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THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Defining Terrorism

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will enable readers to do the following:

- 2.1 Explain the importance of identifying the common characteristics of extremism and understanding the world view of extremist adherents.
- 2.2 Demonstrate knowledge of the common features of formal definitions of terrorism.
- 2.3 Discuss whether violence should be classified as terrorism by recognizing the contextual perspectives of perpetrators and participants in terrorist environments.
- 2.4 Explain how the Political Violence Matrix can serve as a conceptual tool to interpret the quality of violence.

Opening Viewpoint: Are “Hate Crimes” Acts of Terrorism?

Hate crimes refers to behaviors that are considered to be bias-motivated crimes but that at times seem to fit the definition of acts of terrorism. Hate crimes are a legalistic concept in Western democracies that embody (in the law) a criminological approach to a specific kind of deviant behavior. These laws focus on a specific motive for criminal behavior—crimes that are directed against protected classes of people because of their membership in these protected classes. Thus, hate crimes are officially considered to be a law enforcement issue rather than one of national security.

The separation between hate crimes and terrorism is not always clear because “hate groups at times in their life cycles might resemble gangs and at other times paramilitary organizations or **terrorist** groups.”^a They represent “another example of small, intense groups that sometimes resort to violence to achieve their goals by committing . . . vigilante terrorism.”^b Among experts, the debate about what is or is not “terrorism” has resulted in a large number of official and unofficial definitions. A similar debate has arisen about how to define hate crimes because “it is difficult to construct an exhaustive definition of the term. . . . Crime—hate crime included—is relative.”^c In fact, there is no agreement on what label to use for behaviors that many people commonly refer to as “hate crimes.” For example, in the United States, attacks by racial supremacist and fringe-right White perpetrators against African Americans, Latinos, the LGBTQ community, and religious institutions have been referred to with such diverse terms as *hate crime*, *hate-motivated crime*, *bias crime*, *bias-motivated crime*, and *ethno-violence*.^d

Are hate crimes acts of terrorism? The answer is that not all acts of terrorism are hate crimes and not all hate crimes are acts of terrorism. For example, in cases of **dissident terrorism**, terrorists frequently target a state or system with little or no animus against a particular race, religion, or other group. Likewise, state terrorism is often motivated by a perceived need to preserve or reestablish the state's defined vision of social order without targeting a race, religion, or other group. On the other hand, criminal behavior fitting federal or state definitions of hate crimes in the United States can have little or no identifiable political agenda, other than hatred toward a protected class of people.

It is when *political* violence is directed against a particular group—such as a race, religion, nationality, or generalized “undesirable”—that these acts possibly fit the definitions of both hate crimes and terrorism. Terrorists often launch attacks against people who symbolize the cause that they oppose. In the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere, many individuals and groups act out violently to promote an agenda that seeks to “purify” society. These crimes are committed by groups or individuals who are “dealing in the artificial currency of . . . ‘imagined communities’—utopian pipe dreams and idealizations of ethnically cleansed communities.”^e For example, after German reunification, “street renegades [demanded] a new *Lebensraum* of a purified Germany whose national essence and coherence will not be weakened and ‘contaminated’ by ethnic and racial minorities.”^f Their targeted enemies were Turkish, Slavic, and southern European immigrants and “guest workers.”

This chapter concludes with a Case in Point discussing the 2016 mass shooting in the United States in Orlando, Florida, within the context of incidents that can be defined as both an act of terrorism and a hate crime.

a. Barkan, Steven E., and Lynne L. Snowden. *Collective Violence*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001, p. 105.

b. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

c. Perry, Barbara. *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes*. New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 8.

d. Hamm, Mark S. “Conceptualizing Hate Crime in a Global Context.” In *Hate Crime: International Perspectives on Causes and Control*, edited by Mark S. Hamm. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, 1994, p. 174.

e. Kelly, Robert J., and Jess Maghan. *Hate Crime: The Global Politics of Polarization*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998, p. 6. Citing Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: New Left, 1983.

f. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

This chapter investigates definitional issues in the study of terrorism. Readers will probe the nuances of these issues and will learn that the truism “**one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter**” is a significant factor in the definitional debate. It must be remembered that this debate occurs within a practical and “real-life” framework—in other words, a nontheoretical reality that some political, religious, or ethnonationalist beliefs and behaviors are so reprehensible that they cannot be considered to be mere differences in opinion. Some violent incidents are *mala in se* acts of terrorist violence. For example, the **New Terrorism** of today is characterized by the threat of weapons of mass destruction, indiscriminate targeting, and intentionally high casualty rates—as occurred in the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States; March 11, 2004, in Spain; July 7, 2005, in Great Britain; November 26–29, 2008, in India; January and November 2015 in France; March 22, 2016, in Belgium; and repeated attacks in Israel, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan. The use of indiscriminate targeting and tactics against civilians—a common practice in the modern era—is indefensible, no matter what cause is championed by those who use them.



A protestor (right) from the Stand Against Communism rally, an event organized to oppose antifascist demonstrations and to support U.S. President Donald Trump, among other causes, argues with a counter-protestor (left) during May Day events in Seattle, Washington, in the United States, May 1, 2017.

Sipa USA via AP

The definitional debate is evident in the following examples drawn from state-sponsored and dissident terrorist environments:

- **State-Sponsored Terrorist Environments.** The *Régime de la Terreur* during the French Revolution was an instrument of revolutionary justice, such that terrorism was considered a positive medium used by the defenders of order and liberty. From their perspective, state-sponsored domestic terrorism was both necessary and acceptable to consolidate power and protect liberties won during the revolution. Modern examples of state terrorism such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia also sought to consolidate an ideological vision through internal political violence—a racial new order in Germany and an egalitarian workers’ state in the Soviet Union. The methods they used to build the ideological vision resulted in the deaths of many millions of noncombatant civilians, and both the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were quintessential terrorist states.
- **Dissident Terrorist Environments.** The anticolonial and nationalist wars after World War II often pitted indigenous rebels against European colonial powers or ruling local elites. Many of these wars involved the use of terrorism as an instrument of war by both state and dissident forces. During these wars, as well as in subsequent domestic rebellions, the rebels were referred to as freedom fighters by those who favored their cause.¹ The counterpoints to these freedom fighters were the European and American “colonial and imperialist oppressors.” Thus, for example, indiscriminate attacks against civilians by rebels in French Indochina and French Algeria were rationalized by many of their supporters as acceptable tactics during wars of liberation by freedom fighters against a colonial oppressor.

The discussion in this chapter will review the following:

- Understanding Extremism: The Foundation of Terrorism
- Defining Terrorism: An Ongoing Debate

- A Definitional Problem: Perspectives on Terrorism
- The Political Violence Matrix

UNDERSTANDING EXTREMISM: THE FOUNDATION OF TERRORISM

An important step toward defining terrorism is to develop an understanding of the sources of terrorism. To identify them, one must first understand the important role of extremism as a primary feature of all terrorist behavior.

Behind each incident of terrorist violence is some deeply held belief system that has motivated the perpetrators. Such systems are, at their core, extremist systems characterized by intolerance. One must keep in mind, however, that though terrorism is a violent expression of these beliefs, it is by no means the only possible manifestation of extremism. On a scale of activist behavior, extremists can engage in such benign expressions as sponsoring debates or publishing newspapers. They might also engage in vandalism and other disruptions of the normal routines of their enemies. Though intrusive and often illegal, these are examples of political expression that cannot be construed as terrorist acts.

Our focus in this and subsequent chapters will be on violent extremist behavior that many people would define as acts of terrorism. First, we must briefly investigate the general characteristics of the extremist foundations of terrorism.

Defining Extremism

Political extremism refers to taking a political idea to its limits, regardless of unfortunate repercussions, impracticalities, arguments, and feelings to the contrary, and with the intention not only to confront, but to eliminate opposition. . . . Intolerance toward all views other than one's own.²

Extremism is a precursor to terrorism—it is an overarching belief system that is used by terrorists to justify their violent behavior. Extremism is characterized by *what* a person's beliefs are as well as *how* a person expresses their beliefs. Thus, no matter how offensive or reprehensible one's thoughts or words are, they are not by themselves acts of terrorism. Only persons who *violently* act out their extremist beliefs are labeled terrorists.

