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Terrorism

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No handbook of Security Studies would be complete without a chapter on terrorism. In the twenty-first century, the majority of scholars working in the field of Security Studies would agree with this assertion, even though there are many disputes about the underlying causes of terrorism; its impact on nation-states and International Relations; and about the most appropriate and effective responses to terrorist challenges to democratic societies and the international community.

This chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of terrorism or an assessment of all the uses of terrorism by states and non-state actors at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It rather aims to provide an introduction to the concept of terrorism; a typology of current actors; and an analysis of the most significant recent developments and trends in terrorism. The main body of the chapter highlights some of the major debates that have preoccupied specialists in terrorism studies before and after 11 September 2001, both in relation to terrorism within Western democracies and in front-line states such as Iraq, where terrorism is accompanied by a wider insurgency or internal war. In conclusion, the chapter offers some thoughts on the future of terrorism; the unresolved issues that challenge both academic researchers and policy-makers; and the ways in which academic research and debate has influenced the practice of security.

The concept of terrorism

It is important at the outset to dispel some of the confusion about the concept of terrorism that has hampered the development of the systematic study of the subject (Schmid et al. 1988). Some commentators in the media, some politicians and members of the public continue to use 'terrorism' as a synonym for political violence in general, when in reality it is a special form of violence. It is a deliberate attempt by a group or by a government regime to create a climate of extreme fear to intimidate a target social group or government or commercial organization with the aim of forcing it to change its behaviour. It is generally directed at a wider target than the immediate victims and inherently involves attacks on random or symbolic targets, including civilians. It is important to note that the use of the

term 'terrorism' came into the English language at the time of the Reign of Terror (1793–94) during the French Revolution (Greer 1935; Lucas 1972). In their quest to establish a republic based on the principle of 'virtu' following Montesquieu (Montesquieu 1965), the revolutionary leaders Robespierre and Saint-Just saw systematic mass terror as an emanation of virtue.

It is obvious that governments and regimes have historically frequently used the weapon of terror, and because they generally command far greater firepower and manpower than non-state groups, state terror has been responsible for far higher levels of death and destruction than have been achieved by non-state groups (Arendt 1958; Walter 1969). The notorious Roman *princeps* Nero, for example, carried the use of terrorism to such extremes that he engaged in a wholesale massacre of the nobility and wilfully set fire to the city (Suetonius 1957).

One of the earliest organized non-state groups (with some parallels to al-Qaida today) to employ terrorism systematically for a religious cause was the Shi'ite Muslim sect of the Hashshashin (Lewis 1967), who were active in the Middle East from the eleventh century until their suppression by the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century. Another key stage in the history of non-state terrorism was the campaign of the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) group (Avrich 1980; Laqueur 1977), against tsarist autocracy in late-nineteenth century Russia. The tactic it adopted was a series of assassination attempts on senior officials of the regime. In March 1881, Narodnaya Volya succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II. However, although this alarmed the Russian elite, Narodnaya Volya failed to bring about any major change in the tsarist system. The main lesson of Narodnaya Volya's ultimately futile struggle is that non-state groups using terror are unlikely to succeed in overthrowing a ruthless autocracy or dictatorship that is prepared to use state terror, with all the resources of a secret police and an army of informers.

It is often assumed that terrorism today poses the greatest threat to security. This is perhaps understandable in the light of the attacks carried out in 2001 by al-Qaida terrorists against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington, DC, killing nearly 3,000 people (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). This was the most deadly terrorist assault ever carried out by a non-state terrorist group in a single day. However, it is important to consider the terrorist threat in a wider strategic perspective. There are other, arguably far more serious threats to international security, for example the threat to our environment from climate change and the threat of conflict between nuclear-armed states escalating to nuclear war.

