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An Introduction to Terrorism

Welcome to the first lecture in the series on terrorism. We begin with a look at the definition of terrorism. Mainstream media, Hollywood movies, and some politicians often portray terrorists as crazy dudes blowing stuff up. However, that's not entirely accurate. In truth, terrorism is a complex phenomenon that has been studied and debated for several decades. Further, there are many competing definitions of the term *terrorism*, not only among scholars but also among policymakers and government agencies. For example, according to the U.S. Department of State, the term "terrorism" means "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience."[1] Meanwhile, the Department of Justice defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."[2] The distinction that the Department of State makes in referring to "politically motivated violence" is an important one, as it is a key reason why terrorism is considered different from other kinds of violent acts.

The political motivations behind acts of terrorism vary across a broad spectrum. Many terrorist groups have pursued goals that are common among the broader landscape of political insurgency or revolution, including sociopolitical control or regime change. Some have sought to establish a geopolitically separate identity (often referred

to as nationalism or ethnonational self-determination), while others have tried to use terrorism to bring about the cessation of animal testing, deforestation, or abortion clinic services. Some terrorists pursue religiously oriented goals like imposing ***Shari'a*** (Islamic law) on a population or subjugating members of another faith, but these goals are still related to politics and power.[3] The challenge of finding a common definition of terrorism has been illustrated most prominently by decades of debate at the United Nations. For instance, while the United States and Western European nations usually endorse Israel's definition of Palestinian suicide bombers as terrorists, many Arab nations in the Middle East support the Palestinians' cause and argue that they are "freedom fighters" (another term used within the genre of political violence) or tend to use some other more benign label.

We have seen similar debates on a national or local level as well. Many Catholics in Northern Ireland refused to call the Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provisional IRA) terrorists, while many Protestants in Northern Ireland refused to call the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) or Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) terrorists, when each of these groups were clearly responsible for significant terrorist violence for nearly half a century. The definitional debate has led some to suggest that terrorism should be considered a matter of perception, promoting the old adage that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." However, I personally believe that freedom fighters or insurgents can certainly attempt to achieve their political objectives without resorting to terrorism.

Essentially, those of us who study terrorism have a variety of definitions to choose from. According to the eminent political scientist David Rapoport, "Terror is violence with distinctive properties used for political purposes both by private parties and states. That violence is unregulated by publicly accepted norms to contain violence, the rules of war, and the rules of punishment. Private groups using terror most often disregard the rules of war, while state terror generally disregards legally codified rules of punishment, i.e., those enabling us to distinguish guilt from innocence. But both states and non-state groups can ignore either set of rules."[4] Louise Richardson, another scholar whom I admire, explains that terrorist organizations have a political objective that they seek to obtain through violence or the threat of violence, and that the use of this violence is not really meant to defeat the enemy but to send a message through violent acts of symbolic significance that gain maximum attention to a cause.[5]

Professor Cindy Combs refers to terrorism as "a synthesis of war and theatre: a dramatization of violence which is perpetrated on innocent victims and played before

an audience in the hope of creating a mode of fear without apology or remorse for political purposes."[6] And Bruce Hoffman, one of the most internationally respected scholars in this field, defines terrorism as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change . . . [it is] designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack . . . [and] to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is very little."[7] Hoffman also notes that certain aspects of various terrorism definitions are fundamental. For example, most definitions of terrorism include some political dimension (as demonstrated by many of the authors I have just mentioned). Most terrorists desire political change, but some terrorist groups are motivated by a desire to prevent political change and preserve the status quo. (We'll talk more about those kinds of groups in Lecture 10.) Further, states can also terrorize their citizens, and when this happens it's usually the case that political change is not desired.

Fundamental to most descriptions and definitions of terrorism is the notion that those who engage in it do not abide by conventional norms of warfare—rather, they intentionally target innocents (including off-duty military, law enforcement, or other government officials), and they seek to cause psychological trauma as much as (if not more than) death and damage. And of course, there are also criminal dimensions to terrorism as well. Terrorists kill, maim, and destroy, and it would be difficult to find a court of law anywhere in the civilized world that does not view these as crimes, regardless of motives or ultimate goals. Further, terrorists have also routinely engaged in money laundering, theft, fraud, extortion, smuggling (including drugs, weapons, and humans), bank robbery, and many other kinds of criminal activity.

