17

Terrorism

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When states or armed rebels indiscriminately attack civilians, they generally attack civilians who support and/or have a substantial capacity to influence opposing states or rebel movements. Overthrowing, defeating or strongly pressuring such states or movements is the primary goal of terrorism, which is thus a kind of *indirect* warfare. 'Categorical' terrorism – violence against a whole category of non-combatants – will generally be employed against non-combatants who support states or rebel movements that themselves perpetrate extensive, indiscriminate violence against non-combatants who support their armed enemies. By contrast, categories of civilians which include significant numbers of allies or potential allies (or which can be strongly influenced by non-violent appeals or protests) will not be attacked by states or rebels.

Like 'democracy', 'power', 'class', and other 'essentially contested' concepts, there is no universally accepted definition of 'terrorism'. And yet an explanation of terrorism requires a clear definition, even if, empirically, terrorism is not always easily distinguished from cognate phenomena.

I define terrorism as *a strategy characterized by the deliberate use of violence against, or the infliction of extreme physical suffering upon, civilians or non-combatants in order to pressure or influence other civilians and, thereby, governments or armed rebels*. Terrorism is thus a strategy that may be employed by states or rebels and by ideological moderates as well as 'extremists'. This definition directs attention to the killing of civilians in conflicts between two or more armed actors, state or non-state. This strategy does not encompass all types of political violence against non-combatants, including, for example, state violence against an oppressed ethnic group which is not aimed at pressuring a state or movement supported by that ethnic group (e.g., Nazi violence against Jews). This definition of terrorism encompasses (1)

violence or other lethal actions against non-combatants by rebel groups (i.e., 'terrorism' as many if not most people think of it) but also (2) violence or other lethal actions by states or allied paramilitary forces against non-combatants in conflicts with rebels and (3) violence or other lethal actions by states against non-combatants in international conflicts. 'State terrorism' is important to consider for a number of reasons, not least because state violence against non-combatants has claimed many more victims than has rebel violence against non-combatants (see, for example, Herman and O'Sullivan 1989: chs 2–3; Gareau 2004).

This definition of terrorism stipulates that terrorism involves violence against or the infliction of suffering upon non-combatants, thus differentiating terrorism from conventional and guerrilla warfare directed against armed actors (however literally terrifying these may be), whether waged by state or non-state actors. What we must explain in order to explain terrorism, accordingly, is not why states or political groups sometimes resort to violence, but why they employ violence against civilians or non-combatants in particular. Indeed, one virtue of this definition is that it squarely focuses our attention on violations of the idea (and the ideal) of *non-combatant immunity* – the principle that non-combatants should never be targeted in wars or civil conflicts. Non-combatant immunity is a fundamental principle of 'just war' theory and international law, including the Geneva Conventions.

Two Types of Terrorism

Two types of terrorism need to be analytically differentiated, both of which differ from conventional and guerrilla warfare, insofar as the latter are directed against the combatants or armed forces of a state or rebel movement (see Table 17.1). Of course, as Black points out, 'those popularly known as guerrillas may sometimes engage in terrorism [when they attack civilians], and those popularly known as terrorists may

Table 17.1 Three types of armed struggle

Targets of state or rebels		
Combatants	*Non-combatants*	
Armed rebels	Politicians, rebel political leaders	Anonymous members of an ethnic group, nationality, social class, or other group
Government soldiers and security forces	State officials, bureaucrats	
Paramilitaries	Leaders/activists of competing oppositional groups	
Armed civilians	Collaborators Common criminals	
[1. Conventional/ guerrilla warfare]	[2. Selective/individualized terrorism; i.e. targeted assassination]	[3. Categorical/indiscriminate terrorism]

sometimes engage in guerrilla warfare [when they attack military facilities or personnel]' (2004: 17).

One type of terrorism, which we may call 'selective' or 'individualized', is directed against non-combatants who are targeted because of their individual identities or roles. These individuals typically include politicians and rebel political leaders, competing oppositional leaders and political activists, collaborators and spies, unsympathetic intellectuals and journalists, and common criminals who prey upon the state's or rebels' supporters. This type of terrorism – essentially a strategy of 'targeted assassination' or 'extrajudicial execution' – was employed by some nineteenth-century Russian revolutionaries, a number of anarchist groups and several radical European groups of the 1960s, and, more recently, by US and Israeli 'counterterrorism' forces.