Two examples illustrate this point:

First, an example of extremist behavior. Daniel and Philip Berrigan were well-known members of the Roman Catholic pacifist left and were leaders in the antiwar and anti-nuclear movements in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. *What* they believed in was an uncompromising commitment to pacifism. *How* they expressed their beliefs was by committing a series of symbolic, and often illegal, protest actions. During one such action on May 17, 1968, they and seven other Catholic men and women entered the Baltimore Selective Service Board, stole Selective Service classification forms, took them outside to a parking lot, and burned several hundred of the documents with a homemade, napalm-like gelled mixture of gasoline and soap flakes. This was certainly extremist behavior, but it falls short of terrorism.³

Second, an example of extremist speech. The American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (AK-KKK) were an activist faction of the KKK that operated mostly in the Midwest and East during the 1990s. *What* they believed in was racial supremacy. *How* they expressed their beliefs was by holding a series of rallies at government sites, often county courthouses. They were known for their vitriolic rhetoric. The following remarks were reportedly taken from a speech delivered

by the Imperial Wizard of the AK-KKK in March 1998 at a rally held at the county courthouse in Butler, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh:

Take a stand. . . . Join the Klan, stick up for your rights. . . . Only God has the right to create a race—not no black and white, not no nigger, not no Jew. . . . Yes, I will use the word *nigger*, because it is not illegal. . . . We are sick and tired of the government taking your money, and giving food and jobs to the niggers when the white race has to go without! Wake up America.⁴

This language is intentionally racist, hateful, and inflammatory, yet it falls short of advocating violence or revolution. A sympathetic listener might certainly act out against one of the enemy groups identified in the speech, but it reads more like a racist diatribe than a revolutionary manifesto.

Common Characteristics of Violent Extremists

Scholars and other experts have identified common characteristics exhibited by violent extremists. These characteristics are expressed in different ways, depending on a movement's particular belief system. The following commonalities are summaries of traits identified by these experts and are by no means an exhaustive inventory.⁵

Intolerance

Intolerance is the hallmark of extremist belief systems and terrorist behavior. The cause is considered to be absolutely just and good, and those who disagree with the cause (or some aspect of the cause) are cast into the category of the opposition. Terrorists affix their opponents with certain negative or derisive labels to set them apart from the extremists' movement. These characterizations are often highly personalized so that specific individuals are identified who symbolize the opposing belief system or cause. Thus, during the Cold War, the American president was labeled by the pro-United States camp as the "leader of the free world" and by Latin American Marxists as the embodiment of "Yankee imperialism."⁶

Moral Absolutes

Extremists adopt moral absolutes so that the distinction between good and evil is clear, as are the lines between the extremists and their opponents. The extremists' belief or cause is a morally correct vision of the world and is used to establish moral superiority over others. Violent extremists thus become morally and ethically pure elites who lead the oppressed masses to freedom. For example, religious terrorists generally believe that their one true faith is superior to all others and that any behavior committed in defense of the faith is fully justifiable.

Broad Conclusions

Extremist conclusions are made to simplify the goals of the cause and the nature of the extremist's opponents. These generalizations are not debatable and allow for no exceptions. Evidence for these conclusions is rooted in one's belief system rather than based on objective data. Terrorists often believe these generalizations because in their minds, they simply *must* be true. For example, ethnonationalists frequently categorize all members of their opponent group as having certain broadly negative traits.

New Language and Conspiratorial Beliefs

Language and conspiracies are created to demonize the enemy and set the terrorists apart from those not part of their belief system. Extremists thus become an elite with a hidden agenda and targets

of that agenda. For example, some American and European far- and fringe-right conspiracy proponents express their anti-Semitic beliefs by using coded references to international bankers or a Zionist-occupied government (ZOG). White nationalist, neo-fascist, and neo-Nazi rightists degrade members of non-European races by referring to them as mud people or other pejorative appellations.

The World of the Extremist

Extremists have a very different—and, at times, fantastic—worldview compared with nonextremists. They set themselves apart as protectors of some truth or as the true heirs of some legacy. For example, racial extremists within the American Patriot and White nationalist movements have argued that non-Whites are “Fourteenth Amendment citizens” and that only “whites are sovereign citizens whose rights are delineated, not by the government, but rather by a cobbled assortment of historical writings whose meaning is often subject to their fanciful interpretation.”⁷

Extremists frequently believe that secret and quasi-mystical forces are arrayed against them and that these forces are the cause of worldwide calamities. For example, some bigoted conspiracy believers argue that the Illuminati or international Judaism mysteriously controls world banking and the media or that they run the governments of France and the United States. One conspiracy theory that became viral on the Internet, and was widely believed among Islamist extremists, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks was that Israeli agents were behind the attacks; that 4,000 Jews either did not report to work or received telephone calls to evacuate the World Trade Center in New York; and therefore that no Jews were among the victims of the attack.

As in the past, religion is often an underlying impetus for extremist activity. When extremists adopt a religious belief system, their worldview becomes one of a struggle between supernatural forces of good and evil. They view themselves as living a righteous life in a manner that fits with their interpretation of God’s will. According to religious extremists, those who do not conform to their belief system are opposed to the one true faith. Those who live according to the accepted belief system are a chosen people, and those who do not are not chosen. These



Members of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement, including a young boy, march in Washington, D.C., from the Washington Monument to the U.S. Capitol building.

David S. Holloway/Reportage by Getty Images

interpretations of how one should behave include elements of the social or political environment that underlies the belief system. For example, Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, is a fundamentalist Christian university founded in 1927. It once justified its prohibition against interracial dating and marriage as an application of God-mandated truths found in Holy Scripture. Similarly, one student at a Pakistani religious school explained that “Osama [bin Laden] wants to keep Islam pure from the pollution of the infidels. . . . He believes Islam is the way for all the world. He wants to bring Islam to all the world.”⁸

Extremists have a very clear sense of mission, purpose, and righteousness. They create a worldview that sets them apart from the rest of society. Thus, extremist beliefs and terrorist behaviors are very logical from the perspective of those who accept the extremists’ belief system but illogical from the point of view of those who reject the system.

DEFINING TERRORISM: AN ONGOING DEBATE

The effort to formally define terrorism is a critical one because government antiterrorist policy calculations must be based on criteria that determine whether a violent incident is an act of terrorism. Governments and policy makers must piece together the elements of terrorist behavior and demarcate the factors that distinguish terrorism from other forms of conflict.

There is some consensus among experts—but no unanimity—on what kind of violence constitutes an act of terrorism. Governments have developed definitions of terrorism, individual agencies within governments have adopted definitions, private agencies have designed their own definitions, and academic experts have proposed and analyzed dozens of definitional constructs. This lack of unanimity, which exists throughout the public and private sectors, is an accepted reality in the study of political violence.

A significant amount of intellectual energy has been devoted to identifying formal elements of terrorism, as illustrated by Alex Schmid’s surveys, which identified more than 100 definitions.⁹ Establishing formal definitions can, of course, be complicated by the perspectives of the participants in a terrorist incident, who instinctively differentiate freedom fighters from terrorists, regardless of formal definitions. Another complication is that most definitions focus on political violence perpetrated by dissident groups, even though many governments have practiced terrorism as both domestic and foreign policy.