Alex Schmid, another internationally respected senior scholar in this field, notes that criminal and terrorist organizations have much in common: both are rational actors, they produce victims, they use similar tactics such as kidnapping and assassination, they operate secretly, and both are pursued as criminals by the authorities of the state governments in which they operate.[8] However, in most definitions of terrorism, a common theme is that *motives matter*. For example, organizational crime expert Phil Williams distinguishes terrorist and criminal organizations by their motives: at the heart of terrorist organizations is the desire to bring about (or prevent) political change, while criminal organizations focus on profit generation and maximization.[9] Further, terrorist attacks should be seen as a sum total of activities that include fundraising, recruitment, training, development of special skills, and preparation for an attack—all

of which can stretch over several months or even years. Criminal organizations focus much of their energies on protecting themselves from peer competitors or government and law enforcement agencies, and they pursue strategies to manage, avoid, control, or mitigate risk—but of course, many terrorist groups do this as well.[10] For the most part, the one aspect that distinguishes terrorists from other criminals is the political nature of the violence they inflict. Many see terrorism as the use or threat of violence to bring about change, and most often the kind of change terrorists seek is political in one way or another.

You can also see clear distinctions between terrorists and criminals in how they view money. As researcher Loretta Napoleani notes, criminal organizations run their operations like private corporations, with the accumulation of profit as the ultimate goal. In contrast, terrorist organizations are more interested in money disbursements than money laundering; instead of accumulation and profit maximization, money is to be distributed within the network of cells to support operations.[11] Overall, while terrorism is often considered a form of political violence, it is also seen by law enforcement professionals as a unique form of violent crime—unique primarily because of the motives behind it. However, a growing number of authors have also begun to suggest that the distinctions between organized crime and terrorism may be fading. For example, professor emeritus Walter Laqueur has argued that, 50 years ago, a clear dividing line existed between terrorism and organized crime, but that "more recently this line has become blurred, and in some cases a symbiosis between terrorism and organized crime has occurred that did not exist before."[12] Other scholars have described the phenomenon as a nexus, a confluence, a continuum or some other kind of paradigm involving fluid, constantly changing relationships among members of terrorist and criminal networks.[13] We'll discuss more about these evolving changes in the world of terrorism later in this lecture series.

In the late 1980s, Schmid and several of his European colleagues conducted a study involving hundreds of publications about terrorism, and found a number of common themes, shown in Table 1.1.

Based on this research, they offered a definition that attempts to capture most of what the scholarly community seems to agree on in its use of the term:

> Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively

TABLE 1.1: Frequency of definitional elements in the study of terrorism

Concept/theme	How often it was part of definition (%)	Concept/theme	How often it was part of definition (%)
Violence, force	83.5	Arbitrariness; impersonal, random character	21
Political	65	Civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, outsiders as victims	17.5
Fear, terror emphasized	51	Intimidation	17
Threat	47	Innocence of victims emphasized	15.5
Psychological effects and anticipated reactions	41.5	Group, movement, organization as perpetrator	14
Victim-target differentiation	37.5	Symbolic aspect, demonstration to others	13.5
Purposive, planned, systematic, organized action	32	Incalculability, unpredictability, unexpectedness of occurrence of violence	9
Method of combat, strategy, tactic	30.5	Clandestine, covert nature	9
Extranormality, in breach of accepted rules, without humanitarian constraints	30	Repetitiveness; serial or campaign character of violence	7
Coercion, extortion, induction of compliance	28	Criminal	6
Public aspect	21.5	Demands made on third parties	4

(representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.[14]

To me, this is a nice way of comprehensively representing the vast scholarship in the study of terrorism. Unfortunately, it is a bit too long and complicated to deliver in a standard classroom lecture. So, in my introductory lectures on terrorism, I typically draw on some version of the following as a working definition:

Terrorism is a combination of strategies and violent tactics in which the victims (e.g., ordinary citizens) are a sub-element of a broader target (e.g., a government). These strategies and tactics are used by individuals or groups in pursuit of some type of objectives—typically of a political, social, criminal, economic and/or religious nature—and they perceive terrorism to be the most effective way to *obtain the power* needed to achieve those objectives.

Essentially, this definition reflects my own thinking that terrorism is to some degree a product of a basic unequal distribution of power on local, national, or global levels. This admittedly simplistic view of terrorism is underscored by a much broader and more important basic issue: the choice to engage in terrorism is driven by a belief that the present is inadequate, and thus something dramatic (using violent tactics) must be done to ensure a better future.

Thus, from political revolutionaries to religious militants, the results are similar in terms of their adoption of politically violent tactics as a means to achieve their objectives. Dissatisfaction with the status quo has led to terrorist group formation in Ireland, Italy, Egypt, Germany, Sri Lanka, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United States, and many other nations. Moreover, terrorism has proven effective in bringing about change, from the perspective of some observers. For example, supporters of Hizballah believe that terrorism drove the powerful United States (and later Israel) out of Lebanon, and Islamists believe that terrorist attacks convinced the French to pull out of Algeria. To understand terrorism requires, at some level, an ability to consider how terrorists view themselves and how they rationalize their behavior.

