

Anarchism, Terrorism Studies and Islamism

The period following 9/11 saw those looking for historical precedent for Al Qaeda rediscover the Anarchist terrorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Coincidentally this seemed to coincide with the emergence of Islamo-Anarchism, an attempt by some to marry a spiritual Islam with the decentralised anti-governmental approach of Anarchism.

This article firstly rejects these developments, but goes on to contend that such narratives are perhaps not surprising given the paucity of debate in the fast developing academic field of Terrorism Studies, dominated as it is by either statist and security industry tendencies, or a Critical Terrorism Studies perspective that risks becoming the mirror opposite of its opponent.

Keywords: Terrorism Studies, Anarchism, Jihadism

Introduction

Amongst the many explanations of Al Qaeda and Islamist violence since 9/11, one is particularly contentious. Put simply it is the suggestion that Al Qaeda's violence is something outside of Islamic fundamentalism, indeed outside of Islam per se. In searching for historical precedents, a small number of writers, journalists and political figures have begun to compare Al Qaeda to Anarchist organisations and currents, and in particular the wave of violence that was associated with Anarchism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Between 1892 and 1901, Anarchists assassinated the Heads of State in France, the United States and Italy, as well as killing the Prime Minister of Spain and the Empress

of Austria,¹ whilst the years during and immediately after the First World War saw a significant wave of violence in the United States, mostly associated with Anarchist émigrés from Europe.

A characteristic of the violence in America was its combative and innovative nature. At the end of April 1919, 30 letter bombs were posted to figures in the American establishment, timed to arrive on Mayday.² This was followed by a bomb attack on the home of the Attorney General, and in September 1920 the first known car bomb, planted by Anarchists at the New York Stock Exchange. 33 people were killed, whilst the likely bomber, an Italian Anarchist called Mario Buda, quietly made his way back to his country of birth.³ Earlier the route between Italy and the United States had been traversed in 1900 by Italian-American Anarchist Gaetano Bresci, who travelled from New Jersey to Monza to assassinate King Umberto.

Examples such as these do demonstrate that terrorism has been crossing borders for some time. Al Qaeda's global reach, demonstrated most clearly on 9/11, and its use of émigré or migrant communities is not without precedent – a point seized upon by some of the commentators considered below. Let us now consider some of those who, alongside *The Economist* of 18 August 2005 argue 'For jihadist, read anarchist'.

Tariq Ali

¹ Graham Stewart. 'Al Qaeda, Victorian Style' *Times Online*. 5 August 2005 Available at: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article551682.ece (Accessed 5 February 2009).

² Bach Jensen, Richard, 2008. Nineteenth Century Anarchist Terrorism: How Comparable to the Terrorism of Al Qaeda. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 20 Issue 4 October 2008 pp.589-596.

³ Mike Davis. *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb*. (London: Verso, 2008), 11.

The Anglo-Pakistani writer and commentator blames the 7/7 attacks on then Prime Minister Tony Blair and his decision to join the American led invasion of Iraq. In “Why They Happened”, an article written immediately after the attacks and syndicated globally, he states:

“Ever since 9/11, I have been arguing that the ‘war against terror’ is immoral and counterproductive. It sanctions the use of state terror – bombing raids, tortures, countless civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq – against Islamo-anarchists whose numbers are small, but whose reach is deadly.”⁴

Meghnad Desai

An economist, academic and Labour peer, Desai argues that Islamism is a political ideology quite distinct from religion “the modern Islamist terrorist is a descendant of the anarchist, except that there is a central ‘office’, al-Qaeda, which either controls them or at least inspires them.”⁵

John Gray

One of the UK’s most eminent thinkers, Gray’s “Al Qaeda and What It Means To Be Modern” rejects the view that Bin Laden wishes to turn the clock back to the seventh century world of the Prophet and his companions. Instead he categorises the group as a modern political movement, which seeks to use violence to alter the human condition. The Anarchist era of propaganda by deed is a precursor to radical Islam,

⁴ Tariq Ali. “Why They Happened: The London Bombings.” *Counterpunch*, 6 July 2005.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/tariq07082005.html> (Accessed on 11 May 2010).

⁵ Meghnad Desai. *Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror*. (London: IB Tauris, 2007),

and Gray compares Bin Laden to the nineteenth century Russian Anarchist Nechaev. He insists “Al Qaeda’s peculiar hybrid of theocracy and anarchy is a by-product of Western radical thought.”⁶

Tim Pendry

A leading communications, politics and public relations analyst, discussing the exact nature of Al Qaeda, and western reporting of it, Pendry stated

“This always begged the question of what precisely Al-Qaeda was if it had no central command structure and no extensive identifiable cell system like international communism. The model was closer to pre-first world was anarchism. This could manage random and dangerous atrocities but was incapable of doing what the Muslim Brotherhood might do and the AKP has done, capture control of a government.”⁷

Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi

A Pakistani political and defence analyst, writing in July 2008 about the return of the Taliban to prominence in the region:

⁶ John Gray. *Al Qaeda and What It Means To Be Modern*. (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), 117.

⁷ Tim Pendry. New Assessments of Al Qaeda. *TPPR Blog* 11 June 2008.

<http://asithappens.tppr.info/journal/2008/6/11/new-assessments-of-al-qaeda.html?printerFriend...>

(Accessed on 11 May 2008).

“It is a wrong assumption that the Taliban will again become friendly to Pakistan if it gives up its support to the US led war on terrorism. The Taliban have an anarchist agenda that aims at dismantling the Pakistani state.”⁸

Brevity Versus Substance

What characterises the above positions is their brevity. With the exception of Desai they are not part of wider books or substantive articles that attempt to build any detailed case to justify the assertions made. In two instances (Tariq Ali and Dr Rizvi) the information provided is taken as a given, and the reader broadly asked to take their word for it. When I entered into correspondence with Tim Pendry about the motivations behind his quote, he explained:

“The comments were not based on any particular report or analysis, just the commonsense assessment of someone who has read fairly widely in late nineteenth century intellectual and political revolt.”⁹

When Tariq Ali was pressed by those critical of his invention of the term ‘Islam-Anarchism’ he responded with the curious answer that “I coined Islam-Anarchism to counter the Islamo-Fascism of American and Brit neo-Cons.”¹⁰

⁸ Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi. “Analysis: Saving Pakistan.” 20 July 2008 *The Daily Times* (Pakistan) http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/print.asp?page=2008\07\20\story_20-7-2008_pg3_2 (Accessed 25 August 2009).

