

Chapter 8

The Modern Terrorist Mind-set: Tactics, Targets, Tradecraft, and Technologies

The wrath of the terrorist is rarely uncontrolled. Contrary to both popular belief and media depiction, most terrorism is neither crazed nor capricious. Rather, terrorist attacks are generally both premeditated and carefully planned. As shown in chapter 6, the terrorist act is specifically designed to communicate a message. But, equally important, it is also conceived and executed in a manner that simultaneously reflects the terrorist group's particular aims and motivations, fits its resources and capabilities, and takes into account the "target audience" at which the act is directed. The tactics and targets of various terrorist movements, as well as the weapons they favor, are therefore ineluctably shaped by a group's ideology, its internal organizational dynamics, and the personalities of its key members, as well as a variety of internal and external stimuli.

The Nexus of Ideological and Operational Imperatives

All terrorist groups seek targets that are rewarding from their point of view and employ tactics that are consonant with their overriding political aims. Whereas left-wing terrorists like the German Red Army Faction

(RAF) and the Italian Red Brigades (RB) have selectively kidnapped and assassinated people whom they blamed for economic exploitation or political repression in order to attract publicity and promote a Marxist-Leninist revolution, terrorists motivated by a religious imperative have engaged in more indiscriminate acts of violence, directed against a far wider category of targets encompassing not merely their declared enemies but anyone who does not share their religious faith. The actions of ethno-nationalist/separatist groups arguably fall somewhere in between these two models. On the one hand, the violent campaigns waged by groups like the PLO, the IRA, and the Basque separatist organization ETA have frequently been more destructive and have caused far greater casualties than those of their left-wing counterparts. But, on the other hand, their violence has largely been restricted to a specifically defined “target set”—namely, the members of a specific rival or dominant ethno-nationalist group.¹ Perhaps the least consequential of all these terrorist group categories (in terms both of frequency of incidents and of impact on public and governmental attitudes) has been the disparate collection of recycled Nazis, racist “political punk rockers,” and other extreme right-wing elements that has emerged over the years in various European countries. But even their sporadic and uncoordinated, seemingly mindless violence—fueled as much by beer and bravado as by a discernible political agenda—is neither completely random nor unthinkingly indiscriminate. Indeed, for all these categories, the point is less their inherent differences than the fact that their tactical and targeting choices correspond to, and are determined by, their respective ideologies and attendant mechanisms of legitimation and justification, and, perhaps most critically, by their relationship with the intended audience of their violent acts.

The overriding tactical—and, indeed, ethical—imperative for left-wing terrorists, for example, has been the deliberate tailoring of their violent acts to appeal to their perceived “constituencies.” In a 1978 interview, the German left-wing terrorist Michael “Bommi” Baumann denounced the hijacking of a Lufthansa passenger plane the previous year by terrorists seeking the release of imprisoned RAF members as “madness . . . you can’t take your life and place it above that of children and Majorca holiday-makers and say: *My life is valuable!* That is elitarian madness, bordering on Fascism.”² For Baumann, the deliberate involvement of innocent civilians in that terrorist operation was not only counterproductive but wrong. It was counterproductive in that it tarnished the left-wing terrorists’ image as a true “revolutionary vanguard”—using violence to draw attention to themselves and their cause and “educate” the public about what the terrorists perceived as the inequities of the democratic-capitalist state. It was also wrong in itself

because innocent people—no matter what the political justification—should not be the victims of terrorist acts directed against the state.

For this reason, left-wing terrorists' use of violence historically has been heavily constrained. Their self-styled crusade for social justice is typically directed against governmental or commercial institutions, or specific individuals who they believe represent capitalist exploitation and repression. They are therefore careful not to undertake actions that might alienate potential supporters or their perceived constituency. Accordingly, left-wing violence tends to be highly discriminate, selective, and limited. Individuals epitomizing the focus of the terrorists' ideological hostility—wealthy industrialists like Hans Martin Schleyer (who was kidnapped and later murdered by the RAF in 1977) or leading parliamentarians like Aldo Moro (who similarly was kidnapped and subsequently murdered by the RB)—are deliberately selected and meticulously targeted for their intrinsic “symbolic” value. “You know that we did not kidnap Moro the man, but [rather] his function,” explained Mario Moretti, the leader of the RB Rome column who masterminded the operation, during his trial in November 1984. For Moretti, Moro was first and foremost a powerful symbol: a former prime minister and reigning Christian Democratic Party chief; a political wheeler-dealer par excellence; and architect of the impending historic compromise with the Italian Communist Party that would fundamentally alter the country's political landscape and further marginalize the RB. He was, in the terrorists' eyes, the “supreme manager of power in Italy” and had been for the previous twenty years, a man whom Moretti described as the “demiurge of bourgeois power.” By abducting so important a leader and so profound a symbol, the RB sought to galvanize the Italian left and thereby decisively transform the political situation in its favor.³

Even when less discriminate tactics such as bombing are employed, the violence is meant to be equally “symbolic.” That is, while the damage inflicted is real, the terrorists' main purpose is not to destroy property or obliterate tangible assets but to dramatize or call attention to a political cause. The decision-making process of the left-wing terrorist group is perhaps depicted most clearly in Baumann's description of the planning of a 1969 terrorist attack by the group known as the Tupamaros West Berlin (a precursor of both the Second of June Movement and the original RAF). Baumann and his colleagues wanted to stage an operation that would simultaneously attract attention to themselves and their cause, publicize the plight of the Palestinian people, and demonstrate the West German left's solidarity and sympathy with the Palestinians' struggle. “We sat down and pondered what would be a story that nobody could miss, that everyone

would have to talk about and everyone would have to report,” Baumann recalled. “And we came up with the right answer—a bomb in the Jewish Community Centre—and on the anniversary of the ‘Crystal Night’⁴ during the Third Reich. . . . Though it didn’t explode, the story [still] went round the world.”⁵ By striking on this particular date, against this specific target, with its deep—and unmistakable—symbolic significance, the group sought to draw a deliberate parallel between Israeli oppression of the Palestinians and Nazi persecution of the Jews.⁶

The use by left-wing terrorists of “armed propaganda” (i.e., violent acts with clear symbolic content) is thus a critical element in their operational calculus. It is also the principal means by which these organizations “educate” the masses through their self-anointed role as “revolutionary vanguard.” The first official “strategic resolution” of the RB, for example, stressed exactly this theme. “It is not a question of organizing the class movement within the area of armed struggle,” the 1975 document stated, “but of entrenching the organization of the armed struggle and the political realization of its historical necessity within the class movement.”⁷ A less turgid explanation of this strategy was later offered by Patrizio Peci, leader of the group’s Turin column, when he reflected how, “as crazy as it might seem, the plan in a few words was this: First phase, armed propaganda. . . . Second phase, that of armed support. . . . Third phase, the civil war and victory. In essence, we were the embryo, the skeleton of the future . . . the ruling class of tomorrow in a communist society.”⁸ The RAF drew similar parallels in its exegesis of the relationship between the terrorist vanguard and “the people.” “Our original conception of the organization implied a connection between the urban guerrilla and the work at the base,” explained the document, titled “Sur la Concepción de la Guerilla Urbaine”:

We would like it if each and all of us could work at the neighborhoods and factories, in socialist groups that already exist, influence discussion, experience and learn. This has proved impossible. . . .

