

# Why Revolutions & Political Violence Occur – Is There a Link & Logic to Terrorism?

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## Theories.....

- Why a Revolution happens in one place and not another is the critical issue.
- For MVZ 203 / 448, our task is: Why do some individuals turn to terrorism, but most individuals do not? How do we understand this phenomenon? Is it new? Different? The same as it ever was?
- There are three general theories that explain why revolutions happen.
- The theories tend to overlap and include the other, and in essence it depends more on where the emphasis is put.

## Three General Theories...

- 1. Ideological/Nationalist
- 2. Behaviorialism/Rational Choice
- 3. Structuralist

## Ideological

- Ideological can be divided into two sub sections and one *sub-sub section*:
  - a) nationalism
  - b) justice, and
  - C) *religious/political*
- a) Nationalism is the reason that underlies many of the revolutions in Africa post W.W.II. Most were in response to colonialism.

## Ideology

- The attraction of nationalism as an ideology was widespread and an obvious route to self-empowerment.
- Poverty alongside the knowledge or sense that there was no access to social mobility -- unless you were European.
  - According to the colonized, all Europeans were wealthy .

## Ideology

- The belief was that if the Europeans left, they would leave their wealth behind and the poor would then have enough.
- European educational institutes taught European history including how Europeans threw off their own dictatorships (monarchies) to be free and equal, and to live with the dignity that accompanies a democracy.

## Nationalist Revolutions

- Hence, European history and culture became the “toolbox” from which the colonized extracted what they needed: civil rights, democracy, sovereignty, and nationalism.
- Nationalist revolutions were the easiest – and most successful type of revolution to wage: it made so much sense that it is easy to persuade the masses to support the goals of independence.

## Nationalist Revolutions

- There is no counterrevolution: once the European colonial administration is dismantled, colonial administrators leave.
- Other countries did not tend to invade because of the strength of a nationalist revolution.
- By definition, it is not a threat to other states.

## Nationalist Goals are Undisputed: The Logic is Clear

- The national revolutionary group does not have to invent a different economic system -- nor set out to destroy a middle and upper class – the class element tends to be less divisive.
- A nationalist revolution has as its goal a Western nation/state; that is, one that is developed, egalitarian, sovereign.
- Generally however, the achievement of this for most post colonial states has been almost totally out of reach.

## Justice as a Centerpiece...

- What underlies nationalism is an idea of the status quo not being *just or fair*.
- Philosophers have suggested that humanity is fundamentally a meaning-shaping species.
  - Implicit is the issue of morality..we are “moralizing creatures:” what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s good and what’s evil.
- Diaries and autobiographies of guerilla fighters show that the majority were motivated by justice.

## Injustice Sustaining Revolutions..

- Latin America had the highest division of wealth in the world, where less than 10% of the population own 70% of the country's wealth.
- The sense of injustice in this pattern of distribution was recognized by the majority:
  - many supported “movements” which emerged in their countries.
  - It is the idea of justice that sustained the “guerilla fighter” when conditions worsened.

## Behavioralism

- *Behavioralism* is a sub-field of psychology that tried to give a *rational* explanation for human behavior.
- Theorist Ted Gurr, in *Why Men Rebel*, suggested that people respond aggressively when they feel that they are denied something that they are promised or that they *feel entitled* to.

## Relative Deprivation

- This is called 'relative deprivation' not absolute deprivation... because it's relative to what one thinks one should have.
- Deprivation is contextual:
  - While the aggression may be initially focused, in a situation of systemic inequality, it can spiral into broad based revolution which (attempts to) overthrow the status quo.

## Relative Deprivation & Economics

- Relative deprivation theory was enhanced by a study which plotted revolutions in relation to the economy.
- Studies have shown that revolutions occurred when after prolonged periods of strong economic growth and social development, a period of sharp reversal or downturns followed.
- Often, hard- won ground gained during the periods of growth are drastically diminished.

## Rational Choice Theory, Behavior (RCB): The Logic of Terrorism

- According to rational choice theorist, Martha Crenshaw, 'terrorism can be understood as an expression of political strategy.'
- Terrorism follows logical processes that can be explained..
  - That is terrorist behavior – the resort to violence – is a willful choice made by an organization for political and strategic reasons, rather than the unintended outcome of psychological or social factors.

## The Logic of Terrorism Through RCB

- Terrorism displays a "collective rationality."
- The radical group/political organization is the central actor in the "terrorist drama," and possesses collective preferences or values.
- Terrorism is the *course of action selected* from a range of other (perceived) alternatives.
- According to Crenshaw, regular decision-making procedures are employed to make an intentional choice in conscious anticipation of the consequences.

## Strategic Choices

- Organizations reach collective judgments about the relative effectiveness of different strategies of opposition, on the basis of abstract strategic conceptions derived from ideological assumptions.
  - Social learning theories come into play here.
- Issue of “free-riding” have made the benefits of terrorism more psychological when looking at traditional rational choice analysis.
  - Strategic analysis shows that people can be collectively rational
    - realizing that size and cohesion are important as are the implications of free-riding.

## Collective Rational Strategic Choice

- Advantages of “collective rational strategic choice” theory:
  - A standard can be created from which deviations can be measured, I.e. for research/intelligence purposes.
  - Although miscalculations and imperfect knowledge are inevitable, it is useful to perceive terror groups as having a clear strategy
  - Issue of “limited rationality.”
  - Wide range of terrorist activity cannot be dismissed as “irrational” pathological, unreasonable, inexplicable: not necessarily an aberration, but a response to circumstances –moral inhibitions are overcome.

