

## **Chapter 2**

### **Terrorist Behaviors, Motivations, and Characteristics**

Terrorists and terror groups constitute the enemy in the current struggle the United States finds itself engaged in today. However, despite decades of study, the nature of terrorists and their behaviors are hard to pin down. In addition to the difficulty in analyzing secretive, conspiratorial groups and individuals, the variety of motivations, ideologies, and behaviors involved gives the appearance of complete confusion. There seems to be no common characteristics or clearly defined traits that cut across the bewildering variety of terrorists and their organizations.

While all of this is true, there are benefits to studying terrorist motivations and behaviors, both at the individual and group level. Observations on human nature and group dynamics under the conditions of stress, excitement, and social isolation (to name just a few factors terrorists experience) can give us insight into the causes of particular behaviors. Also, understanding the various types of motivations for particular terrorists allows us to assess their stated aims against their actual intent. And despite the wide variety of individual terrorists, there are some practical observations about their general characteristics.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section is a discussion of terrorist behaviors and psychology at both individual and group level. The second examines the impact of group goals and motivations on their planning and operations. The third section consists of observations of general terrorist characteristics.

#### **Section I: Terrorist Behavior**

The common view of the terrorist is usually the unpredictable, viciously irrational stereotype colored by a lot of media images and sensationalism. However, as our examination of the nature and history of terrorism in Chapter 1 shows, terrorism is a rationally selected tactic, employed in the pursuit of political aims. Yet, to lend some truth to the cinema stereotype, the individuals or small organizations that employ terrorist tactics may in fact not always be concerned with particular causes or avowed ideology. Some may in fact be motivated purely by a need to be terrorists, in whatever cause suits them, or as a gun for hire serving a variety of causes.

This contradiction is summed up in the two most common approaches in analyzing terrorist group and individual behavior. They are:

- The psychologically compelled model: This supposes that terrorists engage in terrorism because it fulfils a psychological need (not exclusively a need for violence) on their part. It treats avowed ideology and political causes, as after the fact justifications for behaviors the terrorist will commit anyway.
- The rational choice model: Terror is a tactic selected after rational consideration of the costs and benefits. The individual chooses participation in terrorist activities by a conscious decision (although they may not know what they are getting into). While it acknowledges that individuals or groups may be predisposed to violence, this is not considered the determining factor in the choice to use or renounce terror.

Neither of these descriptions is universally applicable, with all groups or individuals conforming to one or the other. Aspects of both theories are observed in groups and individuals. As usual, the real world provides instances of both theories, and they should both be kept in mind when examining the actions of terrorists.<sup>44</sup>

### **Individual Terrorist Behaviors**

**“An opinion can be argued with; a conviction is best shot”  
- T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia)**

No one profile exists for terrorists in terms of their backgrounds or personal characteristics. The differences in the origins of terrorists in terms of their society, culture, and environment preclude such a universal approach. The profiles developed for the typical West German RAF member 15 years ago is irrelevant to predicting the nature of an Indonesian al Qaeda recruit. Trying to predictively profile potential terrorists, even within the same culture, is a task beyond the scope of this work. But while we cannot predict the identity of future terrorists, there are some valid observations to be made of practicing terrorists. These consist of behaviors and attitudes to which such individuals conform.

### Utopian Worldview

Terrorists typically have utopian goals, regardless of whether their aims are political, social, territorial, nationalistic, or religious. This utopianism expresses itself forcefully as an extreme degree of impatience with the rest of the world that validates the terrorists' extreme methods.<sup>45</sup> This philosophy may be best expressed as “Tear everything up; change now and fix later.” The individual commonly perceives a crisis too urgent to be solved other than by the most extreme methods. Alternately, the perception is of a system too corrupt or ineffective to see or adopt the “solution” the terrorist expounds. This sense of desperate impatience with opposition is central to the terrorist worldview. This is true of both secular and religiously motivated terrorists, although with slightly different perspectives as to how to impose their “solutions.”

There is also a significant element of impracticability associated with this utopian mindset. Although their goals often involve the transformation of society, or a significant reordering of the status quo, individual terrorists, even the philosophical or intellectual leaders, are often vague or uncaring as to what the future order of things will look like or how they will be implemented. It seems that change, and the destructive method by which change is brought about, is much more important than the end result.