Guerrilla Warfare

One important distinction must be kept in mind and understood at the outset: *Terrorism is not synonymous with guerrilla warfare.* The term *guerrilla* (“little war”) was developed during the early 19th century, when Napoleon’s army fought a long, brutal, and ultimately unsuccessful war in Spain. Unlike the Napoleonic campaigns elsewhere in Europe, which involved conventional armies fighting set-piece battles in accordance with rules of engagement, the war in Spain was a classic unconventional conflict. The Spanish *people*, as opposed to the Spanish *army*, rose in rebellion and resisted the invading French army. They liberated large areas of the Spanish countryside. After years of costly fighting—in which atrocities were common on both sides—the French were driven out. Thus, in contrast to terrorists, the term *guerrilla fighters* refers to

a numerically larger group of armed individuals who operate as a military unit, attack enemy military forces, and seize and hold territory (even if only ephemerally during the daylight hours), while also exercising some form of sovereignty or control over a defined geographical area and its population.¹⁰

Dozens, if not scores, of examples of guerrilla warfare exist in the modern era. They exhibit the classic strategy of hit-and-run warfare by small mobile units, and many examples exist of successful guerrilla campaigns against numerically and technologically superior adversaries. Guerrilla insurgencies have often been successful in affecting the global political environment. The following are examples of conflicts in the modern era when guerrilla insurgents prevailed against strong adversaries:

- 1940s: Chinese communist guerrillas led by Mao Zedong defeated Chinese nationalists.
- 1950s: Communist-led Viet Minh guerrillas forced French colonial forces to withdraw from Vietnam.
- 1960s–1970s: Numerous guerrilla insurgencies successfully resisted European colonial forces, including anticolonial wars in Africa.
- 1980s: Afghan *mujahideen* guerrillas fought invading Soviet troops for 10 years, eventually prevailing after the Soviet withdrawal.
- 2000s: Using guerrilla tactics, Iraqi insurgents resisted the American-led occupation of Iraq following the conventional phase in the war that toppled the Ba’athist regime of dictator Saddam Hussein.
- 2000s–2020s: Afghan Taliban guerrillas resisted U.S.-led NATO forces and the central government for 20 years, eventually prevailing after the U.S. and NATO withdrawal.

A Sampling of Formal Definitions

The effort to formally define terrorism is critical because government antiterrorist policy calculations must be based on criteria that determine whether a violent incident is an act of terrorism. Governments and policy makers must piece together the elements of terrorist behavior and demarcate the factors that distinguish terrorism from other forms of conflict.

In Europe, countries that endured terrorist campaigns have written official definitions of terrorism. The British have defined terrorism as “the use or threat, for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, of action which involves serious violence against any person or property.”¹¹ In Germany, terrorism has been described as an “enduringly conducted struggle for political goals, which are intended to be achieved by means of assaults on the life and property of other persons, especially by means of severe crimes.”¹² And the European interior ministers note that “terrorism is . . . the use, or the threatened use, by a cohesive group of persons of violence (short of warfare) to effect political aims.”¹³

Scholars have also tried their hand at defining terrorism. Terrorism has been described by Gurr as “the use of unexpected violence to intimidate or coerce people in the pursuit of political or social objectives.”¹⁴ It was described by Gibbs as “illegal violence or threatened violence against human or nonhuman objects,” so long as that violence meets additional criteria such as secretive features and unconventional warfare.¹⁵ Bruce Hoffman wrote,

We come to appreciate that terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives; violent—or, equally important, threatens violence; designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial structure

(whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia); and perpetrated by a sub-national group or non-state entity. We may therefore now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of change.¹⁶

To further illustrate the range of definitions, Whittaker lists the following descriptions of terrorism by terrorism experts:¹⁷

- contributes the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are targeted (Walter Laqueur)
- a strategy of violence designed to promote desired outcomes by instilling fear in the public at large (Walter Reich)
- the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political change (Brian Jenkins)

From this discussion, we can identify the common features of most formal definitions:

- the use of illegal force
- subnational actors
- unconventional methods
- political motives
- attacks against “soft” civilian and passive military targets
- acts aimed at purposefully affecting an audience
- provoking a public reaction

The emphasis, then, is on terrorists adopting specific types of motives, methods, and targets. One fact readily apparent from these formal definitions is that they focus on terrorist *groups* rather than terrorist *states*. As will be made abundantly clear in Chapter 4, state terrorism has been responsible for many more deaths and much more suffering than has terrorism originating in small bands of terrorists.

The American Context: Defining Terrorism in the United States

The United States has not adopted a single definition of terrorism as a matter of government policy, although as a legal matter the U.S. Code provides definitions in 18 U.S.C. section 2331. Policy makers and practitioners also reference and rely on definitions that are developed from time to time by government agencies. These agency and legal definitions reflect an evolution of the traditional U.S. law enforcement approach that distinguishes terrorism from more common criminal behavior. The following definitions are a sample of the official approach.

The U.S. Code differentiates between international terrorism and domestic terrorism.

International terrorism is defined (in pertinent part) as

activities [that] involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state . . . [that] appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by

intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and 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.¹⁸

Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 defines *domestic terrorism* as

activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.¹⁹

The USA PATRIOT Act is discussed further in Chapter 14.

Regarding government agency definitions, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has defined terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a Government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”²⁰ The U.S. Department of Defense has defined terrorism as “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.”²¹ The U.S. Department of State has defined terrorism generally as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents,”²² and international terrorism specifically as “terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country.”²³

Using these definitions, common elements can be combined to construct a composite American definition:

Terrorism is a premeditated and unlawful act in which groups or agents of some principal engage in a threatened or actual use of force or violence against human or property targets. These groups or agents engage in this behavior, intending the purposeful intimidation of governments or people to affect policy or behavior, with an underlying political objective.

These elements indicate a policy-grounded and legalistic approach to defining terrorism. When these elements are assigned to individual suspects and organizations, they may be labeled, investigated, or detained as terrorists. Readers, in evaluating the practical policy implications of this approach, should bear in mind that labeling and detaining suspects as terrorists is not without controversy. Some counterterrorist practices have prompted strong debate as a consequence of the post–September 11, 2001, war on terrorism. For example, when enemy soldiers are taken prisoner, they are traditionally afforded legal protections as *prisoners of war*. This is well recognized under international law. During the war on terrorism, many suspected terrorists were designated by the United States as *enemy combatants* and *battlefield detainees* and were not afforded the same legal status as prisoners of war. Such practices have been hotly debated among proponents and opponents. These practices and the concomitant civil liberties debate are more fully discussed in Chapter 14. Chapter Perspective 2.1 discusses the ongoing problem of labeling the enemy.

CHAPTER PERSPECTIVE 2.1

THE PROBLEM OF LABELING THE ENEMY IN THE NEW ERA OF TERRORISM

When formulating counterterrorist policies, policy makers are challenged by two problems: defining terrorism and labeling individual suspects. Although defining terrorism can be an exercise in semantics—and is often shaped by subjective political or cultural biases—certain fundamental elements constitute objective definitions. In comparison, using official designations (labels) to confer special status on captured suspects has become a controversial process.

During the post-September 11, 2001, war on terrorism, it became clear to experts and the public that official designations and labels of individual suspected terrorists is a central legal, political, and security issue. Of essential importance is the question of a suspect's official *status* when they are taken prisoner.

Depending on one's designated status, certain recognized legal or political protections may or may not be observed by interrogators or others involved in processing specific cases.

According to the protocols of the third Geneva Convention, prisoners who are designated as *prisoners of war* and who are brought to trial must be afforded the same legal rights in the same courts as would soldiers from the country holding them prisoner. Thus, prisoners of war held by the United States would be brought to trial in standard military courts under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and would have the same rights and protections (such as the right to appeal) as all soldiers.

Suspected terrorists have not been designated as prisoners of war. Official and unofficial designations such as *enemy combatants*, *unlawful combatants*, and *battlefield detainees* have been used by U.S. authorities to differentiate them from prisoners of war. The rationale is that suspected terrorists are not soldiers fighting for a sovereign nation and are therefore ineligible for prisoner-of-war status. When hundreds of prisoners were detained at facilities such as the American base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, the United States argued that persons designated as enemy combatants were not subject to the protocols of the Geneva Conventions. Thus, such persons could be held indefinitely, detained in secret, transferred at will, and sent to allied countries for more coercive interrogations. Under enemy combatant status, conditions of confinement in Guantánamo Bay included open-air cells with wooden roofs and chain link walls. In theory, each case was to be reviewed by special military tribunals, and innocent prisoners would be reclassified as *nonenemy combatants* and released.