## Terrorism as a Choice

- Terrorist claim that there is no other choice but violence/terror.
- In several cases, terror followed the failure of other methods:
  - E.g. In the Palestinian-Israeli struggle, terror followed the failure of Arab efforts at conventional warfare against Israel.
  - Non-state or sub-state users of terror are constrained in their options by a) the lack of mass support and b) superior power aligned against them.

## Terror as a Sign of Weakness

- Small organizations resort to violence to compensate for their lack in numbers; the imbalance between the resources mobilized and the power of the regime is a decisive consideration in decision making.
- Terrorism is often perceived as the weapon of the weak, but is *actually* the explanation *for weakness*: why does an organization lack the potential to attract a large support base (to change government policy or overthrow it)?
  - Incompatibility of preferences; extreme political/religious/ideological position: e.g. Italians did not support aims of neo-fascist groups in the late 1960s: groups such as the ETA in Spain or the Provisional Irish Republican Party (PIRA) appeals exclusively to ethnic, religious or other minorities – hence fixed and limited boundaries.

## Terror as a Strategy of the Weak

- Failure to mobilize support is another reason that terror is utilized:
  - Resources are limited, organizational work is difficult and slow, and rewards are not immediate.
    - In an authoritarian state, the problem is worsened.
    - Oftentimes when the use of violence is combined with non-violent organizing strategies, the latter suffers the consequences. For example many groups have split as a result of the tensions incurred between wanting to use violence – Red Brigades, and wanting to maintain a peaceful organizational efforts – left-wing Italian organizations. The IRA and Sinn Fein is another example.

## Terror as a Tool of the Weak

- The weakness of terror groups is also central to repressive regimes.
- People may not support a groups because of fear of countermeasures/revolution: hence groups will misperceive support.
- Time constraints lend themselves to the decision to use terror.

## Advantages of Terror

- Terrorism can put the issue of political change on the public agenda: 'resistance' is put on the public's mind by attracting attention.
- Terrorism can (be intended to) create revolutionary conditions; it can prepare the ground for mass revolt by undermining the government's authority and demoralizing major institutions – courts, police, military.
- By spreading insecurity, the regime may be pressured into making concessions

## Hostage Taking as a Bargaining Tool

- Terrorists take hostages because a government's strength and resources are not an immediate advantage.
- Kidnappings, hijackings and barricade-type seizures of embassies or public buildings are attempts to manipulate a government's political decision.
- Strategic analysis of bargaining terrorism assumes that the terrorists seek the concessions they demand: it does not allow for the possibility of deception or hostage taking as an end in itself (because of the publicity benefits).
- HT is a form of blackmail or extortion; hostages are seized to affect a government's choices.

## Paradoxes of Hostage Taking

- The threat to kill hostages must be credible, but control over the situation can only be maintained as long as the hostages are alive.
- One strategy is to make the threat sequential – that is by killing one hostage at a time: this shows the terrorists' commitment to carrying out the threat.
- Barricading is another terrorist strategy: when they are trapped with their hostages, it's more difficult to back down: the government expects desperate behavior because the losses are greater for the terrorist.

## Cost-Benefits of Bargaining

- Terrorists try to make their demands legitimate by asking for food to be distributed to the poor: rewarding compliance is not easy to reconcile with making threats credible.
- If terrorists use publicity to emphasize their threat to kill hostages, they also increase the costs of compliance for the government.
- Prolonging the hostage crisis increases the costs to both sides: Bargaining depends on the existence of a common in a common interest between two parties – bargaining theories assume that preferences of each side remain stable during negotiations.

## Changing Preferences, Breaking the Stalemate

- Often the nature and intensity of preferences may change throughout the incidence: embarrassment over the Iran-Contra scandal may have decreased the US's interest in ensuring the release of hostages in Lebanon.
- Bargaining is not useful if a government is willing to accept the maximum cost rather than concede: I.e. Tupacamaru in Uruguay in late 1970s.: Hostage Taking at Entebbe, Uganda of Israelis by the PLO, etc.
- The government's options are not restricted to resistance or compliance; armed rescue attempts break the stalemate.
- Terrorists may also provoke military intervention.

## Structuralist Arguments

- Structural explanations include how colonialism and the violence that emerges in response to it, is part of the structure of society -- as is the status quo of repression, vast inequalities, and the culture of poverty.
- Structuralist explanations tend to focus on historical explanations for why revolutionary/terrorist tendencies exist.

## Structural Arguments

- Society is structured in such a way to benefit only a small sector of the population -- society thus inherently creates the seeds of its own destruction.
- Society (as it stands) creates no avenues for political expression.
- Expression is ultimately gotten through alternative and more violent means. In this way, poor countries tend to be perceived as more prone to revolutionary activity.

## Structuralist Economic Arguments

- Structuralists will tend to focus on economic characteristics of a country – and international system:
  - world systems theory, imperialism, neo-colonialism, proxy powers, I.e. how Israel is perceived by domestic and international terror organizations.
- The structuralist argument alongside behavioralist explanations are used most of the time (when ideology and nationality are not central) -- particularly presently.