Typology of terrorism

Although it is wrong to equate terrorism with political violence in general, it is nevertheless a fairly broad concept. Specialists in terrorism studies have found it essential to develop typologies of the main types of terrorism (Schmid et al. 1988: 39–59). One fundamental distinction is between *state* and *non-state terrorism*. The former has been infinitely more lethal because regimes/governments generally have greater supplies of weapons and manpower at their disposal to implement policies of terror. However, although there has been some very important scholarship on state terrorism (Arendt 1958; Conquest 1968), particularly in the Cold War, the major preoccupation of specialists in terrorism studies in the late twentieth century, and particularly since September

2001, has been the threat from terrorism posed by non-state movements or groups seeking to impose their own agenda on the international system (Hoffman 1998).

A second major distinction is between *international* and *internal* or domestic terrorism. The former involves the citizens, property or international legal obligations of more than one country. The latter is confined within the borders of a single state and involves no foreign citizens or property. However, almost every major protracted internal terrorist campaign against a specific state develops an international dimension through the creation of overseas support networks designed to secure funds, weapons, recruits and supportive publicity for the struggle against their chosen 'enemy' state authorities and security forces.

It is also very useful to classify non-state terrorist groups by their predominant political motivation: *ethno-nationalist groups* (e.g. ETA and the Tamil Tigers); *ideological groups* (e.g. the Peruvian Maoist group Sendero Luminoso); *religio-political groups* (e.g. al-Qaida and Hamas); *single-issue groups* (e.g. the Animal Liberation Front); and *state-sponsored groups* (e.g. the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), which was active in the 1980s).

Another distinction worth adding to our typology is that between potentially *corrigible groups* and *incorrigible groups*. In the case of the former, there is at least a possibility of finding a political/diplomatic pathway to lead the terrorist group out of violence and into peaceful participation in politics (e.g. the route followed by the IRA since the Good Friday Agreement of August 1998). *Incorrigible terrorism* occurs when the terrorist movement or group has such maximalist and absolutist aims and poses such a threat to innocent life that the only resource is to use all possible measures within the law to suppress the group.

Finally, we can construct a typology of the effectiveness of terrorist groups in achieving their goals. The majority of groups do manage to achieve some *tactical* or short-term gains, such as obtaining publicity for their cause through media coverage; raising more funds from supporters; and recruiting more militants who are ready to commit acts of terrorism. However, historically, very few groups have succeeded in winning their *strategic* political objectives. The exceptions mainly occurred in the era of anti-colonial struggles (e.g. the FLN against the French in Algeria and the EOKA against the British in Cyprus), but they were made possible due to special conditions in the post-Second World War period. The European colonial powers were exhausted and bankrupt after the war, and their government and citizens had little interest in seeing their police and soldiers killed to preserve a colonial rule that most of the public wished to terminate (Horne 1996; Townshend 1986).

The roots of terrorism can sometimes also be traced to mistaken policies of the major powers in the recent past. British policy-makers, for example, made some very serious mistakes in the way they ended the Palestine Mandate and British rule in India that were to cost many lives and plant the seeds of protracted conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians and between Pakistan and India over control of Kashmir, which was handed to India despite having a majority of Muslim inhabitants.

Terrorism studies: major issues and debates

Much of the early scholarship on terrorism was accomplished by historians dealing with specific terrorist movements. But there was also a flurry of interest in the field on the part of political scientists and sociologists writing about both state and non-state terrorism (Hardman 1937; Roucek 1962; Walter 1969; Arendt 1958; Conquest 1968; Thornton 1964). However, it was not until the burgeoning of international terrorism stemming

from the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and the emergence of the 'Fighting Communist Organizations' (Alexander and Pluchinsky 1972) such as the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction in Western Europe, that academic interest in the subject began to increase rapidly. The growth of research and academic publications dealing with all types of international and internal terrorism in the late 1960s and the 1970s was clearly a reflection of the dramatic increase in terrorist incidents in many countries and the growing political and public debate on the subject. Major contributors to the growing literature of terrorism studies included Brian Jenkins (1975), Martha Crenshaw (1978, 1983), and historian Walter Laqueur (1977).

