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CHAPTER 8

The New Age of Terrorism

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The purpose of this chapter is to consider how terrorism has changed over the past four decades. The word *terrorism* dates from the eighteenth century, but as recently as 1971—when Rand published my essay ''The Five Stages of Urban Guerrilla Warfare''—the term had not yet acquired its present currency. Nor did it then refer to a distinct mode of armed conflict. That meaning would be added subsequently, by terrorists themselves and by analysts of terrorism; and in my view the latter impart more coherence to the phenomenon than the former.

We should be careful not to think of terrorism or terrorists as monolithic. Terrorism is a generalized construct derived from our concepts of morality, law, and the rules of war, whereas actual terrorists are shaped by culture, ideology, and politics—specific, inchoate factors and notions that motivate diverse actions. But although terrorists are not monolithic, neither are they isolated. They innovate; exploit new technology; learn from one another; imitate successful tactics; produce manuals of instruction based on experience; debate tactics, targets, and limits on violence; and justify their actions with doctrines and theories.

Thus we can, cautiously, identify apparent trends:

- Terrorism has become bloodier.
- Terrorists have developed new financial resources, so that they are less dependent on state sponsors.

- Terrorists have evolved new models of organization.
- Terrorists can now wage global campaigns.
- Terrorists have effectively exploited new communications technologies.
- Some terrorists have moved beyond tactics to strategy, although none of them have achieved their stated long-range goals.

These trends do not allow prediction or extrapolation; analysis is not prophecy. Neither do they imply inexorable progress. Terrorists have not done many of the things we worried about 30 years ago—our worst fears have not been realized. On the other hand, no amount of analysis can cover every conceivable terrorist scenario, every form of attack, or every angle. The future, like the past 40 years, will probably bring surprises and shocks.

TERRORISM HAS BECOME BLOODIER

Perhaps the most striking development is that terrorism has become bloodier, in terms of what acts are committed and how many victims are involved. The order of magnitude has increased almost every decade. In the 1970s the bloodiest incidents caused fatalities in the tens. In the 1980s, fatalities from the worst incidents were in the hundreds; by the 1990s, attacks on this scale had become more frequent. On 9/11 there were thousands of fatalities, and there could have been far more. We now contemplate plausible scenarios in which tens of thousands might die.

At one time, I wrote that terrorists wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead. They were limited not only by access to weapons but by self-constraint. Mayhem as such was seldom an objective. Terrorists had a sense of morality, a self-image, operational codes, and practical concerns—they wanted to maintain group cohesion, avoid alienating perceived constituents, and avoid provoking public outrage, which could lead to crackdowns. But these constraints gave way to large-scale indiscriminate violence as terrorists engaged in protracted, brutal conflicts; as the more squeamish dropped out; as terrorism became commonplace and the need for headlines demanded higher body counts; and as ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism replaced political agendas.

Some terrorists still operate below their capacity. Even the most fanatic jihadists, who believe that God mandates the slaughter of infidels, debate, pragmatically, the acceptability of collateral Muslim casualties, whether Shiite Muslims are potential allies or apostates, and whether beheadings are counterproductive. Overall, though, jihadists seem ready to murder millions, if necessary. Many of today's terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people dead.

To repeat, though, some fears about what terrorists might do have not been realized. In a poll conducted in 1985, most experts predicted chemical terrorism by the end of the twentieth century; but when nerve gas was released on the subway in Tokyo in 1995, the consequences were less severe than had been imagined. Biological warfare has taken place only on a small scale, as in the anthrax letters of 2001.

During the 1960s and 1970s there were fears of nuclear black markets and nuclear terrorism. This fear was heightened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the exposure of its nuclear arsenal to corruption and organized crime. But although nuclear terrorism remains a concern, it has not yet happened, nor have cities been held hostage with weapons of mass destruction.

