The Technique Of Terrorism

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Abstract

We are living in a radically new age of global terrorism, and we must seek significantly new ways of comprehending its nature and ramifications. In an effort to overcome some of the traditional obstacles to defining and understanding terrorism in terms of its aims and motives, the author proposes a means-based conception that allows for a more comprehensive, holistic approach to the terrorist phenomenon. The term "technique" is used to denote the vast array of means, methods, weapons, and strategies commonly employed by contemporary terrorists, as well as to define the unique nature of the global terrorist presence. In this regard, the author argues that today's terrorism is best understood by the techniques it employs, rather than the goals it pursues, or the specific political context in which it operates. To further clarify the concept of the technique of terrorism, the author advances three interconnected propositions that characterize and define the terrorist phenomenon today: first, the technique of terrorism implies the totality of means employed or advocated by an individual, group, or organization in furtherance of express or implied political, ideological, social, cultural, economic, or religious objectives; second, the technique of terrorism incorporates the planned, calculated, and systematic acts or threats of violence that generally typify the modes of operation and selection of victims by terrorist groups; and third, the technique of terrorism involves the unique application of psychological and sociological instruments of propaganda with the intent to generate fear, anxiety, intimidation, and demoralization in a wider social audience, as well as to mobilize and indoctrinate its followers.

The Technique Of Terrorism

Definitions

We are living in a radically new age of global terrorism, and we must seek substantially new ways of comprehending its nature, means, and manifestations.[1] When we speak of terrorism today, we are no longer dealing with the historically and relatively discrete, small-scale, sporadic, and marginalized individuals or groups that employed weapons of limited scope and consequence. The latter is what Walter Laqueur has referred to as "nuisance terrorism" in his discussion of *The New Terrorism*.[2] Today, neither historical precedent nor political prescription can guide us through our global struggle with terrorism. Today, we must ponder the implications

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[1] See, for example, Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* (Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill, 2006); Charles W. Kegley, Jr., ed., *The New Global Terrorism* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); Cindy C. Combs, *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003); Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Ian O. Lesser, and others, *The New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1999); Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (NY: Colombia University Press, 1998).

[2] Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, 3-4.

of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear—as well as cyberterrorism, narcoterrorism, and transnational groups and networks using increasingly powerful and sophisticated means and methods of mass communication, information, and propaganda. Today, we must weigh the causes and consequences of frequent, horrific, and unpredictable terrorist events, such as hijackings, kidnappings, suicide bombings, 9/11, the recent bombing attacks in Madrid and London, and the continuous violence and mayhem in Iraq and elsewhere in the world. Today, we must confront the increasing lethality, destructiveness, lawlessness, and fanaticism displayed by contemporary terrorist organizations, whose means and methods collectively surpass anything we have witnessed historically. Likewise, we must carefully consider the possibility that many acts of terrorism emerge from the "clash of civilizations" that Samuel Huntington so eloquently outlined in the mid-1990s.[3] Indeed, we need to understand the nature and scope of this "clash"—especially in the present conflicts between the West and Islamist fundamentalism—because these conflicts have produced the most serious and substantial confrontations and threats to world peace at this time. In sum, any definition of terrorism that does not take *all* of these matters into consideration is destined to mislead and misinform its audience, among other serious consequences. We live in a unique historical context, and our comprehension of this fact must constitute the first major step we take towards understanding the prevalence and originality of contemporary terrorism.

There is, however, an additional concern related to our understanding and analysis of contemporary terrorism. And this concern has to do with the entire process by which we conceptualize and define it. Defining what we mean by "terrorism" in a clear, comprehensive,

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[3] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (NY: Touchstone Books, 1996).

and generally acceptable manner has proved to be a persistently problematic task.[4] In fact, there are literally hundreds of definitions of terrorism from a wide variety of sources—e.g., academics, politicians, government agencies, security experts, journalists, and militants—yet none has been able to capture the essence of the phenomenon to the general satisfaction of most. I agree fundamentally with Jessica Stern's observation that defining terrorism is much more than an academic exercise: "The definition inevitably determines the kind of data we collect and analyze, which in turn influences our understanding of trends and our prediction about the future…How we define it profoundly influences how we respond to it."[5] One thing is certain: We can no longer indulge the conventional illusion that "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter."[6] This kind of moral relativism clouds our thinking and presents an imposing obstacle to understanding and defining the realities and threats of modern terrorism. If an individual or group resorts to terrorist means, then he or it cannot legitimately avoid either the terrorist label or its consequences. A terrorist is one who employs terrorist means, for whatever stated or unstated purpose!