Difference in the US and Europe

Scholars, like policy-makers and communities, are to a considerable extent influenced by the political culture, history, traditions and dominant perceptions of national interest in the countries where they originate. This helps to explain the noticeable differences between the preoccupations of terrorism research in the US and those of European academic specialists in the study of terrorism: European terrorism experts mainly concentrated on the significant domestic terrorist movements that were also the focus of the counter-terrorism efforts of their countries' intelligence and security agencies – in the UK, the IRA; in Germany, the Red Army Faction; in Italy, the Red Brigades; and in Spain, ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, Basque Fatherland and Liberty). It was obvious to successive US administrations that the personnel and overseas facilities of the US as the leading superpower during the Cold War years were regarded as prime targets by terrorist groups in many countries. They were well aware that US installations in the Middle East were particularly vulnerable to attacks because the US is the key ally and supporter of Israel, the object of intense hatred in the eyes of most Middle Eastern terrorist groups. US intelligence and security agencies also invested considerable effort in monitoring, surveillance and countering of state-sponsored terrorism, a key feature of international terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s. The US government's annual reports, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, compiled initially by the CIA and then by the State Department, provide abundant evidence of major concerns harboured by US officials concerning international terrorism. Each report includes a survey of the activities of state sponsors as viewed from Washington. It is hardly surprising that security specialists in US universities, research institutes such as RAND and think-tanks such as CSIS in Washington researched, analysed and debated similar themes.

This fundamental difference in recent historical experience of terrorism in the US and Western Europe also explained their rather different priorities in response to terrorism. The US took a leading role in drafting and promoting international measures and conventions aimed at preventing, or at least reducing, the threat of international terrorism. In addition to the diplomatic effort to secure international conventions, some of the most successful US initiatives included practical measures such as the system of boarding-gate x-ray machines and magnetometer archways, which were designed to strengthen airport security against the hijack threat and were designed and pioneered in US airports before being adopted by the entire international civil aviation community. European governments, on the other hand, challenged by significant levels of internal terrorism, understandably tended to concentrate on introducing anti-terrorism legislation to assist the police and judiciary to bring terrorists to justice in the 1970s and 1980s (Wilkinson 2006).

Issues prior to September 2001

The issues that preoccupied academic specialists in the study of terrorism prior to 9/11 included hardy perennials such as: Could generally agreed definitions for terrorism be found, and if not, should the concept of terrorism be discarded? How serious was the threat of terrorism to (a) democratic societies and (b) the international community? How should democratic governments and the international community respond to terrorism? Was it permissible to seek a political pathway out of terrorism, and if so, under what conditions (Wilkinson 1987: 453–65)? How could a peace process be initiated and sustained? How could basic human rights and freedom in a democracy be preserved in the face of clamour for more draconian counter-terrorist measures? How could a proper balance between the preservation of international security and democratic freedoms be attained? What roles were appropriate for the intelligence services, the police, and the military in combating terrorism (a) within a democracy and (b) against international terrorism?

There was also a debate about the future of terrorism, and particularly about the possible threat from terrorists using weapons of mass destruction (Taylor and Horgan 2000). This debate has remained unresolved, despite the rise of al-Qaida in the 1990s and the 9/11 attacks with their clear demonstration of al-Qaida's desire to cause mass casualties on an unprecedented scale. All these major issues and debates about terrorism remain on the agenda of terrorism studies today, some with still more relevance in the post-9/11 era. However, the rise of al-Qaida has had considerable implications for the study of terrorism.

