

When Hatred is Bred in the Bone: Psycho-cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism

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This paper addresses the psychology of terrorism. Terrorism is a diverse and complex phenomenon for which there is no one overarching psychological explanation; each terrorism must be understood in its unique cultural, historical, and political context. I will first present a broad overview of the spectrum of terrorism and then focus on the two types of terrorism that dominate the terrorism landscape today: nationalist-separatist terrorism and religious extremist terrorism.

The beginning of the modern era of terrorism is usually dated to the early 1970s, with the iconic event being the seizure of the Israeli Olympic village by Black September terrorists, demonstrating the power of the media to convey the terrorists' cause to a wide international audience. The two major group types which dominated the scene at that time were the social-revolutionary terrorists and the nationalist-separatist terrorists. They regularly claimed responsibility for their acts and were employing their strategy to call attention to their cause. I contrast their generational dynamics: the social revolutionary terrorists of the left were rebelling against the generation of their family which was identified with the regime. In contrast, the nationalist-separatist terrorists were carrying on the mission of their parents and grandparents who had been damaged by and were disloyal to the regime. Often there were multiple claims of responsibility as they sought recognition for their cause.

Then in the late 1980s and early 1990s, for upwards of 40% of terrorist acts, no responsibility was claimed. These were the acts of radical Islamist fundamentalist terrorists who were not seeking recognition from the West, but sought to expel the West with its corrupt secular modernizing values; they did not need headlines or television stories, for they were "killing in the name of God" and God knew.

Drawing on interviews of incarcerated nationalist-separatist and religious fundamentalist terrorists, this paper emphasizes that for the radical Islamic

fundamentalist terrorists and the nationalist-separatist terrorists, “hatred has been bred in the bone,” has been instilled in childhood. It stresses that explanations at the level of individual psychology are insufficient in trying to understand why people become involved in terrorism. The concepts of abnormality or psychopathology are not useful in understanding terrorist psychology and behavior. Rather group, organizational, and social psychology, with a particular emphasis on “collective identity,” provide the most constructive framework for understanding terrorist psychology and behavior. In these regards, the role of leadership is extremely important in fashioning a “sense-making” unifying message that conveys a religious, political, or ideological justification to their disparate followers.

I distinguish between the Palestinian suicide bombers and the suicidal hijackers of 9/11. The former for the most part are unformed youth, the latter fully formed adults who had subordinated their individual identity to the cause of their destructive charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden. I conclude with recommendations for a psychological framework for counterterrorism, which follows from the foregoing psychological understandings.

Introduction

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President George W. Bush declared that this was “the first war of the 21st century.” But in fact, the modern era of terrorism is usually dated to the early 1970s, as represented by the radical Palestinian terrorist group Black September seizure’s of the Israeli Olympic village at the 1972 Munich Olympics, an event which captured an immense international television audience and demonstrated powerfully the amplifying effect of the electronic media in the information age.

In considering psychological and behavioral bases of terrorism, it is important to consider each terrorism in its own political, historical, and cultural context, for terrorism is a product of its own place and time. It is an attractive strategy to a diverse array of groups which have little else in common. In considering the psychology of the broad spectrum of terrorist types reflected in the lower tier of Figure 1¹—right-wing, nationalist-separatist, social revolutionary, and religious fundamentalist terrorists—given how different their causes and their perspectives, these types would be expected to differ markedly. So we should be discussing terrorisms, plural—not terrorism—and terrorist psychologies, plural, rather than searching for a unified general theory explaining all terrorist behavior.

While the lay public often considers terrorists to be crazed fanatics, in fact terrorist groups regularly exclude emotionally disturbed individuals from their

¹ This figure is modified from the graphic originally introduced by Alex Schmid in 1983 (Schmid, 1983).

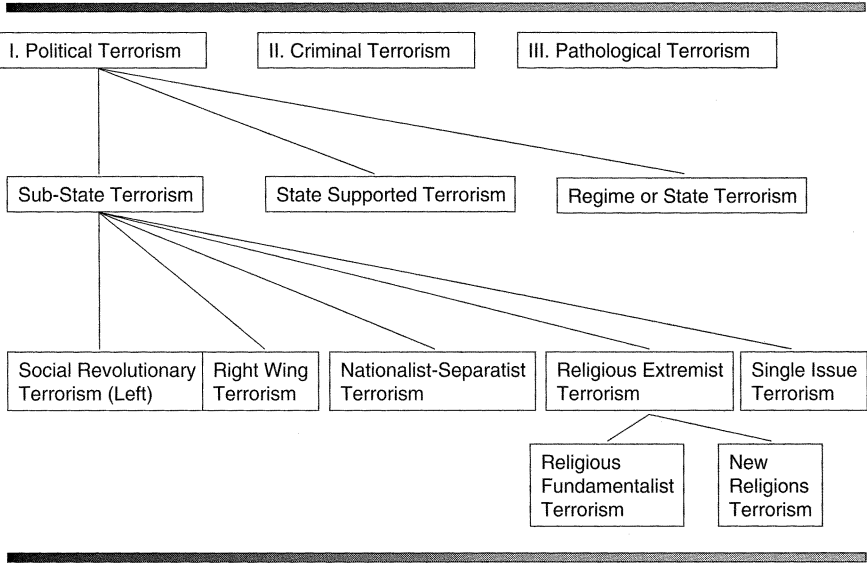


Figure 1. Typology of Terrorism.