In many cases, individuals who carry out acts of terrorism are consumed by hatred toward others, and display a willingness and ability to kill without remorse or regard for those who may die from their terrorist acts.

A good deal of this animosity—particularly in the developing world—may stem from a perception that they have been victimized by corrupt governments, backed by powerful nations and multinational corporations, that have little concern for their lives, needs, or suffering. This results in widespread perceptions of helplessness (again, a lack of power) and

> **TO THE POINT**
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> Terrorism has criminal, political and communicative dimensions.

hate, which can lay the groundwork for terrorist recruitment. However, it can also be said that hatred in the soul of the terrorist is a symptom of something deeper, a central dissatisfaction with one's place in this world vis-à-vis others.

The unequal distribution of power feeds a perception of "us versus them," a perception found in almost all ideologies associated with politically violent groups and movements. From William Potter Gale's rabid white supremacy radio shows in the United States to the firebrand imams in the mosques of Riyadh or Finsbury Park, London, the hardships and challenges "we" face can be framed in terms of what "they" are, or (more likely) what "they" have done to "us." From this perspective, "we" desire a redistribution of power in order to have more control over our destiny, and one could argue that many terrorist groups use violence as the way to bring this about.

A cursory look at the stated objectives of some of the world's more notorious terrorist groups exemplifies this view. Ethnic separatist groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, in Sri Lanka), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG, in the Philippines), and the Euzkadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom, or ETA, in Spain) all want the power to form their own recognized, sovereign entity, carved out of an existing nation-state. The Provisional IRA and its various dissident offshoots have tried to use terrorism to force the six counties of Northern Ireland to leave the U.K. and reunite with the rest of the Republic of Ireland. Groups engaged in the Middle East conflict against Israel—like the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine—want the power to establish an independent Palestinian state. Other groups have wanted the power to establish an Islamist government where they live, including Ansar al-Islam (in Iraq), the Armed Islamic Group (in Algeria), al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (in Egypt), the Islamic

Movement of Uzbekistan (in Central Asia), and Jemmah Islamiyyah (in Southeast Asia). Terrorists like these groups seek the power to change the status quo and to forge a future that they do not believe will come about naturally. They have convinced themselves that acts of terrorism are necessary to achieve their objectives.

The pursuit of power to control resources can be seen in many terrorist campaigns. In seeking the power to decide what to do with a country's natural endowments— including land, oil, diamonds, water, etc.—some have resorted to terrorism as a tactic for compelling others into reluctant agreement with their preferred agenda. We've seen this kind of violence most recently in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Land is another important finite resource and source of conflict; indeed, a relatively tiny strip of land plays a key role in the deadly Middle East conflict. Both Palestinians and Jews focus on the "occupation" of "our land" by "the other." Zionist groups complain about the "evil forces who have become stronger in our Holy Land,"[15] while Palestinians focus on a history of Israeli forces entering villages and driving entire populations out into what became the refugee settlements in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and elsewhere. The powerful combination of a conflict over territory and an "us versus them" narrative framing that conflict remains the primary motivation for terrorism in this region.

Further, throughout its history, terrorism has also been used (by both Muslims and Jewish extremists) to disrupt the Middle East peace process. This is often referred to as a "spoiler" strategy of terrorism. For example, on November 4, 1995, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a Jewish ultra-Orthodox student. Investigators found that Amir was convinced his attack was a necessary way of exacting God's retribution for Rabin's plan to evacuate a small settler enclave in Hebron as part of the Oslo Accords Rabin had signed with Yassir Arafat in 1993. As a result of the attack, the implementation of the accords was slowed and eventually abandoned, fueling a resurgence of violence on both sides of the conflict. A similar kind of "spoiler" terrorist attack occurred on August 15, 1998, when a car bomb killed 29 people in Omagh, Northern Ireland. The group responsible for the attack, the so-called Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), was attempting to blow up the local courthouse and disrupt the peace process that had begun with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement earlier that year.

In sum, terrorism can be seen as a combination of strategies and tactics used in the pursuit of power to achieve some form of political, social, criminal, economic, religious, or other objective. At a most basic level, those with a comparatively greater position

of power over others and over their own future typically have little incentive to use terrorism to achieve their goals. When one has power, one's goals can be achieved through other means. But the relatively powerless—engaged in a struggle with the powerful over resources, political and economic decisions, and the shape of their future—may resort to terrorism as a primary way to influence the evolution of history.

From this perspective, it is intuitive to suggest that only through the global spread of democracy—in which all groups, large and small, have equal opportunity to influence the course of future events—will we ever find a way to bring about the decline of terrorism. However, democracies require compromise, and it is here that the argument hits a stumbling block: in true democracies, small groups—particularly those with relatively unpopular social, political, or religious agendas—are often unable to achieve their objectives, and a willingness to compromise may not be among their core values in the first place.

