

Animal rights extremism: Victimization, investigation and detection of a campaign of criminal intimidation

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Abstract

UK Ministry of Justice data and documents and police records are used to examine the crimes committed by SHAC (Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty) activists against Huntington Life Sciences, a company using animals for research. The police response and its effects on the animal rights campaign are also considered. The study is distinctive in that it explores activists' *modi operandi* using case studies and the use of covert investigative techniques in policing offences against victims of animal rights activists. The effects of SHAC's leadership 'decapitation' are measured, not only with offence numbers, but also by using sentence length to measure harm. The intelligence-led investigation proved effective in providing evidence of an organized campaign of intimidation that had very serious effects on families, employees and commercial profitability. Leadership removal resulted in a marked offending drop, offset somewhat by increased seriousness, so that overall harm fell, but less than expected from offence numbers. This counters the view that leadership removal in organizations motivated by ideological principles is pointless or counterproductive.

Keywords

Animal rights extremism, victimization, fear, harm, policing, leader removal

Introduction

The objectives in this paper are to examine the campaign of intimidation organized by a small group of animal rights activists against Huntington Life Sciences (HLS), a UK

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company involved in testing the effects of new drugs on animals. It considers the characteristics of the offences committed by the supporters of SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty), the police response and its effects on offending. The policing of animal rights extremism in the UK is distinctive in that, to deal with it, a special unit with national responsibilities was created, manned by officers from CID (Criminal Investigations Department) and Special Branch,¹ a part of UK Intelligence Services. This paper provides insights into how this unit collected and collated diverse data and drew on sophisticated intelligence-based approaches to identify offenders, build a prosecution case and arrest those who led and organized the campaign. It is notable that SHAC's activities switched targeting from premises to people (Huggett, 2008) and towards illegal acts involving the use of blackmail and harassment to instil fear and terror. They provided a model for attacks by animal rights activists implemented in continental European countries, and paralleled those undertaken in the USA (Marris and Simonite, 2005). *Modi operandi* employed by activists targeting HLS, its suppliers and clients are highlighted, and the intimidation of employees and their families is examined and placed in the context of existing work on victimization, harassment and fear of crime. The effects of leadership removal on subsequent offending and the harm it caused to victims are measured and evaluated in the light of existing studies of leadership 'decapitation' from criminal or terrorist organizations (for example, Byman, 2006; Cronin, 2009; David, 2002; Jordan, 2009; Price, 2012).

Existing research

Animal rights protests have a long history in the UK (Henshaw, 1989), with Animal Liberation Front (ALF) groups such as the Hunt Retribution Squad and the Band of Mercy prominent in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; some of their members, though not fully active, were still regarded as influential in the 2000s. However, the early 2000s marked a watershed in terms of the marked rise in incidents and a targeting switch from attacks on premises where animals were farmed for fur or bred for experimental purposes or where experiments were carried out, increasingly to the homes and families of employees of organizations engaged in research using animals (Huggett, 2008). Even though the motives and aims were largely unchanged, the means some activists used to achieve them had. They successfully targeted companies via their suppliers, customers and bankers in order to damage profitability, making those with thin profit margins vulnerable (Lutz and Lutz, 2008).

Animal rights activism can be viewed on a 'protest, crime, terrorism' continuum (Walby and Monaghan, 2011), and Liddick (2006) draws parallels between eco-terrorism and animal rights extremism. The view of insurgency as the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to force change (Hauenstein, 2011) appears to fit the actions of many animal rights groups. Where activities involve the unlawful use of violence or threats of violence to create terror or fear as a means of coercion to achieve ideological goals, it is reasonable to view them as comparable to terrorist movements with religious or political aims (for example, Hillyard, 2010; Jackson et al., 2011; Silke, 2003). Parallels may also be drawn between SHAC and other doctrinal organizations that use ideology and dogma to justify terrorist actions (Long, 1990) and

are characterized by a belief in radical change, the use of violence, the specifying of targets, depicting members as righteous and idealizing group goals (Post, 2004), which, in SHAC's case, were to stop HLS using animals in live experiments.

Terrorist groups may be under less pressure to adhere to social and moral sanctioning (Crenshaw, 1996) but often must still consider public opinion. Broad, popular support usually means that doctrinally motivated groups with strong underpinning values and clarity of purpose tend to be more resilient (Cronin, 2002/3; Hoffman, 1998), even if there may be setbacks owing to successful counter-measures (Hoffman, 1998). Such has proved to be the case with animal rights activism, which may be set against a trend towards more humanitarian animal farming, such as the European Union's 1999 directive banning animals from confinement production systems (Davis and Croney, 2004). This is reflected in the large segment, 67 percent, of UK public opinion that is 'very' or 'fairly concerned' about the use of animals in laboratories (Illman, 2005), and the fact that only 60 percent support the use of animals for medical research (ICM Research, 2006). The ethics of using animals for research are not considered in this paper, other than to note that moral notions are not necessarily legal ones (Korvesi, 1967) and that animal rights supporters' activities are examined in so far as they are unlawful. Prior to registering new medicines for safe and effective use on humans, pharmaceutical companies are required by UK law to have tested them on at least two species of mammals, so that animal testing must take place, even if not carried out by HLS or in the UK.