⁹ E mail correspondence with Tim Pendry on 16 December 2008.

¹⁰ Cited in Tarek Fatah. *Chasing A Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State*. (Ontario: Wiley, 2008),

The term Islamo-Fascism is certainly problematic. Fascism as an ideology is characterised by an ultra-nationalist stance, with the state holding supremacy over competing interests or groups.¹¹ For Islamists it is Islamic law, rather than the state that is pervasive. Mohammed Heikal argues in his study of the assassination of President Sadat in Egypt, that Jihadi groups believe political authority depends on the will of the people, which can only be given to those following the sharia. This means that consent is in fact given to the sharia, not the ruler.¹²

It is however noticeable that the term Islamo-Fascism appears to have entered President George W Bush's rhetoric in late 2005-6,¹³ some time *after* Tariq Ali coined the term Islamo-Anarchism in July 2005. Indeed it was as late as August 2006 that American Muslim organisations were to be found objecting to the President's categorisation of the UK liquid bomb plot as an example of Islamo-Fascism, terminology they deemed as offensive to Muslims.¹⁴

On this evidence at least, Ali's case that he was merely responding to the language of the neo-Conservatives is questionable. Why then would he coin the term? For Anarchists, a second possible reason emerges. It is difficult to see how Ali's wordplay

¹¹ See for example Juan J Linz "Some Notes Towards A Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective" in Walter Laqueur. *Fascism: A Readers Guide* (London: Penguin, 1979), 28.

¹² Mohammed Heikal. *Autumn of Fury – The Assassination of Sadat*. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983), 269-70.

¹³ The term was used by President George W Bush in a speech on 28 October 2005. See *President Discusses War on Terror* <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051028-1.html> (Accessed on 11 May 2010).

¹⁴ Richard Allen Greene. Bush's Language Angers US Muslims. 12 August 2006. *BBC News On-Line*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4785065.stm> (Accessed on 11 May 2010).

advances any extant cause, indeed it comes with the suspicion of petulance rather than a detailed analytical case. Is there something of the old Trotskyist remaining in Tariq Ali, perhaps seeing an opportunity to criticise the Neo-Conservatives and an old ideological rival on the revolutionary left at the same time?

Given Desai's 2007 work is perhaps the most detailed of the authors cited above, it is worthy of some analysis. Despite a long career in academia, this is the first substantive piece of research Desai has undertaken into terrorism, the bulk of his writing being devoted to economics. His "Rethinking Islamism" has a tendency to make sweeping statements about terrorist organisations who are not only distinct but often differed substantially in terms of ideology, composition and practice. When discussing Western terrorist organisations such as the Weathermen, Baader-Meinhof, Angry Brigade or Red Brigades he observes "They were individualistic, anarchist, and mindlessly violent. Their organisation anticipated later terrorist groups".¹⁵

Biographers of any of those four organisations would find much that is contentious in that one sentence alone – to give just two examples the 'mindlessly violent' Angry Brigade never killed anyone, whilst the ideological categorisation of Anarchism was absent from the discourse of the Weather Underground, Red Army Faction or Red Brigades. Indeed it is tempting to speculate that Desai's use of the colloquial names for the Weather Underground (Weathermen) and Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof) is indicative.

This lack of ideological sophistication continues when Desai considers Anarchism as a historical entity, and secondly when he discusses violent currents in the American political tradition. The ideological conflict in the First International is described thus

¹⁵ Desai, op cit p.23

“...anarchists and Communists continued to fight about who should lead the workers”.¹⁶

No Anarchist would state that they wished to ‘lead’ the workers. Anarchists want the workers to lead themselves, and a large part of the dispute between Bakunin and Marx in the First International was taken up by the former’s concerns that the latter wished to not just lead, but dictate. To Desai the appeal of Anarchism in this period comes not from the intellectual positions of Proudhon, Bakunin or Kropotkin, or the political activity of Anarchist organisations but that

“Anarchism appealed to the young because while Marxism emphasised study and waiting for the development of productive forces until the time was ripe for revolution, anarchists could at least throw bombs and hope to kill Kings and Presidents”.¹⁷

Moving into the modern era, Desai demonstrates that he is capable of assigning the term Anarchist to virtually anyone, including some who could be horrified to receive such a title. The activities of 1996 Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh are regarded as an example of the anarchist tradition in America taking a violent turn. The Militias of that era are designated to be a “scattered anarchist right wing movement”, whilst members of the Ku Klux Klan may be shocked to read that they are “another anarchist terrorist outfit”.¹⁸ Such sweeping claims are not accompanied by any detailed analysis of ideology, theory or practice, and the words of the practitioners themselves are

¹⁶ Desai, op cit p.78

¹⁷ Desai, op cit p.79

¹⁸ Both quotes in Desai, op cit, p.80

entirely absent. Then again, if Desai were to interview a member of an American militia organisation or the Ku Klux Klan, or even to study their publications or websites in detail, he is very unlikely to find any Anarchists, or for that matter Anarchism.

That such books are commissioned, written and published is perhaps not surprising, given the glut of titles that have appeared on terrorism in recent years. Andrew Silke estimates that the five years following 9/11 arguably saw more books published on terrorism than the previous fifty years, and that a new book on terrorism appears every six hours.¹⁹ From my own analysis of the Amazon.co.uk website between 7 October 2008 and 9 October 2009, a total of 62 new titles were accessible via a search under ‘Al Qaeda’ – more than one new book per week, on what is only one of many terrorist organisations. Quantity is unlikely to always be accompanied by quality.

Wearing Black and Green?

Intellectually, it is hard to consider two ideologies as different, ostensibly, as Anarchism and Islamism. Anarchism is based on the concept of life without rulers, whilst the core of Islam is submission to an authority – Allah. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Anarchy as “A theoretical social state in which there is no

¹⁹ Andrew Silke. “Research on Terrorism: A Review of the Impact of 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism.”, p.28. In *Terrorism Informatics Knowledge Management and Data Mining for Homeland Security*. Hsinchun Chen et al.

governing person or body of persons, but each individual has absolute liberty (without implication of disorder).”

Islamism could almost be its exact opposite.