This is a particularly worrisome factor in today's era of sacred terror, where terrorism is being used as a tactic for achieving an ideologically absolutist agenda without regard for the niceties of diplomatic negotiation or democratic compromise. For example, since the 1980s the United States has suffered numerous terrorist attacks by the Army of God, a loose underground network of Christian extremists committed to attacking abortion clinics and doctors. Members of this network are convinced that God wants them to use violence "in defense of the unborn child," and in this sense

Figure 1.1: The World Trade Center towers in New York City being struck by hijacked aircraft on September 11, 2001, attacks. Source: Flickr user Robert (TheMachineShop)

they are not much different from the jihadists of al-Qaeda who are convinced God wants them to use violence "in defense of the *umma* [global Muslim community]." In both cases, a negotiated settlement to their grievances seems virtually impossible. We'll examine this critical challenge of modern terrorism at several points throughout this lecture series.

THE STUDY OF TERRORISM

Obviously, the study of terrorism can get very complicated and confusing, especially because there are so many different kinds of terrorist groups, and gaining a solid understanding of each one requires studying its political goals, leaders, and sources of financial support, as well as the specific contexts from which it emerged. In short, there is no easy way to simplify the study of terrorism. In my courses on terrorism, as reflected in this book of lectures, most of my lessons focus on either attributes of the groups, or attributes of the environment in which they operate.[16] I also begin each semester with a review of key terms that one finds prominently in the terrorism studies literature. A handful of these are highlighted in bold type throughout this book. A glossary and additional online materials are available at: **www.TerrorismLectures.com.**

Attributes of Terrorist Organizations

When describing a typical terrorist organization, I usually begin with a look at what seems to motivate all terrorists: a **vision**. Terrorism is most often fueled by an individual's or group's vision of the future, a future which they believe cannot be achieved without resorting to violence. Further, as I mentioned a moment ago, individuals who embrace this kind of vision do not believe they have the **power** to bring about change or a vision of the future *without* resorting to violence. In some instances, terrorism is used in an attempt to gain the power to impact the policies of a government, or to decide the fate of a certain piece of land.

When a terrorist group describes its grievances and a strategy through which they can be addressed, we generally refer to this as the group's **ideology**. These terrorist group ideologies typically call for the use of various forms of violent action in the pursuit of objectives like establishing a utopian political system, religious governance, or an independent geopolitical entity based on ethnic identity. There are four primary types of terrorist ideologies that represent the majority of terrorist groups

that have existed over the past century: ethnonationalist/separatist, left-wing, right-wing, and religious.[17]

Ethnonationalist terrorist groups usually have clear territorial objectives, like the liberation of a particular region of a country from a government that they view as oppressive and illegitimate. Groups in this category may draw their support from those who share their ethnic/racial background, even if they live elsewhere. Examples include the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the ETA in Spain, the PKK in Turkey, the Irish Republican Army, Chechens in Russia, and various Kashmir separatist groups. We'll focus on groups like these in Lecture 8.

Left-wing terrorists are usually driven by liberal or idealist political concepts that are anti-authoritarian, revolutionary, and sometimes anti-materialist. Groups in this category have typically targeted elites (business, government, etc.) who symbolize authority. Some examples include the Red Brigades of Italy, the Red Army Faction in Germany (also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group), and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru. We'll focus on groups like these in Lecture 9.

Next, there are the **right-wing** terrorists, whose violence is usually aimed against individuals of a particular race or ethnicity, and may be in reaction to perceived threats to the status quo. Examples include various white supremacist groups as well as certain groups that mix a religious (sometimes anti-Semitic) dimension with racial supremacy. We'll focus on groups like these in Lecture 10.

Finally, the largest proportion of active terrorist groups today adhere to some kind of **religious-oriented** ideology. Among the ideological categories that describe modern terrorism, religious ideologies are unique for many reasons. First, they provide a long-term view of history and the future, meaning that adherents come to believe they are taking part in an epic battle of good versus evil. Piety and persistence in the faith will give you the strength to overcome anything, and will lead to rewards in this life and the next (including for your family). Religious ideologies also draw on a common reliance on individuals with special intellectual gifts for interpreting sacred texts (imams, clergy, rabbis, etc.)—individuals who provide meaning for those seeking enlightenment, or who are pursuing an understanding of "what God wants from me." This, in turn, means extremist religious leaders have a particular opportunity to exploit the need of some people for religious guidance. Doing the bidding of a higher power demands sacrifice but also means fewer limits on violence. It's easier to kill if you think you're doing God's will—violence is seen as necessary in order to save oneself, one's family, or even the world from the forces of evil. Examples of religiously oriented terrorist groups are

found among Shia and Sunni Islamist extremists, Jewish/Zionist extremists, and some Christian extremist groups in the United States and Europe. We'll focus on groups like these in Lectures 11 and 12.

