Suspect Community: A Product of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts or a Product of Conflict Dynamics?

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Abstract

The 'suspect community' theory, first introduced by Paddy Hillyard, claims that the British Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 in its operation was responsible for producing discrimination against the communities of Northern Ireland during 'The Troubles". This theory has subsequently been applied to Muslim communities in the UK in the wake of the attacks of 9/11 (New York and Washington) and 7/7 (London Transport System) by Islamist terrorists. This article presents an alternative theory on the emergence of suspect communities, arguing that a suspect community is formed at the initiation of conflict and not in response to legislation dealing with conflict. In this alternative framework, the initiation of conflict and the reactions of opposing factions, combined with public outgroup perceptions of threat, create the suspect community. This alternative theory draws on psychosocial theories, including group perception of threat, social and group identity theory and out-group paranoia. The article suggests an altered starting point and offers a process to potentially reduce public bias and therefore radicalisation and recruitment at the community level.

Keywords: suspect community, group threat, terrorism, conflict, prejudice, Northern Ireland

Introduction

The suspect community—a group of people under suspicion from members of the wider society—has been a historical phenomenon for centuries wherever conflict has been in existence.[1] The creation of a suspect community or any group which poses an apparent threat to society, its dominant structure or the governing body is not a new phenomenon—although a specific theory of the suspect community was introduced only in 1993 by Paddy Hillyard.[2] The original theory suggested that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions Act) 1973 and subsequent British Prevention of Terrorism Acts (to be referred to as PTA) were responsible for the discrimination against Irish and Northern Irish communities, particularly in mainland Britain and at border crossings, causing infringements of the civil liberties of those at the receiving end. The PTA was initiated four years after the escalation of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland and has since been updated in the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005.[3] It was claimed that the introduction of the PTA and its counterterrorism measures, including stop and search, increased suspicion toward the Irish community and was ultimately responsible for the creation of a suspect community—a community experiencing discrimination and distrust from the side of the authorities and the general public.[4]

Pantazis and Pemberton[5] have argued that British PTA legislation, intended to counter terrorist activity, has increased radicalisation and led to recruitment into terrorist groups in the Muslim population in the United Kingdom and had historically done the same in Northern Ireland. It is certainly plausible that PTA legislation may create both sympathy toward, and stigmatisation of certain segments of the community.[6] However, the identification of contributing factors behind the creation of a suspect community, may be worthy of reexamination, based on an alternative theory. This is the purpose of this article.

During conflict and in the presence of a perceived threat, a number of psychological, behavioural and psychosocial processes occur on an individual and a group level.[7] It is suggested here that these reactions primarily emanate from the actions of the source of the perceived threat, creating suspicion and ultimately a 'suspect' group—the suspect community. This theory, an alternative to Hillyard's original theory, rests on perceived threat and identity formation in the population causing suspicion, with the government's safeguarding policy in the form of anti-terrorism legislation being a secondary contributing factor only.

The theory of the suspect community in its accepted form has linked the formation of a suspect community to the introduction of counterterrorist protocols. The hypothesis from the research presented here suggests that the suspect community is created at the community conflict and perception of threat levels, not as a consequence of counterterrorism legislation. It is also suggested that the psychosocial group dynamics which create responsive behaviour to a perception of threat are partially responsible for the growth and support of extremist ideals as well as the perpetuation of a conflict. In short, the notion 'they blew people up' contributes more to the creation of a suspicion of a community than legislation devised to safeguard the population from extremists emanating from that community.

Suspect Community Theory

The established theory suggests the suspect community is instigated from PTA legislation which then causes suspicion through targeting of those communities via emergency legislation and the implementation of counterterrorism measures. The original theory has been carried from the Northern Irish conflict into current concerns about Muslim extremist terrorism on the UK mainland.[8]

One of the elements Hillyard's theory raised is the dual judicial system used in the conflict in Northern Ireland. He alleged it caused resentment and alienation of the higher risk community and suspicion from the side of the general public. This thesis was supported by case studies presented by Hickman[9] and Heath-Kelly.[10] One point not raised in the literature is that there are other dual judicial systems in place in British law enforcement, like in the case of sex offenders listing and the Serious Crime Act 2015[11] relating to gang crimes. These examples include special provisions and restrictions under the judicial system, such as stop and search, powers of seizure and, in the case of sex offenders, loss of civil liberties, i.e. restrictions in the freedom of movement. [12] Hillyard's theory would suggest that these measures meant for sex offenders and gang members also create a suspect community based on official scrutiny, surveillance and reporting in the media. However, this is clearly not the case. It is therefore the thesis of this article that the acts of the offenders themselves create concern among the public toward those individuals, not the existence of a dual judicial system.

