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## Understanding the ‘War on Terrorism’: Responses to 11 September 2001\*

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This study investigates how people interpret the war on terrorism that commenced as a result of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The utilitarian and retributive philosophies of punishment and the international relations approach to deterrence provide a framework for understanding the ways in which the war on terrorism may be construed. The participants were 178 British university students. The literature suggests that messages of deterrence and revenge have potentially opposite outcomes in terms of the behaviour of the targeted audience. This study identified five different messages that could be conveyed by the range of possible reprisals that could be taken in response to terrorist attacks: negotiation with terrorists; military action against terrorists; diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists; economic sanctions; and military action or use of weapons of mass destruction against countries supporting terrorists. All types of reprisal were understood as demonstrating that terrorism would not be tolerated, and none was interpreted as communicating that terrorism would be eliminated. Non-military responses of diplomacy and negotiation were interpreted as deterrence, whereas the more severe military sanctions were interpreted as revenge. It is suggested that there may be a discrepancy between intended and conveyed messages of government responses to terrorist action. Further research is required, but the findings of this study suggest that the nature of government responses to terrorism could have implications for public support for the war on terrorism and future counter-terrorism policies.

### Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11), it rapidly became clear that there was a desire for retaliation against those responsible for the attacks. This was exemplified by the statement of US President George W. Bush that ‘the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible’ (*The Times*, 2001).

This response took the form of the ‘war on terrorism’, and the targets were identified as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban leaders of Afghanistan who supported them. On 7 October 2001, the USA, supported by Britain, commenced airstrikes against military targets in Afghanistan (US Department of State, 2002). Financial assets of those believed to be associated with terrorism were also blocked (US Department of State, 2002).

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how people understand and

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interpret the international response to the attacks of 9/11. Although the attacks took place in the USA, citizens of many other countries were involved (US Department of State, 2002), and the war on terrorism is likely to affect people from many nations. Likewise, any messages intended by the USA and its allies to be conveyed by the war on terrorism have a variety of audiences from nations that may actively support, provide passive support, or even oppose such action. This study, therefore, set out to gauge the messages that different possible responses were perceived to communicate.

Terrorism has been characterized as a form of communication intended to gain publicity for the terrorists' cause and, ultimately, to obtain the realization of their goals (Martin, 1985; Rubin & Friedland, 1986). The communicative function of terrorism is supported by findings that exposure to media coverage led to increased anxiety in a sample of Israeli participants, suggesting that terrorism does communicate a message of increased personal risk (Slone, 2000). However, the ultimate target of the communication of a terrorist act is generally a government or other political body rather than the individuals who initially react to the message (Martin, 1985). Analysis of the Iranian media has indicated that terrorism can be a form of political communication to foreign governments by states that arguably have sponsored terrorism (Anderson, 1998; Medd & Goldstein, 1997). If terrorism is a means of communication from terrorists to individuals or governments, and even between governments, then it can be argued that responses to terrorism, be they political, economic or military, can also be seen as a form of communication.

After 9/11, there were various retaliatory options available in the military, economic and diplomatic arenas, and it is likely that these could be perceived as transmitting a number of different messages. Some of the

messages intended by the war on terrorism are illustrated by the statements made by political leaders from around the world who used expressions such as the 'elimination of terrorism', 'punishment', 'prevent the repetition' and 'bring justice' (US Department of State, 2001).

Some have suggested that the war on terrorism is intended to punish the perpetrators of the attacks of 9/11. Indeed, in relation to previous acts of terrorism, Medd & Goldstein (1997) note that diplomatic, economic and military actions have all been taken to punish states that have supported terrorists. In view of this interpretation, it is useful to consider what the retributive and utilitarian philosophies of punishment contribute to understanding the war on terrorism.

The retributive approach to punishment prescribes that an offender should receive the punishment that is deserved for the crime (McFatter, 1978). The punishment refers back to the offence and is set at a level to avenge the wrong done (Weiner, Graham & Reyna, 1997). The punishment is based solely on the seriousness of the offence, without taking into account factors such as rehabilitation or deterrence (Moore, 1998; von Hirsch, 1998). If people interpret the war on terrorism in accordance with the retributive approach, it should be understood only as a justly deserved punishment, with no further motives. However, according to the retributive philosophy of punishment, it is only ever fair to punish the perpetrators of a wrong (von Hirsch & Ashworth, 1998). Any accidental harm to innocent parties, such as civilians of countries believed to be supporting terrorists, may reduce the perception of the war on terrorism being a form of punishment for those who subscribe to this view.

