

# Chapter 1

## Nature and History of Terror

Terrorist acts or the threat of such action have been in existence for millennia. Despite having a history longer than the modern nation-state, the use of terror by governments and those that contest their power remains poorly understood. While the meaning of the word *terror* itself is clear, when it is applied to acts and actors in the real world it becomes confused. Part of this is due to the use of terror tactics by actors at all levels in the social and political environment. Is the Unabomber, with his solo campaign of terror, a criminal, terrorist, or revolutionary? Can he be compared to the French revolutionary governments who coined the word terrorism by instituting systematic state terror against the population of France in the 1790s, killing thousands? Are either the same as revolutionary terrorist groups such as the Baader-Mienhof Gang of West Germany or the Weather Underground in the United States?

So we see that distinctions of size and political legitimacy of the actors using terror raise questions as to what is and is not terrorism. The concept of *moral equivalency* is frequently used as an argument to broaden and blur the definition of terrorism as well. This concept argues that the outcome of an action is what matters, not the intent.<sup>6</sup> Collateral or unintended damage to civilians from an attack by uniformed military forces on a legitimate military target is the same as a terrorist bomb directed deliberately at the civilian target with the intent of creating that damage. Simply put, a car bomb on a city street and a jet fighter dropping a bomb on a tank are both acts of violence that produce death and terror. Therefore (at the extreme end of this argument) any military action is simply terrorism by a different name.<sup>7</sup> This is the reasoning behind the famous phrase “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. It is also a legacy of legitimizing the use of terror by successful revolutionary movements after the fact.

“One democracy’s terrorist is another democracy’s terrorist.”  
- Professor Paul Wilkinson, St. Andrews University

Finally, the very flexibility and adaptability of terror throughout the years has contributed to the confusion. Those seeking to disrupt, reorder or destroy the status quo have continuously sought new and creative ways to achieve their goals. Changes in the tactics and techniques of terrorists have been significant, but even more significant are the growth in the number of causes and social contexts where terrorism is used.

Despite these problems, terrorism can be studied and useful conclusions drawn. The first section of this chapter introduces a background of definitions and concepts for understanding terrorism. The second section provides a brief survey of the historical employment of terrorism. By establishing specific definitions and concrete concepts regarding terrorism, and determining how it has been used in the past, we can improve our ability to understand how it works in the present, and what it may become in the future.

### Section I: What is Terrorism

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 33.

<sup>7</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “The Terrorists’ View.”

Terrorism has been described variously as both a tactic and strategy; a crime and a holy duty; a justified reaction to oppression and an inexcusable abomination. Obviously, a lot depends on whose point of view is being represented. Terrorism has often been an effective tactic for the weaker side in a conflict. As an asymmetric form of conflict, it confers coercive power with many of the advantages of military force at a fraction of the cost. Due to the secretive nature and small size of terrorist organizations, they often offer opponents no clear organization to defend against or to deter. That is why preemption is now so important. In some cases, terrorism has been a means to carry on a conflict without the adversary realizing the nature of the threat, mistaking terrorism for criminal activity. Because of these characteristics, terrorism has become increasingly common among those pursuing extreme goals throughout the world. But despite its popularity, terrorism can be a nebulous concept. Even within the U.S. Government, agencies responsible for different functions in our current fight against terrorism use different definitions.

## Defining Terrorism

The Department of Defense approved definition of terrorism is: “The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this document, this will be the standard definition. However, this is not the last or only word on the subject. A researcher did a review of writings on terrorism and found 109 different definitions!<sup>9</sup> Here is a sampling of definitions to illustrate the difficulties of categorizing and analyzing terrorism.

The FBI uses this: “Terrorism is the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Department of State uses the definition contained in Title 22 U.S.C. Section 2656f(d). According to this section, “terrorism” means “premeditated politically-motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”<sup>11</sup> These definitions stress the respective institutional concerns of the organizations using them. The FBI concentrates on the “unlawful” aspect, in keeping with its law-enforcement mission. The Department of State concerns itself with “politically motivated” actions by “sub-national” or “clandestine” actors, a focus appropriate to the Department’s functions of international relations and diplomacy.

### Related Definitions

**Terrorist:** (JP 1-02) - An individual who uses violence, terror, and intimidation to achieve a result.

**Counter-terrorism:** (JP 1-02) - Offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism.

**Anti-terrorism:** (JP 1-02) - Defensive measures used to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and property to terrorist acts, to include limited response and containment by local military forces.

<sup>8</sup> FM 100-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, 5 December 1990; and Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 12 April 2001, as amended through 09 January 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 39.

<sup>10</sup> Title 28, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 0.85, *Judicial Administration*, (Washington, D.C., July 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001* (Washington, D.C., May 2002), xvi.

Outside the United States Government, there are greater variations in what features of terrorism are emphasized in definitions. The United Nations produced this definition in 1992; “An anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets.” The most commonly accepted academic definition starts with the U.N. definition quoted above, and adds two sentences totaling another 77 words on the end; containing such verbose concepts as “message generators” and “violence based communication processes.”<sup>12</sup> Less specific and considerably less verbose, the British Government definition of 1974 is “...the use of violence for political ends, and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public, or any section of the public, in fear.”<sup>13</sup>

On the extremely terse end of the spectrum, the terrorism expert Brian Jenkins bluntly stated in 1974 “Terrorism is theatre.”<sup>14</sup> This is possibly the best three-word analogy for such a complex phenomenon. We can think of terrorism, like a play, as a constructed incident presented to a large audience to gain and hold their attention. Modern media provide the stage, and audience attention is further engaged because random individuals are selected to join the principals on stage. And like a play, the point of the exercise is the feelings and attitudes of the audience, not the actors.

