Research Option for completion of NPSIA M.A. International Affairs
Littlewood
May 2016 onwards:

Summary

Below is a list of topics and some provisional thinking on research essay topics I would be particularly interested in supervising from Summer 2016 onwards. These are not prescriptive – in that I will not reject well thought out proposals in other areas and on other topics – but reflect my current and on-going interests.

Procedure

Candidates interested in completion of their M.A. program via research should ensure they do the following:

1. Read and review the requirements of the program. Information on INAF 5908 / 5909 available on the NPSIA website
2. Consider if you have a sufficient interest in the subject or topic to develop a research question, design the research (methodology), and, are willing and able to conduct the research.
3. Discuss with me, or other faculty, possible topics and areas of interest.
4. Complete the Research Proposal Template for INAF 5908 / 5909 in Winter 2016 are required.

Topics

1. **Rational behavior and terrorism**: In 2014 Celso argued in *Cycles of Jihadist Movements and the Role of Irrationality* (Orbis) that jihadist groups were irrational. As the abstract notes, “The article argues that Islamist terror is driven by irrational forces; it analyzes jihadist values and doctrines that animate Islamic revolutionaries; it then contends that jihadist movements go through a cycle of mobilization, extremism, implosion and recreation. ... Examples from the Iraqi and Algerian jihadist campaigns are used for illustrative purposes throughout.” The cases used to elucidate the “Regenerative Wave Theory of Jihadist Organizations” were AQIM and AQI. **The theory is ripe for testing with other cases of jihadist movements.**

2. **Going Dark**: Privacy, surveillance, security, and encryption are entwined. In the wake of Snowden’s revelations ISPs and technology companies have shifted to, or indicated an intention to adopt, end-to-end encryption on devices. The law enforcement community is concerned about going dark and the advantages and disadvantages of encryption are debated in the wider community. See for example the [New America Foundation](http://www.newamericafoundation.org) What does this mean for Canada based on existing legislation, regulations, and information-sharing activities related to national security?

3. **Vigilante Counterterrorism**? Following the rise of ISIS the foreign fighter problem emerged. A different aspect of this was a number of individuals who left Canada and other democratic states to fight ISIS by joining Kurdish or other groups. More recently Anonymous has declared “war” on ISIS and sub-groups, such as GhostSec have used means and methods to disrupt ISIS’ social media and other communication means. So, what are the implications (positive and negative) of permitting non-state actors and individuals to target listed terrorist entities or join battle – real and virtual – against them? Is such activity something states should ignore, turn a blind eye to, encourage, or prevent?
Extremism, radicalization, and terrorism: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is now considered a core component of counterterrorism. As Richards observes (2015) in his article From terrorism to ‘radicalization’ to ‘extremism’: counterterrorism imperative of loss of focus (International Affairs) the shift may be confusing the remit of counterterrorism. As he notes in his conclusion, ‘[o]ne of the foremost researchers on radicalization has argued that ‘the idea that the adoption of radical ideas causes terrorism is perhaps the greatest myth alive today in terrorism research’ and, ‘[t]he concern is that counterterrorism, rather than focusing on the threat from terrorism, has itself become increasingly ideological – that it has gone beyond the remit of countering terrorism and has ventured into the broader realm of tackling ideological threats to the state.’ It is possible to construct a rationale for both the drift into countering extremism as both a detection aspect of possible terrorism and as a prevention aspect serving both national security and communities. Nevertheless, the evolution is not without its risks. Of equal note, AQ-inspired, or ISIL-inspired terrorism is not the sole terrorist threat to Western democracies. States tend to claim that CVE efforts are focused on all forms of extremism. Within North America (US and Canada) right wing extremism remains a significant threat to public safety and national security. Is there, however, a balance and similar approach to both right wing extremism and jihadist extremism? Put another way, can we learn lessons from the efforts to monitor right wing extremism? I would be interested in supervising research that compared efforts in the United States and Canada on countering right wing extremism and AQ-inspired extremism in terms of discourse, public understanding, legal, and community-based responses.

Counterterrorism in Canada: As Crenshaw and others note, counterterrorism can often have negative effects on civil liberties, rule of law and patterns of democratic governance. In Canada it is possible to identify negative consequences with concrete cases and there are sufficient indicators suggesting that negative consequences have rippled across a variety of communities, laws, and civil liberties. However, at face value Canada appears, post-9/11, to have avoided many of the common traps. The record is not perfect and the burden borne – or imposed – on some individuals and communities is palpable. The pending review of Bill C-51, and the concerns expressed by politicians, individuals, and civil society groups in the debate on C-51 in 2015 raised a number of concerns about the possible negative effects of counterterrorism legislation. What I am interested in is a more systematic study of Canada in this regard. Using post-9/11 as an example, I would be interested in a structured study of the Anti-Terrorism Act (2001) and the debates in Parliament and the mainstream media about expectations and fears vis-à-vis the ATA and whether or not they have been realized in the ensuing fifteen years. The focus should, probably, be on both concerns about counterterrorism overreach and concerns about under reaction, i.e. arguments both for and against the legislation. It might also seek to establish if there is a pattern in the 2001 and 2015 debates vis-à-vis actors, problems, and outcomes. Such patterns might be in discourse, framing, examples/cases etc.. Rather than focus on what did occur I am more interested in what didn’t happen in terms of identifying if the fears and concerns of both proponents and opponents of legislation were realized. And what explains and accounts for such fears failing to materialize?

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