficult to control, have their own agendas, often do not translate what the researcher or the interviewee considers important and sometimes interject their own opinions and interpretations on the subject of the interview into both the question and the answer. Less experienced interpreters also sometimes interpret in reverse, starting with the last point made and working backwards to the beginning of the question posed, completely negating the effects of a carefully and diplomatically crafted question on a sensitive topic. Thirdly, interpreters sometimes have their own discussions on the side with the interviewee, failing to interpret its content to the researcher in the process. Fourthly, interpreters

are typically not well versed in the art of interviewing, which can result in the negation of the potential benefits of using some of the aforementioned communication techniques. For this reason, it is advisable to set firm rules for the interview process beforehand and to brief the interpreter on the principles of active listening, explaining that when the researcher asks clarifying questions it is all part of the technique. It is therefore not helpful if the interpreter, instead of translating the clarifying question, simply answers affirmatively on behalf of the interviewee, as this will fail to convey the message of the interviewer's attentiveness and keen interest. By the same token, working effectively with interpreters also requires preparation and experience on behalf of the interviewer. The one crucial mistake people tend to make when interviewing or negotiating through interpreters is that they talk to the interpreter instead of the subject. In such indirect conversation, speakers have a tendency to face the interpreter, and convey their questions and comments in a very factual, monotonous, and emotionless voice. To the interviewee, who does not understand what exactly is being said and has only the tone of voice to go on, this can sound like an indifferent, uninterested, even dismissive questioning – creating exactly the opposite effect of what the researcher should strive to achieve.

To avoid this situation it is important to face the interviewee and speak to them directly, to maintain eye contact and an attentive posture in the process of asking questions, as well as when listening to the answers. Further, body language research has shown that people tend to talk three to four times more when the listener nods their head using groups of three nods in regular intervals. Especially slow nods in deliberate clusters coinciding with the interviewee making a point are very powerful in conveying the interviewee's interest.[95] Crucially, this dynamic is the same whether using an interpreter or not, and it is sensible to focus on the interviewee in the same way as if he or she spoke in a language the interviewer understands. The same gestures should then be repeated during consecutive interpretation, to further reiterate one's interest and understanding of what has been said. In addition, due to cause and effect and the contagious nature of head-nodding, engaging in this practice will also cause the other side to reciprocate, creating a more favorable impression of the interviewer. Finally, continuing to nod for several seconds after the interviewee has finished speaking, generally encourages the person to fill the silence by adding additional information, which can be further encouraged by the listener's hand-to-chin evaluation gestures. Overall, head nodding is an excellent rapport-building tool across most cultures.[96]

***Traps Impacting on the Interpretation Phase***

Most interviews in the Terrorism Studies field are unstructured, using open-ended questions in order to allow for a greater breadth of data. Whereas structured interviewing seeks to collect precise data that can be coded and that can be interpreted through a set of prescribed categories, unstructured interviewing seeks to gain insights about the complex behavior of the subject without pre-imposing limitations on the interpretation of the information.[97] This also means however, that unstructured interviews leave a wide-open playing field for subsequent interpretation of the data, which, however, can be subject to many biases and interferences. These can be based on multiple internal and external factors as well as underlying assumptions.

This section focuses on the biases and traps involved in interpreting data collected via interviews in the field.

Given the elusive nature of terrorists and their activities, most of the interviews are highly opportunistic, which raises the issue of limited representativeness of the data. It is important to recognize that the findings of any study based on interviews with terrorists only apply to the population of terrorists who are willing to speak to a Western researcher, which, by itself, may be a minority. Similarly, when interviewing "terrorists" it is important to distinguish between different roles that people play within terrorist organizations. Most interviews will be conducted with leaders, spokespersons, and ideologues of the group; that means with people who do not necessarily participate in actual killing. These people frequently come across as intelligent, worldly, and educated, which is a characteristic that may not be representative of the rank-and-file fighters (who typically form the majority of the group). Moreover, in the case that the purpose of these interviews is to determine the characteristics of people who become terrorists, then such a study might give too much credit to variables such as "education" and "intelligence," while simultaneously missing the importance of the "capacity to inflict violence" variable, simply because of limited representativeness of the data. The final example comes from the realm of the popular area of suicide terrorism, where many of the insights about this phenomenon are based on interviews with "suicide bombers". The problem in this case is similar, as the people interviewed represent only the population of *failed* suicide terrorists, which may be quite different in their thinking and personal characteristics from the population of their 'successful' colleagues, who for obvious reasons, can no longer be interviewed. Some of these limitations in empirical research are inherent, but openly acknowledging them as qualifiers for one's findings is an important part of the research process.