In contrast to the retributive approach, the utilitarian philosophy seeks to maximize the good for the greatest number of people (Bentham, 1789/1982). Therefore, as

punishment can be seen to 'harm' the offender, according to the utilitarian view there must be some greater benefit to society gained by the imposition of the punishment. Examples of such benefits are the elimination of crime, general deterrence, rehabilitation and, possibly, 'vindication of the outraged' (von Hirsch & Ashworth, 1998). The utilitarian approach looks forward to the potential outcomes of the punishment to determine its suitability, rather than back to the original crime.

Interpreting the war on terrorism in accordance with utilitarian philosophy suggests a number of messages that may be communicated. First, it may communicate the intention to eliminate terrorism by destroying terrorist weapons and their bases and by removing the authorities that support terrorists. Second, it may demonstrate that terrorism will not be tolerated. Finally, it may also be perceived as a deterrent to other potential terrorists by showing the consequences of any future acts of terrorism. However, the literature related to deterrence of crime suggests that the factors associated with effective deterrence are not clear.

The deterrence literature does not specifically relate to situations such as the war on terrorism, but terrorism is a criminal act and therefore the principles, such as criminal rationality, behind deterring other types of criminals may be relevant to terrorists (Crenshaw, 1998). It is frequently concluded that the certainty of punishment has a general deterrent effect, whereas severity of punishment does not (Beyleveld, 1998). Therefore, the war on terrorism would be expected to deter future acts of terrorism only if it successfully identifies and punishes all those responsible for the attacks of 9/11. If punishment, no matter how severe, is applied to only a few of the perpetrators, it would not be expected to deter further terrorism. However, as Beyleveld (1998) and Sherman (1993) argue, methodological

issues around many studies investigating whether it is certainty or severity of punishment that has a deterrent effect mean that the results of such studies need to be interpreted with caution.

Sherman (1993) suggested that it is not necessarily the certainty or severity of sanctions that determines deterrent effect, but that group membership may be a factor. He argues that sanctions lead to more crime when the individual being punished is a member of an out-group in relation to the punishing authority. Sherman proposes a theory of defiance to account for this increase in offending, caused by 'a proud and shameless reaction' (Sherman, 1993: 459) to a sanction perceived as unfair. If the perpetrators of the attacks of 9/11 see the war on terrorism as an unfair punishment, this theory would predict a defiant increase in terrorism, rather than any reduction due to deterrence. Thus, while deterrence may be a stated aim of the war on terrorism and a theoretical justification for it, it is uncertain whether this would be the message conveyed.

In addition to the deterrent effects of punishment on individuals in a society, deterrence of aggression and the prevention of conflict between states may also be useful to consider (e.g. Danilovic, 2001a,b; Harvey, 1999; Snyder, 1961; Sorokin, 1994). Deterrence of conflict between countries may parallel the current situation in the war on terrorism and may assist in understanding how this action will be interpreted. In an international context, deterrence refers to the state of military readiness of a country to respond if another country acts in a way that is unacceptable to the deterring country (Danilovic, 2001a). Hence, the war on terrorism is a method whereby the USA and its allies can demonstrate that they have both the means and the resolve to retaliate (Harvey, 1999), and it can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to increase the credibility of the deterrence message (Danilovic, 2001b).

The display of power and the readiness to use force may act as a deterrent on groups of terrorists in a similar manner to the way it is argued to work between nations. This approach suggests that the severity of potential retaliation in an international context is the deterring factor.

