Criminals or Crusaders?

Nothing is easier than to denounce the evil doer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him.

Fedor Dostoevsky

KEY CONCEPTS

- crazies
- criminals
- crusaders
- image of the enemy
- image of themselves
- image of the conflict
- image of the victim
- theme of millenarianism
- characteristics of a “successful” terrorist
- fedayeen
- HAMAS
- Provisional Irish Republican Army
- soldiers of the revolution
- al-Qaeda
- Osama bin Laden
- radicalization
- revenge
- renown
- motivation
- group dynamics
- religious fanaticism
- Sicariis
- demographic trends
- Black Widows
- socialization toward violence
- madrassas

What kind of person becomes a terrorist? Perhaps an understanding of the dynamics of becoming a terrorist will increase our understanding of this phenomenon. As noted in Chapter 3, terrorist acts are committed for a wide variety of causes. It is also true that there are a wide variety of individuals and groups who commit terrorist acts.

The political world changed a great deal in the last two decades of the twentieth century. These political changes influenced the type of persons more likely to be recruited into terrorist groups. A study of the type of individuals known to be drawn to terrorism in the twentieth century will, perhaps, help us to predict the most probable type of twenty-first century
terrorist. This could be an extremely useful tool for governments and institutions confronted with the need to plan to cope with terrorism.

PROFILE OF A TERRORIST
Is there any way to tell who is likely to become a terrorist? This question provides a clue as to why political scientists and government officials are particularly interested in the psychological factors relating to terrorism. If one could identify the traits most closely related to a willingness to use terrorist tactics, then one would be in a better position to predict, and prevent, the emergence of terrorist groups.

Unfortunately, identifying such traits is not easy. Just as not all violence is terrorism and not all revolutionaries are terrorists, not all persons who commit acts of terrorism are alike. Frederick Hacker suggests three categories of persons who commit terrorism: crazies, criminals, and crusaders. He notes that an individual carrying out a terrorist act is seldom “purely” one type or the other, but suggests that each type offers some insights into why an individual will resort to terrorism.1

Understanding the individual who commits terrorism is vital, not only for humanitarian reasons, but also to decide how best to deal with those individuals while they are engaged in planning or carrying out terrorist acts. From a law enforcement perspective, for example, it is important to appreciate the difference between a criminal and a crusading terrorist involved in a hostage-taking situation. Successful resolution of such a situation often hinges on understanding the mind of the individuals perpetrating the crime.

Consider the three categories of terrorists suggested by Hacker: crazies, criminals, and crusaders. For the purposes of this study, we need to establish loose descriptions of these three types. Hacker offers some ideas on what is subsumed under each label. Crazies, he suggests, are emotionally disturbed individuals who are driven to commit terrorism “by reasons of their own that often do not make sense to anybody else.”

Criminals, on the other hand, perform terrorist acts for more easily understood reasons: personal gain. Such individuals transgress the laws of society knowingly and, one assumes, in full possession of their faculties. Both their motives and their goals are usually clear, if deplorable, to most of mankind.

This is not the case with the crusaders. These individuals commit terrorism for reasons that are often unclear both to themselves and to those witnessing the acts. Their ultimate goals are frequently even less understandable. While such individuals are usually idealistically inspired, their idealism tends to be a mixed bag of half-understood philosophies. Crusaders, according to Hacker, seek not personal gain, but prestige and power for a collective cause. They commit terrorist acts in the belief “that they are serving a higher cause,” in Hacker’s assessment.
What difference does it make what kind of terrorist is behind the machine gun or bomb? To the law enforcement personnel charged with resolving the hostage situation, it can be crucial to know what type of person is controlling the situation. Criminals can be offered sufficient personal gains or security provisions to induce them to release the hostages. Crusaders are far less likely to be talked out of carrying out their threats by inducements of personal gains, since to do so they would have to betray, in some sense, that higher cause for which they are committing the action.

For the same reason, it is useful for security agents to know what type of individual is likely to commit a terrorist act within their province. A criminal would be more likely to try to smuggle a gun aboard an airline than a bomb, since the criminal usually anticipates living to enjoy the reward of his or her illegal activities. Crusaders are more willing to blow themselves up along with their victims, since their service to that higher cause often carries with it a promise of a reward in the life to come.

The distinction between criminals and crusaders with respect to terrorism needs some clarification. Clearly, when anyone breaks the law, as in the commission of a terrorist act, he or she becomes a criminal, regardless of the reason for the transgression. The distinction between criminal and crusader, though, is useful in understanding the differences in the motives and goals moving the person to commit the act.

The majority of the individuals and groups carrying out terrorist acts in the last decade of the twentieth and the beginning years of the twenty-first century have been crusaders. This does not mean there are not occasional instances in which individuals decide to take a machine gun to the target of their anger. Nor does it mean there are not individual criminals and criminal organizations that engage in terrorist activities.

Nonetheless, it is true that the majority of individuals who commit modern terrorism are, or perceive themselves to be, crusaders. According to Hacker, the typical crusading terrorist appears to be normal, no matter how crazy the cause or how criminal the means used for this cause may seem. He or she is neither an idiot nor a fool. Instead, the crusading terrorist is frequently a professional, well trained, well prepared, and well disciplined in the habit of blind obedience to a cause.

Table 4.1 indicates a few dramatic differences between the types of terrorist Hacker profiles. One is that crusaders are the least likely to negotiate a resolution to a crisis, both because such action can be viewed as a betrayal of a sublime cause and because there is little that the negotiator can offer, since neither personal gain nor safe passage out of the situation is particularly desired by true crusaders. Belief in the cause makes death not a penalty, but a path to reward, therefore, the threat of death and destruction can have little punitive value. What can a police or military negotiator offer to a crusader to induce the release of hostages or the defusing of a bomb?

Similar problems exist with crazies, depending upon how much in touch with reality such an individual is at the time of the incident. Negotiation is difficult but not impossible if the negotiator can ascertain the goal or motive
of the perpetrator and offer some hope (even if it is not real) of success in achieving that goal. One of the critical elements is that crazies, according to Hacker’s evaluation, have a limited grip on the reality that they themselves may die in the course of this action, making the threat of death by a superior force carry diminished weight. Just as very young children find the reality of death a difficult concept to grasp, Hacker suggests that crazies offer serious difficulties for negotiators because they often cannot grasp this reality.

Criminals, then, are the preferred perpetrators, since they will negotiate; their demands are generally logical (although often outrageous) and are based in terms that can be met or satisfied with rational alternatives. Criminals know they can be killed and have a strong desire to live to enjoy the rewards of the actions they are taking. Thus, negotiators have specific demands to be bartered, and their “clients” can be expected to recognize superior force and to respond accordingly in altering demands and resolving the incident.

These differences are critically important in at least two contexts: (1) resolving situations in which hostages are held by terrorists and (2) establishing security measures and training for vulnerable targets. Negotiators in hostage situations need to know whether they are dealing with a crusader or a criminal to know whether there is any potential for negotiation. If crusaders are holding hostages, an immediate hostage rescue attempt may be more appropriate than initiating negotiations.

In terms of security devices and training, the profiles become even more vital. The events of September 11, 2001, illustrate dramatically the consequences of training and equipping for the wrong type of perpetrators. Airline pilots in the United States had been trained to respond to attempts to take over flights as hostage situations. Thus, the pilots of the doomed September 11 flights were engaged in trying to keep the situation calm and to “talk down” the plane, to initiate a hostage release without violence. But the individuals taking over the planes were not criminals or crazies but crusaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Terrorist</th>
<th>Motive/Goal</th>
<th>Willing to Negotiate?</th>
<th>Expectation of Survival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>Personal gain/profit</td>
<td>Usually, in return for profit and/or safe passage</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crusader</td>
<td>“Higher cause” (usually a blend of religious and political)</td>
<td>Seldom, since to do so could be seen as a betrayal of the cause</td>
<td>Minimal, since death offers reward in “afterlife”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazy</td>
<td>Clear only to perpetrator</td>
<td>Possible, but only if negotiator can understand</td>
<td>Strong, but not based on reality</td>
</tr>
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who did not plan to live through the incidents. Only the passengers on the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania were able to offer substantial resistance—perhaps in part because they had not been trained to assume that a peaceful solution could be negotiated.