ranks—after all, they represent a security risk. My own comparative research on the psychology of terrorists (Post, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1990) does not reveal major psychopathology, agreeing with the finding of Crenshaw that “the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality” (1981, p. 390). Her studies of the FLN in Algeria in the 1950s found the members to be basically normal. Franco Ferracuti’s studies of Italian left-wing and right-wing terrorists similarly did not find psychological abnormality (Ferracuti, 1983). In fact, he was unable to distinguish among those who entered into the drug culture, political activism, or terrorism, the only discriminator being their friends and the nature of their network. In a review of the social psychology of terrorist groups, McCauley and Segal conclude that “the best documented generalization is negative; terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology” (1987, p. 44). Horgan’s recent review of terrorist psychology confirms that the search for psychopathological origins is fruitless and reconfirms the importance of the social psychological perspective (Horgan, 2005).

It is social psychology that provides the most powerful lens through which to examine and explain terrorist behavior, with the majority of the experts stressing the “normality” of the terrorists and emphasizing group and organizational psychology, with a particular emphasis on collective identity, not individual psychopathology (Horgan, 2005; Post, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1990). The

importance of collective identity and the processes of forming and transforming collective identities cannot be overemphasized. This in turn emphasizes the socio-cultural context, which determines the balance between collective identity and individual identity, and it emphasizes the importance of the externalizing hate-mongering leader who, in the words of Eric Hoffer, author of *The True Believer*, manipulates “the slime of discontented souls,” ([1951] 1989, p. 149) forming a mass movement. Indeed, the terrorist group leader can be considered a malevolent group therapist who focuses the discontent of the group members on an external cause for their difficulties, righteously justifying aggression against the identified target (Robins & Post, 1997).

In the early years of the modern era of terrorism, two terrorist types dominated the landscape. They were the *social revolutionary terrorists*, also known as terrorism of the left—groups seeking to overthrow the capitalist economic and social order—exemplified by the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy and *nationalist-separatist terrorists*, such as al-Fatah and other radical secular Palestinian terrorists, the Provisional Irish Republican Army of Northern Ireland (PIRA), and the Basque separatist group Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) (Freedom for the Basque Homeland), seeking to establish a separate nation for their national minority. Both of these group types wished to call attention to their cause and would regularly claim responsibility for their acts. Often there were multiple claims of responsibility for the same act. They were seeking to influence the West and the establishment. These two group types—social-revolutionary and nationalist-separatist terrorists—that predominated at the onset of the modern era of terrorism could not be more different. Indeed, the generational dynamics of these two group types are polar opposites as reflected in Figure 2 (Post, 1984). As reflected in the upper left-hand cell of Figure 2, individuals who are at one with their parents do not become terrorists.

Social-Revolutionary Terrorism

As reflected in the lower left-hand cell of Figure 2, social revolutionary terrorists are rebelling against the generation of their parents who are loyal to the regime. They are disloyal to the generation of their families that is loyal to the regime. Their acts of terrorism are acts of revenge against the generation of their family, which they hold responsible for their failures in this world. A member of the Red Army Faction spoke derisively of his parent’s generation: “They are the corrupt old men who gave us Auschwitz and Hiroshima.” The West German social revolutionary terrorists were studied extensively during the height of their activity by an interdisciplinary team of social scientists sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They examined extensively the life course of 227 left-wing terrorists and found that a great deal had gone wrong in their lives. Twenty-five percent had lost one or both parents by age 14, and loss

	Parents' Relationship to Regime	
Youth's Relationship to Parents	L oyal	D isloyal amage dissident
L oyal	X	✓ Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism
D isloyal	✓ Social Revolutionary Terrorism	

Figure 2. Generational Pathways to Terrorism.

of the father proved especially disruptive. Seventy-nine percent reported severe social conflict, especially with the parents. One in three had been convicted in juvenile court. There was a high frequency of school dropouts and job failure; many were characterized as loners (Baeyer-Kaette, Classens, Feiger, & Neihardt, 1982). What a comfort for such individuals to have a group whose credo is: "It's not us; it's them. They are responsible for our problems." And it then not only becomes morally permissible, it becomes a moral obligation to strike out at them, the establishment that is held responsible for their problems. Social-revolutionary terrorist groups have experienced a significant decline over the last two decades, paralleling the collapse of Communism in Europe and the end of the Cold War.

Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism

In contrast to the social-revolutionary terrorist groups, nationalist-separatist terrorism continues as one of the two predominant terrorist types active today. Also known as ethno-nationalist terrorism, these groups are fighting to establish

a new political order or state based on ethnic dominance or homogeneity. In vivid contrast to the generational dynamics of the social-revolutionary terrorists, as reflected in the upper right-hand cell of Figure 2, they are carrying on the mission of their parents and grandparents who have been damaged by, or are dissident to, the regime. They are loyal to families that are disloyal to the regime. Their acts of terrorism are acts of vengeance against the regime that damaged their families.

Islamist Fundamentalist Terrorism

But in the past decades, no responsibility has been claimed for upwards of 40% of terrorist acts. We believe this is because of the increasing frequency of terrorist acts by radical religious extremist terrorists, in particular radical Islamist fundamentalist terrorists. They are not trying to influence the West. Rather the radical Islamist terrorists are trying to expel the secular West with its corrupt, modernizing values. And they do not need recognition by having their name identified in a *New York Times* headline or on a story broadcast on CNN. They are “killing in the name of God” and they don’t need official notice; after all, God knows (Post, 2001b).