Targeted assassination or selective terrorism is very different from 'indiscriminate' or what I term 'categorical' terrorism, which is directed against anonymous individuals by virtue of their belonging to a specific ethnic group, nationality, social class or some other collectivity. This type of terrorism – with which this chapter is especially concerned – is typically called indiscriminate or 'random' terrorism because it makes no distinctions among the *individual* identities of its targets. In another sense, however, such terrorism is *very* discriminate, being directed against specific categories of people and not others. For this reason, I believe 'categorical terrorism' is a more accurate label than 'indiscriminate terrorism' for this strategy.

Following the general definition of terrorism given above, categorical terrorism may be defined as *a strategy characterized by the deliberate use of violence against, or the infliction of extreme physical suffering upon, civilians or non-combatants who belong to a specific ethnic group, nationality, social class or some other collectivity, without regard to their individual identities or roles, in order to pressure or influence other civilians and, thereby, governments or armed rebels*. In much, if not most, popular discourse, as well as for many scholars (e.g., Turk 1982; Senechal de la Roche 1996; Black 2004), 'terrorism' is basically understood as what I am calling categorical terrorism. 'Indiscriminate' violence, that is, is seen by many as an essential property of terrorism.

There is substantial variation in the extent to which states and rebel movements employ categorical terrorism as a strategy in conflict situations. Of course, both states and rebels generally employ a range of both violent and non-violent strategies in pursuit of their goals, and their mix of strategies typically changes over time. Some states and rebel groups have perpetrated extensive categorical or indiscriminate terrorism. Others have been much more selective or individualized in their use of terrorism, and some (e.g., the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua) have employed virtually no terrorism to speak of. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA) are borderline cases. Between its founding in 1969 and a cease-fire in 1997, the IRA typically engaged in attacks on security forces as well as some selective terrorism, but it also occasionally carried out bombings and other sectarian killings of ordinary Protestants in both Northern Ireland and Britain, especially during the height of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland during the mid-1970s (English 2003). Historically, ETA has directed most of its violence against the Spanish military and police presence in the Basque region and against politicians of parties that oppose Basque independence. However, it has also

engaged in occasional bombings and attempted bombings against ordinary civilians (Clark 1984).

Two Theories of Terrorism

How have social scientists and other analysts attempted to explain why states or rebels employ terrorism? Many theories have been proposed, but here I will focus on just two important theoretical claims: (1) terrorism is a product of the *weakness and/or desperation* of rebels or states, and (2) much terrorism is *a retaliatory response to terrorism* by one's armed enemies (be they states or rebels). While these claims offer important insights into terrorism, they are ultimately unsatisfactory.

Perhaps the most common idea about what causes terrorism is the notion that oppositional movements turn to terrorism when they are very weak, lack popular support, and yet are desperate to redress their grievances. A similar argument has been proposed as an explanation for state terrorism, emphasizing that states turn to terrorism – or 'civilian victimization' – when they become desperate to win wars (Downes 2008). This claim – or rationalization – also seems very popular among many groups and states that employ terrorism. The core idea here is that states and rebels who lack the capacity to pressure their opponents non-violently or through conventional or guerrilla warfare, or who fail to attain their goals when they *do* employ these strategies, will turn to terrorism as a 'last resort'.

Disaffected elites turn to terrorism, according to Crenshaw (1981), because it is easier and cheaper than strategies that require mass mobilization, especially when government repression makes mass mobilization difficult if not impossible. 'In situations where paths to the legal expression of opposition are blocked, but where the regime's repression is inefficient, revolutionary terrorism is doubly likely, as permissive and direct causes coincide' (Crenshaw 1981: 384). Rebel groups will presumably employ categorical terrorism, moreover, because it is generally even cheaper and more efficient than selective terrorism. For example, there may be only fleeting opportunities available for assassinating a particular politician or competing opposition leader, but setting off a bomb in a pub or bus may be relatively simple and will also produce more casualties.

There are a number of logical and empirical problems with this 'desperation' theory of terrorism. Most importantly, the theory seems simply to assume that desperate state officials or rebels would view attacks upon ordinary civilians as beneficial instead of detrimental to their cause. But even if terrorism is cheaper than many other strategies, why employ it at all? We need to know what beneficial consequences state officials or rebels believe their attacks on specific categories of civilians will bring about. How exactly will these attacks advance their cause? Why would officials or rebels not assume that attacks on civilians would undermine their popularity? Or create more – and more determined – enemies from the civilian population they are attacking?