Although accurate surface-to-air missiles are widely available and have been in some terrorists' arsenals for years, they have not been used against commercial aircraft outside conflict zones. Terrorists, so far as we know, have not attacked agriculture. Terrorists have not attempted to seize or sabotage nuclear reactors.

Also, there are no more terrorist organizations today than 10 or 20 years ago; and the annual number of international incidents has remained in the hundreds, not the thousands.

What conclusion can we draw? Although not all our fears have been realized, some may materialize in the future. Scenarios that seemed far-fetched in the 1970s are now plausible; in fact, 9/11 redefined plausibility. In present attempts to anticipate and prepare for what terrorists might do next, virtually no scenario is dismissed. Analysts and the public seriously consider the possibility that terrorists may send waves of suicide bombers to America's shopping malls; wipe out Boston's waterfront with a hijacked liquid-natural-gas carrier; topple the George Washington Bridge in New York City; crash planes into the Houses of Parliament in London, the Capitol in Washington, or a nuclear reactor; spray anthrax over a city; sink tankers to block narrow straits; release hoof-and-mouth

disease; sabotage the banking system; spread smallpox; or destroy Manhattan with a nuclear bomb. Terrorists' own chatter, echoing this speculation, may be picked up by intelligence services and taken as confirmation.

These concerns are due partly to 9/11 and partly to a new basis for analysis. Whereas traditional threat-based analysis assessed an enemy's intentions and capabilities, today's vulnerability-based analysis identifies a weakness and hypothesizes a terrorist and a worst-case scenario. Vulnerability analysis is useful for assessing consequences and preparedness, but it relegates the terrorist to a secondary role: the scenario is driven by the vulnerability. Often, such a scenario is reified and becomes a threat: it is successively considered possible, probable, inevitable, and imminent. In vulnerability-based assessment, consequences trump likelihood. Terrorists' actual capabilities, ambitions, and fantasies blur with our own speculation and fears to create what the terrorists want: an atmosphere of alarm.

By contrast, ''red team'' exercises, in which analysts actually plan terrorist operations, put terrorists (or their red team surrogates) back in the main role. This approach narrows the spectrum of potential attacks. From a terrorist's assumed perspective, some operations appear less attractive, or planning them seems more challenging. This may indeed happen in real-life terrorist groups. Actual terrorists may contemplate many modes of attack but keep returning to common forms such as vehicle attacks.

TERRORISTS HAVE DEVELOPED NEW WAYS OF FINANCING THEIR OPERATIONS

Since terrorists are outlaws, unable to hold territory and openly collect taxes, their finances are necessarily clandestine and often depend on criminal activity. Terrorist organizations that have survived for long periods have developed various financial resources. In the 1960s, rival superpowers and their local allies were willing to finance terrorism; but this support (with some exceptions) declined at the end of the Cold War, and terrorists had to seek other means.

One innovation of South American urban guerrillas in the early 1990s was kidnapping for ransom. Terrorists had previously avoided such kidnapping because its criminal connotations might tarnish a group, but its use spread as it brought in tens of millions of dollars.

Some groups engaged in extortion and protection rackets, gradually adding fraud and even legitimate investments. Drug trafficking also offered large-scale returns that benefited groups in South America, central Asia, and the Middle East.

Ethnic diasporas, émigré communities, and coreligionists could also be a source of contributions, especially when charity was presumably ordered by a religion. Such groups may sometimes have been unwitting supporters. In some cases, they were duped; in other cases, their contributions were ostensibly meant for humanitarian efforts by the recipients—schools, medical supplies, assistance to widows and orphans. However, some private contributors knew that their money financed terrorist operations.

Collecting money from various foreign sources and disbursing it to scattered operational units and operatives require clandestine transfers of funds. Some terrorist organizations are skilled at moving money from charitable organizations and criminal operations through informal banking systems, money order and cash wire services, and regular banks. Some authorities have reduced high-volume transactions, but it is not clear that they have severely impeded terrorists' cash flows, which may simply move into less regulated areas. We know the sums that have been blocked, but it is difficult to estimate the amounts moving in ways governments cannot monitor.

