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TERRORISM AND GLOBAL SECURITY

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IT HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE TO SAY that September 11, 2001, marked a watershed in international affairs, but the statement is nevertheless true. Previously, few people thought of terrorism as a serious threat to global security. After 9/11, terrorism suddenly became the centerpiece of U.S. national security strategy and a world priority. In 2004 the UN secretary-general's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change concluded that "terrorism attacks the values that lie at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations: respect for human rights; the rule of law; rules of war that protect civilians; tolerance among peoples and nations; and the peaceful resolution of conflict."¹

This chapter opens with an overview of the nature and origins of the threat of terrorism in the twenty-first century. It then turns to the causes of terrorism. Do the "root causes" lie in conditions such as poverty, inequality, globalization, lack of democracy, or religious doctrines? Do ongoing political conflicts stimulate terrorism? The answers are much more

complex than common wisdom would suggest, and focusing exclusively on "root causes" does not provide a complete explanation of the phenomenon of terrorism. We must also try to understand the intentions and capabilities of the actors using terrorism in specific historical contexts. Why is terrorism attractive to non-state challengers? This analysis suggests that terrorism serves the purposes of provocation, polarization, mobilization, and compellence. It also contends that such terrorism is not new; post-1990s "jihadist" terrorism and the "old" terrorism of nationalists, revolutionaries, and right-wing extremists have much in common. The next question the chapter addresses, by way of conclusion, is why terrorism is a threat to international security and how the world community can cope with it. The answer to why terrorism is perceived as a first-level threat lies in its global diffusion, potential destructiveness, and the tenacity and resilience of the jihadist movement. Despite the sharp international differences over how to respond to terrorism raised by the U.S. intervention in Iraq, it is essential

that multilateral cooperation be sustained and expanded within the framework of a global consensus that terrorism is not a legitimate form of political struggle.

IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGE OF TERRORISM

Attempts to define terrorism have been contentious since the phenomenon became an international issue in the 1970s, particularly after the 1972 Munich Olympics attack on Israeli athletes by the Palestinian Black September organization. Since 1973, and despite the passage of twelve antiterrorism conventions, the members of the United Nations have yet to agree on a definition. As the High-Level Panel report explained, disagreement has centered first on whether states should also be considered “terrorist” when their armed forces or security services attack civilians. The second problem concerns moral justifications for violence. Should the violence of resistance movements confronting foreign occupations be considered terrorism? Overriding these objections, the panel concluded that terrorism is never acceptable, no matter how legitimate or popular the cause it purports to serve. Terrorism should be defined as “any action . . . that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.”²

Since the 1990s, the principal driving force behind terrorism on an international scale has been al Qaeda and its affiliates and offshoots, which together loosely constitute a global Salafist or “jihadi” movement. Al Qaeda is an amorphous type of nonstate actor.³ It consists of both a remnant of the central core of the organization that ordered the 9/11 attacks and those that preceded it (chiefly, the 1998 East African embassy bombings, the millennium plots, and the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen)

and local associates and imitators around the world. Their links to what is left of the original conspiracy that was based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan are hard to trace. The presence of these successor groups is global, including cells within immigrant communities in the West. The most virulent form of al Qaeda-related terrorism persists in Iraq, in conjunction with a Sunni-led insurgency aided by foreign fighters who have provided the majority of suicide bombers since the U.S. intervention in 2003. Since 2001, however, attacks in Indonesia, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Spain, and Great Britain have shown that al Qaeda in the broadest sense, including all aspects of jihadi terrorism, retains both the will and the capacity to conduct operations around the world.

An important source of unity within this diffuse movement is its origin in the anti-Soviet resistance in 1980s Afghanistan. There the links that exist today among individuals and different national groups were forged. These connections are based on shared experiences, socialization, training, and indoctrination in camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as ideological affinity. Many of the fighters in Afghanistan returned home with a sense of having fulfilled a transcendental mission, and sometimes with an exalted reputation, to alter the course of local conflicts (e.g., in the Philippines and Indonesia). Others, whether by choice or because their own governments would not permit their repatriation, joined or formed Islamist groups in diasporas in the West.

The convictions driving this movement are vehemently anti-Western and anti-American. The movement is fundamentally antidemocratic and intolerant. Many of its adherents do not shrink from killing Muslims who do not agree with their interpretation of Islam. They are thought to wish not only to overthrow non-Islamist regimes in Muslim countries and reestablish a version of the early Islamic caliphate

but to diminish Western influence worldwide, which they see as a threat to Islam. They oppose the presence of "Crusaders and Jews" in Muslim countries and seek a return to a more pure form of Islam that would restore the Muslim community to greatness. Scholars and policymakers debate the question of whether al Qaeda is genuinely motivated by the conflicts in Palestine and now Iraq or whether references to these grievances are opportunistic. In either case, conflicts that pit Muslims against non-Muslims, often outside the Middle East, help them to justify their position that Islam is on the defensive and that jihad is a moral obligation for individual Muslims.⁴ In providing evidence for these claims, the war in Iraq may have revived a fading movement.