The second bias lies in the process of the interview itself, which tends to be influenced by a combination of different factors. Some of these factors include liking, rapport, language ability, the environment in which the interview takes place, etc. In other words, it is not so much about what questions the researchers is asking, but also the manner and sequence in which these questions are asked, that determine what the answers will be. In fact, different researchers could be posing exactly the same questions to the same respondent, and could receive significantly different answers depending on what level of rapport and trust exists between them and the interviewee, and under what conditions the interview is taking place. Timing of the interview as well as the exact wording of each question are, of course, crucial as well.[98]

The third critical issue, as observed by Goodhand, is that conflict creates an "information economy" in which the political situation privileges some voices while suppressing others, thus enabling powerful actors to manipulate the content of information and control its dissemination.[99] Field research then involves choices about which voices are heard, and whose knowledge counts.[100] The fact is that such decisions are not always the sole product of the researcher's methodological choice as these are heavily influenced by the environment. For instance, factors such as greater ease of access, sense of familiarity, comfort and security, often leads researchers to privilege information coming from capital cities at the expense of information coming from

rural areas. And since capital cities are also more tightly controlled by governments, this may inadvertently privilege government narratives.[101] Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in terrorism research where state narratives are often by default given much more credibility and attention than those of the "terrorists".

A closely related danger in field research is the problem of so-called "seduction", or a situation in which the researcher's objectivity is impacted by favors granted by a party to the conflict, such as providing exclusive access to data or sources, allowing the researcher to embed him or herself with a combat unit, or simply by being friendly and hospitable. The fact is that even if such acts of "seduction" (whether deliberate or unintentional) are fairly obvious, as human beings we are programmed to find it difficult to feel indebted, and have a tendency to repay favors.[102] Whether researchers admit it or not, the principle of reciprocity does affect their views, and consequently the level of critique of government policies in the author's conclusions will at least partially reflect the way the researcher was treated by the government while spending time in the country. By the same token, this situation can also exist in reverse. Researchers who spend time among militants on their territory and could potentially become easy victims of kidnapping, find themselves subject to a variation of the Stockholm Syndrome, or the mutually positive relationship between captives and their captors that frequently occurs in hostage situations.[103] The researcher's awareness of his or her own vulnerability, can result in feelings of gratitude toward the militants for not exploiting the situation, which then by itself can cause the researcher to view the militants more favorably than he or she might have if presented with exactly the same data in a more detached setting.[104] And as observed by Zahar in "giving voice to the voiceless we could fall for another bias: either accepting the 'counter-hegemonic' discourse of the non-state actors at face value or imposing upon them our own interpretation of the situation and romanticizing their reality."[105]

On a final note, researchers should be aware of the principle of scarcity, or the natural human tendency to assign more value to that which is difficult to attain.[106] In other words, researchers subconsciously tend to assign greater meaning to data that was difficult for them to acquire, or data to which they have exclusive access. In reality, the information gained from an interview in the process of which the researcher was nearly killed, or a classified document that the researcher spent months trying to get access to, could be less meaningful than information available in open secondary sources more easily accessible over the internet. But the human tendency to assign greater value to the former can easily skew the researcher's conclusions, frequently without him or her even being aware of it. Although the value of researching terrorism in the field is clear, it is important to remember that the fact that a certain piece of information comes from an interview with a terrorist does not necessarily make it the "Holy Grail."[107]

***Conclusion***

Greater emphasis on field research is the clear next step in taking the discipline of Terrorism Studies to the next level. Field research is useful in helping researchers in navigating with greater certainty through multiple contradictory versions of events available in open sources. It

contributes to counterbalancing some of the key research biases that inherently exist. It also enhances the reliability and accuracy of findings, and above all, the process itself can be highly beneficial in educating the researcher by allowing him or her to acquire a tacit knowledge of the context. But while many researchers have answered the call and have ventured into the field, there is still an acute absence of attempts to share the know-how on the intricacies of the step-by-step process of conducting such research. This is needed in order to enable other researchers to build on the experiences of their colleagues and to learn from their insights and mistakes.