Perhaps a single, unified definition is neither desirable nor achievable, but that is not the essential issue in this context. The real obstacle lies in the fact that many analysts focus almost entirely on the ends or goals of terrorism and attempt to grapple with the political, legal, moral, and normative implications of terrorist beliefs and behavior, while others get bogged down in attempting to sort out the multitude of subjective aims and ideologies that typify particular terrorist groups or movements. The end result of these approaches is that they are too often

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[4] For two interesting reflections on the definitions of terrorism, see H.H.A. Cooper, "Terrorism: The Problem of Definition Revisited," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44, no. 6 (2001); and Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?" (undated) http://www.ict.org.il/articles/researchdet.cfm?researchid= 4#proposal.

[5] Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists,* 12-13.

[6] H.H.A. Cooper addresses this issue convincingly in "Terrorism: The Problem of Definition Revisited."

politically biased and value-laden, leading to the wide variety of sometimes confusing and inconsistent individual definitions. This leads in turn to the practical impossibility of reaching general agreement about the nature, extent, or characteristics of terrorism *as a whole*. What we have now, therefore, is a multitude of definitions that reveal as much about the analysts as they do about the terrorist phenomenon itself. Symptomatically, Alex Schmid and associates initially surveyed a number of leading academic experts almost two decades ago in order to identify and isolate the most salient elements of terrorism in the experts' definitions.[7] Schmid's findings revealed a wide selection of elements that were based on their statistical recurrence in the survey data: i.e., violence, force (83.5%); political factors (65%); fear, emphasis on terror (51%); threat (47%); psychological effects and anticipated reactions (41.5%); discrepancy between targets and victims (37.5%); intentional, planned, systematic, organized action (32%); methods of combat, strategy, tactics (30.5%); publicity aspects (21.5%); and criminal intent (6%). Although the weight given to some of those elements may have changed somewhat since the events of 9/11, Schmid's findings are still representative of a rather vague "consensus" among some of the experts about which factors they consider to be most relevant to the study and definition of terrorism today.

Bruce Hoffman, a well-known expert on terrorist matters, reviewed many of the same definitional issues ten years later in his work, *Inside Terrorism.*[8] Hoffman attributed many of the deficiencies in definition to the tendency towards "equivocation" by many authors, which he believed had led to the fact that "there is no one widely accepted or agreed definition for terrorism."[9] I concur generally with Hoffman's overall assessment but find that he offers a rather

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[7] Alex P. Schmid and others, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988).

[8] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[9] Ibid., 37.

weak alternative to the issue of equivocation when he proposes to define terrorism as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change."[10] Hoffman's emphasis on the elements of fear and violence is perfectly legitimate and consistent with other experts, but his analysis is incomplete, and his mention of the "pursuit of political change" leaves much to the imagination, as do virtually all definitions that focus on the purely political or ideological goals of terrorism.

The Technique of Terrorism

In order to address further the definitional issues I have raised so far, I propose something more than the addition of another idiosyncratic definition to those that have already been amassed. As stated above, I believe that contemporary terrorism must be understood in a broader social context than has previously been the case. It must be understood as a significant *sociological* reality that reflects most of the basic features of the technological societies and civilization in which we live.[11] In fact, one could convincingly argue that the cumulative effects of technology are among the major causes of terrorism today.[12] Because the world of technique and technology is characterized by the predominance of technical means over subjective, hypothetical, theoretical, or moralistic ends, we must recognize that terrorism itself is a matter of *means*: i.e., a vast but interconnected system of ideas, methods, weapons, tactics, and strategies that must be understood as an inseparable whole. Indeed, it is my contention that terrorism is a

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[10] Ibid., 43.

[11] My thinking on this matter is strongly influenced by Samuel Huntington's arguments in *The Clash of Civilizations*, but more fundamentally by Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (NY: Alfred Knopf, 1964), and *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (NY: Alfred Knopf, 1965).

[12] See, for example, the excellent contributions to Akorlie A. Nyatepe-Coo and Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, eds., *Understanding Terrorism: Threats in an Uncertain World* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004).

technique in the sense that it is an effective means to a stated or implied objective, just like any other vehicle for achieving any goal whatsoever. Although my contention is somewhat unorthodox, I believe that it captures the sociological essence of terrorism in a manner that is more complete and comprehensive than other, more traditional approaches. It also allows us to focus upon what I would argue is the determining factor in contemporary terrorist operations: i.e., the search for the most efficient and effective technical means to accomplish their proposed objectives. To clarify my conception of the technique of terrorism I will concentrate on the following three interrelated propositions that I will use sequentially to define and delineate the terrorist phenomenon.

