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Psychology of Terrorism

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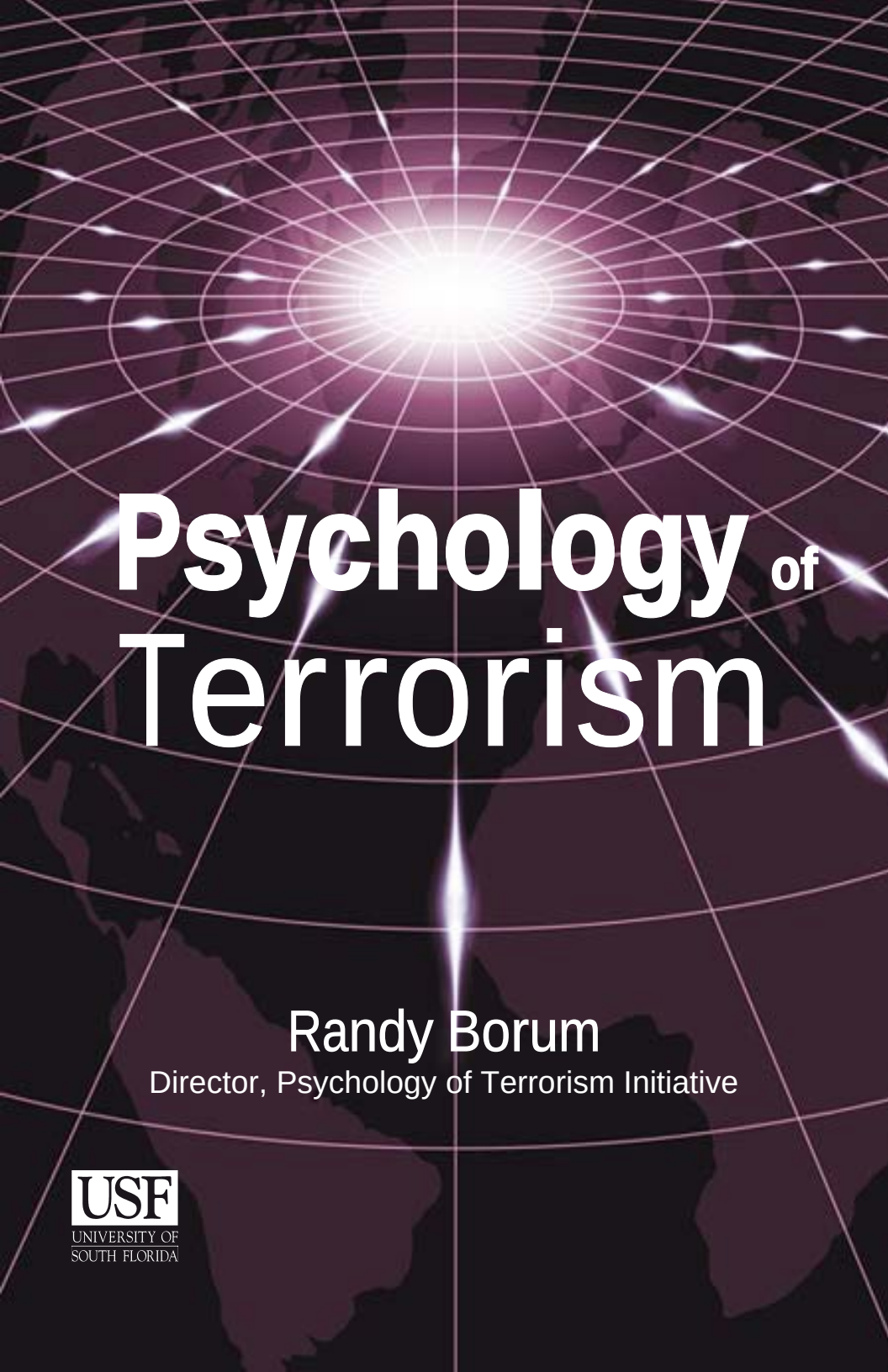

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As part of the ongoing effort to better understand the causes, motivations and determinants of terrorist behavior, based on a comprehensive review of the scientific and professional literature, this report analyzes key findings on the "psychology of terrorism."

- Although early writings on the "psychology of terrorism" were based mostly in psychoanalytic theory (e.g., narcissism, hostility toward parents), most researchers have since moved on to other approaches.
- People become terrorists in different ways, in different roles, and for different reasons. It may be helpful to distinguish between reasons for joining, remaining in, and leaving terrorist organizations.
- Perceived injustice, need for identity and need for belonging are common vulnerabilities among potential terrorists.
- Mental illness is not a critical factor in explaining terrorist behavior. Also, most terrorists are not "psychopaths."
- There is no "terrorist personality", nor is there any accurate profile – psychologically or otherwise – of the terrorist.
- Histories of childhood abuse and trauma and themes of perceived injustice and humiliation often are prominent in terrorist biographies, but do not really help to explain terrorism.
- Terrorist ideologies tend to provide a set of beliefs that justify and mandate certain behaviors. Those beliefs are regarded as absolute, and the behaviors are seen as serving a meaningful cause.
- Not all extremist ideologies promote violence, nor are all extremists violent. One might ask whether the ideology is driven more by *promotion* of the "cause" or *destruction* of those who oppose it.
- The powerful, naturally-occurring barriers that inhibit human killing can be eroded either through outside social/environmental influences or by changing how one perceives the situation.
- Terrorist groups, like all social collectives, have certain internal (e.g., mistrust, competition) and external (e.g. support, inter-group conflict) vulnerabilities to their existence.
- Surprisingly little research or analysis has been conducted on terrorist recruitment. Recruitment efforts do appear concentrated in areas where people feel most deprived and dissatisfied. Relationships are critical. Effective recruiters create and exploit a sense of urgency and imminence.
- Effective leaders of terrorist organizations must be able to: maintain a collective belief system; establish and maintain organizational routines; control the flow of communication; manipulate incentives (and purposive goals) for followers; deflect conflict to external targets; and keep action going.
- Research on the psychology of terrorism largely lacks substance and rigor. Cultural factors are important, but have not been studied. Future research should be operationally-informed; maintain a behavior based focus; and derive interpretations from analyses of incident-related behaviors.

Section
1

Introduction

In the current national security environment, there is little question that terrorism is among the gravest of threats. Massive resources throughout the government and private sectors have been allocated and re-allocated to the task of preventing terrorism. These efforts, however, often lack a conceptual - let alone empirically-based – foundation for understanding terrorists and their acts of violence. This void creates a serious challenge at many levels, from policy-level decisions about how a state should respond to terrorism, to individual-level decisions about whether a given person of interest, who espouses extremist ideas, truly poses a serious threat to U.S. personnel, assets, and interests.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and synthesize what has been reported from the scientific and professional literature about the "psychology of terrorism." This focus is not intended to suggest that the scientific discipline of psychology provides the only, or even necessarily the best, analytic framework for understanding terrorism. Like all approaches to understanding or explaining human behavior, a psychological approach has advantages and limitations. Nevertheless, as psychology is regarded as "the science of human behavior," it seems a reasonable, and potentially productive, line of inquiry.

Although the basic question of how best to define terrorism has itself been a vexing problem, for purposes of this analysis, we are concerned generally with acts of violence (as opposed to threats or more general coercion) intentionally perpetrated on civilian non-combatants with the goal of furthering some ideological, religious or political objective. Our focus on psychological dimensions, de-emphasizes analysis of sociologically-based explanations (sometimes referred to as "root causes") or macro-level economic and political theories. Moreover, our focus on terrorist acts de-emphasizes analysis of the psychological effects, consequences or amelioration of terrorism.

In many ways, our basic aim is rather modest. We do not anticipate identifying or discovering THE explanation for all terrorism. Rather, we

hope to identify, describe, and evaluate what contribution – if any – psychological theory or research may have made to understanding terrorists and terrorism. In approaching this task, we are mindful of Walter Laqueur's incisive conclusion based on more than a quarter century of personal research on the topic: "Many terrorisms exist, and their character has changed over time and from country to country. The endeavor to find a "general theory" of terrorism, one overall explanation of its roots, is a futile and misguided enterprise. ..Terrorism has changed over time and so have the terrorists, their motives, and the causes of terrorism." (Laqueur, 2003[1]). Psychiatrist Jerrold Post makes that caveat even more directly applicable to an exploration of the psychological dimension of terrorism. He cautions that "there is a broad spectrum of terrorist groups and organizations, each of which has a different psychology, motivation and decision making structure. Indeed, one should not speak of terrorist psychology in the singular, but rather of terrorist psychologies" (Post, 2001[2]). With that cautionary note, we offer the following review.

Section
2

Aims & Methodology

We have defined terrorism here as “acts of violence intentionally perpetrated on civilian non-combatants with the goal of furthering some ideological, religious or political objective.” Our principal focus is on non-state actors.

Our task was to identify and analyze the scientific and professional social science literature pertaining to the psychological and/or behavioral dimensions of terrorist behavior (not on victimization or effects). Our objectives were to explore what questions pertaining to terrorist groups and behavior had been asked by social science researchers; to identify the main findings from that research; and attempt to distill and summarize them within a framework of operationally relevant questions.

Search Strategy

To identify the relevant social science literature, we began by searching a series of major academic databases using a systematic, iterative keyword strategy, mapping, where possible onto existing subject headings. The focus was on locating professional social science literature published in major books or in peer-reviewed journals. The following database searches were conducted in October, 2003.

- Sociofile/Sociological Abstracts
- Criminal Justice Abstracts (CJ Abstracts)
- Criminal Justice Periodical Index (CJPI)
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service Abstracts (NCJRS)
- PsychInfo
- Medline
- Public Affairs Information Service (PAIS)

The "hit count" from those searches is summarized in the table below. After the initial list was generated, we cross-checked the citations against the reference list of several major review works that had been published in the preceding five years (e.g., Rex Hudson's "The Psychology and Sociology of Terrorism"[3]) and included potentially relevant references that were not already on the list. Finally, the list was submitted to the three senior academic consultants on the project: Dr. Martha Crenshaw (Wesleyan University), Dr. John Horgan (University College, Cork), and Dr. Andrew Silke (UK Home Office) soliciting recommendations based only on relevance (not merit) as to whether any of the citations listed should be removed and whether they knew of others that met the criteria that should be added. Reviews mainly suggested additions (rarely recommending removal) to the list. Revisions were made in response to reviewer comments, and the remaining comprised our final citation list.

	Psych Info	**Medline**	**CJPI**	**NCJRS**	**CJ Abstracts**	**PAIS**	**SocioFile**
Terrorism					50		
Terror* (kw)	844		1353	N/A	N/A		2115
Terror* (kw) & Mindset	1 (0)	0	4(0)	Boolean 33 (0)		10 (0)	2 (0)
Terror* (kw) & Psych* (kw)	N/A	428	141	N/A	N/A		N/A
Terrorism and Mindset	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Psychology(Sub) & Terror*(kw)	50	17 (0)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Psychology(Sub) & Terrorism (Sub)	35	11 (0)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Psychology & Terrorism	N/A	N/A	N/A	Boolean 154 (0)	14	23	28
Political Violence (kw)	55	764(0)	89 (0)	Boolean 19	50	N/A	N/A
Political Violence (kw) & Psychology	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10 (0)	149

Numbers= Total results

N/A= Search Term unnecessary

(0)=No items were kept from the results

kw=keyword

Project Team

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Section
3

Psychological Approaches to Understanding Violence

Before exploring psychological approaches to the specific problem of terrorist violence, it may be helpful first to examine whether and how psychology and other behavioral sciences have sought to explain violent behavior more generally. Definitions of "violence" in the social science literature are at least as plentiful as definitions of terrorism. Most focus on causing harm to others, but some also include suicide and self-mutilation as forms of "violence to self." Acts that intentionally cause physical harm or injury to another person would fit within most definitions. Yet many would insist that those parameters are much too narrow and restrictive to provide any meaningful description of violence. They might argue that threats as well as overt acts be included, that psychological or emotional harm is as relevant as physical harm, and that injury is merely an outcome and not a descriptor of the act. On the other hand, some would contend that "intentional harm" is too restrictive because it would include legitimate behavior in some contact sports or consensual infliction of pain.

Of what practical relevance is such an arcane definitional discussion among pointy-headed academics to someone who has to deal with understanding violence in the real world? A fair question.

Consider the following incidents:

- A 25-year old man drinks and beats his live-in girlfriend at least three times a week.
- A 17-year old girl who was thrown out of her parents' house when she got pregnant and decided to keep the baby, now has a 9 month old colicky infant who has never slept through the night, and who screams so loudly and so persistently that the mom has vigorously shaken the youngster, just to get him to stop.

- A 53-year old man is known to lurk around playgrounds and summer campsites looking for young pre-pubescent boys who he then takes to a prepared location where he rapes them. Once he even killed a 10-year old boy.

- A 20-year woman has spent her entire life in an area where people of her ethnicity are marginalized and oppressed by the state. After two years of serving in a "first aid corps" of a militant resistance movement – and having her family killed in a raid by state soldiers – her anger and hatred toward the state has welled within her to the point that all she can think about is revenge. She dons an explosive-laden vest, and with a determination borne of rage, she heads toward a nearby military checkpoint, disguised as an expectant mother.

- A 30-year old man was born into the longstanding, intense religious and political strife of his homeland. His father is a university professor who is constantly watched by state security authorities, both because of his own radical religious involvement and because of family connections to known religious-based terrorists. The man is described by others as quiet, serious, and devout. He has been involved in coordinating and recruiting for a militant *jihadist* group that is widely known to be a terrorist organization.

Many people would view each of these cases as involving violence, but one might expect to understand or prevent the violence in such cases in very different ways. The personal and situational factors involved – and the extent of their contribution – might reasonably be expected to vary in these diverse circumstances. Yet, at a broad level, they might all be similarly classified as "violent." What might "cause" or "explain" behavior in one of these cases, might not in another. The point here is not to resolve the longstanding definitional debate, but to illustrate how the way in which practitioners and researchers view the problem of violence affects practical issues and decisions in the "real world."

One observation about causes that generally seems to be true and supported by the best available research is that violence is "caused" by multiple factors, many of which are strongly related to - and even affect - each other. The dichotomy of "Nature vs. Nurture" in explaining any form of human behavior, including violence, is outdated and inconsistent with the current state of research in the field. Violence is "caused" by a complex interaction of biological, social/contextual, cognitive, and emotional factors that occur over time. Some causes will be more prominent than others for certain individuals and for certain types of violence and aggression.

A second general observation is that most violence can be usefully viewed as intentional. It is chosen as a strategy of action. It is purposeful (goal-directed) and intended to achieve some valued outcome for the actor. It is not the product of innate, instinctual drives[4], nor is it the inevitable consequence of predetermining psychological and social forces. Obviously, many factors influence that decision and the competing options available, but humans typically are not passive vessels for involuntary displays of behavior. Certainly, there are exceptions. One can conceive of circumstances where an individual might have some brain dysfunction that causes general disinhibition and/or emotional instability that may result in aggression or violence. This would be inconsistent, though, with the kind of organization and planning necessary to carry out a terrorist attack.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

In reviewing explanatory theories and empirical models, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the discipline of psychology has yet to develop or discover (much less agree upon) any that substantially explain violent behavior, particularly across its many contexts, motivations and actors. The problem is not that researchers, scholars and practitioners have not tried to locate such an explanation, but the "holy grail" has proved to be elusive. In fact, it is probably fair to say that psychological theoretical development in explaining violence has been given less attention, and has made less progress than in many behavioral realms of substantially lesser social importance or consequence.

