Terrorism

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter discusses driving factors for the future of global terrorism and its academic study. It focuses on the role of old and new media, facilitating terrorist strategies aimed at mobilizing recruits and polarizing societies. Other types of violence kill more people, but terrorism threatens democratic societies by pitting values such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and non-discrimination, on the one hand, against protecting the lives of potential victims, on the other. Scholars have responded by seeking predictive "models" of radicalization, sometimes without understanding the local contexts from which operatives emerge. The narrow historical scope of most quantitative databases and the tailoring of inquiries to fit the data available further hobble their efforts. Terrorism is neither a hermetically sealed phenomenon nor the worst type of violence that can occur. Scholars must collaborate more across disciplines if they are to analyze and counter it effectively.

Keywords: terrorism, new media, social media, definition of terrorism, history of terrorism, strategies of terrorism, radicalization, extremism, polarization, mobilization

THE study of terrorism changed dramatically in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, reflecting the vast number of academics and policy analysts who entered the field after the September 2001 attacks on the United States. This yielded mixed results. Improved academic rigor was a positive development. Many of the best academics turned their attention to this subject, analyzing the causes of terrorism, strategies of terrorism, the use of suicide attacks, and evolving ideologies, for example, often supported by large government grants. New and better terrorism incident databases enabled stronger quantitative analyses and reduced the politicization of the field. Thousands of books and articles emerged, some of them excellent contributions that enhanced our understanding of terrorism, how to respond to it, and how to prevent it.

But troubling cleavages also opened up in the study of terrorism, notably a sharp geographical divergence between the analysis of terrorism and those who experienced it. Analysts focused on the relatively small number of terrorist attacks in the United States and Western Europe (as horrible and tragic as they were), even as terrorism in the Middle

East, South Asia, and North Africa skyrocketed. Keeping terrorism “over there” was a deliberate policy. During the 2000s, the top four countries in terms of terrorist attacks were Iraq, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, in that order (LaFree et al. 2015: 58). These were, not coincidentally, the countries (or their neighbors) where US and European militaries had intervened. The number of terrorist attacks in Iraq was more than 29,000, 98 percent after the invasion of 2003 (to 2012). By contrast, from 1970 to 2012, the United States homeland suffered a total of 3,496 attacks, only 32 of them between 2003 and 2012 (LaFree et al. 2015: 135 and Global Terrorism Database). Brutal attacks in Paris, Brussels, Orlando, and Nice horrified audiences in Europe and the United States, yet the contrasting levels of bloodshed still held. From 2015 to mid-2016, the death toll from attacks in Europe and the Americas was 658 in 46 attacks, even as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia suffered 28,031 deaths in 2,063 attacks (IHS Janes).

Another negative trend was uneven expectations about major acts of terrorism. Americans, especially, demanded zero risk of terrorism at home, while those in fractured regions bore the brunt of escalating terrorist violence. It was a kind of outsourcing (p. 503) of political violence, logical perhaps for a government whose top priority is to protect its own citizens, but solipsistic, short-sighted, and unsustainable over time. The vast majority of victims of terrorist attacks during the first two decades of the twenty-first century were Muslims from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Yet the vast majority of terrorism research focused on the small number of attacks perpetrated or inspired by Islamists in Europe and North America. US terrorism analyses that did look elsewhere focused first on terrorist attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan during the occupation (but very little afterwards), and then on the flow of foreign fighters to and from Syria (but very little on the people who lived there). Thousands of civilians were slaughtered by the Syrian regime or forced to flee; yet most of the academics still saw the situation there through the narrow lens of US and European counter-terrorism, especially the struggle between al Qaeda and ISIS. There are reasons for this, including the difficulty of traveling to unstable places, the greater availability of funding for US- and European-focused projects, and the lack of accessible data from active conflict zones or countries lacking a free press. But academics should at least acknowledge that the field of “terrorism studies” has been globally skewed.

