

Part I: The Origins and Evolution of Terrorism

Today, the word terrorism inevitably conjures up images of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and angry encounters in the Middle East fueled by Islamic extremism. But terrorism is neither new nor confined to the Middle East or Islamic extremism.

Throughout history, terrorists have come from many places with many motivations. States, groups seeking self-determination or the end of colonial rule, left and right wing ideologues—all have used terror to advance their goals. In almost all of these cases, groups have acted out of political motivations, not merely out of a desire for senseless acts of violence. While terror has often been a weapon of the less powerful against the state, states have also used it as a weapon to intimidate populations and to weaken and destroy political opponents. Often the psychological effects of terrorism—the fear and uncertainty—can be as bad or worse than the physical effects.

What is terrorism?

Experts have struggled to agree on a definition of “terrorism.” The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as politically motivated violence directed at civilians and perpetrated by nonstate groups.

Some argue that this definition of terrorism is too narrow. They claim that terrorism should include violence that governments perpetrate against their own citizens or against the citizens of other countries. For example, many argue that state violence during the French Revolution was a form of terrorism. From 1793 to 1794, during what became known as “The Reign of Terror,” the revolutionary government harnessed its power to eradicate its enemies and arrested or executed thousands of people. Similarly, some experts claim that the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin used terrorism to strike fear into the hearts of its citizens. During Stalin’s reign, dissent was repressed, millions were executed, and tens of millions were arrested and imprisoned. Some twenty million Soviets died. This period of So-

viet history has been referred to as “The Great Terror.”

Others argue that the definition of terrorism should not be limited to acts against civilian targets. Instead, they claim that violence against political leaders and targets can be a form of terrorism. For example, some argue that the violence of Anarchist International in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should be classified as terrorism. A worldwide movement of groups operating in secret cells, Anarchists murdered the president of Italy in 1894, the king of Italy in 1900, the prime ministers of Spain in 1897 and 1912, the empress of Austria in 1898, and U.S. President William McKinley in 1901.

Nearly all experts agree that terror has always been used as a violent means to a political end. Examining the evolving means and methods of terror and terrorists reveals a shifting political landscape that may help you understand the motivations behind these acts as well as develop strategies to counter terrorism.

Modern Terror

After World War II, terrorism spread as a political instrument of revolutionaries, those seeking independence from colonial powers, and those in struggles of self-determination. For example, the states of Israel, Kenya, and Algeria owe their independence in part to nationalist political groups that used terrorism against colonial powers.

It is important to note that groups that use terror tactics do not necessarily have international aims. Groups may have strictly national goals, for example a change in government in their home country. Others may have both national and international aims. For many people today, the current conception of international terrorism and terrorists was shaped by the hostage crisis at the Munich Olympics in 1972.

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How did the Munich Olympics of 1972 affect the world's view of terrorism?

During the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Germany, a group known as Black September seized Israeli athletes inside the Olympic Village. The Palestinian group demanded the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel in return for the hostages they held in Munich. The Israeli government refused the terrorists' demands. German police allowed the terrorists to leave the Olympic Village, but eleven Israelis, one German policeman, and five of eight terrorists were killed in a failed German-led rescue attempt.

Advances in satellite technology meant that much of the world was able to watch on television as the drama unfolded. Germany's hopes for an uplifting Olympic competition devoid of politics were dashed. The public was shocked by images of the crisis and by the idea that the Israeli athletes, who were not directly responsible for their government's policies, would be held accountable for those policies. Black September targeted the athletes simply because they were representatives of Israel—and, by extension, of Israel's policies.

The enduring image of the 1972 Olympic Games remains a terrorist in a ski mask, instead of an exhilarating athletic performance. Terrorists around the world absorbed the lessons of the power of that image as well. Ter-

rorists began to understand that they could capture the world's attention if the right targets were chosen—the wider the audience, the greater the impact of their actions. Terrorists also saw the power of striking at important symbols. In this case, terrorists struck at an event meant to symbolize the unity of humankind to show that sport could not transcend politics.

The events of Munich had a lasting impact. Terrorism became more prominent in the world's consciousness. In the years

after Munich, terrorists continued to choose targets for their symbolic value and for maximum media coverage. Throughout the 1970s, terrorism experts concluded that when terrorists acted, they did not want a lot of people dead—but they did want a lot of people watching.

Terrorism Becomes More Deadly

Following the events in Munich, the international community debated the best response to terrorism and produced several agreements addressing specific types of terrorist activity, including aircraft sabotage and hijacking, attacks on diplomats, and hostage taking. Despite these efforts, state-sponsored terrorism, in which states provide assistance to terrorists, grew during the 1980s.