The above discussion of deterrence has included both the penal approach to general deterrence taken by the US and British criminal justice systems and that employed in international relations literature. Penal deterrence is defined by the aim of sentencing of offenders, which is 'to induce other citizens who might be tempted to commit crime to desist out of fear of the penalty' (von Hirsch & Ashworth, 1998: 44). This implies that deterrence is achieved through some kind of a cost-benefit analysis. If the cost is set high enough, deterrence should be achieved, as the potential benefits of a crime would not be sufficient to outweigh the costs. A similar theme, although applied to the international rather than the interpersonal context, can be seen in the definition of deterrence given by Snyder (1961: 3): 'deterrence means discouraging the enemy from taking military action by posing for him a prospect of cost and risk outweighing his prospective gain'. While terrorism is a criminal offence, responses to terrorism do not fit entirely within the traditional penal approach to deterrence that is applied to the majority of crimes. Similarly, the status of terrorists means that the international relations approach to deterrence may not be entirely appropriate either.

Another possible message that may be communicated by responses to terrorism is revenge. This has generally been studied in interpersonal (McCullough et al., 2001) or small- to medium-size group contexts (Waldmann, 2001). However, it is possible that revenge of a nation on another group, as in the war on terrorism, could serve a similar purpose to revenge in personal and small

group situations. Interpersonal revenge can be seen as a means of getting even for a wrong done, as a way of showing that the offending behaviour will not be tolerated and as a means of saving face (McCullough et al., 2001). These aims could also be relevant to the war on terrorism and overlap with some of the utilitarian motives for punishment.

Vidmar (2000) proposes a system for classifying the different motives for punishment, based on the combination of the aim of the punishment, in terms of behaviour control or retribution, and the target of the punishment, being either the offender or the social group. This gives rise to a model of punishment with four sub-goals. The first of these is to control the behaviour of the offender through mechanisms such as specific deterrence of the individual, re-education or incapacitation. The second sub-goal is behaviour control of the social group through factors such as general deterrence and preventing vengeance by individuals. The third sub-goal is to achieve retribution directed towards the offender, through mechanisms such as changing the offender's system of beliefs and asserting power over the offender. The fourth sub-goal is to obtain retribution directed towards society, through factors such as the vindication of the rule of society and supporting consensus about the validity of social rule.

The classification system suggested by Vidmar (2000) maps onto the theoretical perspectives on punishment discussed above, which together indicate five different motives that may be perceived for the war on terrorism. The general goal of the war on terrorism can be interpreted as punishment, which can then be divided into four sub-goals: eliminating terrorism by removing the ability of those responsible to launch any further attacks; general deterrence aimed at other potential terrorists; taking revenge on the individuals responsible; and showing that terrorism will not be tolerated to vindicate

the rule of society. The interpretation of the war on terrorism according to this model would be dependent upon the constellation of the broad aims understood by the audience, being either behaviour control or retribution, and the target, being the individuals involved in the attacks of 9/11 or the wider group of society, including any potential terrorists.

Previous research has found that acts of terrorism serve as a means of communication, and it is argued that any reprisals in response to terrorism could also have a communicative function. It has been shown that those conducting the war on terrorism claim to be communicating messages of deterrence, punishment and the intention to eliminate terrorism. However, it has been argued that the messages of revenge and showing that terrorism will not be tolerated are also potentially communicated by the war on terrorism. The debate surrounding criminal deterrence suggests that the message intended by those in authority is not the message necessarily understood by the audience. Therefore, it is of interest to investigate whether the messages sent by the war on terrorism are understood in the way intended by those responsible.

The purpose of the present research is to investigate how people interpret the war on terrorism. The various philosophical and theoretical approaches to punishment suggest five main messages that might be communicated to an audience: punishment for its own sake; elimination of terrorism; general deterrence; revenge; and showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. Six preliminary semi-structured interviews were conducted with a non-student convenience sample of people, selected to include a broad age range between 21 and 79 years and both genders. These participants were asked what reprisals the USA should take and what purpose such reprisals may serve. Among the participants interviewed, the five messages

mentioned above were all spontaneously produced, and no others were suggested. Six possible types of reprisal were identified by the participants: negotiation with terrorists; diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists; economic sanctions against countries supporting terrorists; military action against the terrorists; military action against countries supporting terrorists; and the use of weapons of mass destruction against countries supporting terrorists. The following study, therefore, investigates whether different reprisals are perceived as communicating different messages and how the war on terrorism was understood in relation to the messages intended by the US government and its allies.