Civil liberties and human rights groups disagreed with the special status conferred by the labeling system on prisoners. They argued that basic legal and humanitarian protections should be granted to prisoners regardless of their designation. In June 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court held that foreign detainees held for years at Guantánamo Bay had the right to appeal to U.S. federal judges to challenge their indefinite imprisonment without charges. At the time of the decision, about 200 foreign detainees had lawsuits pending before federal court in Washington, D.C.

In one interesting development, the U.S. Department of Defense conferred *protected persons* status on members of the Iranian Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization (MKO), who were under guard in Iraq by the American military. The MKO is a Marxist movement opposed to the postrevolution regime in Iran. The group was regularly listed on the U.S. Department of State's list of terrorist organizations, and it was responsible for killing Americans and others in terrorist attacks.

Types of Terrorism

The basic elements of terrorist environments are uncomplicated, and experts and commentators generally agree on the forms of terrorism found in modern political environments. For example, the following environments have been described by academic experts:

- Barkan and Snowden describe vigilante, insurgent, transnational, and state terrorism.²⁴
- Hoffman discusses ethnonationalist/separatist, international, religious, and state-sponsored terrorism.²⁵
- While undertaking the task of defining the New Terrorism, Laqueur contextualizes far-rightist, religious, state, “exotic,” and criminal terrorism.²⁶
- Other experts evaluate narco-terrorism, toxic terrorism, and netwar.²⁷

We will explore all of these environments in later chapters within the following contexts:

State Terrorism

Terrorism “from above” committed by governments against perceived enemies. State terrorism can be directed externally against adversaries in the international domain or internally against domestic enemies.

Dissident Terrorism

Terrorism “from below” committed by nonstate movements and groups against governments, ethnonational groups, religious groups, and other perceived enemies.

Religious Terrorism

Terrorism motivated by an absolute belief that an otherworldly power has sanctioned—and commanded—the application of terrorist violence for the greater glory of the faith. Religious terrorism is usually conducted in defense of what believers consider to be the one true faith.

Ideological Terrorism

Terrorism motivated by violent interpretations of political systems of belief. Some ideologies, such as anarchism and radical socialism, explicitly advocate the overthrow of perceived ideological opponents. Other ideologies, such as fascism, glorify the assertion of the natural supremacy of a particular nation, race, or ethnicity over nonmembers of the championed group.

International Terrorism

Terrorism that spills over onto the world’s stage. Targets are selected because of their value as symbols of international interests, either in the home country or across state boundaries.

Criminal Dissident Terrorism

Terrorism motivated by sheer profit or some amalgam of profit and politics. Traditional organized criminal enterprises (such as the Italian Mafia, Chinese Triads, and the Japanese Yakuza) accumulate profits from criminal activity for personal aggrandizement. Criminal-political enterprises (such as Colombia’s FARC and Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers) accumulated profits to sustain their movement.

Gender-Selective Terrorism

Terrorist violence explicitly directed against the males or females of enemy populations in order to eliminate potential fighters and culturally degrade or otherwise terrorize the enemy population.

A DEFINITIONAL PROBLEM: PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

It should now be clear that defining terrorism can be an exercise in semantics and context, driven by one's perspective and worldview. Absent definitional guidelines, these perspectives would be merely the subject of personal opinion and academic debate.

Perspective is a central consideration in defining terrorism. Those who oppose an extremist group's violent behavior—and who might be its targets—would naturally consider them terrorists. On the other hand, those who are being championed by the group—and on whose behalf the terrorist war is being fought—often see them as liberation fighters, even when they do not necessarily agree with the methods of the group. Fighters within movements may themselves resist attempts to classify them based on Western perspectives. For example, many radical Islamists view themselves as *mujahideen* (holy warriors) or *shahheed* (martyrs), whose motivating ideal is selfless obedience to God's will rather than Western notions of freedom. "The problem is that there exists no precise or widely accepted definition of terrorism."²⁸ We will consider four perspectives that illustrate this problem:

1. **Four Quotations.** Several well-known statements provide a useful conceptual foundation for understanding the importance of perspective.
2. **Participants in a Terrorist Environment.** People who participate in, or are affected by, terrorist incidents are prone to have very different interpretations of the incident.
3. **Terrorism or Freedom Fighting?** The classification of a group or movement as terrorists or freedom fighters is simply a question of one's perspective.
4. **Extremism or "Mainstreamism"?** Whether extremist behavior can move from the ideological fringes into a nation's or people's mainstream.

Perspective 1: Four Quotations

Evaluating the following aphorisms critically will help to address difficult moral questions:

"One Person's Terrorist Is Another Person's Freedom Fighter"

Who made this statement is not known; it most likely originated in one form or another in the remote historical past. The concept it embodies is, very simply, perspective. As will become abundantly clear, terrorists never consider themselves the "bad guys" in their struggle for what they would define as freedom. They might admit that they have been *forced* by a powerful and ruthless opponent to adopt terrorist methods, but they see themselves as freedom fighters—or, in the case of radical Islamists, obedient servants of God. Benefactors of terrorists always live with clean hands because they present their championed group as plucky freedom fighters. Likewise, nations that use the technology of war to knowingly attack civilian targets justify their sacrifice as incidental to the greater good of the cause.

This concept will be applied throughout our examination of terrorist groups, movements, and individuals.

“One Man Willing to Throw Away His Life Is Enough to Terrorize a Thousand”

This concept originated with Chinese military philosopher **Wu Ch’i**, who wrote,

Now suppose there is a desperate bandit lurking in the fields and one thousand men set out in pursuit of him. The reason all look for him as they would a wolf is that each one fears that he will arise and harm him. This is the reason **one man willing to throw away his life is enough to terrorize a thousand.**²⁹

These sentences are the likely source for the better-known aphorism “**kill one man, terrorize a thousand.**” Its authorship is undetermined but has been attributed to the leader of the Chinese Revolution, **Mao Zedong**, and to the Chinese military philosopher **Sun Tzu**. Both Wu Ch’i and Sun Tzu are often discussed in conjunction with each other, but Sun Tzu may be a mythical figure. Sun Tzu’s book *The Art of War* has become a classic study of warfare. Regardless of who originated these phrases, their simplicity explains the value of a motivated individual who is willing to sacrifice themselves when committing an act of violence. They suggest that the selfless application of lethal force—in combination with correct timing, surgical precision, and an unambiguous purpose—is an invaluable weapon of war. It is also an obvious tactic for small, motivated groups who are vastly outnumbered and outgunned by a more powerful adversary.

“Extremism in the Defense of Liberty Is No Vice”

During his bid for the presidency in 1964, Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona stated during his acceptance speech for the Republican Party nomination, “I would remind you that **extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.** And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”³⁰ His campaign theme was staunchly conservative and anti-Communist. However, because of the nation’s rivalry with the Soviet Union at the time, every major candidate was overtly anti-Communist. Goldwater simply tried to outdo incumbent president Lyndon Johnson, his main rival, on the issue.³¹

This aphorism represents an uncompromising belief in the absolute righteousness of a cause. It defines a clear belief in good versus evil and a belief that the end justifies the means. If one simply substitutes *any cause* for the word *liberty*, one can fully understand how the expression lends itself to legitimizing uncompromising devotion to the cause. Terrorists use this reasoning to justify their belief that they are defending their championed interest (be it ideological, racial, religious, or national) against all perceived enemies—whom they view, of course, as evil. Hence, the practice of ethnic cleansing was begun by Serb militias during the 1991–1995 war in Bosnia to forcibly remove Muslims and Croats from villages and towns. This was done in the name of Bosnian Serb security and historical claims to land occupied by others.³² Bosnian and Croat paramilitaries later practiced ethnic cleansing to create their own ethnically pure enclaves.