### **Common Elements of Terrorism**

There is clearly a wide choice of definitions for terrorism. Despite this, there are elements in common among the majority of useful definitions. Common threads of the various definitions identify terrorism as:

- Political
- Psychological
- Coercive
- Dynamic
- Deliberate

#### Political

A terrorist act is a political act or is committed with the intention to cause a political effect. Clausewitz’ statement that “war is a continuation of policy by other means” is taken as a truism by terrorists. They merely eliminate the intermediate step of armies and warfare, and apply violence directly to the political contest.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “The Academic View.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “The Official View.”

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics and Power* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1962), 83.

## Psychological

The intended results of terrorist acts cause a psychological effect (“terror”). They are aimed at a target audience other than the actual victims of the act. The intended target audience of the terrorist act may be the population as a whole, some specific portion of a society (an ethnic minority, for example), or decision-making elites in the society’s political, social, or military populace.

## Coercive

Violence and destruction are used in the commission of the act to produce the desired effect. Even if casualties or destruction are not the result of a terrorist operation, the threat or potential of violence is what produces the intended effect. For example, a successful hostage taking operation may result in all hostages being freed unharmed after negotiations and bargaining. Regardless of the outcome, the terrorist bargaining chips were nothing less than the raw threat of applying violence to maim or kill some or all of the hostages. When the threat of violence is not credible, or the terrorists are unable to implement violence effectively, terrorism fails.

## Dynamic

Terrorist groups demand change, revolution, or political movement. The radical worldview that justifies terrorism mandates drastic action to destroy or alter the status quo. Even if the goals of a movement are reactionary in nature, they require action to “turn back the clock” or restore some cherished value system that is extinct. Nobody commits violent attacks on strangers or innocents to keep things “just the way they are.”

## Deliberate

Terrorism is an activity planned and intended to achieve particular goals. It is a rationally employed, specifically selected tactic, and is not a random act.<sup>16</sup> Since the victims of terrorist violence are often of little import, with one being as good for the terrorists’ purposes as another, victim or target selection can appear random or unprovoked. But the target will contain symbolic value or be capable of eliciting emotional response according to the terrorists’ goals. Remember that the actual target of terrorism is not the victim of the violence, but the psychological balance of the society or population.

## **Specific Observations**

In addition to these common elements derived from attempts to define terrorism, some specific observations about terrorists become apparent. These observations are not definitive; meaning they do not automatically indicate terrorist activity. But they are common to the practice of terrorism.

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<sup>16</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 120 (September/October 2000): 66-73.

## Media Exploitation

Terrorism's effects are not necessarily aimed at the victims of terrorist violence. Victims are usually objects to be exploited by the terrorists for their effect on a third party. In order to produce this effect, information of the attack must reach the target audience. So any terrorist organization plans for exploitation of available media to get the message to the right audiences.<sup>17</sup> Victims are simply the first medium that transmits the psychological impact to the larger target audience. The next step in transmission will depend on what media is available, but it will be planned, and it will frequently be the responsibility of a specific organization within the terrorist group to do nothing else but exploit and control the news cycle.<sup>18</sup>

Some organizations can rely on friendly or sympathetic news outlets, but this is not necessary. News media can be manipulated by planning around the demands of the "news cycle", and the advantage that control of the initiative gives the terrorist. Pressures to report quickly, to "scoop" competitors, allow terrorists to present claims or make statements that might be refuted or critically commented on if time were available. Terrorists often provide names and details of individual victims to control the news media through its desire to humanize or personalize a story. For the victims of a terrorist attack, it is a certainty that the impact on the survivors (if there are any) is of minimal importance to the terrorists. What is important is the intended psychological impact that the news of their death or suffering will cause in a wider audience.

## Operations in Permissive Societies

Terrorists conduct more operations in societies where individual rights and civil legal protections prevail. While terrorists may base themselves in repressive regimes that are sympathetic to them, they usually avoid repressive governments when conducting operations wherever possible. An exception to this case is a repressive regime that does not have the means to enforce security measures. Governments with effective security forces and few guaranteed civil liberties have typically suffered much less from terrorism than liberal states with excellent security forces. Al Qaeda has shown, however, that they will conduct operations anywhere.

## Illegality of Methods

Terrorism is a criminal act. Whether the terrorist chooses to identify himself with military terminology (as discussed under insurgencies below), or with civilian imagery ("brotherhood", "committee", etc.), he is a criminal in both spheres. The violations of civil criminal laws are self-evident in activities such as murder, arson, and kidnapping regardless of the legitimacy of the government enforcing the laws. Victimized the innocent is criminal injustice under a dictatorship or a democracy.<sup>19</sup> If the terrorist claims that he is justified in using such violence as a military combatant, he is a de facto war criminal under international law and the military justice systems of most nations.

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 55-58.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 33.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 190.

## Preparation and Support

It's important to understand that actual terrorist operations are the result of extensive preparation and support operations. Media reporting and academic study have mainly focused on the terrorists' goals and actions, which is precisely what the terrorist intends. This neglects the vital but less exciting topic of preparation and support operations. Significant effort and coordination is required to finance group operations, procure or manufacture weapons, conduct target surveillance and analysis, and deliver trained terrorists to the operational area. While the time and effort expended by the terrorists may be a drop in the bucket compared to the amounts spent to defend against them, terrorist operations can still involve large amounts of money and groups of people. The need for dedicated support activities and resources on simple operations are significant, and get larger the greater the sophistication of the plan and the complexity of the target.

