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2 Literature review: the state of the art of research into counterterrorism effectiveness

Given the topic's unquestionable policy relevance, there is surprisingly little research into counterterrorism effectiveness. In 2006, an extensive study showed that research publications on counterterrorism effectiveness were rare.[1] Not much appears to have changed since then. More than twelve years after 9/11, the field of terrorism and counterterrorism studies is still only beginning to address counterterrorism effectiveness: not many authors assess counterterrorism effectiveness, and those that do, often do so in a rather crude manner. This chapter will critique the ways in which the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies has been measured, and will conclude by drawing lessons for the construction of a new framework for the evaluation of counterterrorism policies.[2]

2.1 Measures of effectiveness used in the literature

2.1.1 Numbers of attacks

When assessing the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies, it is tempting to look at statistics about terrorist attacks that have occurred in a certain country or region. They provide seemingly hard data, and increases and decreases can be clearly established. Numbers of terrorist attacks are fairly easy to count, and lend themselves to comparisons over time. Also, attack statistics seem to go to the heart of what terrorism is about. The ambition of all counterterrorism practitioners is to reduce as much as possible the risk of terrorist attacks and thus decrease the likelihood of victims. From this perspective, it makes intuitive sense to look at indicators like the numbers of terrorist attacks. Several authors have followed this approach in assessing counterterrorism effectiveness.

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[1] C. Lum, L. W. Kennedy, and A. Sherley, "Are Counter-Terrorism Strategies Effective? The Results of the Campbell Systematic Review on Counter-Terrorism Evaluation Research," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 2, no. 4 (2006): 489–516.

[2] Parts of this chapter have been published in T. van Dongen, "Break It down: An Alternative Approach to Measuring Effectiveness in Counterterrorism," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 6, no. 3 (2011): 357–71.

Gary LaFree, for instance, examined the effect of some interventions by the British state against the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland by looking at the numbers of terrorist attacks that took place after the interventions had been placed.[3] Similarly, Carlos Pestana Barros tried to establish the effects of the opening up by the Spanish state of political channels for the Basque separatist organisation Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Freedom and Fatherland, ETA). He does so by comparing the numbers of attacks in periods in which the more conciliatory *Partido Popular* (People's Party, PP) was in power to those in periods in which the more intransigent *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE) held office.[4] A third example is Hillel Frisch, who shows that the intensity of Palestinian violence decreases in periods when Israel uses massive force and offers no concessions.[5] In their analysis of Turkish counterterrorism against the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan), Kim and Yun, too, used attack statistics. Like Frisch, they found that harder measures (i.e. forced displacement of the population and leadership elimination) yield the best results.[6]

Although terrorists need a certain level of violence to maintain their credibility, there are good reasons to be critical of the use of numbers of terrorist attacks as indicators of success of counterterrorism measures. First, it is not clear what increases and decreases say about the state of the

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[3] G. LaFree, *Efficacy of Counterterrorism Approaches: Examining Northern Ireland*, START Research Brief, (2006),
http://www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/research_briefs/20061017_lafree.pdf.

[4] C.P. Barros, "An Intervention Analysis of Terrorism: The Spanish ETA Case," *Defence and Peace Economics* 14, no. 6 (2003): 401–12.

[5] H. Frisch, "Motivation or Capabilities? Israeli Counterterrorism against Palestinian Suicide Bombings and Violence," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 5 (2006): 866–867. Although they speak of counterterrorism effects, and not of effectiveness, one could also think of S.M. Shellman and V. Asal, "The Effects of Counterterrorism: Empirical Political Dynamics," in *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-Radicalization and Disengagement*, 2010, 201–202,
http://www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/U_Counter_Terrorism_White_Paper_Final_January_2010.pdf.

[6] E. Kim and M. Yun, "What Works? Countermeasures to Terrorism: A Case Study of PKK," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 32, no. 1 (2008): 74 and 79–81.

terrorist organisation committing the attacks. It is possible that a group in decline initiates a wave of terrorist attacks to send a message, both to its own members and to the public, that it is not finished yet. The Real IRA after the arrest of its leader Mickey McKevitt is a case in point.[7] Coming from a group in this position, an increase in the numbers of attacks is certainly not a sign that a counterterrorism strategy is not working. An increase can also be the result of radicalisation of a movement in leadership transition, when the new leaders are vesting their authority by organising spectacular or large numbers of attacks. This, too, would shed doubt on the meaning of numbers of attacks as measures of effectiveness.