Some say that the possibilities for agitation, propaganda and organization are far from being eradicated and that only when they are, should we pose the question of arms. We say: it will not really be possible to profit from any political actions as long as armed struggle does not appear clearly as the goal of the politicization.⁹

This approach is not entirely dissimilar to that of many ethno-nationalist/separatist groups. These terrorist movements also see themselves as a revolutionary vanguard—if not in classic Marxist-Leninist terms, at least as

a spearhead, similarly using violence to “educate” fellow members of their national or ethnic group about the inequities imposed upon them by the ruling government and the need for communal resistance and rebellion. As one Basque nationalist bluntly told an interviewer, “ETA is the vanguard of our revolution.”¹⁰ Accordingly, like all ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorists, ETA uses demonstratively symbolic acts of violence to generate publicity and rally support by underscoring the powerlessness of the government to withstand the nationalist expression that it (ETA) champions, and thereby to embarrass and coerce the government into acceding to the group’s irredentist demands. ETA’s “target audience,” however, is not just the local, indigenous population but often the international community as well. These groups, accordingly, recognize the need to tightly control and focus their operations in such a manner as to ensure both the continued support of their local “constituencies” and the sympathy of the international community. What this essentially means is that their violence must always be perceived as both purposeful and deliberate, sustained and omnipresent. Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein, the Irish nationalist political party linked to the IRA, himself expressed precisely this point in an article he wrote in 1976 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Uprising. “Rightly or wrongly, I am an IRA Volunteer,” Adams explained,

and, rightly or wrongly, I take a course of action as a means to bringing about a situation in which I believe the people of my country will prosper. . . . The course I take involves the use of physical force, but only if I achieve the situation where my people can genuinely prosper can my course of action be seen, by me, to have been justified.¹¹

Indeed, as the veteran Northern Ireland correspondent David McKittrick points out, “Sinn Fein, in its efforts to build a political machine in both parts of Ireland, has [always] been concerned to project IRA violence as the clinical and carefully directed use of force.”¹²

The more successful ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorist organization will be able to determine an effective level of violence that is at once “tolerable” for the local populace, tacitly acceptable to international opinion, and sufficiently modulated not to provoke massive governmental crackdown and reaction. The IRA has demonstrably mastered this synchronization of tactics to strategy. Since the mid-1980s, according to Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, the organization’s military high command has clearly recognized that “Republican strategy required a certain level of violence—but only enough to distort the private and public life of the North, and to make sure

that the military arm was properly exercised.”¹³ What this has often resulted in is the targeting of members of the security forces (ordinary policemen and soldiers) in preference to the terrorists’ avowed enemies in some rival indigenous community. This is true in Northern Ireland, where fewer than 20 percent of the IRA’s victims between 1969 and 1993 were Protestant civilians,¹⁴ and in Spain, where more than 60 percent of fatalities inflicted by the Basque ETA have been members of the Spanish security forces.¹⁵

Certainly, “traitors,” informants, and other collaborators among their own brethren are regularly targeted, but here the terrorist group must be careful to strike another balance between salutary, if sporadic, “lessons” that effectively intimidate and compel compliance from their own communities and more frequent and heavy-handed episodes that alienate popular support, encourage cooperation with the security forces, and therefore prove counterproductive. By the same token, highly placed government officials and security force commanders will, when the opportunity presents itself and the political conditions are propitious, be attacked. But given the combination of uncertain—and possibly undesirable—political and security repercussions, the difficulties involved in gaining access to these VIPs, and the considerable effort required of such operations, they are generally eschewed in favor of more productive, if less spectacular, operations that, moreover, conform to the terrorists’ perceptions of what are regarded as “legitimate” or “acceptable” targets—however abhorrent the attacks may seem to the outside world.

The terrorist campaign is like a shark in the water: it must keep moving forward—no matter how slowly or incrementally—or die. Hence, when these more “typical” targets fail to sustain the momentum of a terrorist campaign, or when other, perhaps even totally unrelated, events overshadow the terrorists and shunt their cause out of the public eye, terrorists often have to resort to more violent and dramatic acts to refocus attention back upon themselves. But it would be a mistake to see these acts—which often involve the bombing of public gathering places or the hijacking of airliners—as random or senseless. For example, the discussion in chapter 3 showed how, following the Palestinian terrorists’ failure to mount a concerted guerrilla campaign against Israel in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip after the 1967 Six Day War, the PFLP began hijacking international airliners. The purpose of these operations was not necessarily wantonly to kill or otherwise harm innocent persons (in contrast to many subsequent terrorists’ targeting of civil aviation) but to use the passengers as pawns in pursuit of publicity and the extraction of concessions from unsympathetic governments. As one of the group’s most famous hijackers, Leila Khaled, once

explained, “Look, I had orders to seize the plane, not to blow it up. . . . I care about people. If I had wanted to blow up the plane no one could have prevented me.”¹⁶

Even when terrorists’ actions are not as deliberate or discriminating, and when their purpose is in fact to kill innocent civilians, the target is still regarded as “justified” because it represents the terrorists’ defined “enemy.” Although incidents may be quantitatively different in the volume of death or destruction caused, they are still qualitatively identical in that a widely known “enemy” is being specifically targeted. This distinction is often accepted by the terrorists’ constituents and at times by the international community as well. The recognition that the Palestinians obtained in the wake of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre is a particularly prominent case in point. The poignant message left behind by the terrorist team struck precisely the sympathetic chord they had intended. “We are neither killers nor bandits,” their letter stated. “We are persecuted people who have no land and no homeland. . . . We are not against any people, but why should our place here be taken by the flag of the occupiers . . . why should the whole world be having fun and entertainment while we suffer with all ears deaf to us?”¹⁷ As the PFLP’s Bassam Abu Sharif explained, “For violence to become fruitful, for it to get us to our aims, it should not be undertaken without a proper political base and intention.”¹⁸ While the logic in such a case may well be contrived, there is nonetheless a clear appreciation both that violence has its limits and that, if used properly, it can pay vast dividends. In other words, the level of violence must be kept within the bounds of what the terrorists’ “target audience” will accept.

But acts of terrorism, like battles in conventional wars, are difficult to limit and control once they are started, and often result in tragedy to civilians who are inadvertently caught up in the violence. One well-known example is the tragic bombing that occurred at Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, in November 1987, causing the deaths of eleven innocent bystanders attending a memorial ceremony and injuries to sixty-three others. The IRA was quick to describe the incident as an accident resulting from the “catastrophic consequences” of an operation against British troops gone awry.¹⁹ In this instance, there was an acceptance that some grievous wrong had been done, albeit clothed in layers of self-serving justifications. Eamon Collins, a former IRA terrorist, describes the organization’s reaction to another botched attack that also accidentally claimed the lives of innocent civilians some years later:

The IRA—regardless of their public utterances dismissing the condemnations of their behaviour from church and community leaders—tried to

act in a way that would avoid severe censure from within the nationalist community; they knew they were operating within a sophisticated set of informal restrictions on their behaviour, no less powerful for being largely unspoken.²⁰