**“...the time after victory, that is not our concern ...We build the revolution, not the socialist model”  
- Gudrun Ensslin, co-leader, Red Army Faction**

<sup>44</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 3 & 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

## Interaction with Others

Terrorists interact within their groups with both other members and leadership. It is common for individuals forming or joining groups to adopt the “leader principle”. This amounts to unquestioning submission to the group’s authority figure. This is true of both hierarchical and networked organizations, and of large and small groups. It explains the prevalence of individual leaders of great charisma in many terrorist organizations.<sup>46</sup> With a predisposition to view leaders and authority figures within the group as near ideal examples, such leaders can demand tremendous sacrifices from subordinates. It also is a cause of the bitterness of internal dissension when a leader is at odds with the group, or factions arise in the organization.<sup>47</sup>

Another adaptation the individual makes is accepting an “in-group” (us against the world) mentality. This results in a presumption of automatic morality on the part of the other individual members of the group, and the purity of their cause and righteousness of their goals. It also involves the view of the wider world as aggressively attacking or persecuting the individual and his compatriots. Thus, violence is necessary for the “self-defense” of the group and carries moral justification. In some cases, the group comes to identify completely with their use of violence, and it becomes to them the defining characteristic of their existence on both the individual and collective level. Groups in this mind-set cannot renounce violence, since it would equal renouncing their own reason for being.<sup>48</sup>

## De-humanization of Non-members

**"Dear animal killing scum! Hope we sliced your finger wide open and that you now die from the rat poison we smeared on the razor blade."**

**- Anonymous letter rigged with rat poison covered razor blades sent to 65 guide outfitters across B.C. and Alberta from the “Justice Department” (radical animal rights group), Jan. 1996**

There is a de-humanization of all “out-group” individuals. This de-humanization permits violence to be directed indiscriminately at any target outside the group. Assuming that all those outside of the group are either enemies or neutral, terrorists are justified in attacking anyone. And since anyone outside the group is a potential enemy, circumstances can change that permit any restraints that the terrorists might have observed to be broken in the name of expediency.

De-humanization also removes some of the onus of killing innocents. The identification of authority figures with animals (“pigs” is a common favorite) makes murder simple slaughter of inferior life. The continual picture held up to group members is that there are oppressors and oppressed; they are fighting inhuman opponents in the name of the oppressed.

This is the other aspect of de-humanization. By making “the oppressed” or “the people” an abstract concept, usually an ignorant mass, it permits the individual terrorist to claim to act on

<sup>46</sup> Sabil Frances, “Uniqueness of LTTE’s Suicide Bombers,” *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Article no. 321 (4 February 2000): 1; available at <http://www.ipcs.org>; Internet; accessed 7 September 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Lacquer, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 38.

their behalf. The terrorist believes these acts further the interests of some “un-awakened” social or ethnic constituency that is too oppressed or misinformed to realize its interests. They see themselves as leading the struggle on behalf of the rest of whatever constituency they represent. This view on the part of terrorists is common to all shades of the political spectrum. It is variously identified as “the revolutionary vanguard” or “true patriots”, but involves the terrorists acting for the good of either a silent or ignorant mass that would approve of their struggle if they were free to choose.

### Lifestyle Attractions

**"There's something about a good bomb."  
- Bill Ayers, Former Weather Underground leader in his memoir "Fugitive Days"**

Frequently, there is actual enjoyment of the lifestyle of a terrorist. While not particularly appealing for members of stable societies, there are emotional, physical and sometimes social rewards for being a terrorist. Emotional rewards include the feelings of notoriety and power. In some societies, there may be a sense of satisfaction in rebellion; in others there may be a perceived increase in social status. For some, the intense sense of belonging generated by membership in an illegal group is emotionally satisfying.<sup>49</sup>

Physical rewards can include such things as money, authority, and adventure.<sup>50</sup> The lure of these things can subvert other motives. Several of the more notorious terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Abu Nidal<sup>51</sup>, became highly specialized mercenaries, discarding their convictions and working for a variety of causes and sponsors.