## **Differences between Terrorism and Insurgency**

If no single definition of terrorism produces a precise, unambiguous description, we can approach the question by eliminating similar activities that are not terrorism, but that appear to overlap. For the U.S. military, two such related concepts probably lead to more confusion than others. Guerilla warfare and insurgencies are often assumed to be synonymous with terrorism. One reason for this is that insurgencies and terrorism often have similar goals.<sup>20</sup> However, if we examine insurgency and guerilla warfare, specific differences emerge.

A key difference is that an insurgency is a movement - a political effort with a specific aim. This sets it apart from both guerilla warfare and terrorism, as they are both methods available to pursue the goals of the political movement.

Another difference is the intent of the component activities and operations of insurgencies versus terrorism. There is nothing inherent in either insurgency or guerilla warfare that requires the use of terror. While some of the more successful insurgencies and guerilla campaigns employed terrorism and terror tactics, and some developed into conflicts where terror tactics and terrorism became predominant; there have been others that effectively renounced the use of terrorism. The deliberate choice to use terrorism considers its effectiveness in inspiring further resistance, destroying government efficiency, and mobilizing support.<sup>21</sup> Although there are places where terrorism, guerilla warfare, and criminal behavior all overlap, groups that are exclusively terrorist, or subordinate "wings" of insurgencies formed to specifically employ terror tactics, demonstrate clear differences in their objectives and operations. Disagreement on the costs of using terror tactics, or whether terror operations are to

**Insurgency:** (JP 1-02, NATO) - An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.

**Guerilla Warfare:** (JP 1-02, NATO) - Military and paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held or hostile territory by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces.

<sup>20</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Theories of Insurgency and Terrorism: Introduction."

<sup>21</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 16-20.

be given primacy within the insurgency campaign, have frequently led to the “urban guerilla” or terrorist wings of an insurgency splintering off to pursue the revolutionary goal by their own methods.

The ultimate goal of an insurgency is to challenge the existing government for control of all or a portion of its territory, or force political concessions in sharing political power. Insurgencies require the active or tacit support of some portion of the population involved. External support, recognition or approval from other countries or political entities can be useful to insurgents, but is not required. A terror group does not require<sup>22</sup> and rarely has the active support or even the sympathy of a large fraction of the population. While insurgents will frequently describe themselves as “insurgents” or “guerillas”, terrorists will not refer to themselves as “terrorists” but describe themselves using military or political terminology (“freedom fighters”, “soldiers”, “activists”). Terrorism relies on public impact, and is therefore conscious of the advantage of avoiding the negative connotations of the term “terrorists” in identifying themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Terrorism does not attempt to challenge government forces directly, but acts to change perceptions as to the effectiveness or legitimacy of the government itself. This is done by ensuring the widest possible knowledge of the acts of terrorist violence among the target audience. Rarely will terrorists attempt to “control” terrain, as it ties them to identifiable locations and reduces their mobility and security. Terrorists as a rule avoid direct confrontations with government forces. A guerilla force may have something to gain from a clash with a government combat force, such as proving that they can effectively challenge the military effectiveness of the government. A terrorist group has nothing to gain from such a clash. This is not to say that they do not target military or security forces, but that they will not engage in anything resembling a “fair fight”, or even a “fight” at all. Terrorists use methods that neutralize the strengths of conventional forces. Bombings and mortar attacks on civilian targets where military or security personnel spend off-duty time, ambushes of undefended convoys, and assassinations of poorly protected individuals are common tactics.

“We have the right to kill four million Americans- two million of them children...”

- Suleiman abu Ghaith, al Qaeda spokesman

Insurgency need not require the targeting of non-combatants, although many insurgencies expand the accepted legal definition of combatants to include police and security personnel in addition to the military. Terrorists do not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, or if they do, they broaden the category of “combatants” so much as to render it meaningless.

Defining all members of a nation or ethnic group, plus any citizen of any nation that supports that nation as “combatants” is simply a justification for frightfulness. Deliberate de-humanization and criminalization of the enemy in the terrorists’ mind justifies extreme measures against anyone identified as hostile (more on this in Chapter 2). Terrorists often expand their groups of acceptable targets, and conduct operations against new targets without any warning or notice of hostilities.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 29-33.

Ultimately, the difference between insurgency and terrorism comes down to the intent of the actor. Insurgency movements and guerilla forces can adhere to international norms regarding the law of war in achieving their goals, but terrorists are by definition conducting crimes under both civil and military legal codes. Terrorists routinely claim that were they to adhere to any “law of war” or accept any constraints on the scope of their violence, it would place them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the establishment. Since the nature of the terrorist mindset is absolutist, their goals are of paramount importance, and any limitations on a terrorist’s means to prosecute the struggle are unacceptable.<sup>24</sup>

### **Use of Terror by Nation-States: Is there a difference?**

Is there a difference between terrorism and the use of specific tactics that exploit fear and terror by authorities normally considered “legitimate”? Nations and states often resort to violence to influence segments of their population, or rely on coercive aspects of state institutions. Just like the idea of equating any act of military force with terrorism described above, there are those who equate any use of government power or authority versus any part of the population as terrorism. This view also blurs the lines of what is and is not terrorism, as it elevates outcomes over intentions. Suppression of a riot by law enforcement personnel may in fact expose some of the population (the rioters) to violence and fear, but with the intent to protect the larger civil order. On the other hand, abuse of the prerogative of legitimized violence by the authorities is a crime.