Al Qaeda originated during the U.S.-assisted campaign to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi Arabian activist, became an energetic supporter of the Afghan mujahideen, raising money and mobilizing recruits from the Muslim world to join the jihad. However, to him it must have seemed that the victory in Afghanistan was short-lived. When Saudi Arabia agreed to allow U.S. troops on Saudi territory after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he was apparently infuriated. His opposition to the Saudi regime became sufficiently troubling that he was stripped of his citizenship and removed to Sudan. From there he built an organization that grew out of the contacts he had made in Afghanistan, including links to Egyptian radical groups. When he was expelled from Sudan, he relocated to Afghanistan, conveniently on the eve of the Taliban's takeover. With a sympathetic ally in power, he was able to establish a base of operations and link forces with other radical Islamic groups. Egyptian leader Ayman al-Zawahiri became one of his key lieutenants. Together with other Islamist extremist leaders they issued a fatwa in February 1998, calling for attacks on Americans wherever they might be found. The August 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania and sub-

sequent U.S. retaliation signaled the beginnings of the campaign.

In light of the intense contemporary focus on al Qaeda, it is important to remember that terrorism has been used in the service of a variety of ideologies: nationalism, revolution, religion, and right-wing extremism. Moreover, domestic terrorism has undoubtedly caused more damage than international terrorism, although figures on this are unreliable. Terrorism perpetrated by groups other than al Qaeda continues to threaten democracy and stability. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and right-wing paramilitaries remain potent forces in Colombia. Both Hezbollah (which retain a capacity for global action although it abandoned attacks on U.S. and other Western targets after the Persian Gulf War) and Hamas are strong and socially rooted Islamic organizations. Both have successfully competed in elections, especially Hamas, which won a majority in Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade joined Hamas in attempting to block a negotiated settlement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. India confronts continued terrorism related to the conflict in Kashmir. State-supported terrorism has not disappeared, either, as the United States frequently accuses Iran and Syria of assisting al Qaeda and Hamas, and India holds Pakistan responsible for supporting terrorism in Kashmir.

We should also recognize the fact that campaigns of terrorism can come to an end. After the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the IRA in Northern Ireland agreed to disarm and abandon violence. Similarly, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka dropped their campaign in 2002, although the subsequent cease-fire was tenuous. ETA remained a problem for Spain into the twenty-first century, although its strength was vastly diminished from its high point in the 1970s. In Germany and Italy, left-wing revolutionary terrorism had largely ended by the mid-1980s.

Peru had defeated Sendero Luminoso by the 1990s. Thus there is precedent for the decline of even very persistent groups.

SOURCES OF CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM

A discussion of the sources of terrorism needs to address two issues: the underlying conditions or structures that facilitate its emergence and encourage its growth, and the specific goals and methods of the actors using terrorism. Risk propensity does not guarantee terrorism; that is, the fact that societies are at risk for terrorism because they have the conditions that might encourage it does not mean that they will necessarily experience it—other things have to happen. The direct causes of terrorism lie in the perceptions and calculations of political actors as they interact with their constituencies and with their opponents in a given historical context.

Several conditions may contribute to the occurrence of terrorism: globalization, democracy, conflict, and ideology or religion.

Globalization

Globalization is associated with terrorism in two senses.⁵ One is the possibility that resentment over being left behind fuels terrorism in areas of the world that do not benefit from but feel exploited by the West. The second is that permeability of borders, mobility of persons, and instantaneous worldwide communication through the Internet and the news media provide important resources for terrorist conspiracies. However, the relationship is more complex than one might imagine at first glance.

The first argument is more problematic than the second. It is not clear that the most disadvantaged parts of the world, those that profit least from globalization of the means of production, produce more terrorist conspiracies than those less advantaged. This issue relates to the question of whether poverty and underdevelopment yield terrorism.⁶ If they do, then terrorism is a sign of deep conflict between

North and South, between haves and have-nots, between the powerful and the powerless. If those who are left out of the process of globalization become terrorists, then terrorism is in effect caused by global inequality.

A variation of this argument takes into account the fact that even in poorer countries most of the individuals who become terrorists are better educated and more prosperous than other members of their societies, that many members of al Qaeda come from Saudi Arabia, and that other jihadist terrorists are citizens of the West. Such individuals are the products of globalization, not those left behind. They seem to be material beneficiaries of the modern world who are socially and politically unasimilated and spiritually adrift. They are caught between traditional families and communities and modernity. Thus they may be left behind by globalization on a psychological rather than a material level.

However, although these propositions may be intuitively plausible, they lack definitive empirical support. If they were valid, we would expect to see much more terrorism than we do, since millions of people live in poverty yet are cognizant of global disparities. Millions of new emigrants live in Western societies. Many people are caught between traditional and modern societies. Few of them turn to terrorism.

The second argument about globalization, that it is a permissive rather than a direct cause, is more convincing. Globalization enables terrorism rather than motivating it. Underground transnational conspiracies can take advantage of all the developments that make the world a smaller place. It is easy to travel, communicate, instruct, and transfer money. Islamist-oriented groups that call for a return to the past, paradoxically, are quite adept in using the tools of the modernity they ostensibly reject. They establish Web sites to promote the cause, talk by cell phone, and jet around the globe. Just as businesses, NGOs, and universities find it easier to integrate their activities and reach consumers and clients on an international scale,

so do the users of terrorism. It would be surprising if it were otherwise.

Democracy, or the Lack Thereof

Another condition linked to terrorism is the presence or absence of democracy. Here again the relationship is not simple.⁷

Repression of peaceful means of political dissent may force opposition movements into the underground and encourage their resort to violence, because they lack alternatives and face persecution from the state. Repression fuels perceptions of injustice. Inclinations to use terrorism are thought to be reduced when the political process is open to the expression of diverse viewpoints and when opposition groups are not just heard but represented in the structures of power.