“It Became Necessary to Destroy the Town to Save It”³³

This quotation has been attributed to a statement by an American officer during the war in Vietnam. When asked why a village thought to be occupied by the enemy had been destroyed, he allegedly replied, “**It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.**”³⁴ The symbolic logic behind this statement is seductive: If the worst thing that can happen to a village is for it to be occupied by an enemy, then destroying it is a good thing. The village has been denied to the enemy, and it has been saved from the horrors of enemy occupation. The symbolism of the village can be replaced by any number of symbolic values.



Indoctrinating the young. A Palestinian boy wearing a Hamas headband attends a pro-Islamist demonstration at a refugee camp in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip.

Abid Katib/ Getty Images

Terrorists use this kind of reasoning to justify hardships that they impose not only on a perceived enemy but also on their own championed group. For example, in Chapter 5, readers will be introduced to nihilist dissident terrorists, who are content to wage “revolution for revolution’s sake.” They have no concrete plan for what kind of society will be built on the rubble of the old one—their goal is simply to destroy an inherently evil system. To them, anything is better than the existing order. A historical example of this reasoning on an enormous scale is found in the great war between two totalitarian and terrorist states—Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union—from July 1941 to May 1945. Both sides used scorched-earth tactics as a matter of policy when their armies retreated, destroying towns, crops, roadways, bridges, factories, and other infrastructure as a way to deny resources to the enemy.

Perspective 2: Participants in a Terrorist Environment

Motives, methods, and targets of violent extremists are interpreted differently by the participants in a terrorist environment. These participants can, and often do, draw their own subjective conclusions about violent political incidents regardless of the accepted formal definitions that have been crafted by officials or experts.

The participants in a terrorist environment adopt a multiplicity of interpretations of political violence. Depending on their role when an incident occurs, these participants often provide different assessments of the motives, methods, and targets of violent extremists.³⁵ Subjective considerations commonly affect how an incident will be interpreted. Adversaries in a terrorist environment view participants as audiences that can be manipulated by effective propaganda or other selective information. In many ways, the hearts and minds of the participants in a terrorist environment can become a virtual battleground.

Typically, the participants in a terrorist environment include the following actors, each of whom may advance different interpretations of an incident:³⁶

The Terrorist

Terrorists are the perpetrators of a politically violent incident. The perspective of the terrorist is that the violent incident is a justifiable act of war against an oppressive opponent. “Insofar as terrorists seek to attract attention, they target the enemy public or uncommitted bystanders.”³⁷ This is a legitimate tactic in their minds because, from their point of view, they are always freedom fighters and never terrorists.

Terrorists seek attention and legitimacy for their cause by engaging in publicity-oriented violence. **Propaganda by the deed**, if properly carried out, delivers symbolic messages to a target audience and to large segments of an onlooker audience. One message could be, for example, to “show their power preeminently through deeds that embarrass their more powerful opponents.”³⁸ Terrorists also attempt to cast themselves as freedom fighters, soldiers, and martyrs. If successful, their image will be that of a vanguard movement representing the just aspirations of an oppressed people. When this occurs, political and moral pressure can be brought against their adversaries, possibly forcing them to grant concessions to the movement.

The Supporter

Supporters of terrorists are patrons, in essence persons who provide a supportive environment or apparatus. Supporters generally refer to the terrorist participants as freedom fighters. Even if supporters disagree with the use of force or with the application of force in a specific incident, they often rationalize its use as the unfortunate consequence of a just war.

Supporters and patrons of terrorists often help with “spinning” the terrorists’ cause and manipulating the reporting of incidents. Supporters with sophisticated informational departments—such as Northern Ireland’s Sinn Féin, Lebanon’s Hezbollah, or the Palestine Liberation Organization’s Fatah—can successfully use the Internet and the mass media to deliver their message to a wide audience. Clandestine supporters online have become adept at posting favorable information on websites and disseminating propaganda via social media. And in societies with a free press—or with supportive authoritarian regimes—sympathetic reporters and editors might lend a hand in portraying the terrorists as freedom fighters.

Supporters always defend the underlying grievances of the extremists and often allude to these grievances as the reason for the group’s decision to use terrorist methods. For example, in November 2002, an audiotape purportedly from Osama bin Laden was broadcast by Al Jazeera. The speaker paid tribute to those who had carried out a series of attacks in Indonesia, Russia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Yemen, noting that the attacks were “undertaken by the zealous sons of Islam in defense of their religion and in response to the call of their God and prophet, peace be upon him.”³⁹ The key for activist supporters is to convey to the audience the impression that the terrorists’ methods are understandable under the circumstances. If they can do this successfully, public opinion “can provide the movement with a feeling of legitimacy.”⁴⁰

The Victim

Victims of political violence, and of warfare, rarely sympathize with the perpetrators of that violence, regardless of the underlying motive. From their perspective, the perpetrators are little better than terrorists.

Terrorist violence can be used to spin incidents so that they symbolize punishment or chastisement against victims for injustices. From the terrorists’ point of view, high-profile attacks that victimize an audience are useful as “wake-up calls” for the victims to understand the underlying grievances of the movement. Although victims do not sympathize with the perpetrators who cause their suffering, terrorists believe that they can become educated, through propaganda, by

the deed. Because they are the innocent “collateral damage” of a conflict, victims—with help from political and expert commentators in the media—often question why they have become caught up in a terrorist environment. This process can theoretically cause public opinion shifts.

The Target

Targets are usually symbolic. They represent some feature of the enemy and can be either property targets or human targets. As is the case with the victim, human targets rarely sympathize with the perpetrators.

Targets are selected because they symbolize the interests of the terrorists’ adversaries. Of course, attacks on some targets—such as symbolic buildings—frequently risk inflicting casualties on large numbers of people. With the proper symbolic spin, terrorists can achieve “the lowering of the opponent’s morale and the boosting of the self-confidence of its own constituency.”⁴¹ Terrorists can also garner sympathy, or at least a measure of understanding, if they can successfully use the Internet, social media, or the traditional media to disseminate their reasons for selecting the target. Targeted interests engage in an assessment process similar to that of victims and are likewise assisted by media commentators. The difference is that the investigatory process is conducted with the understanding that they have been specifically labeled as an enemy interest. In many circumstances, targeted audiences can have a significant impact on public opinion and government policy.

The Onlooker

Onlookers are the broad audience to the terrorist incident. They can be directly affected by the incident at the scene of an attack or indirectly affected via modern mass media. The onlooker may sympathize with the perpetrators, revile them, or remain neutral. Depending on the worldview of the onlooker, they might actually applaud a specific incident or a general dissident environment. Television is a particularly effective medium for broadening the scope of who is an onlooker. This was evident during the live broadcasts of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and such live dissemination is a ubiquitous occurrence in the modern era. The Internet has also become a means for broadening the audience for terrorist acts, such as beheadings of hostages, bombings, and other incidents.

Onlookers to terrorist incidents observe the dynamics of the attack, public reactions to the event, and political and media analyses of the incident. They can be directly or indirectly affected by the incident, and the media play a significant role in how the onlooker receives information. Depending on who is successful in the battle for information, the result can be that the onlooker sympathizes with the terrorists’ grievances, opposes them, or remains indifferent. If the government engages in repression, and terrorists or their supporters can spin this to their advantage, “one positive effect of repression is that it can supply the movement with new volunteers.”⁴²

The Analyst

The analyst is an interpreter of the terrorist incident. Analysts are important participants because they create perspectives, interpret incidents, and label the other participants. Analysts can include political leaders, media experts, and academic experts. Very often, the analyst simply defines for the other participants who is—or is not—a terrorist.

Political leaders and the media play strong roles as interpreters of the terrorist incident. The media also play a role in how other (nonmedia) analysts have their views broadcast to a larger audience.

