Beginnings

The Causes of Terrorism

OPENING VIEWPOINT: THE CASE OF CARLOS

Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, popularly known as Carlos the Jackal, was a Venezuelan-born terrorist who became notorious during the 1970s for his violence on behalf of the Palestinian cause. He became politically conscious at a very young age, his Marxist father having named him after Vladimir Ilich Lenin (Ilich’s brothers were named Vladimir and Lenin). His father indoctrinated Sanchez in Marxist ideology and literature, as well as stories of Latin American rebellion, when he was a boy. Sanchez came from a family of revolutionaries, with an uncle who participated in a coup in 1945 and a grandfather who led an army that overthrew the government in 1899. When he was 14, he joined the Venezuelan Communist Youth. He supposedly received guerrilla training in Cuba. Sanchez then attended Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, but he rejected the Soviets’ doctrinaire brand of communism.

It was in Moscow that Sanchez learned about the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). He traveled to Beirut, Lebanon, in July 1970 and walked into an office of the PFLP. He was immediately accepted into the fold and began training with the PFLP, apparently in Jordan. Sanchez was given the nom de guerre of “Carlos” by Bassam Abu-Sharif, a top official in the PFLP. Later, a reporter for the British newspaper Guardian appended the new nom de guerre of “The Jackal,” named for the assassin in Frederick Forsyth’s novel The Day of the Jackal.

Carlos the Jackal was a terrorist-for-hire, apparently retained by Libya, Iraq, Syria, Cuba, the PFLP, Italy’s Red Brigade, and Germany’s Red Army Faction. He has been suspected of committing dozens of attacks, including assassinations, bombings, skyjackings, kidnappings, and the taking of hostages. Carlos’s most stunning operation was the 1975 kidnapping in Vienna of approximately 70 people attending a meeting by the ministers of the powerful Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).4

The Jackal’s career was terminated when the government of Sudan “sold” him to France in August 1994. French intelligence agents, acting on a tip from the U.S. CIA, seized Carlos from a Khartoum hospital room after he was sedated for liposuction surgery; he literally went to sleep in the hospital and awoke on board a French military plane. In 1997, he was prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment for
This chapter investigates the causes of terrorism. In the following discussion, readers will identify factors that explain why individuals and groups choose to engage in terrorist violence. Readers will also explore and critically assess the sources of ideological belief systems and activism and the reasons why such activism sometimes results in terrorist violence. This search for causes requires a critical examination of many possible reasons. For example, is the terrorist option somehow forced on people who have no other alternative? Is terrorism simply one choice from a menu of options? Or is politically motivated violence a pathological manifestation of personal or group dysfunction?

Experts have long struggled to identify the central causes of terrorist violence. The most fundamental conclusion in this regard is that terrorism originates from many sources. The final decision by an individual or group to accept a fringe belief or to engage in terrorist behavior is often a complex process. For example, the decision to engage in violence may be the result of the following:

Photo 3.1  Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, also known as Carlos the Jackal. He was personally responsible for the deaths of scores of victims.

Source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Note

a. The OPEC raid is explored further in Chapter 7.
Logical choice and political strategy
Collective rationality
Lack of opportunity for political participation
Disaffection within an elite

It is useful in the beginning of our discussion to identify broad causes of terrorism at the individual and group levels.

At the individual level, some experts have distinguished rational, psychological, and cultural origins of terrorism:

Rational terrorists think through their goals and options, making a cost-benefit analysis. . . . Psychological motivation for resorting to terrorism derives from the terrorist’s personal dissatisfaction with his/her life and accomplishments. . . . A major cultural determinant of terrorism is the perception of “outsiders” and anticipation of their threat to ethnic group survival. (italics added)

These factors are only a few of many theoretical sources, but they illustrate the different types of motivations that shape the individual behavior of terrorists.

At the group level, terrorism can grow out of an environment of political activism, when a group’s goal is to redirect a government’s or society’s attention toward the grievances of an activist social movement. It can also grow out of dramatic events in the experience of a people or a nation. Although these two sources—social movements and dramatic events—are generalized concepts, it is instructive to briefly review their importance:

Social Movements. Social movements are campaigns that try either to promote change or to preserve something that is perceived to be threatened. Movements involve mass action on behalf of a cause; they are not simply the actions of single individuals who promote their personal political beliefs. Examples of movements include the Irish Catholic civil rights movement of the 1960s in Northern Ireland and the African American civil rights movement in the American South during the same decade. Proponents of this type of movement seek the “moral high ground” as a way to rally sympathy and support for their cause and to bring pressure on their opponents. In both of these cases, radicalized sentiment grew out of frustration with the slow pace of change and the violent reaction of some of their opponents. The modern era has witnessed many movements that advocate violent resistance. Social movements are explored in greater detail in Chapters 5, 7, and 12.

Dramatic Events. A synonym for this source of terrorism is traumatic events. They occur when an individual, a nation, or an ethno-national group suffers from an event that has a traumatizing and lasting effect. At the personal level, children of victims of political violence may grow up to violently oppose their perceived oppressor. This is likely to occur in regions of extended conflict, such as the war between Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland, or the Palestinian intifadeh.
At the national level, nations may be victims of traumatic events, such as invasions or terrorist attacks, that shape their behavior and culture for an extended period of time. For example, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan destabilized the country dramatically, leading to a breakdown in central authority, civil war, and then the rule of the Taliban regime. At the ethno-national level, and in the histories of ethno-national groups, massacres, forced migrations, or extended repression can affect them for generations. For example, the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran have suffered from all of these traumas, including being gassed by the Iraqis in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.

Regardless of the specific precipitating cause of a particular terrorist’s behavior, the fact that so many individuals, groups, and nations resort to terrorist violence so frequently suggests that common motives and explanations can be found. The discussion in this chapter will review the following:

- Extreme Convictions: Motives of Terrorists
- Extreme Circumstances: Explanations of Terrorism

**Extreme Convictions: Motives of Terrorists**

Although not all extremists become terrorists, some do cross the line to engage in terrorist violence. For them, terrorism is a calculated strategy. It is a specifically selected method that is used to further their cause. Significantly,

the terrorist act is different in that the violence employed is not only in pursuit of some long-range political goal but is designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions on a particular target audience.4

Affecting a target audience is an important reason for political violence. Dissident terrorists—as compared with state terrorists—are small bands of violent subversives who could never defeat a professional army or strong government, so they resort to high-profile acts of violence that have an effect on a large audience. It is instructive to review the basic motives of those who commit acts of terrorist violence. To facilitate readers’ critical understanding of the motives of terrorists, the following four motives are reviewed:

1. Moral convictions of terrorists
2. Simplified definitions of good and evil
3. Seeking utopia
4. Codes of self-sacrifice

**Moral Convictions of Terrorists**

Moral conviction refers to terrorists’ unambiguous certainty of the righteousness of their cause; to them, there are no gray areas. The goals and objectives of their
movement are considered to be principled beyond reproach and their methods absolutely justifiable. This conviction can arise in several environments, including the following two settings:

In the first setting, a group of people can conclude that they have been morally wronged and that a powerful, immoral, and evil enemy is arrayed against them. This enemy is considered to be adept at betrayal, exploitation, violence, and repression against the championed group. These conclusions can have some legitimacy, especially when a history of exploitation has been documented. This historical evidence is identified and interpreted as being the source of the group’s modern problems. For example, many leftist insurgents in Latin America characterized the United States as an imperialist enemy because of its long history of military intervention, economic penetration, and support for repressive regimes in the region.5 In fact, U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean was unlike European imperialism elsewhere, because

[U.S. military] officers shared several convictions about America’s tropical empire. They believed the racist canards of their generation that professed the inferiority of Caribbean peoples, and they acknowledged, though occasionally grudgingly, America’s obligation to police what their countrymen called “turbulent little republics.” Their role was to inculcate respect for rule in what they saw as unruly societies.6

Photo 3.2  Bloody Sunday (January 30, 1972): A British soldier runs down an Irish Catholic demonstrator during protests and rioting in the city of Londonderry in Northern Ireland. The confrontations resulted in elite paratroopers firing on Catholic civilians. The incident was a seminal event that rallied many Catholics to support the Provisional Irish Republican Army.