One key aspect that was not covered sufficiently here is the need to demystify the everyday reality of field research. The majority of time spent in field research involves idleness and even boredom. Myriads of phone calls to contacts are often followed by endless hours and days of waiting for a return call that may or may not come. Interviews with *active* terrorists, if they actually materialize, are often not nearly as insightful as people expect: the frustrated researcher often walks away with a basic lecture on the group's ideology and stated grievance; something of which the researcher who has done his homework typically has a deeper knowledge of than the interviewed terrorists themselves. *Former* terrorists are a more "user friendly" population, as their disengaged position allows them to share more details.[108] Such interviews are frequently more interesting – yet still inherently limited in their representativeness. Most meetings with local government officials, investigators and intelligence agencies are full of predictable propaganda. Any information acquired in such meetings needs to be treated with a healthy dose of scepticism. And, to make matters more difficult, in most cases, after a long enough exposure to the conflict, the overall picture becomes much more blurred for the researchers than it was back at the university office where the illusion of having objective, exact knowledge that could be neatly compartmentalized into typologies still may have existed. Instead, researchers exposed to the greyness of everyday reality of conflict zones where no information can be fully trusted and everything is open to alternative interpretations, may start to second-guess almost everything they thought they knew for sure. After realizing how different their perceptions of a given conflict are as a result of direct first-hand experience, researchers may start to doubt absolutely everything they have learned through standard academic study about other conflicts and terror campaigns as well. Often the more a researcher learns, the greater the number of questions that arise. This state of "confusion" and "uncertainty about anything" is possibly the greatest non-physical "danger" of field research.

Similarly, functioning in conflict zones involves much time spent in frustration while dealing with even simple logistical issues, rather than the hoped for but rather rare experience of excitement and action. The limited ability to move around freely often leaves the researcher in desperate need of some physical activity. However unless one is staying at a ridiculously overpriced hotel completely secluded from the local everyday reality, the security environment makes opportunities for exercise practically non-existent. Being perpetually stereotyped and constantly treated as a potential threat, does not add to the enjoyment of the experience, especially for those academics that are used to being treated with at least some respect. The perpetually busy and fast-paced terrorism specialist often cannot escape the thought whether

there is not something more rewarding and productive to be done in the field than endless waiting, coupled with constant uncertainty and only doubtful prospects of achieving the imagined results.

Coming home after weeks or months in a conflict environment is not easy either. Whether the researcher admits it or not, spending endless hours talking to victims and perpetrators of political violence about massacres of civilians in gruesome detail and constantly having to worry about one's own safety, does take its toll. But despite all these unpleasant by-products there is something invaluable that field research does contribute: an overall increased understanding of the context in which terrorism occurs. This incremental acquisition of a more insightful, sceptical and nuanced lens through which the researcher processes subsequently incoming information on a conflict of terror campaign is simply priceless - it cannot be acquired in any other way than through direct exposure to the field. In the end, it may well be that the "greyness" and "confusion" of the researcher resulting from this experience simply represents an more advanced level of knowledge.

**About the Author:** ***Adam Dolnik*** *is the Director of Terrorism Studies at the Centre for Transnational Crime Prevention (CTCP) at the University of Wollongong in Australia and Professor of Counterterrorism at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security Studies in Germany. Formerly he has served as Chief Trainer at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) in Singapore as well as a researcher at Monterey Institute of International Studies in California. Dolnik has lectured for various governmental and nongovernmental organizations and agencies in over 40 countries and regularly conducts field research in conflict zones. He is also the author of three books and over 40 reports and articles on terrorism-related issues.*

