

II. Resources

Trends and Developments in Terrorism: a Research Note

by Richard J. Chasdi

In the current issue and in future ones, Richard J. Chasdi, member of the Editorial Board of 'Perspectives on Terrorism' and author of three large monographs on terrorism (including "Counterterror Offensives for the Ghost War World" [2010]), will share with readers of this journal statistics, graphs and tables, based on newly released quantitative data in order to depict developments and trends in terrorism and political violence.

Introduction

For some years now, the *Worldwide Incidents Tracking System* (WITS) of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has produced high-quality figures on global, regional, as well as national developments in the field of terrorism. Certain broader trends emerge from the NCTC data. While in 2010 there were some 11,200 terrorist assaults worldwide, the figure for 2011 has fallen to around the 10,000 incidents level – a decline of nearly 12 percent. This is in line with a continuing declining trend since 2007 when roughly 14,000 terrorist attacks were recorded. Put differently, the figure for 2011 represent an almost 29% decrease compared to those for 2007. Even though those roughly 10,000 incidents for 2011 represent the trough for the past five years interval on a global scale, terrorist assault rates in “the Western Hemisphere” and “Africa” nevertheless peaked at “five years highs.” The large majority of all assaults, however, take place in “South Asia” and “the Near East” - with roughly 7,500 terrorist attacks accounting for 75% of the 2011 world total.[1]

Nowadays, political events in countries like Pakistan, Egypt, and Syria demand the increased attention of foreign policymakers concerned with political instability and social unrest and the implications of those dynamics for both “insurgent” and state terrorism. [2] In Pakistan the government’s commitment to combat Taliban and Al-Qaeda near the border with Afghanistan remains episodic and inconsistent. Pakistan also suffers from acute bouts of domestic terrorism carried out by mainly Sunni extremists, and sectors of the government are suspected to continue to support Kashmiri “freedom fighter” actions in Indian held Kashmir. In Egypt, the prospect of “state” and “insurgent” terrorism in response to expansion of Egyptian military political power remains a lurking calamity and as internal instability grows apace, terrorism that emanates from the Sinai continues to pose a threat to Israel. In Syria, full blown “state” terrorism against civilians carried out by Bashar el-Assad’s regime poses profound and lasting challenges both to countries in close proximity to Syria such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.

A presentation of some empirical trends in broader political instability and terrorist assault characteristics in the narrower sense provides some perspective about antecedent conditions prior to some of the immediate crises and suggests possible associations between variables that researchers might wish to take a closer look at in the future. In addition, such broader trends can also provide some “food for thought” in terms of possible future patterns in those states.

The basis for the following presentation are data produced by the *Institute for Economics and Peace* “Global Peace Index” (GPI) and the U.S. *National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Worldwide Incidents Tracking System (WITS)* annual reports for 2010 and 2011 with supplementary data from the “*Failed State Index*” produced by the *Fund for Peace*. The framework of discussion involves a description of several metrics for those three countries and preliminary efforts to tie together some of those findings for a time interval of several years that is more comprehensive and therefore able to provide a greater understanding of each country’s terrorist assault attributes and political context.

Broader Empirical Trends

The “Global Peace Index” (GPI) scores for particular countries are based on 23 indicators, such as “respect for human rights,” “number of displaced people as a percentage of population,” and “volume of transfer of major conventional weapons” that themselves revolve around “external peace” and “internal peace” conditions.[3]

RISERS AND FALLERS
Countries with the greatest change in Global Peace Index scores, 2011–12.