Source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.
In later generations, native populations who shared this kind of history, and who interpreted it to be part of an ongoing pattern in contemporary times, developed strong resentment against their perceived oppressor—in this case, the United States and the governments it supported. To them, there was no need to question the morality of their cause; it was quite clear.

A second setting in which moral conviction may arise is when a group or a people concludes that it possesses an inherent moral superiority to its enemy. This can be derived from ideological convictions, ethno-national values, or religious beliefs. From this perspective, the cause is virtually holy; in the case of religious beliefs, it is holy. A sense of moral “purity” becomes the foundation for the simplification of good and evil. In this setting, extremists decide that no compromise is possible and that terrorism is a legitimate option.

For example, a major crisis began in the Yugoslavian territory of Kosovo in 1998 when heavy fighting broke out between Serb security forces, the Kosovo Liberation Army, and the Serb and Albanian communities. The conflict ended when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian troops occupied Kosovo and the Serb security units were withdrawn. The strong Serb bond with Kosovo originated in 1389 when the Serb hero, Prince Lazar, was defeated by the Ottoman Turks in Kosovo. Kosovo had been the center of the medieval Serb empire, and this defeat ended the Serb nation. Over the next 500 years, as the Turks ruled the province, Albanian Muslims migrated into Kosovo and gradually displaced Serb Christians. Nevertheless, Serbs have always had strong ethno-national ties to Kosovo, considering it to be a kind of spiritual homeland. It is at the center of their national identity. Thus, despite the fact that 90% of Kosovo’s population was Albanian in 1998, Serbs considered their claim to the territory to be paramount to anyone else’s claim. From their perspective, the morality of their position was clear.

The Kosovo case exemplifies how quasi-spiritual bonds to a territory, religion, or history can create strong moral self-righteousness. When this occurs, extremists often conclude that their claim or identity is naturally superior to that of opponents and that terrorist violence is perfectly justifiable.

Chapter Perspective 3.1 illustrates the application of selective and “moral” terrorism. It is a quotation from a document captured during the war in Vietnam from the Viet Cong by American soldiers of the First Cavalry Division. It is a directive explaining procedures for the suppression of “counterrevolutionary elements.” The directive is remarkable because of its instructions for how to correctly conduct the suppression campaign.

**A Viet Cong Directive Ordering Selective Terrorism**

The Viet Cong were southern Vietnamese communists who fought alongside the North Vietnamese Army against American forces and the Republic of South Vietnam. The communist forces considered this war to be one phase in an ongoing effort to unify the North and South into a single nation.
During the American phase of their long war, Vietnamese communists in South Vietnam routinely used terrorism to eliminate enemies. Assassinations and kidnappings were common, and targets regularly included civilians. Thousands fell victim to this policy.

The following quotation is from a passage concerning the suppression of counterrevolutionaries in areas under American or South Vietnamese control. It is interesting because it orders Viet Cong operatives to be very selective in choosing their targets.

**DIRECTIVE**

Concerning a number of problems that require thorough understanding in Z’s task of repressing counterrevolutionary elements . . .

2. In areas temporarily under enemy control:

   (1) We are to exterminate dangerous and cruel elements such as security agents, policemen, and other cruel elements in espionage organizations, professional secret agents in organizations to counter the Revolution, henchmen with many blood debts . . . in village administrative machines, in the puppet system, in enemy military and paramilitary organizations, and in [South Vietnamese political parties].

   (2) We are to establish files immediately and prepare the ground for later suppression of dangerous henchmen whom we need not eliminate yet or whose elimination is not yet politically advantageous . . .

While applying the above-mentioned regulations, we must observe the following:

- Distinguish . . . the elimination of tyrants and local administrative personnel while fighting from the continuous task of repressing counterrevolutionaries in the liberated areas.
- Distinguish the ring leaders, the commissioned officers, from the henchmen.
- Distinguish exploiting elements from the basic elements and distinguish persons determined to oppose the Revolution from those who are forced to do so or those who are brought over and have no political understanding.
- Distinguish between persons with much political and religious influence and those who have no influence or very little influence.
- Distinguish between historical problems and present-day problems.
- Distinguish major crimes with many bad effects from minor crimes or innocence.
- Distinguish determined and stubborn antirevolutionary attitudes from attitudes of submission to the Revolution and true repentance, and willingness to redeem by contribution to the Revolution.
- Distinguish counterrevolutionary elements from backward and dissatisfied persons among the masses.

**Notes**

Simplified Definitions of Good and Evil

Revolutionaries universally conclude that their cause is honorable, their methods are justifiable, and their opponents are representations of implacable evil. They arrive at this conclusion in innumerable ways, often—as in the case of Marxists—after devoting considerable intellectual energy to political analysis. Nevertheless, their final analysis is uncomplicated: Our cause is just, and the enemy’s is unjust. Once this line has been clearly drawn between good and evil, the methods used in the course of the struggle are justified by the ennobled goals and objectives of the cause.

A good example of the application in practice of simplified delineations of good and evil is found in the influential Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla, written by Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighella. In this document, Marighella clearly argues that the use of terrorism is necessary against a ruthless enemy. The Mini-Manual was read, and its strategy implemented, by leftist revolutionaries throughout Latin America and Europe. Marighella advocated terrorism as a correct response to the oppression of the Brazilian dictatorship. He wrote:

The accusation of assault or terrorism no longer has the pejorative meaning it used to have... Today to be an assailant or a terrorist is a quality that ennobles any honorable man because it is an act worthy of a revolutionary engaged in armed struggle against the shameful military dictatorship and its monstrosities.

As articulated by Marighella, terrorism is an “ennobling” option if it is applied by a selfless revolutionary against a ruthless dictatorship. This concept is at the heart of modern urban guerrilla warfare, which in practice has involved the application of terrorist violence. From this perspective, the use of terrorism is perfectly acceptable because of the nature of the enemy. Dissident terrorism will be explored further in Chapter 5, and the strategy of urban guerrilla warfare will be explored further in Chapter 7.

One fact is clear: There is a moment of decision among those who choose to rise in rebellion against a perceived oppressor. This moment of decision is a turning point in the lives of individuals, people, and nations.

Seeking Utopia

The book Utopia was written by the English writer Sir Thomas More in the 16th century. It was a fictional work that described an imaginary island with a society having an ideal political and social system. Countless philosophers, including political and religious writers, have since created their own visions of the perfect society. Terrorists likewise envision some form of utopia, although for many terrorists this can simply mean the destruction of the existing order. For these nihilist dissidents, any system is preferable to the existing one, and its destruction alone is a justifiable goal. Nihilist dissident terrorism will be explored further in Chapter 5.

The question is: What kind of utopia do terrorists seek? This depends on their belief system. For example, religious terrorists seek to create a God-inspired society on earth that reflects the commandments, morality, and values of their religious
faith. Political terrorists similarly define their ideal society according to their ideological perspective. A comparison of left-wing and right-wing goals on this point is instructive. Readers will recall from Chapter 2 that radical leftists are future oriented and idealistic, while reactionary rightists are nostalgic. Radical leftists seek to reform or destroy an existing system prior to building a new and just society. The existing system is perceived to be unjust, corrupt, and oppressive toward a championed group. In comparison, reactionaries on the right seek to return to a time of past glory, which in their belief system has been lost or usurped by an enemy group or culture. Reactionaries perceive that there is an immediate threat to their value system and special status; their sense of utopia is to consolidate (or recapture) this status.

Regardless of which belief system is adopted by terrorists, they uniformly accept the proposition that the promised good (a utopia) outweighs their present actions, no matter how violent those actions are. The revolution will bring utopia after a period of trial and tribulation, so that the end justifies the means. This type of reasoning is particularly common among religious, ethno-nationalist, and ideological terrorists.

**Codes of Self-Sacrifice**

Terrorists invariably believe that they are justified in their actions. They have faith in the justness of their cause and live their lives accordingly. Many terrorists consequently adopt “codes of self-sacrifice” that are at the root of their everyday lives. They believe that these codes are superior codes of living and that those who follow the code are superior to those who do not. The code accepts a basic truth and applies it to everyday life. This truth usually has a religious, ethno-national, or ideological foundation. Any actions taken within the accepted parameters of these codes—even terrorist actions—are justified, because the code “cleanses” the true believer.