This does not suggest that the pilots and crew were not vigilant and did not make every effort to save the lives of the passengers. But because the profile they had been trained to respond to did not match the profile they confronted, they were unable to respond successfully to the demands of the situation. Thus, inaccurate profiling in pilot training was a serious contributing factor to the sequence of events on September 11.

To political scientists, as well as to military, police, and other security and intelligence units assigned the task of coping with terrorism, an understanding of the type of person likely to commit acts of terrorism is invaluable. As our understanding of a phenomenon increases, our ability to predict the behavior of its adherents with some accuracy also increases. Thus, as we try to understand who terrorists are and what they are like, we should increase our ability to anticipate their behavior patterns, thereby increasing our ability to respond effectively and to prevent more often the launching of successful terrorist attacks.

**TERRORIST BELIEFS AND IMAGES**

Terrorism has been justified by relatively sophisticated theories, such as anarchism, by less well-defined concepts, such as the right of self-determination, and by religious zealotry. But how do modern terrorists justify themselves, on a personal level, for their actions?

The content of terrorist belief systems has not been the subject for much systematic study. The reasons for this neglect are in some respects understandable. For one thing, the study of terrorism is an emerging field, with increasing emphasis placed today on understanding the view of the world held by those committing acts of terrorism.

Another serious problem in analyzing terrorist belief systems lies in the difficulties in acquiring and interpreting data. Since the initiation of a “war on terror” by the international community, a flood of documents has been recovered about training camps and online meetings of people engaged in terrorist activities although a limited number of “decision makers” from functioning groups engaged in terrorism are available to facilitate a reconstruction of events. Much of the existing data is classified by governments in ways that make it virtually inaccessible to academic researchers.

This does not mean that there are no studies of terrorist belief systems. In 1984, Gerald A. Hopple and Miriam Steiner employed content analysis to evaluate twelve factors as potential sources of action and applied the techniques to forty-six documents from the German Red Army Faction (RAF), the Italian Red Brigades, and the Basque Euzkadi Ta Azkutasuna (ETA). Their findings indicated that emphasis within belief systems changes over
time and that different groups stress different motivations. Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writing and Manuals of al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from Around the World and Throughout the Ages, edited by Walter Laqueur, offers one of the best collections of the words of those willing to engage in terrorism.

Some significant components of terrorist belief systems emerged from these and other studies. A brief review of these, although not sufficient to explain why all terrorists do what they do or believe what they do, will offer insights into the framework of logic by which a terrorist justifies his or her actions.

One of the significant components of a belief system is the image of the enemy. Dehumanization of the enemy is a dominant theme. The enemy is viewed in depersonalized and monolithic terms. It is not human beings whom the terrorist fights; rather, it is this dehumanized monolith.

As one group of researchers noted, for many terrorists, “the enemy is nonhuman; not good enough. He is the enemy because he is not the hero and is not friendly to the hero.” This rationalization is particularly prominent among right-wing terrorists, whether neofascist or religious extremist. Such groups tend toward prejudicial stereotyping based on class, ethnic, or religious attributes.

Making war—even illegal, “unthinkable” war—on an inhuman enemy is easy. As long as that enemy does not have a face, a wife or child, a home, grieving parents, or friends, the destruction of that enemy is a simple matter, requiring little or no justification beyond the enemy status.

Viewing the enemy in these terms also makes depicting the struggle in which the terrorists see themselves as engaged relatively simple. It is a struggle in which good and evil are very obvious. The enemy is often seen as much more powerful in its monolithic strength, with many alternative courses of action from which to choose. The terrorists, on the other hand, have no choice except to resort to terrorism in confronting this “monster,” which becomes, in their view, a response to oppression—not a free choice on their part, but a duty. Osama bin Laden, in his call for a jihad against America, stated, “The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country which it is possible to do it.”

Also of interest in this belief system is the terrorists’ images of themselves. Terrorists of both the left and right tend to think of themselves as belonging to an elite. Most left-wing revolutionary terrorists view themselves as the victims rather than the aggressors in the struggle in which they are engaged—an obligation, a duty, not a voluntary choice—because they are the enlightened in a mass of unenlightened. For the religious zealot, the image tends to be of being chosen by a supreme being to lead the struggle and to be a martyr in confronting the monster that threatens the world of the faithful.
morality, which they often regard as the corrupt and self-serving tool of the enemy. It would clearly be useless to condemn as immoral an action by a terrorist, because it is quite likely that those embracing terrorist tactics have already reached the belief that the morality condemning their action is inferior to their own morality.

This view of morality is integral to the terrorists’ view of the **nature of the conflict** in which they are engaged. Not only is this a moral struggle, in which good and evil are simplistically defined, but terrorists tend to define the struggle also in terms of elaborately idealistic terms. Terrorists seldom perceive what they do as the murder of innocent persons. Instead, they are to describe such actions as executions committed after trials.

Menachem Begin offered insights into this legalistic rationalization. He noted that, in terrorist struggles, “what matters most is the inner consciousness that makes what is ‘legal’ illegal and the ‘illegal’ legal and justified.”

Also of importance in understanding the belief system of terrorists is the **image of the victims** of the violence. If the victims are fairly easily identifiable with the enemy, then as representatives of the hostile forces, they are despised and their destruction is easily justified, even if such victims have committed no clear offense against the terrorist or his group. As Michael Collins, founder of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), noted with reference to the killing of 14 men suspected of being British intelligence agents, such persons were “undesirables . . . by whose destruction the very air is made sweeter.” This remained true, according to Collins, even though not all of the 14 were guilty of the “sins” of which they were accused.

Innocent victims, persons whose only “crime” was in being in the wrong place at the wrong time, are generally dismissed as unimportant by-products of the struggle. Thus, the persons in the airplanes flown into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon were only victims because they were on the wrong flight; those killed in the towers and at the Pentagon were part of the American “monster” against which bin Laden had called for a jihad.

This brings up one last important point about terrorist belief systems: the predominant **theme of millenarianism.** Personal redemption through violent means is a millenarian theme found in many terrorist belief systems. Violence is often viewed as being essential to the coming of the millennium, whose coming may be hastened by the actions of believers willing to violate the rules of the old order in an effort to bring in the new order.

Such beliefs have led to a deliberate abandonment of restraints. Coupled with the tendency to divide the world into clear camps of good and evil, this abandonment of restraints usually entails a strong conviction that no mercy can be shown to the evil that the enemy embodies. Terrorists are wrapped in an impenetrable cloak of belief in the absolute righteousness of their cause and the ultimate success that will inevitably come. If all violence brings the millennium closer, then violence, regardless of its consequences, cannot be regarded as a failure. The terrorist always “wins” in this struggle.

Other elements are common to some terrorist belief systems. Some, for instance, place a premium on martyrdom, suggesting this as a desirable goal.
A statement from the “Ladenese Epistle” illustrates the strength of this commitment to martyrdom:

Those youths know that their rewards in fighting you, the USA, is double than their rewards in fighting some one else not from the people of the book. They have no intention except to enter paradise by killing you.9

Understanding at least these few fundamental elements of terrorist beliefs may facilitate an ability to deal with terrorism in its many forms and to anticipate its future growth patterns. Certainly the modern terrorist appears to hold belief systems very different from those of either soldiers or criminals.

CAN WE GENERALIZE ABOUT A “TYPICAL” TERRORIST?