Traditional groups include Islamic, Jewish, Christian, and Sikh radical fundamentalist extremists. In contrast to social revolutionary and nationalist-separatist terrorists, for religious fundamentalist extremist groups, the decision-making role of the preeminent leader is of central importance. For these true believers, the radical cleric is seen as the authentic interpreter of God’s word, not only eliminating any ambivalence about killing, but endowing the destruction of the defined enemy with sacred significance.

These groups are accordingly particularly dangerous, for they are not constrained by Western reaction; indeed they wish to expel the West with its secular modernizing influences. They have shown a willingness to perpetrate acts of mass casualty terrorism, as exemplified by the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the U.S.S. Cole, and the coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., mass casualty terrorism on a scale never seen before. Osama bin Laden, responsible for these events, has actively discussed the use of weapons of mass destruction in public interviews.

Osama Bin Laden: Destructive Charismatic Leader (Post, 2002)

Bin Laden may be considered a social revolutionary in the guise of religious fundamentalist. After all, when he criticized the “apostate” Saudi leadership for accepting American military bases in the “land of the two cities” (Mecca and Medina), he was criticizing the regime that had enriched his family, and he was being disloyal to his family that was in turn intensely loyal to the regime. He is the 17th of 25 sons of a multibillionaire construction magnate, Muhammad bin

Laden, an émigré from Yemen, whose financial empire and wealth came from a special relationship with the Saudi royal family. When Osama bin Laden was 11, his father died. The elder bin Laden was worth between two and three billion dollars at the time of his death. Osama bin Laden was to inherit some 57 million dollars at his 16th birthday. After his victory in Afghanistan, expelling the Soviet superpower, bin Laden actively railed at the corruption of the Saudi royal family and criticized the “apostate regime” for their lack of fidelity to Islam in permitting the American military to “occupy the land of the two cities” (Mecca and Medina) and to establish a base on holy Saudi land. For this criticism, the Saudi royal family expelled him from his Saudi citizenship, and his family turned against him as well: after all, he was striking out at the source of his family wealth. He was biting the hand that had fed and enriched them. He was rebelling against the family that was loyal to the regime.

While not a religious authority, Osama bin Laden is known for his piety and has been granted the title “emir.” Like Khomeini, Osama bin Laden regularly cites verses from the Koran to justify his acts of terror and extreme violence, employing many of the same verses earlier cited by Khomeini. Consider this extract from the February 1998 Fatwa, *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders, World Islamic Front Statement*:

In compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, “and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,” and “fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.”

We—with God’s help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it.

Note that it is not Osama bin Laden who is ordering his followers to kill Americans. It is God! Osama bin Laden is the messenger, relaying the commands of God, which are justified with verses from the Koran. The author discussed this language with a moderate Muslim cleric, who indicated that bin Laden’s words were blasphemous, that bin Laden was speaking as if he were the new prophet, and was the authentic interpreter of the Koran. He emphasized that many of the actions for which bin Laden found justification in the Koran were in fact prohibited by the Koran.

Collective Identity and the Crucial Role of Leadership

Al Qaeda, HAMAS, Hezbollah, and the Islamic Jihad all have found an abundance of recruits, eager to join these Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations. Indeed, Ariel Merari, a prominent Israeli expert on terrorism, noted wryly that for every terrorist killed or captured, there were 10 waiting to take his or her place and that there were now more terrorist volunteers than there are suicide explosive belts (Merari, 2002). For them, like the youth drawn to the path of nationalist-separatist terrorism, hatred has been “bred in the bone.”

This emphasizes the crucial role of the leader. The hate-mongering leader plays a crucial organizing role, provides a “sense-making” explanation for what has gone wrong in their lives, identifying the external enemy as the cause, as well as drawing together into a collective identity otherwise disparate individuals who may be discontented and aggrieved, but who, without the powerful presence of the leader, will remain isolated and individually aggrieved. Sageman’s (2004) analysis of the global Salafi *ihadists* emphasized the importance of the collective identity, an identity provided by the sense-making ideology propagated by bin Laden and his designated successor Ayman Zawahiri, cofounder and principal ideologue of al-Qaeda.

Terrorists in their Own Words

These two groups—nationalist-separatist terrorists and Islamist religious fundamentalist terrorists—represent the major threats to contemporary society and will be the focus of the balance of this paper. To bring the reader into their minds, we will draw upon the words of terrorists themselves and on material from a research project I directed involving semistructured interviews with 34 incarcerated radical Middle Eastern terrorists, both radical Islamist terrorists from Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah and secular terrorists from Fatah and the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003), as well as interviews conducted with an Abu Nidal terrorist (Post, 2000) and al Qaeda terrorists (Post, 2001a) in connection with federal trials in which I served as expert witness.

Secular Palestinian Terrorists in their Own Words

While most Fatah members reported their families had good social standing, their status and experience as refugees was paramount in their development of self-identity.

I belong to the generation of occupation. My family are refugees from the 1967 war. The war and my refugee status were the seminal events that formed my political consciousness, and provided the incentive for

doing all I could to help regain our legitimate rights in our occupied country.

For the secular terrorists, enlistment was a natural step, and it led to enhanced social status.

Enlistment was for me the natural and done thing . . . in a way, it can be compared to a young Israeli from a nationalist Zionist family who wants to fulfill himself through army service.

