Crime and Criminal Behavior

Terrorism and Extremism

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Chapter 17: Terrorism and Extremism

Terrorism is one of the primary concerns faced by citizens in the modern world. Furthermore, political and academic experts claim that terrorism is the greatest threat to global security in the 21st century, and it has increasingly become a major factor in all international relations. The apprehension of terrorist suspects still at large has become a major preoccupation of law enforcement at all levels. Despite its importance in world affairs, there is little consensus on the many definitions of terrorism, which overlaps conceptually with a related term, *extremism.* Extremists seek a radical restructuring of the society in which they live, although their methods may or may not involve terrorism.

There are as many definitions for the term *terrorism* as there are methods of executing it, and the term means different things to different people. However, there are two commonly used definitions of terrorism. The first defines terrorism as deliberate, violent attacks on people or property in an attempt to use fear and chaos to force a government to change its policies or a citizenry to bow to the will of the state. A second commonly used definition is that of the U.S. State Department, which defines terrorism as premeditated and politically motivated violence targeted against noncombatants by subnational groups or clandestine agents, intended to influence an audience.

Complicating the definition of terrorism is the fact that it is associated with a number of acts that at face value are considered criminal acts, but are **[p. 225 ↓] [p. 226 ↓]** not terrorism. For instance, some argue that the terroristic threats of criminal gangs should be studied as terrorism, race-based hate crimes should be studied as terrorist acts, or serial killers should be considered terrorists to the degree that their acts terrorize a population.

While there is little agreement on a definition of terrorism, there is a consensus that most acts commonly labeled as terrorism suffer from a lack of legitimacy under international norms.

History of Terrorism

Although the word *terrorism* is of fairly recent origin, terrorism as a practice is thought to have begun in first-century Judea, where Jewish men would use a short dagger to slit the throats of occupying Romans and their collaborators in full view of the public. These dagger men were among the group known as the Zealots, who sought to drive Roman rulers and Greek settlers out of the Holy Land during 66–73 C.E. Later, in the 19th century, the philosophical antecedents of modern-day terrorism were formed by the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, who wrote that no other action except terrorism by individuals or small groups could effectively solve Russia's problems.

The 1960s saw terrorism spring up throughout the world. This upsurge was not limited to Europe and Asia; it affected the United States in a number of ways. Frustrated with the slow pace of social change, some radical activists broke off the Students for a Democratic Society to found the violent group called the Weathermen. Puerto Rican nationalists and Jewish extremists also became active during this period.

Terrorism expert Harvey Kushner suggests that throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many Middle Eastern terrorist groups sent their recruits to the Soviet Union for training in low-intensity warfare. The Soviets viewed terrorism as compatible with their efforts to support wars of national liberation. A significant turning point in the history of terrorism was the Iranian Revolution of 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini influenced the creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982. The recruits of Hezbollah, drawn from the poorest segments of society, were not only interested in carrying out the goals of the revolution, but were also concerned with the social condition of their fellow Shiites throughout the Middle East.

Hamas, the main Islamic movement in the Palestinian territories, was formed by Sheik Ahmed Yassin in 1987 during the first *intifada,* or uprising against Israeli occupation of the territories. Hamas members seek their **[p. 227 ↓]** identity in their Islamic roots. Hamas is uncompromising and maximalist, insisting on the total liberation of the sacred land of Palestine they interpret as demanded by Allah, whom they believe will repay martyrs for this cause with everlasting life.

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A new breed of terrorist emerged in the 1990s, one trained in the terror camps of Afghanistan and Sudan. Their militant Islamic instructors had more field experience than the Soviet trainers of the past, who learned about bomb making and other terrorist tactics while fighting in Afghanistan. According to Kushner, the new breed was less hierarchically organized than their secular predecessors, and consequently, was more difficult to spot, track, and intercept. The lack of hierarchy did not translate into lack of success, however. The willingness of members of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda to participate in suicide attacks opens up myriad possibilities for devastation. The attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001, illustrate the extent of their destruction.