Azim Nanji observes that an Islamist seeks to “enforce an ideological view of Islam in the political and social life of Muslim societies.” Islamists also

seek to establish norms of Muslim conduct in the affairs of society without necessarily seeking to challenge those in authority or encouraging extremism, including the use of violent means.²⁰

Jihadism arguably goes a step further. There are two different types of jihad. The first is the greater, or individual jihad. This is to live life as good a Muslim as possible, something that may require you to fight against yourself. Second is the lesser jihad where emphasis is again on struggle – but here the objective is to create a just and divinely ordered society. A Jihadist is simply someone who undertakes jihad.

However Nanji adds:

the term has come to refer to those groups in the Muslim world who believe in remaking Muslim societies and fighting Western influence through acts of violence, including suicide missions. Their imagined ideal of the Muslim world includes a unified society under a single authority which would impose Islam on all, by force if necessary.²¹

Why though are writers comparing such disparate phenomena as Anarchism, Islamism and indeed Jihadism?

²⁰ Azim Nanji. *Dictionary of Islam*. (London: Penguin: 2008), 83

²¹ Nanji, op cit, 90-91.

One contention is that human beings can rely on comparisons with known objects or phenomena to categorise or to make descriptions when considering unfamiliar or new trends. A detailed knowledge of the complicated structure of Jihadi organisations, and the succession of individuals, circles and groups that are involved in such attacks is not widespread. In the UK alone 46 international organisations are proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000 or Terrorism Act 2006. Of these 33 are fighting for either the establishment of a caliphate or a state based on sharia in a particular country or region. These include currents as diverse as the succession of groups to emerge from Al Muhajiroun in the UK (The Saved Sect, Islam4UK, Islamic Path, London School of Sharia and Al Ghurabaa) the Somali Al Shabaab group, to organisations fighting in Pakistan and Kashmir and of course Al Qaeda itself.²²

Globally the detail is even more complicated, with further terrorist lists being held by the United States, European Union and United Nations, plus the emergence of new groups, and/or individuals who are fighting for a particular cause without necessarily weighing themselves down with the baggage of group names and structures. Those coming anew to study such developments, are faced with a range of complex theological, political and social questions to address. It is not difficult to see how comparing such entities to earlier 'extremist' currents appeals.

Secondly the association of Anarchism in particular with terrorism is a long running, if inaccurate one. Anarchists have not actually killed anyone in Britain since the

²² Home Office, Office for Security and Counter Terrorism. The Terrorism Threat Proscribed Terrorist Groups. N.d. <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism-threat/proscribed-terrorist-orgs/proscribed-terrorist-groups/> (Accessed on 12 May 2010).

Houndsditch robbery in December 1910, which led to the celebrated Siege of Sidney Street in January 1911. Other ideologies – from Conservatism to New Labour to Irish Republicanism, arguably have a far greater association with violence in practice than Anarchism does. Despite this, Desai can assign the title of Anarchist to those who have not sought it (Timothy McVeigh or the Ku Klux Klan) and the term ‘mindlessly violent’ to those who did not kill anyone – the Angry Brigade.

If an individual is of the mindset that associates bombings with Anarchism - as Tariq Ali and Meghnad Desai appear to - or anti-Semitism and violence with Fascism - as some Neo-Conservatives may do - it is perhaps a short journey to using terms such as Islamo-Anarchism or Islamo-Fascism. Nor does that individual need to concern themselves with contentious religious terms such as Jihad, or get into difficult debates about exactly what is Islamism, and whether it necessarily has any association with violence at all.

Finally it is noticeable that fiction concerning Anarchist terrorism appears to hold an enduring fascination for some contemporary researchers into Jihadism. Consider Peter Bergen and Jason Burke, authors of what may be regarded as standard books on Al Qaeda. Bergen’s 2001 “Holy War Inc: Inside The Secret World of Osama Bin Laden” sees chapter one open with a quote from Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Agent”. The third edition of Burke’s 2007 “*Al Qaeda*” commences with a quote from Osama Bin Laden – directly followed by one from The Secret Agent. Meghnad Desai continues this theme in “Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror”. Here the first three chapters begin with quotes from The Secret Agent, before Desai appears to run

out of suitable lines. Chapter four starts with the same quote Bergen uses to open Holy War Inc, whilst the final two chapters lack any opening quote at all.

It would appear that although a substantial case linking Anarchist terrorism and Jihadist terrorism cannot be maintained, a quote from fiction can still be made that repeats the connection, albeit in a slightly different manner.

An Academic Comparison? James L Gelvin

Only in 2008 did an academic build a substantive case comparing Islamist terrorism and Anarchist terrorism - James L Gelvin, of the University College Los Angeles (UCLA.) An expert on the Middle East, Gelvin had first sketched his thesis in 2007, seeing five core areas where Al Qaeda and Anarchists overlapped. He argued Al Qaeda:

- Places action over ideology
- Has a single minded focus on resistance
- Lacks programmatic goals
- Pursues violence for its own sake
- Is highly de-centralised with semi-autonomous cells.

Thus “all these factors align Al Qaeda with a type of movement that historically has had nothing to do with Islamism at all: Anarchism.”²³

²³ These initial comments had come in an introduction to Gelvin’s 2007 *“The Modern Middle East: A History”*. He reprises them in James L Gelvin “Al Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian’s Reply To Terrology.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol 20 Issue 4 October 2008, 563-581.

Gelvin went on to develop these arguments into a polemic in a core academic journal in this field - *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Here he stresses that Anarchism makes the claim to be defensive in nature, as does Al Qaeda, whose rhetoric is dominated by the perceived injustices of the 'Zionist-Crusader Alliance'.

Adopting a defensive tone is hardly unusual amongst those who take up arms. Anyone who visited Northern Ireland in recent decades will have observed the frequency with which Ulster Loyalists referred to themselves as 'under siege' or groups like the Ulster Defence Association (note the name) characterised themselves as a purely reactive force. Even on the international political stage, government actions such as the invasion of Iraq were characterised as being defensive, counter terrorist actions.