The gap between the focus of terrorism studies and terrorist casualties will narrow in the future. Going forward, the post-9/11 seal between terrorism in those regions and in the United States and Europe has become porous and will break down further. Recent tragic attacks have already demonstrated this. The millions of desperate refugees fleeing the wars in the Middle East, and the xenophobic populist backlash in some places, will further polarize European and American societies. Distinctions between those who are logistically connected to terrorist groups and those who are “inspired” will be harder to draw. Even after the so-called Islamic State Caliphate disappears, the violence related to ISIS, al Qaeda, and their successors or affiliates will persist and become less coherent and less trackable. The future of terrorism studies must reflect a more mature geographical scope,

a better understanding of the social and political context, and a more agile, interdisciplinary framework if it is to adapt.

This chapter will provide an overview of terrorism's current and future challenges, in five sections. Beginning with a short discussion of the definition, the chapter expands upon terrorism's neglected yet important symbolic nature. The third section analyzes time-tested strategies of terrorism, explaining how they have evolved over the centuries. Next is an overview of radicalization studies, an area of driving significance for the future, where more academic rigor, fresh framing, and new methods are needed. The conclusion offers five driving factors that will shape both the future of terrorism and the study of terrorism.

34.1 What is Terrorism?

A common understanding of the problem is a prerequisite to studying it. There is no universally agreed definition of terrorism, a fact that is also true of "war," "legitimacy," (p. 504) and "sovereignty." Still, terrorism is a uniquely value-laden term, often sloppily used, and always associated with creating public fear. It is murder with widespread symbolic meaning, a type of violence whose effects play out partly in audiences' minds afterwards. Non-state attackers killing or maiming innocent victims cause the principal wave of fear, as others watch in horror or deal with the aftermath. But irresponsible pundits, media members, politicians, and sometimes academics can drive the secondary wave, feeding the anxieties of domestic constituencies in an action/reaction cycle that heightens the incentive to strike again and surrenders the initiative to the terrorists. Understanding how terrorism works can avert that fundamental error, as we will discuss below.

Fortunately there are more commonalities than differences in what people consider terrorism. The core elements boil down to five factors. First, terrorism is an *act* that involves the threat or use of violence. The act may be in the name of good or bad causes: means and motivation are separate. Second, terrorism has a political aim. The violence can be in the service of a political ideology or a spiritual belief (religion is, after all, the most ancient type of "politics") but it must be more than self-serving. Terrorism is about seeking justice, or at least someone's conception of justice. There must be a sense of altruism on behalf of a broader community (misguided as it may be) or else the violence is strictly a criminal act. Third, the targets must be illegitimate, meaning innocent victims, non-combatants, or civilians. Those who are strong enough to attack active military forces and to hold territory (even temporarily) are insurgents (see Checkel, Chapter 11, this volume). Terrorists can transition to becoming insurgents but only if they gain strength and numbers, typically going from hundreds of operatives to thousands. Fourth, the perpetrators must be non-state actors. This is the hardest aspect to wrestle with, because state violence has led to far more misery and death than terrorism has, and ruling it out of the definition inevitably draws us closer to status quo state governments (Roberts 2015). When state force is used internationally, it is considered an act of war; when it is used domestically, it may be called law enforcement. But perfidious state actions are called crimes against humanity, a violation of the laws of war, genocide, and so on—there is a vocabu-

lary to describe state uses of force (see Hendershot and Mutimer, Chapter 5, this volume). Not so for non-state uses of force. Analysts speak of “terror from above” and “terrorism from below.” Only the latter is included here. Lastly, there must always be an audience, either to intimidate or inspire. Unless there is an audience, terrorism is indistinguishable from other types of violence against civilians. Killing innocents in the absence of symbolism or publicity is murder, not terrorism (Cronin 2002/3; Stohl 2014).

As we admitted at the outset, there are gray areas in every definition of terrorism, not least because the term has evolved in different historical contexts. For example, some people insist that states can be terrorists (as in the strategic bombing of cities during the Second World War) or that military forces can be illegitimate targets (as in the 1983 US Marine Barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 241 soldiers who were peacekeepers). These ambiguous cases spark bitter arguments when the definition is too narrow. Others call virtually every abhorrent act of violence “terrorism,” because the word is so evocative and powerful. They make the definition too broad and ultimately (p. 505) meaningless. Because of the heavily political nature of the term, especially its pejorative usage, a perfect definition is impossible. But the perfect being the enemy of the good, the definition of terrorism for the purposes of this chapter is: the use or threat of use of symbolic violence against innocents by a non-state actor to achieve political ends.