TOP 5 RISERS					TOP 5 FALLERS				
COUNTRY	SCORE, 2012	CHANGE IN SCORE, 2011–12	RANK, 2012	CHANGE IN RANK, 2011–12*	COUNTRY	SCORE, 2012	CHANGE IN SCORE, 2011–12	RANK, 2012	CHANGE IN RANK, 2011–12*
Sri Lanka	2.145	-0.292	103	▲ 27	Syria	2.830	+0.523	147	▼ 31
Zimbabwe	2.538	-0.186	140	-	Egypt	2.220	+0.215	111	▼ 40
Bhutan	1.481	-0.182	19	▲ 11	Tunisia	1.955	+0.193	72	▼ 29
Guyana	1.937	-0.178	69	▲ 21	Oman	1.887	+0.150	59	▼ 20
Philippines	2.415	-0.157	133	▲ 2	Malawi	1.894	+0.146	60	▼ 19

* The 2011 GPI included only 153 countries while the 2012 edition includes 158 countries, which affects changes in ranking between 2011 and 2012.

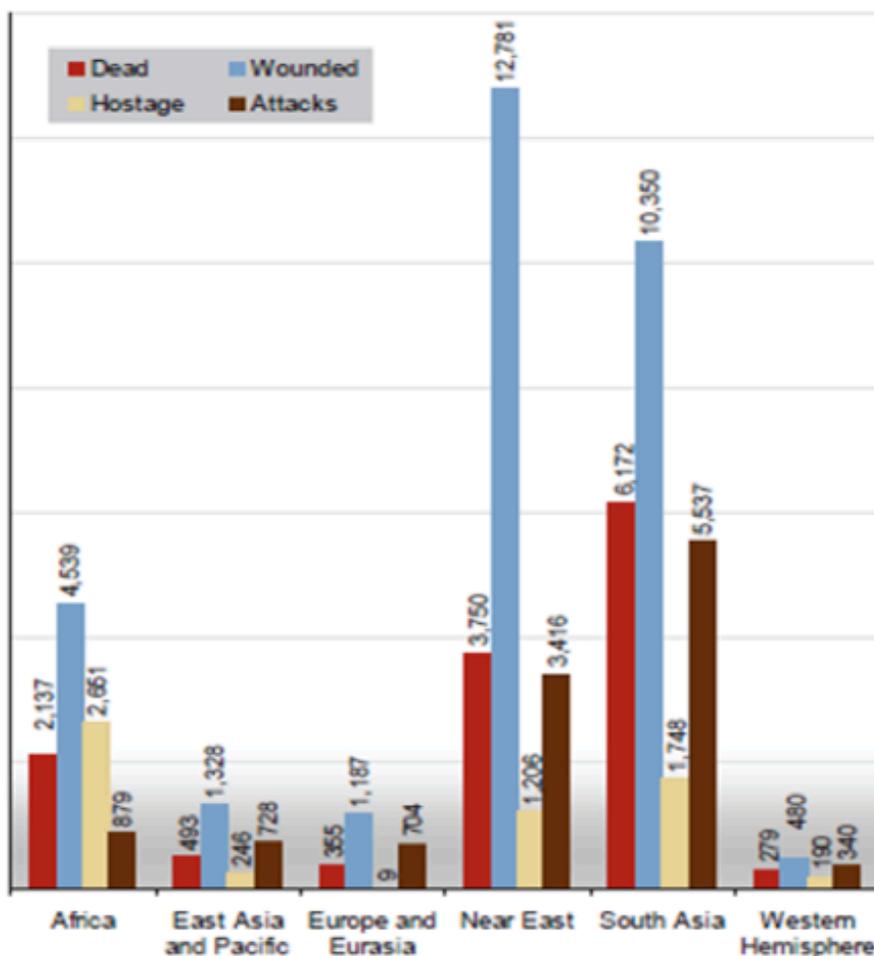
In the IEP chart “Risers and Fallers” (IEP, 2012, 2) those five countries experiencing the most positive and negative change in the “Global Peace Index” are showcased. What seems significant here is that Egypt and Syria dropped in the rankings for “peaceful” countries. Egypt experienced the greatest decline in standing with a change of +0.215 in GPI score and a drop of 40 places to a rank of 111/158 countries in 2012. [4] In a similar vein, Syria registered the largest change (+.0523) and dropped 31 places in the rankings to a position of 147. In turn, Tunisia registered less change with +0.193 and dropped 29 positions for a ranking of 29 out of 158 states under consideration. For the corporate authors at the Institute for Economics and Peace, “...all five of the biggest fallers were caught up in the events of the Arab Spring, with Syria and Libya being impacted the most.”[5]