What do we know about the type of individual who becomes a terrorist? Until recently, with the in-depth coverage given to Osama bin Laden, we had very limited personal data about successful perpetrators of terrorist attacks, because successful terrorists depend upon secrecy for protection. Through the capture of those less efficient in the art of terrorist operations, we have learned some useful information, and our security and intelligence organizations continue to add substantially to that data pool.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to generalize about the “typical” terrorist with any degree of accuracy. The search for a “terrorist personality” is a legitimate exercise, but it is unlikely to produce any common denominator capable of uniting a wide variety of countries, periods of time, cultures, and political alliances. In other words, the community of nations-states is unable, at this point, to agree on such a profile.

As Louise Richardson notes, “the emergence of terrorism requires a lethal cocktail with three ingredients: a disaffected individual, an enabling group, and a legitimizing authority.”10 She points out at least two reasons why it is difficult to generate convincing explanations for terrorism: there are both so many terrorists (since terrorism is a tactic carried out by many different groups in many different locations for many different reasons), and so few terrorists (as religions and social movements have millions of followers, but relatively few are terrorists). She notes that terrorists come from democracies, autocracies, and (more often) transitional or failed states; some come from wealth, others from poverty. Social class and/or political system are not enough to identify “likely” terrorists.

Some scholars suggest that the application of Social Identity Theory (SIT) in terrorism research yields an understanding of the individuals who commit acts of terror that is more comprehensive than the focused study of individuals, since SIT places individuals in a social context. Arena and Arrigo, two scholars who use SIT to study terrorism, suggest that the identity of individuals who engage in terrorism derives from three different sources: personal, social, and group/collective.11 Their studies of five extremist organizations,
including the Provisional Irish Republican Army, HAMAS, the Peruvian Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eclam, lend strength to this theoretical approach, as it helps to explain the roles of individuals within the organizations, as well as the role of the organizations within the culture.

Some scholars have attempted to create a profile of a typical terrorist. Their successes are mixed, at best, but offer some ideas that help us not only to understand what a typical terrorist may be like, but also to evaluate how terrorists and terrorism have changed in recent years.

Edgar O’Ballance offers a critique of what he calls a “successful” terrorist (by which he appears to mean one who is neither captured nor dead). In his book, *The Language of Violence*, O’Ballance suggests several essential characteristics of a “successful” terrorist:

**Dedication.** To be successful, a terrorist cannot be a casual or part-time mercenary, willing to operate only when it suits his convenience or his pocket. He must become a *fedayeen*, a “*man of sacrifice.*” Dedication also implies absolute obedience to the leader of the political movement.

**Personal Bravery.** As a terrorist must face the possibility of death, injury, imprisonment, or torture if captured, O’Ballance regards personal bravery as important, in varying degrees, depending upon one’s position within a terrorist group’s hierarchy.

**Without the Emotions of Pity or Remorse.** Since most victims will include innocent men, women, and children, who must be killed in cold blood, a terrorist must have the killer instinct, able to kill without hesitation on receipt of a code or signal. As this expert notes, many can kill in the heat of anger or in battle, but few can do so in cold blood.

**Fairly High Intelligence.** As a would-be terrorist has to collect, collate, and assess information; devise and put into effect complex plans; and evade police, security forces, and other hostile forces, intelligence appears to be a requisite.

**Fairly High Degree of Sophistication.** This is essential, according to O’Ballance, for a terrorist to blend into the first-class section on airliners, stay at first-class hotels, and mix inconspicuously with the international executive set.

**Be Reasonably Well Educated and Possess a Fair Share of General Knowledge.** By this, O’Ballance means that a terrorist should be able to speak English as well as one other major language. He asserts that a university degree is almost mandatory.

O’Ballance notes that “all terrorists do not measure up to these high standards, but the leaders, planners, couriers, liaison officers, and activists must.”12 This assertion is difficult to challenge effectively, because if the terrorist is successful, then the implication is that he or she has succeeded in evading law enforcement, security, and intelligence officers, and hence the information about the individual is necessarily either scant or unconfirmed.
We could conclude, with some justice, that most of O’Ballance’s assertions are at least half true, half false, and largely untestable. But these generalizations, with their grains of truth, are still useful in analyzing terrorism and terrorist behavior. Let us instead examine each of his suggested attributes of a terrorist to discover whether they can be substantiated by insights into contemporary behavior.

Dedication certainly appears, on the surface, to be characteristic of modern terrorists. Palestinians involved in various groups have indicated a willingness to wait for as long as it takes them to realize their dream of a nation of Palestine. They have been willing to wait as long as the Irgun waited, or longer, and many are reluctant to accept the current peace settlements, because that represents at this point less than full national independence for a nation of Palestine.

The progress toward a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East in the last years of the twentieth century indicated that this tenacity may be a liability to the government established by Yasser Arafat, because Gaza and parts of the West Bank represent only a portion of the land that was Palestine and therefore do not constitute full sovereignty from Israel for the Palestinians, particularly with the Israeli government’s construction of a formidable wall that slices through the West Bank and decimates parts of Palestinian territory. Anger by the Palestinian group now in elected leadership in Gaza, HAMAS, a radical Islamic movement supported throughout the Middle East by Iran, indicates that a significant portion of the Palestinians remains committed to full restoration of Palestine to the Palestinian people. The suicide bombings in this area beginning in 1994, which claimed the lives of innocent men, women, and children and which provoked a harsh response by Israel in the form of attacks that have claimed far more Palestinian lives, have given credence to this absolute resolve.

However, unlike the continuing violence in the Middle East, progress is being made toward a political settlement of the problem in Northern Ireland. Like the situation of Palestine, though, the solution will probably not satisfy all of the truly dedicated terrorists. The willingness of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the organization of radical Irish Catholics committed to the removal of British forces from Northern Ireland and to the unification of Ireland which succeeded the original Irish Republican Army (IRA), to negotiate peace has angered radical elements in the Catholic community. The movement of the British to negotiate with the PIRA openly raised equal anger in militant Protestant groups. As resolution of the dispute between the British and the PIRA was reached and a merging of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland planned, similarly dedicated groups of terrorists determined to force the United Kingdom into retaining sovereignty (thus keeping Protestant control) emerged in the form of the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA.

Such dedication is not always directed at so specific a nationalist cause. The Japanese Red Army (JRA), founded in 1969, describe themselves as soldiers of the revolution, pledged to participate in all revolutions anywhere in the world through exemplary acts. This group was responsible for the massacre of twenty-six tourists at Lod Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. These dedicated revolutionaries
undertook numerous terrorist attacks, many of which, like the Lod Airport massacre, were essentially suicide missions, because escape was scarcely possible.

The dedication of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network—created by bin Laden in the late 1980s to bring together Arabs in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and now engaged in attempting to establish an Islamic Caliphate throughout the world—has also become apparent, as evidence has emerged that most of the attacks generated by this network involved years of preparation. Some of the individuals who carried out the September 11 attacks came to the United States years in advance, slowly and carefully planning each stage of the operation. The dedication involved for those willing to leave home and live for years in the country to be attacked—learning about its airport security systems, taking lessons in order to pilot its airliners, even traveling on the airline’s planes to time and plan each step with accuracy—is clear from the evidence of their activities.

Personal bravery is also a characteristic often attributed to modern terrorists. There are, however, two views of the bravery that terrorists may possess. One might argue that it can scarcely be termed “brave” to use weapons against unarmed and defenseless civilians. The men, women, and children at Lod Airport were wholly unable to defend themselves against the attack of the JRA. Was it “brave” of the JRA to slaughter these innocent and unarmed people?

The opposing view is that to be willing to carry out missions in which one’s own death or imprisonment are inevitable argues no small degree of personal courage. A willingness to give one’s life for a cause has commanded, throughout history, at least a reluctant admiration, even from one’s enemies.