Lack of peaceful means of political expression may sometimes explain terrorism, but the empirical evidence is mixed. At least two caveats are in order before we equate democracy with the absence of terrorism. The first is that the process of democratization, as repressive regimes move toward liberalization, is often violent. The formerly powerful resist loss of power and prestige, and the formerly subjugated lack trust and confidence in the new institutions. If security is not assured during the transition, democracy will be associated with chaos and disorder.

The situation in Iraq after 2003 vividly presents some of these dilemmas. The absence of effective security institutions permits the factions vying for power to use extraordinarily cruel violence to defeat their opponents and exercise vengeance. The case of Algeria is also instructive. The Algerian government in 1990 decided to permit free elections. However, when it appeared that the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) was poised to win, the military stepped in to halt the process. A deadly civil war ensued, leading to the deaths of possibly as many as one hundred thousand people.

The second caveat is that established liberal democracies have also experienced terrorism,

not only from outside their borders, but from discontented citizens of their own. Before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was the most destructive act of terrorism in American history. Timothy McVeigh, who was executed for the crime, was a follower of far-right extremist causes. Spain had to deal with ETA and Britain with the IRA. Germany and Italy faced terrorism from aspiring social revolutionaries. Sendero Luminoso made its appearance just as Peru was making a peaceful transition to democracy. The 2004 and 2005 attacks on public transportation systems in Madrid and London could also be interpreted as internal terrorism, although their goal, apparently, was not to overthrow those governments but to punish them for supporting the U.S. campaign in Iraq.

At the same time, democracies possess real advantages in combating terrorism. First, they offer peaceful means of expressing dissent. They are also prepared to address economic, social, and political problems that may encourage terrorism. A robust legitimacy means that even if a discontented minority launches a campaign of terrorism, it will not attract mass support. In this regard, the strength of the state also matters. Weak and internally divided democracies are more vulnerable than others. It is also critical that the democratic response to terrorism avoid the excesses of repression and violation of human rights that will trigger more terrorism.

Violent Political Conflict

A third possible condition for terrorism on a global level is violent political conflict, whether civil or international. The logic behind this argument is that if these deep conflicts were resolved, terrorism (as a manifestation of the conflict) would disappear. As often as not, terrorism that accompanies such conflicts is state supported. Thus the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir is presumably the source

of Pakistan's support for anti-Indian groups, some of which have lately espoused the cause of radical Islam. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is the source of Palestinian radicalism, and to some even the root of al Qaeda's hatred of the United States. The war in Iraq similarly generates opposition to U.S. policy. Thus conflict resolution would reduce terrorism in the long run.

However, this argument, like that about the effects of globalization, has its weaknesses. Grievances generated by these conflicts are widespread, but terrorism is still a rare occurrence given the numbers of people affected. Also, there are significant anomalies. Al Qaeda launched its jihad before the beginning of the second intifada, when the situation for Palestinians looked considerably brighter than it does now, and well before the war in Iraq. Why are there almost no Palestinians in al Qaeda and no proven links with Hamas or the other Palestinian groups that use terrorism against Israel? Why have no Islamic Palestinian groups attacked U.S. or Western targets?

Furthermore, like the process of democratization, peace processes often attract terrorism from "spoilers" who do not wish to see a conflict resolved.⁸ The use of suicide bombings by Hamas is an excellent example in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obviously, what matters is not the absence of conflict but the terms of the peace. And what constitutes a just peace is subjective and disputed.

Ideology or Religion

A fourth condition is ideology or religion.⁹ Although Islam is the focus of the contemporary debate, terrorism has been associated with many religious doctrines. The argument that religion is a source of terrorism is based on the assumption that values and beliefs cause terrorism. It assumes that specific doctrines, particularly those that are millenarian or apocalyptic, motivate terrorism. Because religious terrorists presumably seek only to please a deity, they are oblivious to the human cost of their actions.

The availability of an ideology, secular or religious, that justifies and legitimizes violence is undoubtedly a contributing factor. Normative justification may even be necessary. But the specific doctrines that extremists espouse are typically narrow, inconsistent, and selective interpretations of wider bodies of thought. Furthermore, the decision to use violence may come first, at least on the part of the leadership, which then crafts a borrowed doctrine out of bits and pieces of established ideology or religion in order to support what is in essence a political goal. It is also important to note that adherents of the Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir have not resorted to violence despite the party's extreme doctrines and rhetoric (although the party has been officially banned in Germany and Britain).¹⁰

Three conclusions emerge from this discussion. First, any conditions that generate discontent can provide a pool for terrorist recruiting. Grievances act both as motivation for the individual and as a mobilizing device for the organization. Second, the groups that use or aspire to use terrorism see such actual or potential constituencies as available and accessible and wish to attract their support in order to grow from small underground conspiracies to genuine social movements with political clout. They script their message accordingly. Third, all these conditions lend themselves easily to transnational expansion. Generalized resentment, antiglobalization, and anti-Americanism are attitudes shared across borders. Television conveys emotionally powerful visual images around the globe. Even the presence or absence of democracy has a border-crossing dimension, in that opposition groups that cannot succeed against a repressive local regime may redirect their activities either against local targets outside the country or against outside powers thought to be supporting the local regime. Democracies that tolerate dissent may find themselves harboring terrorist conspiracies, as Germany did on the eve of the 9/11 attacks.

These conclusions also indicate that we cannot explain terrorism exclusively in terms of “root causes.” Instead, we should turn our attention to the actors using terrorism.¹¹ They may be motivated by these grievances or combinations of them, but they also see them as opportunities for advancement of their goals. Terrorism is not a spontaneous reaction to circumstances. Groups confronting the same conditions choose different responses.