Al-Qaida terrorism

Al-Qaida ('The Base') was founded in 1988 by Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, both of whom had been recruiting Sunni extremists to join the mujahideen fighters who successfully expelled the former Soviet Union's forces from Afghanistan. Al-Qaida believed it must establish strict Sharia religious law (Gerges 2005; Brachman 2009). It aims to expel the US and other 'infidels' from the Middle East and from Muslim lands everywhere. The network also wants to topple Muslim regimes and governments that they claim are 'apostates' betraying the 'true Islam' (as defined by al-Qaida) and collaborating with the US and its allies. Ultimately, al-Qaida aims to establish a pan-Islamic caliphate (super-state) uniting all Muslims, thus changing the entire international system. Al-Qaida has declared a jihad against the US and its allies and stated that it is the duty of all Muslims to kill US citizens – civilians and military – and their allies everywhere (bin Laden 1998).

There has been an ongoing debate about the state of the al-Qaida organization. Some commentators have argued that al-Qaida ceased to be an effective organization once the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was toppled in the autumn of 2001. In reality, there is overwhelming evidence that its core leaders re-established a base across the border in Pakistan's tribal areas and that they are still capable of giving their network of affiliates and cells ideological and strategic leadership, despite the loss of some of their top militants (Evans 2009). It is clear that al-Qaida 'franchises' have a presence in almost half the countries in the world. This gives them global reach and the ability to compensate for setbacks in one country by advances elsewhere. The group has also proved capable of adapting rapidly to changing circumstances. After being forced to move its core base from Afghanistan to the border areas of Pakistan, the jihadist network has made intensive use of the internet as a channel for propaganda; as a means of attracting and indoctrinating

fresh recruits; and as a means of providing its followers with information about the construction of bombs and other practical guidance for terrorists.

The majority of specialists in the study of terrorism recognize a number of very significant differences between traditional terrorists groups and the al-Qaida network. It is explicitly committed to mounting mass casualty attacks. Brian Jenkins once accurately observed that the terrorist groups in the 1970s 'wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead' (Jenkins 1975: 4). Al-Qaida and its affiliates want a lot of people dead and a lot of people watching. Moreover, to this end, it uses coordinated no-warning suicide attacks, the most difficult type of terrorism to prevent in an 'open society', especially when, as they have demonstrated in successive acts of carnage, they are prepared to attack all types of locations where the public is likely to gather, such as hotels, shopping areas, mosques (for example, Shi'ite mosques in Iraq), public transport systems, airliners and shipping, as well as diplomatic and economic targets.

Ever since it was discovered that the members of the terrorist cell that carried out the 7 July 2005 suicide bombing on the London Underground and a London Transport bus, killing 52 members of the public were British, there has been a surge of research interest in the processes of radicalization and recruitment into al-Qaida-linked 'home-grown' terrorism in the UK. Other European countries have also been concerned about the continuing recruitment of members of their own Muslim community into violent extremism. However, the terms 'home-grown' and 'leaderless resistance' can be very misleading: The evidence from dozens of court cases shows that many of the convicted individuals had been in touch with terrorists overseas, in some cases by means of travel to Pakistan or the Middle East. Furthermore, some recruits still obtain training in terrorist training camps abroad and many have travelled to Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia to obtain first-hand experience of terrorist tactics and methods (Evans 2009). Conversely, many of those recruits who have not travelled overseas to meet terrorist leaders and other militants were able to resort to the internet, a transnational medium of communication that provides an alternative and highly accessible source of foreign influence.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the study of radicalization and recruitment (and possible ways to prevent it) has become a top priority for researchers in the field of terrorism studies. Among the major conducive conditions for radicalization identified in recent research (Forrest 2006) are the following.

Political Factors include resentment against US foreign policies and the foreign policies of the UK and other NATO European allies that generally support US policy; extreme resentment and hatred against Israel; and resentment and anger against regimes in the Muslim world, which have, in many cases, ruthlessly suppressed fundamentalist Islamist movements and/or blocked them from gaining power via the ballot box, for example in Algeria in 1991.