Bravery is a very subjective term. One may feel oneself to be cowardly but be perceived by others to be quite fearless. The audience for one’s deeds is often able to judge one’s bravery only by the commission of the deed and is unaware of the inner doubts or demons that may have driven one to the act.

The question as to whether terrorists who murder innocent persons with the knowledge that their own survival is problematic are brave may never be answered to anyone’s satisfaction. Much depends on the way in which one describes the situation.

According to O’Ballance, a successful terrorist should be without the emotions of pity or remorse. Given the necessity of being able to kill, in cold blood, unarmed and innocent persons, this would appear a reasonable assumption regarding the terrorist personality. Unlike criminals who may kill to prevent being captured or to secure some coveted prize, terrorists must, by the very nature of the act kill persons against whom they have no specific grudge, whose life or death is not really material to their well-being or security.

Hacker states:

Often, the terrorists do not know whom they will hurt, and they could not care less. Nothing seems important to them except they themselves and their cause. In planning and executing their deeds, the terrorists are totally oblivious to the fate of their victims. Only utter dehumanization permits the ruthless use of human beings as bargaining chips, bargaining instruments, or objects for indiscriminate aggression.
Consider the following case: On July 22, 1946, an Irgun team, dressed as waiters, rolled seven milk churns full of dynamite and TNT into the empty Regency Grill of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. At 12:37 p.m., the TNT in the milk cans exploded, creating pressure so great that it burst the hearts, lungs, and livers of the clerks working on the floors above.

Thurston Clarke gives a gruesome description of the fate of the people in the King David Hotel at that time:

In that split second after 12:37, thirteen of those who had been alive at 12:36 disappeared without a trace. The clothes, bracelets, cufflinks, and wallets which might have identified them exploded into dust and smoke. Others were turned to charcoal, melted into chairs and desks or exploded into countless fragments. The face of a Jewish typist was ripped from her skull, blown out of a window, and smeared onto the pavement below. Miraculously it was recognizable, a two-foot-long distorted death mask topped with tufts of hair.

Blocks of stones, tables and desks crushed heads and snapped necks. Coat racks became deadly arrows that flew across rooms, piercing chests. Filing cabinets pinned people to walls, suffocating them. Chandeliers and ceiling fans crashed to the floor, empaling and decapitating those underneath.¹⁴

Ninety-one people died in that bomb blast. Of these, twenty-eight were British, forty-one were Arabs, and seventeen were Jews. Another forty-six were injured.

Listen to the words of the person who commanded this attack:

There is no longer any armistice between the Jewish people and the British administration of Eretz Israel which hands our brothers over to Hitler. Our people are at war with this regime—war to the end.¹⁵

Was this bombing the deed of a fanatic, a person who could murder many innocent people in cold blood in this “war to the end”? Certainly it would seem the case.

Yet the perpetrator of this atrocity, the man responsible for the terrible destruction of 91 lives, was Menachem Begin, who in the 1970s served as prime minister of Israel. The Irgun terrorist who plotted to destroy the hotel was the same man who, working with President Jimmy Carter of the United States and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, made significant efforts to move Israel on the road to peace with its Arab neighbors, signing the famous Camp David Accords, bringing a measure of peace between Israel and Egypt.

Just as there is no safe generalization with regard to the personal bravery of terrorists, so there seem pitfalls in making too broad a characterization of a terrorist as incapable of pity or remorse. Perhaps of all that O’Ballance had to say about this particular aspect of a terrorist’s characteristics, it is accurate only to say that terrorists appear to have an image of the enemy that allows them to be willing to use lethal force.
The characteristics that O’Ballance suggests of sophistication and education are less true of post-1970s terrorists than they were of terrorists prior to that time. Many nineteenth-century revolutionary terrorists were indeed intelligent, sophisticated, university educated, and even multilingual. Those responsible for the murder of Czar Alexander II of Russia in March 1881 were men and women who possessed a much higher level of education and sophistication than most other young people of their nation.

Similarly, the Tupamaros of Uruguay were primarily composed of the young, well-educated liberal intellectuals who sought, but never fully gained, the support of the masses. The Baader-Meinhof gang in West Germany, which terrorized that nation throughout the 1970s, was also composed of middle- and upper-class intellectuals. This gang’s master strategist was Horst Mahler, a radical young lawyer, and it drew its membership and support system heavily from the student body of German universities.

The founder of one of Italy’s first left-wing terrorist bands, the Proletarian Action Group (GAP), was Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, the heir to an immense Milanese fortune and head of one of Europe’s most distinguished publishing houses. Like the Red Brigades, which would succeed this group as Italy’s leading left-wing terrorist group, the GAP drew much of its initial membership from young, often wealthy, intellectuals.

Terrorists, in fact, tended to be recruited from college campuses until the 1980s. Many came from well-to-do families, so that sophistication and an ability to mix with the international set were well within their grasp. Intelligence, sophistication, education, and university training: not only the leaders but also many of the practitioners of both nineteenth-century anarchism and contemporary terrorism possessed these attributes.

But standards and modes of behavior among terrorists as we move forward in the twenty-first century are changing. The French anarchists did not abduct children and threaten to kill them unless ransom was paid. The Narodnaya Volya did not send parts of their victims’ bodies with little notes to their relatives as the right-wing Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity did. Neither French nor Russian anarchists tormented, mutilated, raped, and castrated their victims, as too many terrorist groups have done in the latter part of the twentieth century. The Baader-Meinhof would not have flown passenger airlines into the World Trade Center, killing thousands.

As Walter Laqueur pointed out:

Not all terrorist movements have made a fetish of brutality; some have behaved more humanely than others. But what was once a rare exception has become a frequent occurrence in our time.16

According to Laqueur, the character of terrorism has undergone a profound change. Intellectuals, he contends, have made “the cult of violence respectable.”

Nevertheless, Laqueur is correct in his assertion that the terror of recent decades is different. Modern terrorists are significantly different; the type of person becoming a terrorist today has a great deal to do with the difference
in terrorism. No “profiling” of a terrorist can be complete without factoring in an individual analysis of modern terrorist leaders and followers, even if such analysis must be general, with specific examples, rather than comprehensive examples.

**INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS: WHY DOES SOMEONE BECOME A TERRORIST TODAY?**

Based on psychological literature and countless interviews with terror suspects and those imprisoned for the crimes, Richardson suggests that there are three essential points that stand out in analysis of why individuals become terrorists today: simplicity, identification, and revenge. Let us explore each of these motivations to better understand the important *why* of individual terrorist action. In terms of counterterrorism, it is essential to understand *why* a particular action is chosen by an individual, if one is intending to accurately predict such actions, thereby making prevention and/or response to such actions possible. Understanding does not connote sympathy or justification, but it can make prevention and response much more feasible for the general public as well as for those charged with securing public safety. Linking the “causes” discussed in Chapter 3 with the “who” of the profiles in this chapter makes the picture of modern terrorism more easily understood.

**Simplicity**

Individuals carrying out acts of terrorism tend to see themselves as engaged in a struggle of good against evil, right against wrong. This oversimplified view of the world allows them to blame their adversaries for all of their problems, as the “you are evil” discussion from Chapter 3 suggests. This view helps them to see themselves as defenders, not aggressors; as altruistic, not terrorists. Mark Juergensmeyer notes in his interview with Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, one of the founders of HAMAS, that this leader stated: “You think that we are the aggressors. That is the number one misunderstanding. We are not: we are the victims.” Osama bin Laden frequently described the world and the struggle in which he was engaged in simplistic terms, asserting that, “The truth is the whole Muslim world is the victim of international terrorism, engineered by America and the United Nations.” Simplicity of worldview, then, is one vital aspect of individual motivation toward terrorism.