Gelvin sees both Al Qaeda and Anarchists as attacking the wellspring of their subjugation – the state. The man usually regarded as Osama Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, states openly that Muslims are a single nation. Writing before the 2008-9 Israeli attacks on Gaza, Gelvin also sees al-Zawahiri as at times lukewarm about Hamas, and their interpretation of the Palestinian struggle. Indeed the quotes Gelvin selects of al-Zawahiri insisting that the Palestinian struggle is not a nationalist one, but for one for sharia, show the Al Qaeda ideologue engaged in some rather unconvincing verbiage.²⁴

Whilst this is all very interesting to the student of terrorism, in what way does it prove that Anarchism and Al Qaeda are analogous or that they are unique in tackling the 'wellspring of subjugation'? It is tempting to ask why any revolutionary would attempt to attack anything other than the wellspring of subjugation?

²⁴ Gelvin, op cit, 572.

Al Qaeda And Ambiguity

Next is the proposition that both Anarchists and Al Qaeda's worldview are based on an ideal counter-community.

In the Al Qaeda imagination it seems that the caliphate might be defined as a territorial expanse freed from the constraints of the nation state system and ordained and administered according to the precepts of Islamic law.²⁵

Here, Gelvin sees Anarchists and Islamists facing the same core problem, the difficulty in producing "a governance cum disciplinary mechanism from a vantage point located within the existing nation state system".²⁶

Gelvin is on weak ground in arguing that Al Qaeda's vision of counter-community remains ambiguous. Firstly we have the published writings of Osama Bin Laden, Aymaan al-Zawahiri and related ideologues to consider. Secondly we have a view from those who have spent time in Al Qaeda controlled territory such as their camps – the journalist Abdel Bari Atwan,²⁷ or with regard to their jihadist training programme the Islamist turned defector Omar Nasiri.²⁸ They tell us much about how Al Qaeda members go about their business and live their daily lives.

Finally we have our knowledge of the type of society Al Qaeda participated in from 1996-2001 in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Whilst some cultural difficulties and

²⁵ Gelvin, op cit, 573.

²⁶ Gelvin, op cit, 573-4.

²⁷ Abdel Bari Atwan. *"The Secret History of Al Qaeda"*. (London: Saqi Books, 2006).

²⁸ Omar Nasiri. *"Inside The Global Jihad"*. (London: C Hurst & Co, 2006).

political disputes occurred between Al Qaeda and the Taleban,²⁹ evidence of Al Qaeda dissenting from the Taleban's experiment in actually existing sharia is sparse.

More substantially, Gelvin sees Anarchists as adopting an instrumental approach to terrorism. The more outrageous and spectacular the better – the greater to embolden revolutionaries and diminish the control of counter revolutionaries. Here perhaps Gelvin's arguments are at their weakest. If terrorism is viewed as a method, not as part of an ideology or the basis of an ideology under consideration, it is surely not surprising that you can find similarities between the intentions of those using violence? Terrorists of a whole range of political and religious backgrounds – from Islamist to nationalist to fascist - may wish to kill the President of the United States. But does that tell us anything about *them* other than they are willing to use deadly violence?

Gelvin makes great play of this quote from Bin Laden following 9/11:

‘One of the most important positive effects of the attacks on New York and Washington was that they revealed the truth about the struggle between the **Crusaders** and **Muslims**, and they revealed the immense hostility the **Crusaders** feel toward us. The attacks demonstrated that America really is a wolf in sheep's clothing and revealed the truth of its hideousness. The entire world awakened from its sleep, and **Muslims** awoke to the importance of the doctrine that God alone defined friendships and enmities. Thus was the spirit

²⁹ See for example Jason Burke. “Al Qaeda” (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 185-6. Here it is suggested that in 1998 the Taliban had actually agreed to hand Bin Laden to Saudi Arabia to be tried for treason.

of brotherhood amongst **Muslims** strengthened, which might be considered a huge step toward the unification of **Muslims** under the oneness of God and toward the establishment of **the rightly guided caliphate**, should God will it.³⁰

To Gelvin, swap the (highlighted) words Crusader, Muslim and Rightly Guided Caliphate for the words Bourgeoisie, Proletariat and Socialism, and you have the rhetoric of the revolutionary Anarchist.

One could however just as easily play a similar word game, considering a terrorist bombing such as the devastating Zionist attack on the King David's Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946. We could also use the above text, swapping the word British for Crusader, and Jews for Muslims. The rightly guided caliphate could instead be the State of Israel. It is entertaining, but whether it *proves* anything is another matter entirely.

In the midst of these categorisations, there is one voice missing entirely – that of the participants. Terms such as Islamo-Anarchism, or the Islamo-fascism talked of by George W Bush, would almost certainly be unrecognisable to an Al Qaeda member in Afghanistan, a supporter of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan, or a young British Muslim dreaming of fighting jihad. There is certainly no ideologue from any of those positions using either term – however ‘anarchic’ or anti-Semitic their actions may be to others.

³⁰ Gelvin, op cit, 574.

An Oxymoron in the Room? Islamo-Anarchism

If the attempts to conjoin Anarchism and Islam in terms of terrorism are to be rejected, what of those who seek to combine these currents in other ways? A small number of Islamo-Anarchists can now be found on-line,³¹ with their own Facebook page, and a Muslim Anarchist Charter was written by Yunus Yakoub Islam in 2005. This begins with the words “there is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger”.³² Mohamed Jean Veneuse has recently completed a PhD on what he terms Anarca-Islam, with a book scheduled to follow.

The Islam and Anarchism Facebook page suggests a source for these developments. “In the last few years, there has been discussion regarding the idea of Islamic anarchism, primarily from the US-based punk Muslim Michael Knight”.³³

Michael Muhammad Knight is a white convert to Islam, and the author of a 2003 novel *Taqwacore*, which tells the story of a group of Muslim punks in the United States. (*Taqwa* translated from Arabic means god consciousness, *Core* is taken from the word *hardcore*) In this instance life appears to have imitated art, with several punk bands being formed in the United States containing either members of Muslim heritage, or adopting the *Taqwacore* label. This took further shape with the recent release of a 2009 film by Omar Majeed, *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam*. This follows bands such as *The Kominas*, *Vote Hezbollah* and *Secret Trial Five* on tour in

³¹ See for example the Islam and Anarchism Facebook group

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=14952944340> At 12 May 2010 it had just 247 members.

³² Muslim Anarchist Charter. n.d. <http://www.bayyinat.org.uk/manarchist.htm> (Accessed on 12 May 2010).

³³ Islam and Anarchism Facebook page, op cit, n.d. (Accessed on 12 May 2010)

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=14952944340>

the United States, then some of the musicians travelling to Pakistan and attempting to gig there, under the name Noble Drew.