My motivation in joining Fatah was both ideological and personal. It was a question of self-fulfillment, of honor and a feeling of independence . . . the goal of every young Palestinian was to be a fighter.

After recruitment, my social status was greatly enhanced. I got a lot of respect from my acquaintances, and from the young people in the village.

Armed attacks are viewed as essential to the operation of the organization. There is no question about the necessity of these types of attacks to the success of the cause. In addition to causing as many casualties as possible, armed action provided a sense of control or power for Palestinians in a society that had stripped them of it. Inflicting pain on the enemy was paramount in the early days of the Fatah movement.

I regarded armed actions to be essential; it is the very basis of my organization, and I am sure that was the case in the other Palestinian organizations. An armed action proclaims that I am here, I exist, I am strong, I am in control, I am in the field, I am on the map. An armed action against soldiers was the most admired. . . . the armed actions and their results were a major tool for penetrating the public consciousness.

The various armed actions (stabbing, collaborators, martyrdom operations, attacks on Israeli soldiers) all had different ratings. An armed action that caused casualties was rated highly and seen to be of great importance. An armed action without casualties was not rated. No distinction was made between armed actions on soldiers or on civilians; the main thing was the amount of blood. The aim was to cause as much carnage as possible.

You have to understand that armed attacks are an integral part of the organization's struggle against the Zionist occupier. There is no other way to redeem the land of Palestine and expel the occupier. Our goals can only be achieved through force, but force is the means, not the end. History shows that without force it will be impossible to achieve independence.

The hatred socialized towards the Israeli was remarkable, especially given that few reported any contact with Israelis.

You Israelis are Nazis in your souls and in your conduct. In your occupation you never distinguish between men and women, or between old people and children. You adopted methods of collective punishment; you uprooted people from their homeland and from their homes and chased them into exile. You fired live ammunition at women and children. You smashed the skulls of defenseless civilians. You set up detention camps for thousands of people in sub-human conditions. You destroyed homes and turned children into orphans. You prevented people from making a living, you stole their property, you trampled on their honor. Given that kind of conduct, there is no choice but to strike at you without mercy in every possible way.

The Cauldron of Life Experiences of an Abu Nidal Terrorist

In 1997, I had the opportunity and challenge of assisting the Department of Justice as an expert on terrorist psychology in the trial in Federal Court in Washington, D.C., of Mohammad Rezaq, an Abu Nidal terrorist who played a leading role in the skyjacking of an Egypt Air passenger jet in which more than 50 lost their lives in the skyjacking and the subsequent SWAT team attack on the hijacked plane in Malta (Post, 2000).

The defendant epitomized the life and psychology of the nationalist-separatist terrorist. The defendant assuredly did not believe that what he was doing was wrong: from boyhood on Rezaq had been socialized to be a heroic revolutionary fighting for the Palestinian nation. Demonstrating the generational transmission of hatred, his case can be considered emblematic of many from the ranks of ethnic/nationalist terrorist groups, from Northern Ireland to Palestine, from Armenia to the Basque region of Spain.

In 1948, when subject's mother was eight, as a consequence of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, her family was forced to flee their home in Jaffa in Israel. They left for the West Bank, where Rezaq was raised. When young Rezaq was eight, the family fled their pleasant West Bank existence during the 1967 war, ending up in a crowded Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. His mother told him bitterly that this was the second time such a thing had happened to her.

There Rezaq went to school funded by the United Nations and was taught by a member of FATAH whom he came to idolize. At the time, Arafat's stature as a heroic freedom fighter was celebrated in the camps. Rezaq was taught that the only way to become a man was to join the revolution and take back the lands stolen from his parents and grandparents. He first joined FATAH after going AWOL from the Jordanian Army. When he first participated in a terrorist action, he felt at last he was doing what he should do. He left Fatah after becoming disillusioned with Arafat's leadership, moving from violent group to ever more violent group, ending up in the most violent secular Palestinian terrorist group,

the Abu Nidal Organization. When he ultimately was assigned a command role in the skyjacking of an Egypt Air airliner, he felt he was at last fulfilling his destiny. He was taking a bold action to help his people. He was a soldier for the revolution and all of the actions that he directed that led to the major loss of life were seen as required by his role as a soldier for the cause, a cause that ultimately would lead to the restoration of his family's lands.

Islamist Fundamentalist Terrorism

Interview with a Tanzanian Embassy Bomber

In the spring and summer of 2001, I had the opportunity of interviewing at length one of the defendants in the al Qaeda bombing of the U.S. embassy in Tanzania (Post, 2001a). Raised on Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania, the defendant was eight when his father died and then was educated in a madrassa, where he was taught to never question what he was told by learned authorities. When he was the equivalent of a junior in high school, his brother directed him to leave school and help him in his grocery store in Dar es Salaam. There he was miserable—alone, friendless, isolated, except for his attendance at the Friday prayer services at the mosque, where he learned from the imam that they were all members of the *uma*, the community of observant Muslims, and had an obligation to help Muslims wherever they were being persecuted. He was shown videos of Muslim mass graves in Bosnia and the Serbian military, of the bodies of Muslim women and children in Chechnya and the Russian military. He became inspired and vowed to become “a soldier for Allah.” But the defendant was informed (I infer by a spotter from al Qaeda) that he could not do this without obtaining training. So, using his own funds, he went to Pakistan and then on to a bin Laden training camp in Afghanistan, where he was taught weapons and explosives handling in the mornings and had four hours of ideological training each afternoon. After seven months when he could not join the struggle in Bosnia or Chechnya (he had envisaged himself fighting against soldiers hurting innocent Muslims, in accordance with the fourth *jihad*, the *jihad* of the sword, in which the Muslim is obligated to fight those who take up the sword against Muslims), he was offered the opportunity to fight in Kashmir, but he refused for this was irregular conflict and not directed against the military. He returned to Dar es Salaam, where he again pursued his menial existence as a grocery clerk, frustrated at his inability to pursue *jihad*. Three years later he was called in the middle of the night and asked, “Do you want to do a *jihad* job,” and without further inquiry, he accepted. This case emphasizes that rather than seeking out so-called “sleeper cells,” a much greater counterterrorism challenge is the tens of thousands committed to Islam who have been trained in the al Qaeda training camps, who are, in effect, the “ready reserve.” Trained, the defendant went back to civilian life, remained committed, and when the call came, he was activated and was called to active duty. What had been a