Prior to the 21st century, far fewer illegal acts were carried out by animal rights activists: animal rights offending was six times higher in the 2000s compared with the 1980s and 1990s, up from only 12 to 69 incidents a year in the USA (calculations from figures sourced from the Foundation for Biomedical Research; cited in Huggett, 2008). Most offences involved vandalism, theft or harassment, but one-seventh were arsons or bombings (Huggett, 2008). Two-thirds of offences committed between 1981 and 2007 occurred in the final four years, each averaging 114 incidents (calculations from figures sourced from the Foundation for Biomedical Research; cited in Huggett, 2008). Between 2006 and 2008 in the USA, almost one-third of all offences were against HLS and its pharmaceutical clients – Roche, AstraZenica, GlaxoSmithKline – though universities and institutes involved in research were targeted in over one-tenth of incidents (Huggett, 2008). Victims included molecular biologists and neuro-scientists subjected to bombs, death threats and home demonstrations (Conn and Parker, 2008), car fire-bombing (Marron, 2009) and home fire-bombing (Ballantyne, 2008).

Elsewhere, animal rights militants were active in China, Russia and Brazil (Conn and Rantin, 2010) and throughout the European Union (Mason, 2011). Some of the rise in extremist activity in Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany was fuelled by British expertise, with activists organizing actions or travelling abroad to be involved (Marris and Simonite, 2005). In the UK, there were protest demonstrations outside family homes (Clark, 2004), postal campaigns aimed at scientists (Hadley, 2009) and attacks on animal breeders, and the main contractor for Oxford University's new Science Centre withdrew after receiving threatening letters (Illman, 2005). Using records of offences as they occurred, an objective in this study is to examine the actions that SHAC activists took to place pressures on HLS that brought the company to near bankruptcy. These went far beyond anything previously used by animal rights activists.

Fear of being victimized can affect behaviour and well-being, even when this is based on general risks of being robbed, assaulted or burgled (Hale, 1996). Although fear may often be a dynamic and somewhat transitory emotional response to specific events (Lupton and Tulloch, 1999), it seems likely that for prolonged harassment risks, such as those experienced by victims of animal rights extremists, it will be more sustained and stable. Longitudinal surveys indicate that even brief street robbery events of a few minutes duration can result in post-traumatic stress syndrome and mental health issues that last for nine months or longer and cause drastic changes in behaviour to avoid repetition (Gale and Coupe, 2005). Being targeted specifically for stalking harassment, which continues over longer periods, predictably appears to induce even greater fear, mental disturbance and behavioural adjustment to avoid victimization (Dressing et al., 2005; Stieger et al., 2008), even when there is typically only a single perpetrator. Harassment by animal rights activists is likely to mirror, if not multiply, these effects. Victim fear is not measured in this study, but the nature of offending and its effects on victims as reported to and perceived by police officers were recorded and are reported. The effects of threats of violence and systematic harassment aimed at specific victims on the success of the activists' campaign will also be considered. Even scientists and workers with higher educational attainment and confidence in the police, factors that depress fear of crime (Baker et al., 1982; Hale, 1996), are unlikely to endure victimization involving criminal damage, threats and harassment directed specifically at them for long, particularly if spouses and children are also at risk. This can be aggravated by the sustained climate of fear (Pankhurst, 2008) that animal rights campaigns create.

Police agencies combating terrorist or organized crime groups principally employ intelligence-led activities (Innes et al., 2005) and covert investigative techniques for identifying group participants and linking them to criminal activities. These involve human surveillance, informants and under-cover officers, as well as covert, electronic techniques, including wire-tapping, to monitor incriminating communications and understand member roles and ties in criminal networks, such as the Neapolitan camorra (Campana, 2011; Campana and Varese, 2012). As well as the arrest of members of terrorist groups who commit or plan crimes, leaders and upper echelons have been specifically targeted in order to 'decapitate' and weaken or terminate groups (Cronin, 2009; David, 2002; Jordan, 2009; Price, 2012), an approach still emphasized in counter-insurgency doctrine (Hauenstein, 2011). This was the approach adopted by UK police in seeking to disrupt and terminate SHAC's campaign of intimidation.

Many studies indicate decapitation to be ineffective or even counterproductive (David, 2002; Johnston, 2012; Jordan, 2009; Langdon et al., 2004), with some targeted organizations becoming more radical and violent (Cronin, 2009), though benefits have been identified for younger groups (Jordan, 2009; Price, 2012) and smaller groups with non-religious motivations (Jordan, 2009). Examination of group duration over longer periods, however, indicates that decapitation elevates group mortality rates, irrespective of size, counter-insurgency capacity and group structure (Price, 2012). Price (2012) attributes this to leader succession problems in terrorist groups. These reflect their clandestine, violent and values-based nature and the need for charismatic, transformational leaders (Burns, 1978), who may not be easily replaced and tend to avoid succession planning through having to continually secure their own position (Price, 2012).

Decapitation effects appear to differ between the first two years and the decades that follow. In the short term, smaller and non-religious groups are more vulnerable to decapitation (Jordan, 2009), whereas over longer periods of up to four decades following decapitation, size has no effect and religious groups appear less resilient (Price, 2012). For short-term impact, arrest of upper echelons is effective in precipitating group collapse (Jordan, 2009), indicating that SHAC's core leadership removal will be beneficial. When decapitation does not lead to group collapse, evidence is contradictory on how it affects the incidence and severity of terrorist acts. Following decapitation, ETA attacks became more deadly in terms of deaths and injuries (Jordan, 2009) whereas, with continual decapitations, Hamas attacks increased in number but were less lethal (Byman, 2006).