THE ACTORS USING TERRORISM AND THEIR CHOICE OF STRATEGIES

Terrorism is primarily the province of nonstate actors, although governments can passively and actively support them and occasionally sponsor terrorism directly through official agents.¹² In those cases, intelligence or security agencies perform essentially as underground conspiracies in an attempt to evade detection. For such active state sponsors, terrorism is a means of deception and denial, a way of avoiding accountability, whereas nonstate actors typically claim credit because they seek visibility and recognition. Media coverage is an important part of their communications strategy. Passive sponsors are often “failed states” unable to prevent the development of terrorism on their territory. Thus explaining terrorism requires understanding how terrorist conspiracies develop and operate, especially on a transnational scale, and why terrorism is an attractive option for achieving political goals. The answer is not quite as simple as the familiar saying that terrorism is “the weapon of the weak” implies.

THE UTILITY OF TERRORISM

Regardless of overall ideological framework—the structure of beliefs, images, and worldviews that guide action—terrorism has specific tactical purposes that make it attractive. What combination of incentives and opportunities makes terrorism likely? Four main uses of terrorism can be identified: provocation,

polarization, mobilization, and compellence. Describing terrorism as useful does not mean that terrorism necessarily succeeds in obtaining its objectives. Nor are these uses mutually exclusive; in fact, they are complementary. Any given attack will likely be motivated by a combination of objectives.

Provocation

Terrorism, especially random attacks on civilian populations, can be used as a means of provoking a government into overreaction. For example, al Qaeda’s attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon may have been intended to provoke a massive and indiscriminate U.S. response that would justify the charge that the United States wished to destroy Islam and was an enemy of the Muslim world. ETA’s early strategy in Spain was to deliberately provoke the state into repressive acts that would further alienate Basques. The National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria followed a similar line. The severe French response to terrorism in Algiers in 1956 and 1957 led to the use of torture during the Battle of Algiers and then as a consequence to public scandal, which helped make the war deeply unpopular in France.

Such strategies are thought to be particularly effective against democracies, the governments of which are both susceptible to public opinion (and thus outrage accompanied by calls for revenge) and simultaneously restrained by human rights norms.¹³ A more ruthless regime could respond by crushing all opposition and censoring media coverage of the threat. However, these propositions have not been sufficiently tested.

Polarization

In this sense terrorism resembles communal conflict or civil war, in that it can be used to drive divided societies farther apart and that moderates tend to suffer most. Indiscriminate attacks against representatives of the “other” community, whether ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic, fragment societies and perpetuate

conflict. In Iraq, Sunni terrorism is directed against Shiites, and Shiite militias have infiltrated government security forces to avenge themselves against Sunnis. Indiscriminate and high-casualty attacks on marketplaces, mosques, and even funeral processions have divided the two communities. Similar terrorism has occurred in Pakistan and Kashmir. Sinhalese were targeted by the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Catholics and Protestants attacked each other in Northern Ireland. Currently on both global and national levels, for individuals as well as governments, terrorism generates suspicion and distrust between Muslims and non-Muslims. Many Muslims feel that they are implicated in the crimes of a tiny few who do not represent them. Non-Muslims sometimes charge that Muslims have been hesitant to condemn terrorism. In Europe, anti-immigration sentiment has been strengthened.

Mobilization

Terrorism can do more than alter the behavior of an adversary. It serves importantly to mobilize and invigorate supporters and to develop new constituencies. It demonstrates power, even if striking a blow accomplishes nothing concrete. It satisfies demands for vengeance and overcomes feelings of humiliation and resentment. Terrorism can define issues and put previously ignored grievances on the world agenda by attracting international press coverage. For example, before the Palestinian hijackings of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the issue before the world was "Arab refugees," not Palestinian nationalism. The hijackings and the 1972 attack on the Munich Olympics made it impossible to ignore Palestinian claims, despite the unacceptability of their methods.

Furthermore, carefully targeted terrorism helps frame grievances; the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon defined U.S. economic and military might as the problem. Terrorism is a highly symbolic form of violence, and choice of target conveys a message.

Terrorism can also assist in distinguishing a group from its nonviolent or less violent competitors who seek the same outcome. For this reason, competitiveness among organizations can lead to imitation, as in Israel, where Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade competed for public support and recruits in the grim game of suicide bombings during the second intifada. In the 1970s, rivalry among different nationalist factions was common. For example, once the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine had inaugurated the tactic of hijacking aircraft in 1968, other groups quickly followed suit. Similar competition may characterize the conflict in Iraq.

Compellence

Terrorism may be perceived as useful in compelling states to withdraw from foreign commitments through a strategy of punishment and attrition.¹⁴ The point is to make the commitment so painful that the government will abandon it. Like provocation, this strategy may work best against democracies, where governments are accountable to the people and where a free press publicizes the effects of terrorism. Such actions may be intended to end a foreign intervention, such as by weakening alliances. To some people, the 2004 and 2005 Madrid and London bombings were meant to force the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. The Madrid bombings appeared to be evidence of this theory, coinciding as they did with national elections lost by an incumbent regime that supported the United States in Iraq. Osama bin Laden pointed to the success of such tactics of compellence elsewhere, particularly in Lebanon in 1983, when the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at the Beirut airport led to U.S. withdrawal.¹⁵ He also grandiosely claimed credit for the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia. One purpose of assassinations and kidnappings of Western diplomats in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s was to compel their governments to withdraw support,

both economic and military, for the dictatorships then in power. The hope was that popular revolution could then succeed. Bombings in France in the 1980s were apparently meant to halt French support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War. The aim of expelling a foreign occupier is plainly evident in the tactics of the post-2003 insurgents in Iraq. Even the United Nations and humanitarian aid workers, in addition to private contractors, have been targeted in an effort to drive out any stabilizing forces and prevent the restoration of order and prosperity.