## Method

### *Participants*

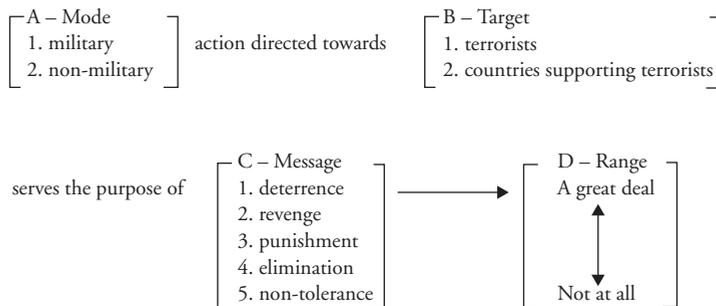
The participants were 178 British university students. Sixty-one participants took part voluntarily, and 117 participated in return for partial course credit. There were 25 males and 152 females and 1 person who did not record their gender. Participants indicated their age in terms of age groups, resulting in 58 under 20, 102 in the range 20–29, 13 in the range 30–39, 4 in the range 40–49, and 1 person who did not record their age. The nationalities of the participants were coded into five groups, giving 132 British, 31 European, 3 from the USA, 2 Middle Eastern and 10 other.

### *Questionnaire Development*

The purpose of the Attitudes to Reprisals Questionnaire (ARQ) was to assess whether the various possible reprisals were interpreted as communicating specific messages. It was developed in the days following 9/11 and based on the responses to the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted prior to the commencement of the military action in Afghanistan.

Figure 1. Mapping Sentence for ARQ Development

The extent to which a person (X) believes that



The responses to the questions about possible US reprisals and the purposes they might serve were combined to create the items for this questionnaire based on a mapping sentence, according to the principles of facet theory (see Shye, Elizur & Hoffman, 1994 for an introductory text or Levy, 1994 for a more detailed text on facet theory). The purpose of a mapping sentence in questionnaire design is to define the boundaries of the questionnaire and to specify the relationships between the components (Donald, 1995; Shye, Elizur & Hoffman, 1994). The mapping sentence for this questionnaire is shown in Figure 1 and has three domain facets representing the Mode of response (military/non-military), the Target for the response (terrorists/countries supporting terrorists) and the Message potentially communicated (deterrence/ revenge/ punishment/ elimination of terrorism/terrorism not tolerated).

The underlying structure of the questionnaire items is obtained by generating all possible combinations of the elements within the Mode, Target and Message facets. It was evident that both military and non-military action against countries supporting terrorists could take more than one form.

Therefore, two of the structuples are represented twice, as shown below, to allow for different types of military and non-military action, giving a total of six different types of reprisal that could be taken:

- A2 B1 Negotiating with terrorists
- A2 B2 Diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists
- A2 B2 Economic sanctions against countries supporting terrorists
- A1 B1 Military action against terrorists
- A1 B2 Military action against countries supporting terrorists
- A1 B2 Using weapons of mass destruction against countries supporting terrorists.

This mapping sentence, therefore, provides a questionnaire with 30 items representing all possible combinations of the six types of reprisal with the five messages, which can be seen in Table I. An example item is 'Taking military action against terrorists would show that terrorism will not be tolerated'. The response scale is represented by the Range facet, which measures the degree to which participants agree that each form of action relates to each of the five

messages, on a seven-point scale between strongly agree and strongly disagree.

### *Procedure*

This study took place in two phases: one in September 2001 before the military action in Afghanistan commenced and the second in October 2001 after it had started. The participants in phase 1 were approached at the end of class, while still in the lecture theatre, and the majority of those present agreed to participate. Participants were given the ARQ with a written briefing explaining the nature of the subject matter and giving instructions on the completion of the questionnaire. A written debriefing was provided after the questionnaire had been completed.

Participants in the second phase of the study completed the questionnaire, along with three other relevant questionnaires, in small groups of up to ten people in a quiet laboratory. A researcher was present at all times to ensure that participants completed the questionnaires individually. The briefing and debriefing were the same as were used in phase 1.

## Results

### *Study Phase*

In order to investigate whether responses were stable over time between pre- and post-commencement of military action in Afghanistan, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to identify whether there were statistically significant differences in any of the ARQ items. Applying a Bonferroni correction, a *p*-value of less than .001 was required to indicate a statistically significant difference. Table I shows the results of the *t*-tests, with each item represented by its structure. None of the *t*-tests indicated a statistically significant change over time. Therefore, the data from the two study phases are amalgamated for the remainder of the analyses.