34.2 The Role of Publicity

Symbolism relies upon publicity, which is at the heart of terrorist violence and always has been. The effect on an audience offers political leverage to otherwise weak political actors. This may seem odd, because terrorism is an ancient phenomenon that pre-dates modern media. David Rapoport claims that it dates at least to the Zealots and Sicarii of the first century BCE, Jewish groups that killed with a dagger (the Sicarii) or used violence to spark an uprising in Judea against the Romans (the Zealots) (Rapoport 1984). But even these two groups attacked their victims using public, demonstrative methods to force a popular reaction.

In the world of social media, the tie to symbolism and publicity is more direct than ever; but it is not new. Modern terrorism traces its lineage to the concept of propaganda of the deed (or propaganda *by* the deed, from the French *propaganda par le fait*), an old activist principle drawn from writings by French politician Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1846), Italian revolutionary Carlo Pisacane (1857) and Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1870). During the late nineteenth century, the concept came to refer to publicized acts of killing, especially bombings. The goal was to engage in “creative destruction,” shake the foundations of society, and shock the masses into revolution throughout the world (Woodcock 1962).

Between the invention of dynamite in 1867 and about 1934 (interrupted by the First World War), there was a global wave of political violence associated with propaganda of the deed. It included social revolutionaries (e.g. *Narodnaya Volya* in Russia, the group that in 1881 assassinated the tsar), anarchist groups and individuals (e.g. Mario Buda, an

anarchist who blew up Wall Street in 1920, killing 38 and injuring 143), and nationalists (e.g. Irish nationalists, who carried out a campaign of violence in Britain between 1881 and 1885 and pioneered the use of timers and detonators) (Clutterbuck 2004). It was not a single coherent movement but more a worldwide wave of violence encompassing both networked organizations and lone individuals "inspired" to act, with the ideal means (dynamite) to do so (Rapoport 2004; Jensen 2014).

Modern terrorism would not have been born without the laying of cross-oceanic telegraph cables (1858+) and the boom in mass media newspapers (so-called "yellow journalism") that followed. During this period there were hundreds of bombings throughout the world, on every continent except Antarctica. Egypt, China, Japan, and Australia all had significant anarchist groups. Ordinary people died in the hundreds, and prominent leaders were assassinated. Between 1892 and 1901, more monarchs, presidents, and prime ministers of major powers were killed than at any other time in history, including (p. 506) President Marie Francois Sadi Carnot of France in 1894, King Umberto of Spain in 1897, and American President William McKinley in 1901 (Jensen 2014: 31). All of the bombings and killings were meant move the populace, by demonstrating dissatisfaction with the current political system and inspiring a global uprising against it. Willingly or not, this agenda suited the worldwide press, competing for a mass readership by pricing newspapers very low and printing boldface banner headlines to attract buyers. This business model helped build both the Pulitzer and Hearst newspaper empires in the United States, for example. Each "anarchist" bombing was reported in sensational terms, reaching both the appalled and the inspired, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The next watershed event was the Munich Olympics massacre, an unprecedented opportunity to reach almost a billion viewers from a global stage via television. On September 5, 1972 members of Palestinian group Black September kidnapped 11 Israeli athletes, killing two immediately and holding the remaining nine hostage over two days. Operationally the episode was a disaster for everyone involved, with both a lack of planning by the operatives and abysmal handling of the rescue attempt by the West German police. Threatening to kill a hostage every two hours, Black September demanded the release of 236 prisoners in Israeli jails and five in West Germany in exchange for the Israeli hostages, but its violence failed to compel either of those governments to comply. After 15 hours of negotiations, the bloody outcome was the deaths of all of the Israeli athletes, a West German policeman, and five of the eight Palestinian terrorists (Reeve 2000).