A good example of ideological codes of self-sacrifice is found on the fringe left among the first anarchists. Many anarchists did not simply believe in revolution, they lived the revolution. They crafted a lifestyle that was completely consumed by the cause. Among some anarchists, an affinity for death became part of the revolutionary lifestyle. The Russian anarchist Sergei Nechayev, who was first introduced in Chapter 2, wrote in *Revolutionary Catechism*:

> The revolutionary is a man committed. He has neither personal interests nor sentiments, attachments, property, nor even a name. Everything in him is subordinated to a single exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion: the revolution.11

A review of recent codes of self-sacrifice is instructive as reference points for understanding contemporary terrorism. The following discussion explores examples of modern quasi-mystical and militaristic codes that exemplify how some modern movements inculcate a sense of superiority—and a belief in a higher calling—among their members. The examples are the following:

- Racial Soldiers at War: Germany’s Waffen SS
- The New Samurai: Japan’s Code of Bushido
Racial Soldiers at War: Germany’s Waffen SS

The Waffen SS were the “armed SS” of the German military establishment during World War II. They are to be distinguished from the original SS, who were organized in 1923 as Adolf Hitler’s bodyguard unit. The acronym “SS” is derived from Schutzstaffel, or “protection squad.”

From the late 1920s, membership in the SS was determined by one’s racial purity. Members were to be of pure Aryan stock and imbued with unquestioning ideological loyalty to Hitler, Germany, and the Aryan race. Height, weight, and physical fitness requirements were established. Their image was eventually honed to symbolize a disciplined, respectable, and racially pure elite. This was accomplished by conducting racial background checks and purging certain “morally deviant” individuals from the ranks, such as the unemployed, alcoholics, criminals, and homosexuals.

The SS eventually grew into a large and multifaceted organization. Different suborganizations existed within the SS. For example, the Algemeine SS, or “general SS,” was a police-like organization and also served as a recruiting pool. Recruits from the Algemeine SS eventually became the first administrators and commanders of SS-run concentration camps. In addition, a Nazi-led “foreign legion” was recruited from Germany’s conquered territories to fight for Germany and was placed under Waffen SS command. A surprising number of non-Germans volunteered to serve in these SS units: From the West, volunteers included an estimated 50,000 Dutch, 40,000 Flemings and Walloons (Belgians), 20,000 French, and 12,000 Danes and Norwegians. Many Western recruits were idealistic anti-Bolshevik fascists who enlisted to fight against Soviet Communism.

The German-manned Waffen SS units were a special military organization, organized around mobile Panzer and Panzergrenadier (armored and armored infantry) units. They were an elite force, receiving the best equipment, recruits, and training. They were also strictly indoctrinated Nazis, or ideological soldiers, so that their training “adhered to the very roots of National Socialist doctrine: the cult of will, the attachment to ‘blood and soil,’ the scorn of so-called ‘inferior’ peoples.” Their war (especially in the East) became a racial war, and the war against the Russians was often characterized as a racial crusade. In essence,

The consequence of their training was to dehumanize the troops. Ideological indoctrination convinced them that the Russians and other eastern Europeans were Untermenschen, or subhuman, who had no place in the National Socialist world.

The Waffen SS committed many atrocities during World War II. For example, in the West during the German invasion of France, an SS unit massacred 100 British soldiers at Paradis-Finistère. During the Normandy campaign, groups of Canadian and British prisoners of war (POWs) were shot. In December 1944, a Waffen SS unit under the command of Jochen Peiper machine-gunned 71 American POWs at Malmédy during the Ardennes campaign (the Battle of the Bulge). On the Eastern Front and in the Balkans, the SS were responsible for killing tens of thousands of...
military and civilian victims. Behind the front lines, their reprisals against civilians for guerrilla attacks by partisans (resistance fighters) were brutal. For example, during the time of the Normandy invasion in June 1944, Waffen SS troops massacred 642 French civilians at Oradour-sur-Glane. In August 1944, Waffen SS soldiers massacred 560 Italian civilians in the Tuscan village of Sant’Anna di Stazzena during an antipartisan campaign. In both examples, the villages were destroyed.

Although not all Waffen SS soldiers participated in these atrocities, the organization as a whole was condemned because of this behavior. At the war crimes trials in Nuremberg after the war, their unmatched sadism was the main reason why the Nuremberg tribunal condemned the SS in toto as a criminal organization after the war.

The New Samurai: Japan’s Code of Bushido

Bushido, or “way of the warrior,” formed the core of Japanese military philosophy from the late 16th century to the collapse of the Japanese Empire in 1945. Modern Bushido hearkened back to the origins of Japan’s code of the Samurai. Sometime during the eighth century, the breakdown of central authority motivated Japan’s wealthy landowners to establish a feudal system of service that lasted (in principle, if not in fact) until well into the 19th century. Large landowners retained the military services of smaller landowners in times of crisis, resulting in an intricate system of loyalty and service, wherein
a master/servant relationship grew, whose bonds were strong and whose loyalties were local and personal. When trouble threatened the servant would follow his master’s lead. . . . Supporters of the powerful landowners called themselves “Samurai,” which is roughly translatable as “those who serve.”

The Samurai became a separate martial class, a kind of nobility, who served their masters with unquestioning devotion. Bushi is literally translated as “warrior,” so that a Samurai was a specific type of bushi, or warrior. Throughout Japanese history, the Samurai were renowned for their bravery, obedience, and discipline. For example, Samurai bushi twice repulsed Mongol invasions prepared by the Great Khan, Kublai Khan, in the 13th century. Legend holds that during the second invasion, when the Samurai faced likely defeat despite fanatical resistance, they prayed to the gods for victory. That night, a small cloud appeared, grew in size to become a great storm, and smashed the Mongol fleet. This storm became known as the Divine Wind, or kamikaze.

The martial class declined—for many reasons—so that it became almost a social burden by the 17th century. Beginning in that century, a series of philosophers redefined the role of the martial class and rekindled Bushido. They instilled the class with a sense of duty that went beyond martial discipline and required that they set high moral and intellectual examples. It was at this time that modern Bushido began to take shape. By the end of this intellectual rebirth, the Way of the Warrior had become a code of life service. “The main virtues [that Bushido] emphasized are the Samurai’s bravery, integrity, loyalty, frugality, stoicism and filial piety.” Included in Bushido was a zealous code of honor, wherein self-inflicted death—ideally by seppuku, an ancient Samurai ritual of self-disembowelment—was preferable to dishonor. Cowardice was considered to be contemptible. Surrender was unthinkable.

By the 19th century, Bushido was a well-entrenched credo, so much so that during relentless attempts to modernize Japan, a rebellion occurred in 1877; an army of 15,000 traditionalist Samurai refused to accept abolishment of the class and restrictions on the wearing of swords. During World War II, imperial Japanese soldiers were indoctrinated with the martial virtues of Bushido. In practice, enemy soldiers who surrendered to the Japanese were often dehumanized and treated harshly. Conquered civilians, particularly in Korea and China, were brutalized. When faced with defeat, Japanese soldiers would often make suicidal charges into enemy lines rather than surrender. Suicide was also common among imperial troops. Toward the end of the war, thousands of Japanese pilots flew planes packed with explosives on missions to crash into American naval vessels. They were called the kamikaze and were considered—under the code of Bushido—to be the new Divine Wind.

Understanding Codes of Self-Sacrifice

As demonstrated by the foregoing cases, codes of self-sacrifice are an important explanatory cause for terrorist behavior. Those who participate in movements and organizations similar to the Waffen SS and Bushido adopt belief systems that justify their behavior and absolve them of responsibility for normally unacceptable behavior.
These belief systems “cleanse” participants and offer them a sense of participating in a higher or superior morality.

Chapter Perspective 3.2 compares and contrasts the motives and behavior of two Palestinian nationalists, Leila Khaled and Abu Nidal.