Types of Terrorism and Terrorist Motivations

At least four types of terrorism can be identified. State terrorism is terrorism committed by a government, whether against its own citizens or against perceived enemies elsewhere. It is distinguished by the unpredictability and secrecy with which it is carried out. Its goal is usually to strengthen government control by complete intimidation of the population. On the other hand, nonstate or dissident terrorism refers to acts committed by nongovernmental groups or individuals against other groups, individuals, or the government. The adoption of terrorist techniques by insurgent groups, especially in the developing world, has led to the perception of terrorism as a natural outgrowth of anticolonial struggles, merely another weapon of revolutionary guerilas in their campaigns for independence. Religious terrorism is usually committed as part of an attempt to glorify, protect, or promote the faith, or to express hatred toward an opposed religious or ethnic group. Finally, criminal terrorism is committed to further illegal acts. Usually, it is connected to acquiring wealth either for its own sake or in order to fund other types of terrorism. Most criminal terrorism is associated with the drug trade.

Motives for terrorism vary according to the type of terrorism embraced, each having its own specific purpose. Thus, terrorists are inspired by many different motives. Beyond this, an effort to generalize terrorist motivation yields at least three categories: rational, psychological, and cultural. A **[p. 228 ↓]** terrorist's ideals may also be shaped by a combination of these general motives.

The rational terrorist thinks through goals and options, making a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether there are less costly and more effective ways to achieve the objective at hand. The terrorists' rational analysis is similar to that of a military commander or a business entrepreneur considering available courses of action.

A psychological motivation for terrorism derives from the terrorists' personal dissatisfaction with life and lack of accomplishments. He or she finds purpose in life as a dedicated terrorist. Although no clear psychopathy is found among terrorists, they possess a nearly universal element that can be described as the "true believer."

In societies where cultural identities lies in group membership—through the family, clan, or tribe—there may be a greater willingness to self-sacrifice than may be seen elsewhere. At times, terrorists seem to be eager to give up their lives for their organization and cause. With the lives of others being wholly evil in the terrorists' value system, the rationale follows that such lives can be destroyed with little or no remorse.

There is a recognizable pattern of mutual attraction between terrorists and educated youth. The noted terrorism historian Walter Laqueur suggests several reasons for this phenomenon. An operative in a foreign country would need knowledge of a separate culture and language in order to assimilate, and this demographic group often has been exposed to different cultures and has traveled extensively. Second, advantaged youth may choose to travel abroad to study at a *madrassa,* an Islamic religious school with a reputation for spreading radical Islam. Two of the London 7/7 bombers had studied in such a school two years prior to the 2005 attack, which targeted two underground trains and a double-decker bus, killing 52 people and injuring more than 770. Finally, in many less-developed countries, the young may be frustrated by a lack of opportunity to use their advanced training. In many such places, there are high birth rates and too few jobs for college-educated citizens, leading to restlessness, resentment, and anger.

While multiple societies express fascination or interest in terrorist motives, there is a line of thought in terrorism studies that the motive for the act is less important than the act itself and what it represents. According to this view, terrorist groups rarely emerge from goal-oriented social movements; they emerge instead from within the context of wider political struggles in which the use of terror is one strategy among other more routine forms of contentious action.

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Extremism

Terrorism is closely associated with extremism. While a large proportion of terrorists are labeled as extremists, not all extremists are terrorists. Extremists can work in numerous, nonviolent ways to promote their agendas.

The term *extremism* is used in daily life by people both inside and outside of the academic world. However, there is little consensus on its meaning, and there are many definitions that appear to conflict. Adding to the confusion, the term appears to suffer from overuse, as when mainstream politicians are called extremists by their rivals.

Sociologists offer a more specific view, arguing that an extremist is someone who desires a radical reordering of society, or is someone who advocates or works toward that goal. A further clarification of the term would be that extremists differ from reformers, or people who want to work within the existing political and economic system to improve it. Reformers, because they seek adjustments within the social order rather than revolution, are not extremists.