The immediate reaction to the Olympics massacre was global condemnation and revulsion; but the longer-term implications were entirely different. By striking at the Olympics, the Palestinians grabbed a huge publicity opportunity, with hundreds of print, radio, and television journalists broadcasting live to sports fans throughout the world. Horrified observers who condemned the violence also found it impossible not to watch. The image of a masked man pacing on the balcony of the athletes' quarters in the Olympic village, broadcast in real time over television networks, was seared into people's minds. Many for the first time saw the Palestinian people and their plight as a force to be reckoned with. Eighteen months later, Yassir Arafat was invited to address the United Nations, and the

Palestinians gained UN special observer status shortly thereafter. Palestinian nationalism also drew increased revenue and thousands of new recruits in the immediate aftermath of the attack (Hoffman 2006: 67–71).

The Munich Olympics tragedy changed both terrorism and counter-terrorism in subsequent decades. It demonstrated how ill-prepared the Germans had been and led to the establishment of special counter-terrorist units there and in most major countries. It also spawned a wave of copycat terrorist attacks aimed at international publicity throughout the 1970s and well beyond. While direct cause and effect cannot be proven, the Global Terrorism Database shows that the total number of attacks worldwide began to increase in the 1970s, with a sharp uptick in 1978–79 (from 1,526 to 2,661 a 74 percent increase), peaking in 1992 (with more than 5,000 attacks). In other words, overall the number of terrorist attacks globally more than tripled and fatal attacks more than doubled between 1978 and 1992 (LaFree et al. 2015: 28–33, and Global Terrorism Database). (p. 507) Terrorism had failed in Munich, and yet the promotional effect of the operation was seen as an enormous success.

34.3 The Strategies of Terrorist Campaigns

Any objective assessment of the terrorist attacks of 1972 would conclude that both "sides"—the Germans and the Israelis, on the one hand, and the Palestinians on the other—had lost in a big way. Yet the operation was celebrated and copied. This is because terrorism is much more than a dyadic relationship between terrorists and counter-terrorists. Strategies are always broader than tactics because they incorporate longer-term effects and take into account other actors.

The strategies of modern terrorism have evolved over the centuries to suit the vulnerabilities of the states or societies against which they are arrayed. Since the nineteenth century, there have been four major strategies engaged in by terrorist groups to achieve their broad political aims. These strategies, which are sometimes used in combination, provide an overarching logic for a terrorist campaign.

The first and best known is compellence—the use of threats to manipulate or influence another actor to stop doing an unwanted behavior or to start doing something that a group wants it to do. This concept comes directly from the writings of Thomas Schelling, whose notions of coercion and compellence are drawn from economics and are foundational to political science, especially the study of international security (Schelling 1966). Compellence may try to force a state to withdraw from territorial commitments through a strategy of punishment and attrition, to engage in terrorist attacks that make holding the territory so painful that the state abandons it. Most academic researchers agree that terrorists make rational strategic decisions in their campaigns (Crenshaw 1998). The bargaining framework is therefore a natural way for them to look at terrorism. It employs the same structure and methods, rationally matching terrorist means to ends, that academics employ for analyzing state behavior (Enders and Sandler 2006).

American policy-makers have also preferred this approach. Al Qaeda's strategy seemed perfectly suited to a compellence framework, for example, not least because the 9/11 attacks looked exactly like a surprise attack from the air. All of the basic axioms of air power, initially put forth by Italian Guiliot Douhet in *Command of the Air* 1921 and expanded in US nuclear strategy during the Cold War, seemed to be playing out, including the hopeless vulnerability of civilians to attack, the difficulty of effective defense, the benefits of sudden attack, and the need for immediate retaliation (Freedman 1981). Given their deep twentieth-century experience with air power and nuclear strategy, US defense policy-makers found the logic comfortably familiar and transferred it to counter-terrorism. Immediate retaliation even played a role in the Bush administration's mistaken 2003 **(p. 508)** invasion of Iraq, as when National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice warned of the potential for a "smoking gun" to turn into a "mushroom cloud" (Blitzer 2003).