positive motivation to help suffering Muslims gradually was bent to his participating in this act of mass casualty terrorism.

Religious Fundamentalist Terrorists in Their Own Words

Twenty-one Islamist terrorists from Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah were interviewed as part of the research program cited above (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003).

The mosque was consistently cited as the place where most members were initially introduced to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, including members of the secular groups. Many of the secular members report that while activism within the community was most influential in their decision to join, their first introduction to the cause was at the Mosque or in another religious setting. Authority figures from the mosque are prominent in all conversations with group members and, most dramatically, for members of the Islamist organizations. The introduction to authority and unquestioning obedience to Allah and authority is instilled at a young age and continues to be evident in the individual members' subservience to the larger organization. This preconditioning of unquestioning acceptance of authority seems to be most evident among the members of the Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

I came from a religious family, which used to observe all the Islamic traditions. My initial political awareness came during the prayers at the mosque. That's where I was also asked to join religious classes. In the context of these studies, the sheik used to inject some historical background in which he would tell us how we were effectively evicted from Palestine.

The sheik also used to explain to us the significance of the fact that there was an IDF military outpost in the heart of the camp. He compared it to a cancer in the human body, which was threatening its very existence.

At the age of 16 I developed an interest in religion. I was exposed to the Moslem brotherhood and I began to pray in a mosque and to study Islam. The Koran and my religious studies were the tools that shaped my political consciousness. The mosque and the religious clerics in my village provided the focal point of my social life.

Community support was important to the families of the fighters as well:

Families of terrorists who were wounded, killed or captured enjoyed a great deal of economic aid and attention. And that strengthened popular support for the attacks.

Perpetrators of armed attacks were seen as heroes, their families got a great deal of material assistance, including the construction of new

homes to replace those destroyed by the Israeli authorities as punishment for terrorist acts.

The Emir blesses all actions.

Major actions become the subject of sermons in the mosque, glorifying the attack and the attackers.

Joining Hamas or Fatah increased social standing.

Recruits were treated with great respect. A youngster who belonged to Hamas or Fatah was regarded more highly than one who didn't belong to a group, and got better treatment than unaffiliated kids.

Anyone who didn't enlist during that period (intifada) would have been ostracized.

View of Armed Attacks

The more an attack hurts the enemy, the more important it is. That is the measure. The mass killings, especially the martyrdom operations, were the biggest threat to the Israeli public and so most effort was devoted to these. The extent of the damage and the number of casualties are of primary importance.

The Justification of Suicide Bombings

The Islamist terrorists in particular provided the religious basis for what the West has called suicide terrorism as the most valued technique of jihad, distinguishing this from suicide, which is proscribed in the Koran. One of the interview subjects in fact became quite angry when the term was used in our question, angrily exclaiming

This is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, it is weak, it is mentally disturbed. This is istishad (martyrdom or self sacrifice in the service of Allah.)

Several of the Islamist terrorist commanders interviewed called the suicide (martyrdom) bomber holy warriors who were carrying out the highest level of jihad.

A martyrdom operation is the highest level of jihad, and highlights the depth of our faith. The bombers are holy fighters who carry out one of the more important articles of faith.—Hassan Salame, responsible for the wave of suicide bombings in Israel in 1996, in which 46 were killed. He is now serving 46 consecutive life sentences.

It is attacks when their member gives his life that earn the most respect and elevate the bombers to the highest possible level of martyrdom.

I asked Halil what it was all about and he told me that he had been on the wanted list for a long time and did not want to get caught without realizing his dream of being a martyrdom operation bomber. He was completely calm and explained to the other two bombers, Yusuf and Beshar, how to detonate the bombs, exactly the way he had explained things to the bombers in the Mahane Yehuda attack. I remember that besides the tremendous respect I had for Halil, and the fact that I was jealous of him, I also felt slighted that he had not asked me to be the third martyrdom operation bomber. I understood that my role in the movement had not come to an end and the act that I was not on the wanted list and could operate relatively freely could be very advantageous to the movement in the future.—Quote from prisoner sentenced to 26 life terms for role in several suicide-bombing campaigns.

I find this quote chillingly normal, especially the clause “I also felt slighted that he had not asked me to be the third martyrdom operation bomber.” It was as if the terrorist’s feelings were hurt that he wasn’t chosen for the pick-up baseball team.

Sense of Remorse/Moral Red Lines

When it came to moral considerations, we believed in the justice of our cause and in our leaders. . . . I don’t recall every being troubled by moral questions.

In a jihad, there are no red lines.