What are some of the main psychological theories that have been applied to understanding violence?

Instinct Theory

Psychoanalytic: "The most widely recognized theory that addresses the roots of all forms of violence is the psychoanalytic model. Despite its influence on writers in the political science, sociology, history, and criminology literature, this model has weak logical, theoretical, and empirical foundations" (Beck, 2002[5]). Freud viewed aggression more generally as an innate and instinctual human trait, which most should outgrow in the normal course of human development. A later development in Freud's theory was that humans had the energy of life force (*eros*) and death force (*thanatos*) that sought internal balance[6]. Violence was seen as the "displacement" of *thanatos* from self and onto others. A number of more narrow violence-related theories have drawn on psychoanalytic concepts and ideas, but none are widely regarded as

psychoanalytic theories of violence.

Ethology: Ethology has been alternately defined as the scientific study of animal behavior, especially as it occurs in a natural environment and as the study of human ethos, and its formation (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Ethologist, Konrad Lorenz advanced the notion that aggression arises from a very basic biological need - a "fighting instinct" that has had adaptive value as humans have evolved. He argued the drive from aggression is innate and that, in humans, only its mode of expression is learned through exposure to, and interaction with the environment. The theory of an instinctual drive for aggression suggests that it builds up over time, is fueled by emotional or psychophysiological arousal, and is subsequently discharged by a process of catharsis, which ostensibly decreases drive. Empirical research, including physiologic studies, however, do not support this "hydraulic" (building until discharge, then receding) theory of aggressive energy. Moreover, anthropologists and other social scientists have found significant differences both in the nature and level of aggression in different cultures, and experimental research has demonstrated that aggression can be environmentally manipulated; both findings that argue against a universal human instinct.

Drive Theory (Frustration-Aggression)

Frustration-Aggression: The link between frustration (being prevented from attaining a goal or engaging in behavior) and aggression has been discussed in psychology for more than half a century. Some even view it as a "master explanation" for understanding the cause of human violence. The basic premise of the frustration-aggression (FA) hypothesis is twofold: (1) Aggression is always produced by frustration, and (2) Frustration always produces aggression. When subjected to empirical scrutiny, however, research has shown that frustration does not inevitably lead to aggression. Sometimes, for example, it results in problem solving or dependent behaviors. And aggression is known to occur even in the absence of frustration. Thus it is not reasonable to view frustration alone as a necessary and sufficient causal factor. In an important reformulation of the FA hypothesis, Berkowitz (1989[7]) posited that it was only "aversive" frustration that would lead to aggression. The newly proposed progression was that frustration would lead to anger, and that anger – *in the presence of aggressive cues* – would lead to aggression. While subsequent research findings have, at times, been inconsistent or contradictory, "it is reasonable to conclude that aversive stimuli do facilitate, but probably not instigate, aggressive behavior" (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994, p. 68[8]). In a now classic work, Ted Gurr was among the first to apply a systematic FA analysis to the problem of

political violence, framing the frustration as one of "relative deprivation" (Gurr, 1968[9]).

Social Learning Theory

Fundamental learning theory suggests that behavioral patterns are acquired by links (contingencies) established between the behavior and its consequences. When behavior is followed by desired results (reward), that behavior is "reinforced" (made more likely). Conversely, when behavior is followed by undesirable or aversive consequence, that behavior is "punished" (made less likely). Social learning theory is a simple extension of this basic idea, suggesting that behavior (e.g., aggression) is learned not only through one's direct experience, but also through observation of how such contingencies occur in one's environment. Some have referred to this as vicarious learning. In this model, aggression is viewed as learned behavior. Accordingly, it is argued that through observation we learn consequences for the behavior, how to do it, to whom it should be directed, what provocation justifies it, and when it is appropriate. "If aggression is a learned behavior, then terrorism, a specific type of aggressive behavior, can also be learned" (Oots & Wiegele, 1985, p. 11[10]).

Cognitive Theory

The core elements in a "cognitive theory" of aggression derive from an area of study called "social cognition." The basic notion is that people interact with their environment based on how they perceive and interpret it. That is, people form an internal (cognitive) map of their external (social) environment, and these perceptions – rather than an objective external reality – determine their behavior. The experimental literature clearly suggests that perceptions of intent affect aggression. Moreover, there are internal and external factors that can affect one's perceptions of provocation or intent. Two common cognitive/processing deficits found among people who are highly aggressive are: (1) an inability to generate non-aggressive solutions to conflicts (and lack of confidence in their ability to use them successfully) and (2) a perceptual hypersensitivity to hostile/aggressive cues in the environment, particularly interpersonal cues[11].

Crenshaw suggests that the principles of social cognition apply both to terrorists and to their organizations. She notes "the actions of terrorists are based on a subjective interpretation of the world rather than objective reality. Perceptions of the political and social environment are

filtered through beliefs and attitudes that reflect experiences and memories" (Crenshaw, 1988[12], p. 12).

Biological Approaches

Consideration of biological factors affecting aggression does not constitute a theory, in any formal sense. Nevertheless they are an important element in a comprehensive biopsychosocial understanding of behavior. Oots and Wiegele (198513) argue that "social scientists who seek to understand terrorism should take account of the possibility that biological or physiological variables may play a role in bringing an individual to the point of performing an act of terrorism" (p. 17). Yet, it is rare that any biological studies are conducted on terrorists. One notable exception is an early finding by psychiatrist David Hubbard that a substantial portion of the terrorists he examined clinically suffered from some form of inner-ear problems or "vestibular dysfunction." This finding has not been replicated, however, nor is there a clear theoretical rationale for a potential link to terrorism. With that said, we offer here only the most basic, cursory review of current knowledge on biological factors influencing aggression.

Neurochemical Factors[14] : Serotonin (5-HT), of all neurotransmitters in the mammalian brain, has received the most research attention and has shown the most consistent association with aggressive behavior. Lower levels of serotonin have been linked to higher levels of aggression in normal, clinical, and offender samples. The association between 5-HT deficits and aggression seem to be specific to (or at least principally affect) impulsive, rather than premeditated aggressive behavior, which also appears to be mediated by perceived threat or provocation. Low levels of 5-HT may heighten one's sensitivity or reactivity to cues of hostility or provocation. "In the absence of provocative stimuli, decreased 5HT functioning may have little effect on the level of aggressive behavior exhibited by humans (Smith, 1986)" (Berman, Kavoussi, & Coccaro, 1997, p. 309). Because Serotonin is primarily an inhibitory neurotransmitter, it is possible that deficits in 5-HT reduce inhibition of aggressive ideas/impulses that would otherwise be suppressed – there is not real evidence that it creates them.
As neurotransmitters, *Norepinephrine* NE may affect arousal and environmental sensitivity and *Dopamine* DA may affect behavioral activation and goal-directed behavior.

"Compared to serotonin, the relationship between both dopamine and norepinephrine and human aggression is less clear" (Berman, Kavoussi, & Coccaro, 1997, p. 309). Although some studies have linked low levels of DA to increases in aggression (particularly impulsive aggression), DA and 5-HT levels are correlated (they travel together) so

it is particularly uncertain whether DA has any relationship to aggressive behavior independent of the effect of 5-HT.

Hormonal Factors[15]: The effects of androgens / gonadotropic hormones on human behavior – particularly aggressive behavior – are weaker and more complex than one might expect. There is not good empirical evidence to support "testosterone poisoning" as a cause of disproportionate violence in males. Testosterone has – at best – a limited role.[16] A meta-analysis of the relationship between testosterone and scores on the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (Archer, 1991) showed a "low but positive relationship between T levels and the overall inventory score of 230 males tested over five studies" (Brain & Susman, 1997, p. 319).

Psychophysiological Factors: Lower than average levels of arousal (e.g., low resting heart rate) and low reactivity are consistently found in studies of people who engage in aggressive and antisocial behavior (Raine, 1993, 1997[17]).

Neuropsychological Factors: Cognitive abilities relating to self-awareness and self-control are referred to as "executive functions." The frontal lobe of the brain, and the prefrontal cortex in particular, has been identified as the primary neuroanatomic site of these functions. "Evidence of the relation between executive deficits and aggression has been found among incarcerated subjects, among normal subjects in laboratory situations, and among nonselected populations. Effect sizes are small to moderate, but consistent and robust[18]. Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that dysfunction or impairment in the prefrontal cortex may be responsible for the psychophysiologic deficits found in people who engage in antisocial and aggressive behavior (Raine, 1993, 1997[19]). Specifically, brain imaging, neurological, and animal studies suggest that prefrontal dysfunction may account for low levels of arousal, low (stress) reactivity, and fearlessness.

Raw Empirical Approaches

In addition to these theoretically-based approaches, psychological researchers also have attempted to apply statistical models to explain violence and to identify its predictors. This line of inquiry has yielded some positive findings on risk factors for violent behavior.
The use of risk factors in the behavioral sciences is a concept borrowed from the field of Public Health, specifically the discipline of epidemiology (the study of causes and course of diseases). Technically, a risk factor is defined as "..an aspect of personal behavior or lifestyle, an environmental exposure, or an inborn or inherited characteristic which on the basis of epidemiological evidence is known to be associated with

health- related condition(s) considered important to prevent.[20] Applied to this study, it is any factor, that when present, makes violence more likely than when it is absent.
Notice that this definition does not imply anything about causation. It is possible to identify risk factors, without a clear understanding of the causal mechanisms by which they operate. In fact, this is why we have a well-developed base of empirical knowledge on risk factors for violence and so little explanation of its cause.

Literally hundreds of studies in psychology, criminology, sociology, and other behavioral sciences have yielded significant risk factors for violence. Risk factors have been classified as broadly falling into two categories: static and dynamic. Static risk factors are those that are historical (e.g., early onset of violence) or dispositional (e.g., gender) in nature, and that are unlikely to change over time. Dynamic factors are typically individual, social or situational factors that often do change (e.g., attitudes, associates, high levels of stress) and, therefore might be more amenable to modification through intervention[21].

Risk Factors for General Violence

• Juvenile delinquency	.20
• Family problems	.19
• Antisocial personality	.18
• Hospital admissions	.17
• Violent history	.16
• Institutional adjustment	.14
• Adult criminal history	.14
• Unmarried	.13

Numbers represent "effect sizes" from a meta-analysis by Bonta, Law & Hanson, 1998

While it may be tempting to apply these risk factors to determine risk for terrorism, they are unlikely to be useful predictors. Although terrorism is a type of violence, risk factors tend to operate differently at different ages, in different groups, and for different – specific - types of violent behavior. For example, the factors that predict violent behavior in the urban gang member with a drug addiction often differ from those that predict violence among predatory child molesters or perpetrators of domestic violence.

Most of the risk factor research in the social sciences has focused on predicting "general violence risk." General violence risk here represents the likelihood that an individual might engage in any aggressive act toward anyone over a specified period of time. That is not the question posed in terrorist threat assessments. Most people who have a collection of general violence risk factors will never engage in terrorism. Conversely, many known terrorists – including some field leaders of the 9/11 attacks – did not have a large number of key general violence risk factors, although they were actively preparing to engage in acts of terrorism. That the correlates of general violence and terrorism are different has at least two important implications: (1) it is likely that the causal (explanatory) mechanisms also are different; (2) one cannot reasonably use the risk factors from one to predict the other.

Conclusion

No single theory has gained ascendance as an explanatory model for all types of violence. Perhaps the diversity in behaviors regarded as violent poses an inherent barrier to such a global theory. Social learning and social cognition approaches have received some of the most extensive empirical attention and support, but not necessarily for terrorism specifically. Terrorist violence most often is deliberate (not impulsive), strategic, and instrumental; it is linked to and justified by ideological (e.g., political, religious) objectives and almost always involves a group or multiple actors/supporters. These issues all add complexity to the construction of terrorism as a form of violence and challenge the emergence of a unifying explanatory theory.

Section 4

First Generation of Psychological Research on Terrorism

The "first generation" of psychological research on terrorism is not officially designated or bounded by any time period, but for purposes of this discussion, will roughly encompass a term from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. The term "research" is used loosely, as virtually none of the professional literature was based on any empirical studies. Rather, the writings that were produced were based largely on clinical speculations and theoretical formulations, most of which were rooted in a psychoanalytic tradition. Terrorism was pathologized as manifestation of psychological and behavioral deviance. Accordingly, within a psychoanalytic framework, the "psychopathology of terrorism" was believed to be driven by unconscious motives and impulses, which had their origins in childhood.

Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud wrote: "one has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, trends and that in a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behavior in human society" (Freud, 1927, p.7). Early writings on psychological dimensions of terrorist behavior were dominated by psychoanalytic formulations, reflecting, in part, the prevailing theoretical orientation in clinical practice at the time. The two themes consistently at the center of these formulations were (1) that motives for terrorism are largely unconscious and arise from hostility toward one's parents and (2) that terrorism is the product of early abuse and maltreatment.

One of the earliest examples of the former was Feuer's (1969[22]) "conflict of generations" theory, "which is based on a Freudian interpretation of terrorism as a psychological reaction of sons against fathers, a generational phenomenon rooted in the Oedipus complex and, thus, in maleness" (Crenshaw, 1986, p. 390-391[23]). The idea that terrorism is rooted in childhood abuse (often unconscious sequelae) is a relatively common theme, and is still held by some contemporary analysts.

Psychohistorian Lloyd De Mause (2002[24]) observes that “The roots of terrorism lie not in this or that American foreign policy error, but in the extremely abusive families of the terrorists.”

Narcissism

Many first generation attempts to understand and explain terrorism within a psychodynamic framework, focused on the trait of narcissism as a defining and driving factor (Crayton, 1983[25]). “The possible linkage between narcissism and terrorism was first advanced by Morf (1970[26]) and subsequently discussed by Lasch (1979), Crayton (1983), Haynal et al. (1983), Post (1984, 1986, 1990), and Pearlstein (1991)” (McCormick, 2003[27]). The premise was that terrorist behavior was rooted in a personality defect that produced a damaged sense of self. The essence of pathological narcissism is an overvaluing of self and a devaluing of others. It is not difficult to see how one might observe these traits among terrorists. In fact, political scientist Richard Pearlstein concluded: “the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism is the most complete and thus most intellectually satisfying theory regarding the personal logic of political terrorism.”

Crayton (1983[28]), for example, posed the “psychology of narcissism” as a framework for understanding (not excusing) terrorist behavior, using Kohut’s concepts to guide his argument. According to Clayton, the two key narcissistic dynamics are a grandiose sense of self and “idealized parental imago” (“If I can’t be perfect, at least I’m in a relationship with something perfect”). With regard to the effect of groups, he argues that narcissistically vulnerable persons are drawn to charismatic leaders and that some groups are held together by a shared grandiose sense of self. As others have posited, he suggested that narcissistic rage is what prompts an aggressive response to perceived injustice.

Indeed “narcissistic rage” has been posed by more than one observer as the primary psychological precipitant of terrorist aggression. In developmental context the way in which this evolves is that as children the nascent terrorists are deeply traumatized, suffering chronic physical abuse and emotional humiliation. This creates a profound sense of fear and personal vulnerability that becomes central to their self concept. To eliminate this fear and create a more tolerable self-image, such individuals feel the need to "kill off" their view of themselves as victims. They buttress their own self-esteem by devaluing others. The result of this devaluation of others - what some have termed "malignant narcissism" - muffles their internal voice of reason and morality. Furthermore, whatever sense of “esteem” has developed in that process is extraordinarily fragile. This makes the individual particularly vulnerable to any slights, insults or ideas that threaten to shatter the

façade of self-worth. Such insults are known as "narcissistic injuries" and are the triggers of narcissistic rage (Akhtar, 1999[29]).