## Notes

[1] Andrew Silke. Research on Terrorism. London: Frank Cass, 2004; Magnus Ranstorp Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions.London: Routledge, 2007 and Alex P. Schmid (Ed.). The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research. London & New York: Routledge, 2011.
[2] Cited in Audrey Kurth Cronin "How al Qaeda Ends. *International Security*, Vol. 31, No.1 (Summer 2006), p. 10.
[3] Jon B. Alterman, "How Terrorism Ends". United States Institute of Peace *Special Report* No. 48 (25 May 1999). Available at: http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr990525.html (accessed on 11.5. 2007) or M. Ranstorp, op. cit., p. 15.
[4]Andrew Silke, "An Introduction to Terrorism Research," in A. Silke, op. cit., p. 13.
[5] The only text focusing on the process of field research on terrorism to date is John Horgan. The Case for Firsthand Research. In: A. Silke, op. cit., pp. 30-56.
[6] A more detailed collection of chapters from experienced authors representing different risk groups, disciplines, methodological approaches, regional specializations, varying levels of local credibility and knowledge, and other context specific aspects is forthcoming in: Adam Dolnik (ed.) *Terrorism Field Research: A Guide.* London: Routledge, forthcoming in 2011.
[7] As observed by J. Horgan, authors engaging in fieldwork rarely, if ever, describe the process of establishing contact with terrorist interviewees. - John Horgan "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).
[8] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 11
[9] Cited in A. K. Cronin, op. cit., p. 10.
[10] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 9.
[11] Martha Crenshaw: The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 2. (June 2000), p. 410.
[12] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 9.

[13] David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith. We're All Terrorists Now: Critical—or Hypocritical—Studies "on" Terrorism? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2009) Vol. 32, pp. 292–302.
[14] In fact, the list of researchers that have engaged in field research on terrorism in conflict areas is so long, that it is not safe to list them here without fear of significant omissions.
[15] John Horgan; in A. Silke, op. cit., p. 30.
[16] Magnus Ranstorp. "Introduction: Mapping Terrorism Research" in M. Ranstorp (ed.) *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions* .London: Routledge, 2007, p. 6.
[17] Edna Reid. Terrorism Research and the Diffusion of Ideas, *Knowledge and Policy,* 6, (Spring 1993), p. 17.
[18] For examples, see Jonathan B. Tucker., *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.
[19] Raphael Perl. "Combating Terrorism: The Challenge of Measuring Effectiveness," Congressional Research Service Report, available at: http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL33160.pdf. For one of the few systematic attempts to measure effectiveness, see: Christopher Hewitt. *The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorist Policies* .Lanham: University Press of America, 1984.
[20] A. K. Cronin op. cit.
[21] A. Silke, op. cit., p. 18.
[22] Martha Crenshaw. "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* Vol. 3, No.1 (1991), p. 73.
[23]A. K. Cronin, op. cit.
[24] Adam Dolnik. *Understanding Terrorist Innovation: Technology, Tactics and Global Trends.* Routledge, London, 2007, p. 220.
[25] Edward F. Mickolus. *Transnational Terrorism: A Chronology of Events, 1968-1979*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980.
Edward F. Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean M. Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology of Events, Volume I: 1980-1983*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
Edward F. Mickolus, Todd Sandler and Jean M. Murdock, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology of Events, Volume II: 1984-1987*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
Edward F. Mickolus. *Terrorism, 1988-1991: A Chronology of Events and a Selectively Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.
Edward F. Mickolus. *Terrorism, 1992-1995: A Chronology of Events and a Selectively Annotated Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.