There are also *religious factors* that can play an important part in the process of radicalization, such as the belief that the world of Islam is under attack by the US and its 'crusader' allies and that only al-Qaida and its affiliates can end the victimization and occupation of the Muslim world; the belief that existing Muslim regimes have betrayed their religion by engaging in friendly relations with infidel states; the belief that by waging a global jihad, al-Qaida and its franchises are carrying out Allah's will and that Allah will ensure that they will defeat the infidels; and the belief that by carrying out acts of voluntary self-sacrifice or martyrdom (i.e. suicide attacks) they will be rewarded in Paradise.

The *socio-economic and personal factors* are too numerous to mention, but they include the alienation felt by many young Muslims in the UK and other EU countries who believe they are being treated as second-class citizens and robbed of their identity, i.e. that they are no longer part of the traditional world of Islam, nor are they accepted as full citizens of the countries where they now reside; in some cases, resentment at being unable to gain employment or rise up the socio-economic ladder; peer group pressure from other young men who have joined extremist groups; and, last but not least, anger at what is seen unjust or repressive treatment of friends or relatives by the police or other agencies of the state.

Thus far, this chapter has dealt primarily with the use of terrorism unaccompanied by any insurgency or civil war. This has been the form of terrorism experienced in Western Europe since the 1970s. However, this has not been the experience of the so-called 'front-line' states in the Middle East and Asia, where terrorism has generally been accompanied by brutal and protracted insurgencies or full-scale internal wars. Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have all experienced conflicts of this kind on a tragic scale. For example, the number of incidents of terrorism in Iraq during the insurgency in 2005 was 3,468. By 2006 this had increased to 6,630 – almost half the total number of terrorist incidents worldwide in that year (US National Counter Terrorism Center as quoted in US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, 2007). The terrorist attacks involved outrages deliberately aimed at killing large numbers of people, such as car bombings in busy market places, crowded streets, and even mosques and hospitals. Such attacks are forbidden under the Geneva Conventions, which are aimed at protecting civilians, places of worship and medical facilities.[1] It would clearly be wrong to assume that all these outrages against civilians were supported or approved by all the groups involved in the insurgency: indeed, many of the attacks by al-Qaida in Iraq were designed to provoke inter-faction conflict between the Sunni and Shi'ite populations and to undermine the very fragile newly elected democratic government in Iraq. The next section looks briefly at the relationship between terrorism and war.

The relationship between terrorism and war

In Western democracies, so-called 'home-grown' terrorism is not accompanied by any wider insurgency or internal war. The overwhelming majority of the public are deeply opposed to the terrorists and will be ready to support and assist the police in their efforts to prevent attacks and to bring terrorists to justice. The same cannot be said for the 'front-line' states, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where al-Qaida affiliates challenge the governments and their Western allies by exploiting full-scale insurgencies, which in certain circumstances can threaten the very stability and survival of the government. In the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, we have seen an increasing number of conflicts in which terrorism becomes interwoven with a wider war. Military and paramilitary organizations as well as terrorist groups increasingly resort to the weapon of terror as a means of breaking the will and morale of the 'enemy' populations.

The late twentieth century was replete with these 'terror wars', for example in Peru, Colombia, Algeria, the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Central Africa, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Cambodia. A feature of these savage conflicts is that they tend to go on for a very long time. There is no easy exit from terror wars. The savagery of the

conflicts, whipped up by ideologies of ethnic or religious hatred, polarizes the belligerents to such an extent that conflict resolution seems unattainable. Frequently, one (or both) of the belligerents obtains assistance from militant supporters from abroad. For example, large numbers of militant jihadis have travelled from Western countries to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and other countries where they can gain direct experience and knowledge of terrorist weaponry, tactics and methods. EU governments have, with good reason, become worried about these militants bringing their practical experience and knowledge back to European countries, where they could apply their expertise.

Some thoughts on the future of terrorism and effective responses against it

At the time of writing (December 2008), there was no sign that the al-Qaida network had been put out of business. It is true that its affiliates in Iraq suffered heavy blows in 2007, largely due to local Sunni leaders and communities turning against them and regaining control of their local areas within the 'Sunni Triangle'. Perhaps the most serious of the many strategic blunders made by al-Qaida's core leadership has been to underestimate the extent of the backlash resulting from their readiness to massacre and maim large numbers of their co-religionists.