The influence of psychoanalytic formulations generally, and emphasis on narcissism specifically, has abated considerably in contemporary research. While some cling to – or attempt to reify - old ideas, these first generation notions did not generate much empirical support. Most current experts in the field have moved on to other approaches in search of more accurate and more useful insights for understanding terrorists.

Early Typologies

Some of the first generation conceptualizations and writings began to presage Laqueur's notion that there is not one terrorism, but many terrorisms. Typologies began to emerge to categorize and classify terrorist groups, acts, and actors. Focusing on the diversity in motivations, psychiatrist Frederick Hacker proposed one of the first psychological typologies. His 1976 book, *Crusaders, Criminals and Crazies*[30], was perhaps the first major popular press release on the psychology of terrorism. Although Hacker's formulations did have a psychoanalytic bent, they were also much broader than those of his contemporary writers. His book introduced the now popular and colloquial terrorist typology of *Crusaders* (idealistically inspired and acting in service of a higher cause), *Criminals* (who simply use terrorism for personal gain) and *Crazies* (often motivated by false beliefs and perceptions arising from their mental illness). Hacker notes immediately (and correctly) "of course, the pure type is rarely encountered." Nevertheless, this effort introduced the notion that there were differences among terrorists and that the phenomenon and the actors were not monolithic.

A second notable effort was made in the early 1980s by former CIA psychiatrist, Jerrold Post. Post (1984[31]) built on the earlier models that sought to explain terrorism a form of psychopathology or personality defect, arguing that two different forms of dysfunction produced two different patterns of terrorist behavior. The first type was the Anarchic-ideologue. These individuals were hypothesized to come from severely dysfunctional families where they likely had suffered severe abuse or maltreatment, leading them to have hostile feelings toward their parents. Their extremist ideology was a displacement of their rebellion and hostility onto the "state" authority. That is, they acted out hostility by rebelling against the "state" of their parents. In contrast, the second type, the Nationalist-secessionist was not hostile, but loyal to his parents, and his extremism was motivated to retaliate or avenge the wrongs done to his parents by the state. In essence, they rebelled against external society out of loyalty to their parents. Post (1984[32])

describes the distinction in the following way: "for some, becoming terrorists is an act of retaliation for real and imagined hurts against the society of their parents; for others, it is an act of retaliation against society for the hurt done to their parents."

Conclusion

While Hacker's typology is still sometimes used as a practical point of reference, it is not considered an important scholarly classification. Similarly, Post's dichotomous taxonomy, since its conception, has not been subjected to any empirical scrutiny and seems somewhat less relevant to the contemporary terrorist threat.

Section
5

Contemporary Psychological Research on Terrorism

The first generation of psychological inquiry, drawing mainly from psychoanalytic theory, largely ran its course. Its framework and findings mostly lacked operationally relevance. In this section we begin to review and evaluate the manner and extent to which social science research and professional literature describes or explains terrorism and related terrorist behavior. While the scope of this tasking required a focus on psychological factors, broadly conceived, such factors cannot – in isolation – form a comprehensive explanation for, or theory of, terrorism. There are many factors at the macro and micro level that affect political violence generally, and terrorism specifically. Indeed, "there is substantial agreement that the psychology of terrorism cannot be considered apart from political, historical, familial, group dynamic, organic, and even purely accidental, coincidental factors." (Freid, 1982[33]). With that acknowledgement we proceed next to focus on the contributions of psychological and behavior research and theory to the "psychology of terrorism." Hypotheses and assertions from first generation research are used to provide context, while more contemporary research focuses the findings in relation to the key study questions.

The charge for this project was given by a U.S. intelligence agency with operational responsibilities. Accordingly, we have chosen to organize the findings from this review around a series of functional questions that might have relevant operational implications

- How and why do people enter, stay in, and leave terrorist organizations?
- To what extent is psychopathology relevant for understanding or preventing terrorism?
- To what extent is individual personality relevant for understanding or preventing terrorism?
- To what extent are an individual's life experiences relevant for understanding or preventing terrorism?
- What is the role of ideology in terrorist behavior?

- What distinguishes extremists who act violently from those who do not?
- What are the vulnerabilities of terrorist groups?
- How do terrorist organizations form, function, and fail?

How and why do people enter, stay in, and leave terrorist organizations?

Better Answers Through Better Questions

While early research seemed to focus almost exclusively in some way on "why" individuals become terrorists or engage in terrorism, the research questions in this realm, informed by a degree of experience, became more focused and more functional. Horgan[34] and others helped to frame future research, in part, by asking better questions.

Implicit in the "why" question was an assumption that becoming a terrorist involved a discrete choice to change status. Social and operational observations of numerous terrorist and extremist groups, however, suggest that recruitment and involvement typically do not occur in that way. Indeed, as Horgan and Taylor (2001[35]) have noted: "What we know of actual terrorists suggests that there is rarely a conscious decision made to become a terrorist. Most involvement in terrorism results from gradual exposure and socialisation towards extreme behavior."

Seeking a better framework within which to examine the question of "why an individual becomes a terrorist" Crenshaw, for example, suggested that the issue of "why terrorists persist despite the risks involved and the uncertainty of reward is an important question" (Crenshaw, 1986[36]). Moreover, she notes that there is a high rate of attrition in terrorist organizations, which itself begs for a greater understanding of how and why some exit or leave terrorist organizations or even desist from terrorist behavior.

Psychologists John Horgan and Max Taylor have structured the issues in a most perspicuous way for terrorism researchers by drawing on contributions from theoretical and developmental criminology "to consider involvement in terrorism as a process comprised of discrete phases to 'becoming' a terrorist, 'being' a terrorist (or what might be construed as both a) remaining involved and b) engaging in terrorist offences) and disengaging from terrorism" (Horgan, in press[37]). They suggest that "a fundamental distinction can be made then in analysing the factors at work at the different stages of becoming, remaining, and leaving or terminating involvement" (Horgan & Taylor, 2001[38]).

Motives and Vulnerabilities

Among the key psychological factors in understanding whether, how and which individuals in a given environment will enter the process of becoming a terrorist are motive and vulnerability. By definition, *motive* is an emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse that acts as an incitement to action, and *vulnerability* refers to susceptibility or liability to succumb, as to persuasion or temptation[39].
One's motivation for engaging in terrorism is often presumed to be the "cause" or ideology of the group. However, as Crenshaw (1985[40]) notes, "the popular image of the terrorist as an individual motivated exclusively by deep and intransigent political commitment obscures a more complex reality." That reality is that motives to join a terrorist organization and to engage in terrorism vary considerably across different types of groups, and also within groups – and they may change over time.

Martha Crenshaw (1985[41]) for example, suggests that there are at least four categories of motivation among terrorists: (1) the opportunity for action, (2) the need to belong, (3) the desire for social status, and (4) the acquisition of material reward. Post (1990[42]) has gone even further to suggest even that terrorism is an end unto itself, independent of any stated political or ideological objectives. His argument is that "*the cause is not the cause*. The cause, as codified in the group's ideology, according to this line of reasoning, becomes the rationale for acts the terrorists are driven to commit. Indeed, the central argument of this position is that *individuals become terrorists in order to join terrorist groups and commit acts of terrorism*" (p. 35).

The quest to understand vulnerabilities should not be confused with a search for the "terrorist personality" (Horgan, 2003[43]). Horgan (in press[44]) has framed the issue of vulnerability in the perhaps most lucid and useful way as "factors that point to some people having a greater *openness* to *increased* engagement than others." Based on a review of the existing literature three motivational themes - injustice, identity, and belonging - appear to be prominent and consistent. These themes also relate to one's potential openness or vulnerability.

Injustice: Perceived injustice has long been recognized a central factor in understanding violence generally and terrorism specifically, dating back to some of the earliest writings. In the mid-1970s, Hacker (1976[45]) concluded that "remediable injustice is the basic motivation for terrorism". A desire for revenge or vengeance is a common response to redress or remediate a wrong of injustice inflicted on another. It is not difficult to imagine that "one of the strongest motivations behind terrorism is vengeance, particularly the desire to avenge not oneself but others. Vengeance can be specific or diffuse, but it is an obsessive drive that is a powerful motive for violence toward others, especially

people thought to be responsible for injustices" (Crenshaw, 1992[46]). Perceptions of injustice may also be viewed as grievances, which Ross (1993[47], p. 326) has posed as the most important precipitant cause of terrorism. He suggests such grievances may be economic, ethnic, racial, legal, political, religious, and/or social, and that they may be targeted to individuals, groups, institutions or categories of people.

Identity: One's psychological identity is a developed, stable sense of self and resolved security in one's basic values, attitudes, and beliefs. Developmentally, its formation typically occurs in a crisis of adolescence or young adulthood, and is tumultuous and emotionally challenging. However, "the successful development of personal identity is essential to the integrity and continuity of the personality" (Crenshaw, 1986[48], p. 391). An individual's search for identity may draw him or her to extremist or terrorist organizations in a variety of ways. One may fall into what psychologist Jim Marcia calls "identity foreclosure" where a role and set of ideas and values (an identity) are adopted without personal, critical examination. The absolutist, "black and white" nature of most extremist ideologies is often attractive to those who feel overwhelmed by the complexity and stress of navigating a complicated world.

A variant on this process is one in which an individual defines his or her identity simply through group membership. Essentially, one's personal identity is merged with a group identity, with no sense of (or need for) individuality or uniqueness. As Johnson and Feldman (1992[49]) suggest, "membership in a terrorist group provides a sense of identity or belonging for those personalities whose underlying sense of identity is flawed." For these individuals, "belonging to the terrorist group becomes … the most important component of their psychosocial identity" Post (1987[50]).

A similar mechanism is one in which a desperate quest for personal meaning pushes an individual to adopt a role to advance a cause, with little or no thoughtful analysis or consideration of its merit. In essence, the individual resolves the difficult question "Who am I?" by simply defining him or herself as a "terrorist," a "freedom fighter," "*shahid*" or similar role (Della Porta, 1992[51]; Knutson, 1981[52]). Taylor and Louis (2004[53]) describe a classic set of circumstances for recruitment into a terrorist organization: "These young people find themselves at a time in their life when they are looking to the future with the hope of engaging in meaningful behavior that will be satisfying and get them ahead. Their objective circumstances including opportunities for advancement are virtually nonexistent; they find some direction for their religious collective identity but the desperately disadvantaged state of their community leaves them feeling marginalized and lost without a clearly defined collective identity" (p. 178).

Belonging: In radical extremist groups, many prospective terrorists find not only a sense of meaning, but also a sense of belonging, connectedness and affiliation. Luckabaugh and colleagues (1997[54]) argue that among potential terrorists "the real cause or psychological motivation for joining is the great need for belonging." For these alienated individuals from the margins of society, joining a terrorist group represented the first real sense of belonging after a lifetime of rejection, and the terrorist group was to become the family they never had" (Post, 1984[55]). This strong sense of belonging has critical importance as a motivating factor for joining, a compelling reason for staying, and a forceful influence for acting[56]. "Volkan (1997) .. argued that terrorist groups may provide a security of family by subjugating individuality to the group identity. A protective cocoon is created that offers shelter from a hostile world" (Marsella, 2003[57]). Observations on terrorist recruitment show that many people are influenced to join by seeking solidarity with family, friends or acquaintances (Della Porta, 1995[58]), and that "for the individuals who become active terrorists, the initial attraction is often to the group, or community of believers, rather than to an abstract ideology or to violence" (Crenshaw, 1988[59]). Indeed, it is the image of such strong cohesiveness and solidarity among extremist groups that makes them more attractive than some prosocial collectives as a way to find belonging (Johnson & Feldman, 1982[60]).

Conclusion: These three factors - injustice, identity, and belonging – have been found often to co-occur in terrorists and to strongly influence decisions to enter terrorist organizations and to engage in terrorist activity. Some analysts even have suggested that the synergistic effect of these dynamics forms the real "root cause" of terrorism, regardless of ideology. Luckabaugh and colleagues (1997[61]), for example, concluded "the real cause or psychological motivation for joining is the great need for belonging, a need to consolidate one's identity. A need to belong, along with an incomplete personal identity, is a common factor that cuts across the groups." Jerrold Post (1984[62]) has similarly theorized that "the need to belong, the need to have a stable identity, to resolve a split and be at one with oneself and with society- … is an important bridging concept which helps explain the similarity in behavior of terrorists in groups of widely different espoused motivations and composition."

Pathways to Radicalization & Terrorism

As important as these motivational factors may be, as Bruce (1997) observes, to understand fully the process of becoming a terrorist, "motive cannot be taken in isolation from opportunity." Stated simply, people follow a pathway into (and often through) radicalization, terrorism and terrorist organizations. The pathway may be different for different people and can be affected by a wide range of factors. Bandura

(1990[63]) observed that "the path to terrorism can be shaped by fortuitous factors as well as by the conjoint influence of personal predilections and social inducements" (p. 186).

The transition into becoming a terrorist is rarely sudden and abrupt. "What we know of actual terrorists suggests that there is rarely a conscious decision made to become a terrorist. Most involvement in terrorism results from gradual exposure and socialisation towards extreme behavior" (Horgan & Taylor, 2001[64]). Luckabaugh and colleagues (1997[65]) view this as one of the few general points of agreement in the field of terrorism studies, stating "it is generally accepted terrorists do not become terrorists over night. They follow a general progression from social alienation to boredom, then occasional dissidence and protest before eventually turning to terrorism."

McCormick (2003[66]) refers to this as the "developmental" approach , which "has been advanced, in various forms, by a wide range of commentators (e.g., Knutson 1981; Jenkins 1982; Braungart & Braungart 1983, 1989, 1992; Sayari, 1985; Crenshaw1986; Bandura 1990; Sprinzak 1990, 1991, 1995; Friedland 1992;della Porta 1992, 1995a,b; Passerini 1992; della Porta & Diani 1999). Terrorism, in this view, is not the product of a single decision but the end result of a dialectical process that gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time. The process takes place within a larger political environment involving the state, the terrorist group, and the group's self-designated political constituency. The interaction of these variables in a group setting is used to explain why individuals turn to violence and can eventually justify terrorist actions."

What is the exact nature and progression of that pathway? Given the wide diversity in motivation, vulnerability and opportunity for terrorism, there may be no single pathway or general answer to that would apply to all types of groups or to all individuals. Several efforts have been made, however, to articulate a general sequence of stages, events or issues that might apply across group types. The question here is how do extremist ideologies develop (radicalization) and ultimately translate into justifications or imperatives to use terrroristic violence?

One early model developed by Frederick Hacker (1983[67]) framed the progression in three stages. The first stage involved an awareness of oppression. The second stage marked a recognition that the oppression was "social" and therefore not unavoidable. The third stage was an impetus or realization that it was possible to act against the oppression. Ultimately, at the end point of that phase, some conclude that working through advocates/ intermediaries (e.g., elected officials) or within the system to "reform" or improve it is not going to work and that self help by violence is the only effective means for change.