A distinctive contribution of this study is to measure the effects of the arrest of SHAC's leadership on subsequent criminal acts by other activists and the extent to which the overall amount of harm caused to victims changed. Sentence length is used to measure offence seriousness and harm, an approach little, if ever, used in research into group leadership decapitation or in other areas of criminological research. The paper also aims to provide fresh insights into how covert offences targeted at homes and families of employees were perpetrated by SHAC's activists and how these resulted in the severing of links between HLS, the primary target, and its supplier and client companies. It also provides understanding of police activities and investigative techniques used to collect evidence linking covert offending to involvement in the public protest demonstrations, which provided the evidence to justify leadership arrest in a single, coordinated police operation.

Methodology

Sample and method

The study uses data on animal rights protesters and the crimes committed against HLS collected by the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU) and documentary evidence on offences, victims and policing activities gathered over the seven-year life of the investigation stored in the Home Office Large or Major Enquiry System (HOLMES), which was content analysed. NETCU's remit was extended in 2009 to collecting data on other aspects of political protest, and the recording categories changed, so that the population of 3665 entries made between May 2006 and May 2008 is the basis for assessing the effects of the 1 May 2007 'strike', when SHAC's leaders were simultaneously arrested, on the subsequent criminal activities of SHAC supporters who were not arrested. Data are also sourced from evidence presented by the prosecution during the Autumn 2008 trial of SHAC members for blackmail at Winchester Crown Court, UK.

Data

HOLMES documentary data consist of evidence gathered during the investigation and used as evidence in open court. It includes victim statements, offence details, email-sourced communications about planned attacks on target companies' employees,

three-month summaries of attacks and evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of strategies sent between SHAC and its counterpart, Biteback, in the USA. Forensic examination of SHAC's computer provided lists of targets, addresses and details of victims' cars, their children's ages and names, and other details obtained by reconnaissance. There are also records of activists' surveillance activities, such as 'overlooked', 'CCTV on left' and 'bin day Tuesday', which made clear their use for direct action attacks.

Through qualitative analysis, the documentary data enable an understanding of how the protests and crimes were coordinated, the links between animal rights extremism in the UK and the USA, which revealed SHAC's criminality, how victims were targeted and reacted, and how customers and companies supplying services to HLS were blackmailed into severing links with HLS. Three victimized companies are used for illustration.

The NETCU data used in this paper relate to when protests and crimes of different sorts occurred. Most crimes related to theft, which was recorded in 9 categories, or criminal damage, in 14 categories, ranging from graffiti to arson. Although the Crown Court trials proved that protest activities were predominantly part of the ongoing blackmail, these incidents are distinguished from the crimes that are the focus of analysis in this paper. Crimes listed under protest activity are normally public order type offences, such as swearing or other offensive language, but can also include a breach of the peace, which is not a criminal offence.

Findings: Crimes and victimization

The aims are to describe the characteristics of the animal rights crimes committed in the UK in the 2000s, how offenders were organized, who the victims were and the sorts of crimes committed. This describes the intimidation and fear directed at the homes and families of employees of targeted companies, which, by terrifying them into compliance, resulted in the severance of links with HLS by its suppliers and customers and a serious loss of profitability. Prosecution at the subsequent Crown Court trial adduced evidence of the targeting of over 30 companies, ranging from multinational pharmaceutical firms to local skip suppliers.

SHAC was formed in 1999 (SHAC, 1999), with the sole purpose of causing HLS to cease its business. Its leaders mounted a well-run and sophisticated criminal campaign, which combined vibrant, noisy and relentless, but lawful, demonstrations with a well-organized campaign of illegal acts of intimidation. Intimidation was directed at HLS, founded in 1952 and one of the world's largest contract research organizations operating on three continents. HLS, in Cambridgeshire, carried out the lawful and licensed testing of pharmaceutical and other products on animals for world-wide clients. Targeted from 1999, 'target hardening' of its premises and the use of civil injunctions had nullified the effects of regular demonstrations. This displaced activist focus to secondary and tertiary targets. By 2006, HLS had been de-listed on UK and US stock exchanges, moved its headquarters administration to the USA, where there are tighter restrictions on shareholder privacy, and had an account with the Bank of England, since no other bank was willing to offer facilities. One of SHAC's leaders, interviewed in 2006, stated:

'Whether you like us and think we're the equivalent of Mary Poppins, or whether you regard us as mad extremists, you have to admit one thing – what we do works.' (Boggan, 2006)

Modi operandi: Extremist tactics

Police interviews with company employees and families targeted by SHAC indicated activists' *modi operandi*. SHAC activists used deception to uncover details of HLS clients, suppliers or contractors, and published the information on SHAC's website, so that companies or their employees became victims of activist crimes and other actions, including some or all of those listed in Table 1. A SHAC representative would then advise a company that it would remain on SHAC's website and be targeted until it wrote or emailed a capitulation statement, severing all association with HLS. The climate of fear fostered was such that it was often sufficient to threaten SHAC website publicity to induce a target company to capitulate (Pankhurst, 2008). Written capitulation stopped all action.