A second problem with using numbers of attacks as indicators of success or effectiveness is that terrorist attacks are not equal units. The impact, material as well as psychological, of a large-scale attack like 9/11, one that requires much preparation, resources and operational capabilities, is likely to be bigger than the impact of a simple arson. Going purely by numbers of attacks means that these differences will be ignored. This can be especially confusing in dealing with terrorist organisations that are waiting for the right moment to carry out a large-scale, advanced attack.[8]

To complicate matters further, the numbers of terrorist attacks do not necessarily correlate with impact favourable for a terrorist organisation. Research has shown that the psychological impact of Provisional IRA bombings was limited in parts of the United Kingdom that were often struck.[9] Also, bombing campaigns can turn against the terrorists. Al Qaeda lost popular support in the Middle East because of the bloody attacks it committed.[10] A terrorist group that increases the numbers of

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[7] Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 78–79. Cronin also mentions the example of Abu Sayyaf.

[8] D. Byman, "Scoring the War on Terror," *The National Interest* 72 (2003): 81.

[9] A. Silke, "The Psychological Impact of Terrorism: Lessons from the UK Experience," in *Meeting the Challenges of Global Terrorism: Prevention, Control, and Recovery* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 189–202.

[10] P. Bergen and P. Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: The Jihadist Revolt against Bin Laden," *The New Republic*, 2008, http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=702bf6d5-a37a-4e3e-a491-fd72bf6a9da1; A. Taher, "Al-Qaeda: The Cracks Begin to Show," *The Sunday Times*, June 8, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article4087373.ece.

attacks may make it seem as if a counterterrorism policy is not working, but could in reality be digging its own grave. The population may turn against the terrorist group, for instance by providing intelligence about the group to the government's security forces. In such cases, increasing numbers of attacks cannot be read as a sign of the ineffectiveness of state efforts to disrupt a terrorist campaign. They might just as well signal the beginning of the end of a terrorist group.

It is clear that the use of numbers of terrorist attacks as indicators of success comes with severe difficulties. They carry no unequivocal meaning, as terrorists may hold back out of strategic considerations, or may go all out exactly because a counterterrorist policy is working. Some authors have tried to fix these interpretational problems by looking at numbers of victims instead.

2.1.2   Numbers of victims

Like numbers of attacks, numbers of victims hold an intuitive appeal as counterterrorism effectiveness indicators because they represent the core of the problem posed by terrorism. Put prosaically, the argument for using numbers of victims to measure counterterrorism effectiveness could go something like this: 1) people get hurt or killed in terrorist attacks, 2) that's what we want to avoid, 3) so the fewer victims, the better the policy. Perhaps on the basis of such a line of thinking, Yonah Alexander, editor of two volumes of comparative counterterrorism studies, and Nadav Morag included numbers of casualties as a criterion that counterterrorist campaigns should be evaluated by, as did Christopher Hewitt.[11] However, many of the arguments that can be made against using numbers of terrorist attacks can also be made against the use of numbers of casualties.

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[11] Y. Alexander, "Introduction," in *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of Ten Countries*, ed. Y. Alexander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 1–23; N. Morag, "Measuring Success in Coping with Terrorism: The Israeli Case," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 4 (2005): 310–311; C. Hewitt, *The Effectivenes of Anti-Terrorist Policies* (Washington, DC: Department of State, Office of Long Range Assesments and Research, 1982), 38 and 43.