But there are times when national governments will become involved in terrorism, or utilize terror to accomplish the objectives of governments or individual rulers. Most often, terrorism is equated with “non-state actors”, or groups that are not responsible to a sovereign government. However, internal security forces can use terror to aid in repressing dissent, and intelligence or military organizations perform acts of terror designed to further a state’s policy or diplomatic efforts abroad.

A government that is an adversary of the United States may apply terror tactics and terrorism in an effort to add depth to their engagement of U.S. forces. Repression through terror of the indigenous population would take place to prevent internal dissent and insurrection that the U.S. might exploit. Military special operations assets and state intelligence operatives could conduct terrorist operations against U.S. interests both in theater and as far abroad as their capabilities allow. Finally, attacks against the U.S. homeland could be executed by state sponsored terrorist organizations or by paid domestic proxies. Three different ways that states can engage in the use of terror are:

- Governmental or “State” terror
- State involvement in terror
- State sponsorship of terrorism

Governmental or “State” terror: Sometimes referred to as “terror from above”, where a government terrorizes its own population to control or repress them. These actions usually

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 33.

constitute the acknowledged policy of the government, and make use of official institutions such as the judiciary, police, military, and other government agencies. Changes to legal codes permit or encourage torture, killing, or property destruction in pursuit of government policy. After assuming power, official Nazi policy was aimed at the deliberate destruction of “state enemies” and the resulting intimidation of the rest of the population. Stalin’s “purges” of the 1930s are examples of using the machinery of the state to terrorize a population. The methods he used included such actions as rigged show trials of opponents, punishing family or friends of suspected enemies of the regime, and extra-legal use of police or military force against the population.<sup>25</sup>

Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons on his own Kurdish population without any particular change or expansion of policies regarding the use of force on his own citizens. They were simply used in an act of governmental terror believed to be expedient in accomplishing his goals.

State involvement in terror: These are activities where government personnel carry out operations using terror tactics. These activities may be directed against other nations’ interests, its own population, or private groups or individuals viewed as dangerous to the state. In many cases, these activities are terrorism under official sanction, although such authorization is rarely acknowledged openly. Historical examples include the Soviet and Iranian assassination campaigns against dissidents who had fled abroad, and Libyan and North Korean intelligence operatives downing airliners on international flights.<sup>26</sup>

Another type of these activities is “death squads” or “war veterans”: unofficial actions taken by officials or functionaries of a regime (such as members of police or intelligence organizations) against their own population to repress or intimidate. While these officials will not claim such activities, and disguise their participation, it is often made clear that they are acting for the state. Keeping such activities “unofficial” permits the authorities deniability and avoids the necessity of changing legal and judicial processes to justify oppression. This is different than “pro-state” terror, which is conducted by groups or persons with no official standing and without official encouragement. While pro-state terror may result in positive outcomes for the authorities, their employment of criminal methods and lack of official standing can result in disavowal and punishment of the terrorists, depending on the morality of the regime in question.

State sponsorship of terrorism: Also known as “state supported” terrorism, when governments provide supplies, training, and other forms of support to non-state terrorist organizations. One of the most valuable types of this support is the provision of safe haven or physical basing for the terrorists’ organization. Another crucial service a state sponsor can provide is false documentation, not only for personal identification (passports, internal identification documents), but also for financial transactions and weapons purchases. Other means of support are access to training facilities and expertise not readily available to groups without extensive resources. Finally, the extension of diplomatic protections and services, such as immunity from extradition, diplomatic passports, use of embassies and other protected grounds, and diplomatic pouches to transport weapons or explosives have been significant to some groups.

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<sup>25</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “Stalin’s Great Terror.”

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 190.

An example of state sponsorship is the Syrian government's support of Hamas and Hizballah in Lebanon. Syrian resources and protection enable the huge training establishments in the Bek'aa Valley. On a smaller, more discreet scale, the East German Stasi provided support and safe-haven to members of the Red Army Faction (RAF or Baader Meinhof Gang) and neo-fascist groups that operated in West Germany.<sup>27</sup> Wanted members of the RAF were found resident in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

## Section II: Historical Overview of Terrorism

U.S. forces need to be aware that there is a historical perspective to terrorism. It has not sprung into being overnight. Terrorists have directly targeted military personnel and facilities since the earliest times. In the 1980s, European and American radical Left terror groups targeted significant numbers of U.S. service members.<sup>28</sup> Now, greater involvement of U.S. military forces in terrorist related operations, either as targets or combatants, makes attacks on military personnel and facilities more likely than in the past.

### Terror in Antiquity: 1<sup>st</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> Century AD

The earliest known organization that exhibited aspects of a modern terrorist organization was the Zealots of Judea. Known to the Romans as *sicarii*, or dagger-men<sup>29</sup>, they carried on an underground campaign of assassination of Roman occupation forces, as well as any Jews they felt had collaborated with the Romans. Their motive was an uncompromising belief that they could not remain faithful to the dictates of Judaism while living as Roman subjects. Eventually, the Zealot revolt became open, and they were finally besieged and committed mass suicide at the fortification of Masada.