> ***Proposition 1: The technique of terrorism is defined by the totality of means employed or advocated by an individual, group, or organization in furtherance of express or implied political, ideological, social, cultural, economic, or religious objectives.***

Contrary to what some specialists assert, modern terrorism is a direct by-product of the technological civilization and technical processes that characterize our world. Just as technological development has become an increasingly powerful and determining aspect of modern advancements in virtually every field of human endeavor, so it has triggered a virtually simultaneous rise in the violence, destructiveness, weaponry, and organization of terrorism throughout the world.[13] Technology and terrorism are inextricably linked together in a complex system of means, methods, ideas, strategies, weapons, and organizations—the whole of which is substantially greater than the sum of its parts. It is precisely in this sense that I use the term *technique of terrorism* to characterize modern terrorism. As stated earlier, terrorism is a *means* to an end—i.e., a technique that is used by terrorists to achieve a calculated objective by applying a variety of deliberately violent means and methods to that specific goal. Nevertheless, as is often

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[13] See especially Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, for a comprehensive discussion of the characteristics of technological development.

the case in our technological civilization, the technical means employed tend to overpower and transform the ends pursued, which is invariably what occurs when terrorists use violence to achieve their objectives. In his impressive analysis of the *Techniques du terrorisme,* Jean-Luc Marret demonstrates extensively, for example, the interconnections between the technological developments in modern weaponry, such as bomb making, and the ever expansive technologies of terrorism.[14] Marret argues convincingly that terrorist methods expand by a process of "contagion," during which innovations are introduced, successful actions copied, and refinements made—all of which influence a variety of terrorist groups and movements almost simultaneously. Thus, the innovations in terrorism follow the same exponential pattern of technological development and diffusion that we witness generally. In other words, to the extent that terrorism forms an inseparable whole, it is characterized by the same technological imperatives that propel and animate the larger technological civilization. This is not, however, an entirely "mechanical" process in which the ends pursued are always realized to technical perfection. Terrorism is not a "science" that produces altogether predictable results; imprecise execution, amateurism, and clumsiness, for example, can definitely alter outcomes, as has been the case in many terrorist plans and aspirations (Note, for example, the brief terrorist career of shoe bomber Richard Reid). Nonetheless, it is important to understand that terrorists are engaged in a continuous process of *searching* for the best and most efficient way to accomplish their aims, and that this process of searching is actually what animates and defines the technique of terrorism. The important thing to remember with terrorism is the fact that it is the *totality* of means terrorists employ or advocate that defines them, not their express or implied intentions,

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[14] Jean-Luc Marret, *Techniques du terrorisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2e edition, 2002). This is the first book devoted entirely to this topic.

ideology, or ultimate motives or mistakes. This point is amply illustrated in the following three characteristics we find in terrorism today.

First of all, terrorists may be classified as individuals acting on their own—such as the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski or Carlos "The Jackal"—or acting in concert, such as Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. They can form relatively small groups, such as the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, or complex organizations or networks, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, or al-Qaeda. Regardless of size, each terrorist configuration has its own "signature" or *modus operandi*, which in fact further underlines the centrality and commonality of technique in its operations. The weapons or tactics it utilizes generally become its defining characteristic, such as hijackings (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, al-Qaeda), kidnappings for ransom (Abu Sayyaf, al-Qaeda), "kneecapping" (IRA, Italy's Red Brigades), and suicide bombings (Tamil Tigers, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iraqi insurgents, al-Qaeda). Furthermore, the arsenal of weapons available to contemporary terrorists is limited only by financial resources, technological feasibility, and technical imagination. The steadily increasing lethality of terrorist weaponry is a function of both the exponential proliferation of weapons technology among terrorist groups worldwide, and the development of a sophisticated class of terrorist technicians, such as the al-Qaeda tactician Kalid Sheik Muhammed, or the infamous bomber Ramsey Youssef.[15] Indeed, the "technicians of terror" deserve far more scrutiny and study than they have received to date!