The Basque ETA is no different—alternately threatening and remorseful in communiqués that seek simultaneously to absolve it of responsibility for its violent deeds and to reap the rewards of introspection and self-criticism. “We claim responsibility for the failed action against a member of the Spanish police,” reads one, “following the placing of an explosive charge under his car. We very much deplore the accidental injuries involuntarily caused to his neighbor . . . and we wish his prompt and complete recovery.”²¹

Right-wing terrorism has often been characterized as the least discriminating, most senseless type of contemporary political violence. It has earned this reputation mostly as a result of the seemingly mindless “street” violence and unsophisticated attacks that in recent years have increasingly targeted immigrants, refugees, guest workers, and other foreigners in many European countries, especially in eastern Germany and other former communist-bloc states,²² but also from an inchoate bombing campaign that briefly convulsed Western Europe in the early 1980s. If the means of the right-wing terrorists sometimes appear haphazardly planned and often spontaneously generated, their ends are hardly less indistinct. Essentially, their ostensible goal is the destruction of the liberal-democratic state to clear the way for a renascent National Socialist (“Nazi”) or fascist one. But the extent to which this is simply an excuse for the egocentric pleasure derived from brawling and bombing, preening or parading in 1940s-era Nazi regalia, is hard to judge, given that the majority of right-wing groups do not espouse any specific program of reform, preferring to hide behind vague slogans of strident nationalism, the need for racial purity, and the reassertion of governmental strength. In sum, the democratic state is somewhat reflexively assailed for its manifold weaknesses—notably its liberal social welfare policies and tolerance of diverse opinion—alongside its permitting of dark-skinned immigrants in the national labor force and of Jews and other minorities in positions of power or influence. The right-wing terrorists believe that their nation’s survival is dependent upon the exorcism of these elements from its environs; only by becoming politically, racially, and culturally homogeneous can the state recover its strength and again work for its natural citizens rather than the variegated collection of interlopers and parasites who now sap the nation of its strength and greatness.

It should be noted that while the European groups share many simi-

larities (racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and a hatred of liberal government) with their American counterparts, they differ fundamentally in their mechanisms of legitimation and justification. Whereas the U.S. groups may be more accurately categorized as religious—rather than strictly as right-wing—terrorists because of the pivotal roles that liturgy, divine inferences, and clerical sanction play in underpinning and motivating their violence, the foundations of the European right are avowedly secular, with neither theological imperatives nor clerics exerting any significant influence. Indeed, the ill-defined, amorphous contours of the contemporary European extreme right's political philosophy can be summed up by the refrain from a popular song by the British white power band White Noise: "Two pints of lager and a packet of crisps. Wogs out! White Power!"²³ or the folk song composed by Gottfried Küssel, Führer of an Austrian neo-Nazi organization: "Do you see his nose, no? Do you know his nose? His nose you do not know? It is crooked and ugly? Then hit him in the face. He is a Jew, a damned Jew, bloodsucker of the European race."²⁴ By comparison, the lunatic and far-fetched millenarian views of American Christian white supremacists appear to be deeply profound theological treatises.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that European right-wing terrorism has rarely transcended the boundaries of street brawls or the Molotov cocktail hurriedly tossed into a refugee shelter or a guest workers' dormitory (even though, of course, such crude acts of violence possess just the same tragic potential to kill and maim as much more sophisticated terrorist operations). Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to see right-wing violence as completely indiscriminate or entirely irrational. Indeed, the few occasions on which the neo-Nazis have attempted more ambitious types of operations have sent shock waves throughout the Continent. In August 1980, for instance, a powerful explosion tore through the crowded rail station in Bologna, Italy, in the midst of the summer holiday crush. At the time, the total of 84 people killed (and 180 wounded) was second only to the record 91 who had perished in a single terrorist act in the Irgun's bombing of the King David Hotel thirty-four years before. When it was followed less than a month later by a bombing at the popular Munich Oktoberfest celebration, killing 14 and injuring another 215, fears were raised of a new terrorist onslaught more lethal and indiscriminate than that waged by either the European leftist terrorist organizations or the Continent's various ethno-nationalist/separatist groups. But it did not materialize. Instead, the pattern of right-wing terrorism in Europe has remained largely the same since the 1970s: one of sporadic attacks, albeit specifically directed against particular types of targets—primarily refugee shelters and immigrant workers' hostels, anarchist

houses and political party offices, and Arab and African immigrants walking along the street, as well as Jewish-owned property or businesses.

As crude and relatively unsophisticated and, indeed, intellectually depraved as this terrorist category may appear, then, right-wing violence, like all forms of terrorism, is based not on some pathological obsession to kill or beat up as many people as possible but rather on a deliberate policy of intimidating the general public into acceding to specific demands or pressures. The right-wing terrorists see themselves, if not as a revolutionary vanguard, then as a catalyst of events that will lead to the imposition of an authoritarian form of government. Thus, like other terrorist movements, they too tailor their violence to appeal to their perceived constituency—be it fellow extreme nationalists, intransigent racists and xenophobes, reactionary conservatives, or militant anti-communists—and, with the exception of a handful of noteworthy, but isolated, indiscriminate bombings, they seek to keep the violence they commit within the bounds of what the ruling government will tolerate without undertaking massive repressive actions against the terrorists themselves.

Moreover, the phenomenon by which terrorists consciously learn from one another, discussed in chapter 2, is evident in the case of at least some German right-wing terrorist elements, suggesting aspirations toward a more planned and coherent campaign of violence than has hitherto existed and raising the possibility of a more serious future threat. As long ago as 1981, Manfred Roeder, for a time Germany's leading neo-Nazi, advocated the emulation of left-wing terrorist targeting and tactics in hopes of endowing the movement with a clearer purpose and attainable goal. For the rightists, however, there was another factor: envy of the attention, status, and occasional tactical victories won by left-wing terrorists in groups such as the RAF, alongside the realization that indiscriminate terrorist attacks would not result in the attainment of the neo-Nazis' goals. "The RAF had brought terrorism to modern Europe," Ingo Hasselbach, one of Roeder's successors, recalled, "and even though they could not have been more opposed to our ideology, we respected them for their fanaticism and skill." Hasselbach therefore advocated for his *Kameradschaft* (Nazi "brotherhood"), before his own disillusionment forced him to break completely with the movement he had once so enthusiastically championed, a lethally discriminate campaign of terrorism mirroring that pursued by the RAF. Like the original founders of the Baader-Meinhof Group twenty years before, Hasselbach believed that his National Alternative Berlin (NA) neo-Nazi organization could not achieve its political objectives by attempting to operate as a legal political party. Accordingly, he sought to mold the group into a terrorist organization modeled on the RAF

and laid plans to assassinate prominent Jews and communists and leading politicians. “We wanted to bring neo-Nazi terrorism up to the level of that carried out by the radical Left,” Hasselbach later explained,

striking at targets that would be both better guarded and more significant—targets that would do serious damage to the democratic German state while driving home our racial message. There was, for instance, talk of assassinating Gregor Gusi, the head of the reformed Communist Party, the PDS; he was East Germany’s most prominent Jew and leader of the Communists to boot. He was not only a major politician but the political representative of the former GDR system. We also considered hitting Ignatz Bubis, the new head of the Jewish community, as well as a number of politicians in Bonn—including the interior minister and Chancellor Kohl himself.²⁵