**CHAPTER PERSPECTIVE 3.2**

Profiles of Violent Extremists: Leila Khaled and Abu Nidal

The processes that cause people to become political extremists and terrorists are very idiosyncratic. Individuals adopt extremist beliefs and engage in terrorist behaviors for many of the reasons discussed in this chapter.

A comparison of two revolutionaries championing the Palestinian cause is very useful for critically assessing why nationalists engage in terrorist violence. These are cases that illustrate the origins of the motives and ideologies of politically violent individuals.

**Leila Khaled: Freedom Fighter or Terrorist?**

During the early 1970s, Leila Khaled was famous both because of her exploits as a Palestinian revolutionary and because she was for a time the best-known airline hijacker in the world.

Khaled was born in Haifa in Palestine. After the Israeli war of independence, she and her family became refugees in a camp in the city of Tyre, Lebanon, when she was a young child. Khaled has said that she was politicized from a very young age and became a committed revolutionary by the time she was 15. Politically, she was influenced by leftist theory. One of her revolutionary heroes was Ernesto “Che” Guevara, whom she considered to be a “true” revolutionary, unlike other Western radicals.

In August 1969, at the age of 23, Leila Khaled hijacked a TWA flight on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The purpose of the hijacking was to direct the world’s attention to the plight of the Palestinians. It was a successful operation, and she reportedly forced the pilots to fly over her ancestral home of Haifa before turning toward Damascus. In Damascus, the passengers were released into the custody of the Syrians and the plane was blown up. Afterward, a then-famous photograph was taken of her.

In preparation for her next operation (and because the photograph had become a political icon), Khaled underwent plastic surgery in Germany to alter her appearance. She participated in a much larger operation on September 6 and 9, 1970, when the PFLP attempted to hijack five airliners. One of the hijackings failed, one airliner was flown to a runway in Cairo where it was destroyed, and the remaining three airliners were flown to Dawson’s Field in Jordan, where they were blown up by the PFLP on September 12. Khaled had been overpowered and captured during one of the failed attempts on September 6—an El Al (the Israeli airline) flight from Amsterdam. She was released on September 28 as part of a brokered deal exchanging Palestinian prisoners for the hostages.

Leila Khaled published her autobiography in 1973, titled *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary.* She eventually settled in Amman, Jordan, and became a...
member of the Palestinian National Council, the Palestinian parliament. She has never mod-
erated her political beliefs, has always considered herself to be a freedom fighter, and takes
pride in being one of the first to use extreme tactics to bring the Palestinians’ cause to the
world’s attention. Khaled considers the progression of Palestinian revolutionary violence—
such as the intifadeh (“shaking off,” or uprising)—to be a legitimate means to regain Palestine.

Abu Nidal: Ruthless Revolutionary

Sabri al-Banna, a Palestinian, adopted the nom de guerre of “Abu Nidal,” which has become
synonymous with his Abu Nidal Organization (ANO). He was a radical member of the
umbrella Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from an early point in its history. Yasir
Arafat’s nationalist Al Fatah organization was the dominant group within the PLO. Unlike
the Fatah mainstream, Abu Nidal was a strong advocate of a dissident ideology that was
pan-Arabist, meaning he believed that national borders in the Arab world are not sacrosanct.

Abu Nidal long argued that Al Fatah membership should be open to all Arabs, not just
Palestinians. In support of the Palestinian cause, he argued that Palestine must be estab-
lished as an Arab state. Its borders must stretch from the Jordan River in the east to the
Mediterranean sea. According to pan-Arabism, however, this is only one cause among many
in the Arab world.

After the 1973 Yom Kippur war, when invading Arab armies were soundly defeated by
Israel, many in the mainstream Al Fatah group argued that a political solution with Israel
should be an option. In 1974, Abu Nidal split from Al Fatah and began his “rejectionist”
movement to carry on a pan-Arabist armed struggle. He and his followers immediately began
engaging in high-profile international terrorist attacks, believing that the war should not be
limited to the Middle East. At different periods in his struggle, he successfully solicited sanc-
tuary from Iraq, Libya, and Syria—all of which have practiced pan-Arabist ideologies.

The ANO became one of the most prolific and bloody terrorist organizations in modern
history. It carried out attacks in approximately 20 countries and was responsible for killing
or injuring about 900 people. The ANO’s targets included fellow Arabs, such as the PLO,
Arab governments, and moderate Palestinians. Its non-Arab targets included the interests of
France, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Many of these attacks were spec-
tacular, such as an attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador to Great Britain in June
1982, simultaneous attacks on the Vienna and Rome airports in December 1985, the hijack-
ing of a Pan Am airliner in September 1986, and several assassinations of top PLO officials
in several countries. It has been alleged that Abu Nidal collaborated in the 1972 massacre of
11 Israeli athletes by the Black September group at the Munich Olympics.

Abu Nidal remained a dedicated pan-Arabist revolutionary and never renounced his
worldwide acts of political violence. His group has several hundred members, a militia in
Lebanon, and international resources. The ANO operated under numerous names, includ-
ing the Al Fatah Revolutionary Council, Arab Revolutionary Council, Arab Revolutionary
Brigades, Black September, Black June, and Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims.
The group seemingly ended its attacks against Western interests in the late 1980s. The only
major attacks attributed to the ANO in the 1990s were the 1991 assassinations of PLO deputy
chief Abu Iyad and PLO security chief Abu Hul in Tunis, and the 1994 assassination of the
senior Jordanian diplomat Naeb Maaytah in Beirut.
There are many explanations given for terrorism, and scholars and other experts have devoted a great deal of effort to explaining terrorist behavior. This has not been a simple task. Explanatory models consider many factors to account for why a particular group or people choose to employ terrorism. This calculus includes political history, government policy, contemporary politics, cultural tensions, ideological trends, economic trends, individual idiosyncrasies, and other variables. Although many terrorist environments exhibit similar characteristics—and groups have historically carried out attacks “in solidarity” with each other—explanations for terrorist activity are not readily transferable across national boundaries.

Finding a single explanation for terrorism is impossible. Nevertheless, experts have identified common explanatory characteristics among politically violent groups and individuals. The following discussion summarizes three explanatory categories:

♦ Acts of political will
♦ Sociological explanations
♦ Psychological explanations

The first category (acts of political will) consists of strategic choices made by ideologically motivated revolutionaries who pursue victory by sheer force of will. The other two categories are theoretical explanations for conditions that contribute to terrorist behavior.

Making Revolution: Acts of Political Will

An act of political will is an effort to force change. It is a choice, a rational decision from the revolutionaries’ perspective, to adopt specific tactics and methodologies to
defeat an adversary. These methodologies are instruments of rational strategic choice wherein terrorism is adopted as an optimal strategy. All that is required for final victory is to possess the political and strategic will to achieve the final goal. The selection of terrorism as a strategic methodology is a process based on the experiences of each insurgent group, so that its selection is the outcome of an evolutionary political progression. Thus,

perhaps because groups are slow to recognize the extent of the limits to action, terrorism is often the last in a sequence of choices. It represents the outcome of a learning process. Experience in opposition provides radicals with information about the potential consequences of their choices. Terrorism is likely to be a reasonably informed choice among available alternatives, some tried unsuccessfully.25

As a result, terrorism is simply a tool, an option, selected by members of the political fringe to achieve their desired goal. Terrorism is a deliberate strategy, and from their perspective success is ensured so long as the group’s political and strategic will remains strong.

The evolution of Marxist revolutionary strategy (first introduced in Chapter 2) illustrates the essence of political will. Karl Marx argued that history and human social evolution are inexorable forces that will inevitably end in the triumph of the revolutionary working class. He believed that the prediction of the eventual collapse of capitalism was based on scientific law. However, Vladimir Ilich Lenin understood that capitalism’s demise would not come about without a “push” from an organized and disciplined vanguard organization such as the Communist Party. This organization would lead the working class to victory. In other words, the political will of the people can make history if they are properly indoctrinated and led. Vanguard theory (the notion of a revolutionary elite) will be explored further in Chapter 7.

An important conceptual example will help readers better understand the theory of revolutionary change through acts of political will. It is a strategy known as people’s war. The context in which it was first developed and applied was the Chinese Revolution.