Terrorists benefit from uneven enforcement. Many financial institutions and some countries remain reluctant to interfere with suspect transfers, not because they support terrorism but because strict controls could interfere with lucrative transactions deriving from tax evasion, white-collar crime, and political corruption.

TERRORISTS HAVE BECOME LESS DEPENDENT ON STATE SPONSORS

Even during the Cold War, there was less and less enthusiasm for backing guerrillas so as to wage surrogate warfare. The Soviet Union became disenchanted with national liberation movements and especially with the Palestinians: by the mid-1980s, Europe's colonial empires had been dismantled; the Americans had been driven from Indochina; Cuba was bankrupt; Marxist guerrillas in Latin America seemed stalled; and in 1985 Soviet diplomats were kidnapped in Lebanon. Similarly, in the United States support faded for

clandestine projects to topple Fidel Castro in Cuba, an enterprise of the 1960s; and Congress restricted further funding for the contras in Nicaragua—although support continued for the mujahideen fighting against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Also, both the United States and the Soviet Union were becoming increasingly concerned about terrorism.

With the departure of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan and the end of the Cold War, local conflicts no longer had strategic significance. This development facilitated the resolution of a few armed struggles—guerrillas and governments made peace. Others in the field were left to their own devices. Some, like the old Palestinian groups, became toothless; some, like those in Central America, turned to local banditry. But certain others, like the Afghan veterans, survived and created new, more autonomous enterprises.

The end of the Cold War also altered the calculations of the few nations identified by the United States as sponsors of terrorism. It reduced support from and protection by the Soviet Union—as in Syria, a patron of the Palestinians. Iraq, involved in a costly war with Iran, had sought assistance from the West, but that was ended when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Libya was bombed by the United States, and although it continued to support terrorist operations (notably sabotage of American and French airliners), it became more circumspect and eventually sought rapprochement with the West. Sanctions eventually had their effect. Gradually, therefore, state-sponsored terrorism became less of a problem.

However, state sponsorship had provided a means of monitoring terrorists, and its decline entailed less influence over terrorist movements and a loss of intelligence sources within them. With the severance of these links, we knew less. This was demonstrated on 9/11. Not only American intelligence but also other intelligence services had missed the preparations. They knew bits but lacked a complete picture.

TERRORISTS HAVE EVOLVED NEW MODELS OF ORGANIZATION

Commenting on terrorists' organization requires distinguishing among groups that use terrorist tactics. Guerrilla groups, governments, and armies differ from urban guerrilla gangs and from groups like Germany's Red Army Faction, Italy's Red Brigades, or the

Japanese Red Army for which terrorism was the primary (or only) activity. When we talk about the evolution of terrorist organization, we mean the latter—organizing to do terrorism. And even in this category, terrorist groups range from primitive gangs to sophisticated organizations.

The guiding principle of all terrorist organization is survival, which depends on maintaining secret membership and operational security, preventing infiltration, punishing betrayal, and limiting damage.

Larger organizations and more ambitious operations have functional specialization, with individuals devoted to recruiting, training, intelligence, reconnaissance, planning, logistics, finance, propaganda, and social services (e.g., support for widows, orphans, and families of suicide attackers). Functional specialization would normally lead to hierarchy and bureaucracy, as in al-Qaida before 9/11. Some groups are organized as miniature armies with general staffs, brigades, and battalions. But hierarchies are open to penetration and may stifle initiative.

Al-Qaida seems to be one of the first groups to pattern itself on a lean international business model: hierarchical but not pyramidal, loosely run, decentralized but linked, able to assemble and allocate resources and coordinate operations, but hard to depict organizationally or penetrate. Networks provide numerous operational benefits: they are quick to learn, adaptive, and resilient—hard to break. To work well, networks require strong shared beliefs, a collective vision, some original basis for trust, and excellent communications. Networks have become an object of intense analysis in the intelligence community. Whether the global jihadist network created by al-Qaida is unique or can be replicated by future groups remains a question.