Taqwacore the movie contains genuine scenes of subversion. The Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) Chicago convention, clearly did not expect the Taqwacore bands to take the form that they did when they were allowed to play. What they ended up with was punk rock, to the fury of the organisers who call police, and the terror of some of the audience. A female ISNA representative is recorded complaining bitterly that woman should not be allowed on stage, before the scene reaches a truly beautiful climax. A group of hijab wearing American Muslim girls are clearly enjoying the music, whilst two police officers demand the bands leave the stage. Muhammad Knight accordingly goes into full provocateur mode, chanting 'Pigs are haram in Islam', before the Taqwacores are thrown out of the convention.

The second half of the film, as Knight and some of the musicians head to Pakistan, is perhaps less of a success. The reality is that Pakistan is a deeply divided country - especially in terms of class - and playing punk rock in such a society presents a particular challenge. The American's efforts to leaflet the masses promoting a free gig are comical, although they do provoke the objections of one angry man (who from his accent appears English) appalled at such a gig being proposed in a Muslim country. This perhaps indicates the major problem facing the Taqwacores, or for that matter any strand of Islamo-Anarchism. Part of the film is about asking hard questions about Islam, denying the authority of Imam's and opposing religious hierarchy. In one scene Muhammad Knight talks of raising a finger to both sides in any clash of civilisations.

Such statements are easier – and safer – to make in suburban America than in Pakistan. Worryingly, whilst the version of the Taqwacore novel that is available in

the United States is complete and unexpurgated, in the edition released in Britain the publishers removed several scenes.³⁴ A mass movement that both challenges Islamic conventions and yet is spiritually Muslim may prove easier to live as a work of fiction than a long term cultural or political phenomenon. Whether anything substantive in terms of politics is likely to emerge from Taqwacore remains therefore to be seen.

Equally Anarchists are likely to be questioning of such developments. A rejection of religion has been present in Anarchism throughout its history, with the slogan ‘No Gods, No Masters’ typical. In the Spanish Civil War in particular Anarchists took a fearsome revenge against the symbols of religious authority, church property and even individual priests.

Anarchists have also been wary of the risks of working with those from other perspectives. Bakunin warned Anarchists against working with those socialists who wanted to maintain private property or the wages system:

“all the experience of history demonstrates to us that an alliance concluded between two different parties always turns to the advantage of the more reactionary of the two parties; this alliance necessarily enfeebles the more progressive party, by diminishing and distorting its programme, by destroying its moral strength, its confidence in itself, whilst a reactionary party, when it is guilty of falsehood is always and more than ever true to itself”.³⁵

Could much the same argument can be applied to Anarchists working with or following a religion which literally means submission to God? Islam certainly does

³⁴ Halal Punk Rock? *The Sprout*. 14 December 2009. <http://www.thesprout.co.uk/en/news/halal-punk-rock/01208.html> (Accessed on 12 May 2010).

³⁵ Mikhail Bakunin. *Marxism, Freedom and the State*. (London: Freedom, 1998), 54.

not reject private property or the wages system. In 2006 in London several hundred Anarchists gathered in Hackney on Guy Fawkes Night, to burn effigies of repressive political figures. As well as setting fire to the Queen, Tony Blair, George W Bush, the Mayor of Hackney and burning the Stars and Stripes, effigies of Jesus and Mohammad were paraded, before they were both set on fire.³⁶

There appears little chance of Islamo-Anarchism becoming popular in such circles.

Failures of the Pen

It is my contention that the failings of writers such as Meghnad Desai and Tariq Ali, is indicative of a wider malaise in writing on terrorism. The need for a nuanced, balanced approach is particularly clear in an academic discipline such as terrorism studies. Here an overwhelming volume of articles, books and journals compete on what is the contested territory of a host of actors. Governments, religious organisations, police, security services, political parties plus of course terrorist organisations themselves all have messages they wish to see disseminated.

The writer Jason Burke, in his analysis of Al Qaeda sets out some of these dangers when he comments “Intelligence services lie, cheat and deceive. Propaganda is one of their primary functions”.³⁷ He illustrates this with reference to claims made in the British government dossier on the 9/11 attacks, presented on 4 October 2001. Burke believes this contains two fabrications and a deliberate omission. First are false claims that Bin Laden was involved in drug production. Second that Al Qaeda was

³⁶ A recording of the latter is available on You Tube at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLuFqpZ0Kdc> (Accessed on 12 May 2010).

³⁷ Burke, op cit, 16.

responsible for the attack on American helicopters in Mogadishu in 1993, immortalised in the film *Black Hawk Down*. The omission centres on the failure to mention Bin Laden's two year residency in the territory of a British ally – Saudi Arabia – whilst mentioning his visits to other countries in the same time period. Burke concludes:

Oddly a convention seems to have developed whereby something from a 'security source', even if released by politicians, suddenly acquires a degree of reliability. Actually such material should be treated with extreme circumspection, not exempted from normal journalistic practices.³⁸

Given this, the benefits to both government or security services if they can influence academics in such a manner should be self-evident.

Terrorism Studies Today

Two main currents arguably predominate in this discipline. The first comprises those who have researched in this field for some years, often as part of a strong working relationship with government, the police, security services and/or the private security industry. In the United Kingdom this trend is perhaps best represented by the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, at St Andrews University, founded in 1994 by Prof Paul Wilkinson, a long term advisor to the British government on terrorism. Similar institutions can be found internationally. Rohan Gunaratna heads the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, whilst also serving as a senior fellow at West Point, the United States military academy. In that country the Rand Corporation emerges as a think tank providing

³⁸ Burke, op cit, 18.

advice to the US government, and for a generation has attracted academics in the field of terrorism research.³⁹

Some obvious difficulties emerge when considering research developed in such environments. Governments are not neutral players in the fields of terrorism or even political violence. Firstly they are frequently the targets of such violence. Those under fear of physical attack can hardly be expected to be objective about those instigating violence against them. Secondly governments are the ultimate arbiters of whether those involved in violence should be negotiated with. Thirdly history has shown governments are frequently participants in politically motivated violence and terrorism themselves – something they will be loathe to admit.⁴⁰

Given these scenarios, consider Dr Marc Sageman, recognised as a world authority on Al Qaeda. Sageman holds positions at two American Universities and think tanks such as the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI).⁴¹ The cynic may contend that a further reason exists for Dr

³⁹ For more on each of these institutions view their respective websites

Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence :

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~wwwir/research/cstpv/>

International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research <http://www.pvtr.org/>

Rand Corporation <http://www.rand.org/>

⁴⁰ The huge subject of state terrorism is out with the remit of this paper, but the participation of organisations such as the Central Intelligence Agency in political assassination has been more than established. See for example Sean Kelly: *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire* (Washington DC, American University Press, 1993) on the CIA ordering the murder of Patrice Lumumba. The Belgium government also appears to have wished to see Lumumba killed.