A popular way to study extremism is by comparing extremist ideologies with those existing along a continuum of behavior called the left-right continuum. At the middle of the continuum are centrists, people in the political center who may prefer minimal participation in politics and whose ideologies may be a complex mix of conservatism or liberalism. Though they may identify themselves with a major political party, they are not typically party activists, and their allegiances may shift often.

Moving to the rightward side of the continuum, conservatives are significantly more likely to be associated with the Republican Party in the United States, and are more likely to be party activists. They are often referred to as "on the right," and tend to be in a higher income bracket. They are reformers, working within the system, and are either defenders of the status quo or people who want to return to time-test values on a variety of issues. Conservatives are typically against new taxes, prefer initiatives such as tax cuts to help individuals, and are opposed to the massive spending packages

used to finance huge federal programs. Against regulatory reforms that might overly restrict business, they want to get the government "off the back" of the people. The conservatism of Ronald Reagan or Barry Goldwater serves as a good examples.

Right-wing extremists are on the far rightward end of the continuum, and are often called "right-wingers" or "far rightists." Their proposed changes may be revolutionary in the sense that they favor returning the United States to a "true democracy" or an "all-white America," and they have their own **[p. 230 ↓]** narrowly defined interpretations of exactly what that means. Their views of an American past of self-sufficient, morally righteous, hard-working people may be similar to mainstream right-leaning individuals, but right extremists split off in that they allow considerable amounts of bigotry and hatred. Their methods of change can sometimes involve violence, and here they risk being labeled as terrorists. In the United States, examples of right-wing extremists include the John Birch Society, the Liberty Lobby, citizen militia groups, Christian Identity groups, the Ku Klux Klan, and sovereign citizens.

Liberals are significantly more likely to be associated with the Democratic Party in the United States, and are referred to as "on the left." Liberals are also considered reformers, working within the system, but will usually advocate for some kind of state program that they view as "progressive" and one they purport will move America forward. They tend to support new federal programs such as national health insurance and higher taxes. They feel government should become larger in order to pay to help the less fortunate. The late Ted Kennedy is often held up as an example of true liberalism.

Located at the far left of the continuum are left wing extremists, often called "left wingers." They may display many of the same rigid, authoritarian characteristics as do right extremists, except that the nature of their program is different. Their program is designed to push the United States forward in a revolutionary way, often according to a Marxist or an anarchist program. Violence is the preferred method of change for most left-wing extremists. These activists tend to be nonreligious internationalists, something they share with liberals. Examples of left-wing extremists in the United States are the Black Panther Party, the Communist Party USA, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Progressive Labor Party.

History of Extremism in the United States

A movement often considered among the first extremist movements in 19th-century America was called the Anti-Masons. This group was considered right wing because it wanted to destroy the elitism of the Masons or the Masonic movement and return the country to the pristine democratic republic of its early years. In 1835, the Anti-Masons merged with the National Republicans to form the Whigs.

By 1850, a new right-wing group had emerged called the Know Nothings. When asked about their business, they would reply, "I know nothing." This did not help the reputation of the group, as many started to declare that the Know Nothings were lacking in intelligence. Yet, they did hold **[p. 231 ↓]** meetings, write tracts, and field candidates; by 1855 the group reached a high-water mark with five U.S. senators and 43 U.S. representatives. The Know Nothings were anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic, and tried to uphold the interests of American-born Protestants.

Rising up to challenge the Know Nothings was a new left-wing group called the Molly Maguires, which was Catholic and openly terrorist. Their organization began in Ireland and then spread to the United States, working mostly in coalfields and areas where there was discrimination against immigrants and Catholics.

The premier extremist group of the 19th century, based upon numbers of members and campaign effectiveness, was the terroristic Ku Klux Klan (KKK). From 1867 to 1871, the KKK intimidated blacks and overthrew black rule or radical reconstruction. The U.S. government, using some questionable techniques, rounded up and prosecuted Klansmen in 1871. This would be the first of at least five identified "eras" of the Klan.