The online monthly manuals to exhort and instruct would-be terrorists seem close to a concept suggested by Louis Beam—"leaderless resistance"—in which self-proclaimed combatants are linked by common beliefs and goals and wage a common terrorist war, but operate autonomously. This model may be possible for isolated actions, such as those by animal-rights activists and ecoguerrillas; but organizational continuity and major operations still require cooperation, coordination, and structure, which in turn require a basis for trust that is difficult to establish on the Internet.

TERRORISTS ARE ABLE TO MOUNT GLOBAL CAMPAIGNS

Contemporary terrorism transcends national frontiers; in fact, this is what initially made it a subject of international concern. There are two ways in which terrorism can be international.

First, terrorists can attack foreign targets: foreign airliners, embassies, and local offices and employees of multinational corporations—a growing body of entities whose activities in a country, inadvertently or by design, make them participants (and thereby targets) in local conflicts. To draw international attention, embarrass, increase their leverage over local governments, or compel international intervention, terrorists have bombed embassies, assassinated or abducted diplomats, and held corporate executives for ransom. Most incidents of international terrorism fall into this first category.

Second, terrorists can cross national frontiers to carry out attacks abroad, again to gain international attention, or to isolate their foes from their hosts—or simply because distant targets are not as well guarded as targets at home. The Palestinians, inspired by the Algerian FLN's (Front de Libération Nationale) terrorist campaign in mainland France, were the first to systematically adopt this approach, but others soon followed.

Many terrorists have seen their struggles as global. Marxist revolutionaries are an example. In the late twentieth century, for instance, Marxist leaders considered themselves beyond borders and united in revolution. In 1966, the Tri-Continental Conference in Havana was intended to bring together the world's guerrilla movements. No coordinated revolutionary movement emerged, but some interesting alliances eventually evolved, such as that between the Japanese Red Army—rebels looking for a cause—and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which was both Palestinian and Marxist and cultivated foreign recruits and relationships. The brief coalescence of Europe's left-wing terrorist groups led to concerns about ''Euroterrorism,'' and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Spain's Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) exchanged technical know-how.

The jihadists, inspired and guided by al-Qaida's ideology, represent a further and apparently more durable development. Historically, al-Qaida was never a centrally directed, disciplined

organization, even when it operated training camps in Afghanistan. It remained a loose association, capable of centrally directed action and of assembling resources for specific operations, but always more of a network than a hierarchy. Its nature proved to be its strength at a time when survival required decentralization. Al-Qaida is truly a global enterprise, drawing recruits and funding from all over the world, maintaining connections in 60 countries, and carrying out operations in perhaps 20. It may properly be called a global insurgency—a phase that implies both scale and reach.

Lesser movements that are global in cause and ambition, though far below the jihadists in operational capabilities, include neo-Nazis, animal-rights extremists, and some segments of the disparate antiglobalization movement.

TERRORISTS HAVE EFFECTIVELY EXPLOITED NEW COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

For terrorists, the most significant technology is not weapons but direct communication with their multiple audiences. Terrorism, to repeat, was originally aimed at the people watching. Victims were threatened or killed to make a point, not only to the terrorists' foes but above all to the terrorists' own constituents. Technological developments in the 1960s and 1970s—the ubiquity of television, more portable television cameras, communications satellites, uplinks to remote news crews, global news networks—allowed terrorists to reach audiences worldwide almost instantaneously. By carrying out visually dramatic acts of violence, terrorists could virtually guarantee coverage, intensifying the terror and inflating their own importance.