Mao Zedong led the Communist Red Army to victory during the Chinese Revolution by waging a protracted war—first against Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists (Kuomintang), then in alliance with the Nationalists against the invading Japanese, and finally driving Chiang’s forces from mainland China in 1949. The Red Army prevailed largely because of Mao’s military-political doctrine, which emphasized waging an insurgent people’s war. His strategy was simple:

♦ Indoctrinate the army.
♦ Win over the people.
♦ Hit, run, and fight forever.

People’s war was a strategy born of necessity, originating when the Red Army was nearly annihilated by the Nationalists prior to and during the famous Long March
campaign in 1934–1935. During the Long March, the Red Army fought a series of rearguard actions against pursuing Nationalist forces, eventually finding refuge in the northern Shensi province after a reputed 6,000-mile march. After the Long March, while the Red Army was being rested and refitted in Shensi, Mao developed his military doctrine. People’s war required protracted warfare (war drawn out over time), fought by an army imbued with an iron ideological will to wear down the enemy.26

According to Mao, the Red Army should fight a guerrilla war, with roving bands that would occasionally unite. The war was to be fought by consolidating the countryside and then gradually moving into the towns and cities. Red Army units would avoid conventional battle with the Nationalists, giving ground before superior numbers. Space would be traded for time, and battle would be joined only when the Red Army was tactically superior at a given moment. Thus, an emphasis was placed on avoidance and retreat. In people’s war, assassination was perfectly acceptable, and targets included soldiers, government administrators, and civilian collaborators. Government-sponsored programs and events—no matter how beneficial they might be to the people—were to be violently disrupted to show the government’s weakness.

A successful people’s war required the cooperation and participation of the civilian population, so Mao ordered his soldiers to win their loyalty by treating the people correctly. According to Mao,

The army is powerful because all its members have a conscious discipline; they have come together and they fight not for the private interests of a few individuals or a narrow clique, but for the interests of the broad masses and of the whole nation. The sole purpose of this army is to stand firmly with the Chinese people and to serve them whole-heartedly.27

Mao’s contribution to modern warfare—and to the concept of political will—was that he deliberately linked his military strategy to his political strategy; they were one and the same. Terrorism was a perfectly acceptable option in this military-political strategy. The combination of ideology, political indoctrination, guerrilla tactics, protracted warfare, and popular support made people’s war a very potent strategy. It was an effective synthesis of political will.

Leftist revolutionaries adopted this strategy elsewhere in the world in conflicts that ranged in scale from large insurrections to small bands of rebels. Terrorism was frequently used as a strategic instrument to harass and disrupt adversaries, with the goal of turning the people against them and forcing them to capitulate. In the end, people’s war had mixed success. It was sometimes very successful, such as in China and Vietnam, but failed elsewhere, such as in Malaysia and the Philippines.28

The Fruit of Injustice: Sociological Explanations of Terrorism

Sociological explanations generally hold that terrorism is a product of intergroup conflict that results in collective violence. The sociological approach argues that terrorism is a group-based phenomenon that is selected as the only available strategy by
a weaker group. From the perspective of an opponent group, “terrorism and other forms of collective violence are often described as ‘senseless,’ and their participants are often depicted as irrational.” However, this is not an entirely complete analysis, because if “rational” means goal directed . . . then most collective violence is indeed rational. . . . Their violence is indeed directed at achieving certain, social change-oriented goals, regardless of whether we agree with those goals or with the violent means used to attain them. If “rational” further means sound, wise, and logical, then available evidence indicates that collective violence is rational . . . because it sometimes can help achieve their social goals.

In essence, the disadvantaged group asserts its rights by selecting a methodology—in this case, terrorism—that from the group’s perspective is its only viable option. The selection process is based on the insurgent group’s perceptions and its analysis of those perceptions. To illustrate this point, the following example describes a hypothetical group’s analytical progression toward revolution:

♦ The perception grows within a particular group that the government or social order is inherently brutal or unfair toward the group. ♦ Because the system does not allow for meaningful social dissent by the group (in the opinion of group members), it concludes that the only recourse is to oust the existing government or order. ♦ The group perceives that an opportunity for change is available at a particular point in history. To wait longer would likely mean a lost possibility for revolutionary change.

Photo 3.4 Photographs that shocked the world. An American soldier pulls an Iraqi detainee with a leash in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad in late 2003. Such images served to rally opposition to the U.S.-led occupation.

Source: Corbis.
After analyzing the contemporary political environment, the group perceives that the government or system possesses inherent weaknesses or “contradictions” (to use a Marxist term). All that is needed is a revolutionary “push” to achieve the group’s goals.

An important ingredient in the group’s calculation is the perception that the people are ripe for revolution. What is required is for the group to act as a vanguard to politicize the broader masses and lead them to revolution.

The foregoing analytical progression incorporates two theoretical concepts: structural theory and relative deprivation theory. These theories are summarized below.

**Structural theory** has been used in many policy and academic disciplines to identify social conditions (“structures”) that affect group access to services, equal rights, civil protections, freedom, or other quality-of-life measures. Examples of social structures include government policies, administrative bureaucracies, spatial (geographic) location of the group, the role of security forces, and access to social institutions. Applying this theory to the context of terrorism,

Structural theories of revolution emphasize that weaknesses in state structures encourage the potential for revolution. . . . According to this view, a government beset by problems such as economic and military crises is vulnerable to challenges by insurgent forces. . . . Other governments run into trouble when their . . . policies alienate and even anger elites within the society.

The state is the key actor in structural theories of revolution. Its status is the precipitating factor for popular revolutions. Popular discontent, the alienation of elites, and a pervasive crisis are the central ingredients for bringing a society to the brink of revolution.

**Relative deprivation theory** essentially holds that “feelings of deprivation and frustration underlie individual decisions to engage in collective action.” According to this theory, when a group’s rising expectations are met by sustained repression or second-class status, the group’s reaction may include political violence. Their motive for engaging in political violence is their observation that they are relatively deprived, vis-à-vis other groups, in an unfair social order. This should be contrasted with absolute deprivation, when a group has been deprived of the basic necessities for survival by a government or social order. This condition can also lead to political violence.

One observation must be made about relative deprivation theory: Although it was, and still is, a popular theory among many experts, three shortcomings have been argued:

- Psychological research suggests that aggression happens infrequently when the conditions for relative deprivation are met.
- The theory is more likely to explain individual behavior rather than group behavior.
- Empirical studies have not found an association between relative deprivation and political violence.
International Cases in Point

Examples of movements that are motivated against a government or social order include ethno-nationalist movements among Basques in Spain, Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, Palestinians in Israel, and French Canadians in Quebec. Sociological explanations for these movements are summarized below.

**Basques in Spain.** The Basque region of northern Spain is home to approximately 2.5 million Basques. Nationalism in the region dates to the defeat of Spanish Republicans during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. After the war, Francisco Franco’s fascist regime suppressed Basque culture, integrated the region into Spain, and banned the Basque language. Spanish culture and language were imposed on the Basque region. Since the late 1950s, Basque nationalists, especially Basque Fatherland and Liberty (Euskadi Ta Azkatasuna, or ETA), have fought for autonomy from Spain and the preservation of their national identity. The Basque cause will be explored further in Chapter 5.

**Irish Catholic Nationalism.** Irish Catholic nationalism in Northern Ireland dates to the 16th century, when English King James I granted Scottish Protestant settlers land in Ireland, thus beginning a long process of relegating Irish Catholics to second-class status in their own country. Protestant (“Scotch-Irish”) and English domination was secured in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. Catholic independence was finally won in 1919 and 1920, but the island was formally divided between the independent Irish Republic in the south and the British-administered six-county region of Northern Ireland. Since that time, some Irish republicans in the north, especially the Provisional Irish Republican Army (first introduced in Chapter 2), have engaged in armed resistance against Protestant and British political domination. They seek union with the southern republic. The Irish republican cause will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 7.

**Palestinian Nationalism.** Palestinian nationalism dates to the formal creation of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. The next day, the Arab League (Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) declared war on Israel. Israel was victorious, and in the subsequent consolidation of power, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians either left Israel or were expelled. Since that time, Palestinian nationalists, especially the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas, have fought a guerrilla and terrorist war against Israel to establish a Palestinian state. The Palestinian cause will be explored further in Chapter 5.