Subsequent work by Eric Shaw (1986[68]) explored the existence of "a common developmental pathway by which terrorists enter their profession." The four stages in that process were as follows: (1) early socialization processes; (2) narcissistic injuries (a critical life event that negatively affects self-image or self esteem); (3) escalatory events (often a confrontation with police offering a perceived provocation); and (4) personal connections to terrorist group members (which enhance opportunity, access, and incentives to enter a terrorist group).

Based on an analysis of multiple militant extremist groups with a span of diverse ideologies, Borum (2003[69]) observes that there "do appear to be some observable markers or stages in the process that are common to many individuals in extremist groups and zealous adherents of extremist ideologies, both foreign and domestic. The process begins by framing some unsatisfying event or condition as being unjust. The injustice is blamed on a target policy, person, or nation. The responsible party, perceived as a threat, is then vilified – often demonized – which facilitates justification for aggression."

He describes the development of extremist ideas and their justification of violence in four simplistically labeled stages:

- *It's not right*: The starting point is a grievance or sense of dissatisfaction, usually pertaining to some perceived restriction or deprivation in a person's environment. The nature of the undesirable condition may vary (e.g., economic, social, etc.), but those who experience it perceive it in some way as aversive.

- *It's not fair*: An undesirable condition is not necessarily an unjust one. Perceptions of injustice usually arise when one comes to view the aversive condition in a comparative context – relative to one's own expectations or relative to how that condition does or does not affect others. This is similar to Ted Gurr's (1968[70]) concept of "relative deprivation," which he defines as the "actors' perception of discrepancy between the value expectations {the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are justifiably entitled} and their environment's apparent value capabilities." This discrepancy, perceived as unfair or unjust, prompts feelings of resentment.

- *It's your fault*: We are socialized to believe that although "bad" things may happen in life, injustices typically don't occur without some cause. Lerner talks about a phenomenon he refers to as the "just world hypothesis," a human condition in which "individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p.1030[71]). If they themselves are the victims of injustice, then it is assumed someone else is at fault for

that condition. By attributing blame, those who have accumulated resentments now have a target or outlet for them.

- *You're evil*: The stages reviewed so far describe a possible mechanism for developing hateful attitudes toward a group or institution. But most people who hate don't kill. What facilitates violence is the erosion (sometimes intentional) of the psychological and social barriers that inhibit aggressive behavior even in the presence of aggressive impulse or intent. This may involve creating justifications for one's actions (such as perceived threat and need for "self defense") and/or dehumanizing the victims to some degree, such as by casting them as "evil."

Although the model may have some heuristic value, it is not statistically derived. It also appears to account better for violent (militant) extremism, than for extremist ideology more generally. Moreover, it is not yet clear how such a progression fits with the stages of becoming, remaining, and leaving.

Summary

There is no easy answer or single motivation to explain why people become terrorists. Similarly, the processes and pathways of *how* that happens are quite varied and diverse. Researchers have begun to distinguish between reasons for joining, remaining in, and leaving terrorist organizations, finding that motivations may be different at each stage, and not even necessarily related to each other. There do appear to be some common vulnerabilities and perceptions among those who turn to terrorism – perceived injustice, need for identity and need for belonging – though certainly there are persons who share these perceptions who do not become terrorists. Promising areas of inquiry have focused on common stages and processes in adopting extremist ideologies, rather than on the content of the motive or justification, *per se.*

To what extent is psychopathology relevant for understanding and preventing terrorism?

Psychology, as a discipline, has a long history of (perhaps even a bias toward) looking first to explain deviant behaviors as a function of psychopathology (i.e., mental disease, disorder, or dysfunction) or maladjusted personality syndromes. As Schmid and Jongman (1988[72]) noted, "The chief assumption underlying many psychological 'theories'…is that the terrorist in one way or the other not normal and that the insights from psychology and psychiatry are adequate keys to understanding." In reality, psychopathology has proven to be, at best, only a modest risk factor for general violence, and all but irrelevant to understanding terrorism. In fact, "the idea of terrorism as the product of mental disorder or psychopathy has been discredited" (Crenshaw, 1992[73]).

Major Mental Illness

It is rather difficult to study the prevalence of psychopathology and maladaptive personality traits in terrorist populations. Most studies that have examined this question using actual psychological measures have included only terrorists that have been captured and/or referred for a mental health examination. Obviously, those viewed as needing a mental health assessment may be different from the general terrorist population. Nevertheless, the research that does exist is fairly consistent in finding that serious psychopathology or mental illnesses among terrorists are relatively rare, and certainly not a major factor in understanding or predicting terrorist behavior (McCauley, 2002[74]; Sageman, 2004[75]). For as Fried (1982[76]) has observed, "Even in the cases of the terrorist who is clearly psychotic and delusional in his thinking, awareness of political realities can play a significant role in determining behavior."

In the opinion of Friedland (1992[77]), "as for empirical support, to date there is no compelling evidence that terrorists are abnormal, insane, or match a unique personality type. In fact, there are some indications to the contrary." The two most significant scholarly reviews of the "mental disorder" perspective on terrorism are that of Ray Corrado (1981[78]) and Andrew Silke (1998[79]). Although written nearly twenty years apart, both reached similar conclusions. Acknowledging that some studies have found psychopathological disorders among some terrorists, Silke (1998[80]), summarized his review of the literature with the following conclusions: "The critique finds that the findings supporting the

pathology model are rare and generally of poor quality. In contrast, the evidence suggesting terrorist normality is both more plentiful and of better quality." An even more recent review of the scientific and professional literature by Ruby (2002[81]) similarly "concludes that terrorist are not dysfunctional or pathological; rather, it suggests that terrorism is basically another form of politically motivated violence that is perpetrated by rational, lucid people who have valid motives."

Psychopathy / Antisocial Personality

Terrorism is regarded by most as a form of antisocial behavior. Indeed to the victims and observers many of the acts could be seen as heinous and the actors as callous, "cold blooded killers." Given the general tendency to view extreme deviance as a sign of abnormality or psychopathology, some have posited that terrorists might best be understood as a collective of psychopaths (Corrado, 1981[82]). Certainly such concepts were invoked to characterize at least some of the hijackers in the 9/11 attacks on America.

It's not difficult to see how the idea of "terrorist as psychopath" holds some intuitive appeal. Pearce (1977[83]), for example, regarded the terrorist as "an aggressive psychopath, who has espoused some particular cause because extremist causes can provide an external focal point for all the things that have gone wrong in his life." To understand the limitations and inaccuracies in such a generalization, however, requires some examination of the essential elements of psychopathy and the way in which those traits interact with the demands of participation in a terrorist organization. First to clarify an issue of terminology, the designation of "antisocial personality disorder" (ASPD) is a clinically recognized diagnosis characterized by a lifelong history (including before age 18) of engaging in a range of delinquent and antisocial behaviors, which might include lying, stealing, aggression, and criminal activity. Psychopathy, though widely recognized as a clinical syndrome, is not formally listed as a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Similar to ASPD, the construct of psychopathy includes a longstanding pattern of antisocial behavior and impulsive lifestyle, but in contrast it also has essential elements deficient emotional experience (e.g., lack of guilt, empathy, and remorse) and interpersonal exploitativeness (e.g., callous, use of others, parasitic lifestyle). Only about 25% of those with ASPD also have those core personality deficits that comprise a psychopathic syndrome[84].

In one of the most detailed clinical analyses on the topic, Martens (2004[85]) acknowledges that not all terrorists have ASPD (nor are they all psychopaths), yet he argues that "individuals who become terrorists (TER) (Hudson, 1999) and persons with ASPD (Martens, 1997, 2000) share characteristics such as: social alienation, disturbed early

socialization processes, aggressive, action-oriented, stimulus-hungry, narcissistic attitude, impulsivity and hostility, suffering from early damage to their self-esteem, defensive attitude, primitive defenses as shame, fear of dependency, unresolved oedipal issues, omnipotent denial, escalatory events, particularly confrontation with police, intolerant of criticism, arrogance and disdain, belief of superiority of their own belief system, indifference to other people belief systems, hostility, lack of self-criticism, justification of their violent behavior, suffering from deep trauma, moral disengagement by dehumanizing victims." Martens (2004[86]) ultimately concludes that terrorists with ASPD should be regarded as a discrete group among terrorists (or people with ASPD) because they have a constellation of distinctive characteristics.
On the other hand, it is clear that some core deficits common in psychopaths would likely impair their effective functioning in a terrorist role. Cooper (1978[87]) noted long ago "terrorism, like any other serious undertaking, requires dedication, perseverance, and a certain selflessness. These are the many qualities that are lacking in the psychopath."

Psychological / Personality Abnormality

In his critical review of the perennial theme of terrorist abnormality in psychological research, Andrew Silke(1998[88]) observed that after researchers failed to find any strong links between terrorism and major psychopathology, "a trend has emerged which asserts that terrorists possess many of the traits of pathological personalities but do not possess the actual clinical disorders. This development has effectively tainted terrorists with a pathology aura, without offering any way to easily test or refute the accusations."

Despite more than two decades of research and theoretical speculation attempting to identify what makes terrorists "different," "perhaps the best documented generalization is negative: terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology" (McCauley, 1989). In fact, Crenshaw (1981) argues that "the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality" (p. 390), and Silke (1998[89]) has concluded that "most serious researchers in the field at least nominally agree with the position that terrorists are essentially normal individuals" (p.53).

Suicide Attacks

While suicide attacks have been a part of conflict throughout the history of the world, most contemporary researchers mark the 1983 suicide attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut, as the beginning of a modern era of suicide terrorism. Since that time, "there have been at least 188 separate suicide terrorist attacks worldwide, in Lebanon, Israel, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Turkey, Russia, and the

United States. The rate has increased from 31 in the 1980s, to 104 in the 1990s, to 53 in 2000-2001 alone" (Pape, 2003[90]). The rate of suicide terrorism was rising, even while the overall number of terrorist incidents was on the decline. U.S. Senator John Warner echoed the sentiments of many who observed this trend when he said: "Those who would commit suicide in their assaults on the free world are not rational and are not deterred by rational concepts." Available data, however, suggest a different conclusion.

Existing research reveals a marked absence of major psychopathology among "would-be" suicide attackers; that the motivation and dynamics for choosing to engage in a suicide attack differ from those in the clinical phenomenon of suicide; and that there is a rational "strategic logic" to the use of suicide attack campaigns in asymmetric conflict. Silke (2003[91]) argues that "as with other terrorists, there is no indication that suicide bombers suffer from psychological disorders or are mentally unbalanced in other ways. In contrast, their personalities are usually quite stable and unremarkable (at least within their own cultural context)" (p. 94). Israeli psychology professor Ariel Merari is one of the few people in the world to have collected systematic, empirical data on a significant sample of suicide bombers. He examined the backgrounds of every modern era (since 1983) suicide bomber in the Middle East. Although he expected to find suicidal dynamics and mental pathology, instead he found that "In the majority, you find none of the risk factors normally associated with suicide, such as mood disorders or schizophrenia, substance abuse or history of attempted suicide[92]."

In some ways, the absence of suicidal risk factors among suicide attackers is not surprising. They are different phenomena (Borum, 2003[93]). Suicide attackers view their act as one of martyrdom, whether for their faith, their people, or their cause. In the case of *jihadists*, for example, "the primary aim of suicide terrorists is not suicide, because to the terrorist group, suicide is simply a means to an end with motivation that stems from rage and a sense of self-righteousness. They see themselves as having a higher purpose and are convinced of an eternal reward through their action" (Salib, 2003[94]). Borum (2003[95]) articulated some of the specific differences in motive, thoughts, feelings, responses of others, and pre-incident behaviors that likely distinguish an act of suicide from an act of *jihadist* martyrdom. "People usually associate suicide with hopelessness and depression. The desire to end intense and unbearable psychological pain typically motivates the actor to commit such an act. Others who care for the actor typically view suicide as an undesirable outcome. Family and loved ones attempt to discourage the behavior and often struggle with feelings of shame if suicide does occur. By contrast, people typically associate martyrdom with hopefulness about afterlife rewards in paradise and feelings of heroic sacrifice. The desire to further the cause of Islam and to answer the highest calling in that religion motivates the actor. Others who care

for the actor see the pending act as heroic. Family and loved ones typically support the behavior, and, if the event occurs, the family is honored. Not only does the family of a martyr gain forgiveness of their sins in the afterlife but the supporting community often cares for them socially and financially." Sheikh Yussuf Al-Qaradhawi, a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood draws the distinction succinctly as follows: "He who commits suicide kills himself for his own benefit, he who commits martyrdom sacrifices himself for the sake of his religion and his nation.... The Mujahed is full of hope" (Cited in Atran, 2003[96]).

Suicide terrorism also is not exclusively a tactic of the religious extremist. Sprinzak (2001[97]) points out that "the Black Tigers {Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam -LTTE} constitute the most significance proof that suicide terrorism is not merely a religious phenomenon and that under certain extreme political and psychological circumstances secular volunteers are fully capable of martyrdom." In fact, that group alone is responsible for nearly half of the suicide attacks worldwide that have occurred in the past decade (Pape, 2003).

If suicide attacks are not driven by mental illness or religious fanaticism, what accounts for its persistent and increasing use? Certainly there are logistical and tactical advantages: the operations are relatively inexpensive, the attackers are unlikely to be captured and compromise the security of the group; and the psychological effects on the target population can be devastating. Moreover, this tactic has shown disproportionate lethality. Even excluding the 9/11 attacks on America, in the span of two decades between 1980 and 2001, suicide attacks accounted for only 3% of all terrorist incidents, but they were responsible for 48% of the terrorism-related deaths (Department of State 1983-2001[98]). However, Pape (2003[99]) suggests that "the main reason that suicide terrorism is growing is that terrorists have learned that it works….Perhaps the most striking aspect of recent suicide terrorist campaigns is that they are associated with gains for the terrorists' political cause about half the time. …the timing of six of the 11 suicide terrorist campaigns {since 1980} correlate with significant policy changes by the target state toward the terrorists' major political goals."

Summary

Research on the psychology of terrorism has been nearly unanimous in its conclusion that mental illness and abnormality are typically not critical factors in terrorist behavior. Studies have found that the prevalence of mental illness among samples of incarcerated terrorists is as low or lower than in the general population. Moreover, although terrorists often commit heinous acts, they would rarely be considered classic "psychopaths." Terrorists typically have some connection to principles or ideology as well as to other people (including other terrorists) who share them. Psychopaths, however, do not form such

connections, nor would they be likely to sacrifice themselves (including dying) for a cause.

To what extent is individual personality relevant for understanding and preventing terrorism?

Person vs. Situation Emphasis in Explaining Behavior

Personality traits consistently have failed to explain most types of human behaviors, including violent behaviors. Certainly they have been shown repeatedly to contribute less to an explanation than situational and contextual factors. Crenshaw (2001[100]), for example, has argued that "shared ideological commitment and group solidarity are much more important determinants of terrorist behavior than individual characteristics." Bandura seems to agree, as reflected in his more general conclusion that "It requires conducive social conditions rather than monstrous people to produce heinous deeds."

The most effective method for explaining behavior, however, is by combining personal *and* situational factors. Past analyses of acts of targeted violence reveal that the "person"- related factors are only one part of the equation, and often not the most critical. Risk for engaging in terrorism is the product of factors related not only to the individual, but also to the situation, setting, and potential target (Borum, et al., 1999[101]; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998[102]). Contextual factors such as the support or rejection of friends and family to the extremist ideology or justifications for violence, the degree of security or target hardening that exists, the recency or severity of experiences that might exacerbate hostility toward the target all could affect the nature and degree of risk posed by a person of investigative concern.