Additionally, through PTA legislation, there are concurrent risk assessments concerning individuals, groups and communities, representative of their potential terrorist threat. This singles out individuals with those characteristics. This has created for some, a segregation and air of suspicion towards those from the North and from the Republic of Ireland.[13] This particularly affected those living and travelling between mainland Britain, which was the basis of the theory. This was also transposed to the resident Muslim community of the UK.[14]

Although Hillyard's theory is widely accepted and has been transferred to current extremist terrorist threats, there has been opposition to the theory from Steven Greer.[15] Greer raises the important point that the suspect community begins formation from intimidation into conformity by the majority in that divided community, not at the level of the state. Greer's suggestion of this has led to an alternative causal theory of creation of suspicion through a threat perception at a psychosocial level within community conflict[16].

Alternative Causal Theory

The alternative causal theory at this point addresses the question: what makes a group of people sharing similar traits of religion, physicality and origin an apparent threat? This cannot be solely due to legislation as there has to be a perception of potential threat based on actions of that group. Ultimately, the legislation is in place due to the actions of political violent extremist groups against government and society. The alternative causal theory is structured upon the psychological and behavioural aspects of group dynamics in the perception of, and reaction to a real or perceived threat. These elements are drawn together from classic experimental and theoretical research in psychology to create a suggested alternative theory.

Creation of the Suspect Community Traversing the Macro to Micro

On a simplistic level, terrorism hinges on a majority population which appears to have controlling power over a minority which in turn has grievances. This results in conflict and terrorist activities, as discussed by Martha Crenshaw.[17] The suspect community originates from behaviour of perceiving to be a 'suspect' within inter community conflict, and follows a process of group dynamics and the formation of prejudice and discrimination[18] and how the group or community responds. The social impact on the communities associated with those terrorist groups can be profound, from deteriorating inter-community relations to global stigma.[19] This is particularly pertinent for those who have discernible characteristics, like physical attributes or accents. The implications for those associated with the communities committing terrorist acts are far-reaching, as Hillyard has pointed out.

Although the PTA instigated security measures on the border crossings between mainland Britain and the North and South of Ireland, the repercussions of Northern and Southern Irish community memberships produced stigmatisation.[20] Hickman et al discuss the suspectification of those of Irish and Muslim backgrounds in England. For those of Irish backgrounds the pinnacle was experienced during the main IRA bombing campaigns in England from 1972 to 1996.

On a macro level, the community experienced prejudice from the mainland Britain community on the basis of fear and anxiety in a response to the sustained threat of further violence, discussed in Stephan and Stephan's 2012 book "Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination".[21] Stephan and Stephan introduced integrated threat theory which is a major component in this work because of its applicability from micro to macro levels. Although the PTA had policies for policing, counterterrorism intelligence gathering, surveillance and practical operational standpoints, the prejudice felt toward the Irish community was on a societal level. Hickman et al describe this in the context of perceived suspicion from the general public toward the Irish community.

On a meso platform, with that being the physical movement of persons between ports, airports and border crossings, encountering systematic scrutiny at security checkpoints is not something specific to the crossings from the island of Ireland to mainland Britain. As Hillyard points out, individuals being from an area of potential threat are singled out as "not normal", with additional scrutiny. Within Northern Ireland, legal vehicle checkpoints operated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (now Police Service Northern Ireland), Ulster Defence Regiment and the Army were a normal part of daily life. The use of Northern Ireland photographic driving licenses and carrying of other identification was standard with security forces operating checkpoints for intelligence gathering, disruption of potential attacks or making random checks.[22] Normalisation and acceptance of random security scrutiny for a majority of the population of Northern Ireland during the troubles would have already included much of the community within the parameters of intergroup threat theory[23] (discussed later in the article) through real and symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes. Previous situations at borders and country security check points within Northern Ireland were likely to create normative appropriateness[24] from the perspective of the traveller, in the selection of individuals to be stopped and questioned.