Forensic examination of SHAC's computer, involving complex reconstruction of email communications, both encrypted and deleted, combined with conventional evidence gathering techniques based on forensic and crime analysis, showed a pattern of activities against companies in Europe and the USA associated with HLS. Evidence showed these to be coordinated by SHAC, and 'management statistics' of numbers of demonstrations, types of illegal action and capitulations were collected monthly and reported in emails and SHAC newsletters to maintain pressure on HLS.

Victimization evidence from three targeted companies

The targeting of three companies illustrates SHAC's approach and its outcomes. These are a pharmaceutical company (referred to anonymously as TPC), an equipment supplier (TES) and a transport group (TTG). TPC, which has a Japanese parent company, markets, sells and distributes pharmaceutical medicines to general practitioners, hospitals and chemists in the UK. TES supplies and distributes decontamination washing machines

Table 1. Activists' actions against companies

False allegations of paedophilia
Hoax bombs
Sending of tampons allegedly contaminated with the AIDS virus
Demonstrations and damage at the homes of members of staff ('home visits')
Threat of or actual criminal damage to property
Threat of or actual physical assault
Threatening/abusive telephone calls, emails or letters
Noisy protests outside the premises
Disruptive trespasses into the premises (aggravated trespass)
The coordinated sending of emails or telephone calls to block companies' email and telephone systems, disrupting their business (denial of service attacks)
Delivery of unwanted material from mail order companies

for surgical theatres and hospitals and TTG specializes in storage and bulk logistics. TES and TTG capitulated to SHAC pressures within, respectively, three months and four days, but TPC did not, so that employee intimidation lasted for three years. Case-study data were sourced from enquiries made at scenes of offences and protests. They included victim impact statements, the contents of seized and reconstructed email communications, telephone records and the analysis of SHAC's computer hard drive. This evidence highlighted the serious effects on those targeted of the combined overt and covert campaign.

In 2003, SHAC's Newsletter 24 announced: 'Time for action against Japanese customers as they are responsible for 20% of HLS income'. In April 2003, a director of TPC received a call and was told that, because he was an HLS customer, his details had been given to 300 SHAC members and that he would be hearing from them. Initial contact was by email with TES, advising it to cease trading with HLS, and by telephone calls to TTG's offices, threatening posting on an animal rights website as a company that supported HLS's vivisection.

In the case of TTG, the MD rang the number given and was told that, 'although he [the person answering] did not condone violence or attacks against companies and people connected to HLS, he could not be responsible for what other people reading "his" website might do or be capable of'. Unsurprisingly, this was taken as a thinly disguised threat and, after reading the reports of company targeting on SHAC's website, TTG sent an email of capitulation which was published on SHAC's website. TTG ceased trading with HLS as a result of SHAC's unwarranted demand with menaces.

In contrast, neither TES nor TPC ceased trading with HLS immediately or communicated any intention to capitulate to SHAC's demands. In the case of TES, this led to its featuring on SHAC's website, followed by demonstrations at TES's offices in July and August. Demonstrators used loudspeakers, air-horns and drums. All protesters, including five members of SHAC's leadership, were served with verbal notices under section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986. A SHAC leader underlined the links between the ostensibly lawful demonstration protests and the undoubtedly illegal intimidation of employees by saying outside TES's offices: 'Do you know when you do this, people at demonstrations don't come back and demonstrate. They go and do stuff at night.'

Three months later, letters received at the homes of TES's MD and Technical Director caused considerable distress and fear to the recipients and their families. They read as follows:

'You have had your chance to sever your links with HLS. Now we are giving you seven days from receipt of this letter to stop doing business with them for good or you will face the consequences. We will attack your property or your family or you whichever we see fit. Anything goes... [Signed] Animal Rights Militia.'

Following receipt, TES notified SHAC of its intention to cease trading with HLS, and there were no further demonstrations, letters or emails. This indicates the degree of control over animal rights activists exercised by SHAC's leadership via its website.

More serious intimidation and victimization at TPC

Mr A of TPC had received a similar letter in May 2003, which stated:

‘You support and profit from animal cruelty and torture at Huntington Life Sciences. You are the no. 1 ALF target. The Animal Rights Militia does not tolerate filthy, sick, evil, perverted scum like you. You have been warned.’

TPC, however, did not capitulate to SHAC’s demands. Whereas capitulation meant that intimidation at TES and TTG was limited to threatening telephone calls, letters and emails, TPC was subjected to prolonged and more serious directed intimidation. Since early 2003, its employees and their families had been persistently targeted by SHAC and, as at TES, there had been demonstrations. With no capitulation, SHAC intensified its programme of intimidation and supplemented threatening letters with paedophile allegations, a hoax bomb, ‘home visits’ to perpetrate criminal damage, sending soiled tampons allegedly infected with HIV, threatening or silent phone calls and further threatening letters.

In May–June, two envelopes were received at TPC offices, one with a note stating: ‘Still supporting HLS. I’ve got AIDS. I hope you touch this.’

This was followed by visits, reported in SHAC newsletters, to Mr A’s home, when the letters ‘ALF’ were sprayed in red paint on his car and garage, and TPC’s Finance Director’s home where his car was also vandalized. In July 2003, TPC’s Finance Director received a hoax bomb package at his home address. There were five further attacks between 2003 and 2005. In July 2003, Mr A and TPC’s Finance Director received the following letter at their homes:

‘You stop supporting HLS and I won’t come over and give you HIV. It could be so easy to give you AIDS. I’m a drug addict and I get through a lot of needles. I know where you live, I’ve seen your place and I’ve been shown what you look like. Don’t make me come over one day and bump into you and accidentally stab you with one of my needles. Bye for now. . .’