**Identification**

Identification with others is frequently cited by both leaders and followers in conversations about the commission of terrorist acts. A report prepared by the New York Police Department’s (NYPD) Intelligence Division suggested that the process of *radicalization*, or *socialization toward politically violent ex-
tremism and terrorism, has four stages: preradicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization. While this report focuses on the attacks in the West (those carried out in London and Madrid as well as those prevented in Canada and the United States) by Islamic radicals, similar studies of such radicals living in the Middle East suggest similar phases of development.

The “identification” stage of this process is important, because it transitions the individual, who may have initially been simply feeling a bit marginalized and unhappy with his or her current social system. As the FBI director noted in his remarks in June 2006,

Radicalization often starts with individuals who are frustrated with their lives or with the politics of their home governments . . . Some may be lonely or dissatisfied with their role in society. Others may have friends or mentors who encourage membership for social reasons . . . Once a person has joined an extremist group, he or she may start to identify with an ideology—one that encourages violence against a government and its citizens. They may become increasingly isolated from their old lives, drift away from family and friends, and spend more time with other members of the extremist group.

Group identity, then, is regarded as a critical phase of the radicalization process, by which individuals become willing to carry out terrorist acts. Not everyone who joins a group carries out a terrorist act, but identification lends strength to the individual’s motivation, as interviews and memoirs of those who have carried out such acts suggest.

As Richardson notes, “terrorist group leaders have told similar stories of being radicalized by identifying with the suffering of others.” For example, Omar Sheikh, a British citizen who became a radicalized member of the Pakistani group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), was convicted of the murder of Daniel Pearl, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal in Pakistan in 2002. Sheikh wrote that, while he was a student at the London School of Economics in 1992, he observed the film, The Death of a Nation, depicting the murder of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs, which he claimed began his “political awakening” and eventual radicalization. His story of radicalization by identification with the suffering of others is similar to that of Abimael Guzman, academic leader of Peru’s militant group, the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), who “saw the fighting spirit of the people during the uprising in Arequipa in 1950.”

Not only intellectual leaders of groups are radicalized toward terrorism by the force of identity with a group. Accounts of Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland who became radicalized by the sight of neighbors injured in bombs detonated by the Catholic-based IRA in Northern Ireland parallel similar stories of IRA members being radicalized by being driven from their homes by Protestant mobs. Identity with a group of one’s faith that is experiencing violent attacks obviously can foster a willingness to carry out acts of violence in support of the group under attack.
Identity, then, is not dependent upon actually being victimized by attackers. The “self-identification” referred to in the NYPD analysis suggests that this is an intentional act of identification, rather than the outgrowth of natural socialization processes; a choice, rather than an accident of fate. As suggested in Chapter 3, alienation and desocialization make individuals vulnerable to the impact of a strong group identity.

According to sociologists, the need for “identity” is critical for mankind. Individuals who are impacted by forces of globalization that threaten or challenge their identity (such as migration to another culture, without assimilation into that culture; loss of traditional norms, jobs, or opportunities; the breaking down of communities as cultures mesh and clash) are vulnerable to this need for identity and today can easily “identify” with groups they may never meet whose needs are depicted daily on the news and the Internet. As the NYPD report makes clear, the identification with a group often occurs today on the Web, rather than in the more tangible personal interaction of group meetings.

Revenge

The identification with the suffering of others is often linked with the desire to avenge the “wrongs” done to those in the identity group. Renato Curcio, the intellectual leader of the Italian group the Red Brigades, asserted that he was “converted” to violence and terrorism in response to an incident in which the Italian police fired on farmworkers, killing some adults and injuring several children. Certainly many of bin Laden’s speeches were laden with calls for, and claims to, vengeance against the United States. Shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, he stated on Al Jazeera television:

America has been filled with horror from north to south and east to west, and thanks be to God that what America is tasting now is only a copy of what we have tasted. Our Islamic nation has been tasting the same for more than 80 years, humiliation and disgrace, its sons killed and their blood spilled, its sanctities destroyed.25

Richardson suggests that combined desire for revenge, renown, and reaction are important elements of the profile of modern terrorism. These are, she suggests, short-term goals of the followers of terrorist movements, while the leadership of such movements generally seeks long-term goals that include philosophical or political aspirations.26 This point is important if we are trying to profile modern terrorists. The rank and file will seek revenge, in the form of inflicting suffering on those responsible for causing or allowing suffering to occur on their identifying group of people, and perhaps renown, often gauged in terms of making headline news around the world. They will seldom, however, link the success of their “mission” or attack in terms of reaction, or the forcing of political or philosophical change to occur. That measure, if it is used at all, is applied by leaders seeking long-term goals by the commission of multiple short-term, focused actions.
Individuals today have become more radicalized and therefore more likely to carry out terrorist acts as they assimilate a very simple view of their world as being full of good and evil, as they identify with a group they consider “good” in the conflict of good with evil in this world, and as they seek to “right” the “wrongs” that are inflicted on their people of identity. The processes of globalization, desocialization, dislocation within systems, and forced relocation into refugee communities have intensified the radicalization of individuals today.

TERRORISM IS DIFFERENT TODAY
Terrorism today is different from terrorism that occurred in previous centuries. While there are many types and levels of changes that have evolved in terrorism, we will explore some of the most significant changes in terms of understanding contemporary terrorism: aims or goals, group dynamics, religion, demographic changes, and socialization patterns. Each offers useful insights into modern terrorist activity.

Aims or Goals
Part of the difference between terrorism as it occurred in previous generations and modern terrorism lies in the motivation that drives individuals to embrace terrorism. Walter Laqueur summed up the situation very well in the 1980s:

Whatever their motives may be, the “ardent love of other” which Emma Goldman observed is not among them. The driving force is hate not love, ethical considerations are a matter of indifference to them and their dreams of freedom, of national and social liberation are suspect. Nineteenth-century nationalist terrorists were fighting for freedom from foreign domination. More recently, appetites have grown, the Basques have designs on Galicia, the Palestinians not only want the West Bank but also intend to destroy the Jewish state, and the IRA would like to bomb the Protestants into a united Ireland. The aims of terrorism, in brief, have changed, and so have the terrorists.27

In the twenty-first century, a less-than-clear political purpose seems involved in much of the terrorism perpetrated. Although idealism, a social conscience, or hatred of foreign oppression can serve to drive one to commit acts of terrorism, so can boredom, mental confusion, and what psychologists term “free-floating aggression.”

What difference does it make whether terrorism is committed by social idealists or persons suffering from free-floating aggression? We could speculate that a social conscience would be more likely to inhibit a perpetrator from using indiscriminate violence against the unprotected masses. Perhaps mental confusion contributes to an inability to recognize limits on the use of terror-violence.
Criminals or Crusaders?

Terrorists of the twenty-first century appear more willing to use weapons of mass destruction than terrorists of preceding decades, perhaps because more states have used such weapons in internal wars in recent years. Iraq’s use of cyanide gas on the Kurds in Halabja in March 1988 dramatically illustrated the willingness of states to use such weapons. Thus, the news that al-Qaeda tested an air dispersal mechanism for cyanide, although a chilling thought, should hardly be surprising. If states, which set the norms that limit the use of such weapons, are using these weapons openly against their own citizens, then individuals engaged in terrorist acts can scarcely be expected to continue to refrain from the use of such weapons.

Group Dynamics

Before considering demographic information that might help to substantiate and explain the differences, let us first consider the impact of the terrorist group upon the terrorist. Group dynamics, forces of group behavior that help to shape terrorist thought and action, must certainly be understood in order to comprehend the contemporary terrorist.

Modern terrorists are for the most part fanatics whose sense of reality is distorted. They operate under the assumption that they, and they alone, know the truth and are therefore the sole arbiters of what is right and what is wrong. They believe themselves to be moralists to whom ordinary law does not apply, because the law in existence is created by immoral people for immoral purposes.