Second, there does not in fact seem to be a particularly strong empirical relationship between the organizational strength of states and rebel groups, on the one hand, and their use (or not) of terrorism, on the other. For example, the US government was hardly desperate when it imposed economic sanctions on Iraq during the 1990s, which resulted in the deaths of more than half a million people (Gordon 2010). (Although

these sanctions did not entail direct violence against Iraqi civilians, they fit our definition of terrorism because they deliberately inflicted extreme physical suffering upon non-combatants.) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, furthermore, were a very powerful rebel movement during the 1990s according to most accounts. The LTTE sometimes even waged conventional warfare against Sri Lankan government forces. Yet the (predominantly Tamil) LTTE also occasionally engaged in indiscriminate attacks on ordinary ethnic Sinhalese civilians, and it did so long after it decimated rival Tamil nationalist groups (Bloom 2005: ch. 3). The desperation theory does not tell us why.

One can also point, conversely, to relatively *weak* states and rebel movements that have *eschewed* terrorism. Perhaps the best example of the latter is the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. In 1961, as many of its leaders were being arrested and many others driven into exile, the ANC established an armed wing called *Umkhonto we Sizwe* ('Spear of the Nation' or MK). The ANC explicitly adopted armed struggle as one of its main political strategies. By most accounts, however, MK failed to become an effective guerrilla force, as the South African Defence Forces were simply too strong and effective. And yet MK did *not* adopt a strategy of terrorism, despite the fact, as Gay Seidman points out, that, 'In a deeply segregated society, it would have been easy to kill random whites. Segregated white schools, segregated movie theaters, segregated shopping centers meant that if white deaths were the only goal, potential targets could be found everywhere' (2001: 118). However, as Davis notes, 'since the exile leadership sought to portray the ANC as a principled and responsible contender for power, it imposed restrictions against terrorist tactics that specifically targeted noncombatant whites' (Davis 1987: 121).

In short, weak states and rebels do not necessarily adopt a strategy of terrorism, and strong states and rebels do not necessarily eschew this strategy. As Turk concludes, 'Because any group may adopt terror tactics, it is misleading to assume either that "terrorism is the weapon of the weak" or that terrorists are always small groups of outsiders – or at most a "lunatic fringe"' (1982: 122).

The main insight of the desperation theory of terrorism is that states and rebel groups *do* often seem to take up arms after they have concluded that diplomacy and non-violent politics cannot work or that they work too slowly or ineffectively to redress urgent grievances. But notice that this does not tell us why armed actors would employ violence against non-combatants as opposed to conventional or guerrilla warfare. Moreover, the argument that attacking 'soft' targets such as unprotected civilians is cheaper and easier than waging conventional or guerrilla warfare does not explain why states or rebels would *ever* bother to wage conventional or guerrilla warfare. The argument implies that rational people would *always* prefer terrorism to these strategies, which is clearly not the case. In sum, the most we can say is that weakness and desperation may be a necessary but not sufficient cause of terrorism in some instances.

A second common view of terrorism is that it is *a retaliatory response to terrorism*. Leftist and radical analysts of terrorism often make this claim about oppositional terrorism, and it is emphasized by Herman and O'Sullivan (1989). They suggest that the 'retail' terrorism of oppositional groups is caused or provoked by the 'wholesale' or 'primary' terrorism of states, especially powerful Western states, above all the United States. The terms 'wholesale' and 'retail' are meant to remind readers that state terrorism has been much more deadly than oppositional terrorism.

This claim certainly has an intuitive plausibility. Why else would oppositional groups turn to a risky strategy of violence – why would they risk their necks – except when they confront a government or state that is unmoved by non-violent protest and indeed itself employs violence against peaceful protesters? Deterring such state violence, or perhaps simply avenging it in a bid to win popular support, would seem to be reason enough for opposition groups to employ violent strategies. And yet, as a general explanation of terrorism, this hypothesis is also beset by both logical and empirical problems.