### Motivation for Destruction

Committing destructive acts for purely personal gratification is not confined to the alienation present in modern society. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was one of the ancient world's most famous buildings. It was renowned both for the richness of the furnishings and the splendor of the architecture. However, because of this fame, it became a target for an individual whose contribution to world history was self-aggrandizing destruction. Herostratus destroyed the Temple in 356 B.C.E., allegedly stating that the name of the man who had built it would be lost to history, but that the name of the man who destroyed such a wonder would live forever.

There can also be a sense of elitism, and a feeling of freedom from societal mores. “Nothing in my life had ever been this exciting!” enthused Susan Stern, member of the Weather Underground, describing her involvement with the group.<sup>52</sup>

### Behaviors Within Organizations

People within groups have different behaviors collectively than they do as individuals. This is as true of terrorists as it is of audiences at concerts or members of book clubs. Terrorist organizations have varying motives and reasons for existence, and how the group interprets these determines a great deal of the internal group dynamics. Again, no one profile or predictive tool works for various terror groups but some common features are set out below.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.,34-35.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>51</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 187

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 176.

Groups are collectively more daring and ruthless than the individual members. No individual wishes to appear less committed than the others, and will not object to proposals within the group they would never entertain as an individual.<sup>53</sup> Leaders will not risk being seen as timid, for fear of losing their influence over the group. The end result can be actions not in keeping with individual behavior patterns as far as risk and lethality, but dictated by the pressure of group expectations and suppression of dissent and caution.

They stress secrecy and loyalty to the group. Disagreements are discouraged by the sense of the external threat represented by the outside world, and pressure to conform to the group view. Doubts about group goals and activities are suppressed, often by eliminating the doubters. No punishment is worse than excommunication from the group, and deserters are objects of universal loathing and hatred.<sup>54</sup> Even the slightest suspicion of disloyalty can result in torture and murder of the suspect. The ideological intensity that makes terrorists such formidable enemies often turns upon itself, and some groups have purged themselves so effectively that they almost ceased to exist.<sup>55</sup>

Frequently, the existence of the group becomes more important than the goal they originally embraced. If the group nears success, it will often “move the goalposts” so as to have a reason to continue to exist. In some cases, success will mean disbanding the organization, an option to be rejected by individuals or factions whose fundamental identity and personal worth is derived from being a terrorist. Factions that advocate keeping to the original objective will inspire bitter infighting and schism in the group. The resulting splinter groups or dissenting individual members are extremely volatile and run the risk of compromising the entire group.

In cases where the terrorists are not tied to a particular political or social goal, groups will even adopt a new cause if the original one is resolved. When first formed, many of the Euro-terror groups such as the Red Army Faction (Germany) and Communist Combatant Cells (Belgium) grew out of the 1960s student protest movement. The initial motivations for their actions were supposedly to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam and support the North Vietnamese government. When American involvement in Vietnam came to an end, the radical left in Europe embraced Palestinian and pro-Arab causes rather than disband. Later, they conducted attacks against research facilities supporting the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, and to prevent deployment of the Pershing IRBM (Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile) in Germany. This is also an illustration of how a terrorist’s announced ideology or goals are misleading. The European radical left was really not “for” anything, but was predominately “anti”; anti-American and anti-NATO.

Organizations that are experiencing difficulties tend to increase their level of violence. This is particularly true when the problems are low morale within the group due to lack of perceived progress or successful counter-terrorism measures putting pressure on the group. The

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<sup>53</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>54</sup> David C. Rapoport, ed., *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 157.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 213.

organization hopes that a change to more spectacular tactics or larger casualty lists will overcome the group's internal problems.<sup>56</sup>

## **Section II: Impact of Terrorist Goals & Motivations on Planning**

Practical strategies against terrorists require consideration of the terrorist's point of view in his targeting and operations. Understanding the opponents' preferences and capabilities allows better defense and promotes an active approach to the threat. Total interdiction of all possible targets is impossible, since the defender cannot protect everything. While consistent prediction is unlikely, accurate determination of what risks are acceptable must consider the terrorists' values, particularly their estimate of the target's value, and the costs of the operation necessary to successfully hit it.