Of course, there are several other types of terrorist groups as well, like anarchists, violent environmentalists (including the Earth Liberation Front), and animal rights extremists (including the Animal Liberation Front). And it should be remembered that several groups have drawn on ideological combinations (for example, a combination of right-wing and religious ideologies, or of left-wing and ethnonationalist ideologies). But the important point to make here is that a terrorist group's ideological orientation determines the kinds of members and funding they can attract, their strategic and tactical decisions, and of course the kinds of things they hope to achieve through their use of violence. For example, Army of God members attack abortion clinics and doctors, animal rights extremists attack research laboratories, and Palestinian groups attack Israeli targets. Table 1.2 offers a brief glimpse at the most active terrorist groups in the world today, many of which will be described in greater detail throughout this book.

Typically, a terrorist group's ideology will try to convince you that you have a **duty** to do something in support of its vision of the future—from providing financial or material support, to the most extreme **self-sacrifice** of so-called **martyrdom** (note that the term "martyrs" has been used by Catholics in Ireland, Buddhists in Sri Lanka, and the anti-abortion movement in the United States, as well as by Islamist extremists in the Middle East and elsewhere). Terrorism is seen by these groups as a **strategy** to achieve the objectives described in their ideology, while terrorist-related **tactics** can include a fairly broad range of violence, from suicide bombings or even the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), to kidnappings and beheadings, to flying passenger airplanes into tall buildings.

The ways in which the terrorist group mobilizes people and convinces them to support its strategy and tactics is often referred to as **radicalization**. Often, according to Stanford University psychologist Albert Bandura, this radicalization will involve a form of **moral disengagement**, a multistep psychological process that members of terrorist groups often go through.[18] First, the new recruit must acquire an ability to sanctify violence as honorable and righteous. He or she must also learn to minimize the consequences of violence, including the murder of others. This disregard for consequences makes it easier for a new terrorist recruit to hurt or kill innocent civilians in pursuit of the larger political objective. And finally, Bandura notes that people find violence

easier if they don't consider their victims as human beings. We'll focus more on the psychological aspects of terrorist radicalization in Lectures 3 and 14.

Of course, it's not enough to develop a desire to be a terrorist—you also have to develop the skill to pull that trigger, manufacture that bomb, and so forth. We'll talk some more about this particular type of terrorist learning in Lecture 13, but an important thing to keep in mind here is that many terrorist organizations have shown the attributes of **learning organizations**—that is, they scan the environment, look for vulnerabilities in their enemies, examine successful terrorist practices of other groups, and incorporate this new knowledge into their own operations. Understanding this helps us avoid underestimating the capabilities of terrorists.

Terrorism is also considered by military and security specialists as a form of **asymmetric warfare** (AW) or **unconventional warfare** (UW) involving nonuniformed combatants. Earlier in this lecture, I described terrorism as a distinct form of **political violence** (as distinguished from criminally oriented violence) involving attacks in which the killing of civilians is not really the primary objective. That is, when a car bomb explodes in Baghdad or Kabul, the primary objective is not only or primarily just to kill a group of people. Instead, the terrorist group seeks to influence public opinion (including confidence in the government's ability to provide security); it wants to communicate a sense of power to supporters and to enemies, and often it wants to motivate new recruits or supporters to join its cause. From this perspective, terrorist attacks have also been described as **communicative acts**—in other words, the violent attacks are meant to communicate certain messages to various audiences, including enemies, supporters, potential supporters and constituents, and so forth.

Many terrorist groups try to portray themselves as a **vanguard**, a group of dedicated elite fighters heroically leading the way in liberating an oppressed people toward a better future. The terrorists' ideologies typically argue that they alone recognize the **"truth"** and because of this knowledge they are motivated to carry out violent terrorist actions. In some cases, like the white supremacist movement in the United States during the 1980s, and more recently the global Salafi-jihadist movement, the ideology is intended to promote a **"leaderless resistance"** campaign of terrorism, through which violent acts are carried out in support of the overall vision and goals, but without any formal group structure. As we'll discuss in Lecture 10, white supremacists in the United States developed this concept loosely, and violent Islamists have expanded it to promote a virtual "leaderless jihad" in which individuals can contribute to the cause by any means available to them, including orchestrating their own terrorist attacks on behalf of the global