It is certainly true that indiscriminate state violence, especially when perpetrated by relatively weak states, has historically encouraged the development of rebel movements (Goodwin 2001). But why would these movements attack and threaten ordinary *civilians* as opposed to the state's armed forces? In other words, if they are responding to *state* terrorism, would not rebels employ violence against *the state* – and just the state? State terrorism, that is, would seem more likely to provoke rebels to employ guerrilla or conventional warfare than terrorism.

Empirically, one can also point to rebel organizations that have arisen in contexts of extreme state violence which have nonetheless eschewed a strategy of terrorism. For example, Central American guerrilla movements of the 1970s and 1980s, including the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation in El Salvador, confronted states that engaged in extensive violence against non-combatants, yet neither movement engaged in much terrorism. In fact, the Sandinistas engaged in virtually no terrorism at all. Another such example is, once again, the ANC in South Africa. Interestingly, Herman and O'Sullivan's book devotes considerable attention to both South African and Israeli state terrorism (1989: ch. 2). And yet, while they note the 'retail' terrorism of the Palestine Liberation Organization during the 1970s and 1980s – emphasizing that Israeli state terrorism was responsible for a great many more civilian deaths during this period – they do not discuss the oppositional terrorism in South Africa which their theory would seem to predict. In fact, as we have noted, the ANC simply did not carry out much terrorism. State terrorism, clearly, does not *always* cause or provoke oppositional terrorism.

Having said this, it is indeed difficult to point to a rebel group that has carried out extensive terrorism which has *not* arisen in a context of considerable state violence. For example, the rebels in French Algeria, the West Bank and Gaza, Sri Lanka and Chechnya who engaged in extensive categorical terrorism are drawn from, and claim to act on behalf of, populations that have themselves suffered extensive and often indiscriminate state repression. The question is what to make of this correlation. Why, in these particular contexts, have rebels attacked certain categories of civilians as well as government forces? To answer this question, we need a different account of terrorism.

A Relational Theory of Terrorism

To explain terrorism, our main task must be to determine why and under what conditions armed actors (state or non-state) regard the killing of ordinary civilians as a reasonable (although not necessarily exclusive) means to advance their political agenda. It also behoves us to consider why and under what conditions armed actors consider terrorism an unreasonable and perhaps even counter-productive strategy.

I outline below a 'relational' theory of terrorism (see Tilly 2004) in which social relations among key actors – states, armed rebels and civilians – carry the primary explanatory burden, as opposed to ideas and ideologies. The presence (or absence) and the nature of social ties (whether conflictual or cooperative) between armed actors (states or rebels), on the one hand, and different kinds of civilians, on the other, provide the main incentives or disincentives for terrorism.

We can begin to move towards a better understanding of terrorism – particularly categorical terrorism – by considering the precise *categories* of civilians or non-combatants which states and rebels (sometimes) target for violence. Why and how states and rebels come to see particular non-combatants as enemies is something the aforementioned theories generally do not examine. Yet, clearly, states and rebels do not indiscriminately attack just *any* civilians or non-combatants. Indeed, both states and rebels are also usually interested in winning the active support or allegiance of certain civilians. So which are the 'bad' or enemy civilians whom they attack?

When they employ a strategy of categorical terrorism, states and rebels generally attack or seek to harm civilians whose support or acquiescence is valuable to their armed enemies. These are civilians who support enemy armed actors in different ways and/or have some capacity to influence the actions of an enemy state or rebel movement. Attacking such civilians is a way to attack indirectly one's armed opponents. Indeed, the main strategic objective – the primary incentive – of categorical terrorism is *to induce civilians to stop supporting, or to proactively demand changes in, certain government or rebel policies or to change the government or rebel movement itself*. Categorical terrorism, in other words, mainly aims to apply such intense pressure to civilians that they will either demand that 'their' government or movement change or abandon certain policies or, alternatively, cease supporting the government or rebels altogether.

States' and rebels' calculations about whether they should employ categorical terrorism as a strategy are strongly shaped by social and political contexts. An adequate theory of terrorism needs, first and foremost, to specify the key contextual factors that create incentives or disincentives for states or rebels to choose terrorism as a strategy. Before I turn to a discussion of the contexts that encourage and discourage terrorism, let me pause briefly to clarify precisely what my theory of terrorism is attempting – and *not* attempting – to explain.

