

Weeks Five, Six:
Explaining Terrorism & Political
Violence From 4GW to 5GW &
Fifth Wave Tribalism

MU MVZ 203 / 448
Spring 2010
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This is Section Builds on our
Previous Discussions of
Radicalization & Waves of
Terrorism Activities Among States &
Sub-State, Non-State Actors
Continuing our Explanations of
Terrorism & Political Violence

General Explanations for Terrorism

- Rational / Rationalist Approach
- Cultural Approach
- Structural(ist) Approach
- Other Competing Approaches as laid out by Sageman and Hoffman

What Makes a Terrorist? Explaining Political Violence

To rationalists, war is not fundamentally different from other forms of political violence, including terrorism. Thus ...

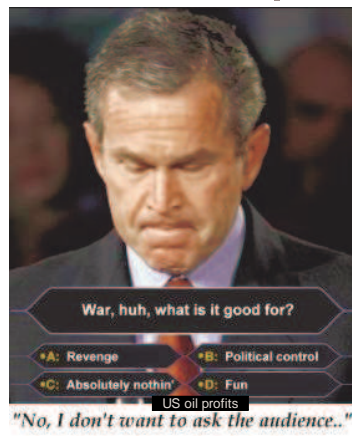
The Rationality of War (Political Violence)

Key Point



- ***So, is war (or political violence) good for “absolutely nothing”?***
- How would a rationalist answer?

HINT: While war may not be good for everyone - especially those who fight it - it may be very “good” for others



What Makes a Terrorist? Explaining Political Violence

The Logic of Terrorism

- ... to understand the rational choice explanation of terrorism, we must begin with a basic assumption, namely, ...

**Terrorism is a rational
act**

What does it mean to say that terrorism is “rational”? What are the implications of this premise?

What Makes a Terrorist? Explaining Political Violence

The Logic of Terrorism

- **Key Implications**

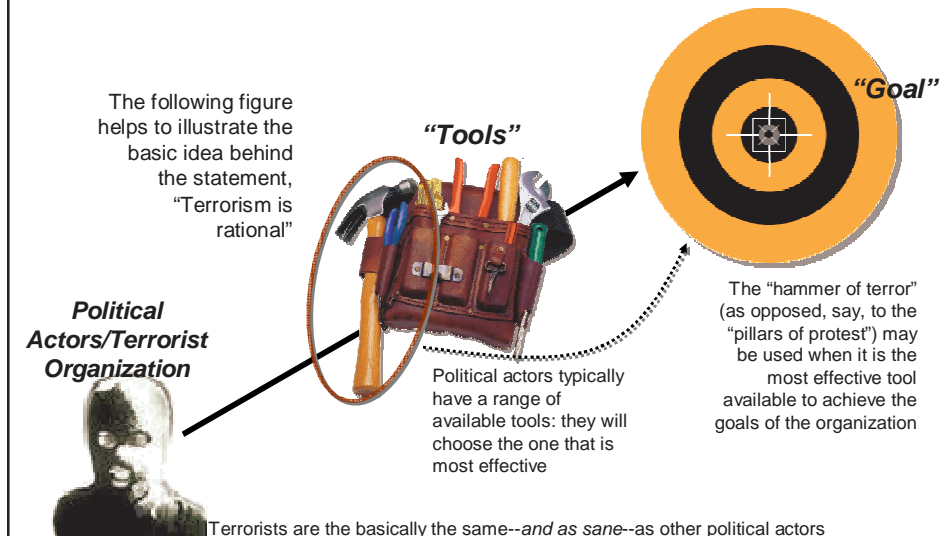
To say that terrorism is rational is to say that terrorists are not crazy, that they are not “abnormal” or otherwise suffering from a psychological disorder that compels them to behave in a pathologically violent manner

To say that terrorism is rational is to say that terrorists, like everyone else, have specific, “reasonable” goals they wish to achieve through their actions; terroristic violence is, in this regard, an instrument or means to an end

To say that terrorism is rational is to say that terrorists engage in a rational process of strategic calculation; that they weigh the costs and benefits of many options and choose the “best” alternative among many

What Makes a Terrorist?, cont'd

The Logic of Terrorism: A Simple Idea



What Makes a Terrorist?, cont'd

The Logic of Terrorism: Key Implications

- **Real World Implications:** Consider one argument made by Patrick Rael, which presupposes that terrorists, such as Osama bin Laden, are rational actors ...