Terror can literally strike anywhere. The proliferation of terrorism expertise, and the breakdown in restraint and observance of international norms means many more groups and individuals can and will use terror as a viable tool<sup>57</sup> to achieve their goals. With more potential terror users, the U.S. will be a prime target for several reasons.

There has been an increase in transnational radicalism as compared to recent historical conflicts. As the most prominent secular democracy and largest single economic, military, and political power in the world, the U.S. becomes the principal opponent of extremists throughout the world, and therefore particularly appealing as a target. Much of the current thinking and literature on terrorism developed when terrorism was closely tied to revolutionary movements and separatist movements concerned with influencing events in relation to one nation. Newer causes and ideologies, such as religion, economic concerns, or environmental issues are international, transnational, or even global in scope.

Further, the perception that the U.S. is the single most powerful nation in the world invites targeting by terror groups regardless of ideology to demonstrate their power and status. In the worldview of many terrorist groups, the perceived power and influence of the U.S. encourages targeting to force the U.S. to extract concessions from third parties (prisoner release, policy changes, etc.).

Another reason to expect greater use of terrorism against the U.S. is that possible competitors may feel that they cannot openly challenge or defeat the U.S. with any other technique. Nations have employed state sponsored terrorism to produce results that could not have otherwise been achieved against U.S. opposition. The current supremacy of American military power leaves adversaries with few options to challenge U.S. interests. Adding non-state groups of formidable capability and few restraints to the roster of potential adversaries of the U.S. increases the likely use of terror against our forces.

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<sup>56</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed., ed. Walter Reich (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 14.

Many potential adversaries view the U.S. as particularly vulnerable to the psychological impact and uncertainties generated by terror tactics in support of other activities.<sup>58</sup> Terrorism and terror tactics have already been used against U.S. forces in support of conventional and insurgent warfare, as well as against U.S. forces during stability and peace support operations in attempts to influence policy. Lessons drawn from previous uses of terror against the U.S. have led to some commonly held perceptions about the effectiveness and impact of terrorism versus the U.S. Some of these perceptions may or may not be valid, but are still widely held. Consequently, terrorist groups are likely to try to capitalize on what they may perceive as vulnerabilities. They include the beliefs that:

- The U.S. is extremely casualty averse. Any loss of life takes on significance out of proportion to the circumstances.

“We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier who is ready to wage Cold Wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when the Marines fled after two explosions. It also proves they can run in less than 24 hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia.”

- Usama bin Laden interview by ABC News’ John Miller, May 1998

- U.S. Government policies and policy makers are overly influenced by public opinion, which in turn is particularly susceptible to the adverse psychological impact of terrorism.
- The U.S. economic performance is perception driven, and therefore equally vulnerable to the adverse psychological impact of terrorism.

“Whoever has stolen our wealth, then we have the right to destroy their economy.”

- Usama bin Laden's “Letter to America” Sunday November 24, 2002

- The U.S. cannot sustain long-term efforts, or exhibit public sacrifice in pursuit of difficult national goals.

Finally, the growing polarization of some domestic political issues means that the U.S. is also

“We are an instrument for the hostages... We force the Administration to put their lives above policy”

- Lesley Stahl, CBS White House correspondent during the TWA flight 847 hostage crisis, 1985

“Those youths are different from your soldiers. Your problem will be how to convince your troops to fight, while our problem will be how to restrain our youths to wait for their turn in fighting and in operations.”

- Usama bin Laden, “Declaration Of War Against The Americans Occupying The Land Of The Two Holy Places” August 26 1996

likely to see increased terror attacks on its own soil by a variety of “home-grown” groups. These

<sup>58</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, trans. Department of State, American Embassy Beijing Staff Translators (Washington, D.C., 1999).

groups may target U.S. forces either as symbols, sources of weapons and equipment, or at the behest of other terrorist groups in exchange for money or support elsewhere.

### **Terrorist Asset Cost versus Target Value**

Despite popular perception, terrorists are not numerous. They require recruitment, preparation, and integration into the operational structure of the group. They also require extensive vetting to ensure that they are not infiltrators from enemy security forces. For this reason, they are valuable assets, which a group's leadership will not employ without serious consideration of the relationship between the cost of using (and possibly losing) the asset, and the potential benefits to the group. While some groups may have a greater supply of personnel assets than others, no group can expend them injudiciously.<sup>59</sup> Therefore terrorist operational planning focuses on economies of personnel, and balances the likelihood of losses against the value of a target and the probability of success. This is why suicide bombings are on the increase – large payoff for low cost.