The suspicion of opposing factions and intergroup conflict within Northern Ireland itself[25], highlight the integrative threat theory of Stephan and Stephan[26] at the micro level. These divisions were intensified from historical, ideological and subsequently geographical social experience[27] and further divided into sub-level suspect communities. These were not only between nationalist and loyalist factions, but intergroups conflicts within those factions, for instance, between the UDA and UVF and the Provisional IRA and INLA. This is discussed in key research by Neil Ferguson and Shelley McKeown Jones which brings the argument of categorisation of others within social identity theory to the fore and underpins the applicability of the two theoretical models.

Interlinking Theories

Theoretical models combine to provide a new vision on the emergence of suspect communities and the dominant drivers for their creation. Such models have previously been applied to Northern Ireland and, to some degree, also to mainland United Kingdom. The theories outlined below provide an interlocking, layered framework which suggests suspect community creation happens predominantly on a psychosocial platform rather than primarily a political one.

The Imagined Suspect Community—Perception

Perception of what is 'suspect' or a threat is based on a set of criteria defined by previous actions, by race, religion, physical attributes, education or by social values.[28] It is augmented after each encounter, representation or event, building a notion of potential threat[29]. There are two issues raised in the perception criteria of the suspect community. First is the marginalisation and therefore possible loss of participation in democratic processes either at an inter-community or at a political level. Second, and more relevant, is the misidentification of suspects from either a sectarian territory level[30], or from a counterterrorism security measures level.[31] This also applies to the general population and the misidentification of suspects.

The concept of the imagined suspect community was put forward by Marie Breen-Smith as a progression from Hillyard's theory of the suspect community. This is the construction of the out-group beyond the real or experienced involvement and to a degree, stereotyping. The theory ties in with Benedict Anderson and Stephan and Stephan's models.[32] To identify what an 'other' is, in terms of security, as Ronnis Lipshutz stated, it must be known what the 'conditions of insecurity' are.[33]

Media has also contributed to the construction of an imagined community. From the Northern Irish perspective, media coverage of the conflict coupled with terrorist attacks in the mainland of Great Britain from members of the Provisional IRA, had already created an imagined and suspect community of the Catholic Northern Irish.[34] In the current climate, Breen-Smith claimed that after the attacks of 9/11 and its coverage in the media Muslim communities became the 'suspect' or 'other' community.

The Group Belief

Belief systems are the fundamental combining factor for a group, from one community to an entire nation. Based on those beliefs, the formulation of the 'other' or the outside group is the demarcation of difference and the point where discrimination, stemming from natural group dynamic behaviour, occurs.[35]

In order to compose a "collective truth" and to make sense of the world individually, a series of cognitive templates is developed to interpret and respond to external events and expectations, becoming organised beliefs.[36] Those beliefs, if upheld, become ingrained and habituated[37] but can hold distortions based on (mis-) perception and prior experience. Unless challenged, they can cause bias and misrepresentation of individuals, groups and situations. Unless the challenge is enough to reform those beliefs, it will be disregarded or reframed to be consistent with the current perception.

Group beliefs are purported to be based on a collective truth experienced by other group members.[38] It is also deemed as essential that the collective core beliefs, or cognitive templates, on a group basis are shared and make sense of the socially shared cognition.[39] In a situation of conflict or threat, this becomes a powerful determinant of reaction and ties into the 'imagined' community of Anderson[40] and Breen-Smith.[41] The problem with this response is that it is based on a certain worldview rather than on objective reality.[42] This can cause discrimination, potential conflict escalation and reinforcement of beliefs.