But there have also been major strategic mistakes by the US, the UK and other Western allies in the conduct of the 'War on Terror'. The most serious of these mistakes was the decision by US President George W. Bush, supported by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to launch an invasion of Iraq in 2003 to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, even though there was no evidence whatsoever that Hussein was involved in the plot to launch the 11 September 2001 attacks, or that he was about to launch attacks on his neighbours using weapons of mass destruction. The strategic blunder of diverting large-scale military and financial resources to the invasion and occupation of Iraq handed al-Qaida a valuable propaganda and recruitment weapon and provided them with hundreds of coalition targets (military and civilian) in Iraq. It also meant that there were insufficient military resources available to help the democratically elected government in Afghanistan to attain the level of security necessary to facilitate economic reconstruction. Most serious of all was the huge death toll of Iraqi civilians and the large number of soldiers who have lost their lives during the occupation.

One of the key lessons of the recent history of terrorism is that it is a serious mistake to believe that the use of military force alone is sufficient to eliminate a terrorist threat completely (Wilkinson 2006, 2008). When President George W. Bush stated, in the aftermath of 9/11, that the US was declaring 'war on terrorism', he misled many into assuming that the US military would be able to 'solve' the terrorism problem by defeating al-Qaida on the battlefields in the Middle East and that with its superior military force, the US would rapidly defeat terrorists who hide among the civilian population and plot secretly to carry out no-warning bombing attacks on the civilian populations.

At time of writing, it could not be said that the US and its allies were winning the struggle against al-Qaida, but it could be said that they had stopped losing it. In Iraq, the local al-Qaida franchise have suffered a crushing blow, and more leading al-Qaida militants have been killed by means of missile attacks launched from Predator unmanned aerial vehicles near the Pakistan border with Afghanistan. However, al-Qaida has been consolidating its position in Pakistan and has managed to protect the area where its core

leadership is believed to be located. Al-Qaida has also been busy expanding its presence in West Africa and the Horn of Africa, while maintaining its recruitment of fresh militants among the Muslim communities in Europe.

It is reasonable to assume that the threat of terrorism from al-Qaida and its affiliates will remain for some years ahead. We are also likely to see the introduction of new al-Qaida tactics and some copying of the tactic of using mass shooting attacks to cause mass casualties as was used to deadly effect in Mumbai in November 2008. It seems likely that the use of similar tactics in other cities would also cause mass casualties, and that the police and security forces in many countries would find it just as difficult as the Indian security forces did to protect the public and capture the terrorists. It is also important to bear in mind that al-Qaida has shown great interest in acquiring unconventional weapons, such as chemical weapons and 'dirty bombs' (improvised explosives combined with radioactive isotopes). Governments, police forces and emergency services need to have contingency plans, equipment and medical supplies to deal with the consequences of this type of attack.

An effective strategy against terrorists has to be multi-pronged, involving the intelligence services, the police, the judiciary, immigration and customs services, the private sector, etc, and success in gaining support from the media and from the public, which can provide the eyes and ears to pick up information and clues to assist the intelligence-gathering by the police and intelligence services. The military can perform many valuable tasks within the framework of this multi-pronged strategy, but over-dependence on military force can become counter-productive. For example, the Israeli government's decision to bombard Lebanon in 2006 only strengthened support for Hizbollah, and Israel's massive and totally disproportionate bombardment and siege of Gaza launched in December 2008 only served to strengthen support for Hamas and created new generations of terrorists eager to avenge the deaths of the hundreds of Palestinian victims of the bombardment and invasion of Gaza.

Note

1 According to www.iraqbodycount.org, the latest figure for civilian deaths in Iraq from 2003 to 14 January 2009 is 98,605.

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