On the left, outside of the appearance of the Molly Maguires, a major significant trend was the appearance and growth of a number of communistic or communal experiments. Robert Owen was the founder of the most famous of these; he established the Utopian socialist communities Harmony and New Harmony. The Amana Colonies in eastern Iowa was another such experiment. Colony members forfeited private property to the community in return for a measure of long-term security, following a socialistic program.

This experiment lasted until 1932, when, faced by a difficult economy, the colonists decided to convert to capitalist enterprise.

In the 20th century, four phases of U.S. extremism can be identified. Phase I is from the early century until the early 1920s, a period punctuated by the Red Scare and the Palmer Raids. During this phase, left-wing extremism began to show muscle. The Socialist Party's Eugene V. Debs ran for president in 1912, receiving about one million votes, while New York City's Socialist Party candidate for mayor finished second. The Socialist Party was nonviolent, so authorities were ill prepared to respond to some of the violent groups that followed them, such as the International Workers of the World, also called the IWW or the Wobblies. This group was very confrontational, even though the members claimed to be pacifists.

Phase I

During Phase I, there was an emerging tension about left-wing groups of all kinds. Although only a small group of left-wing terrorists exploded **[p. 232 ↓]** bombs, authorities tended to view all left wingers as a single, united public threat. There was very little effort to sort out the subtle differences in ideology between the various groups. In 1919, 36 bombs were sent via U.S. mail to prominent people, including J.P. Morgan and U.S. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer. The bombs sent to Palmer triggered the famous Palmer Raids, in which hundreds of left-wing radicals were arrested.

The KKK was reborn in part due to the Red Scare. With law enforcement trying to apprehend and prosecute the left wing, the Klan's assistance was welcome. By helping in the effort to find and fight leftists, the KKK gained a measure of respectability it did not have in the 19th century. The new Klan essentially picked up where the Know Nothings and the American Protective Association left off in the 19th century. They were also anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic, and espoused a hatred of Jews, blacks, and elitists of all kinds.

Phase II

Phase II runs from the Great Depression to the end of World War II, when there was a rise in the level of activity of both the left-and right-wing movements. At the beginning of this phase was the economic crisis of the Great Depression, which alone weakened the commitment of some people to capitalism because of the acute economic sufferings, and socialism began to look attractive as a result. Marxist, left-wing organizations became popular, even hip. Jews were mistakenly blamed for the Depression by some who was believed the Jews controlled international banking and could expand or restrict credit at will. Consequently, there was also a rise in right-wing, pro-Nazi, and pro-fascist groups sympathetic with the Nazis in Germany.

Phase III

Phase III refers to the McCarthyism period of the 1950s. The Communist Party in America was viewed as a direct threat to the American way of life. The group was making some inroads in America, and despite being greatly feared, appeared to succumb to its own strategic blunders. This led to communists and other leftists becoming the focus of an extremist-unearthing group in Congress called the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The stage was therefore set for Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, a U.S. senator who went on his own extremist-hunting crusade. **[p. 233 ↓]** Assisted by HUAC and some private blacklisters, McCarthy developed a list of celebrities and people who served in government whom he claimed were communists.

Phase IV

Phase IV, from 1960 to the end of decade, began with the emergence of the young, radical New Left and the right-wing extremist response to this new brand of radicalism. The New Leftist views of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were left-wing views influenced by Marxism, but were not conventionally Marxist or based primarily

upon Marx's writings. They were more influenced by socialist writers such as C. Wright Mills and Michael Harrington. Eschewing the older-left groups such as the Communist Party USA, the young radicals criticized America for becoming a dangerous mass society where civic participation among the common people was declining as the power of elites was consolidating.