Compellence as a strategy of terrorism at times seems to work. There have been numerous examples, including the US and French withdrawals from Lebanon in 1983, the US withdrawal from Somalia in 1993, and the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. Bin Laden even mentioned Somalia in his public statements and interviews. The heavy focus of most terrorism studies on the anti-colonial struggles of ethno-nationalist groups, along with highly developed quantitative methods drawn from game theory, naturally led to reliance upon bargaining frameworks in analyzing the strategies of terrorism, resulting in many important insights (Enders and Sandler 2006; Kydd and Walter 2006).

But the approach also had its limitations. Terrorist campaigns have employed three other historically proven approaches, all strategies of leverage that maximize a weak hand yet operate very differently from compellence. Its symbolic nature means there are three sides to terrorism: the group, the target state (or states), and the various audiences who are watching. In terrorism, strategy is not just the application of means to ends, because the reactions of the various audiences involved can be a group's means, or its ends, or both.

The first strategy of leverage is provocation, which tries to force a state to react, to *do something*—not a specific policy, but a vigorous action that works against its interests. Provocation was firmly established as a purpose for terrorism during the nineteenth century and was at the heart of the strategy of the Russian populist group *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), for example. *Narodnaya Volya*'s goal was to attack representatives of the tsarist regime so as to provoke a brutal state response and inspire a peasant uprising. Other cases of provocation include the Basque group ETA's early strategy in Spain, the Sandinista National Liberation Front's strategy in Nicaragua, and the FLN's strategy in Algeria (Cronin 2009).

Provocation is a difficult strategy to apply effectively, however, since terrorist attacks often cause a state to behave in ways that no one expects. For this reason, beginning in 1950, terrorist groups targeting strong West European states chose a strategy of provocation less often than their predecessors of the nineteenth century had (Carter 2016/17). Afraid to look weak, policy-makers respond forcefully in the aftermath of an attack in

ways that may alienate their supporters, invigorate the supporters of a terrorist group, draw in third parties (state or non-state), or even catalyze a broader systemic conflict—which is exactly what happened with the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War.

The next strategy, polarization, uses terrorist attacks to affect the domestic politics of a state, trying to divide people and delegitimize governments so it becomes impossible to govern. It often drives regimes sharply to the right, forcing populations to choose between the terrorist cause and brutal state repression, for example. The goal is to set people against each other, fragmenting societies to the extent that it is impossible to maintain a moderate middle within a functioning state. Polarization acts by (p. 509) intimidating neutral civilian populations, preventing them from being uninvolved in a campaign or cause. Sometimes the outcome is a failed state and escalation to a civil war.

Polarization is an attractive strategy against democracies and it appeared often during the twentieth century. But like the strategy of provocation, it results in unintended consequences. Examples include the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland. Terrorist activities in Germany, Austria, and Hungary after the First World War polarized and played a role in the arrival of the Second World War. In the United States, Timothy McVeigh's 1995 Oklahoma City terrorist attack on the Murrah Federal Building (168 killed and more than 600 injured) sought to ignite a white separatist war against the federal government. But the classic example of polarization is the Tupamaros' strategy in democratic Uruguay in the 1960s. They targeted the business community, inciting panic, prompting the Army to take over in 1973 and govern Uruguay for the next 12 years. The terrorist campaign had executed one hostage and assassinated eight counter insurgency personnel; the military regime that came to power "disappeared," tortured, or killed thousands (Cronin 2009: 130–1). In Uruguay a polarization strategy drove the government to destroy itself.

The last strategy of leverage, mobilization, tries to recruit and rally supporters to the cause. Terrorist attacks use the reaction of the state as a means, not an end. The violence may invigorate and energize potential recruits and raise the profile of the group internationally, drawing resources, sympathizers, and allies (Abrahms 2008). The symbolic nature of attacks draws additional attention, even when the terrorist group may be losing a direct confrontation against a stronger state or group of states (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson 2007). This is why, going forward, the most important element of a sustainable terrorist campaign is an effective media operation, including traditional media, social media, and all relevant instantaneous platforms.