Collective Identity—Fusion of the Individual and the Group

Once recruited, there is a clear fusing of individual identity and group identity, particularly among the more radical elements of each organization. This is true both for the Islamist terrorists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as those of al Qaeda and the global Salafi jihad. Many of the interviewees reported growing up or living in a repressed or limited socioeconomic status. Their ability to work was regulated, the ability to travel freely was severely restricted, and there was a general impression that they were denied the opportunity to advance economically. There was a common theme of having been “unjustly evicted” from their land, of being relegated to refugee status or living in refugee camps in a land that was once considered theirs. They expressed an almost fatalistic view of the Palestinian/Israeli relationship and a sense of despair or bleakness about the future under Israeli rule. Few of the interviewees were able to identify personal goals that were separate from those of the organization to which they belonged. But the appeal of al Qaeda as well is to alienated youth, who often feel they are blocked in societies where there is no real possibility of advancement.

There is a heightened sense of the heroic associated with fallen group members, and the community supports and rallies around families of the fallen or

incarcerated. Most interviewees reported not only enhanced social status for the families of fallen or incarcerated members, but financial and material support from the organization and community for these families as well. "Success" within the community is defined as fighting for "the cause"—liberation and religious freedom are the values that define success, not necessarily academic or economic accomplishment. As the young men adopt this view of success, their own self-image then becomes more intimately intertwined with the success of the organization. With no other means to achieve status and "success," the organization's success becomes central to individual identity and provides a "reason for living." Again, while this dynamic emerged clearly for the youth of Islamic Jihad and Hamas, it is also probably a strong characteristic of those attracted to the path of radical Islam elsewhere.

This fusing of the individual to the group is found across all organizations regardless of ideological affiliation. As individual identity succumbs to the organization, there is no room for individuality—individual ideas, individual identity, and individual decision-making—while at the same time self-perceived success becomes more and more linked to the organization. Individual self-worth is again intimately tied to the "value" or prominence of the group—therefore each individual has a vested interest in ensuring not only the success of the organization, but to increase its prominence and exposure. The more prominent and more important (and often times the more violent) a group is the greater the prestige that is then projected onto group members. This creates a cycle where group members have a direct need to increase the power and prestige of the group through increasingly dramatic and violent operations.

As the individuals and the group fuse, the more personal the struggle becomes for the group members. There is a symbiotic relationship created between the individual need to belong to a group, the need to ensure success of the group, and an enhanced desire to be an increasingly more active member of the group. There is thus a personalization of the struggle, with an inability to distinguish between personal goals and those of the organization—they were one and the same. In their discussion of armed action and other actions taken, the success or failure of the group's action was personal—if the group succeeded, then as an individual they succeeded; if the group failed, they failed. Pride and shame as expressed by the individual were reflections of group actions, not individual actions, feelings, or experiences. There is an overarching sense of the collective that consumes the individual. This fusion with the group seems to provide the necessary justification for their actions and absolution, or loss of responsibility, to the individual—if the group says it's okay, then it's okay. If the authority figure orders an action, then the action is justified. Guilt or remorse by the individual is not tolerated because the organization does not express it. Again this is intensified among Islamist groups who feel they have a moral obligation to the cause and a religiously sanctioned justification for their actions.

Most interestingly and illustrative of this concept of individual and group fusion is the perception or characterization of "the enemy." While there are slight

differences between the secular and Islamist groups in the exact definition of the enemy, the overall experience in defining the enemy is remarkably similar. The Islamist groups are fighting for a pure Islamic state. Many interviewees cite Iran as an example of the type of state they would like to create. While the secular groups have a type of constraint by the nature of their view of the struggle, the Islamist groups have no such restraint. There is no concern about alienating any “earthly” population, as the only “audience” they are seeking to satisfy is Allah. With their direction coming in the form of Fatwahs (religious edicts) and sanctioned by religious clerics and other figures, the identification of the enemy is clear and simple for these Islamist groups—whether Israel or the United States—it is anyone who is opposed to their world view.

Contrast between Palestinian Suicide Bombers and Suicidal Hijackers of 9/11

But the Palestinian suicide bombers differ significantly from the suicidal hijackers of 9/11. So-called psychological autopsies, i.e., reconstructions of the lives of suicides, have been developed for some 93 of the suicide bombers in Israel (Merari, 2002). While these findings are undergoing change, and now the age range has broadened significantly and some women have joined the ranks of suicide bombers, they were for the most part carried out by young men between the ages of 17 and 22, unmarried, uneducated, and unemployed. They were unformed youth, who, when they volunteered or were recruited, were told by the recruiters that their life prospects were bleak, that they could do something significant with their lives, that they would be enrolled in the hall of martyrs, and that their parents would be proud of them and would gain financial rewards. From the moment they entered the safe house, they were never alone: someone slept in the same room with them the night before the action to ensure that they did not backslide, and they were physically escorted to the pizza parlor, disco, or shopping mall to carry out their acts of suicide terrorism.

Emphasizing the importance of social psychology, Merari has called attention to the suicide bomber production line, where first individuals volunteer to become a *shahid* (martyr), then they are identified publicly as living martyrs, and finally they make the pre-attack video which will then be used both to memorialize their name as well as for recruitment purposes. Merari observes that it is very difficult to back down after passing through these stages: the shame that would attend such a reversal would be unbearable.