Still TPC did not capitulate and, in August 2003 and March 2005, residents in Mr A’s village received letters alleging he was a paedophile and a pervert and had been investigated for downloading child pornography and assault against young girls, allegations that were wholly false and caused further immense distress to him and his family. Finally, in May 2006, activists spray-painted ‘Murderer at the Ricks’ at the entrance to the railway station near Mr A’s home, an incident reported on the Biteback website as: ‘Now all his neighbours and business commuters will know he is a vile murderer’. The effects on the well-being and peace of mind of Mr A, his wife and his children of this prolonged directly targeted campaign of intimidation and in creating long-term fear of threats and harm, and acts of damage and defamation were communicated to investigating officers as being immense. Living with the knowledge that committed extremists know your identity and where you live and may cause you or your children harm is liable to have seriously detrimental effects on mental well-being that are likely to be far more serious than being the victim of a single crime, such as street robbery, which is far less likely to result from the planned selection of a particular victim known to many offenders. TPC also paid about £200,000 for additional security and legal advice.

Although failing to close HLS in the UK, SHAC's activities led to its stock market de-listing and reduced profitability. SHAC achieved this with pressure on employees, through the capitulation of its suppliers and customers, and by capitalizing on existing fear of the reputation of the ALF. For employees working in industries known to have been ALF targets for years who were fearful of potential victimization, the first signal offence by SHAC, sometimes the ALF symbol painted as graffiti near homes or workplaces, would alone cause them to move jobs. With many suppliers, capitulation was often one of economic calculation rather than just fear. Graffiti painted on skips elicited no response from one waste company, with no background in animal research or knowledge of prior campaigns and, hence, low awareness and little fear. Cutting hydraulic lines on a number of skip lorries, however, resulted in immediate financial impact and capitulation.

SHAC relied on the media to report their demonstrations, mass rallies and leafleting campaigns, as well as the ALF crimes. It boosted this with its own and the more radical Biteback websites. As with TPC, TES and TTG, newly identified victims reported to the police that they had been referred to the SHAC website so that they could see what had happened to others who had resisted and all those who had capitulated – a means of communicating details calculated to enhance fear.

The government response

As well as SHAC, there were virulent and effective animal rights campaigns being undertaken against Oxford University and in Staffordshire, where a guinea pig farm closed after an unrelenting campaign, which included the exhumation of the remains of the owner's mother (Morris et al., 2006). From 2003, multinational, especially Japanese, pharmaceutical and scientific companies operating in Britain lobbied the U.K. government for a more effective response to targeting by animal rights extremists. Under the direction of the Cabinet Office and overseen by a 'miscellaneous' committee chaired by the Minister for Science, a government response was formulated. This consisted of a publicity campaign and a police response.

The publicity campaign

There was considerable public concern about the use of animals in laboratories for research (ICM Research, 2006; Illman, 2005). Unable to rebut visually distressing images of animals being used for experimentation, leading scientists were encouraged to publicize the positive end results of work countering diseases such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and cancer, for which animal experimentation was indispensable. This was only partially successful and SHAC's harassment campaign continued.

The police response

Effectively combating SHAC's campaign involved designating the crimes they committed as blackmail, the formation of a police unit to deal with animal rights extremism and

the use of specialist investigative techniques and a major police 'strike' aimed at arresting and incarcerating the activists' leaders.

The animal rights extremism policing unit and conspiracy to blackmail

In response to the animal rights campaigns in southern England, the Regional Heads of CID for the South of England appointed an experienced and competent senior investigating officer (SIO) with a background in countering organized crime to head a specialist unit.² It became evident that the Special Branches attached to each Force were not communicating with each other or with any of the other police units responding to animal rights extremist campaigns elsewhere in Britain. With an experienced detective sergeant heading the investigations cell, Special Branch officers were posted into the unit in order to facilitate the flow of intelligence on animal rights extremism from each police service. With senior officers practising subsidiarity (Handy, 1993), the SIO with knowledge and expertise was given responsibility to manage the investigation as he saw fit. It is indicative of the trust in him and the belief that he had the best grasp of the situation that his superiors did not replace him with a more senior officer when the scope of the enquiry widened from three counties to the whole of the UK, and then to Europe and the USA, and was accorded a multi-million pound Home Office budget.

All existing UK victims of animal rights activism were visited for 'impact statements'. These impressed on officers that a simple 'ALF' painted on the house wall of a scientist involved in animal research carried all the fear and uncertainty of a direct and explicit threat. Although only a minor offence in law, when set in context the effect was far greater for the individuals concerned. Following liaison with the Crown Prosecution Service, it was decided to investigate a case for conspiracy to blackmail against those who organized the campaign rather than deal with individual offences as they occurred.

