

OXFORD-ADELAIDE

VIDEO CONFERENCE REPORT

February 2010



CONNECTING STUDENTS, SCHOLARS, AND PRACTITIONERS OF INTELLIGENCE

Introduction

Project GOA

Project GOA is a global, postgraduate-led, think tank which aims to connect scholars, practitioners and policy-makers in the fields of Intelligence, Counter-Terrorism and International Relations and to contribute further to the academic and political understanding of these subjects. Currently, Project GOA has a presence in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States and is actively seeking to expand this throughout North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Although Project GOA is an independent organization, it also acts under the auspices of the Oxford Intelligence Forum (OIF). The OIF has been created to encourage voluntary co-operation between organisations, both in and outside Oxford, engaged in the study of intelligence, strategy and related themes. So far, under the Forum's auspices, GOA has worked jointly with the Oxford Intelligence Group (OIG) based at Nuffield College.

The organization has three principal objectives: a.) to contribute to the study and understanding of key issues in the related disciplines of Intelligence, Counter-Terrorism and International Relations; b.) to create and foster new links between academics, policy-makers and practitioners in these fields through a series of conferences and workshops; c.) to establish a strong online presence to facilitate the timely discussion of current events in the international arena and to further consolidate existing and emerging connections between students and stakeholders.

Project GOA is run by a Management Board consisting of a Chairman and three post-graduate Directors. The post-graduate members of the board have dual responsibility for one of the organization's three target regions and other tasks essential to Project GOA's everyday functioning and continued development into the future. In addition to the strong (but informal) ties it holds with a range of practitioners and policy-makers, Project GOA has acquired a notable 'core' following of post-graduate students. The majority of these students have gained the status, subject to the approval of the board, of online 'Commentators', allowing them to post material directly onto Project GOA's main website as well as to the discussion forum. Project GOA is also fortunate to have acquired a smaller number of online 'Correspondents', who comment on various issues in 'the Sandbox'.

Aside from the Video Conference in July 2009, Project GOA's website is, perhaps, the organization's most unique and progressive tool for achieving its three objectives. The website's Home Page provides a space for those with Commentator privileges to post short articles and thought-pieces on which other Commentators and Correspondents can comment and provide feedback. The website also boasts a discussion forum called 'The Sandbox', in which it is envisaged that recent events in the international arena can encourage discussion, create further partnerships between stakeholders and, where possible, formulate new opinions and stances within the organization. The website is still in its infancy and looking into alternative forms of virtual engagement.

July 2009 Video Conference

Project GOA is committed to fostering interaction between graduates and policy analysts around the world. In this spirit, an innovative video conference was held in July 2009, bringing together graduate students and analysts from the UK and Australia to debate cutting edge security issues.

The 2009 Video Conference (VDC), run on a link-up between the Said Business School in Oxford and Adelaide University, was the culmination of Project GOA's first year of operations. It was a technical novelty for many of those involved. During early 2009, teams were formed in Australia and UK under the respective regional directors to produce papers for eventual debate. A group of experts was also selected from outside the GOA core organization; these guests were drawn from academia and the intelligence and IR worlds. The experts volunteered to act in an "overwatch" role during the VDC, and apart from making "live" interventions appropriate to their speciality, they gave the two GOA teams valuable and mature evaluation during the post-VDC washup conference.

The format and discipline of the VDC made for a productive global interaction between UK and Australia. Moreover, because the teams were well-controlled by their respective leaders, and the whole orchestrated by the Project Director, all participants were conscious that they should be economical with words, making their point as succinctly as possible. The resultant quality of debate and its high academic standard was summarized by one senior academic guest as “after experiencing 4 decades of seminars and lectures in [intelligence at] Colleges in Oxford, this is undoubtedly the best I have seen”. The GOA team feels that the VDC has proved to an ideal tool, serving the purpose for which it was employed. It was, moreover, an enjoyable and uplifting experience for all concerned. The participants considered that, looking ahead, GOA should capitalize on the VDC, and feature more such events in whatever materializes as the project’s future programme.

A detailed report of the Video Conference follows below.



Oxford



Adelaide (from the Oxford end)

Purpose of the 2009 VDC

Project GOA's 2009 Video Conference was perceived by all involved to have been an interesting and lively event and a successful proof of concept. Four papers were submitted prior to the event: Team Australia contributed papers by Charles Vandeppeer and David James Olney, and Team England papers by Lawrence Ampofo and Benedict Wilkinson. The topics, approaches and directions of these papers were varied and were designed to provide a springboard for a wide-ranging series of discussions.