Figure 17.1 presents a simplified model of political tactics. Concrete tactical actions or operations – involving specific techniques and technologies, divisions of labor, site
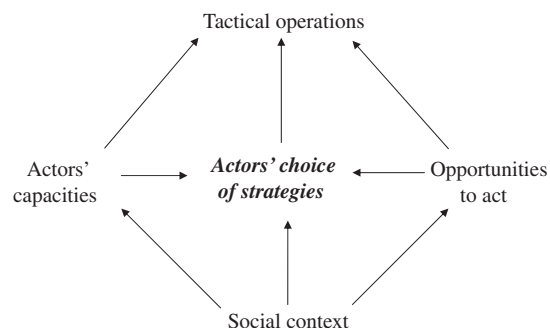

Figure 17.1   A model of political tactics

selection, timing etc. – are *not* my concern here. An adequate explanation of tactical operations would not only have to consider the political strategies that actors have chosen, but also their capacities to act in specific ways (determined by their skills, access to resources etc.) and the situational opportunities (or absence thereof) for specific tactics. What my theory of terrorism seeks to explain, by contrast, is *why and in what contexts state or non-state actors choose a strategy of terrorism* (perhaps among a mix of strategies), recognizing that this choice is also likely to be influenced by their capacities and situational opportunities. In sum, I am not interested in explaining this or that terrorist act per se. Rather, I want to explain why some states and rebels choose to kill non-combatants as a political strategy. Absent this strategic choice, terrorist actions or operations simply do not occur, given that my definition of terrorism stipulates that violence against civilians must be *deliberate or intentional* to count as terrorism. 'If we want to understand the choice of terror', Walzer has written, 'we have to imagine what in fact always occurs … A group of men and women, officials or militants, sits around a table and argues about whether or not to adopt a terrorist strategy' (2004: 57). Perhaps there is an argument; perhaps there is not. But a choice is made.

I propose that there are three general contextual factors that most strongly influence the probability that states or rebels will view non-combatants as enemies and, thus, employ a strategy of categorical terrorism against them. First, and most importantly, there is an incentive for states and rebels to employ terrorism against civilians who support violence by 'their' states or rebels. By contrast, terrorism is discouraged when violence by armed enemies is opposed by significant numbers of civilians (or is limited or non-existent).

Rebel movements, for example, that have employed a strategy of categorical terrorism have typically emerged from populations that have suffered extensive and often indiscriminate state repression (for example, in French Algeria, the West Bank and Gaza, Sri Lanka and Chechnya). In these contexts, moreover, there was also *substantial civilian support* for or acquiescence to that repression 'on the other side' (by European settlers, Jewish Israelis, Sinhalese and Russians, respectively). Indeed, the governments that carried out the repression in these cases had (or have) a substantial measure of democratic legitimacy among civilians. Democratic rights and institutions, in fact, are often effective at creating the impression (especially at some social distance) of substantial solidarity between the general citizenry and 'their' states. When extensive and indiscriminate state violence is supported by civilians and/ or orchestrated by democratically elected governments, it is hardly surprising that rebel movements would tend to view both repressive states *and* the civilians who stand behind them as legitimate targets of counter-violence, which typically begins, and is justified, as 'self-defence'. Nor is it surprising that *retribution* for such violence would be directed at civilians as well as at the enemy state's armed forces. For it would also be reasonable under these circumstances for rebels to conclude that attacking civilians might cause the latter to put substantial pressure on 'their' states to change their ways. Extensive state ('wholesale') terrorism seems to beget extensive oppositional ('retail') terrorism, in other words, in contexts where there is *a citizenry with significant democratic rights*. The latter would appear to be a common if not necessary precondition for extensive categorical terrorism by rebel movements (see Pape 2005; Goodwin 2006).

This also helps us to understand why rebels who are facing an authoritarian or autocratic regime often carry out very little terrorism. Categorical terrorism is much more likely when an entire ethnic group or nationality is supportive of a government as compared, for example, to a small economic elite or the cronies of a dictator. (In fact, all major cases of categorical terrorism seem to have entailed the use of violence against, or infliction of harm upon, a large ethnic or national group.) For example, the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua carried out virtually no terrorism during their armed conflict with the personalistic Somoza dictatorship, an otherwise bloody insurgency during which some 30,000 people were killed (Booth 1985). Civilians who supported the dictatorship consisted of a tiny number of Somoza cronies and a loyal elite opposition, both of which were drawn mainly from Nicaragua's small bourgeoisie. Virtually all other civilians in Nicaragua, from the poorest peasant to Somoza's bourgeois opponents, were viewed by the Sandinistas as potential allies, and indeed many would become such. Had the Somoza dictatorship been supported by more people – a larger social stratum, say, or a substantial ethnic group – then the Sandinistas (other things being equal) might very well have employed terrorism more frequently than they did.