"Of all the misinformation, half-truths, and outright lies about terrorism put forth by the Bush Administration, none is as pernicious as the one repeated by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer ... [and others in the Bush administration]. Echoing a claim Bush has frequently made since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Bremer asserted, with all the authority his 14 months as special envoy to Iraq confers, that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. because they 'hate freedom.'

However reprehensible the attacks on September 11 were, responding effectively to the threat they represent requires the courage to confront the situation truthfully. Seeking to comprehend Islamist Jihadists by facilely asserting that they simply hate freedom is about as sensible as, well, invading a non-Islamist state such as Iraq in the hopes of destroying Islamist terrorism. It does not serve the truth, nor the security of the American people, but only the short-sighted and misguided political aims of those in power."

Citation: "Do They Really Hate Freedom? The Myth of the Insane Terrorist"
By Patrick Rael, Professor of History, Bowdoin College

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

The Logic of (Suicide)Terrorism

- **A Logical Quandary?**

Can suicide terrorism be considered a rational act?

The answer is not at all clear; what is clear, though, is that suicide attacks can be **effective**, very effective. Indeed, they can be one of the most effective “tools” in the arsenal of terrorist organizations

For terrorist *organizations*, suicide attacks represent a relatively low cost way of achieving a political goal: consider the suicide attacks launched by *Hizballah* against the US and French military contingents stationed in Beirut in 1983.

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

The Logic of Terrorism

- If terrorism is a rational act, we must still explain why the choice of terrorism is made, why individuals become terrorists

The answer should already be clear ...

Individuals turn to terrorism when they believe that no other viable option exists to achieve a political goal; terrorism arises when the “benefits” of using political violence outweigh the “costs

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

The Logic of Terrorism

- The lack of viable options is a key to understanding terrorism. It tells us, among other things, that ...

Terrorism is a response to **objective conditions** - political, social or economic inequality, injustice, oppression, exclusion, and so on (conversely, that terrorism is less likely in the absence of inequality, oppression, injustice, and exclusion)

Terrorism is rarely a *first* response; instead, it is typically a **last resort**, an option used when all other methods have failed or are doomed to fail

Terrorism is (relatively speaking) a **“weapon of the weak”**

Terrorism is most intense in places where inequality, injustice, or oppression are very high; however, if the costs are too high, if any resistance is absolutely doomed to failure, then terrorism would not be

Examples: in Soviet Russia, in North Korea, in Iraq under Hussein, there was relatively little, even no significant terrorist activity. State power was so extensive and effective that the likelihood of successful terrorist activity was practically zero

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

The Logic of Terrorism

- **Rationality, Mistakes, and Constraints: Additional Points**

Terrorists, while rational, often make serious, even deadly miscalculations; some decisions, in short, are very bad ones

One reason is the lack of perfect information; in addition, strategic interaction makes any outcome problematic

Another reason is the fact that they typically face overwhelming odds *against* success in the first place: consider Hizballah's confrontation against Israel and the United States ...

Hizballah's leaders recognized that they were no match militarily to the US and Israel, so even under the best-case scenario, failure was always a strong possibility

End of rational choice argument

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- Most culturalists would agree that there is a strong relationship between culture and political violence; the relationship, however, should not be described as strictly causal...

~~Particular cultures make terrorists~~ Culture *can* make large-scale terrorism possible*

* Under *certain* conditions and in *certain* political, social or economic contexts; moreover, pretty much *any* culture--from Islamic, to Hindi, to Christian, to Jewish-- has this same potential



Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- **Important Caveat**

Culture or cultural factors do not act alone. The importance of culture as a variable must always be understood within particular contexts

→ What does this mean? What "particular type of contexts" might matter?

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- While culture and cultural factors do not act alone, culture can still be said to have an **autonomous effect** insofar as culture may provide a **necessary basis** for collective (as opposed to individual) action
- That is, one might say that without an appeal to cultural or religious symbols, certain collective undertakings would be difficult if not impossible to achieve
 - *This is probably more accurate with terrorism than with other types of collective endeavors since becoming a terrorist requires an extraordinarily high level of commitment and risk--and sometimes certain death*

Consider the points made by both Hoffman and Sageman: Even relatively privileged individuals become terrorists. Their behavior cannot be explained by rational factors alone: it would make much more sense for privileged individuals to **free ride** on the efforts of others. To fully explain their choices requires an understanding of how culture can have a fundamental impact on an individual's identity, thinking and perceptions.