The police investigation

This investigation aimed to link the ostensibly lawful campaign of protest and demonstration by SHAC with the unlawful, criminal campaign of intimidation, badged as ALF.³ Premises were bugged with audio probes, activists were subjected to surveillance, and websites and communications with imprisoned activists were monitored. Arrests were carried out on 1 May 2007 in a coordinated operation involving over 700 UK and foreign police officers, who raided 32 addresses, including some in Holland and Belgium (Laville, 2007); 30 people associated with SHAC were arrested, plus others during the following weeks. Although there was previously enough evidence to justify suspects' arrest, the 60 computers, 160 mobile phones and 23,000 other exhibits seized on 1 May provided the evidence needed to prove conspiracy. Proving the controlling influence of SHAC's leadership over those committing ALF criminal offences required painstaking and comprehensive forensic examination and analysis of the computers and other devices seized. SHAC used an encryption program called 'Pretty Good Privacy' to protect almost all emails and some documentary material. Over-reliance on this, coupled with simple mistakes by SHAC, led to large amounts of data being retrieved and reconstructed into evidence that linked the overt protest and covert intimidation campaigns. Rather than

originating as a fully formed approach from the investigative teams, the techniques that resulted in this evidence were the product of many months of effort from a variety of law enforcement agencies, sometimes successful, but often not (Donovan, 2012).

The evidence

An audio probe placed in SHAC's main office at Little Moorcote revealed well-organized and planned quarterly 'business' meetings to review SHAC's activities in the UK, Europe and the USA over the previous three months.⁴ The principal leaders met at a single hub simultaneously, revealing direct ties between them more easily than other forms of criminal networking (Campana and Varese, 2012; Jordan, 2009). Written reports were afterwards destroyed in a bonfire. Considerable overt, covert and secret police work was used to reconstruct these 'management information' documents and the attendance of SHAC's leadership. They provided revealing insights into the character and extent of the campaign and the commitment and sophistication of those conducting it. The documents provided direct evidence that SHAC activists initiated and supported 'direct action' or criminal activities, which, after implementation, were posted on the website of Biteback, SHAC's US equivalent, as ALF attacks.

Decoding of encrypted emails between extremist leaders also provided significant evidence of reports of animal rights activities by SHAC being sent to Biteback. Apart from concealing SHAC as its source, a report of criminal damage (see Table 2) was published unchanged on Biteback's website, where postings were protected by US 'First Amendment' rights. Emails also used the term 'ALF' to cover criminal acts, confirming SHAC's responsibility for both protest demonstrations and criminal intimidation.

Analysis of decoded communications between SHAC and Biteback, the use of audio probes for surveillance and forensic analysis of computers thus helped to reveal communications between the social network of criminals involved in this ideologically motivated organized crime, which helped to build the prosecution case.

Table 2. Extracts from an email from SHAC to Biteback, reported on Biteback's website

'Last night a team of ALF volunteers offered their free vehicle servicing to a farm situation in a small [English county] village.

A large, and fairly new animal transporter used for taking animals to their deaths was given a complete makeover. All tyres slashed, sand poured into the gas tank, locks glued, windscreen wipers glued to windscreen, door mirrors covered in black spray paint, windscreen covered in the word "SCUM" and the rest of the lorry left with messages such as "KILLERS", "ALF WATCHING YOU" etc. . . .

Another large animal transporter, . . . had its tyres slashed and had a wonderful new paint job . . . A third small "livestock" trailer was also dealt with in the same way: now everyone can see what SICKOS you really are while you take sentient animals to be butchered. . . . we slashed the tyres on their sad little caravan, sprayed over the windows and left them the message "CRUEL BASTARD" for the owner to wake up to.

Finally, since we're very generous with our free servicing, we gave a farm trailer used to transport hay bales a good looking over and a new set of tyres.

JUSTICE FOR THE ANIMALS! – A.L.F.'

Effects of the 1 May arrests

Conviction and imprisonment

The arrest of SHAC’s six leaders resulted in their conviction for conspiracy to blackmail at a 2008 trial where 60 witnesses gave evidence. Sentences for the six leaders of SHAC were 11, 9, 8, 6, 5 and 4 years, and the four most serious offenders with the longest sentences were also given life-time anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) prohibiting animal rights campaigning (Nisbet, 2008). The others received five-year ASBOs from the date of their release. A trial of other activists took place in 2010 at which all six defendants, as with the 2008 defendants, eventually pleaded guilty and received rather lighter sentences, the heaviest being six years plus a life-long ASBO, and the lightest a two-year suspended sentence.

Effects of arrests on animal rights activities

The objective of this section, which is based on NETCU data, is to understand the effects of leadership removal on subsequent levels of offending by SHAC activists and any change in the amount of harm.

For the May 2006 – April 2008 population, protests outweighed crimes by 4 : 1 and the number of protests fell far less than the number of crimes (Chi-square = 22.11, $p < .000$, 1 df) following the May 2007 arrests, although both were lower. Protests in the 12 months following the police ‘strike’ were only 14 percent lower than in the preceding 12 months (Cohen’s $d = .98$, about 54 percent non-overlap between pre and post distributions; $F = 7.27$, $p = .015$), indicating a moderate to large effect, whereas crimes were 43 percent lower (Cohen’s $d = 2.128$, >82 percent non-overlap between distributions; $F = 27.17$, $p < .0001$), a very large effect (see Figure 1). This suggests that the removal of SHAC leaders resulted in a marked reduction in criminal activity but had a notably weaker effect on protests.