The Assassins were the next group to show recognizable characteristics of terrorism, as we know it today. A breakaway faction of Shia Islam called the Nizari Ismalis adopted the tactic of assassination of enemy leaders because the cult's limited manpower prevented open combat.<sup>30</sup> Their leader, Hassam-I Sabbah, based the cult in the mountains of Northern Iran. Their tactic of sending a lone assassin to successfully kill a key enemy leader at the certain sacrifice of his own life (the killers waited next to their victims to be killed or captured) inspired fearful awe in their enemies.

The word "Assassin" was brought back to Europe by the Crusaders, and refers to the widespread rumor that the Nizari used hashish to produce the fanatical courage their lone knife-wielding killers repeatedly demonstrated.

Even though both the Zealots and the Assassins operated in antiquity, they are relevant today: First as forerunners of modern terrorists in aspects of motivation, organization, targeting, and

<sup>27</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 200.

<sup>28</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Chronology of Terrorist Events."

<sup>29</sup> Franklin L. Ford, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 91.

<sup>30</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "The Assassins: A Terror Cult."

goals. Secondly, although both were ultimate failures, the fact that they are remembered hundreds of years later, demonstrates the deep psychological impact they caused.

### **Early Origins of Terrorism: 14<sup>th</sup> –18<sup>th</sup> Century**

From the time of the Assassins (late 13<sup>th</sup> century) to the 1700s, terror and barbarism were widely used in warfare and conflict<sup>31</sup>, but key ingredients for terrorism were lacking. Until the rise of the modern nation state after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the sort of central authority and cohesive society that terrorism attempts to influence barely existed. Communications were inadequate and controlled, and the causes that might inspire terrorism (religious schism, insurrection, ethnic strife) typically led to open warfare. By the time kingdoms and principalities became nations, they had sufficient means to enforce their authority and suppress activities such as terrorism.

The French Revolution provided the first uses of the words “Terrorist” and “Terrorism”. Use of the word “terrorism” began in 1795 in reference to the Reign of Terror initiated by the Revolutionary government. The agents of the Committee of Public Safety and the National Convention that enforced the policies of “The Terror” were referred to as “Terrorists”. The French Revolution provided an example to future states in oppressing their populations. It also inspired a reaction by royalists and other opponents of the Revolution who employed terrorist tactics such as assassination and intimidation in resistance to the Revolutionary agents.<sup>32</sup> The Parisian mobs played a critical role at key points before, during, and after the Revolution. Such extra-legal activities as killing prominent officials and aristocrats in gruesome spectacles started long before the guillotine was first used.<sup>33</sup>

### **Entering the Modern Era: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, radical political theories and improvements in weapons technology spurred the formation of small groups of revolutionaries who effectively attacked nation-states. Anarchists espousing belief in the “propaganda of the deed” produced some striking successes, assassinating heads of state from Russia, France, Spain, Italy, and the United States. However, their lack of organization and refusal to cooperate with other social movements in political efforts rendered anarchists ineffective as a political movement. In contrast, Communism’s role as an ideological basis for political terrorism was just beginning, and would become much more significant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“Propaganda of the deed”  
Acts of revolution,  
resistance, or violence  
that will inspire the  
masses to act. It assumes  
that there is an untapped  
force of revolutionary  
will in the population at  
large.

Another trend in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the increasing tide of nationalism throughout the world, in which the nation (the identity of a people) and the political state were combined. As

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<sup>31</sup> Caleb Carr, *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why it has Always Failed and Why it will Fail Again* (New York: Random House, 2002), 52-63.

<sup>32</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “Terror in the French Revolution 1789-1815.”

<sup>33</sup> Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of The French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989), 405 & 447.

states began to emphasize national identities, peoples that had been conquered or colonized could, like the Jews at the times of the Zealots, opt for assimilation or struggle. The best-known nationalist conflict from this time is still unresolved - the multi-century struggle of Irish nationalism. Nationalism, like communism, became a much greater ideological force in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The terrorist group from this period that serves as a model in many ways for what was to come was the Russian Narodnaya Volya (Peoples Will).<sup>34</sup> They differed in some ways from modern terrorists, especially in that they would sometimes call off attacks that might endanger individuals other than their intended target. Other than this quirk, we see many of the traits of terrorism here for the first time; clandestine, cellular organization; impatience and inability for the task of organizing the constituents they claim to represent; and a tendency to increase the level of violence as pressures on the group mount.

### **The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw two events that influenced the nature of conflict to the present day. The effects of two World Wars inflamed passions and hopes of nationalists throughout the world, and severely damaged the legitimacy of the international order and governments.

#### Nationalism on the Rise

Nationalism intensified during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout the world. It became an especially powerful force in the subject peoples of various colonial empires. Although dissent and resistance were common in many colonial possessions, and sometimes resulted in open warfare, nationalist identities became a focal point for these actions.

Gradually, as nations became closely tied to concepts of race and ethnicity, international political developments began to support such concepts. Members of ethnic groups whose states had been absorbed by others or had ceased to exist as separate nations saw opportunities to realize nationalist ambitions. Several of these groups chose terror as a method to conduct their struggle and make their situation known to world powers they hoped would be sympathetic. In Europe, both the Irish and the Macedonians had existing terrorist campaigns as part of their ongoing struggle for independence, but had to initiate bloody uprisings to further their cause. The Irish were partially successful, the Macedonians failed.

