

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGIES

A Campbell Systematic Review

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Are counter-terrorism strategies effective in reducing terrorism?

To answer this question, reviewers located 20,000 studies on terrorism, but found only 7 studies that contained empirical, moderately rigorous evaluations of counter-terrorism programs in which to review. However, although there have been few studies, the Campbell Review provides the most comprehensive analysis of the question today.

What are counter-terrorism strategies?

Since 9/11 there has been a massive increase in spending and interest in, both government and private, on counter-terrorism strategies. The counter-terrorism strategies explored in the review include: (1) the use of metal detectors in airports; (2) fortifying embassies and efforts to protect diplomats; (3) increasing the severity of punishment for hijackers; (4) UN resolutions; (5) retaliatory attacks; and (6) intolerant political governance (to terrorism) and the end of the Cold War.

What does the Campbell Systematic Review find?

There is almost a complete absence of high quality, scientific evaluation evidence on counterterrorism strategies. Based on the few available studies, some strategies do not appear to be effective. Although metal detectors reduce hijacking, they may have a substitution or displacement effect on other forms of terrorism, causing instances of assassination, bombing, and hostage taking to increase. Further, retaliatory attacks (such as the US attack on Libya and Israeli attacks on the PLO) have been shown to significantly increase terrorism, particularly against the US, UK, and Israel. Political governance that is intolerant of terrorism, and the end of the Cold War, could also potentially increase terrorism. However, because of the lack of research in this area, these findings remain “disturbingly” (6) uncertain – as do the cost-effectiveness of the strategies.

What is the bottom line?

For *knowledge creators*: There is not enough rigorous scientific evaluation evidence about the effectiveness (and cost-effectiveness) of counter-terrorism interventions. Much more empirical and evaluative research, using scientific principles, needs to be funded, particularly by governments.

For *knowledge users*: Based on the few available studies, some counter-terrorism strategies appear to be ineffective, and some may even increase acts of terrorism. As a result, governments and other decision-making bodies need to fund more research into counter-terrorism. Also, scientists need to be included in counter-terrorism policy making, strategic thinking, planning, and evaluation.

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