TABLE 1.2: Partial list of the world's most active terrorist groups

Group	Brief Description
Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)	Violent Islamist group founded in the early 1990s in southern Philippines; responsible for kidnappings and bombings
Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMS)	Palestinian nationalist group founded in the early 2000s; responsible for several suicide bombings against Israelis
Al-Qaeda (AQ)	Global jihadist terrorists with a "base" in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region; group wants to re-establish an Islamic caliphate through the use of terrorism on a global scale
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Local affiliate of global AQ jihadist movement in Yemen; linked to several recent terrorist plots against the United States
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (formerly GSPC)	Local affiliate of global AQ jihadist movement in Algeria and North Africa; responsible for several recent kidnappings
Al-Shabaab	Violent Islamist group in Somalia founded in the late 2000s; has used suicide bombings against many civilian targets
Aum Shinrikyo (AUM)	Japanese cult responsible for 1995 sarin nerve agent attack on the Tokyo subway
Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA)	Ethnonationalist group in northern Spain and southern France, founded in the late 1950s; linked to bombings and assassinations over several decades; declared permanent ceasefire in 2011
Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA)	Ethnonationalist group founded in mid-1980s in Northern Ireland; dissident Republican group with few members
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)	Violent Islamist and ethnonationalist group founded in the late 1980s in the Palestinian territories; responsible for many suicide bombings and rocket attacks; elected to power in Gaza Strip
Hizballah (Party of God)	Shiite Islamist group founded in Lebanon in the early 1980s; responsible for many suicide bombings; has members in senior positions throughout the government; fought war with Israel in 2006; also engaged in the Syrian conflict
Islamic State (IS)	Sunni militant group active in Syria and Iraq; also known as ISIS or ISIL; leader al-Baghdadi declared an Islamic caliphate and attracted thousands of foreign fighters to "defend" this territory; also inspired "DIY" terrorist attacks in Europe, Asia, and the U.S.
Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) (Army of Mohammed)	Violent Islamist and ethnonationalist group formed in Pakistan in the early 2000s; wants to unite Kashmir with Pakistan; also attacks foreign troops in Afghanistan
Jemaah Islamiyyah organization (JI)	Violent Islamist group founded in Indonesia during the mid-1990s; responsible for several major bombings; wants to establish an Islamic state in Southeast Asia

Group	Brief Description
Kahane Chai (Kach)	Zionist and racist terrorist group in Israel founded in the early 1990s; advocates killing or expelling all Arabs from the Palestinian Territories
Kongra-Gel (KGK, formerly Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, KADEK)	Ethnonationalist Kurdish group founded in the early 2000s with fighters in southern Turkey as well as parts of Iraq, Syria, and Iran; wants to establish a Kurdish state
Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) (Army of the Righteous)	Violent Islamist and ethnonationalist group founded in the 1990s; wants to unite Kashmir with Pakistan; responsible for several terrorist attacks in India
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)	Ethnonationalist Tamil group founded in Sri Lanka during the mid-1960s; pioneered suicide bombing tactics throughout the 1990s; militarily defeated in 2009
National Liberation Army (ELN)	Left-wing Marxist revolutionary group in Colombia; founded in the mid-1960s; very active in kidnapping and extortions
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	Left-wing Marxist revolutionary group in the Palestinian Territories; founded in the late 1960s
Real IRA (RIRA)	Ethnonationalist group in Northern Ireland; dissident Republican group with few members; founded in the late 1990s; responsible for the 1998 Omagh bombing
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	Originally Marxist revolutionary group founded in Colombia during the mid-1960s; signed a peace agreement with the government in 2016
Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso, SL)	Left-wing Marxist revolutionary group in Peru founded during the late 1960s; mostly destroyed with the capture of leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992, but several attacks in recent years have been blamed on the group
Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	Also known as the "Pakistani Taliban," founded in the late 2000s; promotes attacks against Pakistan and NATO-led forces in Afghanistan; took credit for 2010 attempted terrorist attack in Times Square in New York City

Sources: Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. State Department, "Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations," https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm (accessed May 15, 2017); and the National Counter-terrorism Center, "Terrorist Groups" https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups.html (accessed May 15, 2017).

jihadist movement with no direct ties to any formal terrorist group leaders or affiliated cells. We will examine this version of leaderless resistance more in Lectures 12 and 15.

Finally, when describing terrorism in general, I sometimes use the term **psychological warfare**, which according to the U.S. Department of Defense involves actions that are meant to influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and (ultimately) the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. From the perspective of terrorists or insurgents engaged in asymmetric warfare against a government, a major target of these operations will be the population's support of its government. Thus, terrorism requires an ability to influence beliefs, a focus of efforts that I call **influence warfare**.

Attributes of the Terrorist Groups' Operating Environments

While the study of terrorism is focused quite a lot on the groups themselves, there is also an important area of research which looks at the environments in which these groups emerge and sustain themselves. For many years now, my own research in this area has examined the nature of ideological resonance, a term which describes the degree to which members of a particular population find a terrorist group's ideology appealing. A resonating ideology can influence an individual's willingness to embrace terrorism as a reasonable course of action, and is essential for the success of any terrorist group or movement; if their vision of the future appeals to nobody, there will be no radicalization, no financial support or recruitment, and the movement will die on the vine.