Like other terrorist organizations, the more sophisticated right-wing groups also seek targets that are likely to advance their cause. In this respect, their terrorist acts are as calculated as those of the left-wing organizations they try to emulate. Publicity and attention are, of course, paramount aims, but at the same time there is a conscious recognition that only if their violence is properly calculated and at least in some (however idiosyncratic) way regulated will they be able to achieve the effects they desire and the political objectives they seek. As an IRA terrorist once said, “You don’t bloody well kill people for the sake of killing them.”²⁶ This is not, however, the case with many of the religious terrorist movements discussed in chapter 4. For them, though violence does still have an instrumental purpose, it is also often an end in itself—a sacred duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. A 1990 study of Lebanese Shi’a terrorists, for example, revealed that none of those in the sample were interested in influencing an actual or self-perceived constituency or in swaying popular opinion; their sole preoccupation was serving God through the fulfillment of their divinely ordained mission.²⁷ Hence, for religious terrorists there are demonstrably fewer constraints on the actual infliction of violence, and the category of targets/enemies is much more open-ended. The leader of an Egyptian terrorist cell, for instance, professed absolutely no remorse when he was told that an attack he had planned against visiting Israeli Jews had instead killed nine German tourists. His matter-of-fact response was that “infidels are all the same.”²⁸ Indeed, how else can one explain the mad plots of the American Christian white supremacists? Or the Aum sect’s wanton and repeated attempts to use chemical warfare nerve agents indiscriminately in populous

urban centers? Or the cataclysmic aim of the Jewish Temple Mount bombers in Israel? The willingness of religious terrorists to contemplate such wholesale acts of violence is a direct reflection of the fact that they, unlike their secular counterparts, see in violence a demonstrably divine or transcendental purpose, committed in the service or upon the commandment of their own god or religious figures, and therefore they feel little need to regulate or calibrate that violence. Al Qaeda's repeated calls for unconstrained violence against Americans, Jews, and others clearly underscores the elasticity of the movement's defined "enemy." "All those who oppose U.S. policy," Suleimain Abu Ghaith suggestively warned in October 2001, should "not ride planes or live in high buildings."²⁹ With only slightly more specificity, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born leader of the *Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidaya* (Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers, or QJBR), al Qaeda's operations arm in Iraq, attempted in May 2005 to justify the suicide terrorist attacks in that country that have claimed the lives of Muslims and non-Muslims alike—including in some cases women and children. "There is no doubt," Zarqawi expostulated,

that Allah commanded us to strike the Kuffar (unbelievers), kill them, and fight them by all means necessary to achieve the goal. The servants of Allah who perform Jihad to elevate the word (laws) of Allah, are permitted to use any and all means necessary to strike the active unbeliever combatants for the purpose of killing them, snatch their souls from their body, cleanse the earth from their abomination, and lift their trial and persecution of the servants of Allah. The goal must be pursued even if the means to accomplish it affect both the intended active fighters and unintended passive ones such as women, children and any other passive category specified by our jurisprudence. This permissibility extends to situations in which Muslims may get killed if they happen to be with or near the intended enemy, and if it is not possible to avoid hitting them or separate them from the intended Kafirs.

Although spilling sacred Muslim blood is a grave offense, it is not only permissible but it is mandated in order to prevent more serious adversity from happening, stalling or abandoning Jihad that is [sic].³⁰

The Organizational Dynamics of Terrorist Groups

All terrorists, however, have one trait in common: they live in the future, for that distant—yet imperceptibly close—point in time when they will

assuredly triumph over their enemies and attain the ultimate realization of their political destiny. For the religious groups, this future is divinely decreed and the terrorists themselves are specifically anointed to achieve it. The inevitability of their victory is taken for granted, as a 1996 communiqué issued by the Egyptian Gamat al-Islamiya (Islamic Group) reveals. Citing the Qur'an, the document brusquely dismisses even the possibility that its secular opponents might succeed. "They plot and plan and God too plans," it declares, "but the best of planners is God." Therefore the group must faithfully and resolutely "pursue its battle . . . until such time as God would grant victory—just as the Prophet Mohammed did with the Quredish [his most implacable enemies] until God granted victory over Mecca."³¹

For the secular terrorists, too, eventual victory is as inevitable as it is pre-determined. Indeed, the innate righteousness of their cause itself assures success. "Our struggle will be long and arduous because the enemy is powerful, well-organised, and well-sustained from abroad," Leila Khaled wrote in her autobiography, published in 1973. "We shall win because we represent the wave of the future . . . because mankind is on our side, and above all because we are determined to achieve victory."³² Comparatively small in number, limited in capabilities, isolated from society, and dwarfed by both the vast resources of their enemy and the enormity of their task, secular terrorists necessarily function in an inverted reality where existence is defined by the sought-after, ardently pursued future rather than the oppressive, angst-driven, and incomplete present. "You convince yourself that to reach this Utopia," the Red Brigades' Adriana Faranda later recalled of the group's collective mind-set, "it is necessary to pass through the destruction of society which prevents your ideas from being realised."³³ By ignoring the present and literally "soldiering on" despite hardship and adversity, terrorists are able to compensate for their abject weakness and thereby overcome the temporal apathy or hostility of a constituency whom they claim to represent. "We made calculations," Faranda's comrade-in-arms Patrizio Peci explained in his memoirs. "The most pessimistic thought that within twenty years the war would be won, some said within five, ten. All, however, thought that we were living through the most difficult moment, that gradually things would become easier."³⁴ The left-wing terrorists thus console themselves that the travails and isolation of life underground are but a mere transitory stage on the path to final victory.

The longevity of most modern terrorist groups, however, would suggest otherwise. David Rapoport, for example, estimates that the life expectancy of at least 90 percent of terrorist organizations is less than a year and that nearly half of the ones that make it that far cease to exist within a decade.³⁵

Thus the optimistic clarion calls to battle issued by terrorist groups the world over in communiqués, treatises, and other propaganda have a distinctly hollow ring given the grim reality of their organizational life cycles. “NEVER BE DETERRED BY THE ENORMOUS DIMENSIONS OF YOUR OWN GOALS,” proclaimed a communiqué issued by the left-wing French terrorist group Direct Action in 1985,³⁶ yet less than two years later the group had effectively been decapitated by the capture of virtually its entire leadership, and shortly afterward it fell into complete lassitude. Similarly, in 1978 the RB leader, Renato Curio, bragged about a struggle that he envisioned would last forty years, but within a decade even this terrorist organization—for a time one of Europe’s most formidable—had collapsed under the weight of arrests and defections.³⁷

Some categories of terrorist groups admittedly have better chances of survival—and perhaps success—than others. Historically, although religious movements like the Assassins persisted for nearly two centuries and the Thugs remained active for more than six hundred years, in modern times ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorist groups have typically lasted the longest and been the most successful. Al-Fatah, the Palestinian terrorist organization led by the late Yasir Arafat, for example, was founded in 1957. The PLO itself is now more than forty years old. The Basque group ETA was established in 1959, while the current incarnation of the IRA, formally known as the Provisional Irish Republican Army, is nearly forty years old and is itself the successor of the older official IRA that was founded nearly a century ago and can in turn be traced back to the various Fenian revolutionary brotherhoods that had surfaced periodically since Wolfe Tone’s rebellion in 1789. However, except in the immediate postwar era of massive decolonization, success for ethno-nationalist terrorist organizations has rarely involved the actual realization of their stated long-term goals of self-determination or nationhood. More often it has amounted to a string of key tactical victories that have sustained prolonged struggles and breathed new life into faltering—and in some instances, geriatric—terrorist movements.