From the standpoint of the extremist right wing, SDS and the other "progressive" movements seeking radical changes in American society were essentially viewed as a single enemy attempting to establish a one-world, socialistic government based on the Soviet Union. Radical preachers such as Billy Hargis and Carl McIntyre spoke out against such a government, claiming that integration was one means used by socialists to promote their agenda. Militia groups such as Robert DePugh's Minutemen were poised to create a revolutionary resistance force against this one-world socialist juggernaut. The KKK experienced yet another rebirth as it fought hard to counter the gains of the civil rights movement.

By the late 20th century, left and right extremism took on new forms, though these had been largely influenced and effectively shaped by the pivotal events of the 1960s. The left was pursuing more of an anarchist, antiglobalist program influenced by the writings of the anarchist Noam Chomsky and neo-Marxist scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein. In particular, environmental activists and animal rights activists used sabotage and increasingly violent ecoterrorism as a means of stating their case. Citizen militias made a comeback in the 1990s, this time claiming that the left's one-world socialist plans were still alive and well—not in Russia, but within the organization of the United Nations (UN). White supremacist groups found prison to be a very fruitful recruiting ground, and a number of groups claimed to be "sovereign citizens," indigenous citizens in a land area called the United States, but not bound by all of the United States' rules and regulations.

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Global Extremism of the Current Century

In the 21st century, the left-right continuum of political ideology often does not fare especially well when applied to the kinds of extreme ideologies currently found in the world. In some European nations the labels still apply, but only with difficulty can labels such as left, right, and center be applied to groups encountered in central Asia and the Middle East. The kinds of opponents that U.S. troops encounter daily in that region's war zones—terrorists, insurgents, militias, and criminal organizations—are asymmetrical warriors who fight on their own terrain and on their own terms. There is no playbook or manual for this kind of warfare, which is based on closely held clan and tribal knowledge, passed down by oral tradition. For these warriors, warfare is a way of life, and may include tactics that the Western world calls terrorism.

This asynchronous warfare is unconventional, without uniforms. Most of the time, U.S. troops face a situation where enemy strength cannot be measured by uniforms, battalions, or regiments. The type of war in which America is successful, on the other hand, is more symmetrical, which is actually a refined quantitative science. The United States then marshals its forces and confronts the enemy, subduing it with superior and overwhelming force. The first Gulf War, the Afghanistan war of 2001, and the early stages of the Iraq War are examples.

In contrast, asymmetrical warriors work alone, with others, or with corrupt politicians. The key unit of the asymmetrical warrior is the clan, or several families with a common ancestry; and a tribe, which is a uniting of several clans. This type of warfare was essentially relegated to the history books during the early 20th century. Once thought to be irrelevant to modern warfare, U.S. troops find themselves confronting it daily in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other battlegrounds.

Pro: Effectiveness of Terrorism and Extremism

Despite the deep moral opprobrium that the word *terrorism* carries, certain national, subnational, and stateless groups have sought out terrorist tactics when more conventional means of conflict resolution have been exhausted. For example, any community can be subjected to threats and attacks stemming from civil disorder, government oppression, foreign invasions, and occupations. Normally, the job of defending a community is vested in the sovereign power, but the sovereign does not always deliver. It may be too weak, have been destroyed, or be the aggressor that is tormenting the community. **[p. 235 ↓]** In such cases, a community has the right to collective self-defense when state protection is unavailable, just as individuals have a right to use violence in situations of self-defense in the absence of police protection.

Communities may face an aggressive threat to their very existence, believing that extermination is imminent. Short of destruction, the aggressor may enslave community members, destroy its vital institutions, appropriate its natural resources, seize its territory, or disperse its members. Each of these threats to community survival is an existential threat, and typically will be viewed as unjustifiable from the community's perspective.

If leaders are convinced that their community is worth saving and that the violence against them is unjustifiable under at least one widely accepted canon such as an international statute, they may seek to leverage their justification for a violent response by going to considerable lengths to show that alternate means of conflict resolution were tried and failed. They may document that tactics such as direct negotiations, nonviolent protest, appeals to international law, appeals to international organizations such as the UN, and appeals to regional alliances and major world powers did not produce an end to the conflict.