To understand why a terrorist group's ideology resonates, we have to examine the kind of political, social, economic, religious, or other insecurities and **grievances** that a local population may have and that are used by the terrorist group to rationalize the use of violent acts. We will cover these topics in depth in Lectures 3 through 7, but to give just a summary here, an ideology may resonate among a particular community due to a broad range of political issues like incompetent, authoritarian, or corrupt governments, as well as economic issues like widespread poverty or unemployment. In many instances, the political and socioeconomic grievances that lead to terrorism are tied to a government's **legitimacy**, or lack thereof. As Ted Robert Gurr has noted, the legitimacy of a government can be severely undermined by a range of things, like

widespread injustice or a major gap between the aspirations of a population and the opportunities for them to achieve those aspirations.[19]

Political repression is clearly an important structural element beneath the unequal distribution of power I described earlier. When a government exhibits outright hostility and commits open violence against members of its citizenry, this represents a form of the powerful subjugating the relatively powerless. Many corrupt governments around the world seek to maintain and increase their power over others (and over resources) by any means necessary, while the powerless see the corruption and look for ways to combat it—even through violent acts of terrorism. In essence, when a government fails to uphold a fair and honest social contract between the state and its citizens, people become angry and may often seek the power to force change; this, in turn, has led to a variety of revolutionary and terrorist movements throughout history.

Some of the literature in the field of terrorism studies has used terms like **root causes** to describe these and other kinds of grievances, but in my view the overall root cause of terrorism is most often an individual's decision to pull that trigger, hijack that plane, detonate that bomb, and so forth. Decisions like these are influenced by a wide range of contexts and perspectives that must be appreciated in order to truly understand terrorism. For example, poverty and unemployment don't "cause" terrorism, but they can certainly influence a person's decisions about the legitimacy of a terrorist movement's ideology and actions. Actually, most of the research on so-called root causes really just seeks to find meaningful relationships between certain historical, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical characteristics of the larger society and the occurrence of terrorism. These characteristics could help create an **enabling environment** for a terrorist group to capitalize on what Harvard University psychologist John Mack describes as "a reservoir of misery, hurt, helplessness and rage from which the foot soldiers of terrorism can be recruited."[20]

Other so-called "root causes" are actually **facilitators** of terrorism and can include things like easy access to weapons, financial support, and safe haven. Weak or **failed states** can also facilitate terrorism, particularly in places where the government's authority is routinely challenged and undermined by a variety of violent nonstate actors.[21] These are countries in which a weak central government is unable to provide adequate **human security** to all segments of its population, creating an environment that can serve as a conduit for radicalization and terrorism.[22] In weak states, the absence of rule

of law or peaceful ways to resolve conflict can lead those seeking power to use violent means to achieve their objectives. In many weak states, where security can be readily purchased by the highest bidder, the powerful do what they want, while the powerless are made to do their bidding.

The challenge of state weakness is now explicitly recognized in U.S. national security circles as a strategic problem almost equal in importance to state competitors. As the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* notes, "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones."[23] The 2015 *National Security Strategy* echoes this by emphasizing the "security consequences associated with weak or failing states."[24] And most recently, the 2017 *National Security Strategy* points to the concern that "Transnational threat organizations, such as jihadist terrorists and organized crime, often operate freely from fragile states."[25] It is certainly no coincidence that a significant number of terrorist plots and attacks against the United States and its allies have been linked to places like Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan. These are also the same kind of environments in which we find a strong presence of organized criminal networks, which I'll talk more about in Lecture 6.

Finally, the ability for a society to resist and deflect the terrorist group's efforts to coerce their behavior and beliefs depends largely on its **resilience** in the face of violent attacks or the continual threats thereof. The more resilient a society proves to be, the less likely any terrorist group will achieve its core goals of coercing that society through fear and the threat of violence. In other words, a society that refuses to panic or over-react to terrorism is unlikely to give in to the demands of the terrorists. While the complex topic of countering terrorism will be addressed in a different volume of lectures (forthcoming), it is important to mention this resilience issue here because it is one of the fundamental challenges that a terrorist group faces when trying to achieve its objectives.