Political leaders, experts, and scholars all rely on the media to promulgate their expert opinions. Aside from contact with these analysts, journalists are prominently—and consistently—in communication with other participants in the terrorist environment. Journalists and other media analysts investigate perspectives, interpret incidents, and have significant input on the labeling process.

Many factors shape the perspectives of terrorists, supporters, victims, targets, onlookers, and analysts. These factors include culture, collective history, individual experiences, and group identity. The same event can be interpreted in a number of ways, causing participants to adopt biased spins on that event. The following factors illustrate this problem:

- *Political associations* of participants can create a sense of identification with either the target group or the defended group. This identification can be either favorable or unfavorable, depending on the political association.
- *Emotional responses* of participants after a terrorist incident can range from horror to joy. This response can shape a participant's opinion of the incident or the extremists' cause.
- *Labeling* of participants can create either a positive or negative impression of an incident or cause. Labeling can range from creating very positive symbolism on behalf of the terrorists to dehumanizing enemy participants (including civilians).
- *Symbolism* plays an important role in the terrorists' selection of targets. The targets can be inanimate objects that symbolize a government's power or human victims who symbolize an enemy people. Other participants sometimes make value judgments on the incident based on the symbolism of the target, thus asking whether the selected target was legitimate or illegitimate.

Perspective 3: Terrorism or Freedom Fighting?

The third perspective for understanding terrorism is the question of whether the use of political violence is terrorism or freedom fighting. Members of politically violent organizations rarely label themselves as terrorists. Instead, they adopt the language of liberation, national identity, religious fervor, and even democracy. Ethnonationalist and religious organizations such as **Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)** in the Palestinian Territories, **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** in Sri Lanka, and the **Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provos)** in the United Kingdom all declared that they are armies fighting on behalf of an oppressed people, and they are viewed by their supporters as **freedom fighters**. Conversely, many Israelis, Sinhalese, and British would label members of these groups as terrorists.

The declarations published by these and other organizations are in the language of liberation and freedom. For example, the Palestinian Information Center explained that

Hamas is an acronym that stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement, a popular national resistance movement which is working to create conditions conducive to emancipating the Palestinian people, delivering them from tyranny, liberating their land from the occupying usurper, and to stand up to the Zionist scheme which is supported by neo-colonialist forces. . . . Hamas . . . is part of the Islamic awakening movement and upholds that this awakening is the road which will lead to the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea. It is also a popular movement in the sense that it is a practical manifestation of a wide popular current that is deeply rooted in the ranks of the Palestinian people and the Islamic nation.⁴³

Likewise, the leader of the LTTE delivered the following remarks on November 27, 2001, the LTTE's Heroes' Day:

The Tamil people want to maintain their national identity and to live in their own lands, in their historically given homeland with peace and dignity. They want to determine their own political and economic life; they want to be on their own. These are the basic political aspirations of the Tamil people. It is neither separatism nor terrorism.⁴⁴

Despite the seemingly noble aspirations embodied in the Hamas and LTTE statements, both conflicts were markedly violent and included many assassinations and terrorist bombings as well as thousands of deaths. However, as ruthless as the Hamas and LTTE organizations were capable of being, their opponents—the Israeli and Sri Lankan governments, respectively—regularly applied repressive measures against them and their supporters, including physically coercive interrogations, the destruction of homes, and assassinations. This repression fueled fresh support for the rebellions, including the LTTE until its territorial center was overrun by the Sri Lankan army in 2009.

Sinn Féin, the aboveground Irish Republican political party that champions the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, remarked in a statement titled “The Conditions for Peace in Ireland”:

The root cause of the conflict in Ireland is the denial of democracy, the refusal by the British government to allow the Irish people to exercise their right to national self-determination. The solution to the conflict in Ireland lies in the democratic exercise of that right in the form of national reunification, national independence and sovereignty.⁴⁵

Although Sinn Féin participated in the successful brokering of a peace agreement between the Provos and their opponents, it has historically championed many Provo “martyrs” and their common goal of unification.



Boys in Belfast, Northern Ireland, near pro-IRA graffiti.

Bettmann/Getty Images

These cases exemplify the important role of perspective in defining one's champions or opponents and how the absence of a definitional model relegates the debate of terrorism or freedom fighting to one of opposing values and opinions.

Perspective 4: Extremism or “Mainstreamism”?

The fourth perspective for understanding terrorism is the question of whether political violence always lies at the political fringes of society or whether it is in fact a rational choice of some self-defined mainstream alignment. Members of organizations such as Hamas, the LTTE, and the Provos readily acknowledged that their methods were extreme but justified them as being proportional to the force used by the agents of their oppressors. In Colombia, the **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC)** argued that the Colombian government's response to FARC peace initiatives

was to strengthen the quasi-official death squads, the most despicable form of extermination. In this way, they cold-bloodedly annihilated the opposition political parties, union leaders, defenders of human rights, priests, peasant leaders and democratic personalities, among others. . . . From the moment a new agreement was made with President Andres Pastrana to establish the talks at San Vicente del Caguan on Jan. 7, 1999, the savagery grew. No week passed without a massacre, a murder or a forced evacuation, all done in the name of the paramilitaries but planned in the military bases. It is the realization of the imperialist doctrine of internal security.⁴⁶

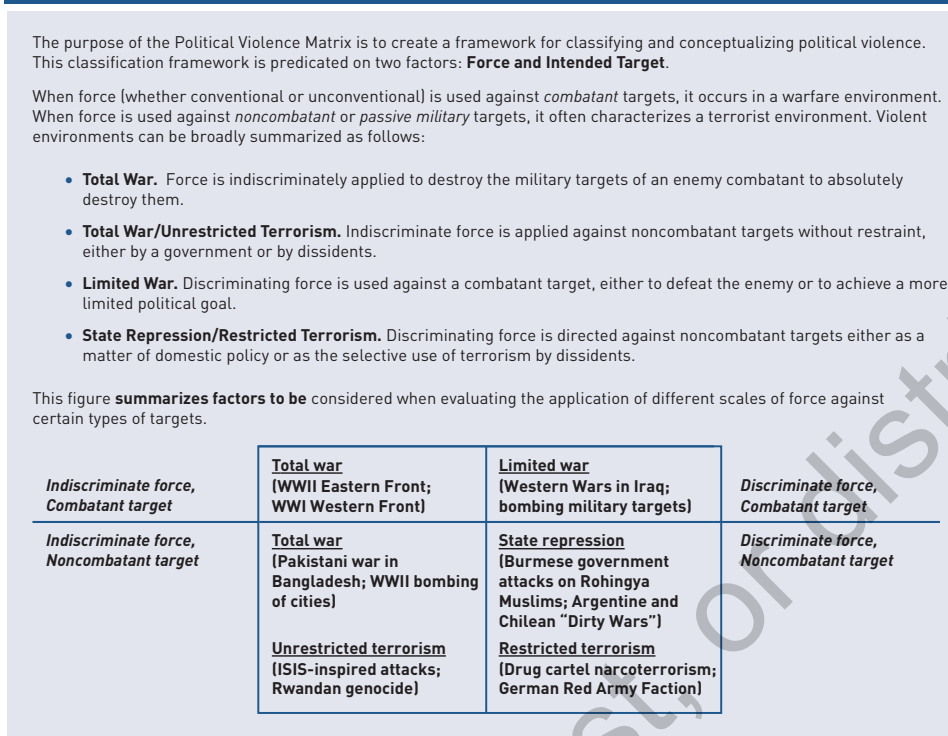
Governments have also adopted authoritarian measures to counter domestic threats from perceived subversives. They likewise rationalize their behavior as a proportional response to an immediate threat. Numerous cases of this rationalization exist, such as when the Chilean and Argentine armed forces seized power during the 1970s and engaged in widespread violent repression of dissidents. In Argentina, an estimated 30,000 people disappeared during the so-called **Dirty War** waged by its military government from 1976 to 1983. The Chilean and Argentine cases are explored further in Chapter 7.