#### Damaged Legitimacy

The “total war” practices of all combatants of WWII provided further justification for the “everybody does it” view of the use of terror and violations of the law of war. The desensitization of people and communities to violence that started in World War I accelerated during World War II. The intensity of the conflict between starkly opposed ideologies led to excesses on the part of all participants. New weapons and strategies that targeted the enemies’ civilian population to destroy their economic capacity for conflict exposed virtually every

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<sup>34</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. “Russian Anarchist Terror.”

civilian to the hazards of combatants. The major powers' support of partisan and resistance organizations using terrorist tactics was viewed as an acceptance of their legitimacy. It seemed that civilians had become legitimate targets, despite any rules forbidding it.<sup>35</sup>

## **The Later 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

### Cold War Developments

The bi-polar world of the Cold War changed perception of conflicts the world over. Relatively minor confrontations took on significance as arenas where the superpowers could compete without risking escalation to full nuclear war. Warfare between the East and the West took place on the peripheries, and was limited in scope to prevent escalation. During the immediate postwar period, terrorism was more of a tactical choice by leaders of nationalist insurgencies and revolutions. Successful campaigns for independence from colonial rule occurred throughout the world, and many employed terrorism as a supporting tactic. When terrorism was used, it was used within the framework of larger movements, and coordinated with political, social, and military action. Even when terrorism came to dominate the other aspects of a nationalist struggle, such as the Palestinian campaign against Israel, it was (and is) combined with other activities.

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union provided direct and indirect assistance to revolutionary movements around the world. Many anti-colonial movements found the revolutionary extremism of communism attractive. Leaders of these “wars of national liberation” saw the advantage of free weapons and training. They also realized that the assistance and patronage of the Eastern Bloc meant increased international legitimacy. Many of these organizations and individuals utilized terrorism in support of their political and military objectives. The policy of the Soviet Union to support revolutionary struggles everywhere, and to export revolution to non-communist countries, provided extremists willing to employ violence and terror as the means to realize their ambitions.

### The Internationalization of Terror

The age of modern terrorism might be said to have begun in 1968 when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an El Al airliner en route from Tel Aviv to Rome. While hijackings of airliners had occurred before, this was the first time that the nationality of the carrier (Israeli) and its symbolic value was a specific operational aim. Also a first was the deliberate use of the passengers as hostages for demands made publicly against the Israeli government. The combination of these unique events, added to the international scope of the operation, gained significant media attention. The founder of PFLP, Dr. George Habash observed that the level of coverage was tremendously greater than battles with Israeli soldiers in their previous area of operations. “At least the world is talking about us now.”<sup>36</sup>

Another aspect of this internationalization is the cooperation between extremist organizations in conducting terrorist operations. Cooperative training between Palestinian groups and European radicals started as early as 1970, and joint operations between the PFLP and the Japanese Red

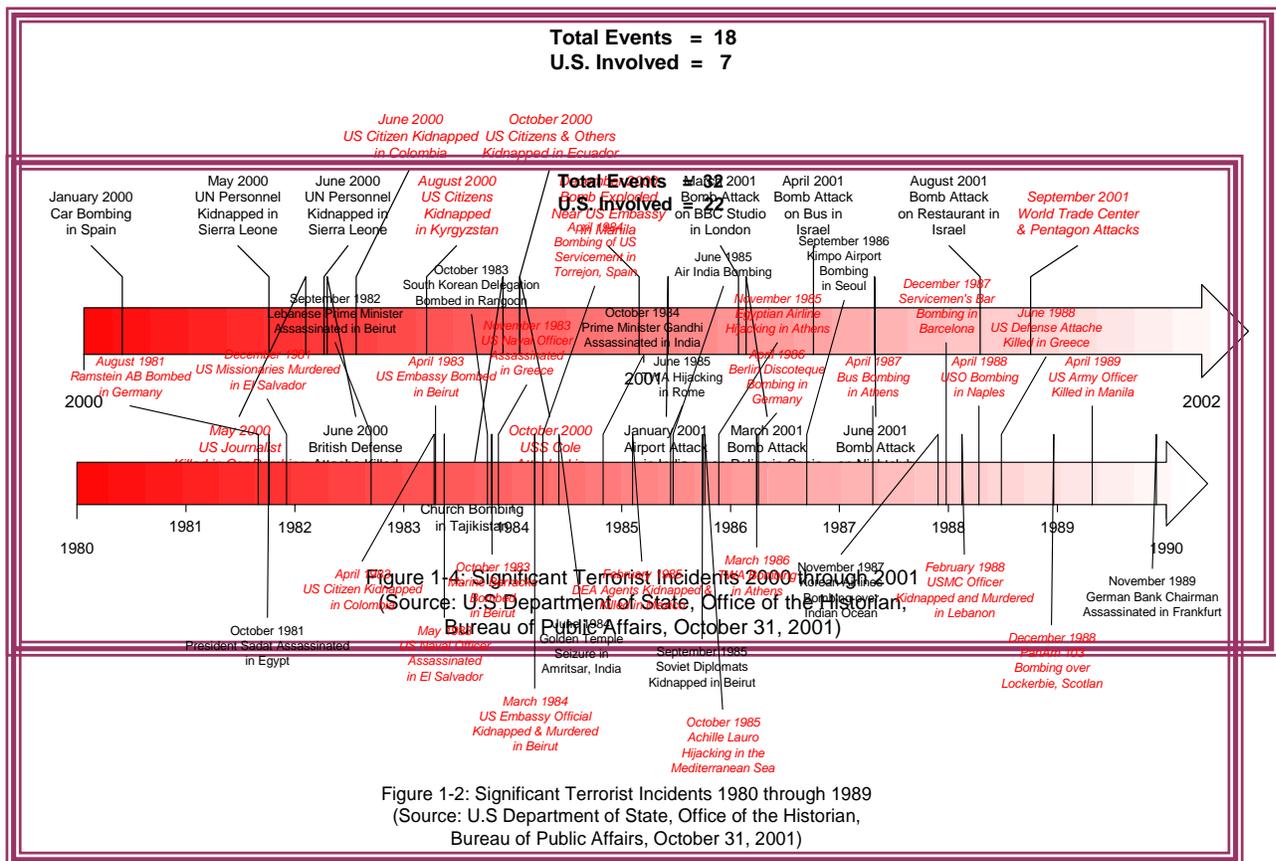
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<sup>35</sup> Martin L. Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 79.