Likewise, the “Failed State Index” that was recently released by the *Fund for Peace*, cites Egypt (score: 90.4; ranked #31), Syria (score: 94.5; ranked # 23), and Libya (score: 84.9; ranked #50) as countries characterized by “increased pressures” on state institutions and “groups” as measured by 12 ordinal political and economic indicators (range 1-5) and many more “sub-indicators” derivatives.[6] In Manning’s article, “Pressure Mounts on Syria,” which is included in the *Fund for Peace* study, the graph, “Syria, 2005-2012” offers a seven year appraisal of Syria’s “failed state” status, highlighting what amounts to some cyclic variation in “failed state” situations: the scores highlight overall “improvement” in Syria’s ranking position from 2005 through 2007, some deterioration from that level (88) to a score of (90) from 2007-2009, some improvement from 2009-2011, before an enormous deterioration of its “failed state position” into the “Alert” zone from 2011 onwards. In ways that echoes “GPI” interpretation of results, Manning tells us about the “Arab Spring” and reports, “...many of its effects have been registered in the 2012 Failed States Index – Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen all saw their scores seriously worsen.”[7]



In the case of terrorism data, clusters of data in bar graphs in “Chart 1 – Victims and Attacks by Region” found in the *2010 National Counterterrorism Center Report* (NCTC 2010, 11)