### *Main Analyses*

In order to identify whether the different types of reprisal were understood to convey different messages, the mean score for each item on the ARQ was calculated. The mean scores for all the type of reprisal/message combinations are shown in Table II, and the message most strongly associated with each type of reprisal is highlighted in italics. The lower the mean score, the stronger the perception that the type of reprisal communicates the particular message, with the mid-point being 4. Preliminary *t*-tests were conducted to compare the responses given by the male and female participants for each type of message. These showed that there were no statistically significant gender differences in response for any of the message types.<sup>1</sup> The data for males and females are therefore amalgamated in the following analyses.

The five mean message scores were compared for each type of reprisal, using six separate  $5 \times 1$  Analyses of Variance (ANOVA). Mauchly's test of sphericity was significant for all the analyses except taking military action against countries supporting terrorists. This means that sphericity cannot be assumed, so the Greenhouse–Geisser adjusted *F*-statistic is reported for those analyses.

**Diplomacy with Countries Supporting Terrorists** It can be seen in Table II that diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists was understood as communicating the messages of deterrence and showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. The mean scores for revenge, punishment and elimination of terrorism were all above 4, suggesting that they are not messages that are associated with this type of reprisal.

<sup>1</sup> Show terrorism will not be tolerated,  $t(174) = 0.96, p = 0.34$ ; deterrence,  $t(174) = 0.93, p = 0.36$ ; punishment,  $t(174) = .09, p = 0.93$ ; revenge,  $t(174) = 1.54, p = 0.13$ ; eliminate terrorism,  $t(174) = 1.19, p = 0.24$ .

Table I. *t*-tests Comparing Responses to the Attitudes to Reprisals Questionnaire Items Pre- and Post-Commencement of Military Action in Afghanistan

<i>Structuple</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d.f.</i>	<i>p</i>
A1 B1 C1 Military action/terrorists/deterrence	0.93	176	.35
A1 B1 C2 Military action/terrorists/revenge	0.04	175	.97
A1 B1 C3 Military action/terrorists/punishment	0.79	175	.43
A1 B1 C4 Military action/terrorists/elimination	0.05	175	.96
A1 B1 C5 Military action/terrorists/non-tolerance	1.36	176	.18
A1 B2 C1 Weapons mass destruction/countries supporting terrorists/deterrence	0.07	175	.95
A1 B2 C1 Military action/ countries supporting terrorists/deterrence	1.41	175	.16
A1 B2 C2 Weapons mass destruction/countries supporting terrorists/revenge	0.52	175	.61
A1 B2 C2 Military action/countries supporting terrorists/revenge	1.08	175	.28
A1 B2 C3 Weapons mass destruction/countries supporting terrorists/punishment	-0.55	176	.58
A1 B2 C3 Military action/countries supporting terrorists/punishment	0.74	173	.46
A1 B2 C4 Weapons mass destruction/countries supporting terrorists/elimination	0.52	176	.61
A1 B2 C4 Military action/countries supporting terrorists/elimination	0.20	176	.84
A1 B2 C5 Weapons mass destruction/countries supporting terrorists/non-tolerance	0.95	176	.34
A1 B2 C5 Military action/countries supporting terrorists/non-tolerance	1.82	176	.07
A2 B1 C1 Negotiation/terrorists/deterrence	-1.18	175	.24
A2 B1 C2 Negotiation/terrorists/revenge	0.69	176	.49
A2 B1 C3 Negotiation/terrorists/punishment	-1.36	176	.17
A2 B1 C4 Negotiation/terrorists/elimination	-1.73	175	.09
A2 B1 C5 Negotiation/terrorists/non-tolerance	1.03	176	.31
A2 B2 C1 Economic sanctions/countries supporting terrorists/deterrence	-0.55	175	.59
A2 B2 C1 Diplomacy/countries supporting terrorists/deterrence	-0.80	176	.42
A2 B2 C2 Economic sanctions/countries supporting terrorists/revenge	0.12	176	.90
A2 B2 C2 Diplomacy/countries supporting terrorists/revenge	-0.22	175	.83
A2 B2 C3 Economic sanctions/countries supporting terrorists/punishment	-0.60	176	.55
A2 B2 C3 Diplomacy/countries supporting terrorism/punishment	-0.11	176	.91
A2 B2 C4 Economic sanctions/countries supporting terrorism/elimination	-2.03	176	.04
A2 B2 C4 Diplomacy/countries supporting terrorism/elimination	0.28	175	.78
A2 B2 C5 Economic sanctions/countries supporting terrorism/non-tolerance	0.03	176	.97
A2 B2 C5 Diplomacy/countries supporting terrorism/non-tolerance	-0.41	175	.69