In any terrorist operation, extensive pre-operational surveillance and reconnaissance, exhaustive planning, and sufficient resources will be committed to the operation.<sup>60</sup> The potential risk of exposure of these resources, and the demands on their time, must be factored into the equation when deciding to commit to an attack.

### **Operational Intent of Terrorism**

It is vital to remember that terrorism is a psychological act. It is communication through the medium of violence directed at others. This requirement to reach a target audience with the intended psychological impact results in terrorist planning exhibiting many differences from military planning or “rational” game strategies. Terrorist strategies will be aimed at publicly causing damage to symbols or inspiring fear. Timing, location, and method of attacks are designed to accommodate media dissemination and insure “newsworthiness” to maximize impact. A terrorist operation will often have the ultimate goal of manipulating popular perceptions, and it will achieve this by controlling or dictating media coverage. This control need not be overt, as terrorists analyze and exploit the dynamics of major media outlets and the pressure of the “news cycle.”<sup>61</sup>

In considering possible terrorist targets, recognize that a massively destructive attack launched against a target that cannot or will not attract sufficient media coverage to impact the target audience is not a viable target for terrorists. A small attack against a “media accessible” target is better than a larger one of less publicity. However, the spread of the global media makes many locations attractive targets that would not have been remotely considered thirty or forty years ago. The 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania illustrate how these two relatively unimportant posts created a global sensation because of the media coverage. Forty

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<sup>59</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 120 (September/October 2000): 66-73.

<sup>60</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, “Suicide Terrorism: a Global Threat,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* (20 October 2000): 1-7; available from [http://www.janes.com/security/international\\_security/news/usscole/jir001020\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/usscole/jir001020_1_n.shtml); Internet; accessed 7 September 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 136-142.

years ago it would have taken days for the international news media to get still photographs and some text from these locations, making them much less attractive targets. However, with today's modern technology, CNN was able to provide immediate broadcast coverage of the bombings.

### **Ideology and Motivation Influences on Operations**

Ideology and motivation will influence the objectives of terrorist operations, especially regarding the casualty rate. Groups with secular ideologies and non-religious goals will often attempt highly selective and discriminate acts of violence to achieve a specific political aim. This often requires them to keep casualties at the minimum amount necessary to attain the objective. This is both to avoid a backlash that might severely damage the organization, and also maintain the appearance of a rational group that has legitimate grievances. By limiting their attacks they reduce the risk of undermining external political and economic support. Groups that comprise a "wing" of an insurgency, or are affiliated with aboveground, sometimes legitimate, political organizations often operate under these constraints. The tensions caused by balancing these considerations are often a prime factor in the development of splinter groups and internal factions within these organizations.

In contrast, religiously oriented and millenarian groups typically attempt to inflict as many casualties as possible. Because of the apocalyptic frame of reference they use, loss of life is irrelevant, and more casualties are better. Losses among their co-religionists are of little account, because such casualties will reap the benefits of the afterlife. Likewise, non-believers, whether they are the intended target or collateral damage, deserve death, and killing them may be considered a moral duty. The Kenyan bombing against the U.S. Embassy in 1998 inflicted casualties on the local inhabitants in proportion to U.S. personnel of over twenty to one killed, and an even greater disparity in the proportion of wounded (over 5000 Kenyans were wounded by the blast; 95% of total casualties were non-American<sup>62</sup>). Fear of backlash rarely concerns these groups, as it is often one of their goals to provoke overreaction by their enemies, and hopefully widen the conflict.

The type of target selected will often reflect motivations and ideologies. For groups professing secular political or social motivations, their targets are highly symbolic of authority; government offices, banks, national airlines, and multinational corporations with direct relation to the established order. Likewise, they conduct attacks on representative individuals whom they associate with economic exploitation, social injustice, or political repression. While religious groups also use much of this symbolism, there is a trend to connect it to greater physical devastation. There also is a tendency to add religiously affiliated individuals, such as missionaries, and religious activities, such as worship services, to the targeting equation.