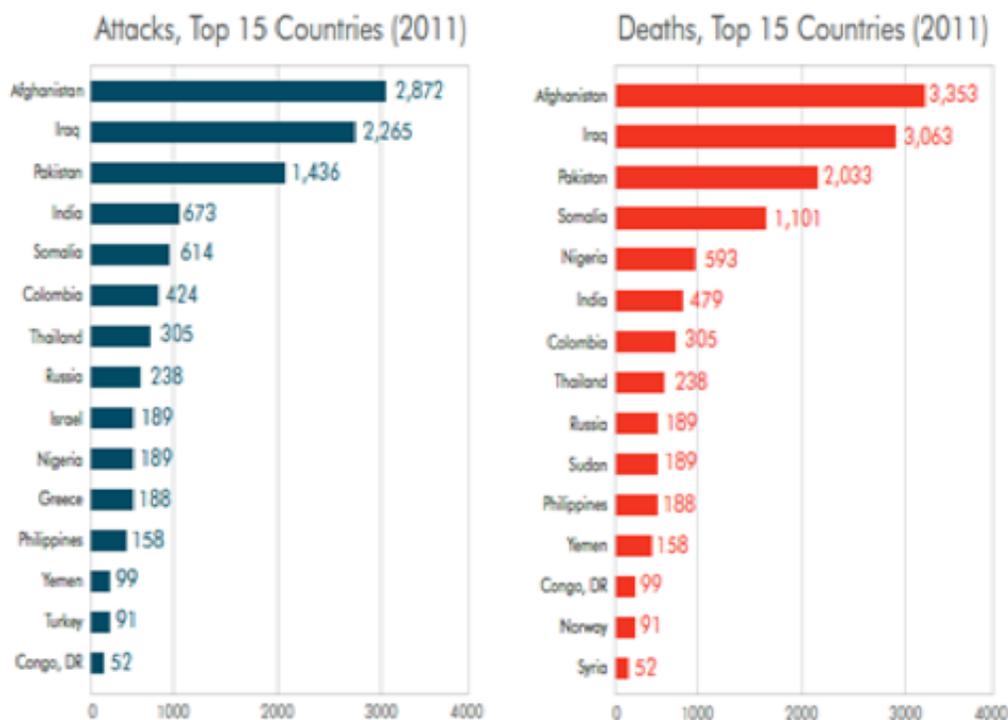
Chart 1
Victims and Attacks by Region



informs us that “South Asia” and “the Near East” were the two most dangerous geographical hotspots for terrorism in 2010. For WITS, “South Asia” ranked first with the greatest number of *terrorist assaults* at 5,537, followed by “the Near East” with 3,416 terrorist assaults. In a similar vein, the *death* rate for “South Asia” ranked highest with 6,172 terrorist assault deaths followed by the rate for “the Near East” with 3,750 deaths linked to terrorist assaults. In comparison, the number of *wounded* in terrorist assaults was lower in the case of “South Asia” with 10,350 injured, by contrast to 12,781 persons injured in “Near East” attacks. Interestingly enough, there was less variation in *hostage situations* across those two regions with 1,748 in the case of “South Asia” and 1,206 for “the Near East.” What seems significant here is that Africa had the highest rate of hostage/kidnap situations with 2,661 incidents. In contrast, the “Western Hemisphere” is

found to have the lowest rates for terrorist attacks (340), number of fatalities (279), number of injures (480), and number of hostage/kidnap situations (190).[8]

The 2011 American National Counterterrorism Center- Report on Terrorism provides more specific data on frequency of terrorist assaults by country in two charts entitled, “Attacks, Top 15 Countries (2011)” and “Deaths, Top 15 Countries (2011)” (NCTC, 2011, 9). [9] Not surprisingly, data found in these bar graphs reveal that Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan hold the top three rankings with respect to frequency of terrorist assaults and number of deaths. This WITS study chronicled 2,872 terrorist attacks and 3,353 deaths for Afghanistan, 2,265 terrorist assaults and 3,063 deaths for Iraq, and 1,436 attacks and 2,033 deaths for Pakistan. The rate of terrorist assaults in Iraq was a little over three-quarters of the rate (78.8 %) found in Afghanistan for 2011, while the death rate in Iraq comprised a full 91.3% of the death rate for terrorist assaults found for Afghanistan. Plainly, while the ratio of deaths to terrorist assaults is higher for Iraq (1.35) than for terrorist assaults in Afghanistan (1.16), the ratio of deaths to terrorist assaults for Pakistan is the highest of these three states at 1.41. It should be noted that the terrorist assault death rate for Syria was 52, presumably for “insurgent” or “oppositional” attacks as according to WITS guidelines, “a group will be included in WITS only if it has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the Department of State.”[10] To be sure, that analysis fails to capture dynamics associated with the state terrorism practiced by President Bashar el-Assad against perceived enemies among the civilian population.