A significant difference was identified between the types of message associated with the reprisal of diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists, adjusted  $F(3.80, 660.43)$

$= 28.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .14$ . The motive most agreed with for this type of action was deterrence, although follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) showed that this was not

Table II. Means and Standard Deviations for Potential Message for Each Action Type

	<i>Show terrorism not tolerated</i>		<i>Deterrence</i>		<i>Punishment</i>		<i>Eliminate terrorism</i>		<i>Revenge</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(s.d.)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(s.d.)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(s.d.)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(s.d.)</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>(s.d.)</i>
Diplomacy – countries N = 175	3.93	(1.48)	3.91	(1.54)	4.63	(1.45)	4.92	(1.58)	4.50*	(1.46)
Negotiation – terrorists N = 177	4.26	(1.68)	4.14	(1.64)	5.09	(1.37)	5.02*	(1.60)	5.51	(1.18)
Economic sanctions N = 177	3.21	(1.40)	4.01	(1.55)	4.01	(1.75)	4.97	(1.57)	3.67*	(1.56)
Military action – terrorists N = 176	2.81	(1.46)	4.23	(1.80)	3.19*	(1.65)	4.92	(1.70)	2.95	(1.56)
Military action – countries N = 174	3.12	(1.63)	4.45	(1.69)	4.43	(1.66)	5.52	(1.44)	4.16*	(1.68)
Weapons of mass destruction N = 176	3.62	(2.04)	5.11*	(1.88)	3.90	(1.96)	5.61	(1.53)	3.57	(2.00)

Italicized entries indicate the most favoured motive for each type of action.

\* Indicates the first motive significantly different from the most favoured motive at  $p < .005$ , being the significance level required using the Bonferroni approach.

significantly different from showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. The difference between showing terrorism will not be tolerated and revenge, which was the next most highly associated message, was significant. In descending order, the messages least associated with diplomacy were punishment and eliminating terrorism.

**Negotiation with Terrorists** Table II shows a similar pattern of associations for negotiation with terrorists as was identified for diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists, with deterrence and showing terrorism will not be tolerated being the most strongly associated with negotiation. However, none of the potential messages has a mean score lower than 4, suggesting that this particular type of reprisal was not interpreted as communicating any of the messages.

A significant difference was found between the possible messages conveyed by negotiating with terrorists, adjusted  $F(3.24,$

$570.95) = 49.98, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .22$ . As with diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists, deterrence was the message most strongly associated with negotiation. Again, follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) showed that this was not significantly different from the message of showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. Eliminating terrorism was the third most strongly associated message, but the mean score was significantly different from deterrence and showing terrorism will not be tolerated.

**Economic Sanctions Against Countries Supporting Terrorists** It can be seen from Table II that showing terrorism will not be tolerated is the message most strongly associated with economic sanctions against countries supporting terrorists. However, the message of revenge also has a mean score of less than 4, suggesting that revenge is another message that is conveyed by the application of economic sanctions.

A significant effect was again found for the potential messages conveyed by imposing economic sanctions on countries supporting terrorists, adjusted  $F(3.62, 637.41) = 47.46$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .21$ . Showing that terrorism will not be tolerated was the message most strongly understood from this particular type of reprisal, and follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) showed that this was significantly different from revenge, which was the next most strongly associated message. In descending order, the three messages least associated with economic sanctions were deterrence, punishment and the elimination of terrorism.