Thus, from the perspective of many violent groups and governments, extremist beliefs and terrorist methods are logical and necessary. They are considered to be rational and justifiable choices. Such beliefs and methods become mainstreamed within the context of their worldview and political environment, which in their minds offer no alternative to using violence to acquire freedom or to maintain order. Conversely, those who oppose the practitioners of political violence reject their justifications of terrorist methods and disavow the opinion that these methods are morally proportional to the perceived political environment.

THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE MATRIX

To properly conceptualize modern terrorism, one must understand the qualities and scales of violence that define terrorist violence. The **Political Violence Matrix** is a tool that aids in this conceptualization.

Experts have identified and analyzed many terrorist environments. These environments include state, dissident, religious, ideological, international, criminal dissident, and gender-selective terrorism. One distinguishing feature within each typology is the relationship between the *quality of force* used by the terrorists and the *characteristics of the intended target* of the attack. Figure 2.1 depicts how the relationship between quality of force and target characteristics often defines the type of conflict between terrorist and victim.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ The Political Violence Matrix

Source: Adapted from Sederberg, Peter C. *Terrorist Myths: Illusion, Rhetoric, and Reality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989, p. 34.

Combatants, Noncombatants, and the Use of Force

Definitional and ethical issues are not always clearly drawn when one uses terms such as *combatant target*, *noncombatant target*, *discriminate force*, or *indiscriminate force*. Nevertheless, the association of these concepts and how they are applied to one another are instructive references for determining whether a violent incident may be defined as terrorism.

Combatant and Noncombatant Targets

The term *combatants* certainly refers to conventional or unconventional adversaries who engage in armed conflict as members of regular military or irregular guerrilla fighting units. The term *noncombatants* obviously includes civilians who have no connection to military or other security forces. There are, however, circumstances in which these definitional lines become blurred. For example, in times of social unrest, civilians can become combatants. This has occurred repeatedly in societies in which communal violence (e.g., civil war) breaks out between members of ethnonational, ideological, or religious groups. Similarly, noncombatants can include off-duty members of the military in nonwarfare environments.⁴⁷ They become targets because of their symbolic status.

Indiscriminate and Discriminate Force

Indiscriminate force is the application of force against a target without attempting to limit the level of force or the degree of destruction of the target. *Discriminate force* is a more surgical use of limited force. Indiscriminate force is considered to be acceptable when used against combatants

in a warfare environment. However, it is regularly condemned when used in *any* nonwarfare environment, regardless of the characteristics of the victim.⁴⁸ There are, however, many circumstances in which adversaries define “warfare environment” differently. When weaker adversaries resort to unconventional methods (including terrorism), they justify these methods by defining them as being necessary during a self-defined state of war. Discriminate force is considered to be a moral use of force when it is applied against specific targets with the intention to limit so-called collateral damage, or unintended destruction and casualties.

Case in Point: The Orlando Mass Shooting—An Act of Terrorism and a Hate Crime

As discussed in the Opening Viewpoint, some cases of political violence may be classified as both acts of terrorism and hate crimes. The mass shooting in Orlando, Florida, in the United States, is a case in point of this nexus between terrorist events and hate crimes, in this case bias-motivated violence directed toward a protected group (the LGBTQ community) by an Islamist-inspired extremist. It is also an illustrative case of how an individual can become radicalized and act out violently as a lone-wolf terrorist.

On June 12, 2016, gunman Omar Mir Seddique Mateen shot 102 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando with an assault rifle and a semiautomatic handgun, killing 49 of his victims and wounding 53. Pulse was a popular nightclub frequented by members of the LGBTQ community and was hosting a “Latin night” music and dance theme on the day of the attack. The attack was the most lethal mass shooting by one individual in U.S. history.

Omar Mateen was a first-generation Afghan American, born in Queens, New York, and raised in Port St. Lucie, Florida. He had an extensive history of behavioral challenges dating from elementary school. He was described in school records and by school officials as an aggressive and confrontational student and classmate, and he received discipline on dozens of occasions. Significantly, classmates reported that 14-year-old Mateen imitated an exploding airplane on his school bus soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. As he matured, Mateen became a dedicated body builder, attended prayers at local mosques, and attempted to pursue a career in law enforcement. His career goal was cut short when he was terminated from a corrections department trainee program because he joked about bringing a firearm to class, poor attendance, and sleeping in class. He was eventually hired as a security guard by a private firm. Mateen’s personal life was turbulent, and his first wife divorced him after less than one year of marriage because of repeated physical abuse. He also allegedly stalked a woman he met via an online dating service while he was married to his second wife.

Mateen attracted the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2013, when the security company he was employed with removed him from his post at the St. Lucie County Courthouse when he commented on his alleged ties to Lebanon’s Shi’a Hezbollah movement and the Sunni Al Qa’ida network—groups that are rivals, not allies. The FBI made inquiries and concluded that not enough evidence existed to continue investigating Mateen. In 2014, the FBI again made inquiries after Moner Mohammad Abu-Salha, who attended the same mosque as Mateen, carried out a suicide bombing in Syria on behalf of an Al-Qa’ida-affiliated group. The FBI concluded Mateen and Abu-Salha were only minimally acquainted. In June 2016, Mateen legally purchased a SIG Sauer MCMX assault rifle and a Glock 9mm handgun, the weapons he used during the Pulse nightclub attack. He had unsuccessfully attempted to purchase body armor.

Omar Mateen deliberately selected an LGBTQ site to carry out his attack. Mateen's first wife reported that he exhibited homophobic tendencies, and his father reported Mateen was angered when he saw two men kissing. Ironically, patrons at the Pulse nightclub reported Mateen had visited Pulse on numerous occasions, appearing to enjoy himself at the nightclub. He again visited Pulse on the evening of the attack and returned later with his firearms. Mateen opened fire as he entered the nightclub, shooting patrons and exchanging gunfire with an off-duty police officer. He continued firing, retreating to a restroom when police officers began arriving on the scene. Mateen shot a number of patrons who tried to take refuge in the restroom. While in the restroom, he dialed the local 911 emergency service and professed his allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS). Mateen also participated in three conversations with a crisis negotiation team, during which he claimed he was an "Islamic soldier" demanding an end to American intervention in Iraq and Syria. He made other claims that he had a suicide vest, had planted bombs outside the nightclub, and had associates who were planning additional attacks. Police attempted to blast a hole in the restroom's wall, and when this failed they used an armored vehicle to breach the wall. They engaged Mateen, who died during the ensuing firefight.



Mourner at the Pulse Nightclub memorial.

Stephen M. Dowell/Orlando Sentinel/Tribune News Service via Getty Images

Omar Mateen's declaration of allegiance to ISIS, his selection of an LGBTQ target, and his stated opposition to U.S. foreign policy strongly indicate that the Orlando attack was both an act of terrorism and a hate crime. The attack successfully influenced the political environment in the United States. It led to significant partisan political division in the United States on the questions of domestic security, counterterrorism, and the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. A debate also ensued on the media's reporting of this and other similar incidents, in particular on whether such publicity could result in copycat incidents.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented readers with an understanding of the nature of terrorism and probed the definitional debates about the elements of these behaviors. Several fundamental concepts were identified that continue to influence the motives and behaviors of those who support or engage in political violence. It is important to understand the elements that help define terrorism. Common characteristics of the extremist beliefs that underlie terrorist behavior include intolerance, moral absolutes, broad conclusions, and a new language that supports a particular belief system. Literally scores of definitions of terrorism have been offered by laypersons, academics, and policy professionals to describe the elements of terrorist violence. Many of these definitions are value laden and can depend on one's perspective as an actor in a terrorist environment.

The role of perspective is significant in the definitional debate. Terrorists always declare that they are fighters who represent the interests of an oppressed group. They consider themselves to be freedom fighters and justify their violence as a proportional response to the object of their oppression. Their supporters often "mainstream" the motives of those who violently champion their cause.

In the United States, official definitions have been adopted as a matter of policy. No single definition has been applied across all government agencies, but there is some commonality among their approaches. Commonalities include premeditation, unlawfulness, groups or agents, force or violence, human or property targets, intimidation, and a political objective.