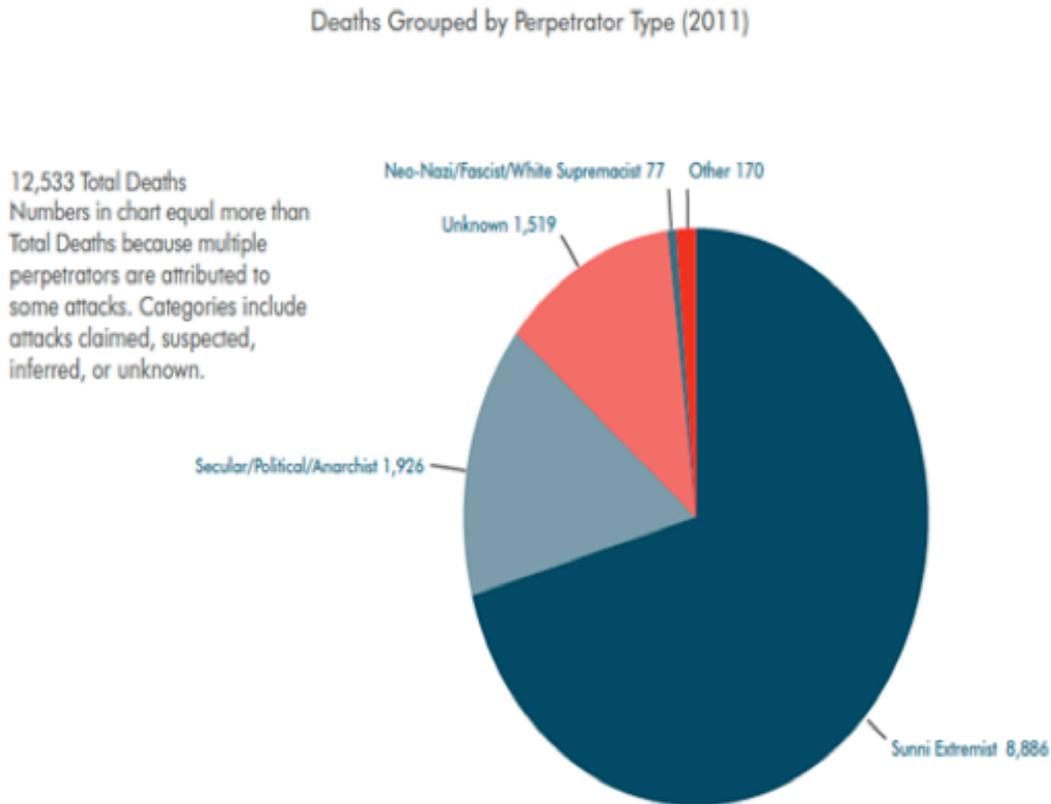


Clearly, the foregoing data suggests that South Asia and the Middle East have high rates of terrorist assaults and that Pakistan, Egypt, and Syria fall into high risk geographical conflict zones and are themselves characterized by political instability and social unrest. Additional data from the *2011 National Counterterrorism Center Report on Terrorism* presents specific terrorist assault trends and death rates in the graph “Trends in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan: Attacks and Deaths 2007-2011” (NCTC 2011, 10). In the broader sense, the data suggest cyclic trends that are not unusual in terrorism time-series data. For the four years under consideration, Iraq had the highest frequency rate of terrorist assaults with 2007 as a peak year with 6,210 acts and 2011 as a trough year with 2,265 acts. In the case of terrorist assault deaths in Iraq, the results were the same: 2007 was a peak year, while 2011 was a trough year. In turn, Afghanistan ranked second in terrorist assault frequencies for the years 2007, (1,122 acts), 2009 (2,124 acts), 2010 (1,346 acts), and 2011 (2,872). The same results for deaths were found: Afghanistan ranked second for 2007 (1,952 deaths), 2009 (2,779 deaths), 2010 (3,205 deaths) and 2011 (3,353). In contrast, Pakistan’s terrorist assault frequency and death rate exceeded those of Afghanistan in 2008 with 1,837 terrorist acts and 2,293 deaths.

As Pakistan, Egypt, and Syria all have populaces comprised of Sunni majorities, it is probably no exaggeration to say that a breakdown of “perpetrator type” characteristics, inclusive of political or religious affiliation by deaths from terrorist assault deaths would be informative. Such analysis is useful because it puts the lethality of assaults by groups with different political/religious ideologies in perspective and offers the possibility to test the widely-held assumption that Sunnis and Shi’ites play a predominant role in terrorist events in many parts of the world.