The central theme of all of these strategies of terrorism is that they are designed to exploit the vulnerabilities of the types of states against which they are directed. As the state and the international system have evolved, so the strategies of terrorism have followed a historical pattern. Provocation especially suited the nineteenth century, when aging autocratic regimes were struggling to hold on as popular suffrage gained ground. Their brittleness and vulnerability increased the incentives to provoke them as they coped with

growing populist movements, especially in Europe and the United States. Compellence best fit the mid-twentieth century, as it aligned well with nationalist movements whose aims could be expressed in terms of territory. Many newly established postcolonial states (Israel, Algeria, Vietnam) began their fights for independence with terrorist attacks directed against colonial powers such as Britain and France, whose governments had touted self-determination during the Second World War. Polarization was at the heart of Marxist movements in the early twentieth century and it has reappeared now, with terrorist attacks designed to polarize along racial, religious, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, or sectarian lines. And mobilization plays directly into globalization, with its sweeping changes in communication, porous borders, alienation of those left behind, and direct access to violent non-state groups (Cronin, 2002/3).

(p. 510) Terrorist groups do use other approaches in specific situations. These include "spoiling," meaning carrying out terrorist attacks to undermine peace processes, and "outbidding," meaning using attacks to convince potential followers to follow one group instead of another (Bloom 2004). Specific operations can achieve these short-term purposes but they are tactics, not strategies. They aim at process goals (e.g. jockeying with other groups, showing strength, drawing attention, undermining talks, etc.) rather than outcome goals (e.g. changing the governance of a state, redistributing resources, attacking or protecting a racial or ethnic identity, promoting religious identity or values, etc.) (Cronin 2009: 77–82). Likewise, suicide attacks may be employed in the *service* of a strategy; but consciously committing suicide while engaging in violence is a tactic that has been used for millennia by individuals, terrorist groups, insurgencies, and even states (Gambetta 2006; Pape 2006). It is not a strategy of terrorism.

Going forward, the most effective strategies for terrorist groups will be polarization and mobilization, the two that best exploit the intense external and internal pressures on states. On the internal dimension, polarization is already yielding benefits for neo-Nazi and right-wing groups like Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) in Germany, for example, as more than a half million migrants seek asylum there. Even as it lost territory, the so-called Islamic State used the November 2015 attacks at the Bataclan theatre and several cafes in Paris to drive European societies apart and cause a violent backlash. On the external dimension, mobilization via social media provides violent groups with direct access to individuals, be they potential recruits, weak-minded seekers, supporters, thugs, antagonists, or potential victims. Porous borders, criminal networks, human trafficking, and other transnational ties all offer physical routes for violent actors; but mobilization via social media is more instantaneous. If a group is successful at "inspiring" individuals to carry out attacks, then even airtight borders will fail to prevent them. How to counter that kind of threat while preserving the rights and freedoms of all people in a democracy is what we will discuss next.

34.4 Radicalization and Extremism

Polarization is very dangerous to democratic countries. Terrorism often pits values such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and non-discrimination against protecting the lives of potential terrorist victims. It heightens fear even as other types of violence kill far more people. For example, the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that annual firearm mortality (including mass shootings) in the United States is around 30,000, while deaths from terrorist attacks after 9/11 through 2016 (15 years) number fewer than 100. This is the result of robust defenses put into place and tips from local communities—the very communities that are alienated by polarizing political rhetoric in the wake of a terrorist attack. Every death from whatever source is a tragedy. But like good policing, good counter-terrorism always depends upon the cooperation of local communities.

(p. 511) In the absence of tips from friends or neighbors, it is almost impossible for intelligence services to track individuals who have no prior experience or logistical ties yet become “inspired” to engage in one-time attacks at home or abroad. For example, the attacks in Nice, France (July 14, 2016, 84 killed, 303 wounded), Orlando, Florida (June 12, 2016, 49 killed, 53 wounded) and San Bernardino, California (December 2, 2015, 14 killed, 22 wounded) were all committed in the name of the Islamic State yet without any direct logistical ties. In most earlier incidents, there were email connections, phone conversations, or some other kind of evidence of a plot underway. Not so now.