Second, the "new terrorism" is different from previous types of terrorism because it is characterized by often vaguely formulated political objectives, indiscriminant violent attacks, attempts to achieve maximum psychological and social disorder, and the potential to use weapons of mass destruction. The Aum Shinrikyo millenarian cult in Japan is a curious example

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[15] See the insightful discussions of these matters in Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pubs., 2003); and Jean-Luc Marret, *Techniques du terrorisme.*

of this new trend. In 1995, members of the cult placed packages containing Sarin nerve gas in the Tokyo subway system, killing more than a dozen victims and injuring about five thousand. Under Shoko Asahara, the cult's leader, the goal was to seize control of Japan, and then the world, as part of the projected coming of Armageddon. Although the cult accumulated an impressive arsenal of weapons of potential mass destruction, it ultimately failed because of poor technical execution of its terrorist plans.[16] Even though the 1995 attack ended in failure, it was a first attempt to use and justify WMD as part of an overall terrorist strategy. Moreover, Asahara attracted literally thousands of adherents in several different countries to his secular-religious movement—a perfect illustration of how beliefs can become instruments of terror.

Third, many features of the "new terrorism" have become an integral part of the signature operations of al-Qaeda in particular.[17] The fact that al-Qaeda has developed the techniques of terrorism to such an advanced stage qualifies it as the quintessential contemporary terrorist organization. Peter Bergen, for example, carefully demonstrates how Usama bin Laden has effectively operated as a "terrorist CEO" and "venture capitalist," while adroitly merging modern organizational and managerial techniques with the ideology of the "clash of civilizations," Islamist piety, and the concept of *jihad*, or "holy war."[18] In many regards, bin Laden and al-Qaeda are prime reflections of the contradictions of our times—promoting *jihad* against the "Crusaders," the "Great Satan," "modernity," "globalization," and "the West," while simultaneously utilizing every material and self-serving component of the technological civilization that they otherwise claim to despise and reject absolutely! It remains to be seen how long this flagrant contradiction can be effectively maintained as a technique of al-Qaeda's terrorist strategy. On the other hand, it is perhaps the surest sign we have that bin Laden's

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[16] See Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 192.

[17] See, especially, Jean-Luc Marret, *Techniques du terrorisme*.

[18] Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (NY: Free Press, 2001).

cynical manipulation of Islam will ultimately fail in the face of technological modernization and globalization, which will determine, inexorably, the ultimate path of modern history. Since bin Laden's brand of terrorism has *no finality*—with the sole exception of self annihilation—the remaining question may only be the price we will have to pay until it inevitably consumes itself!

> ***Proposition 2: The technique of terrorism incorporates the planned, calculated, and systematic acts or threats of violence that generally typify the modes of operation and selection of victims of terrorist groups.***

The history of terrorism correlates strongly with those parts of the human historical experience where violence has been perceived as a morally justifiable means to a projected end. Thus, the violent tactics and tools of terrorism have tended to mirror the general historical development of weaponry and warfare—from the ancient swords and daggers, through the invention of firearms, the guillotine, and dynamite, down to the contemporary age of deadly explosive devices and weapons of mass destruction. The twentieth century has generated more violence, death, and destruction than any previous era of human history, and modern terrorism has tended to emulate those traits uniquely. Because of its sheer lethality, destructiveness, and high public visibility, terrorism has become, with few exceptions, the exclusive method of choice in most modern attempts to bring about political and social change. Both left-wing ideologues and right-wing extremists have resorted to terrorism in impressive numbers, and currently, we see groups and individuals of every persuasion joining the ranks of various secular-religious movements that have become appreciably more dangerous and violent as time goes by.

Terrorist violence has many dimensions, but what makes it particularly dangerous today revolves around three dominant characteristics. The first characteristic involves the fact that terrorism typically involves acts or threats of violence that indicate carefully planned, rationally