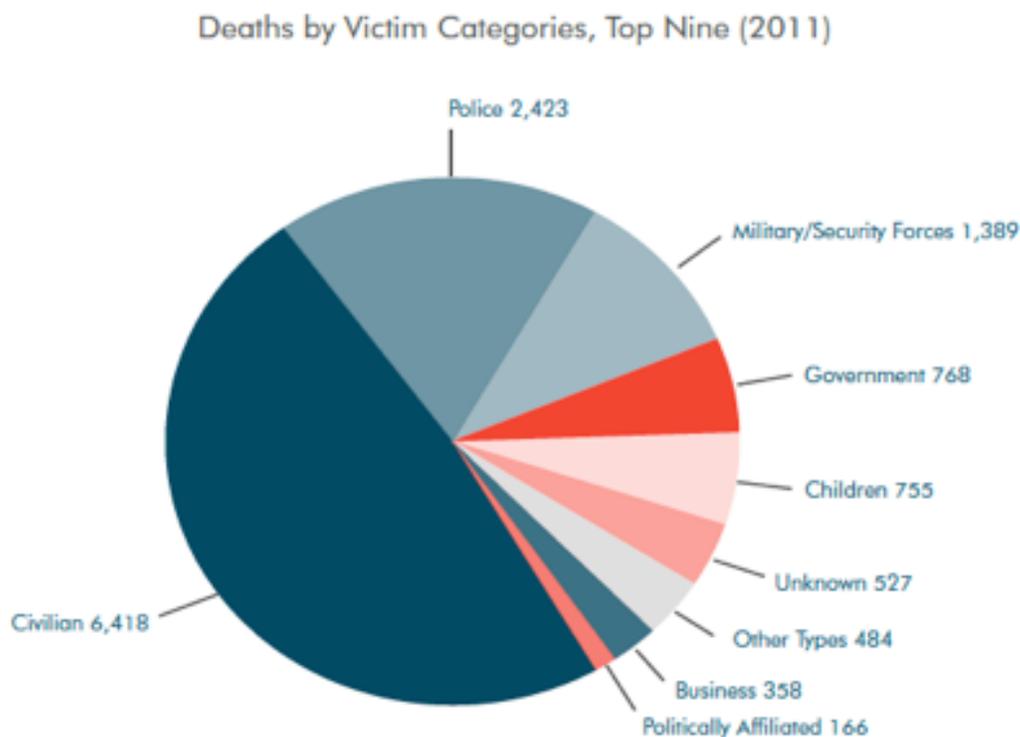
In the NCTC pie Chart “Deaths Grouped by Perpetrator Type (2011)” presented below, (NCTC 2011, 11), what is most noticeable is that for all recorded deaths in terrorist assaults chronicled by the National Counterterrorism Center for 2011, 8,886 were attributed to



“Sunni Extremists” while 1,926 terrorist assault deaths were related to terrorist groups described as “secular/political/anarchist.”[11] Terrorist assault deaths that were not attributable to NCTC standards of direct attribution or “inference” accounted for the third largest cluster of deaths related to terrorist assaults with 1,519 deaths. By contrast “Neo-Nazi/Fascist/White Supremacist” organizations were linked to “only” 77 deaths.[12] In turn, 170 terrorist assault deaths were attributed in the NCTC report to terrorist group “perpetrators” with “Other” political or religious backgrounds.

To be sure, such findings point to the predominant role of Sunni extremists in more lethal terrorist assaults. However, such data are somewhat narrow precisely because they tend to downplay the importance of less lethal terrorist assaults with often important symbolic and psychological repercussions. In addition, that NCTC analysis revolves around a specific focus on

terrorist organizations with no mention made about “lone wolf assailants.” Indeed, the underlying issue of what constitutes the boundaries or threshold between “lone wolf assailants” on the one hand and terrorist organizations on the other would be useful, especially in an age of thickened cyberspace interconnections where for example, “perpetrators” such as Fort Hood assailant U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hassan and Northwest Airlines assailant Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab were directed or otherwise “inspired” on-line by the late terrorist chieftain Anwar al-Awlaki of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.



The pie chart entitled, “Deaths by Victim Categories, Top Nine (2011)”, the 2011 NCTC report provides a breakdown of “victim-type” based on “Civilian,” and “Government” targets with separate categories for “Military/ Security Forces,” and “Police,” victims with “political” or “business” background, “Children,” “Unknown,” and “Other Types.” While some of these categories are not mutually exclusive and seem to detract from the analysis (e.g., “civilians” and “children”; “government” and “police”; “politically affiliated” and “civilians”) “civilian” victims ranked highest with 6,418 deaths, followed by “police” victims with 2, 423 deaths. Deaths for “Military/Security Forces” ranked third with 1,389. At the other extreme, those broadly categorized as “Politically Affiliated” ranked lowest with 166 deaths, followed by “Business” and “Other Types” with 358 and 484 deaths respectively.[13] Trends found for “civilian” targets and what amounts to “government” targets in the broader sense seem consistent with previous

work that reveals a preference for civilian targets typical for terrorist groups. Such attacks against the defenceless generates “abject fear” but also underlying revulsion among the constituencies terrorists claim to fight for. They also generate and sustain anger and rage among those who identify with the victims and might lead to over-reactions by security forces which in turn can lead to spirals of tit-for-tat terrorism and counter-terrorism.[14]