The purpose of Project GOA's 2009 Video Conference was threefold:

1. In the first place, it provided an opportunity to test the successful application of the technology and concepts behind the Video Conference model. Of particular interest to the board was to establish whether the technology impinged upon the general running of the Conference or whether, in fact, it improved it.
2. In the second place, the Conference was an attempt to identify the fields of academic specialism which Project GOA had acquired and to establish key areas for discussion in future conferences. It was widely felt that the submitted papers and ensuing discussion provided a real and focused sense of those topics which the participants considered to be most relevant and pressing in the study of International Relations, Terrorism and Intelligence.
3. In the third place, the Video Conference was set up in order to establish how Project GOA might proceed; more specifically, the Board was eager to learn what the participants felt Project GOA's 'identity' should be – whether it should function as a think tank; an informal, but global research group; or a small but uniquely qualified collective of post-graduates able to conduct high-level research for public and private industry.

The event was divided into three sessions. In the first session, 'Team England' (based in Oxford) and 'Team Australia' (based in Adelaide) discussed the four submitted papers amongst the members of their own Teams. In England, the session began with each speaker providing a five minute summary of his paper, before the Team were free to ask questions and then the group moved into a discussion of the Australian papers. In the second session, the two Teams went 'head-to-head' over a live video-feed which enabled both teams to hear and see each other with surprising ease. Five senior observers were formed into a group entitled the 'Overwatch Group', which comprised GOA Councillors and practitioners from the field; the Overwatch Group were present, but 'off-camera', in the second session to moderate the discussion and, where appropriate, contribute their knowledge and expertise to the discussions. The Overwatch Group noted the discussions taking place and provided further insight at the behest of the Project Director. In the third session, Team England proceeded to conduct a 'hot washup' in order to consolidate the themes which had emerged in the previous discussions and potential ways in which GOA might expand and grow. As a result of the time difference, Team Australia called a close of play and proceeded to run a 'cold washup' at a later date.

Summary of Papers Presented

The papers presented at the inaugural conference were considered by both the postgraduates and members of the Overwatch Group to be both insightful and of a high academic standard, in that they provided the basis for a wide ranging and high level debate of key issues in the fields of Terrorism, International Relations and Security. A brief summary of the papers is provided below.

TEAM AUSTRALIA

Managing Violence: The Soldier, The Group, The State
David James Olney, University of Adelaide

In this paper, Olney investigated the need for a 'learned capacity for violence' to be balanced by an 'equivalent sense of justification' in order to maintain a successful and functional military which remains ethically connected to society. Olney focuses, in particular, on the work of Huntington, and argues that military institutions are moulded by two opposing forces: on the one hand, the functional imperative to maintain state security and to react to threats against the state; on the other, a societal imperative which requires military institutions to reflect the social values and social codes of the society which they protect.

Olney went on to argue that, traditionally, liberal states have employed a 'rhetoric of sacrifice and devotion' in order to legitimize military action for the civilian populace. He argued that this traditional model has become increasingly ineffective – not least because rhetoric, which can be effective in describing the function of the military, is an insufficient tactic for overcoming those social norms which restrict violence. Olney then proceeded to argue that other methods for overcoming the social imperative are equally insufficient. In particular, he noted that military training, which conditions soldiers to undertake action in response to particular external stimuli, can educate the soldier in pulling a trigger, but cannot provide justification against the societal imperative to avoid violence. Moreover, Olney argued that recent advances in technology (which have separated the decision-maker from the action-taker) have not succeeded in locating the emotional consequences of a soldier's action further up the chain of command, but rather, have succeeded only in distributing the blame across all parties involved.

Olney noted that the rhetoric of sacrifice and devotion is similarly adopted by terrorist organizations in order to isolate themselves from traditional state politics and institutions. He described the way in which terrorist groups bifurcate the world into a privileged 'self' protecting itself against a demonized, invasive 'other' and argued that terrorists do not require societal approval if they have the justification of strongly-held group beliefs. Military institutions, by contrast, exist to serve the societies by which they are formed and funded. Olney concluded that existing rhetorics of sacrifice and devotion need to be strengthened, and further research, particularly of officers' and soldiers' responses, to undertaking violent action, should be conducted.