What a vivid contrast with the suicidal hijackers of 9/11! Older, their age range was 28 to 33, with the exception of a small group of younger terrorists, brought in late for “muscle,” who probably were unaware that theirs was not a conventional hijacking. Mohammad Atta, the ringleader, was 33. A number had higher education; Atta and two of his colleagues were in master’s degree pro-

grams in the technological university in Hamburg. Most came from comfortable, middle-class homes in Saudi Arabia or Egypt.

While many drawn to the path of religious fundamentalist terrorism in the Palestinian territories are poor and uneducated, for some of these terrorists there are suggestive similarities to the generational dynamics of the social revolutionary terrorists. As noted above, Osama bin Laden himself is the most striking example of these generational dynamics. When Osama bin Laden railed at the corruption of the Saudi royal family and their lack of fidelity to Islam in permitting the American military to establish a base on holy Saudi land, he was striking out at the source of his family wealth, leading not only to his being expelled from Saudi Arabia, but also severely damaging his family, who also turned against him.

Unlike the Palestinian suicide bombers, the 9/11 hijackers were fully formed adults, who had subordinated their individuality to the organization, as they responded uncritically to the siren song of hatred sung by the hate-mongering destructive charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden. Interestingly, and compellingly, they in some cases had been on their own in the West for upwards of seven years, being exposed to the “buzzing, blooming, confusion of a democracy” we live in, simulating blending in, while carrying within like a laser beam their mission to give of their lives while taking the lives of thousands.

The 9/11 suicidal hijackers were accused of being hypocrites. They were unbearded, did not exchange Muslim greetings, were not seen in mosques, at prayer, or to be fasting. In the al Qaeda terrorism manual, *Declaration of Jihad Against the Country's Tyrants*, which was introduced as an exhibit by the Department of Justice in the trial of the Tanzanian embassy bombers, it explains the rationale for their apparent hypocrisy. In Lesson 11, the manual offers an explanation to the question it poses, “How can a Muslim spy live among enemies if he maintains his Islamic characteristics? How can he perform his duties to Allah and not want to appear Muslim?”

Concerning the issue of clothing and appearance, (the appearance of true religion), Ibn Taimia—may Allah have mercy on him—said, “If a Muslim is in a combat or godless area, he is not obligated to have a different appearance from (those around him.) The (Muslim) man may prefer or even be obligated to look like them, provided his action brings a religious benefit of preaching to them, learning their secrets and informing Muslims . . .

Resembling the polytheist in religious appearance is a kind of “necessity permits the forbidden” even though they (forbidden acts) are basically prohibited.

The manual is an amalgam of tradecraft, with instructions as above on how to live an underground life, instructions on how to carry out terrorist acts, including

recipes for manufacture of toxins, how to devise booby traps, and so forth, and inspiration. Consider the following from the dedication to the manual, which probably was penned by bin Laden's deputy and designated successor, Ayman al Zawahiri.

The confrontation that we are calling for with the apostate regimes does not know Socratic debates, Platonic ideals, nor Aristotelian diplomacy. But it knows the dialogue of bullets, the ideals of assassination, bombing and destruction, and the diplomacy of the cannon and the machine gun.

For other destructive charismatic terrorist movements, such as Peru's Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path), and the Turkish Kurdish separatist group the PKK, when the authoritarian charismatic leader is killed or captured, as was the case with Guzman of Sendero Luminoso, and Ocalan of the PKK, it is a mortal blow to the organization. But Osama bin Laden (Post, 2002) has a different leadership style, perhaps reflecting his education in organizational behavior at the university at Jiddah. He has created a redundant organization, with a flat structure, and can be considered Chairman of the Board of Radical Islam, Inc. He has grown his organization through mergers and acquisitions, has appointed his successor, Zawahiri, and has been able to replace killed or captured senior officials rapidly. When Atef, the former chief of operations, was killed in a bombing raid early in the Afghanistan campaign, he was replaced with Zubaydeh; when Zubaydeh was captured, he was replaced by Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, who also has been captured and assuredly has been replaced. Should bin Laden be killed or captured, he would be replaced seamlessly with Zawahiri, who in effect is CEO and principle ideologue. Should Zawahiri be killed or captured, it would be a blow to bin Laden, but only a temporary one. Should the entire leadership be eliminated, this would not be the end of the threat. For the issue is not Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Al Qaeda as we knew it before 9/11 is essentially dead, replaced by al Qaeda Version 2.0, which is essentially an ideology. The predominant threat now is from radical Islam, what Sageman (2004) has termed the global Salafi jihad, a semi-autonomous network, without central command and control, with broad appeal to alienated Islamic youth.

Terrorist Psychology: Implications for Counter-terrorist Strategy

If these conclusions concerning the individual, group, and organizational psychology of political terrorism are valid, what are the implications for antiterrorist policy? (It is interesting to observe how passionately arguments are waged concerning counterterrorist policies given the relative lack of reliable understanding of terrorist psychology.) This is no mere academic exercise, for after all, policies designed to deter terrorists from their acts of terrorism should be based on an understanding of "what makes terrorists tick."

Since terrorisms differ in their structure and dynamics, counterterrorist policies should be appropriately tailored. As a general rule, the smaller and more autonomous the group, the more counterproductive is external force. When the autonomous cell comes under external threat, the external danger has the consequence of reducing internal divisiveness and uniting the group against the outside enemy. The survival of the group is paramount because of the sense of identity it provides. *Terrorists* whose only *sense of significance* comes from *being terrorists* cannot be forced to give up terrorism, for to do so would be to lose their very reason for being. To the contrary, for such individuals violent societal counterreactions reaffirm their core belief that “it’s us against them and they are out to destroy us.” A tiny band of insignificant individuals has been transformed into a major opponent of society, making their “fantasy war,” to use Ferracuti’s apt term, a reality. One can indeed make the case that left to their own devices, these inherently unstable groups will self-destruct.