During the Northern Ireland conflict, there was little challenge to the belief system of potential threat through the UK media. Mostly negative reporting in the form of media coverage of terrorist attacks and atrocities in Northern Ireland was in line with the collective experience of attacks in England itself. Therefore, no juxtaposing viewpoint was available to the public to challenge the common view portrayed in the British media through reporting of events.[43]

Social and Group Identity Theory

Social identity theory in the case of discrimination, hostility, conflict and terrorism, is the assigning of a category of ourselves to a specific group which is in line with our own personal, social and cultural identity. [44] This also begins the formation of who is friend and foe, based on our individual categorisation and who we consider our own in-group or out-group. This also supports feelings of safety and security on an individual and group level, defining what is normal and abnormal behaviour. There is a clear boundary between the in-group and the out-group, making the out-group the 'suspect' in terms of conflict.[45]

As Tajfel's and Turner's social identity theory suggests[46], a self-categorisation process occurs to distinguish between groups which are identified with. The depersonalisation process which categorises people and their distinguishable attributes removes the human and individual aspect of a person and assigns them to a specific group. This is relevant in the context of being 'suspect', as in a conflict environment it is the self and others categorisation which determines whether a person belongs to an opposing or threat group.[47]   In terms of conflict, personal, social and cultural identification theory are the bedrock of group choice.[48] Depersonalisation and ascribed prototypicality to unknown individuals saves time in the situation of potential threat (also referred to as heuristics). These prototypes, described by Hogg[49], are part of the depersonalisation and categorisation process and give the attributes of an unknown individual or group a 'not like me and therefore must be in the opposing faction', protection response.[50] In terms of individual and group protection, a clear definition of the morality and righteousness of the group is established.

In terms of social identity theory, as Hogg previously noted, "Groups only exist in relation to other groups, they derive their descriptive and evaluative properties, and thus their social meaning, in relation to these other groups."[51] Behaviour as an in-group member or as a 'suspect' is derived from events at the inception of the conflict. External factors linked to authorities, law and legislation become secondary, if having any effect at all as the perception of a suspect community has already been formed.

Although each conflict has its own specific characteristics, each warring faction will consist of members who identify with the cause.[52] The same can be said of what we believe we are defending or protecting. Therefore, with regard to personal, social and cultural identity, the combination augments our behaviour toward our in-group and its protection. Cairns et al.[53] suggest that out-group derogation with in-group favouritism tend to mainly occur in situations where there is extreme conflict. This supports the argument from Ferguson and McKeown Jones[54] that during lower levels of sectarian conflict and instability, lower levels of in-group bias exist. This argument could also be transposed to that of mainland Britain during periods of instability and increased threat perception of those potentially perceived as the out-group or as communities representing potential terrorist threat as experienced by Irish and Muslim communities.

The combination of personal, social and cultural identity, as proposed by Schwartz,[55] produces a strong momentum towards the group over the individual. As each group must legitimise its actions, a clear understanding of the boundaries and 'morality' has to be established, particularly if the group is in conflict, or believes itself to be in conflict with others.[56]

In terms of the conflict within Northern Ireland, clear demarcation between factions were not only ideologically driven, but geographical dispersal and isolation of groups further heightened in-group favouritism and cohesion. Ferguson and McKeown Jones[57] make the point that prior research shows in-group identification as an explanation for paramilitary organisation membership along with in-group pride as antecedent factors. These factors alone suggest that social identity and categorisation of self and others plays a potentially larger part in creation of a suspect community from groups associated with potential threat, through to national identity.

In-Group Behaviour and the Perception of Threat

The perception of threat to a group can induce changes to group behaviour and attitude.[58] It produces vulnerability within the group and challenges their worldview, beliefs and values, while possibly enhancing group cohesion. The perception of threat, or the projection of hostility from an out-group not only affects the group but also causes individual re-examination of self-definition and categorisation to reaffirm commitment to that group.[59]

In the research of Ryan King[60] on group threat theory, prejudice was seen to be higher against those groups which were perceived to be the greatest threat, where the perceived minority group is relatively large and where there is competition for resources. Within this group threat theory, the 'dominant group' is considered as the majority or largest group. In Northern Ireland, whilst the Protestants in the North were a majority, the Catholic minority in the North saw themselves as 'Irish' and therefore part of the large, predominantly Catholic population of the Republic of Ireland (the south) with the ideal of a united Ireland, thus the majority. [61] Within this theory it is suggested that both Protestant and the Catholic community saw themselves as the majority and both behaved as such, both with according reactions of a dominant group.[62]

As King stipulates, the dominant group will fear that the minority group will throw existing structures and arrangements into disarray. Increase or strengthening of the minority will also induce further hostility towards the perceived minority group.[63]

