

There was a large and very serious attendance at London's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) on 18th November 2015 to hear Steve Killelea talk about the Global Terrorism Index Report for 2015, the third such annual report from the Australian based Institute for Economics and Peace (www.economicsandpeace.org). Equally serious discussions continued in the after event reception, which was not surprising given that the Paris terrorist attacks had occurred just five days before.

The scope of the report is very wide. Its statistics (for 2014) are complemented by frequent comments in each section, these continuing coverage well into 2015. When considering the near, medium and long term implications of Paris and the narrow and wider implications of conflict in the Middle East and, especially, the growing tension between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran which could well divert energies and resources from terrorist threats, the compilers do not have the benefit of the greatest commentator's tool, hindsight. The following remarks by Euan Grant, who was there for Defence Viewpoints, are offered with that crucial caveat.

The Report is correctly titled as an Index. It is intended as an intensive product for a wide range of observers of terrorism and law enforcement and security professionals, to name a few. That presents its own challenges. There is a lot of reference and statistical data which should ideally be seen as the foundation for further research and operational activity, particularly in placing individual events in context. The Index's comments are especially strong on contrasting Western perceptions and experiences of both domestic and Middle Eastern fuelled terrorism with those countries' own challenges. Given the underlying message that the trends are "up" for the numbers of incidents and their human impact in both of these huge and diverse regions, there is a rapidly growing need for security organisations to enhance both the quality and quantity of cooperation on an asymmetric basis. Seeking foreign assistance in relation to risks to "us" without considering risks to "you", and how we can help with these, is no longer enough. This will require a significant change in emphasis and great care in relation to the sharing of properly analysed and evaluated intelligence in circumstances where human rights might be violated.

One possible partial solution might be to place much greater emphasis on cooperation with key transit countries, most noticeably Turkey. While this is hardly new given the frequent use of the country as a transit point for UK, other European and North African foreign fighters travelling to Syria and back. Less attention has been paid to the enormous challenges Turkey faces regardless of the refugee crisis from the rapid growth of Istanbul's Ataturk airhub not the city's only airport as a huge transit point. Turkish airlines' own publicity highlights that the carrier serves more international destinations than any other airline in the world. The much criticised EU Frontex has recently - pre Paris - highlighted the challenges these developments pose, especially in routes from high risk African countries such as Somalia and from nearby Yemen. Frontex's report, noted by the Daily Telegraph and a few others, does not seem to have received the attention it deserved. This is not hindsight on this writer's part, as he raised the issue in Spring 2015. The Turks will feel that, while protecting themselves, they are also acting as a shield and an intelligence centre for the EU at least, being able to join up electronic trails left by passengers breaking their journeys in Istanbul. They can reasonably be expected to seek a lot of assistance. Stepping up to the plate on this will require careful coordination by the EU as a collective and from integrated initiatives of Member states and, de facto, from NATO and the USA.

The Report has particularly useful non statistical information in the form of subject specific commentaries, especially on lone wolf attacks which are a particularly Western form of risk and highlight the different challenges faced by different societies and hence the importance of aforementioned asymmetric approaches.

70% of deaths in Western countries between 2006 and 2014 were attributed to such attacks, a dramatically different figure from that for MENA states. These commentaries and the very thought provoking series of subsequent Expert Contributions on issues such as improving quantitative measurements and the handling of returned foreign fighters. These components add timeliness to the Report as they were clearly written very shortly before publication. Some much needed caution is highlighted by the authors who stress that statistics need to be assessed in context. On lone wolves, the US situation is largely non comparable with Western Europe due ♦ as readers will have guessed ♦ to the much greater availability of firearms in the USA, leading to a much higher proportion of fatal attacks. The Paris attacks ought to give a serious kick start to tackling the Western Balkans firearms trade to, at least, the Schengen Zone and to asymmetrically assist the Western Balkan countries outside the EU. It might well be necessary to suspend assistance in relation to drugs and cigarette smuggling and divert all such in country assistance to holistic CT work which takes into account the connections. Has EULEX Kosovo been approached for assistance? If not, why not?

The Expert Contributions need, finally, to be examined carefully as they pose some very pertinent questions about the way forward for western authorities in both protecting their societies and in deploying their considerable technical resources and organisational skills to the most vulnerable sufferers of terrorism and, perhaps more realistically, to key transit states. There is a large pool of expertise available, but whether it can be properly prepared and used is another issue. These challenges are succinctly and forcefully described by Anne - Sylvaine Chassany, reporting from Paris for the Financial Times (7th / 8th January 2016) in an article discussing French criticisms of the 2008 reform of French counter terrorism structures. These changes are reported as having led to ♦ a common theme ♦ greater centralisation of domestic intelligence assets with those of externally focused agencies, but at the expense of significant reductions in local and regional resources. Getting the balance right is crucial, and it is certainly not an either / or situation, not least because, as a quoted contributor stressed, high quality analysis is essential and ensuring this requires much more than good data in integrated and widely available databases. All practitioners need to be aware of the danger of what Stephen Grey, the author of the recent "The New Spymasters" has called "technological certainty". Nothing is certain.

Nobody believes it is easy. But the Index and its contributors provide a useful tool for continuing successful initiatives and, more importantly, starting new ones to fill the gaps and increase warning times. Let us hope they are taking a lot of calls from the right people.

Euan Grant