

CHAPTER 2

Understanding Terrorism and Counterterrorism

INTRODUCTION TO COUNTER- TERRORISM

This chapter will focus on the act of terrorism itself and reveal political motivations of terrorism. The purpose of this chapter is to offer the reader a deeper understanding of the kinds of terrorism and their motivation. Before any significant discussion of terrorism can occur, the definition of terrorism and the controversy of this definition must be discussed. This effort is more than just an academic exercise since it is this definition that prompts the term's use in a variety of media. The term "terrorism" is then revealed as politically motivated violence. How this motivation gains supporters and momentum is then uncovered.



Belgian soldiers on patrol due to a raised terror threat level.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Comprehend the controversy of defining terrorism
2. Identify the major motivations for political violence
3. Discuss the role of an authoritarian government to motivate terrorism

14 Chapter 2 • Understanding Terrorism and Counterterrorism

KEY TERMS

Analyzing intelligence	Disseminating intelligence	Political violence
Asymmetric warfare	Ideational political violence	Propaganda
Authoritarian	Individual political violence	Revolution
Coercion	Institutional political	Violence
Collecting intelligence	violence	
Counterinsurgency	Intimidation	

DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

The process of defining terrorism is an important step in identifying what is and, more importantly, what is not terrorism. The FBI and Department of Justice distinguish between “international terrorism” and “domestic terrorism.” This distinction assists national security agencies in **collecting**, **analyzing**, and **disseminating intelligence** within the intelligence community. International terrorism is defined as having three characteristics:

1. Involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
2. Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
3. Occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.*

In comparison, domestic terrorism replaces the third characteristic with, “occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.” Although the distinction is simple to identify theoretically, in practice the distinction is much more difficult to make. The law also defines federal crime terrorism. The two parts of this definition include:

1. Is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct and
2. Is a violation of one of several listed statutes, including § 930(c) (relating to killing or attempted killing during an attack on a federal facility with a dangerous weapon) and § 1114 (relating to killing or attempted killing of officers and employees of the United States).

* (Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code 18 U.S.C. § 2331 defines “international terrorism” and “domestic terrorism” for purposes of Chapter 113B of the Code, entitled “Terrorism”)

The definitions bring to light that terrorism is an act of **violence** that is aimed to hurt or kill people and it has a purpose of **intimidation** or **coercion**. What these definitions lack is important. First, an act of terrorism is not required to hurt anyone, that is, the threat of bodily harm is enough to meet the requirements under the above statutes. Second, the terrorist or terrorists need not be part of a larger organization. Unlike gang definitions, which include an organized group of criminals, terrorists do not need to be part of an organization. Third, the purpose of the act is broad as long as that act is related to impacting the government in some way. The impact on the government can be both direct and indirect.

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Although legal definitions may differ in the application of the term terrorism, the motivation for terrorism is political in nature. It is a form of **asymmetric warfare** that is the natural choice of a significantly weaker powers to a much greater, generally a government, power. Regardless of whether it is considered freedom fighting, which has a positive connotation, or terrorism, all violence against a population to further some political cause is political violence. Thus, regardless of perspective on the cause, all such acts are political violence. **Political violence** is a violence that is outside of state control and that is politically motivated. It is hostile or aggressive acts motivated by a desire to affect change in the government. **Revolution**, a population's attempt to free themselves from an oppressive force or a perceived oppressive force, is a form of political violence. Political violence can fall into three motivational categories:

- **Institutional** political violence accentuates the repercussions of existing organizations and the associated trends that give rise to political violence. This can include oppression of certain peoples by law, rules, or regulations, all of which limit the people's ability to make appropriate changes in the government in a positive manner. This can also occur when an institution restricts access to jobs, thereby limiting access to basic human needs such as shelter, food, water, or clothing. The consequences of imposing restrictive rules or constraining certain people or groups often culminates in a revolution, or the use of terrorism to combat the inequality. An example of this public push back against an establishment can be seen in Tunisia, Africa, starting in 2010, in what would come to be called the Arab Spring. What started out in Tunisia as peaceful protests and demonstrations, rapidly gained momentum, and spread across the majority of North Africa and into the Middle East. Civilians were influenced by public discontent with local government, human rights violations, economic decline, disparate income levels, a large number of unemployed citizens, and extreme poverty, to resort to revolution to alter the course of the government's decisions that were negatively impacting the lives of the people

16 Chapter 2 • Understanding Terrorism and Counterterrorism

living under their rule. The government responded to protesters with violence to try and maintain control, and the protesters responded in kind. The leaders of several countries involved either fled their respective countries, resigned their posts, or struck deals to avoid prosecution with newly elected leaders, thus making room for new leaders, laws, and policies in favor of the people they govern.