⁴¹ For a profile of Dr Sageman see the Institutes website

<http://www.fpri.org/about/people/sageman.html>

Sageman's knowledge – he served as a CIA officer in Islamabad between 1987 to 1989, directing American programmes in support of the Mujahedeen. Given the importance of this period in the establishment of what was to become Al Qaeda⁴² Dr Sageman can hardly be viewed as a neutral or disinterested analyst. This is especially so when other researchers contend that events such as 9/11 are evidence of 'blowback' from earlier, unwise American policies. Blowback has been defined as

an expression that refers to the unintended consequences of providing support to violent dissident groups in other states. These groups, once they are successful, may turn on their former benefactors and create problems for them.⁴³

To writers such as Chalmers Johnson,⁴⁴ this term perfectly encapsulates the outcomes of American foreign policy. Whether Chalmers fully establishes his case or not, issues such as these illustrate the difficulty in defining objectivity and neutrality with regards to academics in the field of terrorism studies. Despite this, Dr Sageman's entry on the FPRI website describes him as 'an independent researcher on terrorism', a categorisation that is surely contentious.

Critical Studies on Terrorism

A second trend within terrorism studies is that characterised by what has become known as the Critical Studies school, centred in the UK around the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, published from Aberystwyth University. The critical approach

⁴² See for example Burke, op cit, 83.

⁴³ Definition taken from James M Lutz and Barbara M Lutz. "*Global Terrorism*". 2nd Edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁴ See for example Chalmers Johnson. "American Militarism and Blowback" in C Boggs (ed). *Masters of War: Militarism and Blowback in the Era of American Empire*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 111-29.

may perhaps be summed up by the analysis of Richard Jackson when considering the failure of terrorism studies as a discipline to engage sufficiently with the issue of state terrorism. He surmises “knowledge and its production is never a purely neutral exercise but always works for someone and something”.⁴⁵ This process has consequences – terrorism studies as a subject is distorted, dominant power structures reified and elite and state projects enabled. Terrorism studies serves the status quo.

Jackson cites significant academic figures – such as Walter Laquer or Paul Wilkinson – who have at times recognised the scale and significance of state terrorism – but declined to give it the full weight of their research capacity. Where introductory text books for students have covered this strand, it has tended to be restricted to one chapter, focusing on historical examples at the expense of terrorism from contemporary western governments or Israel.⁴⁶ He concludes ‘a discourse analysis of the field reveals that the most notable aspect of the state terrorism discourse is its near complete absence’.⁴⁷

This all the more noteworthy when Jackson is able to list an exhaustive series of terrorist campaigns, groups and repressive regimes supported by Western liberal democracies – from the French bombing of the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior to continued support for Pakistani governments who have sponsored a succession of terrorist organisations in Kashmir.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Richard Jackson. The Ghosts of State Terror: Knowledge, Politics and Terrorism Studies. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Vol 1 No.3, December 2008, 378.

⁴⁶ Jackson, op cit, 381.

⁴⁷ Richard Jackson, op cit, 382.

⁴⁸ Richard Jackson, op cit, 385-6.

A Critical Perspective On Critical Studies

Ostensibly there is much to admire in the critical studies approach. As Richard Jackson goes on to state when critiquing the inability of terrorism studies as a system to properly engage with the issue of state terrorism

The exposure of this dominant narrative also opens up critical space for the articulation of alternative and potentially emancipatory forms of knowledge and practice.⁴⁹

There are however grounds for considerable caution. Some in the field of terrorism studies have questioned the perceived originality of the critical studies approach – asserting that by drawing on the wider body of critical thought in the discipline of international relations, it is not as new as it appears to be.⁵⁰ Torsten Michel and Anthony Richards also question any suggestion from within the critical studies approach that terrorism is linked to human insecurity and/or poverty – propositions that lack empirical validation.⁵¹

A second concern also emerges. If a critical approach is to dominate methodology when considering state actors, should that approach be extended when considering non-state actors? Or indeed those who have been suspected of or accused of participation in terrorism?

⁴⁹ Richard Jackson, *op cit*, 377.

⁵⁰ Torsten Michel and Anthony Richards. False Dawns or New Horizons? Further Issues and Challenges For Critical Terrorism Studies. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Vol 2, No.3 December 2009, 410.

⁵¹ Michel and Richards, *op cit*, 407.

In 2008 George Kassimeris of Wolverhampton University interviewed Moazzam Begg, a Briton formerly held without charge in Guantanamo Bay, released in January 2005 after some three years in custody. Begg is a controversial figure. On 7 February 2010 Gita Saghal, Head of the Gender Unit at Amnesty International's Secretariat, strongly denounced the fact that her organisation had been working with Begg and his Cageprisoners group in a campaign called Counter Terror With Justice. Saghal commented:

As a former Guantanamo detainee it was legitimate to hear his experiences, but as a supporter of the Taliban it was absolutely wrong to legitimise him as a partner.⁵²

Saghal was also scathing at any suggestion that Begg or Cageprisoners believed in human rights as a concept.

No hint of any impending controversy surrounding Begg is discernible from his interview in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Indeed the article, begins with a questionable premise in only the second sentence, when Kassimeris states:

Moved by the plight of the Afghani people, in 2001 Begg travelled to Kabul with his family to start a school for basic education and provide water pumps.⁵³

This statement does not appear to be borne out by Moazzam Begg's autobiography. This offers two reasons for his move to Afghanistan. Begg was running the al-Ansar

⁵² Richard Kerbaj. Amnesty International Is Damaged By Taliban Link. *Sunday Times* 7 February 2010. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/afghanistan/article7017810.ece> (Accessed on 13 May 2010).

⁵³ George Kassimeris. Torture and Terrorism: An Interview With Moazzam Begg. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Vol 1, No.3, December 2008., 405.