It should be noted that terrorists have not always communicated effectively. For example, the dramas that draw the attention of the news media have often obscured the terrorists' political message: whatever they had to say was lost in the anguish caused by the attack itself. Moreover, terrorists' writings have frequently been incomprehensible to all but a few; and some terrorists have issued voluminous manifestos and strategic directives that mostly remain unread. Sometimes they have failed to use the media pragmatically, as when terrorists who had kidnapped a prominent figure released a photo of the victim holding a placard on which they had written not a

short, bold slogan but a message of 50 words or more that was too small to be legible. Also, news editors, rather than the terrorists themselves, determine what will be covered on television. Images considered too gruesome may not be shown; and except for a sound bite, terrorists' messages may be omitted. Videotape permitted terrorists to substitute motion pictures for still shots, so that they and their hostages could speak directly into the camera, but access to the media was still controlled by others. Not until the development of the Internet did terrorists have unmediated access to their audiences.

On the Internet, terrorist violence, performed on-camera, can be webcast directly and unedited. The Internet also allows direct communication between terrorists' public affairs departments and various audiences: recruits, sympathizers, broader constituencies, enemy states, and citizens who may disagree with their own governments' policies. A bombing no longer needs to be followed by a telephone call to a wire service. Today's terrorists have Web sites, publish online magazines, explain their causes, debate doctrine, and provide instruction in making explosives. They may use these same channels to clandestinely communicate with operatives through coded messages or, according to some reports, steganography.

Some of the jihadists' recruiting videos, emphasizing atrocities at the hands of infidels, are of high quality and probably appeal to potential adherents. And after a webcast of an execution appears on the Internet, mainstream media are more likely to show at least short edited segments. Such material may not spread significant alarm, but its appeal to violence-prone young men who harbor fantasies of revenge should not be underestimated. Iraq represents the latest phase in this evolution. Videos of beheadings of hostages circulate in Iraqi markets, and al-Qaida has reportedly compiled them in an exultant film.

This development suggests a democratization of extremism, whereby people can in a sense shop for belief systems and submerge themselves in "virtual groups" that encourage violence.

TERRORISTS HAVE ACHIEVED STRATEGIC RESULTS

Through dramatic acts of violence, terrorists have always attracted attention, evoked alarm, caused disruption, instigated crises, and

obliged governments to divert resources to security and occasionally to make concessions. Strategically, though, they were less effective. They could sometimes upset negotiations and impede the resolution of conflicts. In fragile democracies they could sometimes provoke an overthrow of a government by those, usually the armed forces, who were determined to take a stronger line against terrorism. But terrorists rarely created powerful political movements. They were not able to fundamentally alter national policies, and they brought down no governments directly.

However, terrorists have gradually developed ways to achieve strategic results. Scale was one way. The best example is 9/11, which not only killed nearly 3,000 people, caused hundreds of billions of dollars in damage, and is still affecting the American economy but also has had a profound influence on U.S. policies. It made the ''global war on terror'' the framework for future policy, provoked two invasions, and led to some profound changes in government organization.

Another example of strategic effects is found in Iraq. In 2004, Iraqi insurgents kidnapped and beheaded or threatened to behead foreign nationals—aid officials, contract workers, journalists—and, despite the overall high level of violence in Iraq, were able to create political crises in countries participating in the multinational coalition, especially where there was strong domestic opposition to the war. In return for releasing the hostages, the kidnappers demanded, among other things, that governments withdraw forces or that companies cease operations. Only one government, the Philippines, pulled out; but, coming at a time when the United States was attempting to persuade additional countries to join the coalition, the kidnappings, more than the intensification of the conflict, persuaded others to stay away—not one new country joined. The kidnappings also forced aid organizations to suspend or reduce their activities, thereby slowing economic reconstruction and prolonging the misery that facilitated further recruiting by the insurgents.

Terrorist strategy is based not on achieving military superiority but rather on making the enemy's life unbearable by attacking incessantly (this contributed to Israel's decision to withdraw from Lebanon); by inflicting endless casualties (the strategy of the Palestinians' suicide bombings); by destroying tourism and discouraging investment, and thus inflicting economic pain; and by carrying out spectacular operations like 9/11.