calculated, and systematic behavior on the part of terrorist groups. For example, the hijackings and suicide attacks of 9/11 were without precedent in the annals of terrorism. The attacks were the end result of systematic, detailed, patient, and audacious planning, rarely seen in previous terrorist operations. Al-Qaeda's success demonstrated conclusively that there were no "rules" or "limits" governing terrorist actions, only utilitarian results. The "symbolic" value of 9/11 in terms of utter destructiveness, loss of life, and fear of future attacks, was sufficient justification and validation for bin Laden and his followers in their struggle against the "Great Satan." By boldly and violently attacking the United States, bin Laden and his supporters achieved several specific aims: first, they managed to mobilize and reinforce the profound adhesion of a wide cross-section of the Muslim and Arabic world through persistently anti-American propaganda, both before and after the events of 9/11. What had once been latent hostility and animosity in the relationship between segments of Islam and the West now became overt expressions of violent and aggressive emotions, supported by pan-Arabic propaganda. Thus, the United States specifically became the ideal scapegoat for radical Muslim militants in particular. A second aim revolves around the fact that terrorists were able to *normalize* acts of violence in the relations between Islam and the West—a profound propaganda effect that has since been used to legitimize countless terrorist attacks against "Western" interests throughout the world, especially in Iraq. Finally, the normalization of violence has led to a situation in which the mere suggestion or threat of violent terrorist actions is enough to cause fear and anxiety in a wider social audience. In the age of global mass communications, this effect occurs with unprecedented regularity, and the threat of violence alone is often an adequate substitute for its real-life application. Bin Laden seems to have understood and encouraged this effect in most of his threatening media communications since 9/11.

A second major characteristic of today's terrorism denotes the inevitable dialectic or cycle of violence that in turn engenders the highly predictable syndrome of terrorism/counterterrorism we have seen in recent years. For instance, in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, there was an extraordinary development of safety and security techniques and technologies, both within and outside the United States. This development led to the accelerated creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the passage of the Patriot Act, and numerous security, surveillance, and intelligence initiatives and protocols that are now part of the United States' counterterrorism measures and techniques. Inasmuch as these measures were taken in response to the necessities of the moment, however, they have sometimes generated serious legal and civil liberties controversies, which is perfectly consistent with the political intent and technique of organizations like al-Qaeda. Furthermore, democratic ideals and institutions are meant to be among the many casualties of modern terrorism. In this connection, I am reminded of a February 10, 2006, Associated Press news photo of a Muslim woman carrying a banner alleging that "Freedom of Expression is Western Terrorism!"

A third, and somewhat daunting, characteristic of contemporary terrorist violence is the formidable presence of the suicide bomber. The technique of suicide bombing has proliferated among contemporary terrorist groups through the same process of "contagion" identified earlier, to the point that suicide bombers have become one of the most recognizable and feared "weapons" in the terrorist arsenal. As David Brooks cogently points out, "Suicide bombing isn't just a tactic in a larger war; it overwhelms the political goals it is meant to serve. It creates its own logic and transforms the culture of those who employ it."[19] Suicide bombing is perhaps one of the ultimate expressions of the cycle and logic of violence that typifies Islamist terrorist

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[19] David Brooks, "The Culture of Martyrdom: How Suicide Bombing Became not Just a Means but an End," in Gus Martin, ed., *The New Era of Terrorism: Selected Readings* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pubs., 2004), 143.

groups in particular. Although not without historical precedent—e.g., the Japanese Kamikaze pilots in WWII—contemporary suicide bombing originated with groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and spread rapidly to other organizations, like al-Qaeda. Islamist bombers have not tended to be loners or entirely uneducated or alienated individuals. As Brooks observes, most are products of the "culture of martyrdom," in which tightly run terrorist organizations widely recruit, indoctrinate, train, and reward bombers for their "martyrdom." For organizations like al-Qaeda, suicide bombers fulfill a well-defined need, as their role in terrorism is notoriously inexpensive and effective, and they are less complicated and compromising to employ than other possible terrorist techniques. As Bruce Hoffman notes, the suicide terrorist is "the ultimate smart bomb."[20]

The technique of suicide bombing is fairly simple in that bombers often carry explosive devices strapped to their bodies, which they may detonate at will. Or they may use other means of delivery, such as cars, trucks, and other vehicles, as well as boats, bicycles, or aircraft. The impact of the bombings is immediate, and they produce considerable shock, intimidation and anxiety in a wider audience. We have seen this kind of effect in Israel's experience with terrorism, as well as in the insurgents' use of IEDs in Iraq. Most bombers are religiously inspired Muslims who have been trained and indoctrinated by Islamist ideologues and clerics to sacrifice their lives for the ultimate cause of Islam. In fact, martyrdom is given the highest priority by al-Qaeda in programming its followers for death.[21] As Walter Laqueur observes, "awaiting them in paradise are rivers of milk and honey, and beautiful young women. Those entering paradise are eventually reunited with their families and as martyrs stand in front of God as a new-born

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[20] Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism" *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2003.
[21] Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (NY: Berkley Books, 2002).

baby."[22] Thus, the positive value placed on this ultimate act of self-sacrifice helps explain why legions of young Muslims are more than willing to become martyrs in a self-perpetuating cycle of suicidal violence. As a technique of terrorism, suicide bombing epitomizes the variously attributed Chinese military adage: "Kill one, terrorize a thousand."