For one, increases can be the result from radicalisation brought about by declining power or the eagerness of new leaders, populations can learn to accept victims of terrorist attacks as a fact of life and can even turn against terrorists for causing too many casualties. Regarding this latter point, it is interesting to note that some terrorist attacks, especially when there are children among the victims, can be operational successes but political disasters for terrorist organisations.[12] The population will be outraged over the deaths over innocent victims and withdraw their support to the terrorists. An argument that can be made specifically against the use of numbers of victims is that an increase in the number of casualties can be the result of a substitution effect from hardened to softer targets.[13] If a terrorist organisation finds itself unable to strike at hard targets, it may choose to direct its attacks at targets that are easier to attack.[14] Schools and market squares may then have to bear the brunt of the terrorist attacks, which will lead to higher numbers of casualties but should not be interpreted as a sign that the terrorist organisation is getting stronger.

It is even possible that the shift was triggered by a decreasing sophistication of the operational capabilities of a terrorist group. Limiting the numbers of victims of bomb attacks requires the ability to precisely direct the effects of explosions. Similarly, when handguns are used, the shooter must have the marksmanship needed to hit only the intended victims, and leave bystanders unharmed. This being the case, an increase in the numbers of victims can suggest a failure on the part of the group to

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[12] A. Silke, "Children, Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Lessons in Policy and Practise," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 2 (2005): 201–13.

[13] There is a significant body of research that provides evidence of this so-called substitution effect, which means that terrorists will turn to other, 'softer' targets once security around their targets of preference has been increased. See e.g. W. M. Landes, "An Economic Study of US Aircraft Hijacking, 1961-1976," *Journal of Law and Economics* 21 (1978): 1–31; J. Cauley and E.I. Im, "Intervention Policy Analysis of Skyjackings and Other Terrorist Incidents," *The American Economic Review* 78, no. 2 (1988): 27–31; W. Enders, T. Sandier, and J. Cauley, "UN Conventions, Technology and Retaliation in the Fight against Terrorism: An Econometric Evaluation," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 1 (1990): 83–105.

[14] M. A. Sheehan, *Crush the Cell: How to Defeat Terror without Terrorizing Ourselves* (New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 2007), 27–28; L. Dutter and O. Seliktar, "To Martyr or Not to Martyr: Jihad Is the Question, What Policy Is the Answer?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (2007): 439–440.

limit the colletaral damage, and does not necessarily mean that a terrorist organisation is getting stronger. For instance, several of the most deadly Provisional IRA attacks, such as the Enniskillen Bombing, the Shankill Road Bombing and the La Mon Bombing were operational failures, and were not intended to cause this many casualties. In the case of the Shankill Road Bombing, the explosives went off prematurely; in the case of the La Mon Bombing and the Enniskillen Bombing, the Provisional IRA operatives were unable to call in a warning in time.[15] Thus, these spikes in the Provisional IRA's casualty rates had little to do with the effectiveness of ineffectiveness of British counterterrorism.

This is, of course, not to say that we should always interpret increasing numbers of victims as a sign of a weakening of the terrorist group. The point is rather that victim statistics can be interpreted in various – and even contradicting – ways. Like numbers of attacks, numbers of victims as such have no unambiguous meaning.

2.1.3 Numbers of arrests

This indicator is best known for its use by the US Government, which claimed in 2006 that the arrests of Al Qaeda leaders and cadres showed that the US was making progress in the War on Terror. The capture of Al Qaeda cadres, especially in Afghanistan in the wake of the overthrow of the Taliban, was hailed as a step towards paralysing the Al Qaeda network.[16] Of course, the arrest of any criminal is to some extent always a success for a state, as it is a way of asserting its ability to enforce its rules. Having said that, one should be careful not to read too much into it.

First, at least in the case of Al Qaeda, terrorists can easily be replaced. It has long been recognised that when Al Qaeda cadres are arrested or

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[15] A. Silke, "Beyond Horror: Terrorist Atrocity and the Search for Understanding -- the Case of the Shankill Bombing," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 1 (2003): 50; J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 440; E. Mallie and D. McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story behind the Irish Peace Process* (London: Heinemann, 1996), 58.

[16] *9/11 Five Years Later: Successes and Challenges* (US, 2006), 4 and 7.

eliminated, new recruits are eager to take their places.[17] In this case, as other, similar ones, an ongoing stream of arrests may suggest not counterterrorism effectiveness, but rather a group's ability to replace lost members. Put differently, a high number of arrests can just as easily be read as a sign of a terrorist group's resilience in the face of government repression.