SUMMARY

To sum up this introductory lecture, defining terrorism is clearly not a simple, straightforward task. As we delve deeper into the contested terrain of terrorism studies, you will be encouraged to formulate your own personal definition and description of terrorism. Further, the study of terrorism has become more complicated than in decades past. Because of the global nature of transportation, financial, and communication networks, and media, terrorists can now wage campaigns on a global

scale, particularly if they effectively exploit new communications technologies like the Internet. During the 1980s and '90s, terrorist group recruiters would use CDs and DVDs as part of their indoctrination efforts. However, they still relied largely on conventional media to get national or international news coverage of the attacks they conducted. The Internet changed all that, through the ease of distributing videos—even of nearly real-time events—worldwide, as well as the widespread use of social media and discussion boards to create virtual communities of ideologically aligned "true believers." Further, the Internet has enabled a whole new kind of information gathering by the terrorists, particularly in open societies—they can monitor changes in government security procedures (including information on what airport screeners might be looking for), gather details of transit systems or important government buildings, and get information on how the public is responding to terrorist attacks or the government's response. We'll take a closer look at the relationship between terrorism and the Internet in Lecture 7.

However, amid the many changes we have seen over the years, a fundamental element of modern terrorism is really not all that new: taking instruments from daily life—the backpack, the car, the shoe, the cellphone—and turning them into weapons. Their overall goal here is to damage the trust necessary for an open society to function effectively. We find ourselves looking suspiciously at someone wearing a backpack on a subway train; we have to remove our shoes at airport checkpoints; we can buy cellphones in a convenience store that can be used as a bomb detonator. And while the typical Hollywood portrayal of a terrorist is a wide-eyed, crazy-haired male between the age of 18 and 35, the reality is much different: terrorist groups have been increasingly using women and even children to carry out their lethal attacks. There is no real "profile" of a terrorist. As we'll discuss in Lectures 7 and 14, potentially anyone can be radicalized, indoctrinated, and taught why and how to murder others in pursuit of some broader vision. This is a key challenge for confronting terrorism in today's world.

Overall, there is clearly much to study in the world of terrorism, including the characteristics of terrorist groups and those who join them, which is what we'll look at in the next couple of lectures and in Part III of this volume. We also have to look beyond violent actions and goals, to include the role of perceptions and beliefs that sustain terrorists' ideological resonance, as we'll discuss at various points throughout this book. But first, in the next lecture, we'll take a brief journey through the history of modern terrorism.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the most central elements to any definition of terrorism?
- Why are there so many different definitions of terrorism?
- Why is there not even a common definition across all U.S. organizations?
- How are strategies of terrorism different from tactics of terrorism?
- What is the relationship between "root causes" of terrorism and facilitators of terrorism?
- How is the nature of terrorist violence different from other kinds of political or criminal violence?

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WEBSITES

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
http://www.start.umd.edu/

National Counterterrorism Center
https://www.nctc.gov/

National Institute of Justice, Research on Radicalization and Terrorism
https://nij.gov/topics/crime/terrorism/pages/welcome.aspx

Perspectives on Terrorism
http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt

RAND Corporation, research on terrorism and homeland security
https://www.rand.org/pubs/online/terrorism-and-homeland-security.html

Sentinel—a journal by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point
https://www.ctc.usma.edu/publications/sentinel

St. Andrews U., Handa Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence
https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~cstpv/

START Global Terrorism Database
http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

UML Center for Terrorism and Security Studies
http://www.uml.edu/research/ctss

NOTES

1. 22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d). Cited in *United States Department Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1999* (Washington, DC: Dept. of State Publication, April 2000): viii.

2. See paragraph (l) of 28 C.F.R. § 0.85, available at https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text /28/0.85.

3. However, Charles Tilly also asserts that terror denotes a conflict strategy that may pursue a "distinct extra-political goal." See Charles Tilly, "Violence, Terror, and Politics as Usual," *Boston Review* 27, no. 3–4 (2002).

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8. Alex P. Schmid, "The Links between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes," *Transnational Organized Crime* 2, no. 2 (1996): 66–67.

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10. Ibid., 196.

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14. Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman, et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (Amsterdam: Transaction Books, 1988): 5–6.

15. See Allan C. Brownfeld, "Religious Zionism: A Growing Impediment To Middle East Peace," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 21, no. 9 (2002): 71.

16. I also teach courses on counterterrorism. Lectures from those courses are forthcoming.

17. For descriptions of these and other terrorist ideological categories, along with profiles of groups that are typically categorized within each, see the Terrorist Organization Profiles website at http://goo.gl/416or.

18. See Albert Bandura, "Training for Terrorism through Selective Moral Disengagement," in *The Making of a Terrorist*, vol. 2, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005): 34–50.

19. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

20. John E. Mack, "Deeper Causes: Exploring the Role of Consciousness in Terrorism," *Ions Noetic Sciences Review* (2003): 13.

21. See James J. F. Forest and Matthew V. Sousa, *Oil and Terrorism in the New Gulf* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), particularly Chapters 3, 4 and 9.

22. For more on the relationship between human security and terrorism, please see Cindy R. Jebb and Madelfia A. Abb, "Human Security and Good Governance: A Living Systems Approach to Understanding and Combating Terrorism," in *The Making of a Terrorist*, vol. 3, ed. Forest.

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