**French Canadian Nationalism.** French Canadian nationalism is centered in Quebec, where French-descended residents (known as the Québécois) predominate. The French identity in Quebec has always been vigorously protected by Québécois against English domination. Some Québécois are nationalists, seeking greater autonomy or independence from English-speaking Canada. Most French Canadian nationalism has been democratic in expression and has been led by the Parti Québécois. However, a separatist group founded in 1963 known as the Front du Liberation de Québec (FLQ) engaged in a bombing campaign to promote an independent Quebec. Nationalist sentiment increased during the late 1960s when, during a visit by French
President Charles de Gaulle in July 1967, he delivered a speech using the now-famous phrase “Vive le Québec libre,” or “Long live free Quebec.” Table 3.1 summarizes the constituencies and enemies of groups promoting the foregoing causes.

### Rationality and Terrorist Violence: Psychological Explanations of Terrorism

Psychological approaches to explaining terrorism broadly examine the effects of internal psychological dynamics on individual and group behavior. This kind of analysis incorporates many of the concepts that were discussed previously in this chapter, such as moral convictions and simplified definitions of good and evil.

At the outset, it is useful to examine the presumption held by a number of people—experts, policymakers, and laypersons—that terrorism is a manifestation of insanity or mental illness or that terrorism is the signature of a lunatic fringe. This presumption suggests that terrorism is a priori (fundamentally) irrational behavior and that only deranged individuals or deranged collections of people would select terrorist violence as a strategy. Most experts agree that this blanket presumption is incorrect. Although individuals and groups do act out of certain idiosyncratic psychological processes, their behavior is neither insane nor necessarily irrational.

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**Table 3.1 Nationalism and Sociological Explanations of Terrorism: Constituencies and Adversaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Adversary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish Republican Army factions</td>
<td>Northern Irish Catholics</td>
<td>British and Ulster Protestants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETA factions</td>
<td>Spanish Basques</td>
<td>Spaniards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular and religious Palestinian groups</td>
<td>Palestinians</td>
<td>Israelis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLQ</td>
<td>French-speaking residents of Quebec (Québécois)</td>
<td>English-speaking Canadians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those who engage in collective violence are, in many respects, “normal” people:

How rational are the participants in collective violence? Are they sane? Do they really know what they’re doing? ... The available evidence favors rationality. ... Although some explanations of collective violence stress psychological abnormality among its participants, studies on this issue suggest that in general they’re as psychologically normal and rational as the average person.\(^{37}\)

**Individual-Level Explanations**

Some experts argue that the decision to engage in political violence is frequently an outcome of significant events in individual lives that give rise to antisocial feelings. They actively seek improvement in their environment or desire redress and revenge from the perceived cause of their condition. Very often psychological motivation for terrorism derives from the terrorist’s personal dissatisfaction with his life and accomplishments. He finds his *raison d’être* in dedicated terrorist action. ... Terrorists tend to project their own antisocial motivations onto others, creating a polarized “we versus they” outlook. They attribute only evil motives to anyone outside their own group. This enables the terrorists to dehumanize their victims and removes any sense of ambiguity from their minds. The resultant clarity of purpose appeals to those who crave violence to relieve their constant anger.\(^{38}\)

Research has *not* found a pattern of psychopathology among terrorists. In comparing nonviolent and violent activists, studies reported “preliminary impressions ... that the family backgrounds of terrorists do not differ strikingly from the backgrounds of their politically active counterparts.”\(^{39}\) There is evidence of some psychosocial commonalities among violent activists. For example, research on 250 West German terrorists reported “a high incidence of fragmented families”; “severe conflict, especially with the parents”; conviction in juvenile court; and “a pattern of failure both educationally and vocationally.”\(^{40}\)

**Group-Level Explanations**

In a number of social and political contexts, political violence is a familiar social phenomenon for some people. When this process is combined with “the pronounced need to belong to a group,”\(^{41}\) individuals can in the end “define their social status by group acceptance.” Thus, at the group level, another result of psychological motivation is the intensity of group dynamics among terrorists. They tend to demand unanimity and be intolerant of dissent ... [and] pressure to escalate the frequency and intensity of operations is ever present. ... Compromise is rejected, and terrorist groups lean towards maximalist positions.\(^{42}\)
An important outcome of these dynamics is the development of a self-perpetuating cycle of rationalizations of political violence. This occurs because

the psychodynamics also make the announced group goal nearly impossible to achieve. A group that achieves its stated purpose is no longer needed; thus, success threatens the psychological well-being of its members.43

Generalized Psychological Explanations

Psychological explanations are fairly broad approaches to the dynamics of terrorist behavior. Both individual and group theories attempt to generalize reasons for the decision to initiate political violence and the processes that perpetuate such violence. These explanations may be summarized as follows:

♦ Terrorism is simply a choice among violent and less violent alternatives. It is a rational selection of one methodology over other options.
♦ Terrorism is a technique to maintain group cohesion and focus. Group solidarity overcomes individualism.
♦ Terrorism is a necessary process to build the esteem of an oppressed people. Through terrorism, power is established over others, and the weak become strong. Attention itself becomes self-gratifying.
♦ Terrorists consider themselves to be an elite vanguard. They are not content to debate the issues, because they have found a “truth” that needs no explanation. Action is superior to debate.
♦ Terrorism provides a means to justify political violence. The targets are depersonalized, and symbolic labels are attached to them. Thus, symbolic buildings become legitimate targets even when occupied by people, and individual victims become symbols of an oppressive system.

Case: The Stockholm Syndrome. In August 1973, three women and one man were taken hostage by two bank robbers in Stockholm, Sweden. The botched robbery led to a hostage crisis that lasted for six days. During the crisis, the robbers threatened to kill the four hostages if the authorities tried to rescue them. At the same time, the hostages received treatment from the robbers that they began to think of as kindness and consideration. For example, one hostage was told that he would not be killed, but rather shot in the leg if the police intervened, and that he should play dead. Another hostage, who suffered from claustrophobia, was let out of the bank vault on a rope leash. These were perceived as acts of kindness because the situation was very tense inside the bank:

The hostages were under extended siege by a horde of police seeking opportunities to shoot the robbers, depriving the group of food and other necessities to force their surrender, and poking holes in walls to gas the robbers into submission. The captors often acted as the hostages’ protectors against the frightening maneuvers by the police.44
During the six-day episode, all of the hostages began to sympathize with the robbers and gradually came to completely identify with them. They eventually denounced the authorities’ attempts to free them. After the situation was resolved, the hostages remained loyal to their former captors for months. They refused to testify against them and raised money for their legal defense. One of the female former hostages actually became engaged to one of the robbers. This was, to say the least, surprising behavior. The question is whether this was an isolated phenomenon or whether it is possible for it to occur in other hostage crises.

Experts are divided about whether the Stockholm syndrome is a prevalent condition. Those who contend that it can occur and has occurred in other situations argue that the syndrome sets in when a prisoner suffers a psychological shift from captive to sympathizer. In theory, the prisoner will try to keep his or her captor happy in order to stay alive whenever he or she is unable to escape, is isolated, and is threatened with death. This becomes an obsessive identification with what the captor likes and dislikes, and the prisoner eventually begins to sympathize with the captor. The psychological shift theoretically requires three or four days to set in. An example of the Stockholm syndrome during the kidnapping of newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst is presented in Chapter 12, when Hearst was kidnapped by the terrorist group the Symbionese Liberation Army and joined the group after being psychologically and physically tormented for more than 50 days.

Summing Up. In essence, then, psychological explanations of terrorist behavior use theories of individual motivations and group dynamics to explicate why people first decide to adopt strategies of political violence and why groups continue their campaigns of violence. Among violent extremists,

it appears that people who are aggressive and action-oriented, and who place greater-than-normal reliance on the psychological mechanisms of externalization and splitting, are disproportionately represented among terrorists.45

Pressures to conform to the group, combined with pressures to commit acts of violence, form a powerful psychological drive to carry on in the name of the cause, even when victory is logically impossible. These pressures become so prevalent that achieving victory becomes a consideration secondary to the unity of the group.46 Having said this, it is inadvisable to completely generalize about psychological causes of terrorism, because “most terrorists do not demonstrate serious psychopathology,” and “there is no single personality type.”47

Chapter Perspective 3.3 investigates the subject of gender and terrorism by discussing women as terrorists.