The resilience of these groups is doubtless a product of the relative ease with which they are able to draw sustenance and support from an existing constituency—namely, the fellow members of their ethno-nationalist group. By contrast, both left- and right-wing terrorist organizations must actively proselytize among the politically aware and radical, though often uncommitted, for recruits and support, thus rendering themselves vulnerable to penetration and compromise. The ethno-nationalists derive a further advantage from their historical longevity by being able to appeal to a col-

lective revolutionary tradition and even at times a predisposition to rebellion. This assures successive terrorist generations both a steady stream of recruits from their respective communities' youth and a ready pool of sympathizers and supporters among their more nostalgic elders. These groups' unique ability to replenish their ranks from within already close, tight-knit communities means that even when a continuing campaign shows signs of flagging, the torch can be smoothly passed to a new generation. Abu Iyad, Arafat's intelligence chief, can therefore dismiss as mere ephemeral impediments the cul-de-sacs and roundabouts that have long hampered the advance of the Palestinian liberation movement. "Our people will bring forth a new revolution," he wrote in 1981. "They will engender a movement much more powerful than ours, better armed and thus more dangerous to the Zionists. . . . And one day, we will have a country."³⁸

The ethno-nationalists' comparative success, however, may have as much to do with the clarity and tangibility of their envisioned future—the establishment (or reestablishment) of a national homeland from within some existing country—as with these other characteristics. The articulation of so concrete and comprehensible a goal is by far the most potent and persuasive rallying cry. It also makes the inevitable victory appear both palpable and readily attainable, even though the path to it be prolonged and protracted. Few would have doubted Martin McGuinness's 1977 pledge that the IRA would keep "blattering on until Brits leave,"³⁹ or Danny Morrison's declaration twelve years later that "when it is politically costly for the British to remain in Ireland, they'll go. . . . It won't be triggered until a large number of British soldiers are killed and that's what's going to happen."⁴⁰

Left-wing terrorist movements, by comparison, appear doubly disadvantaged. Not only do they lack the sizable existing pool of potential recruits available to most ethno-nationalist groups, but among all the categories of terrorists they have formulated the least clear and most ill-defined vision of the future. Prolific and prodigious though their myriad denunciations of the evils of the militarist, capitalist state may be, precious little information is forthcoming about its envisioned successor. "That is the most difficult question for revolutionaries," replied Kozo Okamoto, the surviving member of the three-man Japanese Red Army (JRA) team that staged the 1972 Lod Airport massacre, when asked about the postrevolutionary society that his group sought to create. "We really do not know what it will be like."⁴¹ The RAF's Gudrun Ensslin similarly brushed aside all questions about the group's long-term aims. "As for the state of the future, the time after victory," she once said, "that is not our concern. . . . We build the revolution, not the socialist model."⁴² This inability to articulate coherently, much less

cogently, their future plans may explain why the left-wing terrorists' campaigns have historically been the least effectual.

Even when left-wing terrorists have attempted to conceptualize a concrete vision of the future, their efforts have rarely produced anything more lucid or edifying than verbose disquisitions espousing an idiosyncratic interpretation of Marxist doctrine. "We have applied the Marxist analysis and method to the contemporary scene—not transferred it, but actually applied it," Ensslin wrote in a collection of RAF statements published by the group in 1977 (and subsequently banned by the German government). Yet no further elucidation of the desired result is offered, except the belief that Marxism will be rendered obsolete when the revolution triumphs and the "capitalist system has been abolished."⁴³ Slightly more reflective is the exposition offered by the American radical Jane Alpert, who in her memoir explains how she and her comrades-in-arms

believed that the world could be cleansed of all domination and submission, that perception itself could be purified of the division into subject and object, that power playing between nations, sexes, races, ages, between animals and humans, individuals and groups, could be brought to an end. Our revolution would create a universe in which all consciousness was cosmic, in which everyone would share the bliss we knew from acid [LSD], but untainted by fear, possessiveness, sickness, hunger, or the need for a drug to bring happiness.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, this vision comes across as so vague and idyllic as to appear almost completely divorced from reality, an effect, perhaps, of its drug-induced influence. That drugs played a part in the formulation of other leftist terrorist strategies is an interesting, though perhaps exaggerated, sidelight. Baumann, for example, also recounts the centrality of drugs to the would-be revolution. "We said integrate dope into praxis too," he recalled. "No more separate shit, but a total unification around this thing, so that a new person is born out of the struggle."⁴⁵ It should be noted, though, that a study commissioned by the Italian secret services in the 1970s discovered (somewhat counterintuitively) that right-wing terrorists were in fact more likely to abuse⁴⁶ and, indeed, to use drugs than their left-wing counterparts. Two Italian psychiatrists conducting a related study attributed this tendency to the rightists' innate psychological instability, at least compared to Italian left-wing terrorists. "In the right-wing terrorism," wrote Drs. Franco Ferracuti and Francesco Bruno, "the individual terrorists are frequently psychopathological and the ideology is empty; in

left-wing terrorism, ideology is outside of reality and terrorists are more normal and fanatical.”⁴⁷

But it would be a grave error to dismiss the left-wing terrorists as either totally feckless and frivolous or completely devoid of introspection or seriousness of purpose. For them, the future was simply too large and abstract a concept to comprehend; instead, action—terrorist attacks specifically designed to effect the revolution—was embraced as a far more rewarding pursuit. Accordingly, it was Fanon, and not Marx, who arguably exerted the greater influence. For example, Susan Stern, a member of the 1970s-era American left-wing terrorist group the Weathermen, recalled the dynamic tension between thought and action that permeated the group and affected all internal debate. “Once we tore down capitalism, who would empty the garbage, and teach the children and who would decide that?” she and her comrades would often consider.

Would the world be Communist? Would the Third World control it? Would all whites die? Would all sex perverts die? Who would run the prisons—would there be prisons? Endless questions like these were *raised* by the Weathermen, but we didn’t have the answers. *And we were tired of trying to wait until we understood everything* [emphasis added].⁴⁸

The RAF’s seminal treatise, “Sur la Concepción de la Guerilla Urbaine,” reflects the same frustration. Quoting fellow revolutionary Eldridge Cleaver, a leader of the Black Panther Party, an African American radical political organization active during the 1960s, it states: “For centuries and generations we have contemplated and examined the shit from all sides. ‘Me, I’m convinced that most things which happen in this country don’t need to be analysed much longer,’ said Cleaver. The RAF put the words of Cleaver into practice.”⁴⁹

Indeed, all terrorists are driven by this burning impatience, coupled with an unswerving belief in the efficacy of violence. The future that they look forward to is neither temporal nor born of the natural progression of mankind; rather, it is contrived and shaped, forged and molded, and ultimately determined and achieved by violence. “What use was there in writing memoranda?” Begin rhetorically inquired to explain the Irgun’s decision to resume its revolt in 1944.

What value in speeches? . . . No, there was no other way. If we did not fight we should be destroyed. To fight was the only way to salvation.