Civilians may support the violence of 'their' states and rebels, and thereby incentivize terrorism, in three main ways – politically, economically and militarily. First, terrorism is likely to be employed against non-combatants who *politically* support – or at least do not actively oppose – one's armed enemies. In this context, terrorism is a reasonable strategy (other things being equal) to weaken civilian political (or 'moral') support or tolerance for violence. By contrast, terrorism is much less likely to be employed against civilians who do not politically support – or are substantially divided in their support for – one's armed enemies.

Secondly, terrorism is likely to be employed against non-combatants who *economically* support armed enemies by, for example, supplying them with weapons, transportation (or the means thereof), food and other supplies needed to employ violence. In this context, terrorism is a reasonable strategy (other things being equal) to weaken civilian economic support for violence. By contrast, terrorism is much less likely when soldiers are supplied by foreign states or non-state allies or through covert, black markets.

Thirdly, terrorism is likely to be employed, pre-emptively, against non-combatants who may *militarily* support armed enemies by, for example, being required to serve an obligatory tour of duty in a state or rebel movement's armed forces or by serving voluntarily in a state or rebel reserve force, militia or paramilitary force. In this context, terrorism is a reasonable strategy (other things being equal) to pre-empt or weaken civilian participation in the armed forces of a state or rebel movement. By contrast, terrorism is much less likely when civilians are not required to serve as warriors for states or rebels or show little interest in doing so – and may be actively resisting such service.

Terrorism is also likely to occur in contexts in which armed actors have begun to attack the civilian supporters of their armed enemies, presumably for one of the three reasons just given. In this context, terrorism is a reasonable strategy (other things being equal) to deter terrorism by armed enemies, thereby protecting one's civilian supporters, or, alternatively, to avenge such terrorism, thereby winning or reinforcing the political support of civilians who feel they have been avenged. By contrast, terrorism is

much less likely when armed actors are not attacking the civilian supporters of an enemy state or movement – even if they are otherwise at war with an enemy state or movement.

Finally, terrorism is *less* likely to occur in contexts in which civilians have a history of politically supporting or cooperating with opposing states or rebels – which is another way of saying that some significant fraction of civilians has defected from 'their' state or rebel movement to the 'other side'. Such civilians are not simply opposing the violence of 'their' state or rebels – which, as noted above, would itself make terrorism against them less likely – but are also actively supporting the warriors who are fighting 'their' state or rebels. In this context, categorical terrorism would clearly *not* be a reasonable strategy (other things being equal) for the warriors who are supported by the dissident fraction of such civilians. Such categorical terrorism would not only put at risk the support that these warriors are receiving from the dissidents, but would also make it much less likely that additional civilians would defect from 'their' state or rebels. By contrast, terrorism is much more likely (other things being equal) when civilians have not and do not support or cooperate with opposing states or rebels.

The existence of a significant fraction of dissident civilians explains why the African National Congress (ANC) – the leading anti-apartheid organization in South Africa – rejected a strategy of categorical terrorism against white South Africans. The ANC eschewed this strategy even though the apartheid regime that it sought to topple employed very extensive state violence against its opponents. This violence, moreover, was clearly supported (or tolerated) by large segments of the white, especially Afrikaner, population. The Nationalist Party governments that unleashed the security forces against the regime's enemies were elected by the white population. So why did the ANC adhere to an ideology of 'multi-racialism' and refuse to view whites as such as enemies? The answer lies in the ANC's long history of collaborating with white South Africans, especially of British background – as well as with South Asian and 'coloured' (mixed race) South Africans – in the anti-apartheid struggle. Especially important in this respect was the ANC's long collaboration with whites in the South African Communist Party. Tellingly, an important, long-time leader of MK, the ANC's armed wing, was Joe Slovo, a white Communist. (Try to imagine an Israeli Jew leading Hamas's armed wing or an American Christian directing al-Qaeda!) For the ANC to have indiscriminately attacked South African whites would have soured this strategic relationship, which, among other things, was essential for securing substantial Soviet aid for the ANC. In sum, given the long-standing multi-racial – including international – support for the anti-apartheid movement, a strategy of categorical terrorism against white civilians made little strategic sense to ANC leaders.