- **Ideational** political violence is defined as the ideas or beliefs that promote the use of violence. Extreme patriotism, loyalty to one's country, strong advocacy efforts for that country and the desire to see the country overcome oppression or hardship is a major motivator for many citizens in a nation. This concept is often referred to as **nationalism**, and the ideology behind it inspires its citizens to act in whatever means necessary to achieve those goals. In many countries, opposing political parties perceived as the "underdogs" have been known to resort to violence when more peaceful efforts fail to help them achieve their goals in a larger political realm, leaving them with few options except for violence. Perhaps the most commonly recognized, and dangerous, illustration of ideational violence though is religious fundamentalism. **Religious fundamentalism** refers to the belief or beliefs of an individual or group of individuals in the absolute power or authority of a sacred religious text, the teachings of a spiritual leader, a prophet, or God. Religious ideologies can be particularly lethal in the political arena because a person's religion or belief system is such an integral and unwavering part of what makes that person who they are, they are therefore more likely to engage in activities that further their beliefs or protect them from perceived threats. An example of nationalism and religious fundamentalism as a form of ideational political violence can be illustrated by the civil unrest in Iraq beginning with the fall of Saddam Hussein's governmental control in 2003. Hussein seized Presidential power and controlled Iraq from 1979 to 2003 as a Sunni Muslim, one of the two traditional sects of Islam. Eighty to ninety percentages of Muslims worldwide self-identify as Sunni Muslims, leaving 10–20% to self-identify as Shi'a Muslims. In Iraq, however, the distribution is estimated at 32–37% Sunni, and 60–65% Shi'a. After Hussein's execution in 2006, the Shi'a Muslims wanted to regain control of the region. The Shi'a formed small groups and began to launch small-scale attacks on the government. These groups were engaging in **asymmetric warfare**, where the groups' relative military power differs largely from their opponent. This is typically seen between formed, professional armies and insurgents or resistance movements. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is an example of this type of insurgency and was born of the conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. The members of groups such as ISIS are motivated by their perceived or real oppression to use whatever means

necessary to protect themselves, their people, and their beliefs. These groups typically resort to violence when all other methods fail them, as a way to make their voices heard.

- **Individual** political violence is defined as a type of violence that occurs when an individual believes



An arms instructor leads a military drill, circa 1999, Baghdad, Iraq.

that their political or government system will not respond to their demands. The violence occurs as a means of achieving a goal. An example of individual political violence is Ted Kaczynski, otherwise known as the “Unabomber.” Considered odd but a child prodigy from a young age, Kaczynski was a highly educated, articulate man who either mailed or hand delivered 16 homemade bombs to individuals at universities and airlines from 1978 to 1995, killing three people and injuring 23 others. Kaczynski was motivated by his belief that the industrial–technological system was irrevocably changing the behavior of the people using it, and called for a “revolution against technology.” He called this “the disruption of power process.” Kaczynski wrote that he was unsettled by how the “industrial system has robbed contemporary humans of their autonomy, diminished their rapport with nature, and forced them to behave in ways that are increasingly remote from the natural pattern of human behavior.” Kaczynski sent or delivered bombs as a means of expressing his views and opinions that he felt were not going to be heard using any other method of communication outside of violence. After 18 years of investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigations arrested Kaczynski after his “manifesto,” also called “*Industrial Society and Its Future*,” **and** was published in the New York Times and the Washington Post, tipping Kaczynski’s brother off to the Unabomber’s identity. Ted Kaczynski was later diagnosed with schizophrenia and avoided capital punishment because of this diagnosis. He is currently serving eight consecutive life terms at a Super Maximum Security facility in Florence, Colorado.

The aforementioned motivations should be used to assist in defining the motivation for the group, but real life is not so black and white. Political violence generally begins at the

18 Chapter 2 • Understanding Terrorism and Counterterrorism

“grassroots” level. Individuals inspire and grow some cause, thus, counterterrorism must accept that motivations change and adapt. A group may change the focus of their cause from one type of motivation into another or it may embody more than one. Therefore, categorizing political motivations should be done to help the analyst but not be part of the analysis.

In addition to motivation, analysts can use the approach of the terrorists to gain insight on their method to inspire more support and advance their cause.

PERSUASION: IDEOLOGY AND RELIGION, ENTICE PEOPLE TO SUPPORT ONE SIDE

This method to advance a cause relies on culture, often through religion, and attaches a cause to a shared belief system or principle. Because this method is often intertwined with culture and religion, it can be difficult to persuade followers otherwise. **Propaganda**, efforts to change the hearts and minds of a population, can be used but the execution of the tactic must be done carefully as not to arouse suspicion. The tactic of influencing the opinions of a population is commonly known as Psychological Operations, or PSYOPs. The process of developing a plan to change the perspective of a population is to:

1. identify the terrorist belief system
2. identify the aspects of the culture that allows the terrorist argument to propagate
3. identify cultural principles that would undermine the terrorist argument
4. identify a method, generally through an individual or group that the population trusts and who seeks political power, to insert a contrary argument that will be accepted by the population
5. make contact and form an alliance with the individual or group that would insert the propaganda
6. ensure the insertion propaganda is shared and that the trusted parties continue to keep their alliance with your cause
7. continue to support the new political system and further marginalize the terrorism argument

COERCION: THE USE OF INTIMIDATION TO GAIN SUPPORT

In contrast to persuasion, coercion relies on the threat of force to further their cause. This tactic is similar to those used by gangs to intimidate community members into turning a blind eye to crimes. Meanwhile, the gang or terrorist group grows by exploiting economic or social conditions. High unemployment or underemployment rates can cause individuals to join a

prosperous gang or terrorist group. In addition, individuals seeking a greater cause or family cohesion may join the group. Community members, including those who disapprove of the groups' activities, may distrust law enforcement or the counterterrorism authorities. Gaining the trust of the community is paramount when coercion is used to further a counterinsurgency effort. To accomplish this, humanitarian relief and economic inducements, such as subsidizing local businesses to encourage job growth, can be appropriate methods.