Stephan and Stephan[64] used the model of intergroup threat theory, that of symbolic and realistic threat, to predict levels of intergroup conflict and prejudice. They made the distinction between emotion and evaluation in the perception of threat leading to prejudice, conflict and warfare. They included the emotional factors as that of 'hatred' or 'disdain' and evaluative factors as disapproval based on criteria from information of the activity of the group. Combining the two elements constructs a powerful determinant for distortion of threat which consistently contributes to the 'suspect', 'other' or 'them' faction. Combined with the criteria of social identity theory and group threat theory there is a compelling argument that communities viewed as representative of terrorist groups, or out-groups, could foremost be viewed with suspicion by majority in-groups.

If this is applied to communities which represent a threat, in this instance those from Northern and Southern Ireland as well as Muslim communities in current day terms, prejudice and perceived threat would be a relatively logical progression.

Out-Group Paranoia—Being One of the Suspect Communities

Roderick Kramer[65] developed the theory of Out-group Paranoia from the psychosocial relationship between groups of distrust. Paranoid cognition between groups was developed from the understanding that cognitions of suspicion, mistrust and making personal attributions about the behaviour or intent of others[66] are relatively commonplace for individuals in their daily lives.[67] Kramer drew together the theories and the conclusion that individuals are more likely to experience paranoid cognitions when under apparent scrutiny or feeling self-conscious and applied it to group behaviour. The theory centres on the role of trust between groups and the apparition of negative intent and judgement against those who are thought to be scrutinisers.

Drawing on the research of Breen-Smith[68], Hogg[69] and Eidelson[70] already discussed above, the state of being under observation, particularly in conflict, security and counter terrorism situations is likely to bring about a feeling of being 'being scrutinised' or 'self-consciousness'. This occurs even if a group or an individual is innocent of any negative intent. This makes it more likely to distrust or experience cognitive paranoia, forming realistic, symbolic or both, manifestations of distrust and conspiracy or 'sinister attribution error'[71], ascribing ulterior motives. The importance of this relates not only to Northern Ireland and other conflicts, but also to the current relationship with the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. Although two distinctly different situations, the out-group paranoia theory also gives understanding of the dynamics of the building conflict between British Muslim and non-Muslim population. This is particularly relevant when members

of a community which would be deemed as suspect are singled out within public or official interaction and associated reactions.

Public Reaction to Terrorist Attacks—the Public, Risk and Suspects

Rubin et al.[72], conducted a survey in the seven-month period after the London bombings in July 2005. The results were similar to those seen in Fischoff et al.'s study[73] on post 9/11 impacts in that a long stress response and concern over safety and the possibility of another attack were identified as present. Previous research had suggested that individuals' heightened stress and perception of threat after a major incident subsides after an initial two- to three-month period.[74] Repeated media reporting of incidents as in the case of Northern Ireland for those in the UK mainland and exposure to daily incidents within Northern Ireland perpetuated public awareness and reinforced historical incidents of violence and terrorism towards the public, both realistic and symbolic. In the same scenario, continuing global terrorist events involving Muslim extremist organisations have been broadcast. If the same theories are applied, they create the same 'suspicion' and cognitive paranoia towards that out-group of Muslim extremists, which extends to all those who are within the 'symbolic' and 'categorised' section of the community before new counterterrorism legislation is applied. This relates back to the categorisation mentioned by Ferguson and McKeown Jones under the social identity aspect of the model.

The Argument of the Hillyard Theory in Recruitment and Radicalisation

The relevance of radicalisation to this work is the relationship of conflict and distrust (suspicion) at the opposing faction level. There has been suggestion that current counterterrorism legislation alienates the general communities from which violent extremists emanate.[75] The PTA special powers have been questioned as whether they are in part responsible for the alienation of a specific community as being under suspicion and therefore at additional risk of radicalisation.

As Greer[76] noted, the PTA 2000 is there to criminalise proscribed terrorist organisations, across all conflicts and those directly associated and involved with them. This in itself does not marginalise and alienate the entire community. The powers under the Act also cover, as Greer states, money laundering and baggage screening at airports for all passengers. This, as Greer notes, effectively means passengers and financial institutions are under suspicion, are stopped and searched and have their finances investigated. At present there is no evidence of financial institution members being drawn to extremism nor having bags searched at an airport being a catalyst for individual passengers to become radicalised.