Another common form of symbolism utilized in terrorist targeting is striking on particular anniversaries or commemorative dates. Nationalist groups may strike to commemorate battles won or lost during a conventional struggle, whereas religious groups may strike to mark particularly appropriate observances. Many groups will attempt to commemorate anniversaries of successful operations, or the executions or deaths of notable individuals related to their

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<sup>62</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 51.

particular conflict. Likewise, striking on days of particular significance to the enemy can also provide the required impact. Since there are more events than operations, assessment of the likelihood of an attack on a commemorative date is only useful when analyzed against the operational pattern of a particular group or specific members of a group's leadership cadre.

### **Section III: Terrorist Characteristics**

There is no single personality profile of a terrorist, and no predictive test that can reliably identify one. However, there are some general characteristics that are fairly common among terrorists. There are also some common stereotypes and misperceptions regarding the terrorists that are widely held, but inaccurate.

#### Status

Contrary to the oft-repeated charge that terrorism is a product of poverty and despair, terrorists are most commonly from middle class backgrounds, with some actually coming from extreme wealth and privilege. While guerilla fighters and gang members often come from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, and may adopt terrorism as a tactic, terrorist groups that specifically organize as such generally come from middle and upper social and economic strata. Even in terrorist groups that espouse the virtues of "the people" or "the proletariat", membership consists primarily of those of middle class backgrounds. This characteristic must be considered in context with the society the terrorist originates from. "Middle class" or "privilege" are relative terms, and will mean completely different levels of income between West Africa and Western Europe, for example.

#### Education and Intellect

There are two sides to this characteristic. Left wing terrorists, international terrorists, and the leadership echelon of right wing groups are usually of average or better intelligence, and have been exposed to advanced education. These terrorists generally have had exposure to higher learning, although they are usually not highly intellectual, and are frequently dropouts or possess poor academic records. Again, this is subject to the norms of the society they originate from. In societies where religious fundamentalism is prevalent, the higher education may have been advanced religious training.<sup>63</sup>

Domestic and right wing terrorists tend to come from lower educational and social levels, although they are not uneducated. It was right wing domestic groups in the U.S. that first explored the communication and organizational potential of the Internet. They will typically have received a high school level education, and be very well indoctrinated in the ideological arguments they support.

#### Age

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<sup>63</sup> Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000; reprint, Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 208.

Terrorists tend to be young. Leadership, support, and training cadres can range into the 40-50 year old age groups, but most operational members of terrorist organizations are in the 20-35 year old age group.<sup>64</sup> The amount of practical experience and training that contributes to making an effective operative is not usually present in individuals younger than the early 20s. Individuals in their teens have been employed as soldiers in guerilla groups, but terrorist organizations do not tend to accept extremely young members, although they will use them as non-operational supporters. Groups that utilize suicide operations will employ very young individuals as suicide assets, but these youths are not actually members of the organization, but simply exploited or coerced into an operational role.<sup>65</sup>

### Gender

Terrorists are not exclusively male, even in groups that are rigorously Islamic. Women's roles in these groups will often be constrained to support or intelligence work, but some fundamentalist Islamic groups use women in operational roles. In groups where religious constraints don't affect women's roles, female membership may be above fifty percent, with women fully integrated into operations. Female leadership of terrorist groups is not uncommon, and female terrorists lack for nothing in terms of violence and ruthlessness.

Again, there is an exception to this general observation in some right wing groups, particularly those with neo-Nazi and Christian Identity oriented ideologies. Female participation and leadership is much less common in these groups.

### Appearance

Terrorists are often unremarkable individually. They do not appear out of the ordinary, and are capable of normal social behavior and appearance. Over the long term, elements of fanatical behavior or ruthlessness may become evident, but they are typically not immediately obvious to casual observation. Although members of sleeper cells or other covert operators may marry as part of their persona, most terrorists do not marry, even though there have been cases of married couples within terrorist organizations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a discussion of some aspects of terrorist behavior and group dynamics. This information will allow the reader to place these behaviors in context with the descriptions of terrorist organizations in Chapter 3.

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<sup>64</sup> Walter Lacquer, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, rev. ed. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 270.