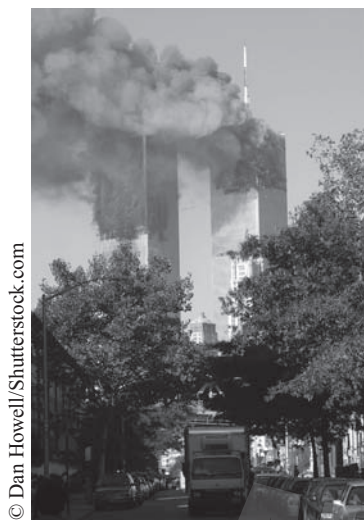
REACTION TO ABUSES: REACTION BY PEOPLE WHEN GOVERNMENT EXCEEDS LOCAL NORMS IN USE OF FORCE

When **authoritarian** governments inflict harm on a population, an antigovernment reaction (possibly terrorism) should be expected unless that government's repressive force is so great that no reaction can be accomplished successfully. Optimally, governments should meet the needs of the people, but if history is any guide, that perspective is rather optimistic. In the Algerian fight for independence from the French, it was the torture techniques that were used by the French that is cited as the motivating for the population to support the terrorist group's cause. The use of torture in obtaining credible intelligence is highly controversial, but it should be noted that counterinsurgency (COIN) operations can be severely hampered if the word of the inappropriate use of torture is made public. Terrorist groups may use torture reports to gain support for their cause. In addition, terrorists may exaggerate or fabricate a foreign government's counterterrorism tactics to garner support.

The aforementioned approaches are three of the most popular insurgency tactics, but many more exist. Terrorist groups may exaggerate the role of foreign support in the form of money or weapons. COIN operations must use accurate intelligence to determine how the terrorist group is garnering support. Although most consider terrorists to be rational, in the sense that they can weigh costs and benefits, it is also possible that some groups operate because they are driven by the desire to fight. Terrorists may be a result of a culture of violence and are thus motivated by the violence alone. It can be argued that this is not terrorism, but instead a criminal act.

Traditional wars are those in which each nation has a formal military and each side attempts to win battles until one must admit defeat due to a lack of resources (money, personnel, equipment, ammunition, etc.). On September 10, 2001 our military was most prepared for such a battle. Structure, culture, and training were designed to prepare the men and women of the military to combat another nation who also had a military. September 11, 2001 was the first of many days in which the military had to change how it fights wars. For many years after 2001, the military continued to use cold war-based strategies. These strategies are what it knew best and those operations were more easily devised and deployed. As the years wore on, strategies needed to change to make our military more effective against a different

20 Chapter 2 • Understanding Terrorism and Counterterrorism



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kind of combatant. Unlike traditional combatants, terrorists will hide behind school children and find shelter in hospitals and places of worship. In addition, how terrorists use the media and disseminate their propaganda is challenging to overcome.

In 2007, the U.S. Army published the new **Counterinsurgency** Field Manual and it marked a new beginning for the operations that should be done in conflicts involving terrorist cells. Unlike traditional military operations, the manual encouraged making connections with the community and fostering trust between the host nation and COIN operations. In essence, the manual makes it clear that winning a war against terrorists means winning the hearts and minds of the people of that nation. Thus, combating terrorism means combating the ideology that inspires terrorism.

GLOSSARY

Analyzing intelligence—The process of taking known information about potential situations and categorizing by importance and probability of the actions happening.

Asymmetric warfare—Opposing groups have unequal military forces. Weaker opponent uses unconventional tactics as terrorism to exploit vulnerabilities.

Authoritarian—A government characterized by absolute obedience to authority.

Coercion—The practice of persuading someone through force or threats.

Collecting intelligence—Process of gathering information then to analyze for intelligence.

Counterinsurgency—Military or political action taken against the activities of guerrillas or revolutionaries.

Disseminating intelligence—Process of delivering the product to the consumer.

Ideational political violence—Political violence is defined as the ideas or beliefs that promote the use of violence.

Individual political violence—Defined as a type of violence that occurs when an individual believes that their political or government system will not respond to their demands.

Institutional political violence—Accentuates the repercussions of existing organizations and the associated trends that give rise to political violence.

Intimidation—The act of intimidating someone.

Political violence—Violence that is outside of state control and that is politically motivated. Hostile or aggressive acts motivated by a desire to affect change in the government.

Propaganda—Information, usually biased, that promotes a certain thought or view.

Revolution—Forcible overthrow of a government or social order.

Violence—Behavior involving physical force with the intent to harm, damage, or kill.