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

• The Case of Terrorism in Lebanon

The larger context: Prior to the emergence of terrorism in Lebanon, Lebanese society was characterized by the **unequal division** of political and economic privileges between Muslims and Christians

Domestic inequality was exacerbated by the country's weak security situation, both domestically and internationally: Lebanon was subject to two military incursions by Israel, the first in 1978 and the second in 1982

The dominant group in Lebanon was supported by Israel; the subordinate group was supported by Iran; Syria had a growing role until about 2007

Important Note: Inequality and seriously imbalanced power relations are an underlying factor in many, if not most cases of terrorism: **Northern Ireland, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Pakistan, and Palestine**, to name a few. At the same time, inequality and political discrimination don't always lead to terrorism; conversely in relatively equitable societies, incidences of domestic terrorism occur. Context matters, but does not explain everything.

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- **The Case of Terrorism in Lebanon**

What role did culture play in the rise of terrorism in Lebanon?

The short answer is ...

Was there a natural fit between “pure” Islamic values, practices, and beliefs, on the one hand, and terrorism on the other hand?

NO

*Instead, Islamic culture was **co-opted** by leaders of organizations, such as Hizbollah; Islamic culture was reshaped to suit the needs of the organization, to help the organization achieve its political goal*

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- **The Case of Terrorism in Lebanon**

How were Islamic values co-opted to justify or legitimize terrorist violence, especially with regard to the use of suicide bombers?

The use of suicide attacks was justified by the spiritual leader of Hizbollah in the following manner: *When an enemy cannot be attacked through conventional means, then the combatant must fight with “special means,” which includes purposefully sacrificing one’s own life. But “such an undertaking differs little from that of a soldier who fights and knows that in the end he will be killed. These two situations lead to death; except that one fits in with conventional procedures of war, and the other does not.” Thus, “there is no difference between dying with a gun in your hand or exploding yourself.”*



Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- **The Case of Terrorism in Lebanon, 2005-2007**

In sum, the rise of political violence in Lebanon was a complex process that involved social, political, economic *and* cultural factors; external political relations were also significant

Culture, however, did play a prominent, if not indispensable role in spurring and sustaining collective action that increasingly relied on “violent sub-state activism”; in this regard, it is important to understand that culture is an extremely powerful symbol or *system of meaning* that can be referenced during terror attacks and by movements.

Explaining Political Violence, cont'd

Culture, Religion and Terrorism

- **The Power of Culture: A Reprise**

Culture, it is important to remember, is not the only powerful system of meaning ... consider the power of another, more pervasive system: **nationalism**

In the name of nationalism (or patriotism), we are willing - even eager - to wage brutal wars where the mass killing of innocents is justified as “collateral damage”; in the name of nationalism, we are willing to subordinate other values and beliefs; in the name of nationalism we are willing to give up our own lives



This is not to say that nationalism is bad; rather, it is to say that nationalism--an idea, a belief--is a powerful, very powerful force in the world. As with any system of meaning, it can have a very positive effect or a very negative one. In this sense, there is nothing inherently “evil” about nationalism, just as there is nothing inherently good about it.

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20 years later, Lebanon bombing haunts

America's first encounter with a suicide bomb

Thursday, October 23, 2003 Posted: 11:33 AM EDT (1633 GMT)

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) -- Twenty years ago the United States had its first experience with the suicide bomb -- initially its embassy, then its Marine barracks, blasted to shreds by a truckload of explosives that killed 241 servicemen and launched a new era in the Middle East. The reverberations are still being felt.



British soldiers help a bombing victim in rescue operations on October 23, 1983.

Today the 19-year-old soldier on duty at Beirut airport's Parking C lot shrugs indifferently when told that this was where the doomed barracks stood. He wasn't even born when the bomb went off on October 23, 1983. For many like him, it's a distant memory, one of scores of atrocities committed during Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war.

But for Washington it was a watershed. It ultimately drove the U.S. military out of Lebanon. A decade later American forces pulled out of Somalia, their mission again wrecked by violence. Today, as U.S. casualties mount in Iraq, some are asking whether the United States will walk away again.

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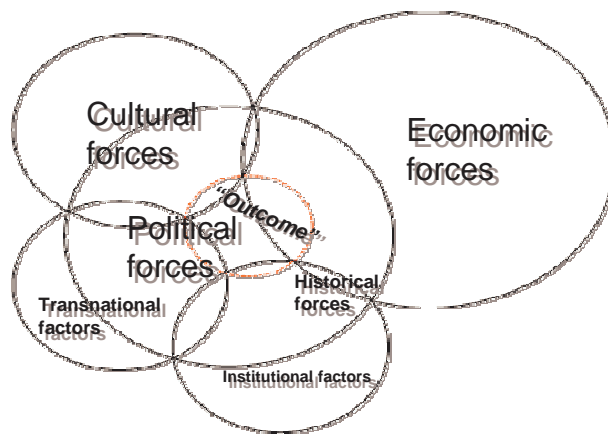
VIDEO MORE VIDEO
 CNN's Brent Sadler looks back at the 1983 bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut and the impact it had on U.S. foreign policy.
 PLAY VIDEO

A retrospective article on the Beirut bombing in 1983: the first suicide terrorist attack against the United States. To read the full article go to:
<http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/middleeast/10/21/lebanon.anniv.ap/>

Question of the media here: Was this accurate with the "first encounter?"