The Terrorist Personality

Although the possible existence of a "terrorist personality" holds some intuitive appeal, it most certainly is devoid of empirical support. "Even the briefest review of the history of terrorism reveals how varied and complex a phenomenon it is, and therefore how futile it is to attribute simple, global, and general psychological characteristics to all terrorists." (Reich,1990[103], p. 263). Further complicating this effort is the fact that terrorists can assume many different roles – only a few will actually fire the weapon or detonate the bomb. The "personality" of a

financier, may be different from that of an administrator or strategist or an assassin. Taylor and Quayle's research (1994[104]) explored whether some systematic differences might be discerned between those who engage in terrorism and those who do not; yet their search led them to the conclusion that "the active terrorist is not discernibly different in psychological terms from the non-terrorist; in psychological terms, there are no special qualities that characterize the terrorist."

Nearly a decade later, psychologist John Horgan (2003[105]) again examined the cumulative research evidence on the search for a terrorist personality, and concluded that "in the context of a scientific study of behaviour (which implies at least a sense of rigour) such attempts to assert the presence of a terrorist personality, or profile, are pitiful." This appears to be a conclusion of consensus among most researchers who study terrorist behavior. "With a number of exceptions (e.g., Feuer 1969), most observers agree that although latent personality traits can certainly contribute to the decision to turn to violence, there is no single set of psychic attributes that explains terrorist behavior" (McCormick, 2003[106]). Nevertheless, Marsella (2003[107]) is still hopeful that "early classical psychological studies of authoritarianism, dogmatism, tolerance of ambiguity, prejudice, trust, alienation, conformity, and other personal predisposition and inclinations can still provide a firm conceptual and empirical foundation for contemporary efforts."

The Terrorist Profile

The term and concept of "profiling" has come to have many different meanings. In the context of the following discussion, the term "profiling" is not used to refer to the type of criminal investigative analysis that was refined by members of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit. That kind of investigative profiling seeks to examine physical and behavioral evidence of an offense *after* it has occurred and, based on that information, draw inferences about potential characteristics of the person who committed the crime. Counterterrorism intelligence, however, is primarily concerned with the identification and interruption of terrorist activity *before* an attack occurs. This poses a very different kind of operational challenge.

Some have assumed by examining characteristics of people who have committed terrorist acts in the past (particularly if the number was large enough), it should be possible to delineate a demographic/ psychological composite of common traits that could be used to spot a terrorist in an otherwise murky haystack of law-abiding citizens[108]. A number of social science researchers have attempted to develop such a composite. In fact, Horgan and Taylor (2001[109]) suggest "a popular approach to terrorism by academia has been to attempt to profile

terrorists, wither in psychological sense or across socio-political dimensions."

One of the best known, most comprehensive, and most often cited of these efforts is a profile developed by Russell and Miller (1977[110]) based on a compilation of published data regarding over 350 individual terrorist cadres and leaders across 18 different Palestinian, Japanese, German, Italian, Turkish, Irish, Spanish, Iranian, Argentina, Brazilian, and Uruguayan terrorist groups active during the 1966-1976 time span. The prototype derived from their composite described a young (22-25), unmarried male who is an urban resident, from a middle-upper class family, has some university education and probably held an extremist political philosophy.

Russell & Miller Profile

AGE: Generally 22-25 for members
SEX: 80% of operations led and directed by males
MARITAL STATUS: Most unmarried
URBAN/RURAL: "Most urban terrorists are natives or long-time residents of metropolitan areas,"
SOCIOECONOMIC: Predominantly middle and upper class for members and leaders.
EDUCATION: Two thirds had at least some university training.
RECRUITMENT SITE: Large universities are the primary sites.
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: The three tendencies at play in terrorist organizations at the time were anarchism, Marxism-Leninism, and nationalism.

Even the briefest reflection should reveal the problem that most individuals who fit that general description are not terrorists and will never commit an act of terrorist aggression. The problem of equally grave significance that could result from its use, however, is that that there are and will be people who are planning and preparing to mount a terrorist attack, who do *not* fit that profile (Borum, et al, 2003[111]). Silke warns "the belief that profiling can provide an effective defence also seriously underestimates the intelligence of terrorist organisations" (Silke, 2003[112]). Indeed, sophisticated terrorist groups, such as al Qa'ida, actively seek to know the "type" of person who will attract suspicion and then scout and use operators who defy that preconception. Al-Qa'ida expert, Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, has documented that the organization recruits members from 74 different countries and among at least 40 different nationalities[113]. If the profile is the gatekeeper of who poses a threat, defenders will be soundly defeated by a known, but unfamiliar-looking enemy.

Summary

There is no terrorist personality, nor is there any accurate profile – psychologically or otherwise – of the terrorist. Moreover, personality traits alone tend not to be very good predictors of behavior. The quest to understand terrorism by studying terrorist personality traits is likely to be an unproductive area for further investigation and inquiry.

To what extent are an individual's life experiences relevant for understanding and preventing terrorism?

Childhood & Adult Experiences

Just as there is no single terrorist personality or profile, a specific constellation of life experiences is neither necessary nor sufficient to cause terrorism. The role of life experiences in understanding a pathway to terrorism is based mainly on certain emotional and behavioral themes; in the contemporary literature three experiential themes appear to be robust*: Injustice, Abuse, and Humiliation*. They often are so closely connected that it is difficult to separate the effects and contributions of each. By definition, most abuse is unjust. Humiliation often results from extreme forms of abuse (often involving the anticipated judgments of others). Moreover, those experiences may have different effects when they present in different forms (e.g. parental abuse vs. prison abuse) or at different points in one's development (e.g., during childhood vs. during adulthood).

Field (1979[114]) spent more than eight years studying terrorism and the "troubles" in Northern Ireland, where she found "the children there have suffered severe disruption in the development of moral judgment-a cognitive function-and are obsessed with death and destruction about which the feel helpless, and against which they feel isolated and hopeless." She apparently was not surprised by the findings: "common sense and experience can tell us that people who are badly treated, and/or unjustly punished, will seek revenge. It should be not be surprising, then, that young adolescents, who have themselves been terrorized, become terrorists, and that in a situation where they are afforded social supports by their compatriots reacting against the actions of an unjust government, the resort to terrorist tactics becomes a way of life" (Field, 1979[115]).

Twenty years later, some in the psychiatric community continue to share this view. Akhtar (1999[116]) concludes that "evidence does exist that most major players in a terrorist organization are themselves, deeply traumatized individuals. As children, they suffered chronic physical abuse, and profound emotional humiliation. They grew up mistrusting others, loathing passivity, and dreading reoccurrence of a violation of their psychophysical boundaries." The nature and strength of the evidence to which she refers, however, is less clear.

Many researchers and terrorist case histories have noted that periods of imprisonment and incarceration often facilitated experiences of injustice, abuse and humiliation (Ferracuti & Bruno,1981[117], della Porta, 1992[118]). Post and colleagues (2003[119]) offer a rich account of the impact of such experiences among the 35 incarcerated middle-eastern terrorists whom they interviewed. They found that "the prison experience was intense, especially for the Islamist terrorists. It further consolidated their identity in the group or organizational membership that provided the most valued element of personal identity. The impact of the prison experience showed more divergence between the secular and Islamist groups. Only a small percentage of either group stated that they were less connected to the group after their incarceration. Sixty two per cent of secular group members reported returning to activity with their organization, compared to 84 per cent of the Islamist group members who returned or plan to return upon their release. The prison experience also reinforced negative perceptions of Israelis and Israeli security forces." (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003[120]).

Taken together, these findings regarding childhood trauma and adult injustice and humiliation, even if they are accurate and generalize to most or all terrorists, do not themselves contribute much to a causal explanation of terrorism. Many terrorists are involved in extremist groups *before* their incarceration and certainly we know that more people have personal histories of having been abused and humiliated than become terrorists. Nevertheless, some of these life experiences may be seen as markers of vulnerability, as possible sources of motivation, or as mechanisms for acquiring or hardening one's militant ideology.

Finally, twenty years ago, Fried (1982[121]) posed the dilemma as follows: "We are left to ponder what events may be the ones that make a potential terrorist cross the line into actual violence, or possibly even lean to terrorist activity on the part of someone whom one would not have described as particularly terrorism-prone. Such factors may include experiences of profound disappointment because of a personal failure or disillusionment with an ideal; the killing or imprisonment of a family member or comrade; being introduced into a setting where terrorism is a long-standing tradition or a response to current political crisis; or contact with a group that influences the way in which one

cognitively restructures and reevaluates the political situation, with membership in that group being something that meets personal needs and participation in terrorist activities merely one of the conditions one has to fulfill for membership."

Summary

Certain life experiences tend to be commonly found among terrorists. Histories of childhood abuse and trauma appear to be widespread. In addition, themes of perceived injustice and humiliation often are prominent in terrorist biographies and personal histories. None of these contribute much to a causal explanation of terrorism, but may be seen as markers of vulnerability, as possible sources of motivation, or as mechanisms for acquiring or hardening one's militant ideology.

What is the role of ideology in terrorist behavior?

Ideology plays a crucial role in terrorist's target selection; it supplies terrorists with an initial motive for action and provides a prism through which they view events and the actions of other people (Drake, 1998).

What Is Ideology?

The term "ideology" often carries a negative connotation. In reality, however, the term is functionally neutral, and, broadly conceived, applies to many. Ideology is often defined as a common and broadly agreed upon set of rules to which an individual subscribes, which help to regulate and determine behavior (Rokeach, 1979[122]; Taylor,1991[123]). These "rules" are, of course, also linked to (perhaps even guided by) one's beliefs, values, principles, and goals (Drake, 1998[124]). The difference and relationship between an ideology and a worldview may depend on one's perspective - perhaps a worldview is broader or just less overt – nonetheless they serve a similar function of acting not only to provide guidelines for behavior, but also as a lens through which we perceive and interpret information, cues, and events in our environment (Mack, 2002[125]). Many religions either embrace or sustain an ideology. The doctrine or core beliefs are certainly a central element of a religious system, but those beliefs generally are at least implicitly tied to a set of "rules," which would comprise an ideology.

The substance of ideologies among individuals and groups probably extend through the entire range of human interest and values. There

do, however, appear to be some commonalities in the *process* or *structure* of terrorist ideologies that may help inform an understanding of terrorist behavior. Aaron Beck (2002[126]) recently applied a cognitive model to terrorist ideologies and concluded that "the thinking of the terrorist evidently shows the same kind of cognitive distortions observed in others who engage in violent acts, either solely as individuals or as members of a group. These include overgeneralization that is, the supposed sins of the enemy may spread to encompass the entire population. Also, they show dichotomous thinking that a people are either totally good or totally bad. Finally, they demonstrate tunnel vision once they are engaged in their holy mission (e.g., jihad), their thinking, and consequently their actions, focuses exclusively on the destruction of the target."

Taking a slightly broader view, based on examination of the existing professional literature and consideration of a variety of extremist ideologies, I suggest that three general conditions seem necessary for an ideology to support terrorism.

First, the ideology must provide a set of beliefs that guide and justify a series of behavioral mandates. Bandura argues that "people do not ordinarily engage in reprehensible conduct until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions." Terrorists, like most others, seek to avoid internal conflict or dissonance by acting in ways that are consistent with their own beliefs and that allow them to see themselves as basically good. In essence, "terrorists must develop justifications for their terrorist actions" (Cooper, 1977[127]).

Second, those beliefs must be inviolable and must be neither questionable nor questioned. "In his classic volume, *The True Believer* (1951[128]), Eric Hoffer pointed out the importance of belief for the human mind and the problems that arise when uncertainty in belief cannot be tolerated. Belief provides meaning and purpose-it reduces uncertainty and facilitates adaptation and adjustment. It offers "deep assurance" and "communion" with others. Of special significance in this syndrome is the inability to tolerate doubt and uncertainty" (Marsella, 2003[129]). The beliefs on which the terrorist ideology is based cannot be doubted, criticized or skeptically examined. Indeed, among those who subscribe to the ideology, "to rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason is heresy and treason. It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible" (Hoffer, 1951, p.83). Keane (2001[130]) has similarly noted that "for terrorism to succeed it demands firstly a rigid adherence to a simple idea. The mind that questions, debates, opens itself to challenging ideas, will prove a source of division for a terrorist movement in the heat of battle. Sticking to a rigid orthodoxy offers security and justification to people committing acts of terror".

Third, the behaviors must be goal directed and seen as serving some meaningful cause or objective. People strive for meaning, and perhaps no cause has greater meaning than the polemic struggle between good and evil, in its various forms (McCormick, 2003[131]). Evidence of this dynamic figures prominently into most terrorist ideologies. Falk (1988[132]) even suggests that "the terrorist mindset is dominated by its melodramatic preoccupation with the destruction of evil." Kernberg[133] argues that such dichotomous, absolutist, "black and white" thinking, especially concerning matters of morality, is a common feature of fundamentalist ideologies in general. He has observed that such ideologies, "divide the world into ideal and evil realms; their own ideology belongs to the ideal realm. The ideas beliefs and behavior of the realm of evil are immoral, dangerous, destructive, and threatening. Typically, such an ideology projects all aggression on to the evil social group, while justifying aggression against the infidel as a necessary defense and retribution if not a moral imperative" (Kernberg, 2003). Many analysts have commented on how this polarized moral polemic provides fertile ground for prescriptions of violence (Baumeister, 1997[134]; Post, 1987[135]; Schorkopf, 2003[136]; White, 2001[137]).

How Does Culture Affect Ideology?

The role and influence of culture on terrorism generally and on terrorist ideologies specifically has been virtually neglected by most social science researchers. Brannan and colleagues have stated the problem quite clearly: "There is one fundamental issue relevant to such understanding that is rarely mentioned in terrorism studies and yet the virtual absence of which is an unambiguous sign of the flawed methodology currently in vogue. This is the issue of culture" (Brannan et al., 2001[138], p. 14).

There are many definitions of culture[139]. Surely as much has been written about defining culture as has been written on defining terrorism itself. At the most general, anthropological level, culture is often defined as "socially patterned human thought and behavior." In the context of understanding its potential impact on terrorist ideologies, however, our primary interest is in "the immaterial or social dimensions of culture, that is, the unique collection of social roles, institutions, values, ideas, and symbols operative in every group, which radically conditions the way in which members see the world and respond to its challenges" (Brannan, et al., 2001[140] p. 15).

Even early on in the study of terrorism, there was some recognition (although little analysis) of the fact that one's social environment could impact the development of beliefs and values, but this would not provide a complete and satisfactory explanation for the phenomenon. Eric Shaw (1986[141]), in crafting his developmental pathway model,

recognized the potentially significant role of early socialization experiences as *part* of a complex of influences that might predispose an individual to move along a path to terrorism.

Knutson (1981[142]) observed "from the life histories available for terrorists (see especially Morf ,1970), it is clear that these individuals are acting upon values into which they have been comfortably socialized- both directly by teaching, and indirectly by life experiences of themselves and important others. However, these social-cultural-political values which are sanguine to a revolutionary terrorist identity are a necessary but not sufficient ingredient in the formation of the terrorist."