They are not, however, consistent in their logic. For example, terrorists demand, when captured, that governments treat them as prisoners of war, as they are involved in a war against either a specific government or society in general. But terrorists vehemently deny the state’s right to treat them as war criminals for their indiscriminate killing of civilians. In other words, they invoke the laws of war only in so far as they serve their purposes, but reject any aspect of such laws that limit their ability to kill at will.

Two other points should be made with respect to understanding the impact of group dynamics on the contemporary terrorist. The first point is relatively simple and involves what seems like a truism. The less clear the political purpose that motivates terrorism, the greater its appeal is likely to be to unbalanced persons. A rational individual will be more likely to require a clear purpose for the commission of an extraordinary act. Thus an irrational mind is more likely to accept the appeal of an act with an unclear political purpose.

Contemporary terrorism has significantly less clear political purpose than terrorism of earlier centuries. Thus, it seems fair to say that a larger proportion of contemporary terrorists may well be less rational persons, making the ultimate goals they are seeking more difficult to articulate. This certainly makes counterterrorism more difficult, as it will be increasingly unclear what political motives and goals are behind the acts of individuals plotting to carry out terrorist attacks.
The second point relates to what psychologists term group dynamics. If it is true that a terrorist’s sense of reality is distorted as discussed earlier in the context of terrorist images, then the greater the association the terrorist enjoys with his or her group of fellow terrorists, the greater that distortion will be. In other words, the more an individual perceives his or her identity in terms of a group of fellow terrorists, the less he or she will be able to see the world as it really is. For the terrorist who is a member of a close-knit organization, reality is defined by the group.

Thus, conventional moral and legal constraints have little meaning to an individual deeply involved in a terrorist group. The group determines for itself what is moral and what is legal. An individual who has just joined the group may be able to perceive the difference between what the group and society declare to be morally or legally justified. The longer the individual remains with the group or the more strongly he or she identifies with the norms of the group, the less the individual is able to see the difference between reality, and “reality” as it is defined by the group.

The strength of the individual’s acceptance of the group’s definition of reality is particularly evident in situations in which terrorism has been a significant part of the culture for several generations. In Northern Ireland, for instance, young people have been “brought up to think of democracy as part of everyday humdrum existence, but of recourse to violence as something existing on a superior plane, not merely glorious but even sacred.”

Religious Fanaticism

Certainly religious fanaticism, religious advocacy that involves a pattern of violently and potentially deadly opposition to anyone perceived as not in agreement with the faith, is today as strong a motivator for the commission of terrorism as it has been in previous centuries. The holy war waged by some Muslims on Christians and fellow Muslims is no less violent than that waged during the Middle Ages. The mixture of political and religious fanaticism has always been a volatile and often violent combination.

Consider the case of the individual who commits terrorism as a member of a fanatic religious group. Religions, as a rule, offer their own versions of reality, as well as a promise of reward for conformity to the norms of that reality. The reward is usually promised for a future time, when the present reality has passed away.

Thus, religious zealots committing an act of terrorism are assured by their religious leaders that their acts are acceptable to a higher morality. They are reinforced in their belief that what they are doing is right by the approval of their fellow zealots. Further, religious fanatics are assured of immortality and a suitable reward if they should die in the commission of the act of terrorism.

It would be difficult if not impossible to persuade such persons out of their beliefs. Little could be offered to such persons as an inducement to discontinue the acts of terrorism. What reward can compete with the promise of immortality, approval by one’s peers, and religious sanctification?
Obviously, the dynamics of some groups are much more powerful than those of others whose reward system and expensive spiritual support system is less organized or persuasive. Certain types of terrorists are, thus, much more difficult to deal with on a rational basis due to this ability of a group to distort reality.

Like some of the earliest forms of terrorism, terrorists in the twenty-first century are increasingly motivated by religious zealotry, seeking not only to change a political system but also to purify a religious community. Seeing themselves as called upon to engage in a holy war against infidels who threaten their faith, these modern zealots have begun to have an impact not enjoyed by their predecessors of earlier times. The Sicarii, dagger-wielding Jewish zealots of ancient Rome who sought to provoke an apocalyptic confrontation between Rome and the Jewish nation, and the Assassins (noted in Chapter Two) who tried to purify the Muslim community by assassination in order to hasten the arrival of the Imam—the heir of the Prophet, who would establish a new and just society—had either a negative or at best a relatively insignificant impact on the growth of their faith community.

Modern religious zealots emerging today have been able to seriously impact both political systems and the strength of faith communities in their movement toward holy wars. Extremists carrying out terrorism—by the state, by groups, or by individual suicide bombers—are making the emergence of a political state of Palestine and the survival of the state of Israel problematic. Religious leaders in several countries in the Middle East advocate instructing the very young to commit themselves to religious fanaticism, which makes peace in that region unlikely. Religiously inspired terrorists carried out the attacks of September 11 and impeded the rebuilding of both Afghanistan and Iraq with calls for a holy war to purify and protect a faith community. Clearly, religious motivation for terrorism today has not only increased but is also becoming more successful.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Some demographic trends in recruitment and membership in modern terrorist affiliations offer clues as to who is currently becoming a terrorist. While this falls short of providing a precise profile of a modern terrorist, it does yield insights into not only who modern terrorists are, but also the impact of such a demographic configuration on contemporary terrorism.

Age

Terrorism is not only a pursuit of the young. In the late 1970s and 1980s, it became a pursuit of the very young. Although terrorists during the time of the Russian anarchists tended to be at least in their mid-twenties, during the two decades in the late twentieth century, the average age steadily decreased. During the turbulent 1960s, many terrorists were recruited from college
campuses throughout the Western world. This brought the average age down to around twenty; the leaders were several years older, often in their early thirties.

As early as the spring of 1976, however, evidence of a change in the age level of terrorists began to emerge. Arrests of Spanish ETA members revealed a number of youths in their teens. In Northern Ireland, some of the terrorists apprehended were as young as twelve to fourteen.\(^ \text{29} \)

Today, although the majority of active terrorists are in their twenties, there has been a tendency, particularly among groups in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa, to recruit children of fourteen or fifteen years of age. These children are used for dangerous, frequently suicidal missions, partly because their youth makes them less likely to question orders and partly because their extreme youth makes them less likely to attract the attention of the authorities.

One explanation of this phenomenon is that the anarchistic-revolutionary philosophy that had begun to infiltrate the province of university students has begun to infiltrate the secondary school level, but this is a less persuasive explanation. Instead, researchers note the increasing level of media violence, access to weapons, development of satanic cults, and other sociological phenomenon are more likely to be found in young people today than in earlier decades.

Although these social patterns may explain part of this demographic trend, another explanation may lie in the number of children growing up in cultures in which violence is a way of life. In the Middle East and in Northern Ireland, for instance, children growing up in violent community struggles easily become a part of terrorist activities spanning successive generations within the same family. Children were thus recruited, not by philosophy learned at university or secondary school, but by the dogma and lifestyles of their parents.

However, by the 1990s, this trend became less clear, as peace within at least one of these regions came closer to reality. Religious fanaticism is still a highly motivating factor compelling young teenagers into roles as suicide bombers; yet, studies of groups such as HAMAS and Ansar al-Islam indicate most members are closer in age to the early 1970s terrorist profile. The individuals responsible for the bombing of the Pan Am flight over Lockerbie and those involved in either the 1993 bombing or the dramatically more successful 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City were certainly not twelve or thirteen years of age!

One pattern remains relatively consistent among groups engaging in terrorism from all regions of the world: leaders tend to be older than followers. While the leaders of European groups continue to be younger than their counterparts in Latin America, they are still older than their followers. This age difference is important in the context discussed earlier concerning goals, as the long-term leader goals of significant political or social change may not always mesh with those of the short-term revenge goals of the followers.
Education

Until the mid-1970s, most of the individuals involved in terrorism were well educated. Almost two-thirds of the people identified as terrorists were persons with some university training, university graduates, or postgraduate students. Among the Tupamaros, for example, about 75 percent of their membership were very well educated, and of the Baader-Meinhof organization in West Germany, the figure reached almost 80 percent.