Islamic bookshop in Birmingham, which was visited frequently by people returning from Taliban controlled Afghanistan. It had also brought the attention of the police and security services. He comments

My close friends were constantly being visited by MI5. They used to ask them to inform on me, but I was quite open with everyone about my plans. I didn't have anything to hide. In the bookshop I used to hear a lot about Afghanistan from people who were going back and forth regularly, and one of them told me about a school project that he had initiated in Kabul.⁵⁴

However the school was already built by the time Begg left for Afghanistan 'The headmaster of the school even phoned me from Kabul to thank me'⁵⁵ (for assistance Begg had given). Instead his reasons for emigrating appear to have been as much financial, and a tiredness and weariness towards Britain brought about by the attentions of the police and security services.

The simple fact of the cost of living weighed with me too. Many people told us we could live in the best areas of Kabul for less than a £100 a month, and gradually the idea of uprooting the family and going there to live took hold of me, and as I talked about it, seemed quite possible.⁵⁶

That Begg had sympathies for the governing Taliban is also clear from his memoir.

When I went to Afghanistan, I believed the Taliban had made some modest progress – in social justice and upholding pure, old style Islamic values

⁵⁴ Moazzam Begg. *“Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim’s Journey To Guantanamo and Back.”* (London: The Free Press, 2006).

⁵⁵ Begg, op cit, 91

⁵⁶ Begg, op cit, 91-92.

forgotten in many Islamic countries. After September 11 that life was destroyed.⁵⁷

A further line in George Kassimeris introduction is equally contentious. This states 'Begg is a spokesman for the Human Rights organisation Cageprisoners.'⁵⁸ This certainly repeats what Cageprisoners currently states on its website

Cageprisoners Ltd is a human rights organisation (company registration no: 6397573) that exists solely to raise awareness of the plight of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and other detainees held as part of the War on Terror.⁵⁹

Difficulties soon emerge however when a deeper examination of Cageprisoners work is conducted. Amongst those supported by Cage Prisoners have included Abu Hamza, convicted of soliciting murder, would be shoe bomber Sajid Badat,⁶⁰ convicted of conspiracy to destroy, damage or endanger an aircraft and Abu Qatada, who features on a United Nations list of affiliates of the Taliban.⁶¹ Cage Prisoners has repeatedly promoted the fugitive Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-Awlaki including publishing an interview between Moazzam Begg and al-Awlaki on 31 December

⁵⁷ Begg, op cit, 381.

⁵⁸ Kassimeris, op cit, 405.

⁵⁹ Cage Prisoners. About us. n.d. <http://www.cageprisoners.com/page.php?id=2> (Accessed on 13 May 2010).

⁶⁰ Literature encouraging prison correspondence with Hamza and Badat was distributed by Cageprisoners at the Islam Expo event in London 11-14 July 2008. Copies in the authors collection. At the time of writing references to Hamza and Badat have been removed from the Cageprisoners website, whilst those for Qatada remain. These changes followed the controversy provoked by Ms Saghal's charges.

⁶¹ United Nations. List of Individuals Belonging to or Associated With the Taliban. 17 October 2007. <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/consoltablelist.shtml> (Accessed on 13 May 2010).

2007.⁶² It is not difficult to come away from reading the Cageprisoners website, that it is one devoted to the support of jihadis, and the propagation of their ideals.

Unfortunately we do not get the opportunity to hear such issues debated with Moazzam Begg – Critical Studies on Terrorism does not put any such questions to him. This is all the more curious when Begg’s own autobiography, mentioned at the start of the interview, talks openly about his visits to Jihadi training camps. These centre on his first visit to Afghanistan, when he went to a Jamaat e-Islami camp still operating four years after the Soviets had been expelled from the country, an adjoining Arab run facility, and a Mujahideen camp in Bosnia. Despite being warned not to by MI5, Begg even attempted to travel to war-torn Chechnya in this period, but was unable to enter an adjoining country.⁶³

Opportunities are also missed to challenge assertions. Discussing the extent to which British foreign policy has radicalised young people, Begg states

If you look at the video statements of some of the July 7th bombers, they say clearly why they did it. It’s not to justify it, but if you want to know why somebody does something you have to hear it from his mouth, and he says clearly that he did it because of Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶⁴

⁶² Moazzam Begg Interviews Anwar al-Awlaki. 31 December 2007.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=22926> (Accessed on 13 May 2010).

⁶³ Begg, op cit, 50-57, 59, 66-7 and 87.

⁶⁴ Begg to Kassemmeris, op cit, 410-411.

Here it is worth considering in some detail the transcript of the suicide video of Mohammed Siddique Khan, ring leader of the 2005 London bombings. Khan certainly appears to be alluding to Iraq and/or Afghanistan when he comments:

Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight. We are at war and I am a soldier. Now you too will taste the reality of this situation.⁶⁵

Neither Moazzam Begg nor George Kassemmeris appear to have considered the words that directly precede the above section of the tape. In this often overlooked segment, Khan says

Our driving motivation doesn't come from tangible commodities that this world has to offer. Our religion is Islam - obedience to the one true God, Allah, and following the footsteps of the final prophet and messenger Muhammad. This is how our ethical stances are dictated.

On this evidence, Khan's actions could just as easily be motivated by a sense of religious duty or adherence, and his own interpretation of the Qu'ran or hadith, as any opposition to British foreign policy. His exact motivations are perhaps a matter for debate – but not one unfortunately conducted in Critical Studies on Terrorism. Begg's analysis is instead allowed to stand unchallenged.

⁶⁵ London Bomber Text In Full. *BBC News On-Line*. 1 September 2005.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4206800.stm> (Accessed on 13 May 2010).

None of these comments is to deny the human rights abuses Begg and others have suffered in American custody. Indeed Kassimeris questions do allow Moazzam Begg to paint a vivid picture of life as a detainee and its long term effects upon him as an individual. But a critical perspective surely requires a robust approach to actors other than the state and orthodox terrorism researchers? To quote Richard Jackson again

Discourses are significant not just for what they say but also for what they do not say; the silences in a discourse can be as important, or even more important at times, than what is stated.⁶⁶

Taken as a whole, Jackson's approach is logical and indeed encouraging for the future of terrorism studies as a discipline – if properly put into practice. But opening up *uncritical* space to Moazzam Begg and Cage Prisoners is deeply problematic. On re-reading Kassimeris' interview, what is absent from the questioning is at times more striking than what is actually present. The interviewee's positions are all too often accepted, at face value, by the interviewer. The very failing that the critical school observes in orthodox terrorism studies is therefore, in this instance, replicated.