Edward F. Mickolus, *Terrorism, 1996-2001: A Chronology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
[26] Patricia Rawlinson "Mission Impossible?: Researching Organized Crime", in Roy King and Emma Wincup (eds.), *Doing Research on Crime and Justice*. Oxford: University Press, ( 2 edition), 2007, p. 304.
[27] AFP: Obama apologizes to Guatemala for US sex-disease study. Available at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20101001/hl_afp/usguatemalahealthsexdisease ; accessed on 09/11/2010.
[28] Tora K. Bikson, Ricky N. Blumenthal, Rick Eden, Patrick P. Gunn. Ethical Principles in Social-Behavioral Research on Terrorism: Probing the Parameters. RAND Corporation. Available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/2007/RAND_WR490-4.pdf (accessed on 9/11/10).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research , p. 14. On Internet available at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/e72.pdf
[31]Certainly, some of the research can be feasibly completed without a human ethics clearance, if its purpose is "to obtain publicly available information or only seeks the professional view of an office holder on the basis of that person's professional role." Nevertheless, most research in the field will raise human research ethics questions.
[32] For instance, according to National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, "research will be ethically acceptable only if its potential benefits justify the risks involved."
[33] National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, p. 13. Available on Internet at: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/_files/e72.pdf .
[34] Ibid.
[35] Tora K. Bikson, Ricky N. Blumenthal, Rick Eden, Patrick P. Gunn, op. cit.
[36] Susan M. Thompson, "'That is not what we authorized you to do….': access and government interference in highly politicized research environments"; in: Chandra Lekha Sriram, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, and Olga Martin-Ortega (eds.), Surviving Field Research: Working in Violent and Difficult Situations. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 121.
[37] John C. King, "Demystifying Field Research" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 15.
[38] Carolyn Gallaher, "Researching repellent groups: Some methodological considerations on how to represent militants, radicals, and other belligerents" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 136.
[39] Ibid, p. 137.
[40] While building rapport and trust is a crucial part of field research, it sometimes becomes difficult to find the cut-off point for when one should start focusing on difficult or controversial questions that can represent a setback in terms of rapport building. It is too easy for researchers to fall into the trap of focusing so much on the relationship that one can simply avoid (consciously or subconsciously) controversial issues all together, especially in interviews where the initial contact or trust was very difficult to establish. It has certainly happened to me in the past, and it is still difficult to provide a useful answer on how to avoid this. The rule of thumb should be for the researcher to at least recognize that this interference exists, and to incorporate it into the data interpretation phase as something that may be skewing the picture.
[41] John C. King, "Demystifying Field Research" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 10.
[42] Adam Dolnik and Keith M. Fitzgerald. *Negotiating Hostage Crises with the New Terrorists* Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Tora K. Bikson et al, op. cit., p. 62.
[45] For instance, in attempts to negotiate access to Gaza to conduct research on Hamas, one needs to initially create a good enough rapport and trust with Israelis, emphasizing the "counterterrorism" value of the research, while in subsequent contact with the militants one might be best advised to talk about "root causes" of conflict etc. In some contexts, such a separation is not even possible, as being seen with one community will already taint the researcher in the eyes of the other.