This autonomous pattern of terrorism is not yet well understood, but it will be important in the future. As one approach to protecting the broader community, many academics and policy-makers focus on “radicalization,” or the process whereby a person begins to hold extreme views. In theory, looking at processes of “radicalization” could help prevent terrorist attacks at an earlier stage. But in practice, this framing of human behavior is problematic. Engaging in violence involves not only adopting radical viewpoints but also deciding to act upon them. Whether or not a person orchestrates a terrorist attack depends on social, political, and personal factors that can be idiosyncratic.

Some scholars compare the radicalization process to the complex factors that lead young people to build circles of friends or join gangs (Sageman 2008; Bjorgo 2009). Of course, context matters. At the societal level, belonging to a community that is marginalized, economically disadvantaged, victimized, or discriminated against may increase the likelihood of violence. Anger at political developments or government policies at home or abroad can play a role. Psychological vulnerabilities may also be relevant, including a sense of personal failure, a yearning for individual agency or adventure, deep empathy for victims, or an overwhelming need to belong to something. But beyond generalities, trying to identify who is or is not likely to be radicalized is impossible: well-funded scholars have been trying for years, without success, to build a single coherent “model” of radicalization.

A key focal point is the movement from ideas to action. A vast amount of research, under the burgeoning categories of “counter-radicalization” or “countering violent extremism,”

focuses on understanding how individuals go from adopting extremist ideas to engaging in violence. Scholars and policy-makers tend to divide along the thinking/action line. In the first category are abstract models of cognitive radicalization with a series of stages in the move from curiosity to adoption of an extreme ideology, especially violent radical Islamism (Neumann 2013: 874; Schmid 2013: 23–5). Those who focus on cognitive processes tend to be psychologists or criminologists, emphasizing the broad political and social contexts that contribute to violence. Analysts in the second category stress the point at which extremists cross over into action, via "action pathways" or "behavioral radicalization" for example (Neumann 2013: 875). They tend to be lawyers, political scientists, or security experts, typically focusing upon violent episodes and working backwards.

As with most research on human subjects, cognitive and behavioral explanations are complementary but inadequate. The relationship between human thinking and action is complex. Looking comparatively at recent cases can be misleading and has a selection (p. 512) bias. Studies rarely use randomized controls when they generalize about sources of radicalization, for example, examining why individuals with dangerous ideas decide *not* to act—that is, thinking without acting. Nor do they examine why individuals who lack any coherent internalized political ideology nonetheless cite political extremist groups as the reason they kill—that is, acting without thinking. And the overall number of terrorists who will talk frankly to researchers about their process of radicalization is tiny. There is reason to fear that the radicalization framework is alienating communities who feel as if "countering violent extremism" initiatives are too close to counter-terrorism and just another way to stigmatize them. If today's scholars were to transfer this intellectual approach to familiar cases less fraught with contemporary political bias—such as nineteenth-century Russian social revolutionaries or mid-twentieth-century Western anti-war movements, perhaps—they might see the problem more objectively and abandon the effort to create a single predictive "model" altogether.

Well short of a predictive model, however, there are common vectors in the spread of political violence. The vector can be impersonal access to information, such as Islamic State propaganda on the Internet, or a relationship or tie to someone who is already radicalized, either in person or via social media. There is ample evidence of traditional recruitment through clubs, prisons, or gangs. All of these are potential channels, and none has been sufficiently studied—as Chapter 22 on new geographies of global security explains.

But even they are insufficient in themselves. A final, rarely mentioned yet crucial ingredient for terrorism is knowledge of, or access to, the *means* to act. Going from radical ideas to taking action involves not just a mental or recruitment process but also practical tools and training—another essential dimension of terrorism that is woefully understudied.