Intelligence and the Challenge of Non-State Threats: Actor-based versus Environmental Methodologies.
Charles Vandeppeer, University of Adelaide

In this paper, Vandeppeer addressed the problems for liberal states, in particular Australia, in the application of actor-based threat assessments to non-state actors. Traditionally, states have employed actor-based threat assessments along a 'capabilities and intentions' paradigm. Vandeppeer argues that this model has limitations, particularly when applied to increasingly disparate and non-hierarchical threats presented by al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

Vandeppeer began by outlining the (surprisingly broad) definitions applied to non-state actors in Australian Defence literature, which view non-state actors as individuals who act independently of a formal Government. Against this backdrop, he noted that the requirement of intelligence analysis, according to the Australian Government, is to gain a full and deep understanding of the adversary. In the third section, he argues that traditional paradigms of intelligence

analysis (which are, according to Singer, derived from estimated intent x estimated capability) are fundamentally actor-based and, as such, present a number of problems when applied to non-state actor threats. These problems include a.) the assumption of prior knowledge of a threat; b.) the changing paradigms of capability and intent in a post-cold war environment; c.) the various difficulties in gaining intelligence about the capabilities (often small arms) of non-state actors; and d.) the difficulties in identifying the intent of often unstable, non-state actors (in contrast with state régimes).

In the final section, Vandepeer proposed that the concept of a 'security environment', in which 'non-state actors (known or unknown) exist and emerge', was a more effective model for assessing the threats posed by non-state actors. The model is derived from the trends which have, historically, been linked with the production of non-state threats identified by Fuller and by Treverton and Jones.

TEAM ENGLAND

Measuring Terrorist Activity on the Web: Do Current Methods and Practices Oversimplify an Overly Complex Phenomenon?

Lawrence Ampofo, Royal Holloway, University of London

The internet presents a fertile location for Intelligence and Criminal Justice Agencies to gather data on terrorist organizations, particularly those which have adopted a non-hierarchical, networked model. So argued Lawrence Ampofo, in his paper on the effect of increased usage of the internet not only by individuals across the globe, but also by terrorist organizations. Crucially, Ampofo suggested, the explosion in internet usage presents these agencies with a problem of how to analyze, accurately, vast quantities of data without resorting to monolithic, and potentially inaccurate, data analysis models. He goes on to argue that the current focus on behaviouralist methods of analysis, particularly those methodologies derived from Social Network Theory and metadata analysis, have brought about an overemphasis on a single method for evaluation of potentially crucial intelligence. Ampofo argues that, rather than reducing complex behavioural phenomena to numerical values and statistical data, Intelligence Agencies should adopt a more a holistic approach.

A Flawed Model? Building Community Trust and the Failure of the 'Prevent' Strategy

Benedict Wilkinson, King's College, London

The UK's counter-extremism strategy (known as 'Prevent') has recently received virulent criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. In this paper, Benedict Wilkinson outlined the evolution of the Prevent strategy, describing its development from its roots in the 2005 'Preventing Violent Extremism' study commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government to its current format outlined in the 2009 Strategy for Countering International Terrorism.

Wilkinson described three persistent criticisms of the Prevent strategy, namely: a.) that it puts the Police Service in an impossible double-bind because they are required to gather actionable intelligence from communities and, and yet simultaneously, to 'befriend' and create trust within these communities; b.) that Prevent has encouraged the affiliation of Prevent stakeholders with individuals who boast sturdy extremist credentials; and c.) that Prevent initiatives have not only failed to recognize the heterogeneity of Muslim communities but have, as a consequence, contributed to the homogenization and alienation of these communities.

Wilkinson went on to argue that these failures can be attributed to the more serious failure to recognize that trust between Muslim communities and Prevent stakeholders is a prerequisite for the success of community-led counter-extremism initiatives proposed by the Prevent strategy. Thus, he suggests, the Prevent strategy has suffered as a result of the widespread assumption, in the academic literature as well as in the political material, that community-based

responses can create trust as a social 'by-product', rather than from the operational failures proposed in the political and academic literature.

Wilkinson concluded by making two recommendations: where the police service is involved, Officers should be seconded to Local Authorities, trained in counter-extremism initiatives and methods, and, ultimately to be distanced from the intelligence-gathering activity conducted by Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Officers. Secondly, that comprehensive research should be undertaken into the diversities of Muslim communities and the results made available to all Prevent partners in order to understand, better, how to improve their relationship with the Police and, consequently, to engage better these communities in counter-extremism initiatives.

Summary of Discussion

The second session of the inaugural video conference consisted of a lively debate around a series of critical issues in the academic fields of International Relations, Terrorism and Security. This session fell into three distinct parts. In the first of these, both Teams provided a précis of the discussions and the salient themes which had arisen in the first session. In the second part, a more wide-ranging discussion took place, which expanded upon these themes and provided a locus for a high-level and engaged debate on a series of inter-connected topics. In the third part of this session, both Teams contributed their opinions on the implications of these discussions for Project GOA and provided ways in which the organization might proceed in 2009/10.