Although in Northern Ireland recruitment took place predominantly on the ground, based on experiences of injustice and loss[77] amongst other pathways, today's injustice has become more 'global'. As John Horgan pointed out, one of the potential contributing factors of radicalisation is identification with injustice which currently is accessible on a global scale.[78] Accessing written text and supporting broadcasts of insurgent and terrorist organisations is freely available on the Internet. Horgan provided examples of European Muslims who have become involved with violence due to identification with Palestinian victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Iraq war and Indian repression in Kashmir. In John Horgan's research there is little, if any, suggestion of a feeling of being 'suspect' from counterterrorism legislation, and he lists contributory factors as being the result of dissatisfaction with current circumstances, displacement or disenfranchisement. The mechanisms of radicalisation are complex and diverse and at this juncture, until further direct empirical evidence is secured, the argument will continue to proceed as a matter of theoretical debate.

Northern Ireland and Terrorist Events—Communication and Contact

In the case of terrorism, during conflict or post event, a risk communication procedure presented by Sheppard et al.[79], becomes of paramount importance when dealing with potential mass panic. They suggest the use a communication management conduit to increase informed decision-making, reducing fear, anxiety and confusion in the case of a major terrorist attack. Two points raised by them feed directly into this hypothesis on a smaller scale: that of 'dread risk' and 'unknown risk'.[80] Scaling it down to national level terrorism and creation of suspect communities, these two points are poignant, not only as a contributory condition, but also as an intervention.

The risk management from the government in the event of a mass attack has suggested guidelines in three overall areas. Clear and direct instruction to assist with decision-making, enough information to familiarise the public with the facts of the incident without bias and to allay incorrect risk perception and alertness including in regard to protective measures. Interestingly, here is a possible intervention which could be developed at this level to combat increased discrimination and provide an opportunity for public involvement in counterterrorism. This could reduce many of the issues discussed regarding conflict and suspect community. This would utilise integrated contact hypothesis, discussed by Hewstone and Swart[81] found to be effective in Northern Ireland on an interpersonal level rather than on a group platform to stunt or regress the categorisation process and group division. However, as Hewstone and Swart noted, "it remains a challenge for contact as an intervention to prove equally effective for both groups" as members of disadvantaged groups have weaker results with this method as Pettigrew and Tropp concluded based on a meta-analysis of 515 contact studies.[82]

Combining these approaches with social programs and transparent governmental press briefings could be an effective alternative pathway from the current theory of Hillyard's. A clear media process to highlight the differentiation and consequences for individuals subject to suspect community prejudice by the public may be able to increase awareness and reduce bias. This combines with expectation management of those within the suspect communities exposed to counterterrorism procedures and a protocol of post engagement explanation and support.

Discussion

The suggested causal theory states the suspect community originates from the perception of being a 'suspect' within inter community or national conflict, rising from a process of identity and group dynamics, influenced by external multifarious factors. It also suggests the creation of that initial 'suspect' or risk community arises from the process and experience of actual conflict or violent events, which threaten the lives of a wider section of society.[83] As Lewin[84] noted, each group becomes suspect to the other. According to the proposed theoretical model, this happens in stages.

The first stage involves competing ideologies, incorporating elements from the group threat theory of Ryan King.[85] King's research showed the level of prejudice was higher against minority groups perceived to be gathering momentum. The role of social identity and categorisation falls within this initial stage, leading to a division of self and others.

The second stage, once the groups are formed, is based on past and recent actions and their repercussions. Kramer's theory of out-group paranoia[86] plays a distinctive part in this second stage of suspect community formation. When individuals and groups are under threat or pressure, due to anxiety they tend to overestimate the level of threat, also supporting the out-group paranoia theory. Distrust through events, history, and media reporting can either be a compounding driving factor for increased hostilities, or a catalyst opportunity for the innocent members of the 'suspect community' to distance and separate their identity from that of the extremists. At this point, according to Sheriff[87], the categorisation of the high-risk group as a threat has already occurred.