The perceived success of such a strategy may be illusory. The U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon may be an exception, not the rule. In most cases, it cannot be shown conclusively that terrorism was the cause of specific government actions (such as the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip). Furthermore, there are numerous counterexamples. India, for example, has not bowed to terrorist pressure in Kashmir. Russia did not withdraw from Chechnya. The opposite reaction to terrorism may indeed be more common: a reinvigorated determination to resist demands.

OLD VERSUS NEW TERRORISM

A central question regarding actors and strategies is whether al Qaeda represents a transformation of the phenomenon of terrorism or a continuation of existing trends. The terrorism that threatens the post-Cold War world, chiefly al Qaeda and its affiliates, is thought by some analysts to differ profoundly from the terrorism of the past.¹⁶ The difference between “old” and “new,” however, may be exaggerated. The differences in question lie along three dimensions: goals, methods, and forms of organization.

Goals

A first debate concerns goals. Is the global jihadist movement the first nonstate actor to espouse a genuinely international goal, that of reestablishing Muslim domination by driving

the West out of Muslim lands and imposing Islamic rule? Is al Qaeda essentially an apocalyptic movement? Or are the goals of such groups basically local and hence part of an old pattern?¹⁷ And how do these objectives compare with those of past extremist groups using terrorism?

There is no consensus on what al Qaeda and its attendant groups want. Do their leaders seek to seize power in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, or Indonesia, in effect replicating the success of the Iranian revolution at the national level, or do they want to challenge the United States and its allies on the global level, in this case repeating the victory over the Soviet Union in Afghanistan? Is the movement driven by religion or politics? An initial *casus belli* for Osama bin Laden was the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, and after the invasion of Iraq, the war there became a drive to expel the infidel. There is no doubt that the fighting in Iraq fuels a sense of rage and urgency among some Muslims, primarily young men, who see Islam as threatened and rise to its defense (from their perspective) even if they themselves live in the West in countries where Muslims are a minority. The memory of the former greatness of the Islamic empires makes the current perceived state of humiliation and subjugation all the more bitter. Terrorism is a form of punishment of the West. The reality is probably that there are complex combinations of motives, varying from individual to individual and from group to group.

How different are these jihadist goals from those of other groups, past and present? Using terrorism to expel a foreign occupier is a tried-and-true method, familiar to students of the history of nationalism. Nor is there anything new about wanting to seize power, at the level of the state or a portion of its territory, and implement revolutionary change or establish an autonomous government independent of external control. Numerous revolutionary and nationalist movements have used terrorism, from the Russian revolutionary organizations

of the late nineteenth century and the IRA to Sendero Luminoso, ETA, and the LTTE.

If the international ambitions of the jihadist movement are genuine, are they strikingly new? As Olivier Roy has reminded his readers, the left-wing revolutionary movements of the 1960s through the 1980s also conceived of their struggle in global terms.¹⁸ For example, the Red Army Faction in West Germany considered itself the ally of Third World national liberation movements, striking at the heart of the imperialist enemy (the United States and NATO) in Europe. Such groups aimed to promote socialism and defeat imperialism worldwide. And in some cases they were assisted by the Soviet Union and its allies, just as the United States aided the mujahideen in Afghanistan (without foreseeing the consequences). It is possible that the international ambitions of al Qaeda are stronger than those of past groups, which would probably be expected in a world where it is easier to develop and communicate a shared ideology and in which the United States is the sole superpower. In other words, international ambitions may be an effect of changing circumstances as much as changing motivations.

Moreover, using terrorism to retaliate for a government's foreign involvements is not new. Iran and pro-Iranian groups retaliated against France for its support of Iraq during the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War. German leftists were angered by U.S. support for repressive Third World regimes. The Red Army Faction got its start in demonstrations against the shah of Iran. Opposition to the war in Vietnam was an important component of the ideological anti-imperialist mix, just as opposition to the war in Iraq is for Islamist movements.

Methods

A second aspect of terrorism that is considered “new” is the desire to cause large numbers of civilian casualties. For this reason, and especially since the 1995 sarin gas attack by the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo on the

Tokyo subway, there has been a fear that the “new” terrorists would acquire and employ weapons of mass destruction.¹⁹ The “old” terrorists, in contrast, were thought to be inhibited by the shadow of the future, the fact that they expected eventually to become legitimate governments. The prospect of success, however illusory, was a source of restraint. They thus regarded terrorism as a means to a concrete political end, whereas to the new Islamist terrorists, violence and destruction are ends in themselves. To proponents of the “new” terrorism argument, terrorism is no longer instrumental.

Indeed, the numbers killed in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks overshadowed anything that had gone before, as the toll of victims rose from the hundreds to the thousands. Subsequent attacks, such as the Bali nightclub bombing and the bombings of train and subway systems in Madrid and London, as well as the bombings of civilian targets in Iraq, reinforce the conclusion that semirandom lethality is the aim.

However, bombings of civilians were scarcely unknown in the past. The film *The Battle of Algiers* dramatizes urban terrorism in 1950s Algeria during the Algerian War, for example. It is also worth noting that the numbers of casualties in single incidents in post-9/11 attacks have not exceeded the bounds of the past.²⁰ Furthermore, the means of terrorism have so far remained largely low tech, such as homemade explosives delivered by backpack or suicide bombers (improvised explosive devices [IEDs]). Although al Qaeda has apparently shown an interest in acquiring WMD, these means have not been used since the Aum Shinrikyo attack in 1995. The 9/11 attacks were shockingly innovative, as well as destructive, but subsequent attacks have followed a more typical pattern.