> ***Proposition 3: The technique of terrorism involves the unique application of psychological and sociological instruments of propaganda with the intent to generate fear, anxiety, intimidation, and demoralization in a wider social audience, as well as to indoctrinate and mobilize its followers.***

In order to fully understand and define modern terrorism, we must include perhaps the most important dimension of its impact on the contemporary world: its relationship to modern forms of propaganda.[23] There is a powerful symbiotic relationship between terrorism and propaganda that combines the material, spiritual, psychological, and sociological techniques necessary for the perpetuation of both. Terrorism must use propaganda in order to achieve any or all of its stated or implied objectives, and propaganda provides the necessary techniques for terrorism to be effective. In this context, I use the term propaganda broadly to imply the cluster of psychological and sociological techniques of persuasion and influence, combined with the techniques of organization discussed earlier, that are designed specifically to mobilize, integrate, and orient its followers toward terrorist actions. Terrorist propaganda is not about telling lies in order to make its adherents believe certain ideas. Rather, it is designed to bypass or overwhelm cognitive and intellectual processes in order to obtain a desired *behavior* or *action* from its followers, as in the earlier example of the suicide bomber and martyr. That is the essence of what is referred to as "propaganda by deed," which is the new reality of propaganda in the modern

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[22] Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, 100.

[23] Jacques Ellul's analysis of propaganda techniques in *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* is among the most insightful sources available on this topic.

age.[24] To clarify my definition, we must examine three major aspects of this relationship: the instruments of propaganda themselves, the purposes they serve, and how they are used to mobilize followers.

First of all, modern terrorism is entirely dependent on our technological civilization, the mass means of communication, and global information systems to survive politically, publicize their purposes, and influence a wider social audience. As Ray Surette points out, terrorists have become increasingly media-wise as a consequence.[25] Various terrorist groups have recognized the power of the media to crystallize public opinion and to set the social agenda through extensive coverage and commentary—especially involving terrorist violence. Surette is correct in underlining the fact that "terrorism has become a form of mass entertainment and public theater and thus highly valuable to media organizations."[26] "Terrorism is theatre," as Brian Jenkins suggested many years ago.[27] And Martha Crenshaw made a similar observation when she stated, "The most basic reason for terrorism is to gain recognition or attention."[28]

Prime examples of the role of the media in the "new terrorism" emerged during the Middle-Eastern "skyjacking" incidents in the early 1970s. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was very successful in gaining worldwide recognition and limited support for their cause as a result of a series of air piracy attacks on commercial airlines. Thus, terrorist actions of this type became influential media events and powerful instruments of propaganda. Another emblematic, widely publicized, and emotionally charged incident occurred during the hostage taking of Israeli athletes by the Palestinian "Black September" group during the Munich

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ray Surette, *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice* (Belmont. CA: West/Wadsworth, 1998).

[26] Ibid., 149.

[27] Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 38.

[28] Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, 13, (1981), 396.

Olympics in 1972. Generally classified as propaganda-by-deed actions, these terrorist techniques soon became part of an identifiable process of imitation and contagion among terrorist groups, with many broad ramifications. For example, it is precisely in this context that we find the propagandistic struggle over control of the terminology of terrorism, especially in regard to the distinction between who will be labeled the "terrorist" and who will become the "freedom fighter." Control of media discourse on this matter is always crucial and remains contentious even today. As media outlets such as the Al-Jazeera network begin to play a more substantial political role in the conflicts between the West and the Islamic world, there will be, of necessity, an increasingly obvious propaganda war over issues such as the war in Iraq. More fundamentally, however, the "clash of civilizations" will be waged in "cyber-space," through the Internet and other multimedia technologies, with often unforeseeable consequences. In sum, the global means of communication and information have become major instruments of propaganda in our technological civilization—with decidedly ambivalent effects. On the one hand, as massive purveyors of information, the media are by nature attracted to the violent, spectacular, visual, and destructive aspects of terrorism, and they give generous attention and coverage to terrorist events, such as the now unforgettable images of 9/11. On the other hand, they sometimes unwittingly engender further violence, destruction, and terrorism by the very nature of their coverage and excessive emphasis on the explicit and graphic means and methods of terrorist groups. Propaganda feeds on information, and the more immediate, dramatic, and audio-visual the information, the more effective it is for propaganda purposes. Television is, of course, the present medium of choice for terrorists, because it prioritizes the dissemination of striking images on a global scale, encourages immediate visibility through satellite feeds and other technologies, and attracts huge audiences to its various formats. The Internet has also become an

increasingly important and popular tool for terrorists for similar reasons.[29] Moreover, one can actually become either a "virtual" or actual terrorist today simply by consulting terrorist websites regularly, joining web-based terrorist groups or sympathizers, consulting training manuals and other published terrorist materials, or learning how to make terrorist explosives—all through the convenience and collaboration of the world-wide web!