In the third stage of distrust and the suspect community enters the discussion of the PTA on communities

which would be considered higher risk from a counterterrorism perspective by the authorities. A number of investigators have used Hillyard's theory (Hickman[88], Pantazis[89], Breen-Smith[90]) to draw comparison with current day UK legislation, namely the PTA 2000, with the terrorist threat of extremist Muslim factions. Hillyard made succinct arguments regarding the difference in the judicial system and special powers and claimed that the Irish community was criminalised by the state due to these powers, and a causal sequence led to the UK's general population manifesting racism.

Terrorist incidents provoke fear in the community[91] and among the wider population. It would appear, according to mass response in the Rubin et al. report of the July 2005 bombings, that the general population post attack will assimilate the categories of higher risk individuals from the perspective of their own personal safety. Therefore, it is hard to assert at this level that only the Prevention of Terrorism Acts of 1974 and 2000 and their subsequent amendments are a major causal factor for the creation of the suspect community or the main contributing factor to radicalisation in the UK.

The importance of an alternative theory dialogue lies with the opportunity of an intervention point on correct identification of suspect community creation in the form of contact hypothesis[92] and using risk communication strategy to implement it.[93] Using community initiatives already in place with a focus on exposure and inclusion to create contact, there may be an opportunity to involve the suspect communities in the counterterrorism process. This could lead to a reduction in anxiety and via that, possibly reduce prejudice. Further research would be critical in the implementation and design of the strategy, but the potential of this approach is worth considering.

Conclusion

The actions of terrorism involve atrocities that even the rules of war would not excuse. Sectarian conflict, as in the case of Northern Ireland, affects the human rights and civil liberties of those living amongst it and betrays the right to life of its ordinary citizens. The fine balance of integration of a counterterrorism protocol and infringement of civil liberties of those living in or travelling between the affected areas has been an ongoing area of controversy and argument. It has concerned those it affects and those actioning or coordinating the protocols at policing, legal and political level, ever since the introduction of the Special Powers Act (1922) and subsequent PTSs.

Within the suggestions of Hillyard's theory asserting that PTA process threatens the rights of individuals suspected of terrorist activities and those associated with the higher-risk communities, there is no mention of the State's responsibility that 'Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law' under Section 1, Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Without these protective mechanisms, even greater civil liberties may be removed without true safeguarding of the citizens of the state under threat. As with most civil rights issues connected with counterterrorism, the problem of security outweighing legality requires continual and crucial reassessment.

Although this article focuses on the creation of the suspect community from wider societal aspects, there is a two-way conduit of prejudice from communities experiencing suspicion. The application of the same theoretical models mentioned in the work applied to the suspect community of imagined and real threat, out-group paranoia and perception of threat can be applied to the wider society and precipitate withdrawal, self-enforced isolation and marginalisation.

Exposure and personal interaction from a contact hypothesis strategy, particularly outlined by Ferguson and McKeown Jones, in unison with risk communication strategy from community through societal levels could be an effective way forward. Expectation management of what may be experienced due to the PTA 2000 processes may provide greater understanding toward those perceived higher-risk communities. Post attack risk communication strategies could deliver this which may increase the possibility of enhanced cooperation between communities, aiding counterterrorism initiatives. Cross community individual involvement in this

process may provide opportunity at this point for negotiation, readdressing elements of the legislation and inclusion of the communities. This process hinges upon the support of the community and the clear message at state level that the prevention of terrorism acts serves to preserve the rights of its citizens, even if they are challenged.

When incorporating the notion of the suspect community as Hillyard projects it into government counterterrorism strategies only at state level, there is the danger of decreased protection for UK society from a reduction of special powers.

Although mistakes were made in some areas of the PTA as pointed out by Hillyard, the Northern Ireland conflict gave an opportunity to assess the legislative and judicial system used. It is inevitable that people associated with a high-risk section of the population will come under scrutiny and judgement, particularly under counterterrorism strategies. The possibility of application of risk communication as suggested by Sheppard et al. in combination with the PTA legislation should be conducted within the Muslim community and post-conflict study of Northern Ireland communities. It is suggested this work may afford opportunity for reexamination and opening of a new discussion of this complex subject.

There must be a level of acceptance that in times of threat there will be those who are caught up in the fight to combat that which threatens our very lives. Dropping our sights away from the state level to how a suspect community is formed may afford options to understanding how to regain the support of a nation whilst still upholding its security and protection.

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Notes

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