Why did state-sponsored terrorism increase during the 1980s?

In November 1979, a militant group of Iranian students seized fifty-two U.S. citizens as hostages at the United States embassy in Tehran. The students, claiming to be acting without their government's support, kept the world's attention focused on Tehran throughout the crisis. After more than a year in captivity, the U.S. government negotiated the release of the hostages.

Examples of State-Sponsored Terrorism				
Date	Event	Deaths	Terrorist Organization	State Sponsor
April 1983	Suicide car bomb outside the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon	69	Islamic Jihad	Iran
July 1987	Simultaneous car bombings in Karachi, Pakistan	72 deaths, more than 250 wounded		Afghan intelligence agents
November 1987	Bombing of Korean Airlines flight from Baghdad, Iraq to Seoul, South Korea	115		North Korean intelligence services
December 1988	Bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland	All 259 passengers, as well as 11 on ground		Libya
August 1989	Bombing of French passenger jet over Chad	171	Islamic Jihad	Iran

The lessons of this event were not lost on the Iranian government, which had expressed an interest in eliminating the powerful influence of the United States in the Middle East. While the government was not initially involved, it allowed the crisis to stretch on for more than fourteen months.

Other governments around the world took note. These states realized that supporting terrorist groups provided an effective way for weaker states to strike at more powerful states. Terrorists also benefited from having states sponsor their activities. Terrorists could have access to false identification in the form of genuine passports. They could use diplomatic privileges to provide immunity and transport weapons and explosives. States could also provide advanced military training and pay terrorists well for their activities. More funding allowed terrorist organizations to recruit people who might not otherwise have been ideologically committed to a cause. And the availability of the state's more sophisticated weaponry meant that the lethality of terrorism increased sharply.

What are some of the ways the United States responded to state-sponsored terrorism?

State sponsorship of terrorism can include a range of activities including helping plan and carry out attacks, supplying weapons and training, and providing safe havens out of view of the international community.

The United States has applied both economic embargoes and sanctions against states it believes sponsors terror. The United States has also used military retaliation to deter further terrorist action. The effectiveness of retaliation has been low. For example, in 1986, the United States led airstrikes in Libya in retaliation for the bombing of a disco in Berlin, Germany by Libyan agents. The disco was popular with U.S. soldiers, and the bombing had killed two and wounded two hundred. Instead of deterring further Libyan terrorist acts, the U.S. bombing of Libya was followed by an increased number of Libyan-sponsored attacks against U.S. citizens. Two years after the air strikes, Libyan-backed terrorists bombed Pan Am flight 103, killing 259 passengers and 11 people on the ground.

Furthermore, despite careful planning, the U.S. air strikes against Libya killed thirty-six civilians and wounded ninety-three. Critics of the action noted that the United States had deprived itself of the moral high ground it claimed to hold above terrorists, subjecting itself to domestic and international criticism.

Why is there concern about a rise of religiously motivated terrorism?

While state sponsorship made terrorism increasingly deadly, another worrying trend in terrorism has emerged in the last few decades. In 1980, the U.S. State Department's list of international terrorist groups included only one group with religious affiliation. By 2003, more than half of the international terrorist groups identified by the State Department had some religious affiliation or ideology.

Even prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, some terrorism experts attributed the increasing lethality of terrorism to attacks perpetrated by groups motivated by religious extremism. These groups see violence as authorized by God and necessary to advance their causes. Experts point with concern to efforts by these groups to acquire and use materials that could be made into nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

What common factors help explain the motivations and methods of religious terrorists?

Religious terrorists are often motivated by a combination of the following factors.

The World Gone Wrong: Most of the religious terrorist groups active in the last twenty years were motivated by the belief that something has gone terribly wrong with the world. These beliefs stem from social, political, cultural, and spiritual issues. For example, foreign military occupation of territory, corrupt secular governments, or the decline of traditional values within a society can all contribute to a sense of crisis. Furthermore, the process of globalization can magnify this sense of “a world gone wrong,” as people fear losing their identity to intruding foreign value systems.

Throughout history, cultures have been forced to confront the possibility of change. In many cases, religion has offered the means to cope with these circumstances, helping a changing society to determine goals for the future. Religion can offer physical or spiritual sanctuary against political repression. It has also functioned as a major instrument for social activism and political action. Religious terrorists also turn to religion to find motivation and justification for their own purposes. They perceive their actions as a defensive reaction to the moral and spiritual corruption of the world.