Certainly, it is not difficult to see how some early life experiences, socialization or exposure to a particular environment might shape one's general worldview in a variety of ways. More subtly, though than the milieu or exposure to experiences of modeling or vicarious learning, is the fact that different cultures tend to have their own personalities that influence development. Of course, any statement that characteristics a culture, can also be a generalization about individuals within that culture. Every element will not apply equally to everyone. As noted above, a more complete understanding of human behavior is achieved by examining factors related both to the person and to the situation. Cultural influences arguably contain a measure of both.

One popular example of a dimensional approach to characterizing cultures is found in the work of Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede, drawing from research that formed the basis for his book:: *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*[143]. Subsequent adaptations have been used (and widely debated[144]) within the international business community. His model is based on a series of five factors that are often referred to as "Hofstede's Dimensions:

- *Power Distance*: focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society.
- *Individualism*: focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships.
- *Masculinity*: focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance*: focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society - i.e. unstructured situations.
- *Long-Term Orientation*: focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values.[145]

These dimensions have been applied to a variety of cultures, countries and religions by assigning “scores”, permitting them to be compared to one another. For example, the following analysis is offered for the Arab World:

> *“The Geert Hofstede analysis for the Arab World, that includes the countries of Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, demonstrates the Muslim faith plays a significant role in the people’s lives.*
>
> *Large Power Distance (PDI) (80) and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) (68) are predominant Hofstede Dimension characteristics for the countries in this region. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens. They are also highly rule-oriented with laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty, while inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society.*
>
> *When these two Dimensions are combined, it creates a situation where leaders have virtually ultimate power and authority, and the rules, laws and regulations developed by those in power reinforce their own leadership and control. It is not unusual for new leadership to arise from armed insurrection – the ultimate power, rather than from diplomatic or democratic change.*
>
> *The high Power Distance (PDI) ranking is indicative of a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. These populations have an expectation and acceptance that leaders will separate themselves from the group and this condition is not necessarily subverted upon the population, but rather accepted by the society as their cultural heritage.*
>
> *The high Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) ranking of 68, indicates the society’s low level of tolerance for uncertainty. In an effort to minimize or reduce this level of uncertainty, strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations are adopted and implemented. The ultimate goal of these populations is to control everything in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected. As a result of this high Uncertainty Avoidance characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse.*
>
> *The Masculinity index (MAS), the third highest Hofstede Dimension is 52, only slightly higher than the 50.2 average for all the countries included in the Hofstede MAS Dimension. This would indicate that while women in the Arab World are limited in their rights, it may be due more to Muslim religion rather than a cultural paradigm.*
>
> *The lowest Hofstede Dimension for the Arab World is the Individualism (IDV) ranking at 38, compared to a world average ranking of 64. This translates into a Collectivist society as compared to Individualist culture and is manifested in a close long-term commitment to the member 'group', that being a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and over-rides most other societal rules.*

The predominant religion for these countries is Islam, the practice of the Muslim faith. There is a high correlation between the Muslim religion and the Hofstede Dimensions of Power Distance (PDI) and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) scores.

The combination of these two high scores (UAI) and (PDI) create societies that are highly rule-oriented with laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty, while inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These cultures are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens.

When these two Dimensions are combined, it creates a situation where leaders have virtually ultimate power and authority, and the rules, laws and regulations developed by those in power, reinforce their own leadership and control. It is not unusual for new leadership to arise from armed insurrection – the ultimate power, rather than from diplomatic or democratic change."

How Does Ideology Affect Behavior?

In itself, ideology is not enough to convince a person to engage in terrorism.
Merari, 2000

Ideologies generally are based on a set of shared beliefs that explain and justify a set of agreed upon behavioral rules. For terrorists, ideology helps to provide "the moral and political vision that inspires their violence, shapes the way in which they see the world, and defines how they judge the actions of people and institutions" (Drake, 1998[146]). To state simply that ideology controls actions (which may generally be true), however, does not explain why or how that control occurs. This is a relevant consideration because it is the strength of behavioral control – not just the appeal of the rhetoric - that determines whether violent mandates will be followed. Taylor has provided perhaps the clearest behavioral explanation: "the way ideology controls behavior is by providing a set of contingencies that link immediate behavior (e.g., violence) to distant outcomes (e.g., new state, afterlife reward[147])." Because the connection is distant, however, to exert any effect, the contingency must be absolutely certain (hence the need for unquestioning acceptance). In addition, the outcomes or rewards need to be powerful motivators or reinforcers. That is, they need to be fervently desired.

The alternative - albeit related - framework for analysis of control is to consider ideologically-driven action as a form of rule-following behavior. A rule can be conceptualized as "a verbal description of relationships between behaviors and consequences, especially aversive events and reinforcement" (Taylor & Horgan, 2001[148]). At this juncture, it is relevant to examine whether and the extent to which religion – particularly compared to secular based ideologies – affects the nature and degree

of ideological control over behavior. Religious extremists are called to participate in the religion and to follow the rules. The professional literature suggests the following about this kind of compliance. Three factors appear to exert primary influence in maintaining religious participation:

1. Hearing that one's existing practice will produce spiritual as well as materialistic reinforcers.

2. No longer hearing that one's current practices are producing negative sanctions.

3. Hearing that our enemies are in supernatural trouble.

In contrast, compliance with religious rules appears to be maintained only by "escape contingency,"- the prospect of reducing or eliminating the feelings of guilt or fear the religion has caused the noncompliance to evoke (Mallot, 1988[149]).

Ideologies – especially religious ones - may also contain mandates or imperatives that impel its adherents to action. Two types of mandates are particularly noteworthy: the moral mandate and the divine mandate. Skitka and Mullen (2002[150]) define moral mandates "as the specific attitude positions or stands that people develop out of a moral conviction that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral. Moral mandates share the same characteristics of other strong attitudes-that is, extremity, importance and certainty-but have an added motivational and action component, because they are imbued with moral conviction." The divine mandate is one of the unique - and potentially most concerning – features of the extremist driven by religious ideology. As characterized by Rapoport (1984[151]), "the transcendent source of holy terror is its most critical distinguishing characteristic; the deity is perceived as being directly involved in the determination of ends and means." In her extensive study of 250 Palestinian terrorists and recruiters, Nasra Hassan noted that all of them believed that their actions were "sanctioned by the divinely revealed religion of Islam."

Finally, in an analysis of the connection between ideology and violent action, Taylor (1991[152]) posited a combination of three key factors as having particular importance:

1. *Militant potential* - (i.e., whether violence is legitimized in the ideology as a means to an end);

2. *Totality of the ideology* - (i.e., extent to which the ideology controls <u>all</u> behavior, not just specific religious or political elements); and

3. *Perceived imminence in millenarian achievement*

Summary

Ideology is often defined as a common and broadly agreed upon set of rules to which an individual subscribes, which help to regulate and determine behavior. Ideologies that support terrorism, while quite diverse, appear to have three common structural characteristics: they must provide a set of beliefs that guide and justify a series of behavioral mandates; those beliefs must be inviolable and must be neither questionable nor questioned; and the behaviors must be goal directed and seen as serving some cause or meaningful objective. Culture is a critical factor in the development of ideology, but its impact on terrorist ideologies specifically, has not been studied. Ideology guides and controls behavior perhaps by providing a set of behavioral contingencies that link immediate behavior and actions to positive outcomes and rewards down the road, or it may best be viewed as a form of rule-following behavior.

What distinguishes extremists who act violently from those who do not?

"The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Extremist vs. Terrorist

Nearly all terrorists are extremists, but most extremists are not terrorists. By definition an extremist is simply one who deviates from the norm, especially in politics. Extremism is ubiquitous among various nations and cultures. While it may be helpful and instructive to examine the factors that facilitate or inhibit extremist ideologies in general, it is the extremists who advocate and use violence and terrorist tactics that pose the greatest concern.

In the prior section, we argued ideologies that support terrorism appear to have three common structural characteristics: they must provide a set of beliefs that guide and justify a series of behavioral mandates; those beliefs must be inviolable and must be neither questionable nor questioned; and the behaviors must be goal directed and seen as serving some cause or meaningful objective. A further relevant

distinction among extremists and between extremist groups is, what I will refer to here as, "direction of activity." The basic dimension of interest is whether the focus is more on *promotion* of the "cause" or *destruction* of those who oppose it. A promotion orientation is more inwardly focused. The goals that drive behavior are creation and attainment of some desired outcome. A destruction orientation is more outwardly focused (i.e., the enemy or "other"). The goals that drive behavior are annihilation of non-believers and those who oppose its interests and values.

Even *among* subscribers to a destruction-oriented ideology, not all will personally engage in acts of extremist violence or become terrorists. They do, however, contribute to the terrorists' success. As applied to anti-American *jihadists*, Keane (2001[153]) makes the following observation: "Most of the people who demonize American and Western values will not become terrorist supporters, but a crucial minority will take further steps, out of community of acceptance and into that of involvement. They may become active terrorists, they could end up providing funding and safe houses, or they will provide a vocal moral constituency that enables the likes of bin Laden to claim (however erroneously) to be acting for the oppressed of the Islamic world. So it would be wrong to interpret the case of Al-Qaida as an isolated psychological phenomenon. What differs is the scale of their atrocity and the use of violence as a 'hold' end in itself."

How do people come to see violence as a legitimate means or even an end in itself?

Breaking Down Barriers to Violent Action

It is a puzzling question to ponder why some people kill, but it is equally curious to reflect on why more people don't. Certainly more people think about it or "wish" they could do it, than actually commit murder. The too-simple answer to this quandary is that there are certain psychological and social barriers in constant operation that serve to inhibit impulses of lethal aggression. Retired Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman in his thoughtful book "*On Killing*[154]" even goes so far as to argue that there is an innate or instinctual taboo against intra-species killing. Regardless of the source, these barriers are not invulnerable. They can be weakened, or broken down to facilitate attainment of a lethal objective. It is possible to conceptualize two main avenues of assault on those barriers: *Outside-In* (i.e., effects of the group or social environment) and *Inside-Out* (i.e., making an internal cognitive adjustment about how to perceive the environment or situation). As they operate in the real world, of course, the lines of demarcation between these bulldozers of constraint is not nearly so clear. Person and situational influences reciprocally affect the other.

Outside-In (Group Effects)

Diffusion of Responsibility: One of the psychological barriers to violent action is anticipating a negative self-evaluation. This can be weakened by mitigating one's perceived culpability. Social psychological research suggests that people feel less responsible (or less culpable) when, either in the presence of, or on behalf of a group, they engage in transgressive behavior (or fail to engage in helping behavior). This phenomenon, labeled *diffusion of responsibility*, has been studied primarily in relation to bystander apathy and failures to act to help others[155]. This effect is similar to, but distinguishable from *displacement of responsibility*, where the actor mitigates his own culpability by noting that he committed the act under an order mandate from some authority. In such displacement, the actor attempts to absolve himself of intent because he is acting under orders. The superior attempts to absolve himself of involvements in the act because he merely issues a directive. Some of the same forces that Nazi soldiers attempted (unsuccessfully) to invoke as a defense for their war crimes, also operate within extremist and terrorist organizations.

Deindividuation: A not dissimilar social psychological process is known as deindividuation. According to classic deindividuation theory, when "individuals are not seen or paid attention to as individuals[156]" (p. 382), they lose their sense of self-awareness and consequently their inhibitions and restraints. The resulting condition is referred to as a "deindividuated state." This was the theory invoked to explain the behavior of student "guards" who participated in Phil Zimbardo's now famous Stanford Prison Experiment[157]. Factors such as anonymity, group presence, and physical arousal were hypothesized to facilitate a deindividuated state (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1982[158]; Silke, 2003[159]). Subsequent research, however, - including a meta-analysis of studies on the phenomenon – suggest that the observed disinhibited behavior may be better explained as a reaction of conformity to situation-specific norms, instead of by a fundamental change in one's psychological state that produces nonconformity to general social norms[160].

Obedience: We noted above that *displacement of responsibility* can occur in response to directions given from someone in a position of authority. The mechanism of obedience is that the actor, transfers his moral agency from self to the authority. Perhaps the best known research on this phenomenon is Stanley Milgram's (1983[161]) study in the 1960s in which students believed they were administering electrical shocks to other student participants. They continued to "increase" the shock intensity as instructed by the experimenter, even to levels they believed to be harmful or dangerous. The basic findings have been replicated by other researchers in other countries and cultures. Milgram

(1965[162]) noted that "a substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority."

Social Identity: If contemporary findings on the phenomenon of deindividuation are correct- that it is a behavioral response to situation-specific norms - then it offers support for Tajfel's (1982[163]) social identity theory. "Tajfel's theory suggests that we tend to structure our social environments in terms of groupings of persons, or social categories, thus simplifying the world we live in. These categories are to some extent based upon our own experiences but also largely determined by our society. Our knowledge of our own membership in various of these social categories is defined as our social identity and forms an important part of our self-concept. To enhance our social identity, we tend to behave in ways that make our own group acquire positive distinctiveness in comparison to other groups. If this is not possible we may seek to change our group membership; or if this is not possible, we may attempt a redefinition of the existing social situation so as to achieve a more positive social identity" (Cairns, 1987[164]). The implication is that group norms will define what is appropriate in a given situation. In this way, the norms of the group can offset or weaken an individual's barriers to non-normative or antisocial action. Reflecting on their interviews with middle eastern terrorists, Post and colleagues (2003[165]) conclude "as the individual and group fuse, the more personal the struggle becomes for the group members. An overarching sense of the collective consumes the individual. This fusion with the group seems to provide the necessary justification for their actions with an attendant loss of felt responsibility for the individual member."

Inside-Out (Cognitive Readjustment)

Albert Bandura (2004[166]) argues persuasively that "self sanctions play a role in the regulation of inhumane conduct. In the course of socialization, people adopt moral standards that serve as guides and deterrents for conduct. After personal control has developed, people regulate their actions by the sanctions they apply to themselves. They do things that give them self satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. They refrain from behaving in ways that violate their moral standards because such behavior brings self-condemnation. Self sanctions, thus, keep conduct in line with internal standards" (p. 121). He notes, however, that these self-sanctions can be selectively "activated and disengaged" to facilitate behavior that would otherwise violate one's own moral standard. He describes this process of breaking down barriers as "moral disengagement", which can operate through a variety of processes:

- moral justification,
- sanitizing language,
- disavowal of a sense of personal agency by diffusion or placement of responsibility,
- disregarding or minimizing the injurious effects of one's actions,
- attribution of blame to victims, and
- dehumanization of victims

Bandura (1990[167]; 2004[168]) argues that any or all of these can contribute to terrorism, but three factors have particular relevance and are supported by theory and empirical research both within and beyond a "social learning" framework.

Moral Justification: One way to remove the barrier of self-sanction is to change one's interpretation or appraisal of events so that they justify the act. Terrorists typically have some justification for their action, whether it is personally construed or derived from the group's ideology, "modern expressions of violence are indissoluably tied to justification" (Hacker, 1976[169]). Wasmund (1986[170]) emphasizes the power of collective ideology in providing an unquestionable justification for violence: "Precisely because group ideology affords terrorists a sense of legitimate and moral justification for their actions-the inhibition to kill is diminished through it and through it alone- it gains as it were a quasi-religious character, with a sacrosanct quality. Doubts are collectively suppressed."