Lighting the Fuse: Adversaries in the War on Terrorism

One final consideration is necessary to fully appreciate modern causes of terrorism. This theory is rooted in the political environment that gave rise to the new era of terrorism.
Women as Terrorists

On October 23–26, 2003, Chechen terrorists seized 700 hostages in a Moscow theater. The episode ended with the deaths of scores of hostages and all of the terrorists. Russian authorities reported that many of the hostage-takers were women who had suicide explosive vests strapped to their bodies. The presence of female suicide bombers is not uncommon within the Chechen resistance movement. As a result, the Russian media has dubbed the women among Chechen terrorists “Black Widows” because they are allegedly relatives of Chechen men who have died in the ongoing war in Chechnya (Chechen terrorism is discussed further in Chapter 5).

How common is terrorism by women? What motivates women to become terrorists? In which environments are female terrorists typically found? Women have been active in a variety of roles in many violent political movements. Historically, some women held positions of leadership during terrorist campaigns and were well-integrated into the command systems and policy decision-making processes in extremist groups. In the modern era, women were central figures in Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers, Germany’s Red Army Faction, Italy’s Red Brigade, Spain’s Basque ETA, and the Japanese Red Army. During the Palestinian intifadeh against Israel, a number of Palestinian suicide bombers were young women. More commonly, women serve as combatants rather than leaders, or women are recruited to participate as support functionaries, such as finding safe houses and engaging in surveillance.

Regardless of the quality of participation, it is clear that such involvement belies the common presumption that terrorism is an exclusively male preserve. In fact, some of the most committed revolutionaries around the world are women.

The following examples are instructive:

♦ Prior to the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Russian women were leading members of violent extremist groups such as People’s Will and the Social Revolutionary Party.
♦ Female anarchists such as Emma Goldman in the United States demonstrated that women could be leading revolutionary theorists.
♦ Leila Khaled became a well-respected and prominent member of the Palestinian nationalist movement after her participation in two airline hijacking incidents.
♦ During the unrest leading up to the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s, women participated in numerous antigovernment attacks.
♦ Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof, and other women were leaders and comrades-in-arms within Germany’s Red Army Faction during the 1970s.
♦ During the 1970s and 1980s, other West European terrorist groups such as France’s Direct Action, Italy’s Red Brigade, and Belgium’s Communist Combat Cells integrated women into their ranks.
♦ Women were leaders in the nihilistic Japanese Red Army during the 1970s and 1980s, and the movement was founded by Shigenobu Fusako.
♦ During the latter quarter of the 20th century, Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) “soldiers” were mostly men, despite the fact that the IRA was a nationalist and mildly socialist movement.
The concept of “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” is very pertinent to how the behavior of the West, and particularly the behavior of the United States, is perceived around the world. When the attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred, many Americans and other Westerners interpreted the events as an attack on Western-style civilization. Reasons given for the subsequent U.S.-led war on terrorism included the argument that war is necessary to defend civilization from a “new barbarism.” From the official American and its allies’ point of view, the war is a just counteraction to the enemies of democracy and freedom. However, there is a wholly different perspective found among many Muslims.

Active participation of women is arguably more common among left-wing and nationalist terrorist movements than in right-wing and religious movements. Rightist and religious movements yield few cases of women as terrorists, and examples of female leaders are equally few. One reason for these characteristics is that, on the one hand, many leftists adopt ideologies of gender equality and many nationalists readily enlist female fighters for the greater good of the group. On the other hand, right-wing and religious movements often adopt ideologies that relegate women to secondary roles within the group. Among religious movements, ideologies of male dominance and female subordination have been common, so that women rarely participate in attacks, let alone in command systems and policy decision-making processes.

Notes

a. For a good discussion of these and other issues, see Talbot, Rhiannon. “Myths in the Representation of Women Terrorists.” Eire-Ireland. Fall 2001.


c. For a good discussion of Italian women in violent organizations, see Jamieson, Alison. “Mafiosi and Terrorists: Italian Women in Violent Organizations.” SAIS Review. Summer/Fall 2000, pp. 51–64.

d. For interviews with female Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades volunteers, see Tierney, Michael. “Young, Gifted and Ready to Kill.” The Herald (Glasgow, UK). August 3, 2002.
Most nations and people in the Muslim world expressed shock and sorrow toward the U.S. homeland attacks and the innocent lives that were lost. At the same time, many Middle Eastern analysts interpreted the attacks as part of a generalized reaction against U.S. policies and behavior. Although little official support was expressed for the ideologies of radical Islamists such as Osama bin Laden, analysts decried the perceived imbalance in U.S. Middle Eastern policies, especially toward Israel in comparison to friendly Muslim countries.

Interestingly, many young Muslims are keen to adopt some degree of Western culture, yet remain loyal to the Muslim community. As one student commented:

Most of us here like it both ways, we like American fashion, American music, American movies, but in the end, we are Muslims. . . . The Holy Prophet said that all Muslims are like one body, and if one part of the body gets injured, then all parts feel that pain. If one Muslim is injured by non-Muslims in Afghanistan, it is the duty of all Muslims of the world to help him.48

The argument, then, is that the cause of anti-American and Western sentiment is the behavior of those nations—that is, the things that they do rather than their values or culture. In the opening paragraph of his controversial book, *Imperial Hubris*, former ranking Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official Michael Scheuer presented the central precept of this argument:

In America’s confrontation with Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, their allies, and the Islamic world, there lies a startlingly clear example of how loving something intensely can stimulate an equally intense and purposeful hatred of things by which it is threatened. This hatred shapes and informs Muslim reactions to U.S. policies and their execution, and it is impossible to understand the threat America faces until the intensity and pervasiveness of this hatred is recognized.49

As religion professor Bruce Lawrence observed, “They hate us because of what we do, and it seems to contradict who we say we are . . . the major issue is that our policy seems to contradict our own basic values.”50 Assuming the plausibility of this theory, terrorists possess ample promise to recruit new fighters from among young Muslims who are incensed by American and Western intervention in their regions and nations. Although such intervention is justified in the West as being fundamentally beneficial to the people of the Middle East, the perception of many local people is to the contrary.

Can Muslim perceptions and Western behaviors be reconciled? What are the prospects for mitigating this source of terrorism in the modern era? Several events portend a continued disconnect between these perceptions and behaviors, at least for the immediate future:

♦ The American-led occupation of Iraq and the protracted insurgency that arose.
♦ An open-ended presence of Western troops in or near Muslim countries.
♦ Broadcasted images of civilian casualties and other “collateral damage” during military operations.
Broadcasted images and rumors of the mistreatment of prisoners in American-run detention facilities.

Cycles of chronic violence between Israelis and Palestinians and the perception that the U.S. and West unfairly favor Israel.

In this regard, a 2004 report by the CIA’s National Intelligence Council warned that the war in Iraq created a new training ground for professional terrorists, much as the 1979–1989 Soviet war in Afghanistan created an environment that led to the rise of Al Qaeda and other international mujahideen (Islamic holy warriors). The report further warned that veterans of the Iraq war will disperse after the end of the conflict, thus constituting a new generation of international mujahideen who will supplant the first Afghanistan-trained generation of fighters. This is a plausible scenario, because many foreigners volunteered to fight in Iraq out of a sense of pan-Islamic solidarity. The concepts of the mujahideen, new networks, and a new generation of mujahideen will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 8.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced readers to the theoretical causes of terrorism and presented examples that represent some of the models developed by scholars and other researchers. Individual profiles, group dynamics, political environments, and social processes are at the center of the puzzle of explaining why people and groups adopt fringe beliefs and engage in terrorist behavior. Social movements and dramatic (or “traumatic”) events have been identified as two sources of terrorism, with the caveat that they are generalized explanations.