**Military Action Against Terrorists** It can be seen from Table II that showing that terrorism will not be tolerated is the message most strongly associated with taking military action against terrorists. Revenge and punishment are also messages that are understood as being communicated by this type of reprisal. However, the participants in this study did not interpret military action against terrorists as communicating either deterrence or the intention to eliminate terrorism.

A significant effect was identified for the message conveyed by taking military action against terrorists, adjusted  $F(3.11, 544.52) = 89.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .34$ . The message most strongly associated with this type of reprisal was showing that terrorism would not be tolerated. However, follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) showed that the difference between this and revenge was not statistically significant. The participants also interpreted punishment as a message conveyed by this reprisal, but the mean score indicated that it was associated significantly less than the most popular option. The motives agreed with least for using military action against terrorists were deterrence and eliminating terrorism.

**Military Action Against Countries** It can be seen from Table II that the only message

interpreted as being conveyed by the reprisal of military action against countries was to show that terrorism would not be tolerated. The mean score for the next most associated message of revenge is over 4, suggesting that the participants did not actually perceive this reprisal as communicating revenge, or any of the other potential messages.

A significant effect was identified for the type of message communicated by taking military action against countries supporting terrorists,  $F(4, 692) = 79.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .32$ . The message most strongly associated with this reprisal was again showing that terrorism would not be tolerated, with follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) showing that the message of revenge was associated significantly less. The messages least associated with using military action against countries supporting terrorists were punishment, deterrence and eliminating terrorism, in descending order of agreement.

**Weapons of Mass Destruction** Table II shows that the participants principally interpreted using weapons of mass destruction as revenge. However, in this case the message of showing that terrorism would not be tolerated was again one of the messages most strongly communicated by this form of reprisal. Participants also understood this reprisal to communicate punishment. Using weapons of mass destruction was not interpreted as sending messages of deterrence or the intention to eliminate terrorism.

There was a significant difference identified between the messages potentially communicated by the use of weapons of mass destruction, adjusted  $F(3.16, 552.70) = 81.77$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .32$ . The message most strongly associated with this reprisal was revenge, although follow-up  $t$ -tests (see Table II) indicated that this was not significantly different from showing that terrorism would not be tolerated or punishment. The mean scores for the potential

messages of deterrence and the elimination of terrorism were both higher than 4, and were significantly different for the three messages that were associated with this type of reprisal, indicating that this type of reprisal was not understood as communicating either of these messages.

To summarize the findings of this study, it has been seen that for all types of reprisal the message of showing that terrorism will not be tolerated is among the messages most strongly communicated. It can also be seen that none of the types of reprisal is interpreted as communicating the intention to eliminate terrorism. The findings for the message of punishment are somewhat mixed, with taking military action against terrorists and using weapons of mass destruction being the only reprisals interpreted as conveying messages of punishment. The most interesting relationship appears to be between the messages of deterrence and revenge, with less severe reprisals, such as diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists or negotiation with the terrorists themselves, generally being interpreted as communicating deterrence and more severe reprisals, such as taking military action against terrorists or using weapons of mass destruction, as communicating revenge.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to begin the investigation into how people understand and interpret a range of possible responses to a terrorist attack, following the specific case of 9/11. While these attacks occurred in the USA, the casualties came from approximately 80 countries (US Department of State, 2002), and any reprisals have the potential to impact the people of many nations. The populations of countries who actively support, provide passive support, or even oppose the war on terror might all be affected by how the war on terrorism is inter-

preted. Hence, it is useful to gain insight into whether or not this is consistent with how those in power appear to intend the reprisals to be understood.

Participants understood all the types of reprisal as showing that terrorism would not be tolerated. This suggests that if that is the message intended by those waging the war on terrorism then this could be achieved by making almost any of these responses. None of the types of reprisal was understood to eliminate terrorism. However, this may be because participants perceived this as a physical action that they believe is unlikely to succeed, rather than as a message of intent. It seems that, in relation to the communication of either of these messages, the choice of reprisal action is irrelevant.

The messages of punishment, deterrence and revenge were conveyed to different extents by the various types of reprisal. Punishment was not among the principal messages communicated by any of the reprisals, and only taking military action against terrorists and using weapons of mass destruction were actually understood as communicating punishment to any extent. This suggests that these particular actions are not the most effective means of communicating a message of punishment. However, this may simply be because other messages are communicated more powerfully by these reprisals.