Forms of Organization

The third dimension that may distinguish al Qaeda from the past is its form of organization.

Whereas the “old” terrorists are said to have been organized in centralized and hierarchical underground conspiracies, al Qaeda has progressively become a looser, decentralized, “flat” network. It is difficult to say whether actions performed in its name are ordered from a central leadership or initiated by local groups acting independently. The original al Qaeda organization was steadily eroded and weakened as the United States prosecuted the “global war on terrorism,” starting with the loss of its sanctuary in Afghanistan in 2001. The steady pressure of arrests and killings deprived the organization of key operatives and interrupted its communications. Thus organizational behavior shifted over time as a way of adapting to changing circumstances. The operational autonomy of local groups may have been a response to decline rather than a deliberate choice. It is also worth noting that the concept of “leaderless resistance” originated with the American far right and that it developed as a deliberate and practical way of eluding detection. Louis Beam, an American white supremacist affiliated with the Aryan Nations, conceived of the strategy in 1992, according to Bruce Hoffman.²¹ Beam recommended “autonomous leadership units” that would escape government surveillance. Violent resistance could thus be both decentralized and coordinated. He also inaugurated the use of computer bulletin boards and Web sites as means of communication and recruitment.

Thus terrorism associated with Islamic extremist tendencies varies from the past along these three dimensions, but the difference is one of degree rather than kind. The fundamental process of terrorism has not changed.

THE TERRORIST THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

After the shock of 9/11, analysts of international relations called for a new approach to terrorism. Most argued that while in the past terrorism had been a second-order foreign

policy issue, it should now be recognized as a major threat to national and international security.²² The U.S. government had no need of this advice as the attacks immediately propelled terrorism to the top of the president’s agenda and led to the launching of the global war on terrorism, the defeat of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The reaction to 9/11 also stimulated the most comprehensive reorganization of the U.S. government since the aftermath of World War II, including the establishment of a Department of Homeland Security and a reorganization of the nation’s intelligence bureaucracy. At the international level, terrorism also became a top priority. The United Nations, NATO, and the European Union moved immediately to recognize the threat and to develop expansive counterterrorism policies based on international cooperation.

What is at stake? Why was and is terrorism perceived as a major threat? States do not face “mutual assured destruction” as they did during the Cold War, despite the gravity of the attacks on the United States in 2001 and the risk that terrorists could acquire WMD. The intensity of the threat does not depend solely on material consequences, such as numbers of killed and injured or infrastructure destroyed. The subjective aspect of the threat is as important as the objective aspect.

For the public, much of what makes terrorism a potent threat lies in the essence of the phenomenon, which has not changed. Terrorism creates uncertainty because it is unpredictable. The time, the place, and the identity of the perpetrator come as a surprise. Terrorism often targets civilians going about their daily lives. They cannot know who among their fellow subway or bus or airplane passengers, among those standing next to them in a crowded spot or sitting next to them in a restaurant, aims to attack. Acts of terrorism themselves, even if relatively minor, are constant reminders of vulnerability. Even threats carry weight. The Cold War was punctuated

by the occasional acute and frightening crisis, such as the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, that reminded the world of the precariousness of the “balance of terror,” but individuals did not experience a taste of the threat itself, in the sense of a nuclear exchange. Terrorism, on the other hand, is visible as a real and present danger, even if residents of Western societies are more likely to die in a household accident than in a terrorist attack. People who normally live in stable societies, whose daily lives are not constantly threatened, are unaccustomed to this risk, although the inhabitants of the many war-torn countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East unfortunately are. And the perception of risk is magnified by media coverage, especially television. Americans see terrorism as more of a threat than do Europeans, but sensitivities are generally high.²³

For governments, terrorism is a threat to sovereignty, reputation, and credibility as well as to the safety of their citizens. National leaders must be sensitive to the challenge to the prestige of the state itself as well as to the security of their territories and populations. The fact that the United States, as the world’s sole superpower, not only declared a “war on terrorism” but intervened militarily in both Afghanistan and Iraq probably reinforces the global perception of terrorism as a source of immediate danger and pervasive insecurity.

Today’s terrorism appears threatening because of where it happens, how it happens, and why it happens.

Although past waves of terrorism had a transnational dimension (especially the anarchist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the contemporary threat exhibits a broader and more sustained territorial reach in terms of the geographical diversity of the location of attacks, the sites where the plots are laid, and the nationalities of the individual perpetrators. The threat is both international and local. Terrorism from al Qaeda or groups associated with the ideas behind al Qaeda has occurred in Kenya, Tanzania,

Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Spain, Britain, the United States, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and plots have been foiled in other countries (e.g., in the Balkans and in France). In addition, planning for attacks was undertaken in other locations, including Germany, Italy, and Singapore. The individuals who commit these attacks come from an even broader range of countries, and they include citizens of the countries that are attacked as well as foreigners. A Belgian woman, for example, became a suicide bomber in Iraq in 2005.

In an era of instantaneous mass communication, the audience for terrorism is also global. Nobody who has access to modern communications systems can escape awareness of the danger. Reminders are constant. Terrorism is visible on a daily basis, whether it occurs in Baghdad, London, or Jerusalem. Television, in particular, is a medium well suited to transmitting the information that makes the threat vivid and salient.²⁴ Terrorists, of course, know this quite well. Over time, audiences might become numb to the terrorism threat. The risk is that terrorists, perceiving this desensitization, will escalate to higher levels of violence in order to shock.