Not true, but implications of the headline? Effect(s)?

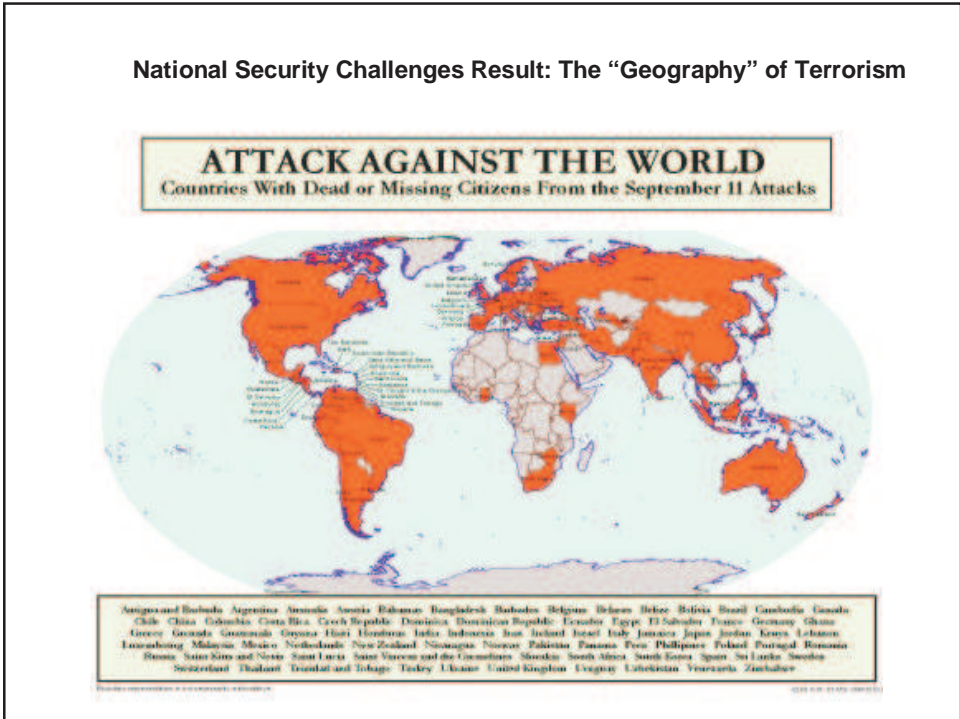
Understanding the Role of Culture & Terrorism: An Interactive Explanatory Model



An interactive understanding of culture: recall this figure from earlier in the quarter

It illustrates a basic assumption in contemporary cultural analysis, which posits that cultural factors never "act alone": they interact with economic, political, social, historical and other forces to produce specific outcomes in specific places and times

National Security Challenges Result: The “Geography” of Terrorism



Regional Stability: Afghanistan’s Humanitarian Crisis in The Long War



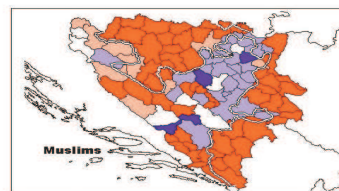
Difficulties of Historical & Cultural Barriers – Tribal, Clan, & Familial



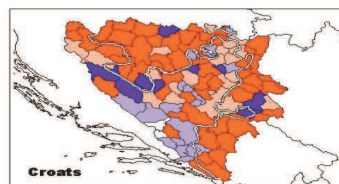
The 1893 Durand Line Is the Source of a Continuing Border Dispute Between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Political Violence, Human Rights, & Genocide

Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina



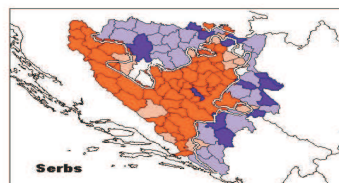
Red Indicates Major Decrease in Ethnic Group Population; Blue Indicates Major Increase



Percent Change in Population by Opstina 1991-1996



Dayton Agreement Line



Source: 1991 Census; 1996 Midyear UNHCR Estimate

Horn of Africa Difficulties?