A second major characteristic that is often mentioned in definitions of terrorism is the idea that the ultimate purpose and conscious intent of terrorism is to generate fear, anxiety, intimidation, and demoralization in a wider social audience. Obviously, according to most definitions, the purpose of terrorism is to terrorize! Boaz Ganor summarizes this perspective when he concludes that "terrorism is the intentional use of, or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims."[30] The strength of this definition lies in its emphasis on the intentional or threatened use of violence for political purposes. I have already discussed the indisputable use of violent means as a decisive aspect of all acts of terrorism; moreover, terrorist violence is often rationalized for political and ideological reasons. Nevertheless, I find Ganor's definition lacking in two areas. First, it does not address other potential forms of violence—such as spiritual, psychological, or intellectual – besides the purely political. The study of propaganda reveals numerous forms of violence that are often more fundamental to the manipulation of human behavior than political agitation. Second, the idea that terrorism is somehow reserved for "civilians" or "innocents" exclusively leaves out important effects of terrorist violence on both combatants and society in general. Terrorists do not neatly distinguish between military and non-military targets, especially when their attacks are directed

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[29] See, for example, Jean-Luc Marret, *Techniques du terrorisme*; and Jess Hollenback, "Technology and the Transformation of Terrorism," in Akorlie A. Nyatepe-Coo and Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, eds., *Understanding Terrorism*, 185-202.

[30] Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism," 6.

against "symbolic" targets, such as those included in the 9/11 attacks. Thus,, on what basis did al-Qaeda actually discriminate between "civilian" targets in the WTC attacks, and "military" targets in the Pentagon attack, not to mention those "secondary" targets that were never attacked? Such a distinction was in fact immaterial to al-Qaeda's calculated plans to attack all major symbols of American power and presence in the world, and to kill as many Americans as possible in the process. Thus, the 9/11 attacks were undertaken primarily for their propaganda value and the additional social-psychological "collateral damage" the attacks were designed to provoke in American society. Since the attacks, bin Laden's role has been to try to create a quasi-permanent sense of anxiety, fear, intimidation, and demoralization in the United States and elsewhere. One way bin Laden attempts to accomplish this is through incessant verbal, visual, and allegorical threat techniques, such as those regarding the safety and security of American interests, the issuance of periodic proclamations and *fatwas* in videotapes and audiocassettes, and the deliberate cultivation of "mystery" about the nature of his leadership and geographic location. To a degree, bin Laden has been quite successful in his propaganda of intimidation throughout the Western world. Although he is no "mastermind" or "genius" of modern terrorism, bin Laden has learned how to cleverly combine previously developed techniques of propaganda into the structure, organization, and ideology of al-Qaeda. Indeed, of necessity, bin Laden has managed to forge a terrorist network that has transformed sectarian violence into an Islamist virtue.

Finally, al-Qaeda has become an effective model for the recruitment, training, indoctrination, and mobilization of contemporary terrorist organizations. Few experts have fully understood how effective al-Qaeda has been in indoctrinating and mobilizing followers for the purposes of "jihad." Bin Laden understood very well the political propaganda value of the defeat