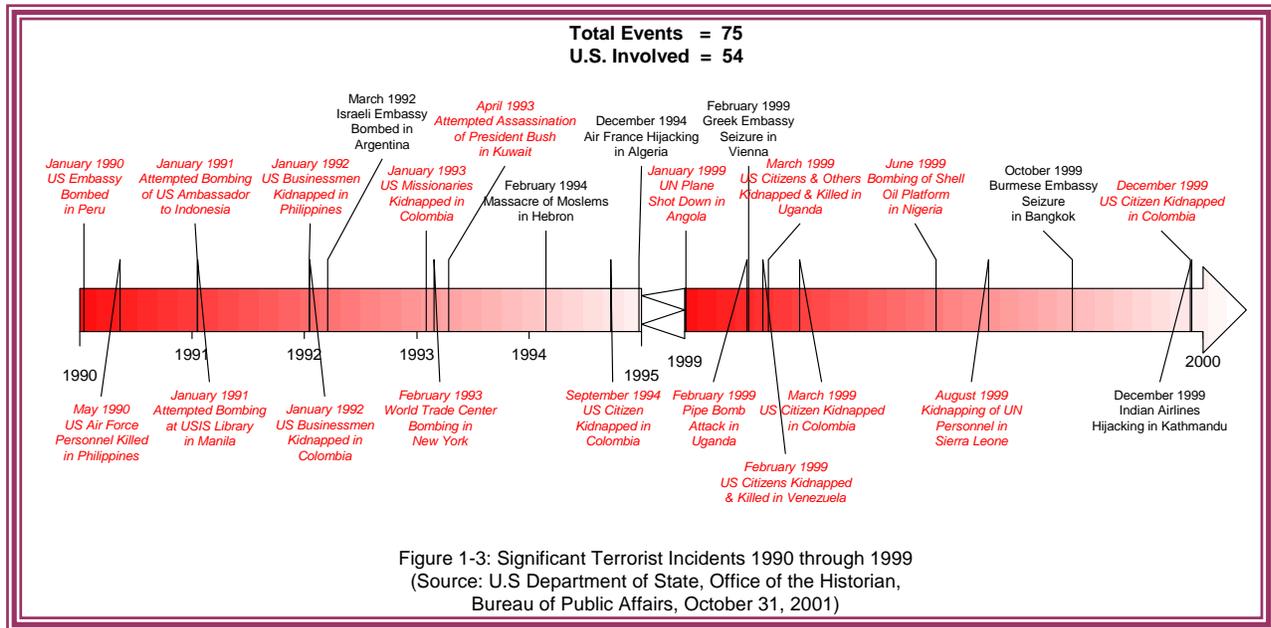
<sup>36</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 70.

Army (JRA) began in 1974. Since then international terrorist cooperation in training, operations, and support has continued to grow, and continues to this day. Motives range from the ideological, such as the 1980s alliance of the Western European Marxist-oriented groups, to financial, as when the IRA exported its expertise in bomb making as far afield as Colombia.

Figures 1-1 through 1-4 below reflect what the U.S. Department of State considers significant terrorist incidents from 1970 through the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001. As you can see, there were 12 significant events in the decade of the 1970s, with 6 of those events involving the United States or its citizens in some fashion. The decade of the 1990s shows an increase in total incidents of 625% over that of the 1970s, and an increase of 900% in incidents involving the United States.<sup>37</sup> (Incidents in *red/italics* involve the U.S.)



<sup>37</sup> Department of State, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Significant Terrorist Incidents, 1961-2001: A Chronology* (Washington, D.C., 31 October 2001), 1-10; available from [http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror\\_chron.html](http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror_chron.html); Internet; accessed 30 January 2003.



## State Sponsorship of Terrorism

State sponsorship of the use of terror is not a strictly modern occurrence. Serbian intelligence officers provided support to the assassins who killed Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, and precipitated World War I.<sup>38</sup> Germany provided arms to Irish nationalists during that war to use against the British.<sup>39</sup> Since then, state assistance to terrorists was used both as a means of surrogate warfare between states, and also as an international diplomatic tool. State sponsorship renders terrorism decidedly more effective. Access to a government's resources of weapons, information, money, and expertise, and use of its privileges in diplomatic travel, transportation, and protection made identifiable state sponsored acts eight times as lethal in the 1980s than non-state attacks. State sponsorship also increases lethality by reducing the need for support from constituent populations, leaving the terrorist free to operate without fear of backlash due to excessive violence.<sup>40</sup> The low cost and deniability of this technique has led to its adoption by nations with ambitious foreign policy goals and limited means.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union provided significant assistance to a wide variety of organizations and individuals involved in terrorism. Attempts to destabilize governments through the use of sponsored terrorist groups to some extent replaced "wars of national liberation" as a method of the Soviet Union during this period.<sup>41</sup> Although the USSR officially denounced terrorism, it provided support directly and via surrogates. Commonly, training in revolutionary theory and practical skills were provided to promising individuals from other countries, some of whom the KGB or GRU recruited for intelligence service. Safe havens were provided for members of terrorist groups in East bloc countries such as East Germany and

<sup>38</sup> *International Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, 1997 ed., s.v. "Assassination at Sarajevo 1914."