When Descartes said: “I think, therefore, I am,” he uttered a very profound thought. But there are times in the history of peoples when

thought alone does not prove their existence. . . . There are times when everything in you cries out: your very self-respect as a human being lies in your resistance to evil.

We fight, therefore we are!⁵⁰

Thirty years later, Leila Khaled similarly invoked the primacy of action over talk and bullets over words: “We must act, not just talk and memorise the arguments against Zionism,” she counseled.⁵¹ This view was echoed by Yoyes, an ETA terrorist who lost faith in the endless promises that “independence can be won by peaceful means. It’s all a lie. . . . The only possibility we have of gaining our liberty is through violence.”⁵² As the former neo-Nazi Ingo Hasselbach recalled of his own experience, “The time for legal work and patience was through. The only thing to do was to turn our *Kameradschaft* into a real terrorist organization.”⁵³

For some terrorists, however, the desire for action can lead to an obsession with violence itself. Abu Nidal, for example, was once known and admired for his “fiery and unbending nationalism,” whereas today he is recalled and almost universally disdained as little more than an “outlaw and killer.”⁵⁴ Eamon Collins described a similar transformation in his PIRA-gunman cousin Mickey, who, Collins realized, had gradually “lost any sense of the wider perspective, and was just obsessively absorbed by the details of the next killing.”⁵⁵ Andreas Baader is perhaps a different type altogether. From the very start of the RAF’s campaign, he never wavered from his conviction that the terrorist’s only “language is action.”⁵⁶ Baumann, who knew Baader well, remembers the RAF’s founder as a “weapons maniac, [who] later developed an almost sexual relationship with pistols (the Heckler and Koch type in particular).”⁵⁷ Indeed, according to Baader himself, “Fucking and shooting [were] the same thing.”⁵⁸ Unquestionably a man of action and not words, he preferred, in the terrorist vernacular, “direct actions”—bank robberies, vandalism and arson, bombings, and armed attacks—to debate and discourse. “Let’s go, then!” was Baader’s immediate response, for example, when his lover and co-leader Ensslin suggested that the group bomb an American military base in retaliation for the U.S. Air Force’s mining of North Vietnam’s Haiphong harbor in 1972. Despite being the leading figure of an organization dedicated to achieving profound political change, he had absolutely no time for politics, which he derisively dismissed as a load of “shit.”⁵⁹ Baader’s whole approach can be summed up in the advice he gave to a wavering RAF recruit. “Either you come along [and join the revolution and fight],” he said, “or you stay forever an empty chatterbox.”⁶⁰

Although Baader may perhaps be an extreme example of this phenomenon, action is the undeniable cynosure for all terrorists—perhaps even more so, the thrill and heady excitement that accompany it. Far more of Peci's 222-page account of his life as a Red Brigadist, for instance, is devoted to recounting in obsessive detail the types of weapons (and their technical specifications) used on particular RB operations and which group members actually did the shooting than to elucidating the organization's ideological aims and political goals.⁶¹ Baumann is particularly candid about the cathartic relief that an operation brought to a small group of individuals living underground, in close proximity to one another, constantly on the run and fearful of arrest and betrayal. The real stress, he said, came from life in the group—not from the planning and execution of attacks.⁶² Others, like Stern, Collins, the RAF's Silke Maier-Witt and the RB's Susana Ronconi, are even more explicit about the "rush" and the sense of power and accomplishment they derived from the violence they inflicted. "Nothing in my life had ever been this exciting," Stern enthused as she drifted deeper into terrorism.⁶³ Collins similarly recalls how he led an "action-packed existence" during his six years in the IRA, "living each day with the excitement of feeling I was playing a part in taking on the Orange State."⁶⁴ For Maier-Witt, the intoxicating allure of action was sufficient to overcome the misgivings she had about the murder of Schleyer's four bodyguards in order to kidnap the man himself. "At the time I felt the brutality of that action. . . . [But it] was a kind of excitement too because something had happened. The real thing," she consoled herself, had "started now."⁶⁵ Ronconi is the most expansive and incisive in analyzing the terrorist's psychology. "The main thing was that you felt you were able to influence the world about you, instead of experiencing it passively," thereby combining intrinsic excitement with profound satisfaction. "It was this ability to make an impact on the reality of everyday life that was important," she explained, "and obviously still is important."⁶⁶

For the terrorist, success in having this impact is most often measured in terms of the amount of publicity and attention received. Newsprint and airtime are thus the coin of the realm in the terrorists' mind-set, the only tangible or empirical means they have by which to gauge their success and assess their progress. In this respect, little distinction or discrimination is made between good and bad publicity. The satisfaction of simply being noticed is often regarded as sufficient reward. "The only way to achieve results," boasted the JRA in its communiqué claiming credit for the 1972 Lod Airport massacre, in which twenty-six people were slain (including sixteen Puerto Rican Christians on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land), "is to shock the world right down to its socks."⁶⁷ The archterrorist Carlos "the Jackal" reportedly

meticulously clipped and had translated newspaper accounts about him and his deeds.⁶⁸ “The more I’m talked about,” Carlos once explained to his terrorist colleague—later turned apostate—Hans Joachim Klein, “the more dangerous I appear. That’s all the better for me.”⁶⁹ Similarly, when Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the alleged mastermind behind the 1993 bombing of New York’s World Trade Center, was apprehended in Pakistan two years later, police found in his possession two remote-control explosive devices, along with a collection of newspaper articles detailing his exploits.⁷⁰

For Carlos and Yousef as for many other terrorists, however, this equation of publicity and attention with success and self-gratification has the effect of locking them into an unrelenting upward spiral of violence in order to keep the eye of the media and the public on them.⁷¹ Yousef, for example, planned to follow the World Trade Center bombing with the assassinations of Pope John Paul II and the prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, and the nearly simultaneous in-flight bombings of eleven U.S. passenger airliners. Klein in fact describes escalation as a “force of habit” among terrorists, an intrinsic product of their perennial need for validation, which in turn is routinely assessed and appraised on the basis of media coverage. The effect is that terrorists today often feel driven to undertake ever more dramatic and destructively lethal deeds in order to achieve the same effect that a less ambitious or bloody action may have had in the past. To their minds at least, the media and the public have become progressively inured or desensitized to the seemingly endless litany of successive terrorist incidents; thus a continuous upward ratcheting of the violence is required in order to retain media and public interest and attention. As Klein once observed, the “more violent things get, the more people will respect you. The greater the chance of achieving your demands.”⁷² Timothy McVeigh, the convicted Oklahoma City bomber, seemed to be offering the same explanation when responding to his attorney’s question whether he could not have achieved the same effect of drawing attention to his grievances against the U.S. government without killing anyone. “That would not have gotten the point across,” McVeigh reportedly replied. “We needed a body count to make our point.”⁷³ In this respect, although the Murrah Building bombing was doubtless planned well in advance of the portentously symbolic date of April 19 deliberately chosen by McVeigh, he may nonetheless have felt driven to surpass in terms of death and destruction the previous month’s dramatic and more exotic nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway in order to guarantee that his attack too received the requisite media coverage and public attention.