Similarly, for terrorist organizations for which violence is defined as the only legitimate tactic for achieving their espoused goals, outside threat and a policy of reactive retaliation cannot intimidate the organizational leadership into committing organizational suicide and ceasing to exist. For that is what ceasing committing acts of political violence would be if those acts were the sole self-definition.

For complex organizations dedicated to a cause, such as Basque separatism, where an illegal terrorist wing operates in parallel with a legal political wing as elements of a larger loosely integrated organization, the dynamics—and the policy implications—are again different. In such circumstances, if the overall organizational goals—in this case Basque separatism—are threatened by societal reactions to terrorism, one can make a case that internal organizational constraints can operate to constrain the terrorist wing. However, insofar as the terrorist group is not fully under political control, this is a matter of influence and partial constraint, for as has been noted earlier, ETA has its own internal dynamics and continues to thrive despite the significant degree of separatism already achieved.

For state-supported and -directed terrorist groups, the terrorist group is in effect a paramilitary unit under central governmental control. In this situation, the individual, group, and organizational psychological considerations discussed thus far are not especially relevant. The target of the antiterrorist policy in this circumstance is not the group per se but the chief of state and the government of the sponsoring state. Since the survival of the state and national interests are the primary values, there is a rational case to be made that retaliatory policies can have a deterring effect, at least in the short term. But even in this circumstance, to watch the children in the camps in the aftermath of bombing attacks shaking their fists in rage suggests such tactics are contributing to rising generations of terrorists.

Just as political terrorism is the product of generational forces, so too it is here for generations to come. When hatred is bred in the bone, and passed from

generation to generation, it does not yield easily to peace talks. *There is no short-range solution to the problem of terrorism.* Once an individual is in the pressure cooker of the terrorist group, it is extremely difficult to influence him. In the long run, the most effective antiterrorist policy is one that inhibits potential recruits from joining in the first place, for once an individual is in the grip of the terrorist group the power of the group and organizational psychology will increasingly dominate his psychology.

Political terrorism is not only a product of psychological forces; its central strategy is psychological. For political terrorism is, at base, a particularly vicious species of psychological warfare. It is violence as communication. Up until now, the terrorists have had a virtual monopoly on the weapon of the television camera as they manipulate their target audience through the media. Countering the terrorists' highly effective media-oriented strategy through more effective dissemination of information and public education must be key elements of a pro-active program.

As important as it is to inhibit potential terrorists from joining, so too it is important to facilitate terrorists leaving. The powerful hold of the group has been described in detail. By creating pathways out of terrorism, that grip can be reduced. Amnesty programs modeled after the highly effective program of the Italian government can usefully contribute to that goal. And reducing support for the group—both in its immediate societal surroundings and in the nation at large—are further long-range programs to foster.

Terrorists perpetuate their organizations by shaping the perceptions of future generations of terrorists. Manipulating a reactive media, they demonstrate their power and significance and define the legitimacy of their cause. To counter them, effective education and dissemination of objective information are required.

One does not counter psychological warfare with smart bombs and missiles, although they can certainly play a useful role in a military campaign against harboring states. One counters psychology warfare with psychological warfare.² In the long run, the most effective ways of countering terrorism are to: (1) Inhibit potential terrorists from joining the group. Security alone cannot accomplish this. Alienated youth must be able to envisage a future within the system that promises redress of long-standing economic and social inequity and come to believe that political activism can lead to their finding a pathway to these goals. Otherwise, striking out violently in despair will continue to seem like the only course available. (2) Produce dissension within the group; the groups are virtual hot-houses of tensions and rivalries. Active measures are required to magnify these tensions and pressures. (3) Facilitate exit from the group; once a terrorist has become a member of a group and committed terrorist acts, he is a wanted criminal, and it can seem as though he has "no way out." Yet, as noted above, with the

² An expansion of this argument will be found in Post (2005).

pentiti program in Italy, a similar program in the Basque region, and the so-called “super-grass” program in Northern Ireland, where reduced sentences or amnesty are offered for cooperation with the authorities, this can not only facilitate exit but also can produce dissension within the group as well. (4) Reduce support for the group and its leader. This is particularly important, as important as inhibiting potential recruits from joining in the first place, indeed contributing to this goal. Thus the group or organization must be marginalized, its leader delegitimized. Osama bin Laden at the present is a romantic hero to many alienated youth in the Islamic world, his organization al Qaeda a highly attractive option to consider. An effective strategic communication program will increasingly marginalize al Qaeda as an aberrant extremist group that is contrary to mainstream Islam and will depict bin Laden not as a heroic figure, but as a self-consumed individual whose extreme actions damage all of Islam and the future of aspiring Muslim youth.

All of these goals are components of a strategic communication process that must be a central component of our antiterrorist policy. This is not a policy that will swiftly end terrorism, but a process that must be put in place. Just as many of the attitudes that have made the path of terrorism attractive to alienated youth have taken place over decades, it will require decades to reduce the attractiveness of terrorism for those who have been raised in a climate dominated by hopeless and despair, with “hatred bred in the bone,” so that extremism and violence have increasingly come to be seen as the only course.

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