[46] In my experience, framing the field research aspect of a given research project as opportunistic, unstructured interviews focusing not on data collection per se, but more on helping the researcher navigate through the different versions of events available in existing open sources is one way of dealing with the problem.
[47] Robert B. Cialdini. *Influence: Science and Practice* Boston: Pierson Education, 5th ed. 2009, p. 81.
[48] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Available on Internet at: http://cpj.org/killed/index.php (accessed on 17/2/2010).
[49] Ibid.
[50] Robert Young Pelton, The World's Most Dangerous Places. New York: HarperCollins, 5th ed. 2003, p. 206.
[51] Thomas Hardgrove. Testimony at the House Committee on International Relations 3/31/98. Available on Internet at www.g21.net/narco.html (accessed on 1/30/2002).
[52] Minwoo Yun, *Understanding Global Terrorist Hostage Taking and Kidnapping*. Saarbruecken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller & Co. 2008, p. 9 ; Robert Young Pelton, op. cit., , p. 206.
[53] New Internationalist Magazine 1997; http://www.newint.org/issue294/facts.html .
[54]WHO Global Status Report on Road Safety. Available at http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241563840_eng.pdf
[55] Robert Young Pelton, op. cit., p.1088.
[56]Among the leading training providers are Centurion Risk Assessment Services, AKE group, and Athena Security & Intelligence Consultants Ltd and others.
[57] It follows that if one is receiving assistance from the government, it is not advisable to try to conduct side trips to the "other side", and the researcher should also develop a high level of tolerance for government propaganda, and should take this interference into account in the data analysis stage.
[58] In one instance, one of my close friends who worked for an NGO in the North Caucasus came extremely close to being executed, after the Ingush militants found a Russian government stamp in her passport. The only reason why she is still alive was that she was in late stages of pregnancy, and her appeal to the militants to shoot her in a way that would cause the least amount of suffering to the baby, saved her life.
[59] For instance, how is a terrorism researcher supposed to conduct any interviews with officials if he or she is expected to avoid "security forces installations, locations that are frequented by police and army personnel ... and government buildings in Kabul"?
[60] Afghan Paradise Lost: Suicide Attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel. Available at: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/540787/afghan_paradise_lost_suicide_attack.html?cat=9 , accessed on (09/11/2010).
[61] Afghan capital Kabul hit by Taliban attack. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8464763.stm , accessed on (09/11/2010).
[62] While this would constitute little reassurance in Iraq and parts of Pakistan where mosques have been routinely targeted, in Afghanistan at the time this did provide at least some form of protection.
[63] I adopted this option during my second and third research trips to Beslan in North Ossetia when researching the September 2004 school hostage crisis. Since I was able to communicate in Russian and had been to Beslan before, I had quite a bit of sympathy for the people in the town. Spending long evenings with local people in their courtyards provided unprecedented informal access to hundreds of hostages who had never spoken to any media representatives.
[64] I am forever indebted to Ismail, who risked his own life to get me out of Chechnya safely, following my release from a detention facility in the middle of a forest at night.
[65] I used to leave a trail by sending SMS's to a contact from every village we passed through. Today, in areas with GSM coverage iPhone's "HereIam" app allows the user to send e-mail coordinates to a predetermined e-mail address with a simple touch of the screen.
[66] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); Available on the Internet at: http://cpj.org/killed/index.php , (accessed on 17/2/2010).
[67] J. Horgan also suggests formal contacts with political fronts or other formal gatekeepers, and informal introductions during formal events and informal approaches in conflict zones as possible access routes to interviewees. - See John Horgan. "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).
[68] This approach also has its risks, such as the journalist independently interrupting your line of questioning, and sidetracking the interview. This is a very frustrating experience, especially if the researcher has painstakingly progressed through mundane questions to establish rapport, etc.. Similar issue can sometimes arise with a driver, who out of courtesy is frequently also invited inside for the interview. Some drivers can be incredibly helpful if they are good communicators or come from the interviewee's extended family or tribe, but they can also be a very disruptive influence if they interfere with the interview process by asking their own questions or offering their own views.
[69] This may be an uncomfortable process for many researchers, but if you are inclined to pay the fixer/interpreter more money, do so after the job is done as a "tip" for good work. In this way, your conscience is clear, your assistant is happy, and this step does not necessarily raise the price for more modestly funded researchers (especially self-funded PhD students).
[70] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.
[71] Discussion with Amir Rana, Islamabad (January 2010).
[72] One useful method I frequently use is what I call the "rebooking" trick. This is how it works. One of the most frequent questions that prospective interviewees ask is:" Until when are you here?" This is a reasonable question to ask when looking for a timeframe that is mutually suitable to conduct an interview. It is a generally good idea to give a date that is several days earlier before the actual date, in order to leave room for any last minute opportunities. Also, people who don't necessarily want to speak to you but do not want to reject you outright remember the date, and graciously consent to an interview, but their availability is universally limited to the day after you have already supposed to leave. Leaving that cushion at the end gives a researcher the option of calling back the interviewee and saying: "Talking to you and learning from your experiences is very important to me, so I changed my ticket to fly two days later just so I can meet you. You said that you were free tomorrow, what time would suit you?"
[73] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*. Boston: Pierson Education, 5th ed. 2009, p. 68.
[74] Hasnain Kazim, "Among Pakistan's Radical Islamists: A Wild Goose Chase with the Taliban", *Spiegel Online*, 10/2/2010. Available at: http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,677031,00.html#ref=nlint (accessed on 11/2/2010).
[75] Reflecting the author's experience from one of his trips to Southern Sudan.
[76] Allan Pease and Barbara Pease. *The Definitive Book of Body Language*. New York: Bantam Books 2004, p. 10.
[77] For instance, when interviewing militants in Pakistan, I have had much success with wearing a long beard, panjshiri hat, and a *shalwar kameez,* and using the traditional Muslim greeting "*Assalamu aleikum/Wa aleikum assalam*", accompanied by a gentle half-hug followed by a soft handshake. This first encounter alone tended to become a good icebreaker and a topic of conversation in which the respondents and their entourage commented on the dress.