Second, arrests, especially in large numbers, may have consequences that certainly do not qualify as success for the state. In some cases, the arrests themselves may draw people who were previously only sympathisers into the terrorist organisation. Infuriation over the treatment of friends and relatives by the state, including waves of arrests, has proven to be a powerful motive for joining a terrorist organisation, for example in the case of the Provisional IRA .[18] Another way in which arrests can indirectly and inadvertently exacerbate the situation concerns the power vacuum that results from arrests of leading cadres. The new leaders may want to underline the credibility of their claims to dominance by advocating spectacular actions, which can then lead to radicalisation of the organisation.

The third difficulty in using numbers of arrests is that they may very well be indicators of efficiency or resource allocation rather than effectiveness. The numbers of arrests may have gone up as a result of a re-orientation on the part of the police, which may have decided to put more pressure on the terrorists. Although an increase in the numbers of arrests can then be a goal in itself, it does not mean that that a policy has been successful. Another possibility is that the number of arrests has gone up as a result of an increase in terrorist activity. Arrests may go up simply as a result of the increase in the number of terrorists. This is not to say that changes in the numbers of arrests should necessarily be interpreted along these lines. The point here, too, is that numbers of arrests in themselves provide no

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[17] B.M. Jenkins, *Countering Al Qaeda: An Appreciation of the Situation and Suggestions for Strategy* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2002), 10.

[18] W.E. Cralley, A.J. Garfield, and C. Echeverria, *Understanding Terrorism: Lessons of the Past - Indicators for the Future*, IDA Paper (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2004), III–5.

basis to draw conclusions about success or effectiveness. The only situation in which numbers of arrests could be used as an indicator of success is a campaign against a declining organisation with a known size and little to no outside support. Only then, when one can be certain that arrested members will not be replaced and that arrests will not generate support for the terrorists, are numbers of arrests by themselves enough to conclude that the security forces are chipping away at the organisation. For instance, left-wing extremist groups in the 1980s, like the French organisation *Action Directe* (Direct Action), were quite isolated and were unable to replenish their ranks after waves of arrests.[19] Only in such cases do high numbers of arrests suggest effectiveness.

2.1.4 Indirect indicators

Instead of focusing on data about the direct manifestations of terrorism, some authors have looked at indirect indicators, i.e. fluctuations in indicators of the general functioning of a society that are thought to be influenced by terrorist attacks. For example, it has been argued that domestic and international support for the government executing a counterterrorism policy could serve as an indicator of the success of that policy. Although the support of the population is crucial for the success of a counterterrorism strategy, using it as an indicator of success is difficult, as it may result from other policies than a counterterrorism policy. Regarding domestic support, it may even be the case that a generous welfare policy may provide the government with the support needed to implement a counterterrorism policy that would otherwise not have been accepted. As for international support, it may well be generated by skilful diplomacy rather than by counterterrorism. This is certainly not to question the importance of domestic and international support in counterterrorism. Quite the contrary, it is a *sine qua non* of success in both terrorism and counterterrorism, but it depends on so many other factors that it does not necessarily tell us much about the counterterrorism policy that was implemented. For example, a particularly brutal terrorist attack

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[19] M.Y. Dartnell, *Action Directe: Ultra-Left Terrorism in France, 1979-1987* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1995), 90–91.

may convince a population of the need of certain controversial counterterrorism measures. Using support for the government as an indicator of effectiveness would give the impression that the counterterrorism policy was less effective on the day before the attack than on the day after, which is not a conclusion that most of us would be willing to accept.

Another option is to establish the effectiveness of a counterterrorism on the basis of data on the functioning of the economy, e.g. growth of the GDP and fluctuations of the stock market.[20] The assumption is here that, when the economy is thriving, the terrorists have not managed to severely disrupt the functioning of the country. The difficulties are obvious. First, fluctuations in the economy can be the result of many factors, most of which have nothing to with either terrorism or counterterrorism. Second, and this partly follows from the first point, terrorist attacks tend to have little impact on the economy.[21] Even the 9/11 attacks, which took place at the heart of the American economy, were too small and too localised to have serious consequences for an economy as vast and diversified as the American.[22] The limited effect on the economy of these attacks, which have had vast effects in other spheres, begs the question whether the economy is sensitive to terrorist attacks at all and suggests that the economy is not the right place to look for the effectiveness of counterterrorism measures.