Team England focused on Olney's theory of a change of attitude in modern warfare and questioned whether this did, in fact, constitute a change from previous models. A number of speakers also challenged Olney's suggestion that a lack of cultural understanding of the military has delegitimized the individual's act of killing in military scenarios. In reaction to both Ampofo's and Vandeppeer's papers, Team England noted the urgent need for a holistic and pluralistic approach to intelligence analysis, but were unclear how Vandeppeer's theory of strategic analysis might provide actionable intelligence rather than theoretical information on the potential of non-state actors for an attack.

Team England noted that their previous discussion had elicited three major points: first, that whilst it has become fashionable in academic, media and political circles to describe the advent of a 'new' terrorism, this description is the reflection of a new political emphasis on security and counter-terrorism. Moreover, Team England argued that far from being a 'new' Terrorism, the threat posed by al-Qaeda and its affiliates can be seen as an old threat conducted through new technology. In light of Olney's paper, Team England also noted that national caveats, which dictate the military rules of engagement sanctioned by a Government for its own forces, had severely impacted on multinational military co-operation.

Team Australia made note of several issues arising from their discussion. With reference to Ampofo's paper, there was broad approval of his commitment to qualitative data collection and analysis in the field of Intelligence. There was, however, some caution about its practicality – specifically, on how to collect, collate, store and analyze qualitative data. Moreover, it was noted that even were technological advances to enable the collection and analysis of qualitative data, there would be a further requirement to engage with policy-makers on a different footing to the current model. Intelligence analysis, it was argued, is a long-term project, where politics and media have shorter-term considerations.

In response to Wilkinson's paper, Team Australia argued that whilst there were similarities between the UK and Australia in terms of extremism, there were fundamental differences. Indeed, this led into the second, more general, stage of the discussion in which extremism and identity became major themes which ran throughout, which are summarized below.

Before launching into an in-depth discussion of the four major themes arising in the second section of the discussion, it is useful to identify some of the common themes raised both by the papers and by the participants of the VDC. In the first place, all members were convinced that, in recent decades, Intelligence and International Relations are being practiced (and, indeed, studied) in a changed context. All four papers, for example, noted existing and concerning difficulties with the everyday 'business' of practicing intelligence and maintaining security in Liberal Democracies. A second and related commonality between the papers and the discussion was the pressing need for new approaches to be undertaken in response to a new and complex terrorist threat. Moreover, those members present in the teams and in the Overwatch Group were convinced that academics – and Graduates, in particular – had the skills, experience and knowledge to help formulate these new approaches.

Themes Arising from the VDC

The Video Conference identified several important thematic areas which, Project GOA believes, will help to provide answers to some of these key questions: identity, processes of radicalization, and threat assessment. The content of the discussions on these themes and the various findings are summarized below.

Identity

There was considerable (but enlightening) disagreement about how to identify 'at risk' Muslim communities without alienation or demonization. Moreover, there were considerable differences of opinion about what the terms 'extremist' and 'violent extremist' constituted, and, perhaps more importantly, how to counter the threat posed by extremism without alienating large communities in liberal, multicultural societies and without contravening the philosophies of the liberal democracy. It was generally felt, on both the British and Australian sides, however, that intelligence analysis needed to understand both sides of this apparent divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, and to take social context into account. For both Team England and Team Australia, it was equally clear that the cultural differences in the two regional contexts – particularly with respect to perspectives on multiculturalism – were central to how policy should be formulated to deal with terrorist threats without the marginalization or isolation of large portions of the Muslim population.

In the UK, for example, policy-makers are reluctant to engage in public discussion on whether and how intellectually to "isolate" identified Islamist radicals. This may partly be due to the desire to appear even-handed under all circumstances, and partly due to fears of stirring up energetic counter-argument amongst the relevant communities. Until recently, the UK Home Office surveillance policy followed what might be characterized as a "leave well alone" principle, which in part may have contributed to the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London. Project GOA encourages students and researchers to focus on identifying essential lines of research to explore what the most effective approach to these dilemmas might be, both in their own work and by engaging discussion on the GOA website. If there is sufficient interest in this topic, GOA is willing to organize a series of papers and a video conference.