The terrorists’ ability to attract—and, moreover, to continue to attract—attention is most often predicated on the success of their attacks. The most

feared terrorists are arguably those who are the most successful in translating thought into action: ruthless and efficient, demonstrating that they are able to make good on their threats and back up their demands with violence. This organizational imperative to succeed, however, in turn imposes on some terrorist groups an operational conservatism that makes an ironic contrast with their political radicalism, decreeing that they adhere to an established *modus operandi* that, to their minds at least, minimizes the chances of failure and maximizes the chances of success. “The main point is to select targets where success is 100% assured,” the doyen of modern international terrorism, George Habash, once explained.⁷⁴ For the terrorist, therefore, solid training, sound planning, good intelligence, and technological competence are the essential prerequisites for a successful operation. “I learned how to be an effective IRA member,” Collins reminisced about his two-year training and induction period: “how to gather intelligence, how to set up operations, how to avoid mistakes.”⁷⁵ Similarly, an unidentified American left-wing radical who specialized in bombings described in a 1970 interview the procedures and extreme care that governed all his group’s operations. The “first decision,” he said, is

political—determining appropriate and possible targets. Once a set of targets is decided on, they must be reconnoitered and information gathered on how to approach the targets, how to place the bomb, how the security of the individuals and the explosives is to be protected. Then the time is chosen and a specific target. Next there was a preliminary run-through—in our case a number of practice sessions. . . . The discipline during the actual operation is not to alter any of the agreed-upon plans or to discuss the action until everyone’s safe within the group again. Our desire is not just for one success but to continue as long as possible.⁷⁶

Good intelligence, therefore, is as critical for the success of an operation as it is for the terrorists’ own survival. Perhaps for this reason, bin Laden and his minions spent five long years planning and plotting the 1998 suicide bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.⁷⁷ The seaborne attack on the USS *Cole* took them two years to plan, while the monumental operations that would become 9/11 began to take shape as early as 1995, when KSM first began to speculate about crashing aircraft into the World Trade Center’s twin towers and the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia.⁷⁸ Indeed, *Mu’askar al-Battar* (*Camp al-Battar*) magazine, for instance, published multiple special issues such as “Covert Work Groups,” “Intelligence: How to Set-up an Intelligence

Network,” “Outlines for Planning a Surveillance Operation,” and “Military Sciences: The Planning of Operations.” Typical of detailed instruction provided is guidance on how the

mujahideen need a strong Islamic Intelligence apparatus in order to counter the dangers that surround their secret operations in towns. . . . The members of this group must be chosen with extreme care . . . [and] all members [must] be trained in the gathering of field intelligence by all methods, in the writing of intelligence reports, in photography (still and video) and in the correct evaluation of information found in the filed (the surveillance site) . . . [so] that if security is compromised, perhaps by the arrest of a cell member, that the remaining cell member are not endangered [sic].⁷⁹

An almost Darwinian principle of natural selection also seems to affect terrorist organizations, whereby (as noted above) every new terrorist generation learns from its predecessors, becoming smarter, tougher, and more difficult to capture or eliminate. In this respect, terrorists also analyze the “lessons” to be drawn from mistakes made by former comrades who have been either killed or apprehended. Press accounts, judicial indictments, courtroom testimony, and trial transcripts are meticulously culled for information on security force tactics and methods, which is then absorbed by surviving group members. The third generation of the RAF that emerged in the late 1980s is a classic example of this phenomenon. According to a senior German official, group members routinely studied “every court case against them to discover their weak spots.” Having learned about the techniques used against them by the authorities from testimony presented by law enforcement personnel in open court (in some instances having been deliberately questioned on these matters by sympathetic attorneys), the terrorists are consequently able to undertake the requisite countermeasures to avoid detection. For example, learning that the German police could usually obtain fingerprints from the bottom of toilet seats or the inside of refrigerators, surviving RAF members began to apply a special ointment to their fingers that, after drying, prevented fingerprints and thus thwarted their identification and incrimination.⁸⁰ As a spokesperson for the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA or Federal Investigation Department) lamented in the months immediately preceding the RAF’s unilateral declaration of a cease-fire in April 1992, the “‘Third Generation’ learnt a lot from the mistakes of its predecessors—and about how the police works. . . . They now know how to operate very carefully.”⁸¹ Indeed, according to a former member of the

group, Peter-Jürgen Brock, now serving a life sentence for murder, the RAF before the cease-fire had “reached maximum efficiency.”⁸²

Similar accolades have also been bestowed on the IRA. At the end of his tour of duty in 1992 as general officer commanding British forces in Northern Ireland, General Sir John Wilsey described the IRA as “an absolutely formidable enemy. The essential attributes of their leaders are better than ever before. Some of their operations are brilliant in terrorist terms.”⁸³ By this time, too, even the IRA’s once comparatively unsophisticated loyalist terrorist counterparts had absorbed the lessons of their own past mistakes and had consciously emulated the IRA to become disquietingly more “professional” as well. One senior Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officer noted this change in the loyalist terrorists’ capabilities, observing in 1991 that they too were increasingly “running their operations from small cells, on a need to know basis. They have cracked down on loose talk. They have learned how to destroy forensic evidence. And if you bring them in for questioning, they say nothing.”⁸⁴

Finally, the pre-9/11 al Qaeda also evidenced the absorption of “lessons” from previous experience in order to help its operatives blend in in Western environments and avoid attracting attention. Manuals found in the movement’s training camps in Afghanistan purported to provide a list of “dos and don’ts” that amounted to a “Tips for the Traveling Terrorist” list. Included among the proffered advice were such pointers as:

- Don’t wear short pants that show socks when you’re standing up. The pants should cover the socks, because intelligence authorities know that fundamentalists don’t wear long pants. . . .
- Underwear should be the normal type that people wear, not anything that shows you’re a fundamentalist.
- Not long before traveling—especially from Khartoum—the person should always wear socks and shoes to [get] rid of cracks [in the feet that come from extended barefoot walking], which take about a week to cure. . . .
- You should differentiate between men and women’s perfume. If you use women’s perfume, you are in trouble.⁸⁵

More recently, this learning process is evident in the operational tradecraft of the bombers responsible for the simultaneous explosions that tore through three London subway trains and a bus on July 7, 2005. The attacks on mass transit during the morning rush hour in London have inevitably been compared with the similar incident involving the bombing of four commuter

trains in Madrid, Spain, on March 11, 2004, that killed 191 people. According to counterterrorism experts, a pattern has emerged whereby “radical cells learn from each attack and refine their operations, making preventive measures and police investigations more difficult.” As one German police officer lamented, “Terrorists discover our tactics and respond. The competition is continuous.”⁸⁶

The Technological Treadmill

Finally, success for the terrorists is dependent on their ability to keep one step ahead of not only the authorities but also counterterrorist technology. The terrorist group’s fundamental organizational imperative to act also drives this persistent search for new ways to overcome or circumvent or defeat governmental security and countermeasures. The IRA’s own relentless quest to pierce the armor protecting both the security forces in Northern Ireland and the most senior government officials in England illustrates the professional evolution and increasing operational sophistication of a terrorist group. The first generation of early-1970s IRA devices were often little more than crude anti-personnel bombs, consisting of a handful of roofing nails wrapped around a lump of plastic explosive and detonated simply by lighting a fuse. Time bombs from the same era were hardly more sophisticated. Typically, they were constructed from a few sticks of dynamite and commercial detonators stolen from construction sites or rock quarries attached to ordinary battery-powered alarm clocks. Neither device was terribly reliable and often put the bomber at considerable risk. The process of placing and actually lighting the first type of device carried with it the potential to attract undesired attention while affording the bomber little time to effect the attack and make good his or her escape. Although the second type of device was designed to mitigate precisely this danger, its timing and detonation mechanism was often so crude that accidental or premature explosions were not infrequent, thus causing some terrorists inadvertently to kill themselves—what was known in Belfast as “own goals.” About 120 IRA members were killed in this way between 1969 and 1996.⁸⁷