Figures 17.2 and 17.3 provide graphic illustrations of the preceding claims about the contextual incentives and disincentives for terrorism. Figure 17.2 portrays the structure of a *symmetrically* terror-prone conflict, that is, a two-party conflict in which the armed actors on each side are likely to employ violence against non-combatants on the other side. Two features of this structure are important: First, the boundaries between the states or armed movements and the civilian populations on each side are blurred, that is, the armed actors are well embedded in the civilian populations. This is meant to represent the fact that civilians support and/or can influence the state or armed movement on each side. Second, the boundaries between the two sets of actors
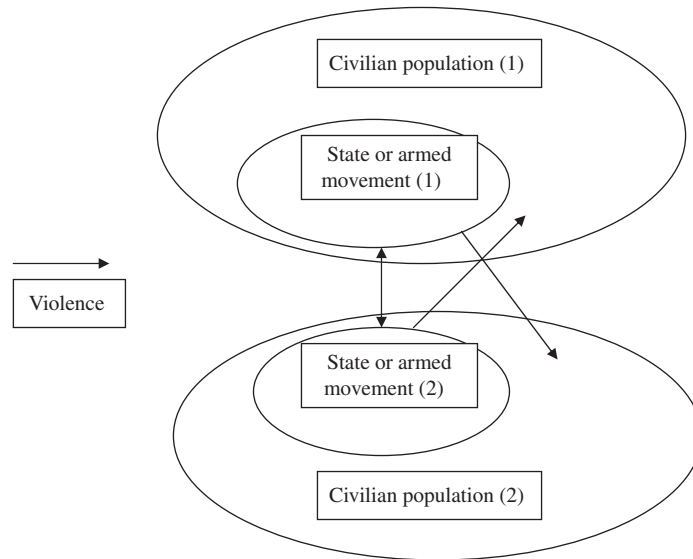
Figure 17.2   The structure of a symmetrically terror-prone conflict

are clearly distinct; the two sides are politically (and otherwise) distant from each other. In this context, when the armed actors have cause to fight, they are also likely to try to kill civilians or non-combatants on the other side, given that the latter are supporting their armed enemies. This structure of conflict is commonly found in international wars and in ethnic and/or nationalist conflicts.

Figure 17.3 portrays the structure of an *asymmetrically* terror-prone conflict, that is, a two-party conflict in which only *one* of the armed actors is likely to employ violence against non-combatants on the other side. The structure of this conflict differs from the previously discussed one in two ways: First, the boundaries between what I have labelled *state or armed movement (1)* and *civilian population (1)* are not blurred
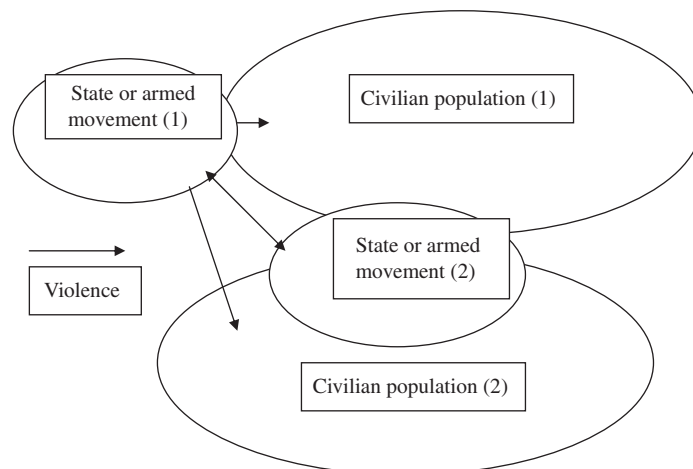

Figure 17.3   The structure of an asymmetrically terror-prone conflict

but quite distinct; the state or armed movement, in this case, is not well embedded in a civilian population. This is meant to represent the fact that *civilian population (1)* does *not* support or have the capacity to influence *state or armed movement (1)*. In fact, this state or armed movement uses violence to oppress or control *civilian population (1)*. Second, *state or armed movement (2)* is not only embedded in (i.e., supported by) *civilian population (2)* but is also connected to *civilian population (1)*. This is meant to represent the fact that some significant fraction of *civilian population (1)* is politically allied to or cooperates with *state or armed movement (2)*. In this context, when the armed actors have cause to fight, *state or armed movement (1)* is also likely to try to attack *civilian population (2)* – given that population's support for its armed enemies, but *state or armed movement (2)* has no incentive to attack *civilian population (1)*, given its political ties to that population.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me try to demonstrate how the theory outlined here helps to explain why al-Qaeda and affiliated or similar Islamist groups have carried out extensive categorical terrorism in recent years, including the attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11).