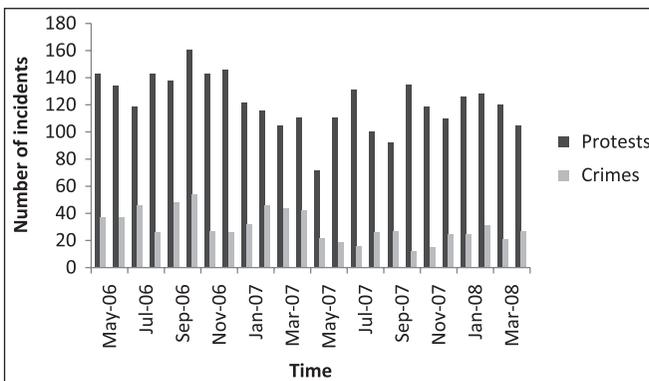


Figure 1. Protests and crimes by month

Overall harm also fell following the May 2007 arrests, but the reduction was rather less than expected from the fall in crime numbers alone. This was because the crimes in the 12 months following the police arrest 'strike' were more serious than those in the months that preceded it (see Figure 2). Mean sentence lengths for different sorts of crimes (Table 3) committed between 1999 and 2009 (Ministry of Justice, 2010) are used as a measure of the harm they cause to victims (Sherman, 2011), an approach rarely, if ever, subjected to empirical testing. By multiplying the numbers of different crimes by their mean prison sentence length and totalling these for each month, measures of the overall and average amounts of harm they caused were estimated. Sentence length appears to be a good indicator of harm, because harm determines seriousness (Sentencing Guidelines Council, 2004), which is the primary determinant of sentence severity (Ashworth, 2010). US federal sentencing guidelines also use sentence length as a proxy for crime seriousness (US Sentencing Commission, 2010) and there is also a very high correlation ($r = .956$) between the US public's perception of crime seriousness and mean sentence length (Jacoby and Cullen, 1999: 285).

The average amount of harm per crime in the 12 months preceding the police 'strike' was 5.4, whereas afterwards it was 6.1 (Cohen's $d = 0.677$; 42 percent non-overlap between distributions; $F = 3.98$, $p < .05$), which is 14 percent higher, a moderate effect. A comparison of the total amounts of harm pre- and post-strike, calculated by multiplying the total number of crimes by their mean harm levels, indicates that overall harm fell by 35 percent, rather less than the 43 percent crime number drop. Although there were far fewer crimes committed after the police intervention, they were, on average, rather more serious and harmful.

The police action was successful, but rather less so than might appear from the number of crimes alone.

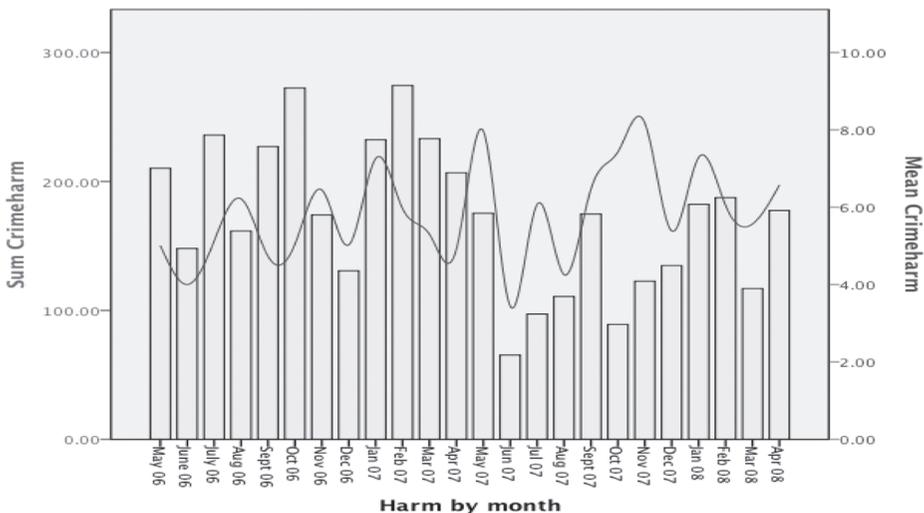


Figure 2. Total harm and mean harm from crimes by month

Table 3. Average sentence length in months used as an indicator of harm

	Average sentence length (months)	
Assaults – all	2.7	Average all courts
Criminal damage – arson	24.0	Average County Courts
Criminal damage – property	12.6	Average all courts
Criminal damage – vehicles	12.6	Average all courts
Criminal damage – graffiti	2.4	Average Magistrates' courts
Criminal damage – released animals	2.4	Average Magistrates' courts
Harassment – criminal communication	2.7	Average Magistrates' courts non-traffic
Harassment – hoax bomb threat	2.7	Average Magistrates' courts non-traffic
Harassment – IED device	3.5	Average County Courts non-traffic
Public order - all demo arrests	1.0	Nominal
Street collections	2.7	Average Magistrates' courts non-traffic
Suspicious activity	1.0	Nominal
<i>Except:</i>		
Suspicious activity – product contamination	3.5	Average County Courts non-motoring
Suspicious activity – suspicious package	2.7	As harassment
Theft act burglary (and attempt)	16.1	Average all courts
Theft act – all other thefts	4.1	Average all courts

Conclusions

The study provides a number of distinctive insights into the character of the animal rights campaign organized by SHAC and how it was policed. The first is that a dedicated police unit was needed to combat this campaign effectively, in terms of bringing together specialists with the skills and abilities to coordinate a response and the sophistication to deploy the necessary devices to collect the evidence and to secure and collate data from the 43 police services in England & Wales. The second is that the police investigation and Crown Prosecution teams worked collaboratively, opting for an investigative strategy based on conspiracy to blackmail and leadership decapitation, rather than viewing all incidents as separate criminal acts. It appears that this strategy will have been more successful than dealing with each crime individually, since few perpetrators of crimes before May 2007, or many of those committed during the following year, were caught and prosecuted. Predicting when and where animal rights crimes will take place and preventing them or catching offenders red handed is difficult and costly, the more so because there are many potential targets.