Only diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists was interpreted as communicating deterrence. However, it is of interest that although, overall, participants did not agree that negotiation with terrorists communicated deterrence, it was the message most closely associated with this reprisal. Furthermore, the various military responses were clearly not interpreted as communicating deterrence. Converse results were found in relation to the message of revenge, which was most strongly communicated by the use of weapons of mass destruction and taking

military action against terrorists. Revenge was also communicated by taking economic sanctions, although it was not the principal message of this type of reprisal. However, diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists and negotiation with the terrorists themselves were not found to communicate revenge. A somewhat anomalous result was that military action against countries supporting terrorists was not understood as conveying a message of revenge, and there is no obvious explanation for this finding.

The finding that the items 'negotiation with terrorists' and 'diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists' were the ones most associated with the message of deterrence, and that the military responses were generally seen as communicating revenge, is counter to that which would be expected based upon the definition of deterrence given by Snyder (1961). This definition and the state of military readiness proposed by Danilovic (2001a) as being a deterrent to hostile action in international terms both indicate that the perceived willingness of a government to use force and to raise the costs of offensive action should be communicating deterrence.

The responses to terrorism included in the ARQ were obtained through interviews with a small sample of the general public. The items in the questionnaire were framed to reflect these responses and no further definition of terms such as 'diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists' or 'negotiation with terrorists' was given. This means that the participants in the main study responded to these issues as they interpreted them, bringing with them their individual understanding and assumptions regarding what these concepts mean. A possible explanation for these somewhat anomalous findings is that the perception of terrorist groups may be sufficiently distinct from that of other nations, so that the power relationship assumed in international deterrence is not translated to this situation. Therefore,

rather than being understood as a deterrent, military responses are seen as more vengeful, owing to factors such as power inequalities, or the difficulty in focusing military force against terrorists who, by nature, are frequently dispersed and hard to identify. Another possible reason for the association of the 'negotiation' and 'diplomacy' items with deterrence is the fear caused by terrorism. It had already been demonstrated that the 9/11 terrorists had the ability to carry out a very large attack and, therefore, may be in a position to do so in future. This differs from the international situation, where conflict has generally not yet occurred. In the context of terrorism, a less confrontational response may seem to be more deterrent, as people may perceive that the terrorists' cause is being recognized. Further research would be necessary to provide evidence regarding the reasons for this result.

The participants in this study generally understood these reprisals in a manner consistent with the utilitarian philosophy of punishment (Bentham, 1789/1982). The reprisals were principally seen to serve a function beyond just being a deserved punishment, as would be the case if retributive principles were applied (Moore, 1998; von Hirsch, 1998). In relation to deterrence, while these findings do not allow for comment on the factor of certainty of punishment, they clearly support the argument that more severe punishment does not convey a message of deterrence to a non-terrorist audience. The participants in this study rated only using diplomacy with countries supporting terrorists as communicating deterrence, whereas this was not a message understood from the various military responses. This indicates that participants were not interpreting the war on terrorism in the manner consistent with the international relations approach, as this would predict that greater deterrence would be understood by the threat of extreme force.

Vidmar (2000) suggested that punishments could be classified according to the aims, in terms of behaviour control or retribution, and the target, being the offender or the social group. The participants in this study understood the various reprisals as being aimed at the social group, in the forms of general deterrence and upholding in-group values by showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. Also, the aim that was principally perceived was of retribution, as evidenced by the interpretations of revenge and showing that terrorism will not be tolerated. The one component of this model that was clearly not a message understood as being communicated by any of the reprisals was behaviour control of the offender. This was represented by the message of eliminating terrorism, and none of the reprisals was understood to communicate that message.

The participants in the main part of this study were a student sample and, as such, are not representative of the wider population. It is also recognized that the message perceived by a British population may be different from that understood by people in other countries. Further research is needed to explore whether these results are also found in the general population and whether there are cross-cultural differences in how responses to terrorism are understood. While the present study, in its own right, does not allow for conclusions to be drawn regarding the wider population, it does highlight some issues that may be appropriate for further investigation. With such further research, the present findings may have policy implications in relation to public support for the present war on terrorism and future counter-terrorism policies.

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