Terrorism in response to a perceived wrong can deliver results. State terrorism in particular has frequently achieved goals: the American manifest destiny was partly achieved through what has been criticized as terrorism against Native Americans, and

it has been argued that the bombing of Japanese cities in 1945 hastened the end of World War II. Nonstate terrorism has been similarly effective. The establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine in 1948 would never have been achieved without the use of terrorist tactics in causing the exodus of the bulk of the Palestine Arab population from the territory that became part of that state. Even suicide bombings have been effective tools toward achieving goals. Hezbollah's bombings against the United States and France in 1983 forced a withdrawal of military forces in Lebanon. The Tamil Tigers assassinated two key adversaries in their conflict with the Sri Lankan government in the 1990s. Hamas bombed Israel in 1994 and 1995, hastening a withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Those belonging to extremist groups—even the armed wings of such groups that have a proclivity for violence—enjoy freedom of speech under the U.S. Constitution, as do all Americans. Even when extremist discourse is inflammatory and highly offensive, the First Amendment to the Constitution protects the rights of extremists to free expression. Efforts to limit the rights of extremist groups have consistently been denied due to First Amendment considerations.

Con: Terrorism and Violations of Human Rights

Terrorism inflicts pain and suffering on people's lives all over the world, and is almost universally condemned as a human evil. It is an attack that indiscriminately affects innocent people who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, and who are enjoying the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Therefore, terrorism impedes the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The fears unleashed by terrorist attacks lead victim populations to believe that their freedoms, their very way of life, and their ways of governance are under direct existential threat. The stress following the attack may well weaken and destabilize the critical institutions upon which the entire society depends. A purpose of terrorism at times is to undermine pluralistic civil society.

Extremist activity—even when falling well short of terrorism—causes fear that a community's security has been eroded, and that terrorist tactics may be used by those extremists in the future. The response to extremism and terrorism, if not a measured one, could function as the precipitant of even more attacks. Thus, the economic and social development of the victim country and even its neighbors would be threatened by the escalation of retaliatory violence. Terrorism widens the divide between nations and complicates the process of peaceful resolution of unsettled conflicts. It could result in a new wave of counter-accusations and counter-actions. The engagement of counterterrorism by victimized nations increases the possibility that victims may inflict terrorism back upon their perpetrators.

The end or purpose of terrorism does not justify the means. If the so-called "sins" of an opposing people are the purpose behind a terrorist attack, the death of defenseless citizens is still an unjustifiable horror visited upon innocent victims. It is an illegitimate means to the end sought, no matter how noble this end is perceived to the perpetrator. Terrorism erodes or takes away the basic human rights of life, liberty, and security of person. Terrorists may claim that their own human rights are abused, but this claim alone does not give terrorists the right to take away others' rights or their lives.

If terrorism is perpetrated as a means of making a political statement about an opposing people, or a way to correct the perceived ills or wrongs of a people, it is unlikely or only very rarely the case that the perpetrator will achieve the desired result by launching an attack. Often, the perpetrator is left frustrated by the lack of direct effect delivered by the event, and surprised by the backlash that results.

[p. 237 ↓] The goals of terrorism cannot be achieved in a moral or less costly way. Terrorism violates international statutes and numerous laws of individual countries throughout the world. In some cases, the intentional aims of terrorism are so broadly drawn that the goal cannot even come close to being achieved through conventional means of conflict resolution. Stated another way, the ends of the perpetrator are unlikely to be met by any means, whether violent or nonviolent, legal or illegal, high or low tech, conventional or contentious, legitimate or illegitimate. This calls into question the legitimacy and even the sanity of the perpetrator's actions as they undertake terrorist acts.

Stan C.Weeber McNeese State University

Further Readings

See Also: Antisocial Personality Disorders Hate Crimes Religious Convictions War Crimes.

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