2.1.5   The end of terrorist campaigns

A fourth way to examine counterterrorism effectiveness is by looking at the end of terrorist campaigns. Recently, a small group of scholars and researchers has carried out examinations of the effectiveness of the

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[20] Morag, "Measuring Success in Coping with Terrorism: The Israeli Case"; A. Zussman and N. Zussman, "Assassinations: Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Israeli Counterterrorism Policy Using Stock Market Data," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20, no. 2 (2006): 193–206.

[21] T. Sandler, D. G. Arce, and W. Enders, *Terrorism: Copenhagen Consensus 2008 Challenge Paper* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Consensus Center, 2008), 18–19.

[22] G. Makinen, *The Economic Effects of 9/11: A Retrospective Assessment*, Report for Congress (Congressional Research Service, 2002), 18–19.

elimination of leadership of terrorist groups. The dependent variables that have been used in these research projects include numbers of attacks, but also the duration of the terrorist life span after the leadership elimination.[23] In other words, the effect of leadership elimination is supposed to be the dissolution or disintegration of the terrorist group. The outcomes of these assessments are mixed, probably as a result of the 'large n'-approach that many of the authors cited below have taken. Perhaps these research results will be more conclusive once more attention has been paid to the similarities of the cases in which leadership elimination was successful compared to the cases in which leadership elimination cannot be credibly linked to the end of a terrorist campaign.[24] But regardless of the ways in which this line of research can be taken forward, as an indicator of effectiveness, the end of a terrorist campaign has its difficulties.

Taking the dissolution or disintegration of a terrorist group as a measure of effectiveness puts the bar needlessly high. It is true that, from a counterterrorism perspective, the end of a terrorist group is certainly a desirable outcome, but this way of working obscures the progress that is being made in the time period before the terrorist group ceases to exist. Evaluating the effectiveness should be an ongoing process, and that requires an approach that looks at more than simply the desired end state. Instead, it should show whether the state is on the right track. The fact that a terrorist group exists does not say much about its state. A terrorist group may still exist, but if it is clearly in decline or disarray, the mere fact that it is still operational should not be reason to discard the counterterrorism policy that is used against it. The exact state of affairs can only be established on the basis of more specific information, e.g.

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[23] P.B. Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 47–79; J. Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 719–55; D. Rowlands and J. Kilberg, *Organizational Structure and the Effects of Targeting Terrorist Leadership*, Working Paper (Ottawa: CSDS, 2011); B.C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 9–46.

[24] T. van Dongen, "Terrorist Leadership Elimination: When to Do It?," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2013): 106–15.

about the group's relation to the support base, or about the group's operational capabilities.

Furthermore, research into the ways in which terrorist groups come to their ends has shown that there are many factors that play a role.[25] Some groups are debilitated by arrests, whereas other are undermined by 'softer' counterterrorism measures. Regarding the latter option, by offering alternative paths to a political solution of the conflict, addressing root causes and providing social reintegration programs, governments can dissuade members of terrorist organisations of the use of violence. With such tools, the perceived necessity of the use of terrorism can be lowered to a point where the movement disintegrates as a result of people leaving.[26]

In yet other cases, the end of a terrorist group has little to do with counterterrorism whatsoever. More personal factors may be more important. People may reach a point where they no longer want to keep up the violent, dangerous and stressful life that comes with being a terrorist.[27] Also, a lack of popular support can bring members of terrorist organisations to question the usefulness of their struggle. The members of the Red Brigades, for example, were dismayed to find out that the outside world was simply not warming up to their style of bringing about a revolution. The doubts that were caused by this realisation and the friction between members over how to proceed, were part of the

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[25] M. Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (1991): 81; J.I. Ross and T.R. Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States," *Comparative Politics* 21, no. 4 (1989): 417; S. Jones and M. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al Qa'ida* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 10–18; A.K. Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 18–19.