In hopes of obviating, or at least reducing, these risks, the IRA’s bomb makers invented a means of detonating bombs from a safe distance using radio controls for model aircraft, which could be purchased at hobby shops. Scientists and engineers working in the scientific research and development division of the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) in turn developed a system of electronic countermeasures and jamming techniques for the army

that effectively thwarted this means of attack. However, rather than abandon the tactic completely, the IRA began to search for a solution to the problem. In contrast to the state-of-the-art laboratories, huge budgets, and academic credentials of their government counterparts, the IRA's own "R&D" department toiled in cellars beneath cross-border safe houses and the back rooms of urban tenements for five years before devising a network of sophisticated electronic switches for their bombs that would ignore or bypass the army's electronic countermeasures. Once again, the MoD scientists returned to their laboratories, emerging with a new system of electronic scanners able to detect radio emissions the moment the radio is switched on—and, critically, just tens of seconds before the bomber can actually transmit the detonation signal. The almost infinitesimal window of time provided by this "early warning" of impending attack was just sufficient to allow army technicians to activate a series of additional electronic measures to neutralize the transmission signal and render detonation impossible.

For a time, this mechanism proved effective. But then the IRA discovered a means to outwit even this countermeasure. Using radar detectors like those used by motorists in the United States to evade speed traps, in 1991 the group's bomb makers fabricated a detonating system that can be triggered by the same type of handheld radar gun used by police throughout the world to catch speeding drivers. Since the radar gun can be aimed at its target before being switched on, and the signal that it transmits is nearly instantaneous, no practical means currently exists either to detect or to intercept the transmission signal. Moreover, shortly after making this breakthrough the IRA's "R&D" units developed yet another means to detonate bombs, using a photo-flash "slave" unit that can be triggered from a distance of up to eight hundred meters by a flash of light. This device, which sells for between sixty and seventy pounds, is used by commercial photographers to produce simultaneous flashes during photo shoots. The IRA bombers attach the unit to the detonating system on a bomb and then simply activate it with an ordinary commercially available flashgun.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the IRA bombers earned a reputation for their innovative expertise, adaptability, and cunning. "There are some very bright people around," the British Army's chief ammunitions technical officer (CATO) in Northern Ireland commented in 1992. "I would rate them very highly for improvisation. IRA bombs are very well made."⁸⁸ A similar accolade was offered that same year by the staff officer of the British Army's 321 Explosives and Ordnance Disposal Company: "We are dealing with the first division," he said. "I don't think there is any organization in the world as cunning as the IRA. They have had twenty years at it and they have learned

from their experience. We have a great deal of respect for their skills . . . not as individuals, but their skills.”⁸⁹ While not yet nearly as good as the IRA, the province’s loyalist terrorist groups have themselves been on a “learning curve” with regard to bomb-making and are said to have become increasingly adept in the construction, concealment, and surreptitious placement of bombs.

In certain circumstances, even attacks that are not successful in conventionally understood military terms of casualties inflicted or assets destroyed can still be counted a success for the terrorists provided that they are technologically daring enough to garner media and public attention.⁹⁰ Although the IRA failed to kill the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, at the Conservative Party’s 1984 conference in Brighton, the technological ingenuity of the attempt, involving the bomb’s placement at the conference site weeks before the event and its detonation timing device powered by a computer microchip, nonetheless succeeded in capturing the world’s headlines and providing the IRA with a platform from which to warn Mrs. Thatcher and all other British leaders: “Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once—you will have to be lucky always.”⁹¹ Similarly, although the remote-control mortar attack staged by the IRA on No. 10 Downing Street as Mrs. Thatcher’s successor, John Major, and his cabinet met at the height of the 1991 Gulf War failed to hit its intended target, it nonetheless successfully elbowed the war out of the limelight and shone renewed media attention on the terrorists, their cause, and their impressive ability to strike at the nerve center of the British government even at a time of heightened security. “The Provies are always that step ahead of you,” a senior RUC officer has commented. “They are very innovative.”⁹² Although the technological mastery employed by the IRA is arguably unique among terrorist organizations, experience has nonetheless demonstrated repeatedly that when confronted by new security measures, terrorists will seek to identify and exploit new vulnerabilities, adjusting their means of attack accordingly and often carrying on despite the obstacles placed in their path.

Conclusion

“All politics is a struggle for power,” wrote C. Wright Mills, and “the ultimate kind of power is violence.”⁹³ Terrorism is where politics and violence intersect in the hope of delivering power. All terrorism involves the quest for power: power to dominate and coerce, to intimidate and control, and ultimately to effect fundamental political change. Violence (or the threat of

violence) is thus the sine qua non of terrorists, who are unswervingly convinced that only through violence can their cause triumph and their long-term political aims be attained. Terrorists therefore plan their operations in a manner that will shock, impress, and intimidate, ensuring that their acts are sufficiently daring and violent to capture the attention of the media and, in turn, of the public and government as well. Often erroneously seen as indiscriminate or senseless, terrorism is actually a very deliberate and planned application of violence. It may be represented as a concatenation of five individual processes, designed to achieve, sequentially, the following key objectives:

1. *Attention.* Through dramatic, attention-riveting acts of violence, terrorists seek to focus attention on themselves and their causes through the publicity they receive, most often from news media coverage.
2. *Acknowledgment.* Having attracted this attention, and thrust some otherwise previously ignored or hitherto forgotten cause onto the state's—or, often more desirably, the international community's—agenda, terrorists seek to translate their newfound notoriety into acknowledgment of (and perhaps even sympathy and support for) their cause.
3. *Recognition.* Terrorists attempt to capitalize on the interest and acknowledgment that their violent acts have generated by obtaining recognition of their rights (i.e., acceptance of the justification of their cause) and of their particular organization as *the* spokesperson of the constituency whom the terrorists purport to, or in some cases actually do, represent.
4. *Authority.* Armed with this recognition, terrorists seek the authority to effect the changes in government and/or society that lie at the heart of their movement's struggle. This may involve a change in government or in the entire state structure, or redistribution of wealth, readjustment of geographical boundaries, assertion of minority rights, imposition of theocratic rule, etc.
5. *Governance.* Having acquired authority, terrorists seek to consolidate their direct and complete control over the state, their homeland and/or their people.

While some terrorist movements have been successful in achieving the first three objectives, rarely in modern times has any group attained the last two. Nonetheless, all terrorists exist and function in hopes of reaching this ultimate end. For them, the future rather than the present defines their

reality. Indeed, they can console themselves that in 1987 the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, said of the African National Congress, “Anyone who thinks it is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land.”⁹⁴ Exactly ten years after that remark was uttered, Queen Elizabeth II greeted President Nelson Mandela on his first official state visit to London.