In the Palestinian groups, most members were university students or graduates, frequently those who, by virtue of their middle-class wealth, had been able to study at foreign universities. This group became an important recruiting pool for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Indeed, George Habash, the chief of the PFLP for decades, was a medical doctor who obtained his degree abroad.

Marc Sageman, who researched the biographies of 172 members of al-Qaeda, found that 60 percent had gone to college; several had doctorates. Peter Bergen’s study of the background of seventy-five Islamic terrorists responsible for the most damaging attacks in recent history indicated that more than half had attended college, and two had doctorates from Western universities, while two others were working on their PhDs.

But the level of education of the terrorist “followers” in many other groups is declining today, partly because of the trend in recruitment age of the last two decades of the twentieth century already noted. If young people are being recruited out of secondary school rather than out of college, then the number of individuals in terrorist groups with college educations will necessarily decline as well.

This trend brings with it another important decline: a diminishing of the understanding by the rank and file among terrorists of the political, religious, and social philosophies that motivated the groups to adopt terrorist activities. As a rule, elementary school children are unable to grasp the impetus of Marxist philosophy toward social revolution. Unlike the college students of the 1960s who studied and at least half-understood radical political philosophies, today’s new terrorist recruits are fed watered-down versions of Marx and Lenin, radicalized religious dogma, and other distortions that they are not able to challenge effectively.

Economic Status

During the 1960s, many young people joined terrorist organizations as a way of rejecting the comfortable, middle-class values of their parents. Often children of parents who could afford to send them to private colleges, they were rejecting the comparative wealth of their surroundings to fight for justice for those less fortunate.

Today’s terrorist followers tend to be drawn more from the less fortunate than from comfortable middle-class homes. Although some come from families who have had wealth, most are from absolute destitution, individuals for whom terrorism represents the only way to lash out at society’s
injustices. In the terrorist group, these individuals find a collective wealth and ability to improve one’s financial situation that is enormously appealing to the impoverished.

Again, Abu Nidal provides insight into the change in the economic circumstances of the type of person who becomes a terrorist today in many parts of the world. Nidal, born Sabri al-Banna, was the son of wealthy Palestinian parents who lost everything. From the lap of luxury, his family moved into the extreme poverty of refugee camps. The bitterness and frustration of a life of endless poverty and statelessness may well have been the catalyst for the terrorist he was to become.

Leaders of groups today, however, are increasingly emerging from middle-to upper-class families. Mohammed Atta, the leader of the al-Qaeda team that carried out the September 11 attacks, was the son of an Egyptian lawyer and had himself earned a doctorate in urban planning. Sageman’s study of al-Qaeda members indicated that about two-thirds of them were from middle-or upper-class families, findings supported by Gilles Keppel’s studies of 300 Islamic militants, who were from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.32

Osama bin Laden clearly illustrates this trend in economic status. The son of a multimillionaire who inherited substantial wealth, bin Laden was similar to the terrorists of the 1970s, rejecting a life of wealth and perceiving himself as fighting on behalf of those victimized by the very economic system from which his family benefited. This emergence from a background of privilege to identify intensely with and eventually lead a group perceived (by its leaders) to be “victimized” is similar to that of Raúl Sendic, one of the founders of the Tupamaros in Uruguay.

**Gender**

During the earlier part of the twentieth century, the leaders of terrorist cadres included some women among their numbers, but the rank and file was usually predominantly male. In many such groups, women were assigned the less life-threatening roles of intelligence collection, courier, nurse or medical personnel, and maintenance of “safe houses” for terrorists on the run.

Terrorism of the late twentieth century, however, was an equal opportunity employer. The commander of the JRA for years, Fusako Shigenobu, was a woman, and of the fourteen most wanted West German terrorists in 1981, ten were women. Studies show that female members of terrorist groups have proved to be tougher, more fanatical, more loyal, and they have a greater capacity for suffering. In some terrorist groups, women on average tended to remain members longer than men.

One example of the difference in the roles played by women in terrorism today is a pregnant woman who was given the task of carrying a suitcase loaded with explosives aboard an airplane in the 1980s. Only a few decades ago, she would have been, at best, allowed to provide a safe haven for the man entrusted with that task. This is not to suggest that this is in any way “progress,” but it does indicate a difference in the role women now play in
terrorism. Indeed, women as suicide bombers is becoming an increasingly common role today in troubled areas, as Case Study 4.1 indicates.

**Case Study 4.1  THE BLACK WIDOWS**

This group of women, known as *Chyornyye Vdovy* in Russia, originated in 2000 in Chechnya and operates primarily in this region. Its first terrorist attack was carried out by Khava Batayeva, a young woman who was a suicide bomber attacking a Russian military base in June of 2000, killing three soldiers and injuring five others. The actual size and membership of this group is unclear, as the Russian media dubs any woman who carries out a suicide bombing in Russia a “Black Widow.” Most of the women known to belong to this group lost their husbands in the Chechen wars against the Russian Federation. Reports suggest that many of the women were encouraged by other Chechen separatists to carry out suicide bombings as a last resort, a final act of defiance in the wars that had cost them their marriage partners.

Reports from the Russian government indicate that this group has caused extensive damage, resulting in the deaths of several hundred Russians, with about 150 killed in the summer of 2003 alone. The Global Terrorism Database 2 suggests that the Black Widows will undoubtedly continue to gain recruits as the reservoir of widowed Chechen women grows commensurate with the death of rebel Chechen fighters.

**DISTURBING PATTERNS OF SOCIALIZATION**

Although the trends in recruitment of individuals into terrorist acts offer insights into the demographics of groups engaged in terrorism today, there are several more disturbing patterns also emerging. Many individuals who engage in terrorist acts share either a lack or a rejection of the desire for a peaceful society. Among many groups, too, is an emerging and violent antipathy toward Western cultures. When these two factors combine with religious fanaticism, the potential for escalating terrorism against Western targets by individuals and groups who share a common enemy and even a common religious motivation easily becomes a holy war of immense proportions.

**Socialization toward Violence**

Intellectuals have, during the past few decades, helped to make the cult of violence respectable. But for today’s terrorists there has been socialization toward violence in ways never before experienced in civilized society. Intellectual terrorists of the 1960s were, for the most part, first-generation terrorists. Today we see an increasing number of third- and even fourth-generation terrorists. Young people recruited in such circumstances have been socialized to accept violence as a normal pattern of life. Peace, as much of the rest of the world knows it, has no meaning for them, and the related values of a civilized society have equally little relevance in their lives.
This pattern of successive generations of terrorism produced terrorists in Northern Ireland and parts of the Middle East who had no understanding of the kind of limits on the use of violence regarded by much of the world as fundamental until the peace efforts of the 1990s. The successful use of violence offers a means of security and enhancement of oneself and one’s family.

This role of violence is made vividly clear in remarks made by the Reverend Benjamin Weir, a former U.S. hostage, held by terrorists in Lebanon in the 1980s. He suggested that for many Lebanese youths the only employment open to them that offered both an income and some form of security for their families was with one of the warring militia factions. Life as a terrorist was, in some respects, the only alternative for many young people in that war-torn country.

**Alienation toward Western Systems**

Globalization has left at least 20 percent of the world’s population completely stranded, alienated, and desperate, without hope of catching a ride on the accelerating economic train led by the West. Terrorism and violent religious fundamentalism, however complex their causes, grow well in the soil of poverty and hunger. For people who struggle to feed their families and feel left behind by economic globalization, the call to radicalism is powerful. More than 800 million people globally are chronically undernourished, a condition with devastating consequences for their health and for the welfare of their communities. The poverty and hunger in the developing nations threaten social and political stability, while providing fertile ground for those who want to blame the Western governments for these conditions.