Yet although terrorists have escalated their violence, developed new methods of financing their operations, exploited new communications technologies, created new organizational models, and undertaken global enterprises, they have yet to achieve their own stated long-range objectives.

TERRORISTS HAVE NOT ACCOMPLISHED THEIR LONG-RANGE GOALS

The South American urban guerrilla groups that initiated the wave of kidnappings and bombings in the 1970s were wiped out in a few years, having achieved no political result except brutal repression. Their counterparts in Europe, Japan, and North America were also suppressed, although offspring of Italy's Red Brigades reemerge from time to time. The IRA has made peace; apart from a few diehards, it is no longer a fighting force—its contest has been resolved politically. In Europe, only Spain's ETA, now in its fourth decade, fights on for Basque independence.

The death of Yasir Arafat symbolized the end of an era in the Palestinians' struggle. If a viable, independent Palestinian state is ultimately formed, much credit will be given to him. It cannot be denied that terrorism kept the Palestinians' hopes alive when Arab governments were defeated on the battlefield, that terrorism galvanized the Palestinian population and contributed to the concept of the Palestinian state, and that terrorism compelled international intervention. But today, the violence continues. Different militants have taken the field. Suicide bombings have been elevated to a strategy. Walls have been erected. Peace initiatives are renewed. War-weary populations await some kind of resolution. What that will be remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, today's jihadists speak of driving the infidels out of the Middle East, of toppling the exposed apostate regimes that depend on their support, of then going on to destroy Israel and ultimately reestablishing the caliphate. They have proved to be dangerous terrorists, have achieved some strategic results, are determined to continue attacking, and are resilient survivors, capable of recruiting despite adversity. Destroying their terrorist enterprise will take years. And until that happens, they might prevail in Afghanistan or Pakistan and might make it too costly for the United States to remain in Iraq. But they have not yet achieved these

successes, and the verdict on their movement must await the judgment of future historians.

This is a paradox of terrorism. Terrorists often succeed tactically and thereby gain attention, cause alarm, and attract recruits. But their struggle has brought them no success measured against their own stated goals. In that sense, terrorism has failed, but the phenomenon of terrorism continues.

CONCLUSION

The course of terrorism over the next few decades cannot be predicted, just as the actual evolution of terrorism over the last 30 years could probably not have been predicted.

Suppose that at the beginning of the 1970s, when contemporary terrorism was still in its early stages and formal research had just begun, I had, with remarkable prescience, outlined its future course. Take as the starting date President Nixon's creation of the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism in October 1972.

It would have been easy to forecast hundreds of airline hijackings, since many had already occurred; but the screening of all passengers, let alone the elaborate security measures that have now become routine, would have been considered very unlikely. A terrorist attack had just occurred at the Munich Olympics; still, it would have been far-fetched to predict that in 2004, more than $1 billion would be spent on security at the games in Athens.

Suppose that I had predicted the terrorist assassinations of the former prime minister of Italy, the former president of Argentina, the presidents of Lebanon and Egypt, two prime ministers in India, and one in Israel; and the attempted assassinations of the pope and the heads of government of Pakistan, Egypt, and the United Kingdom.

Suppose that I had predicted hundreds of suicide bombings; the release of nerve gas on subways; a Senate office building shut down by letters containing anthrax spores; and the destruction of the World Trade Center (which was still being built in 1972). Suppose that, with regard to the United States, I had predicted its military retaliation against terrorism; a global war on terror as the framework for its foreign policy; its bombing of Libya; its invasions of Afghanistan and of Iraq; its creation of a new Department of Homeland Security; its detention of American citizens without trial; and its arguments supposedly justifying the use of torture.

Such predictions would have been dismissed as fiction, not sober analysis. Who, then, can say with confidence what will or will not happen over the next 30 years?

See also Chapter 25 **A Typology and Anatomy of Terrorist Operations.**