The extreme lethality of the 9/11 attacks may not have been typical, but the horror they caused permanently altered expectations of what terrorists could accomplish. The fear that al Qaeda or those inspired by its message will acquire weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear—in order to engage in truly catastrophic terrorism is widespread. The example of Aum Shinrikyo, as well as al Qaeda’s apparent aspirations in this regard, cannot be ignored. Some analysts think that such fears are exaggerated and that sufficient harm can be done with “ordinary” weapons at a much-reduced cost to the perpetrators. Coordinated sequences of suicide bombings, for example, have a profound impact on the public. Others think that it is only a matter of time before terrorists take the step.

Finally, in the United States, the image of al Qaeda and jihadist terrorism is that it aims to undermine the values on which Western civilization is built. It is seen as a threat to democracy, tolerance, and freedom. The refrain of the U.S. government is that they hate us because of who we are. Terrorism is seen as a threat to identity rather than interests. Regardless of the accuracy of this portrayal of the motives behind terrorism, the vision is frightening.

Coping with Terrorism:

Taking the Offensive

The 9/11 attacks generated an initial burst of international solidarity with the United States and strong support for overturning the Taliban regime and destroying al Qaeda in Afghanistan. However, the decision to invade Iraq introduced a period of bitter disagreement. The war in Iraq divided those who had formerly supported American policy, and other background disagreements related to the war on terrorism came to the fore.

The shock of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the distinct possibility that the White House itself might have been struck had the passengers on one flight not rebelled against their hijackers, produced a genuine sense of collective security, in that the attack on the United States was perceived as an attack against all. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked its collective defense provision and then engaged in a process of transforming its conception of security and its post-Cold War mission. The UN Security Council immediately adopted a resolution imposing counterterrorist obligations on its member states. For the first time there appeared to be a solid and comprehensive international consensus against terrorism.

The use of military force to destroy a terrorist organization and overturn the government of the state that supported it was unprecedented, as previous U.S. retaliations had been brief and limited.²⁵ Nevertheless, the war

in Afghanistan was widely approved as a legitimate response since the Taliban had refused repeated requests to surrender Bin Laden and had already been placed under UN sanctions. Even Pakistan abandoned its support for the Taliban and joined the U.S. side. The United States also stepped up military assistance programs for states threatened by al Qaeda-related terrorism, such as the Philippines.

Although U.S. policymakers framed the response as a “war” on terrorism and insisted that the “terrorism as crime” model had been decisively rejected, much of the response to 9/11 consisted of coordinating police and intelligence work around the world. Governments cracked down on terrorist financing, for example, conspiracies were progressively uncovered and dismantled, and hundreds of al Qaeda operatives were arrested in countries around the world.

This aspect of the response to terrorism did have a harder edge than in the past, thus deviating from a strict criminal justice mode. For one thing, the United States was more inclined to use covert operations, including strikes against al Qaeda leaders in Yemen and Pakistan. The United States expanded the practice of rendition rather than extradition or deportation of terrorist suspects. And it introduced the controversial concept of “unlawful combatants” to justify holding suspects in military detention centers in Afghanistan and at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba and then trying them in military rather than civilian courts. These practices were criticized as violations of international law and of human rights from the outset.

The real breakdown of consensus, however, began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which isolated the United States from most of its closest allies. Before that move, the United States was viewed as a benevolent superpower; after the intervention in Iraq, the United States appeared assertive and unilateralist. The military offensive followed closely on the adoption of a new security strategy for the United

States, one based on military preemption of threats, including forceful regime change. President George Bush declared that in the war on terrorism, countries were either with the United States or against it. There could be no middle ground.

On grounds of expediency, critics saw the engagement in Iraq as a distraction from the task of securing Afghanistan and dealing with what President Bush had termed the other two axes of evil: North Korea and Iran. The fact that the United Nations had not sanctioned the use of force to overthrow the Iraqi government was detrimental to the legitimacy of American military intervention and subsequent occupation. Turkey refused to allow U.S. forces to use its territory. France and Germany objected strenuously, while Britain remained a staunch U.S. ally. The publics of countries that did support the United States often disapproved of their governments' positions, thus aggravating tensions at home.

The ostensible reason for the invasion, the charge that Iraq possessed chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons, turned out to be false, which further undermined confidence in the U.S. mission. The United States shifted its emphasis to building democracy in Iraq as a stepping-stone to transforming the politics of the Middle East region, but the striking absence of postwar planning for such a task damaged its credibility. So, too, did U.S. support for conspicuously nondemocratic regimes that took the U.S. side in the war on terrorism. Resistance to U.S. occupation only gained strength, as the Sunni minority rejected accommodation with a new Iraqi government dominated by Shiites and Kurds. A "war of ideas" to convince Muslims that the United States was a trustworthy partner and to lay the groundwork for democratization stalled immediately. Instead, Iraq became a magnet for foreign sympathizers prone to suicide bombings. Within two years the conflict had deteriorated into a full-scale insurgency with extensive sectarian violence. To critics, the war in Iraq gave

al Qaeda a new life in a second generation of leaders such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

With relations[**what relations?**] already strained, revelations of mistreatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq propelled human rights issues to the fore. Concern mounted over the use of torture by U.S. forces or by the countries to which suspects were sent, or "rendered." To these concerns were added questions about the defensive side of coping with terrorism: the effect of counterterrorist measures on domestic civil liberties. Even preventive measures were controversial: Britain, for example, was thought before the July bombings of 2005 to be far too tolerant of Islamic extremism. The reaction was then thought to go too far in the other direction, by restricting free speech. Legal coordination of the response to terrorism within the European Union still remained problematic. Asylum and immigration policies came into question.