Processes of Radicalization

A second key theme which occurred throughout the discussions were the various potential factors, processes and locations involved in the radicalization of extremists in the UK and Australia. In particular, a number of participants made comments about University campuses as locations of radicalization – which, in turn, sparked a lively debate about the involvement of the internet in radicalization. By the end of this discussion, there was widespread agreement about the increasing role played by the internet in providing not only the information, but also a series of tools which could enable individuals to progress further down a radicalization path. What these tools are, and how they are employed, are topics that GOA will encourage in its future discussions.

This discussion of radicalization blended, usefully, into a further discussion about deradicalization. Some time was spent discussing the 'Prevent' strategy outlined in Wilkinson's paper and there was general agreement over his theory that trust must be a pre-requisite for successful counter-extremism work. Both Teams felt, however, that trust must first be given a more specific definition in order to ascertain how communities might acquire it. There was, by contrast, considerable disagreement about foreign counter-extremism initiatives, particularly those currently being rolled out in Saudi Arabia. This academic disagreement extended to the facts, figures and initiatives involved and remained largely unresolved. Both Teams, however, were convinced that there was an urgent need for new training for the Police Service and related Criminal Justice agencies, in soft approaches to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism work. It was felt that this work should parallel the work of Her Majesty's Government in countering extremist ideologies and there was much agreement that Project GOA could usefully contribute to the formulation of this new training.

The discussion then moved back to the subjects of extremism and violent extremism: some contributors highlighted the problems of identification of extremists and violent extremists in both the UK and Australia and the even greater difficulties in legitimately challenging those legal, but anti-democratic views which they expound, whilst remaining true to the ideology and philosophy of a liberal democracy. Both the UK and Australia have suffered from their choices of Islamic and Muslim representatives and from their media coverage of Muslim communities which has contributed to the further alienation of these communities.

Threat Assessment

The last stages of the general discussion, like much of what had gone before, focused upon the interface of threat and identity. Several papers identified the pervasive and persistent (if problematic) categorization of Muslims as extremists as a default position. One speaker noted the online presence of a remarkable number of extreme left- and right-wing groups, whose ideology could be compared to that of extremist Islamists.

There was further agreement that Vandepier's concept of a security environment, in conjunction with further qualitative data analysis could provide a new and effective methodology for considering non-state actor threats. It was the overriding opinion of all members that there has not only been a substantial change in threat, but in the nature and demands of security, particularly in Liberal Democracies. It was felt that Vandepier's article provided an interesting and effective way to navigate the often conflicting demands between Civil Liberties and Security. Project GOA is eager to explore this concept further in future VDCs.

Ways Forward: Project GOA in the Future

In short, the discussion focused strongly on some of the most hotly contested topics in Project GOA's academic specialisms. Time and again, participants returned to that grey area between identity, identification and threat assessment. The repeated question was how to identify an emerging threat without contributing to the precise problem one is trying to resolve – specifically in the alienation and demonization of communities on ethnic, religious or social terms.

Participants of the Video Conference put forward a number of imaginative and interesting themes for future Project GOA Video Conferences, which are listed below. There was also widespread agreement that the inaugural Video Conference had been a success of which all involved should be proud.

1. The papers presented in the first session and discussed in the second made it apparent that there has been a substantial shift in threat and in academic theories on the subjects of Security and Terrorism. Whilst these theories

have been widely challenged in the academic and political fields, there has been a discernable lack of thought about the intelligence tools and social policies which can be brought to bear upon this altered threat. It was noted that all four papers, in their own way, attempted to address this oversight. It was also noted that this oversight could present Project GOA, and those involved in it, with an interesting and innovative way forward.

2. There was also widespread agreement that there was an urgent need for methodological and definitional solidarity which was sorely lacking in the field: in particular, participants returned to the requirement for a workable definition of 'extremist' and 'violent extremist' in order to develop national identities which were appropriate to liberal democracies. It was felt that this, too, might present an interesting theme for future conferences and workshops.
3. There was also agreement that the conditions, factors and location involved in the processes of radicalization and de-radicalization required more attention, and would provide fertile ground for further Project GOA work.
4. There was also a widespread consensus that whilst the practical and academic fields had acknowledged a change in threat in the aftermath of the Cold War, less attention had been paid to changing the paradigms employed in intelligence analysis and counter-terrorism work. This was a particularly common theme, touched upon by all four papers. It was also felt that Project GOA could usefully focus its not inconsiderable expertise on developing new models and theories for threat assessment – and, moreover, that these theories might have a genuine market-value.
5. In conclusion, members of the Overwatch Group felt that the conference papers and discussions had all been held at a highly intelligent and intellectual level and had been extremely useful both in terms of demonstrating knowledge on the topics under examination and also in delineating crucial gaps in the existing academic literature.