Blaming Victims: It is generally more acceptable to target aggression at people who are considered blameworthy or deserving of retribution or "justice." Terrorists' rhetoric is often riddled with accusations and grievances toward their adversary. The adversary is deserving of violence not only because of who they are but because of what they do (or did). Terrorists are indeed collectors of injustices, and they invoke and use them to characterize the targets of their violence in ways that would justify aggression (at least within the structure of their ideology) and make the victim targets appear culpable, provocative, and unsympathetic. Consider, for example, the case Usama bin Laden makes for *jihad* against America: "The call to wage war against America was made because America has spear-headed the crusade against the Islamic *Ummah*, sending thousands of its troops to the land of the Two Holy Mosques over and above its meddling in its affairs and politics and its support of the oppressive, corrupt, and tyrannical regime that is in its control."

Dehumanizing Victims: Whether or not there exists some innate prohibition against intra-species killing, it certainly seems reasonable to conclude that it is more difficult to behave inhumanely toward a victim with whom one can identify than one who can be completely vilified and

objectified. "By declaring your enemies 'nonpersons,' and by denying their human qualities, moral scruples are blocked from the beginning" (Wasmund, 1986[171]). Terrorist rhetoric and ideologies often cast their adversaries in dehumanized terms. Typically, this either takes the form of comparison with unclean an unappealing animals (e.g., pigs) or truly demonizing them. Della Porta (1992[172]), for example, describes how Italian "militants justified their use of political violence by depersonalizing their victims, defined in the documents of the underground groups as "tools of the system" and, later as 'pigs' or 'watch dogs'. Berlet views demonization as a step beyond dehumanization, which, he argues, "fuels dualism-a form of binary thinking that divides the world into good versus evil with no middle ground tolerated" (Berlet, 2004[173]). Demonization, in essence," is a death sentence imposed on the adversary" (Falk, 1988[174]).

Summary

Not all extremist ideologies facilitate violence, nor are all extremists violent. One potentially useful distinction to consider is the "direction of activity;" that is, whether the focus is more on *promotion* of the "cause" or *destruction* of those who oppose it. Even within destruction-oriented extremism, it usually takes more than ideology to compel violent action. Psychological and social influences must erode the powerful, naturally-occurring barriers that inhibit widespread human killing. The two main avenues of assault on those barriers are : *Outside-In* (i.e., effects of the group or social environment) and *Inside-Out* (i.e., making an internal cognitive adjustment about how to perceive the environment or situation).

What are the vulnerabilities of terrorist groups?

"The same factors that aid in the formation of terrorist organizations may also be related to their decline." – Oots, 1989

Internal Factors

Internal mistrust: Terrorist organizations must maintain a reasonable level of internal security in order carry out operations and even to survive. They must be vigilant against outside infiltration – mindful always that they are under surveillance, under pursuit, and subjects of a hefty bounty. In addition to the tactical considerations to guard against defection, there are strategic ones as well – acting against the group compromises the power of the collective ideology. Fundamentally,

these dynamics create a climate of mistrust. The result is that "terrorists cannot trust one another" (Kellen, 1980[175]). The effects on the group:

- the greater the climate of suspicion, the more energy must be directed inward and not externally toward operations or goal directed activity;
- a climate of suspicion contributes to interpersonal tension throughout the group and also within specific relationships;
- within group coalitions or alliances may form that breed internal competition, erode unity, and disrupt cohesion.

Boredom/ inactivity: Groups are most vulnerable during periods of inactivity and when the perceptions of external threat are low. Threat and task-related activity bring group members closer together. They focus less on internal suspicions and tensions and more on their shared values and objectives. Operations generate excitement and unity, but the "intervening long periods of inactivity, when group members are cooped up somewhere underground, lead to great tensions and violent quarrels" (Kellen, 1980[176]). This factor is so critical to the functioning of terrorist organizations that McCauley and Segal (1989[177]) caution "without action and external threat, the group may destroy itself. "

*Internal power com*petition: Most groups, at some point, are vulnerable to internal power struggles. Stirrings of dissent may come from a variety of sources: concern about a particular decision by the leadership, collective restlessness bred by lengthy periods of inactivity, or the aggressive actions of a member who has the ability to influence others. Whatever their origin, Oots (1989[178]) observes that "internal struggles for the leadership of the organization are likely to divide the organization into factions and lead to its decline as well."

Major disagreements: Kellen (1980[179]) notes that often within terrorist groups, "there are big differences of opinion among terrorists on almost all subjects- tactical; ethical; the use of force; strategy and tactics; the proper assessment of past actions; and so on." Conflict, per se, is not unusual. In fact, some argue that in groups it's the rule rather than the exception. McCauley and Segal (1989[180]), for example, find that "an important factor in the psychosocial reality of terrorist groups is constant and pervasive conflict." Disagreements typically will have a greater impact on small groups or cells than on larger organizations and networks. Within larger groups, effective leaders can manage routine diversity and sometimes even mobilize it to their advantage. What is potentially most damaging is any disagreement about core elements of doctrine and ideology. One of the greatest dangers this poses is risk of factionalism. Crenshaw has observed that factionalism within large terrorist organizations is common. "When factionalism develops, the organization may cease to function and become instead a number of smaller groups, with each pursuing its own political agenda[181]."

While not formally discussing factionalism, in a classic work, Irving Janis (1968[182]), outlined four conditions found in factions ("units") that deviate from the larger organization:

- "most men in the unit have specific grievances against the subordinate organization, and feel resentful toward the top leadership for neglecting their needs, for inflicting unnecessary deprivations or for imposing extraordinary harsh demands which menace their personal welfare;

- the members perceive their group as having no channel open for communicating their grievances to the top levels of the hierarchy or are convinced that such communications would be wholly ineffective in inducing any favorable changes;

- the organization is perceived as having little or no opportunity for detecting the deviant behavior in question; and

- one or more central persons in the local unit communicates disaffiliative sentiments to the others and sets an example contrary to the organization's norms or by failing to use his power to prevent someone else in the same group from doing so."

External Factors

External support: No political or ideologically-driven organization can survive and thrive without a support network. "The types of support are financial, training, weapons, organizational, and operational. A group must be able to raise the resources necessary to provide sufficient incentives to attract and maintain a membership. Outside support is especially crucial to continuance of small terrorist groups" (Oots, 1989[183]). In addition, financial support mechanisms may alter the group's resources and they require transactions, connections, communications and activity that can be susceptible to detection. "Once terrorists lose their support from silent sympathizers, terrorists have difficulty surviving, and this reinforces the effectiveness of cutting them off from sources of international funding and logistic support" (Kernberg, 2003[184]). In considering the implications of support vulnerability for counterterrorism, Post and colleagues (2002[185]) suggest that "being familiar with sources of support is important because they offer clues to the group's intentions….. Changes in the type of support a group receives, particularly as support changes from more ideological and financial to weapons and operational assistance, are of particular concern."

Constituencies: The broader populace, which provides expressive and instrumental support for the terrorists or sympathy to their cause,

comprise the constituency of a terrorist organization. This can be an area of vulnerability because terrorist groups (especially, but not exclusively, secular ones) must consider the reactions of their constitutency in decisions about targets, tactics, and strategy. This may encourage or inhibit certain kinds of activity. Changes in the attitudes of the supporters can lead to changes in the organization. Indeed, "a group's constituents or supporters can either deter or encourage terrorist activity" (Post, et al., 2002[186]).

Inter-group Conflict: It has been noted that conflict is an immutable characteristic of terrorist groups; that it is constant and pervasive (McCauley & Segal, 1987[187]). Beyond the conflict that arises *within* a group, however, there are conflicts that arise *between* groups that can threaten the integrity or even the very existence of the terrorist organization. Other groups may be composed of factions from the main organization; separate collectives with similar ideologies vying for the same recruits and rewards; or militant groups with competing ideologies. Inter-group conflicts also can occur between the terrorists and a government or regime, and these can affect the relative degree of ease or difficulty with which the group operates.
Post (2001[188]) has suggested that an effective strategy for counterterrorism would be for the pursuing governments to exploit some of the internal and external vulnerabilities to disrupt the organization. Specifically, in congressional testimony, he argued the merits of the following long-term strategies:

- Inhibit potential terrorists from joining the group
- Produce dissension within the group
- Facilitate exit from the group,
- Reduce support for the group (Post, 2001[189])

There are, of course, also a host of vulnerabilities that are more tactical than strategic in character. These are often used as avenues for operational disruption, for example:

- Need for mobility
- Need to communicate
- Need to plan and conduct advance work
- Need to acquire technology and weapons capacity
- Need to obtain approval or permission
- Need to store, spend, and move funds
- Need to transport materials

Summary

Terrorist groups, like all social collectives, have certain vulnerabilities to their existence. Some come from within the organization, some operate from outside. Internal vulnerabilities include: internal mistrust, boredom/inactivity, competition for power, and major disagreements. Some of the more common external vulnerabilities include: external support, constituencies, and inter-group conflict.

How do terrorist organizations form, function, and fail?

"the group performing the act of terrorism is more significant than the individual." Crenshaw, 1992

Crenshaw (1985[190]) notes that there are several core structural similarities between political terrorist groups and other nonviolent voluntary organizations: Specifically, she notes the following parallels:

- "The group has a defined structure and processes by which collective decisions are made;
- Members of the organization occupy roles that are functionally differentiated;
- There are recognized leaders in positions of formal authority; and
- The organization has collective goals which it pursues as a unit, with collective responsibility claimed for its actions."

Another truism about groups, however, is that they are dynamic and constantly changing in structure, membership, culture, beliefs, perceptions, activity, unity, and dedication. In this section, we examine some observations on how terrorist organizations have changed over time, and take a careful look at what is known from the social science literature on terrorist recruitment, how groups sustain themselves, the role of leadership, and the processes by which terrorist groups decline.

"New" Terrorist Organizations

"Several recent works focus on a "new" terrorism that is motivated by religious belief and is more fanatical, deadly, and pervasive than the older and more instrumental forms of terrorism the world had grown accustomed to (e.g., Laqueur, 1999). This emerging "new" terrorism is

thought to differ from the "old" terrorism in terms of goals, methods, and organization (see Hoffman, 1999[191])" (Crenshaw, 2001[192]).

"From the end of World War II through the end of the Cold War, terrorist groups and activities were driven primarily by nationalistic interests. Most of these terrorists had similar, classic patterns: they belonged to discreet groups with hierarchical command structures; clearly defined ideology and objectives; that were relatively small in number; and struck selectively and primarily at targets selected for their symbolic value, rather than their potential to maximize casualties. After the attack, the responsible group often would identify itself and state the reason for the violent act. As Bruce Hoffman has so aptly stated: "however disagreeable or repugnant the terrorists and their tactics may have been, we at least knew who they were and what they wanted" (Borum, et al., 2004, p. 421[193]).

Recruitment

The ability to attract and indoctrinate young new recruits is critical to the long-term success of any terrorist organization (Oots, 1989[194]). Most extremist organizations have a relatively short lifespan; only those that thrive and are resilient will survive. If the organization is persistently active in high-risk operations, it is vulnerable to substantial losses from the capture, incarceration, or death of its members.

Remarkably little is written in the social science literature about recruitment in terrorist organizations. Most articles that even mention the issue have it only as a small piece of a larger analysis. Of the few who have reflected on the topic, one of the consistent themes seems to be that processes of recruitment into religious cults – for which there has been slightly more social science inquiry – might serve as a useful analogue to study the phenomenon among terrorists (Post, 1984[195]).

Three other promising factors are suggested by the current literature, but clearly this is an area in which further research is desperately needed. The three observations are as follows:

Terrorists focus their recruitment where sentiments about perceived deprivation are deepest and most pervasive.

This might be viewed through Gurr's lens of "relative deprivation" or in Borum's model, that which is "not right." This observation warrants a qualifying caveat, however, which is that not all terrorist organizations are looking for the same kinds of people, and different recruiting "pools" are more useful in identifying individuals for some kinds of group roles than for others. Most of the literature draws from an era in which organizations were less selective about initial recruits than are many

organizations of today. Militant terror networks may still recruit in some of the most impoverished, oppressed and destitute places in the world, but they do not *only* recruit there. Moreover, for militant *jihadists*, for example, the location where sentiments about what is "not right" may be strongest and most readily identified and expressed are in religious institutions. Thus, the recruiters' focus on "areas" of deepest sentiment is not necessarily bounded by socioeconomic factors.

Social networks and interpersonal relationships provide critical connections for recruitment into terrorist organizations.

One's network of social relationships and personal connections to specific individuals often play a key role in decisions to enter a terrorist group. Sometimes joining itself is a group decision among a young cohort. Della Porta (1992[196]), for example, notes that among Italian extremists, "the decision to join an underground organization was very rarely an individual one. In most cases it involved cliques of friends. In some cases recruitment was determined by the individual's solidarity with an "important" friend who was arrested or had to go underground." More recently, using open source material, Marc Sageman (2004[197]) analyzed the cases of approximately 172 global Salafi *mujahedin* and found that nearly two thirds "joined" the *jihad* collectively as part of a small group ("bunch of guys") or had a longtime friend who already had joined. For most terrorist recruits, their first approach or exposure to the terrorist organization comes from someone they know. In other cases, a recruiter may use new recruits to identify other prospects or leverage other important relationships to "hook" the individual. That leverage can be emotional (e.g., making the family proud or avenging harm done to a loved one) or material (e.g., financial reward that may come to one's family for conducting a martyrdom operation).

Effective terrorist recruiters either identify or impart upon the prospect a sense of urgency and imminence to "close the deal."

As we have noted, terrorist organizations always have a broader base of support than the cadre of "members" or active operatives. Not all believers are willing or impelled to act, especially violently. Terrorist organizations are dangerous places. Minimally, a recruit risks arrest; in some cases, certain death. For many who enter, the decision is not fully informed and they understandably are besieged by some underlying ambivalence, despite their endorsement of the "cause" (Kellen, 1980[198]). The recruiter is motivated to impart a sense of urgency to the decision, both because it fuels an impetus to action and it invokes a powerful dynamic of connection or cohesion to the group. Again, in Della Porta's (1992[199]) sample of Italian militants, in addition to the social network, the other precipitating cause for recruitment was "the militants' perception of a situation of emergency." For reasons that should be clear from reviewing justifications for violence, a recruit's

connection to the group is a critical foundation for facilitating the ability to kill.

Self- Sustaining Functions

"A basic principal of organizational psychology-that the survival of the organization is the highest priority-applies fully to terrorist organizations." Post (1989)

Any mission-oriented collective must balance its mission-oriented activity with a measure of attention to the functional and relational status of the group. A purely organizational approach to understanding extremist groups would argue that maintaining its own existence is its sole purpose (Crenshaw, 1985[200]). The ideology or mission (and its associated activity) simply becomes a means to an end. While it may not be the *only* motive it certainly is an important consideration. If the group sees itself as the "banner bearer" for the cause, then their desistence signals its defeat. Two of the key tasks in sustaining the group are to maintain cohesion (so they are not dissolved by dissention) and to maintain loyalty (so that they will not deviate, defect or leave the group).

Cohesion Management

Cohesion means sticking together. The technical use of the term derives from a molecular description of a state in which particles of a homogenous body are held together. As long as members are sticking together and feeling and acting as part of a "homogenous" body, the organization can resist a multitude of internal and external threats. What we know about cohesiveness in groups is that it is strongest in times of collective activity and perceptions of external threat. This is such a robust finding that even in the 1960s, Janis (1968[201]) observed that "It has long been known that when people are exposed to external danger they show a remarkable increase in group solidarity. That is, they manifest increased motivation to retain affiliation with a face-to-face group and to avoid actions that deviate from its norms." This, in part, is why good leaders of militant organizations are constantly talking about the adversary and reminding members that they are under siege. Paradoxically, the threat of the enemy is necessary to sustain the group. As framed by Jerrold Post (1989[202]): "Terrorist groups require enemies in order to cope with their own internal tensions, and if such enemies do not exist they create them." If group cohesion is not monitored and managed either by the leader or the group process, then dissention can stir, tensions may rise, and "when a lack of internal cohesiveness leads to competition, it can also lead to the decline of the organization" (Oots, 1989[203]).