34.5 Future Challenges and Opportunities for Terrorism Studies

A key challenge going forward is determining who the audience (or audiences) for a terrorist attack actually is. This is no longer as simple as reading public opinion polls in the place where the attack occurs (e.g. Jordan after the 2005 attacks by al Qaeda in Iraq on three popular hotels), or even in the countries where purported recruits may live (e.g. Muslim-majority countries with respect to al Qaeda). The ubiquity of social media means that individuals can be following a group's activities from anywhere, as is the situation with the so-called Islamic State. Individuals who become "radicalized" appear without the usual trail of plotting and planning that enables intelligence agencies to identify them, much less academics. Indeed, in the age of social media, the group may not even know for sure exactly who its audience is. In this respect, ISIS and al Qaeda echo the anarchists of the nineteenth century, who inspired hundreds of attacks by (p. 513) alienated workers, Irish nationalists, or ill-treated immigrants, individually or in small groups. Many of the "dynamitards" who carried out bombings were angry, inspired, weak-minded, or just desperate for attention and knew next to nothing about anarchist ideas. Yet their killing became associated with the anarchist movement, a global pattern of terrorist attacks that persisted for decades.

Another serious challenge for the analysis of terrorism is the limited historical scope and political depth of most academic studies. All of the major databases are collected and maintained in the United States, a fact that helps explain the geographical bias mentioned at the outset of this chapter. The periods they cover are short and very recent. For example, the ITERATE database begins in 1968, the RAND database begins in 1968, and the Global Terrorism Database begins in 1970 (Sheehan 2011). The Terrorism in Western Europe: Events Data (or TWEED), database does go a few decades earlier to 1950, but it only covers Western Europe. If we consider the age of modern terrorism to have begun in about 1881, with the killing of the Russian tsar kicking off what David Rapoport calls the first wave of terrorism, then more than half of the total period that has elapsed since then (~135 years at this writing) is not included (Rapoport 2004). There is a serious possibility that the period covered by our databases is anomalous—or at least not accurately representative of the phenomenon of terrorism either in the past or the future.

Related to this problem, the focus of the field has shrunk to myopic questions that can be addressed by looking at the data that are available. Academics divide topics for analysis into smaller and smaller fragments so as to permit clear, unchallengeable conclusions. This is understandable for young scholars still trying to prove themselves but it is also true of seasoned writers, who increasingly divide big strategic questions into data-driven fragments. The field is driven by segmentation, looking for example at certain tactics (e.g. suicide attacks, drone strikes), certain types of operatives (e.g. women, children), or certain geographic territories (Afghanistan, Iraq). At the same time, US policy is driven by tactics such as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles ("drones"), the use of special operations raids, or the training of rebel groups (e.g. in Syria). The parallels are striking. Both

academics and practitioners are getting more and more into the weeds, even as terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States are going up, hundreds of thousands of refugees are fleeing the violence, and reality is less and less reflective of our elegant theories. To take one obvious example, neither academics nor practitioners have seriously examined the strategic effectiveness of kinetically attacking terrorism at its source, the idea that led to the military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Syria and Iraq (again) to begin with (Roberts 2015).

A fourth problem is the lack of knowledge of the histories, languages, and cultures of societies that are most affected by terrorism, either producing the violence or absorbing it. The growth in quantitative analyses and databases, as well as a shift to the functional approach to terrorism and counter-terrorism of the past two decades, has given the research much more rigor. But it has also crowded out the seasoned regional experts who lent perspective and expertise regarding local situations. Qualitative comparative analyses across cases are very useful but they must be done in depth. If we are to draw (p. 514) strong conclusions about terrorism as a phenomenon, we must ensure that the research is not based on superficial knowledge of the societies under examination.

Finally, the relationship between terrorism and other types of violence must be examined more carefully in the future. Terrorism is neither a hermetically sealed phenomenon nor the worst type of violence that can occur. Most terrorist groups aspire to engage in types of political violence that are stronger and more effective in achieving their aims, such as insurgency or even conventional war. For example, in 2014 the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria rapidly morphed beyond a terrorist group yet analysts still saw it strictly in that framework (Cronin 2015). Academics who study criminology, insurgency, civil war, and conventional war will have to be more intellectually agile and collaborate more if they are to reflect the future reality of terrorism.

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