In Chapter 3, readers will investigate the causes of terrorism. The discussion will focus on the motivations of terrorists, explanations of terrorist behavior, and cases in point that illustrate causal factors in the making of a terrorist.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The following topics are discussed in this chapter and can be found in the glossary:

Dirty War	New Terrorism
dissident terrorism	"One man willing to throw away his life is enough to terrorize a thousand"
"Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice"	"One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter"
freedom fighters	<i>participants in a terrorist environment</i>
<i>guerrilla</i>	Political Violence Matrix
hate crimes	propaganda by the deed
international terrorism	terrorist
"It became necessary to destroy the town to save it"	
"Kill one man, terrorize a thousand"	

PROMINENT PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

The following names and organizations are discussed in this chapter and can be found in Appendix B:

Castro, Fidel	Mao Zedong
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)	Provisional Irish Republican Army
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)	(Provos)

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de
Colombia, or FARC)

Sinn Féin
Sun Tzu
Wu Ch'i

DISCUSSION BOX

COLD WAR REVOLUTIONARIES

This chapter's Discussion Box is intended to stimulate critical debate about the role of perspective in labeling those who practice extremist behavior as "freedom fighters" or "terrorists."

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union lasted from the late 1940s until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. During the roughly 40 years of rivalry, the two superpowers never entered into direct military conflict—at least conventionally. Rather, they supported insurgent and government allies in the developing world (commonly referred to as the "Third World"),^a who often entered into armed conflict. These conflicts could be ideological or communal in nature. Conflicts were often "proxy wars," wherein the Soviets or Americans sponsored rival insurgent groups (such as in Angola), or "wars of national liberation," which were nationalistic in nature (such as in Vietnam).

The following examples were several important "fronts" in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cuban Revolution

The American influence in Cuba had been very strong since it granted the country independence in 1902 after defeating the Spanish in the Spanish-American War of 1898. The United States supported a succession of corrupt and repressive governments, the last of which was that of Fulgencio Batista. Batista's government was overthrown in 1959 by a guerrilla army led by **Fidel Castro** and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, an Argentine trained as a physician. Castro's insurgency had begun rather unremarkably, with significant defeats at the Moncada barracks in 1953 and a landing on the southeast coast of Cuba from Mexico in 1956 (when only 15 rebels survived to seek refuge in the Sierra Maestra mountains).

It was Batista's brutal reprisals against urban civilians that eventually drove many Cubans to support Castro's movement. When Batista's army was defeated and demoralized in a rural offensive against the rebels, Castro, his brother Raul, Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos launched a multifront campaign that ended in victory when their units converged on the capital of Havana in January 1959. The revolution had not been a Communist revolution, and the new Cuban government was not initially a Communist government. But by early 1960, Cuba began to receive strong economic and military support from the Soviet Union. Castro and his followers soon declared the revolution to be a Communist one, and the Soviet-American Cold War opened a new and volatile front. American attempts to subvert Castro's regime included the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and several assassination attempts against Castro.^b The Soviets and Americans came close to war during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

Cubans in Africa

In the postwar era, dozens of anticolonial and communal insurgencies occurred in Africa. During the 1970s, Africa became a central focus of the rivalry between Soviet- and Western-supported groups and governments. Thousands of Cuban soldiers were sent to several African countries on a mission that Fidel Castro justified as their "internationalist duty." For example, in the 1970s, Cuba sent 20,000 soldiers to Angola, 17,000 to Ethiopia, 500 to Mozambique, 250 to Guinea-Bissau, 250 to Equatorial Guinea, and 125 to Libya.^c

Angola

Portugal was the colonial ruler of this southern African country for more than 500 years. Beginning in 1961, guerrillas began conducting raids in northern Angola, committing brutal atrocities that few can argue were not acts of terrorism. Three guerrilla movements eventually drove the Portuguese from Angola and declared independence in November 1975. These were the Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

In the civil war that broke out after the Portuguese withdrawal, the United States and China supported the FNLA, the Soviets and Cubans supported the MPLA, and the United States and South Africa supported UNITA. The MPLA became the de facto government of Angola. Cuban soldiers were sent to support the MPLA government, the United States and South Africa sent aid to UNITA, and South African and British mercenaries fought with UNITA. The FNLA never achieved much success in the field. Direct foreign support was withdrawn as the Cold War and South African apartheid ended, although the conflict continued through the 1990s. The MPLA finally forced UNITA to end its insurgency when UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi was killed in February 2002.

Nicaragua

U.S. influence and intervention in Nicaragua were common during most of the 20th century. Its governments had been supported by the United States, and its National Guard (the “Guardia”) had been trained by the United States. These pro-American Nicaraguan governments had a long history of corruption and violent repression. Cuban-oriented Marxist guerrillas, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, overthrew the government of Anastasio Somoza in 1979 with Cuban and Soviet assistance.

During much of the next decade, the United States armed, trained, and supported anti-Sandinista guerrillas known as the Contras (“counterrevolutionaries”). This support included clandestine military shipments managed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the mining of Managua Harbor, and an illegal arms shipment program managed by Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North.

a. At the time, the First World was defined as the developed Western democracies, the Second World was the Soviet bloc, and the Third World was the developing world, composed of newly emerging postcolonial nations.

b. At least one plot allegedly proposed using an exploding cigar.

c. See Cross, R. W., ed. *20th Century*. London: Purnell, 1979, p. 2365, and “The OAU and the New Scramble for Africa,” pp. 2372–2373.

Discussion Questions

- Che Guevara is revered by many on the left as a “principled” revolutionary. He believed that a revolutionary “spark” was needed to create revolution throughout Latin America. Guevara was killed in Bolivia trying to prove his theory. Was Che Guevara an internationalist freedom fighter?
- The United States used sabotage to destabilize Cuba’s economy and government and plotted to assassinate Fidel Castro. Did the United States engage in state-sponsored terrorism? Compare this to Soviet support of its allies. Is there a difference?
- The Soviet Union sponsored the Cuban troop presence in Africa during the 1970s. The wars in Angola, Ethiopia/Somalia, and Mozambique were particularly bloody. Did the Soviet Union engage in state-sponsored terrorism? Compare this to U.S. support of its allies. Is there a difference?
- During the Soviet–United States rivalry in Angola, Jonas Savimbi commanded the pro-Western UNITA army. He was labeled as a freedom fighter by his U.S. patrons. Savimbi

never overthrew the MPLA government. Promising efforts to share power after an election in 1992 ended in the resumption of the war when Savimbi refused to acknowledge his electoral defeat, and a 1994 cease-fire collapsed. From the U.S. perspective, has Jonas Savimbi's status as a freedom fighter changed? If so, when and how?

- The Sandinistas overthrew a violent and corrupt government. The Contras were presented by the Reagan administration as an army of freedom fighters battling a totalitarian Communist government. Contra atrocities against civilians were documented. Were the Contras freedom fighters? How do their documented atrocities affect your opinion?

RECOMMENDED READINGS

The following publications provide discussions for defining terrorism and terrorism's underlying extremist motivations:

Berger, J. M. *Extremism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.

Carr, Matthew. *The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism*. New York: New Press, 2007.

Gerstenfeld, Phyllis B. *Hate Crimes: Causes, Controls, and Controversies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013.

Hamm, Mark S., ed. *Hate Crime: International Perspectives on Causes and Control*. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, 1994.

Howard, Lawrence, ed. *Terrorism: Roots, Impact, Responses*. New York: Praeger, 1992.

Jackson, Richard, et al. *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Kassimeris, George, ed. *Playing Politics With Terrorism: A User's Guide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Laqueur, Walter. *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Lawrence, Frederick M. *Punishing Hate: Bias Crimes Under American Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Richardson, Louise. *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*. New York: Random House, 2007.

Sederberg, Peter C. *Terrorist Myths: Illusion, Rhetoric, and Reality*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.