of the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. He also understood the sociological value of the "mujahideen" from Afghanistan in organizing the local leadership cadres for the cellular structure of the al-Qaeda network. Although he was not formally educated in the theology of Islam, bin Laden was able to grasp the secular-religious implications of the Islamic faith and transform it into a workable Islamist ideology. This secular-religious ideology became the necessary belief and behavior system around which al-Qaeda was organized and initially led by bin Laden and his closest associates.[31] Upon this foundation, bin Laden was able to attract large numbers of disaffected, educated, alienated, and illiterate Muslims from all walks of life by constant references to "Allah," and the insinuation that bin Laden is always carrying out Allah's divine wishes in his terrorist actions.[32] In addition, al-Qaeda intensely recruits and indoctrinates all followers into a sociological and psychological mold of absolute conformity to the secular-religious beliefs and values of the group. The culture of self-sacrifice and martyrdom and the rewards to be reaped in the afterlife from waging jihad are integral parts of that same sociological and psychological mold. Most importantly, the ultimate purpose of this kind of propaganda is, again, not to change ideas or opinions, or to make adherents "believe" a certain set of preconceived ideas; most followers of Islam are already true believers in the precepts of their faith. Rather, the primary purpose is to obtain a *behavior* or an *action* at a desired moment—i.e., to create a kind of "orthopraxy" in which an individual is propelled through indoctrination to reflexive action for the sake of the cause. When fully understood, this form of propaganda can help us better understand the phenomenon of the suicide bomber who dispassionately carries out a suicidal mission, or the presence of followers of differing backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses in the ranks of suicide terrorists. Al-Qaeda has

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[31] Cf. Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*; and Jean-Luc Marret, *Techniques du terrorisme.*
[32] Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda*, 117-118.

certainly understood the techniques of propaganda necessary to generate public anxiety about these kinds of attacks, as well as the mobilization techniques needed to ensure the constant supply of Muslims willing to become martyrs in the future. Interestingly, the most recent orgy of violence over the unfortunate cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammed should also provide pause for reflection about the propaganda effects mentioned above. Once certain reflexes are created, mythical beliefs are exploited, scapegoats are identified, and media attention is mobilized, there must be a "release," or "focus," toward which the militants can direct their pent-up, emotional rage. In this case, the release was not provided by a specific terrorist group, but spilled over into locally orchestrated and irrational rampages of indiscriminate, anti-Western violence based on a deliberately calculated release of the cartoon information to the Arabic media. This kind of effect was also seen recently in the month-long 2006 rioting in France and has become a frequent occurrence in many contemporary societies, including the United States, for diverse reasons. This is certainly one of the most troublesome sociological characteristics we must confront in correctly defining and comprehending contemporary terrorism, as the phenomenon itself becomes increasingly global and apparently limitless in nature.

Conclusion

From the outset, I have attempted to establish the need for a means-based approach to understanding and defining modern forms of terrorism. Because of the difficulties in defining terrorism along traditional lines, in which the emphasis upon the political, ideological, and other subjective motivations predominate, I proposed a more comprehensive, holistic conception based on my contention that terrorism is best understood as a *technique*, rooted in the very characteristics and means of the technological civilization that surrounds us. In order to develop

my idea further, I set forth three interconnected propositions that collectively illustrate and define what I wished to imply by the technique of terrorism. In the context of the new, global forms of terrorism, I developed abundant examples and illustrations for my basic ideas and contentions. As a result, I am convinced that the facts of modern terrorism generally support my three propositions for defining the technique of terrorism.

First, it is obvious to me that looking at terrorism as the totality of means used by terrorist groupings to further their objectives is a much better way to understand terrorism than emphasizing the often confusing and sometimes misleading aims and ideologies set forth by terrorists themselves. To focus entirely on the justifications or motives of terrorists is to ignore the more fundamental and determining factor in all of their operations: the means they employ. Moreover, the most common and unavoidable instrument of terrorism is violence. Violence has common effects on anyone who uses it, and terrorists participate in a cycle of violence that has a certain logic and predictability in its effects and outcomes. The amount of terrorist violence we see today seems to be a function of both the widespread availability of conventional and non-conventional (WMD) weapons, and the pervasiveness of the mass means of communication and information. Both of these characteristics are products of our technological civilization, and both are crucial components of the dialectic of terrorism and counterterrorism we see on a regular basis.

Finally, the most intractable aspect of modern terrorism involves the relationship between terrorism and propaganda. The manipulation of modern societies by the mass media has led to the accelerated application of modern propaganda techniques on a global scale. As a consequence, terrorism has become a substantial and extremely dangerous presence in world affairs, and a constant source of fear and anxiety to those who are directly or indirectly

victimized by its violence. In the specific case of al-Qaeda, we see a terrorist organization that provides a model to others, and that effectively uses modern propaganda techniques to recruit, indoctrinate, and animate masses of followers. Al-Qaeda's systematic and calculated use of psychological and sociological techniques of integration and indoctrination help explain the suicidal trends in Islamist terrorism, and the veritable "clash of civilizations" that has emerged in attempting to address and control aspects of contemporary terrorism. Only a focus on the techniques of terrorism will supply us with the necessary insight and information to both comprehend and combat terrorism in this day and age.

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