Not all extremists become terrorists, but certainly all terrorists are motivated by extremist beliefs. Motives behind terrorist behavior include a range of factors. One is a moral motivation, which is an unambiguous conviction of the righteousness of one’s cause. Terrorists believe that the principles of their movement are unquestionably sound. A second motive is the simplification of notions of good and evil, when terrorists presume that their cause and methods are completely justifiable because their opponents represent inveterate evil. There are no “gray areas” in their struggle. A third factor is the adoption of utopian ideals by terrorists, whereby an idealized end justifies the use of violence. These idealized ends are often very vague concepts, such as Karl Marx’s dictatorship of the proletariat. The fourth motive is critical to understanding terrorist behavior. It is the development of codes of self-sacrifice, when an ingrained belief system forms the basis for a terrorist’s lifestyle and conduct. Collectively, these factors form a useful theoretical foundation for explaining terrorist motives.

Explanations of terrorism also consist of a range of factors. The theory of acts of political will is a rational model in which extremists choose to engage in terrorism as an optimal strategy to force change. Sociological explanations of terrorism look at intergroup dynamics, particularly conflict that results in collective violence.
Perception is an important factor in the decision to engage in collective violence. Psychological explanations broadly explain individual motivations and group dynamics. Psychological theories also help to explicate the cohesion of terrorist organizations and why they perpetuate violent behavior even when victory is logically impossible.

One final point should be considered when evaluating the causes of terrorism: When experts build models and develop explanatory theories for politically motivated violence, their conclusions sometimes “reflect the political and social currents of the times in which the scholars writing the theories live.” It is plausible that to a large degree, the development of theories . . . reflects changing political and intellectual climates. When intellectuals have opposed the collective behavior of their times . . . they have tended to depict the behavior negatively. . . . When scholars have instead supported the collective behavior of their eras . . . they have painted a more positive portrait of both the behavior and the individuals participating in it.

This is not to say that analysts are not trying to be objective or that they are purposefully disingenuous in their analyses. But it is only logical to presume that the development of new explanatory theories will be affected by factors such as new terrorist environments or new ideologies that encourage political violence. The progression of explanations by the social and behavioral sciences in the future will naturally reflect the sociopolitical environments of the times in which they are developed.

Key Terms and Concepts

The following topics were discussed in this chapter and can be found in the glossary/index:

- absolute deprivation
- Abu Nidal
- Abu Nidal Organization
- act of political will
- Al Fatah
- Basque Fatherland and Liberty (Euskadi Ta Azkatasuna, or ETA)
- Black September
- Black Widows
- Bloody Sunday
- Bushido
- Carlos “The Jackal”
- codes of self-sacrifice
- end justifies the means, the
  intifadeh
- jihad
- jihadi
- kamikaze
- Khaled, Leila
- Kosovo Liberation Army
- Marighella, Carlos
- Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla
- mujahideen
- nihilist dissidents
- nihilist dissident terrorism
- pan-Arabist
- people’s war
- relative deprivation theory
- Samurai
- Schutzstaffel
- Stockholm syndrome
- structural theory
- utopia
- Viet Cong
- Waffen SS
DISCUSSION BOX

Bloody Sunday and Black September

This chapter’s Discussion Box is intended to stimulate critical debate about seminal incidents in the history of national groups.

Bloody Sunday

In the late 1960s, Irish Catholic activists calling themselves the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association attempted to emulate the African American civil rights movement as a strategy to agitate for equality in Northern Ireland. They thought that the same force of moral conviction would sway British policy to improve the plight of the Catholics. Their demands were similar to those of the American civil rights movement: equal opportunity, better employment, access to housing, and access to education. This ended when mostly peaceful demonstrations gradually became more violent, leading to rioting in the summer of 1969, an environment of generalized unrest, and the deployment of British troops. After 1969, the demonstrations continued, but rioting, fire bombings, and gun battles gradually became a regular feature of strife in Northern Ireland.

On January 30, 1972, elite British paratroopers fired on demonstrators in Londonderry. Thirteen demonstrators were killed. After this incident, many Catholics became radicalized and actively worked to drive out the British. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) received recruits and widespread support from the Catholic community. In July 1972, the Provos launched a massive bombing spree in central Belfast.

Black September

When Leila Khaled and her comrades attempted to hijack five airliners on September 6 and 9, 1970, their plan was to fly all of the planes to an abandoned British Royal Air Force (RAF) airfield in Jordan, hold hostages, broker the release of Palestinian prisoners, release the hostages, blow up the planes, and thereby force the world to focus on the plight of the Palestinian people. On September 12, from the three planes that landed at Dawson’s Field (the RAF base) 255 hostages were released and 56 were kept to bargain for the release of seven Palestinian prisoners, including Leila Khaled. The group then blew up the airliners.

Unfortunately for the hijackers, their actions greatly alarmed King Hussein of Jordan. Martial law was declared on September 16, and the incident led to civil war between Palestinian forces under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Jordanian army. Although the Jordanians’ operation was precipitated by the destruction of the airliners on Jordanian soil, tensions had been building between the army and Palestinian forces for some time. King Hussein and the Jordanian leadership interpreted this operation as confirmation that radical Palestinian groups had become too powerful and were a threat to Jordanian sovereignty.

On September 19, Hussein asked for diplomatic intervention from Great Britain and the United States when a Syrian column entered Jordan in support of the
Palestinians. On September 27, a truce ended the fighting. The outcome of the fighting was a relocation of much of the Palestinian leadership and fighters to its Lebanese bases. The entire incident became known among Palestinians as Black September and was not forgotten by radicals in the Palestinian nationalist movement. One of the most notorious terrorist groups took the name Black September, and the name was also used by Abu Nidal.

Discussion Questions
♦ What role do you think these incidents had in precipitating the IRA’s and PLO’s cycles of violence?
♦ Were the IRA’s and PLO’s tactics and targets justifiable responses to these incidents?
♦ What, in your opinion, would have been the outcome in Northern Ireland if the British government had responded to the Irish Catholics’ emulation of the American civil rights movement?
♦ What, in your opinion, would have been the outcome if the Jordanian government had not responded militarily to the Palestinian presence in Jordan?
♦ How should the world community have responded to Bloody Sunday and Black September?

Recommended Web Sites
The following Web sites provide links to examples of the reasons given for political agitation, as explained by activist organizations and movements.

- European Federation of Green Parties (Belgium): www.europeangreens.org
- Islamic Resistance (Lebanon): http://www.moqawama.net/english/
- National Socialist Movement (U.S.): www.nsm88.com

Note: To assist you with the Web exercise below, and to enable you to better master the course and book material, be sure to visit the book’s Study Site:

http://www.sagepub.com/Martin2Study

Web Exercise
Using this chapter’s recommended Web sites, conduct an online investigation of the causes of extremist agitation and terrorist violence.
1. What issues do these groups consider to have unquestioned merit? What reasons do they give for this quality?

2. What scenarios do you think might cause these groups to engage in direct confrontation or violence?

3. Act as “devil’s advocate” and defend one of these causes that you disagree with.

For an online search of factors that are commonly cited as causes for terrorist violence, readers should activate the search engine on their Web browser and enter the following keywords:

“Intifadeh (or Intifada)”

“Just War”

**Recommended Readings**

The following publications provide discussions about the causes of terrorist behavior.


**Notes**


3. *Intifadeh* literally means “shaking off.”


6. Ibid., pp. 7–8.

8. Marighella’s name has been alternatively spelled with one l and two ls. Marighella himself alternated between spellings.


13. Ibid., p. 1732.


19. Dating the origins of the code of Bushido and the Samurai is imprecise and must be approximated.


21. Ibid., pp. 84–94.

22. Ibid., p. 282.

23. Ibid., p. 286.


25. Ibid., p. 11.


30. Ibid., p. 7.

31. Maoists and Trotskyites in particular cite “contradictions” in the capitalist democracies—for example, the existence of democratic institutions and ideologies of equality existing alongside entrenched poverty, racism, sexism, and so on.

34. See ibid., p. 55.
36. Discussed ibid., p. 18.
41. Post, p. 28.
42. Ibid., p. 20.
43. Ibid.
46. Ibid., pp. 25–42.
47. Ibid., p. 31.
50. Ibid.
53. Barkan and Snowden (note 29 above), p. 27.
54. Ibid., pp. 27–28.