[78] It is important to avoid prolonged continuous eye contact, as this can be perceived as a challenge. The key difference in whether the eye contact will be perceived favorably or not lies in the level of pupil dilation, which cannot be consciously controlled.
[79] A. Pease and B. Pease, op. cit., p. 142.
[80] Ibid p. 99.
[81] The following books provide a good starting point:
A. Pease and B. Pease, op. cit., 400 pp.; Joe Navarro. *What Every BODY is Saying* .New York, Harper 2008, 272 pp.; Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, Wallace V. *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions From Facial Expressions.* Cambridge, MA: Malor Books, 2003, 212 pp.; Paul Tieger and Barbara Barron Tieger *The Art of Speed Reading People* .New York, Little Brown and Co., 1998, 224 pp..
[82] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this issue.
[83] Unsurprisingly, the pace and progress of my interviews in Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya directly in Russian contrasted sharply with the frustratingly slow pace of working through an interpreter in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Colombia.
[84] For instance, using an interpreter and having an agreement with him or her to "receive" an important phone call during the interview and to have to leave the room, and staying around to listen on the sidelines conversation between the militants who do not know that you can understand them, can be an effective way to gauge the interviewee's intentions and identifying potential threats to the researcher. And there is nothing unfair about such a "trick," as in most interviews with militants, there is someone in the room who understands English in order to monitor everything that is said in the conversation between the researcher and the interpreter. Another way in which knowledge of the local language can be a double-edged sword, is the fact that it eliminates the option for the local intelligence agencies of questioning an interpreter about the researchers' activities. As a result, in some areas the researcher can expect long hours personally spent in interrogation.
[85] Julie M. Norman, "Got Trust? The Challenge of Gaining Access in Conflict Zones" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit.,, p. 72
[86] Ibid., p. 73.
[87] For example, during my first trip to Minadano (Philippines), I spent half a day planting coconuts with the MILF fighters making small talk and joking around while refraining from any formal interviews at all during the first visit. Similarly, in my research on the LRA in Northern Uganda, my first meetings with ex-LRA senior commanders focused on self-introduction and informal conversation followed by a request for an interview, providing the option to the recipient to think about it. Following their consent and organizing the interview, in the second meeting I asked fairly general questions, and specifically refrained from asking about personal involvement in the LRA atrocities, which have become infamous for their unprecedented brutality. Before leaving I organized an informal party for all my interviewees, and specifically stated that it was not for work but for fun. It was in this setting when people started coming out with their stories…and the process was reinforced even more during future visits.
[88] In my travels, I specifically train myself in sampling the most exotic and off-putting food in order to be able to eat just about anything.
[89] Perhaps it is precisely this unwillingness to step out of one's comfort zone (more so than the perceived physical dangers) that is responsible for the comparative rarity of field research on terrorism to date.
[90] Of course, this stereotypical view of academics is highly reductionist, and there are certainly some brilliant and natural communicators in the Terrorism Studies field. Similarly, many soldiers, militants and terrorists are also rather astute and intelligent individuals.
[91] Arthur A. Slatkin. *Communications in Crisis and Hostage Negotiations*. Springfield IL: Charles C Thomas Publishers, 2005, p. 19.
[92] ibid. p. 20.
[93] Psychotherapists make a living precisely on this natural desire of people to share their problems and their need to feel heard and understood.
[94] A. Dolnik and K.M. Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 162.
[95] A. Pease And B. Pease, op. cit., p. 231.
[96] The only exception here are Bulgaria (nodding indicates rejection rather than affirmation) and Japan (nodding illustrates listening, but not necessarily agreement).
[97] A. Fontana and J. H. Frey. "The Interview: From Structured to Negotiated Text" in: Jaber Gubrium, and Jams Holstein (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research.* London: Sage Publications, 2nd ed., 2000), p. 652.
[98] John Horgan. "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here?* (forthcoming).
[99] Julie M. Norman, "Got Trust? The Challenge of Gaining Access in Conflict Zones" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit.,p. 77.
[100] Susan M. Thompson, "'That is not what we authorized you to do….': Access and government interference in highly politicized research environments" ,in: Chandra Lekha Sriram, et al, op. cit., p. 112.
[101] Marie-Joelle Zahar. "Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, p. 194.
[102] Daniel Coleman, *Social Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Book 2006, p. 5.
[103] James Poland and Michael McCrystle. *Practical, Tactical and Legal Perspectives of Terrorism and Hostage Taking* . Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000, p. 24.
[104] Another factor that can play a role in affecting the researcher's perceptions is the "celebrity factor" associated with interviewing important figures in the terrorist domain. Few researchers could argue that having a chance to interview Osama bin Laden would leave them impartial and objective.
[105] Marie-Joelle Zahar, "Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise" in: Chandra Lekha Sriram et al, op. cit., p. 204.
[106] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice.* Boston: Pierson Education, 2009, 5th edition, p. 210.
[107] Horgan expresses a similar sentiment in his article "Interviewing the Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research." *Political Psychology*, Special Issue: Where Do We Go from Here? (forthcoming).
[108] Ibid.