Loyalty Management

To ensure its own survival (as well as its tactical success) group members must have a sense of allegiance to the organization. Although the "mission" of the organization may nominally center on an ideology –religious or secular- most often feelings of loyalty and fidelity are directed toward people, rather than ideas (Crenshaw, 1992[204]). One may maintain loyalty to the collective because of personal unwavering devotion to a charismatic leader, or, more commonly, because of a shared sense of obligation among members. Loyalty is necessary, not only in the hearts and minds of the followers, but in their actions as well. Groups have their own rules and standards, and any deviation from them may be cast as a betrayal of the group. Some are deterred from deviation or leaving by fear of severe sanctions. Hans Joachim Klein of the Baader-Meinhof said of his own efforts to leave that: "There is no exit except via the cemetery." Others are kept in line by factors such as "mutual interdependence, peer pressure, sensitivity to betrayal, and security risks" (Crenshaw, 1992[205]).

Role of Leadership

"Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities." Voltaire

There is an extensive social science literature on the nature of leadership; however, very little is written about how or even whether leadership in terrorist organizations might be different. Fundamentally, a leader is an agent of influence. Some leaders hold positions of legitimate rank and authority; others count themselves among the rank and file. Effective leaders must attend simultaneously to the task and mission of the group, as well as to the processes and relationships within it. One conclusion seems clear about effective group leadership, and that is there is not one right way to lead every organization at all times.

Strentz (1981[206]) attempted to construct a psychological portrait of the terrorist leader. According to this profile, "the leader shows the fewest signs of self-interest. This personality is rigid, dedicated, overly suspicious, and highly motivated. She or he projects personal faults and inadequacies onto others and ascribes evil motives to those who disagree. The leader is convinced of her righteousness and the underlying evil of those who oppose her. The leaders primary defense mechanism is projection. She specializes. The leader is dedicated, but not as delusional as the paranoid personality. She or he is not mentally ill. The leader can read people well and appeal to their needs."

In contemporary discourse, discussions of leadership in terrorist organizations very often turn quickly to the notion of the "charismatic leader." Characteristically, such a leader has a confident physical presence, is educated, experienced, well spoken and regarded as intelligent. The "charisma" gives these leaders an emotional appeal that can motivate the members to action and, which powerfully and uniquely fosters unquestioning obedience and loyalty their followers. Charismatic people in positions of authority are not always good leaders. Conversely, effective leaders do not necessarily need to be charismatic. Good leaders understand their own strengths and weaknesses and structure their environment accordingly.

Crenshaw (1992[207]) outlines several key leadership tasks that would apply to most terrorist organizations. These provide a useful framework through which to examine the role of leadership.

To maintain a collective belief system

"A key role of the leadership is to develop or maintain a collective belief system that links overall ideological orientation to the environment in which the group operates" (Crenshaw, 1992[208]). The leader should be able to clearly articulate the vision and mission of the group, passionately defend its ideology, and authoritatively keep the group ethos stable and cohesive. The leader should be able to teach and persuade others on the tenets of the beliefs system and quickly silence any harbingers of disbelief.

To establish and maintain organizational routines

"Once recruits enter such groups, leaders try to teach them a certain set of values and to develop organizational routines that make violence easier to perform" (Crenshaw, 1992[209]). The organization's leader must assume primary responsibility for socializing its members, and particularly for providing structure. Structure in one's environment and routine reduces anxiety and facilitates compliance, as the performance of certain tasks becomes almost mechanical. The leader uses these to help maintain a sense of cohesion and collective identity.

To control the flow of communication

As arbiters of the collective belief system, leaders must control operational, strategic and doctrinal communication. They typically maintain a "one voice" policy, where dissent and differences are not tolerated in public and not encouraged in private. Even if the leader chooses not to be a "hub" of communication or even its primary voice, the ultimate mechanism and rules for communication flow must be under his or her control.

To manipulate incentives (and purposive goals) for followers

"Irrespective of their ideological commitment, the job of the leadership in the formative stage of the organization is to develop selective incentives that are sufficient to attract members" (Oots, 1989[210]). Once engaged in the organization, the leader needs to monitor – and modify as needed – the incentives (both political and psychological) to determine whether they are still "resonating" with the needs of young recruits and whether they are sufficient to maintain cohesion and loyalty among the collective members. "Crenshaw points out that a group's leader may even alter the purposive goals of the organization in order to maintain the group and recruit new members" (Oots, 1989[211]).

To deflect conflict to external targets

"Because internal conflict threatens group cohesion and identity, the leader may try to deflect aggression onto external targets" (Crenshaw 1992[212]). If, as so many have suggested, conflict in extremist groups is constant and pervasive, a leader should have an arsenal of strategies not only to deter it, but to manage its potentially destructive influence. The task of the leader is to redirect the tension and hostility from within the group to without – to aim those energies at the adversary and mobilize them in service of a collective goal.

To keep action going

"Leaders must keep the action going or lose control of their followers" (Crenshaw 1992[213]). We have already noted that periods of inactivity create peak experiences of vulnerability for terrorist groups. Leaders keep the group vigilant and mindful of how wicked the adversary truly is and how grave of a threat they pose, not just to the mission, but also to the group's very existence. By keeping actions and planning at a constant pace, the group's attention continues to be focused outwardly, and it is difficult to sustain an environment where dissent might fester.

The leader of a terrorist organization must constantly concern and preoccupy him or herself with each of these tasks, as "the loss of leadership may bring about the disintegration of the terrorist group" (Oots, 1989[214]).

Decline of Organizations

No organization can expect to endure forever. No extremist organization can expect to make it through the first year unless it either has extraordinarily good fortune, competent leadership and nurturance or both. According to David Rapoport, 90% of nascent terrorist groups last less than a year. Among the terrorist organizations with any staying power, the ethno nationalist groups - with their lucid objectives and

ready pool of available support - have fared reasonably well, despite consistent failure to achieve their ultimate objectives (Hoffman, 1999[215]).

There are numerous pathways by which a terrorist organization is eliminated or falls into decline. Some are cannibalized by internal vulnerabilities and conflicts; others are decimated by government disruption

Crenshaw describes three sources or mechanism of organizational decline among terrorist groups[216]:

- *Defeat*: The organization is destroyed physically
- *Strategic shift*: The group makes a rational decision to abandon terrorism in favor of other modes of political behavior.
- *Internal disintegration*: Internal factors, e.g., dissatisfaction of members, attrition through death, result in the organization's demise.

Ross and Gurr conceptualize the pathways to decline somewhat differently. They have posed the following four sources of decline[217]:

- *Preemption*. The authorities make it impossible for the group to act.
- *Deterrence*. The authorities increase the costs and risks to the group.
- *Burnout*. Members commitment to the organization and its goal diminish
- *Backlash*. Political support for the organization declines.

Summary

The primary objective of any group is to maintain its own survival or existence as a collective. Its long-term success depends on its ability to ability to attract and indoctrinate a steady stream of young new recruits. Surprisingly little research or analysis has been conducted on terrorist recruitment. Three tentative conclusions are as follows: (1) Terrorists focus their recruitment where sentiments about perceived deprivation are deepest and most pervasive; (2) Social networks and interpersonal relationships provide critical connections for recruitment into terrorist organizations; and (3) Effective terrorist recruiters either identify or impart upon the prospect a sense of urgency and imminence to “close the deal.” The group must be able to maintain both cohesion and loyalty. Effective leaders of terrorist organizations must be able to: maintain a collective belief system; establish and maintain organizational routines; control the flow of communication; manipulate incentives (and purposive goals) for followers; deflect conflict to external targets; and keep action going.

Section 6

Conclusions on the State of Research

Terrorism is a relatively recent topic of interest in the field of psychology. "The *Psychological Abstracts*, the most authoritative compendium of academic publications psychology, listed no reference to terrorism or related terms, such as 'hostages' or 'hijacking,' until the end of 1981. By this criterion, academic psychology recognized terrorism as a subject worthy of consideration only in 1982. In that year, *Psychological Abstracts* listed ten publications under this topic." Ariel Merari[218]

General conclusions

The objective of this review was not primarily to provide a detailed methodologically-based critique of social science research in the field of terrorism studies. Rather, our goal was to explore what questions pertaining to terrorist groups and behavior had been asked by social science researchers; to identify the main findings from that research; and attempt to distill and summarize them within a framework of operationally relevant questions.

Regarding an appraisal on the "state of the research," our incidental critique is akin to taking its temperature. Based on this review, however, the prognosis is not particularly favorable. This is particularly true if one is interested in research that might directly inform counterterrorism operations. Several rigorous, comprehensive reviews of the existing literature have been conducted at various intervals over the past fifteen years. The researchers come from diverse orientations, but their conclusions are strikingly similar, and unfortunately, consistent over time:

- "There are probably few areas in the social science literature in which so much is written on the basis of so little research.

Perhaps as much as 80 percent of the literature is not research-based in any rigorous sense…." (Schmid & Jongman, 1988[219])

- "With a few clusters of exceptions there is, in fact, a disturbing lack of good empirically-grounded research on terrorism" (Gurr, 1988, p.2). "This may well be an understatement" (Merari,1991[220]).

- "Ultimately, terrorism research is not in a healthy state. It exists on a diet of fast food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious….. It was found that the problems identified in1988 remain as serious as ever" (Silke, 2001[221]).

Certain general conclusions can be discerned about the current state of research on psychology of terrorism:

There still is no agreed upon definition of terrorism

By the late 1980s, there were more than 100 definitions of terrorism that had appeared in the professional literature[222]. Some researchers are concerned that without a common definition, it won't be possible for the field to systematically accumulate a body of knowledge.

Most of the existing research is not empirical or based on any data

Andrew Silke (2001[223]) systematically reviewed all terrorism research published in the field's primary journals during the five-year period from 1995-99. More than 80% of the articles were "thought pieces" or based on information taken from media sources, with less than 20% providing substantially new knowledge based on previously unavailable data. Moreover, "just over three per cent of research papers in the major terrorism journals involved the use of inferential analysis…Terrorism articles rarely incorporate statistics and when they do they are nearly five times more likely to be just descriptive statistics. Barely one article in 30 published in the past five years incorporated inferential analysis." The reasons for this relative lack of empirical inquiry are varied, but include difficulty gaining access to terrorists as subjects for research (because they may be dead, underground, or incarcerated) and inability of many academic researchers to access classified data or information.

Existing research is largely inapplicable to operational considerations

Merari (1991[224]) has aptly characterized the limitations of academic contributions to terrorism studies: "Academic contributions on

terrorism have often been occasional and amateurish, lacking in factual knowledge of the subject matter. Many of them are too theoretical to have an applicability value and some are too speculative to be reliable. It seems that the majority of the academic contributions in this area have been done by people whose main research interests lie elsewhere, who felt that they had something to say on this juicy and timely subject. Usually, a contribution of this kind is well-grounded in the empirical and theoretical findings of the writer's particular area of expertise, but lacking in knowledge of terrorism."

The Bottom Line

In 1989, Jerrold Post reflected on the state of our research-based knowledge of terrorist behavior. His conclusion was that: "Our understanding of terrorist psychology is primitive at best. Nevertheless, behavioral scientists attempting to understand terrorist psychology are making encouraging-if halting- progress in developing an evidence-based knowledge base concerning the psychology of terrorists" (Post,1989[225])

Based on a review of the subsequent research, in 2000 Andrew Silke (2001[226]) concluded that: "Our knowledge of terrorism most certainly is deficient but the field shows no clear ability to improve this situation. After 30 years of study, we simply should know more about terrorism than we currently do. That we continue to languish at this level of ignorance on such a serious subject is a cause of grave concern."

Future directions

Although Merari (1991[227]) has been highly critical of psychologists' contributions to terrorism research, he also has suggested two potential avenues for more productive inquiry: "(1) In-depth studies of the specific terrorist groups, describing ideology, motivations, structure, decision-making processes, demographic and personality characteristics, etc. (2) Problem oriented studies cutting across time and places. These are basically comparative studies looking into issues such as conditions leading to escalation in the level of terrorist violence, anti terrorism legislation, the utility of deterrence as applied to terrorist groups and to terrorism-sponsoring states, factors influencing the success of amnesty programs for terrorists, political negotiations with terrorist groups, hostage negotiations, etc.."

Perhaps the clearest vision of a future research agenda on the psychology of terrorism is provided by one of the field's pioneers, Martha Crenshaw. Her appraisal is as follows: "The study of terrorism

should go beyond a concentration on current events or speculation about the future to develop systematic analysis of the development of the phenomenon over time. First, little is known about why the users of terrorism would abandon the strategy. Research should try to identify the psychological incentives for giving up violence. A second area for fruitful research concerns the development of strategies of terrorism. In particular, what leads to innovation in terrorist behavior, such as hostage-takings or the resort to weapons of mass destruction? Another research area that has been neglected is the study of decision-making in the area of counter terrorism (see also Crenshaw, 1990). What is needed is an investigation of the effects of different policies on a range of groups with different motivations, organizational structures, and social relationships. An additional research concern is the public reaction to terrorism. Last, the study of psychological motivations for terrorism, as well as for ending terrorism, should continue to be based on a model that integrates the individual, the group, and society" (Crenshaw, 2001[228]).

Based on the profound limitations in operational relevance encountered in the present review, we would advance the recommendation that research should be designed and conducted to answer key questions of operational interest to professionals who work to prevent and counter terrorism. In academic circles, the nature and extent of partnerships between researchers and government counterterrorism agencies is a matter of some debate. While there are reasonable scientific and professional arguments on both sides of the issue, our concern here has less to do with advancing the scientific study of the social phenomenon of terrorism than it does with the desire for prevention and interdiction strategies to be informed by the results of systematic inquiry. We suggest that a model of operational research be applied to address some critical questions in counterterrorism research. That research model is based on the following principles[229]:

> *First, the research endeavor must be operationally-informed*. The design of the inquiry must begin with an understanding of the key ultimate questions that end users (e.g., investigators, intelligence analysts, defense and security decision-makers) routinely are required to answer, the threshold decisions they are required to address, and the environment in which that process occurs.
>
> *Second, the study should maintain a behavior-based focus*. When exploring the realm of terrorism, or other violent behavior, it may seem intriguing or even tempting to speculate about the personality or internal dynamics of the actors. These questions may have some theoretical or even scientific merit, but they are unlikely to produce operationally-relevant findings.

Third, the interpretation or lessons from the study must derive from an analysis of incident-related behaviors. This means that facts should drive conclusions. Those designing and analyzing the research should recognize that preconceived notions, assumptions, or conventional wisdom may be wrong. One of the major objectives of research is to submit ideas and hypotheses to critical scrutiny. Operational research should set aside preconceptions about what "causes" the behavior, and redirect interest to what behaviors precede the outcome.

We believe that applying this research method to cases of terrorism could produce findings that would help to guide information gathering, intelligence analysis, resource deployment, identification of inter-systems relationships, and information integration. Those advances can lead to more effective use of information in the intelligence-driven war against the new terrorism.

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