The decision to arrest all SHAC's principal leaders in a single police operation proved to be highly effective in securing full evidence of conspiracy, and also in removing the campaign's organizing, planning, liaison and coordinating centre. It supports the idea that removing the leadership results in sharp falls in criminal activity, since a drop in criminal acts of 43 percent resulted. This drop averaged 3.8 incidents a week and may, in part, be directly attributable to the incarceration and incapacitation of the leaders, who had been present at many incidents and who were no longer able themselves to commit crimes. However, offences following the leadership arrest 'strike' were more harmful and serious. This effect is in line with ETA, whose attacks became more deadly following decapitation (Jordan, 2009), rather than with Hamas, where they were more numerous and less lethal (Byman, 2006). This may be indicative of a loss of moderating influence from experienced leaders (Cronin, 2009).

Even if SHAC did not collapse, the sharp reduction in offending and harm tends to counter views that leadership removal may be of little or no avail or may even be detrimental (for example, Hauenstein, 2011; Johnston, 2012; Langdon et al., 2004), owing to other activists stepping into leadership roles. It appears likely that SHAC's small size, associated with meetings of all key leaders at a single hub (Jordan, 2009), made the group vulnerable. That the leaders' simultaneous removal had so marked an effect on offending indicates deficiencies in succession planning, though not from fears of being internally displaced as in political and religious terrorist groups (Price, 2012), but because SHAC's leaders evidently did not anticipate being arrested and charged with conspiracy and overrated their computer and email security. It is also possible that arrest of the leadership for blackmail, with its heavier sentences, may have had a deterrent effect on some activists. Nevertheless, as with the arrest of leaders of environmental extremist groups in the USA (Liddick, 2006), the arrest of SHAC's leaders did not stop activist crimes, although it did considerably reduce them.

The findings confirm that the effects of leadership removal from organizations involved in ideologically motivated crime depend on their particular circumstances. These include whether leaders have prepared for their possible removal by training others who can step into their shoes, the number of crimes being committed and leaders' own involvement in them, and organization size and structure, which affect the proportion of the full leadership that may be removed at a single stroke.

This study demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between the harmfulness of different crimes. Counts of incidents alone fail to capture real levels of harm, and the seriousness of offences needs to be taken account of in evaluating the success or otherwise of policing operations.

The hardening of targets and the stifling of activist intimidation by police action helped to serially displace SHAC's crimes from HLS premises to HLS employees' homes, thence to HLS suppliers and customers, thence, in turn, to their employees. This process was reinforced by successful capitulation. It was complemented by parallel actions instigated against HLS, its suppliers and its customers in the USA. That ideologically motivated crime is so readily displaced is somewhat at odds with studies of acquisitive crime, including burglary (Guerette and Bowers, 2009) and preventive police patrol (Weisburd and Eck, 2004).

The study underlines the very serious effects that a sustained and skilfully directed campaign of intimidation and harassment directed at specific individuals and their families have on their well-being, and the fear, if not terror, it creates. SHAC's offences involved the systematic use of violence or threats of violence to create terror or fear as a means of coercion to achieve ideological goals. This was amplified by media reporting and SHAC's own promulgation of its activities, which generated a climate of fear. It is understandable that many companies on whom such pressures were placed capitulated quickly. This and the profit reduction and stock market de-listing of HLS were a successful outcome for SHAC activists. A once very profitable business was reduced to near bankruptcy in three years by a core group of no more than 15 activists. They were, however, unsuccessful in that they were convicted and imprisoned.

Equally the police were both successful and unsuccessful. They successfully detected the crimes committed by SHAC's leaders and provided the evidence needed for a successful prosecution. Leadership arrest resulted in fewer crimes and in harm reduction. However, many acts of criminal damage and intimidation occurred before and after the arrest of SHAC's leaders, so that substantial harm was sustained by victims. Moreover, policing could not prevent HLS and other companies that supplied services and products to HLS losing income. This appears inevitable, given the time needed to accumulate the evidence required to sustain a more serious charge of conspiracy. Therefore, neither police nor extremists can claim success with no detrimental effects and this seems to be inherent to policing a campaign of ideologically motivated crimes perpetrated by sophisticated and committed activists.

Notes

1. UK animal rights extremism is often dealt with by 'Special Branches' or by counter-terrorism units in police services. Special Branches are coordinated by the Security Service for state security and by the National Domestic Extremism Unit for such issues as animal rights offences.
2. Information in this section is drawn principally from records compiled by a senior officer in the SHAC investigation and open court evidence.
3. Information in this section is drawn principally from records compiled by a senior officer in the SHAC investigation and open court evidence.
4. This section is principally based on data from HOLMES, supplemented by data sourced from the Foundation for Biomedical Research (cited in Huggett, 2008).
5. Although the basis for the study is a population of incidents for which inferential testing is inappropriate, significance tests are included as an indicator of external validity.

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