Clearly, many who responded to bin Laden’s call for holy war against the United States were among those stranded and alienated by the Western-led pattern of globalization. Not only did the poverty and hunger breed resentment of those who appear to enjoy so much of the world’s wealth, but the presence of the West, particularly the United States, in the Middle Eastern region provided a focus for the anger. When the U.S. presence could be described as desecrating the holy sites of Islam, then the fires of religious zeal could be added to the desperation of poverty and hunger, creating a lethal combination.

**Case Study 4.2  OSAMA BIN LADEN**

Mastermind of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the alleged architect of the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen, Osama bin Laden is perhaps the world’s best known terrorist. A brief review of his life to date offers interesting insights into the profile of this modern crusader terrorist.

Osama, which means “young lion,” in Arabic, was born on March 10, 1957, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His family moved to Medina when he was six months old, later dividing their time between Jeddah and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.
At seventeen, bin Laden married a Syrian relative (the first of his four wives) and soon began his studies at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, receiving his degrees in economics and public administration in 1981. At the university, bin Laden became acquainted with both the Muslim Brotherhood and the leading teachers in Islamic studies, Abdullah Azzam and Muhammad Qutb. Both of these men would influence bin Laden’s life significantly. Azzam would eventually create the first contemporary international jihadist network, and Qutb was the brother of Sayyid Qutb, author of *Signposts*, the key text of the jihadist movement.

Bin Laden absorbed Sayyid’s writings with intensity; indeed, they shaped the way he saw the world and his role in it. Sayyid Qutb suggested that the way to establish the Islamic order desired by true Muslims is through an offensive jihad against the enemies of Islam, whether they be non-Islamic societies or Muslim societies that are not following the precepts of the Koran. As one scholar notes, “This is the ideological underpinning of bin Laden’s followers, who target not only the West but also such rich Muslim regimes as Saudi Arabia, which they regard as apostates.”

In the middle of his studies of these writings, the Muslim world was undergoing a period of substantial change. In 1979, the shah of Iran was overthrown and a Muslim state under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini came to Tehran. Egypt and Israel signed a peace agreement in March of that year; in November, hundreds of armed Islamic militants seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca; and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in late December.

Muslims from around the world were drawn to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Rob Schultheis, one of the few journalists who covered this largely ignored war, called it “the holiest of wars,” as the Afghans rose up under the banner of Islam to drive the infidels out and to stop the carnage, which ultimately cost more than a million Afghan lives and displaced at least another five million.

Bin Laden, then twenty-two, headed to Pakistan to meet with the Afghan leaders who were calling for support from the Muslim world. He then returned home to Saudi Arabia to lobby his family and friends for support of the mujahideen. During the next few years, he made several trips to Afghanistan, taking hundreds of tons of construction machinery from his family construction business, which he made available to the mujahideen to build roads, dig tunnels into the mountains for shelter, and build simple hospitals for the wounded.

Having lost his deeply religious father at a very early age, bin Laden was influenced throughout his life by older religious men, often radicals, but always men of strong faith. He told a Pakistani journalist that his father “was very keen that one of his sons should fight against the enemies of Islam,” and he clearly saw himself as fulfilling his father’s wishes.

Bin Laden’s contribution to the Afghan war was primarily in terms of fundraising and the intensity with which he advocated support for the mujahideen. Like most Afghans who fought in the war, the significance of their interaction lay in the lessons they learned from it, the network that emerged from contact with militants from dozens of countries, and the indoctrination in the most extreme ideas of jihad. All received at least some military training, a little battlefield experience, and went home to continue this jihad on another front.
CHAPTER FOUR

The war in Afghanistan profoundly affected bin Laden in what he viewed as a spiritual rather than a political or military context. In an interview with CNN, he stated:

I have benefited so greatly from the jihad in Afghanistan that it would be impossible for me to gain such a benefit from any other chance. . . . What we benefited from most was [that] the glory and myth of the superpower was destroyed not only in my mind, but also in [the minds] of all Muslims.\textsuperscript{36}

Bin Laden’s subsequent willingness to call for a jihad against the remaining superpower, the United States, clearly grew from his experiences in the Afghan war. This, from his perspective, was his destiny. The events of September 11, 2001, although not necessarily planned by him, were certainly a fulfillment of his desire for such an attack on what he viewed as enemies of Islam.

CONCLUSIONS

These trends present an alarming portrait of modern terrorists. Some are younger, much younger than in previous centuries. As any parent (or older sibling) knows, younger children are harder to reach by logical argument. Their values are less clearly formed or understood. They are, as a whole, less rational and more emotional than their elders. They are also less likely to question the orders of their leaders, more likely to follow blindly where their trust is given.

However, the exception to this pattern appears to be found in Islamist groups, where the followers, while still younger, are on average in their mid-twenties. This creates the potential for forming autonomous cells of groups carrying out terrorist acts, rather than having such cells clearly under the leadership of a central command.

Younger or older, the followers in most groups are less educated than their leaders, are less likely to be following the dictates of a strong social conscience or clearly formed political philosophy, and are thus more likely to be simply following orders. It is very difficult to reason with someone who is “just following orders.” Some of the world’s greatest atrocities have been committed by those who were just following orders—who did not even have the excuse of being children.

The majority of individuals committing terrorist acts today are less likely to have a comfortable home to cushion their failure. As the largest percentage in most groups are followers rather than leaders, their families are increasingly likely to be extremely poor. For these new recruits, membership—and success—in a terrorist group is the only way out of abject poverty for themselves, or for their families. For them, there can be no turning back.

They are used to violence; for them it is a daily occurrence. They neither understand nor recognize the need for limits on that violence. They have seen homes destroyed and families killed in endless wars of attrition. The idea that civilization wishes to impose limits on the types or victims of violence is beyond their understanding, because they have seen almost every type of violence used against almost every conceivable victim.

Too often, their faith and the teachings of their religious leaders not only justify their actions but call upon them to do more. The agents of socialization—family, community, religion—are now offering increasing support for young people to carry out extreme acts of violence against enemies of their faith community. Western concern about
the role of madrassas, the Arabic word for any type of school, secular or religious, in Saudi Arabia reflects awareness of the pivotal role of these socialization agents.

These are the new terrorists, and they are a formidable force. Whether it is possible for modern civilization to successfully counter this radicalization of the very young toward the violence of terrorism is questionable. What is beyond question is that unless we can reverse these trends, civilization will have to cope with an increasing spiral of terror-violence.

DISCUSSION

The modern terrorist is different. The requisites suggested by O’Ballance are met less frequently, even by terrorist leaders, and the trends in terrorist recruitment suggest an increasing deviation from those norms he suggested.

Taking Osama bin Laden as an example of a modern terrorist leader, try to resolve the following questions:

1. To what extent does bin Laden meet, or fail to meet, the criteria suggested by O’Ballance?
2. If bin Laden is a “typical” modern terrorist, what does that suggest about terrorist acts today (more cruel, more indiscriminate)?
3. Judging by the trends, from what areas or groups are terrorist recruits more likely to come?
4. Do the individuals who committed the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center or the Oklahoma City bombing fit the typical pattern offered here?

ANALYSIS CHALLENGE

Two attacks in public schools in this country generated serious concerns about safety, training, and planning for school officials, parents, and community workers. Read about one or both of these events, and look for the elements discussed in this chapter (alienation, desocialization, etc.) which you think may help explain these events. How can we be more proactive in identifying individuals, as well as groups, who are becoming alienated?

Columbine High School: http://www.acolumbinesite.com/columbine.html
Virginia Tech: http://www.techtragedy.com

SUGGESTED READINGS


NOTES

Criminals or Crusaders?


22. Richardson, What Terrorists Want, 42.


27. Laqueur, The Age of Terrorism, 93.


35. Bergen, Holy War, 52.