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. "State Sponsored Terrorism."

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 189.

<sup>41</sup> Uri Ra'an, ed., et al., *Hydra of Carnage; International Linkages of Terrorism* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1986), 11.

Czechoslovakia. Weapons and explosives were given to radical regimes such as Libya, with the knowledge that they would likely end up in the hands of terrorist groups.

The example provided by the Soviet experience led other countries to adopt state sponsorship. Ranging from tenuous diplomatic support internationally, to direct operational control of a terrorist organization, state involvement in terror can be a flexible, low-risk tool for a variety of policy goals. Iran in particular has found sponsorship of terror to particularly suit its objective of militant Islamic revolution. The incidence of state sponsorship declined somewhat after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and due to isolation and retaliation on other identified state sponsors, but shows no signs of going away completely.

### **Current State of Terrorism**

Currently terrorism continues its process of evolution. Although future trends in terrorism will be covered at length in Chapter 6, we are seeing the beginning of many of those trends in current conditions. Shifts in the dominant motivations for terrorists; changes in organizational structures; and the changes in response to world developments such as the global economy and the development of information technology have altered the nature of terrorism considerably.

#### Changes in Dominant Ideologies

Religious ideology has replaced political and nationalist ideologies as the principal cause for terrorist groups. To cite one example, international terrorist groups espousing religious ideologies went from three percent of total international terror groups in 1980, to forty six percent of international groups by 1995.<sup>42</sup> And the trend is accelerating. Also, the emergences of “single issue” movements, limited to a single concern such as environmentalism or anti-globalization, have started to supplant revolutionary ideology.

For many of the social revolutionaries, the failure of the Soviet Union, and of virtually all of the eastern bloc communist governments, severely discredited Marxist-Leninist ideologies. The loss of supportive governments also impacted the viability of the left-wing groups in Europe. Also, nationalist movements that might have previously turned to terrorism have had success in realizing their goals in the post Cold War world. A large number of separatist movements were accorded international recognition and acceptance as the old world order shifted. Although in some areas, such as the former Yugoslavia, this process has been anything but peaceful, it has not seen long campaigns of insurgent warfare and terrorism previously associated with nationalist struggles.

#### Changes to Organizational Structures

In response to improvements in counter-terror capabilities, and increased cooperation between governments, terrorists groups are moving to networked organizational models, rather than hierarchical structures. Similar to the “leaderless resistance” model of the American right wing and “eco-terror” domestic groups, this decentralized organization takes advantage of uniform ideology or beliefs to guide the efforts toward the group’s goals. The huge advances made in

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<sup>42</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 90.

personal communication and privacy technology have enabled this change to a networked organization. It will be discussed in Chapter 3, but features:

- Increased security, due to fewer communications, no identifiable leadership or command structures, and less required coordination between elements not directly involved in operations.
- Faster response cycles to new countermeasures and tactics.
- Increased deniability, as actions can be acknowledged or disavowed depending on the results.

### Changes to Global Conditions

Information technology has provided significant increases to the operational capabilities of terrorists, and also tightened the symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media. The spread of information technology together with the rise of globalization has enhanced the terrorist capability to communicate, collect intelligence, operate and spread its message. Terror tactics have expanded in scope, and increased in effectiveness in proportion to the development of global media and information technology. The transmission of the message has likewise become easier and more amenable to manipulation by the terrorist.

Today, terrorists are organizing themselves in more fluid ad hoc amalgamations of individuals who appear to have been brought together for a specific, “one time only” mission. Fewer barriers between countries for people and finances are intended to improve commerce, global trade, and freedom of movement, but are enabling factors for modern terrorists and contribute to the development of ad hoc, limited duration alliances and relationships.<sup>43</sup> These terrorist groups may emerge from obscurity to strike, and then just as suddenly disappear.

Terrorism historically flourishes in areas that are permissive. The presence in the modern world of failed states, or dysfunctional governments, has given the terrorist a replacement for state sponsorship, with few of the disadvantages. Weak governments attract criminal activity and outcast movements. In this developing relationship, terror organizations can become local power brokers, commanding more money and technical expertise than the “legitimate” government. In return for assistance from the terrorists, the government provides physical refuge and the protection the status of a sovereign government provides against retaliation and arrest.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was intended to increase the reader’s understanding of the nature of terrorism. Terrorism is a particular tactic in political conflicts that is usable by individuals as well as nations. Due to its complexity it is difficult to define, but can be understood through a combination of description, observation, and historical review. Understanding the larger phenomenon of terror and terrorism is necessary before proceeding to the study of terrorists and their behaviors, motivations, and characteristics in Chapter 2.

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<sup>43</sup> David Newman, ed., *Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity* (Portland: Frank Cass Books, 1999), 17-20.