Clearly, there are associations between political instability and social unrest, state terrorism and domestic terrorist assaults sometimes elicited in response to those state actions. Such associations point to the need to delve in more detail into “political context”. Indeed, scholars of ethnic conflict such as Robert F. Melson and Mahmood Mamdani have also suggested a set of interconnections between state terrorism in a particular country and regional or international conditions or both.[15] Plainly, the “Arab Spring” and its regional effects is an example as good as any of those linkages as is the pre-planned state terror carried out in Rwanda by the Hutu government in the 1994 genocide in response to perceived Tutsi threats to “Hutu power.” What seems significant here is the notion that “contextual factors” act as drivers to give structural shape to terrorist assaults and campaigns. Empirical studies of such factors in Pakistan, Egypt and Syria could provide greater insights into ways to craft foreign harm-reduction policies.[16]

Non-state terrorism cannot be studied without constant attention to the kind of policies states enact towards their populations or sectors thereof. While datasets on terrorism are improving - and WITS is a primary example of this - we have yet to see databases that look simultaneously at both/all sides in domestic and transnational conflicts and pay attention to terrorist acts as well as other acts of political violence and also take into account the impact of non-violent campaigns and mainstream politics and state repression on trends in non-state and state terrorism.

The interplay between terrorism and counter-terrorism, both in its aspects of force and in its propaganda dimensions, calls for data which at this moment are not available in an integrated format. In the following issues of *Perspectives on Terrorism* we will continue to discuss findings of a quantitative nature and explore past and emerging trends and developments.

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Notes

[1] National Counterterrorism Center (2011). “2011 The National Counterterrorism Center – Report on Terrorism.” Washington, DC: 12 March, v-28.

[2] Jeffrey Ian, Ross and Ted Robert Gurr (1989). “Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States.” *Comparative Politics* 21 (4): 405-426; Jeffrey Ian Ross and R. Reuben Miller 1997. “The Effects of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Five Actor-Based Models.” *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement*. 6 (3) (Winter), 76-107.

[3] Institute for Economics and Peace.(2012). “Fact Sheet – Risers and Fallers” www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2007/OVER/2.

[4]*Ibid.*, 2.

[5]*Ibid.*, 53.

[6] The Fund for Peace. (2012). "Failed State Index: The Failed States Index 2012 Interactive Grid." (<http://www.fundforpeace.org/global?q=fsi-grid2012>); Natalie Manning. 2012. "Pressure Mounts on Syria." *The Fund for Peace*. (<http://www.fundforpeace.org/global?q=node/234>) 18 June; Nate Haken. 2012 "Interpreting the Arab Spring." The Fund for Peace (<http://www.fundforpeace.org/global?q=node/235>) 18 June.

[7] N. Manning, op. cit., 18 June 2012.

[8] National Counterterrorism Center. (2010). "2010 National Counterterrorism Center Report." Washington, DC: 8 April, v-57.

[9] National Counterterrorism Center. (2011).

[10] *Ibid.*, 7.

[11] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

[12] *Ibid.* For NCTC, "when reporting provides detailed information, a confidence level as to the identity of the perpetrator of 'likely,' 'plausible,' or 'unlikely' can be cataloged."

[13] *Ibid.*, 14.

[14] Richard J. Chasdi (1999). *Serenade of Suffering: A Portrait of Middle East Terrorism, 1968-1993*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books; Richard J. Chasdi (2002). *Tapestry of Terror: A Portrait of Middle East Terrorism, 1994-1999*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

[15] Robert F. Melson (1992). *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001; *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 203-204.

[16] Richard J. Chasdi (2010). *Counterterror Offensives for the Ghost War World: The Rudiments of Counterterrorism Policy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.