[26] Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, 13–14; Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends," 25–27.

[27] Research has shown that this factor plays a part in the right-wing extremist movement. See T. Bjørgo, "Processes of Disengagement from Violent Groups of the Extreme Right," in *Leaving Terrorism behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. T. Bjørgo and J. Horgan (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 38.

downward spiral that led to the end of the organisation.[28] Establishing mere correlations between counterterrorism and dissolution or disintegration of terrorist groups is not enough to demonstrate which of the factors listed above played a crucial role, and fails to further our understanding of the effects of counterterrorism.

2.2   Towards a new approach

Summing up the previous sections, there are several major factors that undermine the credibility of the indicators of success that have been used so far in counterterrorism effectiveness assessments. The most obvious one is the ambivalence regarding the meaning of an indicator. The problem with many of the indicators discussed above is that it is not clear whether increases or decreases can be interpreted as a success. There are a lot of possible causes for increases in numbers of terrorist attacks, as there are a lot of reasons why the numbers of arrested terrorists might go up. While increasing numbers of attacks and victims are certainly worrying, it would be overly simplistic to see them as evidence that a counterterrorist policy is failing.

Related to the ambivalence regarding the meaning of shifts in indicators, is the attribution problem. One of the reasons why we cannot be sure about the meaning of shifts in the indicators discussed above is that we cannot be sure about what causes these shifts. Put differently, we cannot tell whether or not they can be perceived as success because we do not know to what they should be attributed. For a meaningful assessment of counterterrorism effectiveness, it must be clear that effectiveness indicators shift under the influence of counterterrorism. Given the many possible explanations, the mere occurrence of a shift – such as a decrease in numbers of terrorist attacks – says little about the effectiveness of a counterterrorism policy.

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[28] D. Della Porta, "Leaving Underground Organizations: A Sociological Analysis of the Italian Case," in *Leaving Terrorism behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. T. Bjørgo and J. Horgan (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 73–74.

Another major problem is that most of the indicators discussed in the previous sections is that they are used as representing a counterterrorism policy in its entirety. It is true that, at the very least, an increase in numbers of attacks or victims shows that a state has been unable to put a stop to the terrorist group's violent activities. But an assessment of counterterrorism effectiveness should not end here. There is more to counterterrorism than undermining a terrorist group's capabilities for violent action. It may very well be that a state is failing to dismantle a terrorist organisation's operational network, but is doing very well in other respects, like the winning over of the population. In such a case, the terrorist group will survive, but the state will have won the political contest, as a result of which the terrorist group will not achieve its political goals. This outcome does not warrant the one-sided conclusion, which one would draw if only one indicator of effectiveness was chosen, that a counterterrorism policy has been ineffective. In sum, the use of only one indicator to represent the effectiveness of a wide range of instruments stands in the way of a more nuanced assessment of the effectiveness of a state's counterterrorism policy. It obscures the successes and failures that have been yielded by tools that do not have a direct bearing on the one indicator that was selected.

There is also the possibility that successes and failures even each other out. Suppose that a counterterrorism policy is made up of two tools that both have an impact on an indicator that is used to establish the policy's effectiveness. If one works quite well, and the other does quite poorly, and if both tools have an equal impact, the indicator will not show a significant increase or decrease. However, the reliance on this one indicator does not show the difference in the effectiveness of the two tools. From merely reading the indicator, one might as well draw the conclusion that both are equally contributing to a stabilisation of the situation. Here, too, a more differentiated analysis, would lead to a very different conclusion.

The preceding sections point to two main conclusions. First, existing ways of measuring counterterrorism effectiveness are flawed and cannot be

used to answer the research question formulated in the introduction. Second, there are two pitfalls that a framework to establish counterterrorism effectiveness, or lacks thereof, must avoid: it must do justice to the diversity of counterterrorism instruments, and it must establish clear cause-and-effect links between policies and indicators. With these concerns in mind, we now move on to the research design that will be used to examine the relation between the nature of terrorist threats and counterterrorism effectiveness.