An Attack On Academia?

The failed Christmas Day attempt to bring down an airliner over Detroit, with a bomb positioned in the underpants of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, focused attention on University College London (UCL), where the Nigerian had studied Mechanical Engineering from 2005-8 and been President of the Islamic Society in 2006-7. The sensitivity of terrorism studies, and the conduct of academic institutions with regards

⁶⁶ Richard Jackson, op cit, 379.

to terrorism was emphasised as certain newspapers used the bombing as an opportunity to raise wider issues.

A *Daily Telegraph* editorial on 28 December 2009 thundered “Academic liberalism is a danger to life” calling for a greater focus on the activities of University Islamic societies. The Telegraph continued:

Liberal British academics, along with their friends in the media and public sector, have a habit of diverting any discussion of terrorism away from Islamism towards the evils of Anglo-American foreign policy. By doing so they are less likely to offend students from developing countries whose delicate sensibilities seem to matter more than security.

Perhaps not surprisingly the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) felt the need to respond to such media coverage, issuing a press release the following day.

This stated:

there remains no evidence to suggest that Muslim students are at particular risk of radicalisation or that university campuses are vulnerable to people seeking to recruit to this extreme ideology.⁶⁷

It is a wonder that the Federation of Student Islamic Societies could make such a claim. Abdulmutallab is far from being the first executive of a student Islamic society to be involved with terrorist offences. He follows Glasgow airport suicide bomber

⁶⁷ FOSIS, 2009. “Fosis comments on media reports regarding terror suspect” Press Release, 29 December 2009.

<http://fosis.org.uk/media/press-releases/649-fosis-comments-on-media-reports-regarding-terror-suspect>

(Last accessed on 2 March 2010)

Kafeel Ahmed (Queens University) and Yassin Nassari (University of Westminster) who was convicted of bringing guides on constructing weapons into the UK. 2003 Tel Aviv suicide bomber Omar Sharif was a former member of Kings College London Islamic Society, whilst alleged liquid bomb plotter Waheed Zaman was the head of the Islamic Society at London Metropolitan University.⁶⁸

In the case of Abdulmutallab's alma mater, this was not the first time the UCL Islamic Society has stood accused of extremism. In 1994 the then Islamic Society was disaffiliated from the wider students union due to its dominance by the caliphate seeking Hizb-ut-Tahrir organisation, distributing anti-Semitic literature and attempted intimidation of students union officials.⁶⁹

Whilst academics may have established that press coverage of British Muslims can be unfair and stereotypical,⁷⁰ an examination of the involvement of some British Muslims students with terrorism indicates that Muslim organisations such as FOSIS can be just as inaccurate or disingenuous in their analysis. To properly address these issues may require an academic approach that is not encumbered by either of the dominant trends within terrorism studies at this time.

⁶⁸ At the time of writing two juries have been unable to establish Zaman's guilt or innocence, and he awaits a third trial.

⁶⁹ Interview with Edmund Lyon, External Affairs and Welfare Officer UCL Union 1993-4, 2 April 2010.

⁷⁰ Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis. *Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000-2008*. Cardiff School of Journalism, media and Cultural Studies, 2008.

What an Anarchist Approach Can Bring

The great Irish author Brendan Behan once argued that there was no situation so bad, the arrival of a police officer would not make it worse. Anarchists take a perhaps similar viewpoint with regards to government, security services and the police. Some of the controversies that have affected government counter-terrorism strategies such as the Prevent initiative or the Metropolitan Police's work with Salafi and Islamist communities via their Muslim Contact Unit, would come as no surprise to Anarchists.

Secondly Anarchist thinkers, given their ideological hostility towards government, have tended to be suspicious of, or even hostile towards national liberation movements. This allows Anarchists to sidestep what is perhaps the most contentious and perhaps core debate in terrorism studies – the ever present cliché that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Given this, Anarchists, and indeed Anarchism, has much to contribute to debates concerning terrorism. Anarchist scepticism of government, hierarchy, power, national liberation movements and of organised religion, is arguably a less compromised starting position than those of existing researchers and participants.

At this stage however, few Anarchists are writing and researching in terrorism studies. It is to be hoped that will change, as the positive advantages the critical studies approach can bring should not be taken for granted. Perhaps the greatest danger is that as the interview with Moazzam Begg indicates the thrust of critical studies results in it potentially diminishing or underplaying trends that do not readily fit its wider political perspectives.

My research thus far indicates a British Jihadism that is older, deeper and more widespread than many – including the police, Muslim organisations and Her Majesties Government – may at times care to admit.⁷¹ British Muslims have now been killing, fighting and dying in the name of jihad for three full decades.⁷² I do not consider that research (or such conclusions if demonstrated in my final thesis) to be incompatible with Anarchism. The question of whether such analysis – or findings - fit comfortably within a critical perspective perhaps remains to be established. At this stage a degree of pessimism may be advisable here.

Conclusion – The Whole Future Lies In Front Of Us

Anarchism remains an easy ideal to misrepresent, as indeed do Anarchists. We are unlikely to have seen the end of Islamo-Anarchism, whether the tune is played by Tariq Ali or an American punk rocker.

Anarchists tend not to sue, they do not form a particular lobby or voting bloc, they do not seek to develop working relationships with the orthodoxies of power and Anarchists do not form a set community or racial group. For these reasons alone Anarchism may continue to be mis-represented, attacked, adapted or used by others.

That should not however blind us to the uses of Anarchism. That hostility to power and suspicion of those who seek it, is a significant tool in any researchers armoury. Those looking to establish a socialist or Anarchist society, or even to develop strong

⁷¹ My PhD research is entitled British Jihadism: History, Theory, Practice.

⁷² It is often overlooked that at least six British Muslims died fighting in Bosnia in the early 1990s, or that prior to 7/7 Britons had been involved in suicide bomb attacks in Kashmir and Israel.

healthy currents of such thinking, have a clear task. It is to develop the capability to expose not just the conduct of Western states, but the nature of some of the religious and political currents that have emerged in the past few decades, often voicing their opposition to imperialism, neo-liberalism or capitalism. It is worth repeating time after time – to both activists and academics - our enemy's enemy, is far from being our friend.

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