THE FUTURE

An optimistic projection would foresee a gradual decline of Islamist-inspired militancy, as governments keep up pressure on its networks and constituencies reject the excesses of the movement. As past groups have done, the organization would exceed the bounds of its supporters' tolerance. Its appeal would thus diminish and critical social support would evaporate. Such a scenario would probably depend on a relatively stable Iraq with U.S. forces largely withdrawn. This outcome in turn would depend not just on U.S. policy but on the Iraqis themselves and also on neighboring governments, who would need to support an elected Iraqi government and to prevent infiltration of "volunteers" to assist violent opposition. The precedent of the Lebanese civil war indicates that such a process would be slow. This scenario would also assume that al Qaeda would not regenerate in new failed states.

The task for states and international organizations is to find and implement the policies

that will encourage positive developments, particularly the withdrawal of support for al Qaeda or similar groups that might appear in the future. The first requirement is to recognize that terrorism is a political problem, to be solved through political means. Multilateral cooperation in police and intelligence work is the basis of an effective response. This means that counterterrorism must remain a priority at all levels of government. In addition, the sources of popular support for terrorism, even passive support, must be addressed. Otherwise, the terrorist networks that are destroyed will only grow back.

An international consensus on how to deal with terrorism would strengthen the response. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has identified the main elements of a strategy in terms of five "D's": dissuading those who are dissatisfied from resorting to terrorism, denying them the means to act, deterring state supporters of terrorism, developing the capacity of states to deal with terrorism, and defending human rights.²⁶ He has called for global recognition of the unacceptability of terrorism under any circumstances and in any culture. At the same time, he has stressed that good governance and respect for human rights are essential to an effective strategy against terrorism.

In the meantime, the world will have to live with the unpredictable threat of terrorism. It can be reduced but not eliminated. And the danger should be put in perspective: terrorism is not an existential threat. Those targeted must resist the terrorists' logic, recalling that terrorists intend to provoke overreaction, polarize communities, mobilize support, and compel the abandonment of commitments. Only a response that respects democratic values and rewards peaceful means of expressing opinion can make terrorism illegitimate.

NOTES

1. United Nations High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, *A More Secure World: Our*

Shared Responsibility (New York: United Nations, 2004), 45.

2. *Ibid.*, 52.

3. See *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, by Fawaz A. Gerges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Gerges explains that Salafism is an ultraconservative Islamic school of thought that "idealizes the time of the Prophet" and "advocates strict adherence to traditional Islamic values, religious orthodoxy, correct ritualistic practice, and moral issues" (pp. 131–132).

4. For some of the debate over al Qaeda's goals, see Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, "Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11," *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 76–92; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

5. On the relationship between globalization and terrorism, see Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002–3): 30–58.

6. For some of the debate, see Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002–3): 5–29; C. Knight, M. Murphy, and M. Mousseau, Comments, "The Sources of Terrorism," *International Security* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 192–198; and Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (November 2003): 119–144.

7. See Martha Crenshaw, "Political Explanations," in *Addressing the Causes of Terrorism: The Club de Madrid Series on Democracy and Terrorism*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Club de Madrid, 2005).

8. See Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 263–296.

9. On the subject of religion and terrorism, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

10. See the party's official Web site: <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org>.

11. For another overview, see Karin von Hippel, "The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths," in *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 25–39.

12. Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

13. Robert Pape suggests that this is the case for suicide terrorism meant to compel withdrawal from occupied territory in *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

14. Compellence is the companion of deterrence; it is meant to make an adversary do something rather than prevent the adversary from doing something.

15. Translations of Osama bin Laden's speeches can be found in *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence (London: Verso, 2005).

16. See, for example, Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War against America* (New York: Random House, 2003).

17. For the view that al Qaeda is motivated by realpolitik rather than zealotry, see Michael Doran, "The Pragmatic Fanaticism of al Qaeda: An Anatomy of Extremism in Middle Eastern Politics," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 2 (2002): 177–190.

18. Roy, *Globalized Islam*.

19. See Richard A. Falkenrath, Robert D. Newman, and Bradley A. Thayer, *America's Achilles' Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998); and Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

20. Walter Enders and Todd Sandler find that although the 9/11 hijackings were unprecedented,

transnational terrorism shows little change in its patterns before and after 9/11, other than that terrorists tend increasingly to rely on bombings rather than taking hostages. See "After 9/11: Is It All Different Now?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (April 2005): 259–277.

21. Hoffman says that the idea came from a novel by William Pierce, *Hunter*, ed. Andrew McDonald (National Vanguard, n.d.). See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 117–119.

22. See Martha Crenshaw, "Terrorism, Strategies, and Grand Strategies," in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 74–93.

23. See the Transatlantic Trends Project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, <http://transatlantictrends.org>. In 2005, Americans felt significantly more likely than Europeans to be personally affected by terrorism (71 percent to 53 percent).

24. See Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

25. In 1986 the Reagan administration retaliated against Libya, and in 1998 the Clinton administration used airpower against Sudan and al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in response to the embassy bombings in East Africa. However, Israel did invade Lebanon in 1982 in order to destroy the PLO.

26. See Kofi Annan, address to the Madrid Summit on Democracy, Terrorism, and Security, March 10, 2005, <http://www.un.org>.