Al-Qaeda's political project is best described as pan-Islamic, viewing itself as a defender of the transnational *umma* or Muslim community. In al-Qaeda's view, this multi-ethnic, transnational community is currently balkanized and violently op- pressed by 'apostate' secular and 'hypocritical' pseudo-Islamic regimes, from Mo- rocco to Mindanao, as well as by the 'Zionist entity' in Palestine. And standing behind these regimes – and occupying Iraq and Afghanistan – is the powerful US government (and, to a lesser extent, other Western governments, especially Britain). This under- standing that the United States is the ultimate power which is propping up repressive, un-Islamic regimes in the Muslim world is the fundamental source of al-Qaeda's conflict with the United States. Al-Qaeda believes that until the US government – the 'far enemy' – can be compelled to end its support for these regimes – the 'near enemy' – and withdraw its troops and other agents from Muslim countries, local struggles against these regimes cannot succeed (Gerges 2009).

But why does al-Qaeda kill ordinary, 'innocent' Americans in addition to US armed forces? Why would al-Qaeda target the World Trade Center, for example, in addition to US political and military installations? Shortly after 9/11, Osama bin Laden described the rationale for the 9/11 attacks in an interview that first appeared in the Pakistani newspaper *Ausaf* on 7 November 2001:

> The United States and their allies are killing us in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine and Iraq. That's why Muslims have the right to carry out revenge attacks on the U.S. . . . The American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government and that they voted for their president. Their government makes weapons and provides them to Israel, which they use to kill Palestinian Muslims. Given that the American Congress is a committee that represents the people, the fact that it agrees with the actions of the American government proves that America in its entirety is responsible for the atrocities that it is committing against Muslims. I demand the American people to take note of their government's policy against Muslims. They described their government's policy against

Vietnam as wrong. They should now take the same stand that they did previously. The onus is on Americans to prevent Muslims from being killed at the hands of their government.

(Quoted in Lawrence 2005: 140–141)

Bin Laden believes that it is reasonable to kill ordinary American citizens, then, because they pay taxes to and otherwise support an elected government, which makes Americans responsible for the violent actions of this government in Muslim countries (and, indirectly, of governments supported by the United States) (Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003: 88–89). Al-Qaeda views ordinary American citizens, in other words, not as 'innocents', but as morally responsible for US-sponsored 'massacres' and oppression of Muslims in a number of countries.

This idea has also been articulated by Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the four suicide bombers who killed more than 50 people in London on 7 July 2005. In a videotape broadcast on al-Jazeera television in September 2005, Khan said, 'Your democratically-elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters' (quoted in Rai 2006).

To be sure, al-Qaeda's precise strategic goal in attacking US citizens remains unclear: Was 9/11 a reprisal for massacres carried out or supported by the United States? Was 9/11 meant to 'wake up' Americans to what their government was doing in the Islamic world, in the hope that they would force it to change its policies? Or was the goal perhaps to provoke a violent overreaction by the US government, luring it into Afghanistan, where it would become bogged down (like the Soviet Union before it) in an unwinnable war? What is certain is al-Qaeda's belief that it is logical and reasonable for it to attack ordinary Americans in order to bring about a change in 'their' government's policies.

As in similar cases in which states or rebels have turned to a strategy of terrorism, al-Qaeda has concluded that the violence directed against its constituents has widespread civilian support – or, at least, is widely tolerated – in the United States. At the same time, al-Qaeda and its Islamist sympathizers obviously do not have the type of history of political collaboration with American citizens which might lead them to reject a strategy of categorical terrorism; language, religion and, above all, US government policies have created a formidable chasm between the two. The confluence of these factors, as elsewhere, has strongly encouraged, and continues to encourage, al-Qaeda's terrorist strategy against non-combatants in the United States and allied countries.

Further Reading

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