No Other Options: Many people, when confronted by the kinds of cultural or political crises mentioned above, turn to political campaigns or social movements to address their concerns or to right what they perceive as wrong. These efforts might succeed or fail. Nonetheless, they are undertaken with the understanding that things could change—public support could be gathered, new leaders elected, and policies changed. There are others who feel no hope that these traditional political methods will help them achieve their objectives. They feel powerless and humiliated about their inability to do anything about their frustration with the world. Such people have sometimes turned to terrorism and violence, believing that to be the only way change will occur.

Cosmic War Against the Enemy: When that sense of powerlessness is combined with some religious interpretations, the struggle takes on cosmic terms—a struggle between good and evil, or between God and the devil.

“America is struck by God Almighty in one of its vital organs. So that its greatest buildings are destroyed. Grace and gratitude to God. America has been filled with horror from north to south and from east to west.”

—Osama bin Laden, October 2001

Seeing social or political struggles in this way can lead some people to religiously motivated terrorism. In these cases, the struggle is

thought to be a defense of culture and identity in which the enemy appears to have the power to destroy the culture and community. The enemy's victory would be absolutely intolerable, yet there seems to be no way to defeat the enemy with traditional means, such as conventional military campaigns or diplomacy. To the terrorist's mind, the stakes are so high and the cause so virtuous that any means may be justified to achieve the ends.

Symbolism and Violence: Religious terrorists often choose their targets and the timing of their attacks for their symbolic value. This means that terrorists will choose to strike targets that they feel represent the things or ideas they are fighting against and convey a sense of the terrorists' power.

What are some examples of religiously motivated terrorism?

The following are four examples of major terrorist attacks by religiously motivated groups.

The First World Trade Center Bombing: On February 26, 1993, a van loaded with explosives and cyanide parked in the garage of the World Trade Center in New York City. It exploded and collapsed several floors of the parking garage, killing six people and injuring thousands. The terrorists had planned for the explosion to collapse one tower, forcing it to fall sideways onto the other tower. The plan, designed to kill thousands, failed because the force of the explosion was not great enough.

An Islamist terrorist group based in the United States carried out the attack. The group, followers of the Egyptian Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman, was angered by U.S. support for Israel and for those it considered enemies of Islam, including Egypt's then-president, Hosni Mubarak. The group's supporters were also angered by the United States' secular culture, which they regarded as hostile to religion in general and particularly threatening to Islam. In 1996, Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman and eight others were convicted of planning the World Trade Center bombing and of plotting to blow up the United Nations, two tunnels

under the Hudson River, and the FBI building in Manhattan.

The Trade Center was attacked because of its symbolic significance. In the eyes of the world, it represented U.S. power, technology, and that quintessential U.S. city, New York. Eight and a half years later, this symbolism would make the towers targets again.

Baruch Goldstein: On February 25, 1994, during Islam's holy month of Ramadan, Dr. Baruch Goldstein entered the Ibrahim Mosque, located in the town of Hebron on the West Bank. He fired 111 shots with his automatic assault-rifle into the congregation of 800 Palestinian Muslim worshippers. He killed 29 people and wounded 150 before being beaten to death.

A follower of the Jewish terrorist group Kach, Baruch Goldstein felt betrayed by his government's actions in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. He believed that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was giving away what God had given Israel and that Israel was in grave danger from Palestinian Arabs.

The Hebron massacre had important religious symbolism. Goldstein acted during the Jewish festival of Purim, which celebrates the biblical story of Mordechai destroying the enemies of the Jews.

Goldstein's action repulsed most Israelis. But a large segment of militant and orthodox Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza settlements saw Goldstein as a righteous man and a martyr. They made his grave site a shrine and voiced uncompromising religious fervor not only against Palestinian Arabs but also against the Israeli government. A few months later, a young orthodox Jewish student named Yigal Amir assassinated Prime Minister Rabin. He claimed he acted on God's orders.

Aum Shinrikyo: On March 20, 1995, five members of Aum Shinrikyo, a group with roots in Japanese Buddhism, boarded trains at different ends of Tokyo's subway system. As they approached the city center, each of the men punctured a bag containing Sarin nerve gas and quickly left the train. In the next few

minutes, people on the trains began choking and vomiting. Passengers stumbled out of the trains and collapsed on the platforms in convulsions. Eventually 12 people died and over 5,500 were injured, many with permanent injuries. This was the first example of the use of weapons of mass destruction (in this case chemical) by a terrorist group.

Members of Aum Shinrikyo believed that they were in a dehumanized society threatened by an Armageddon of nuclear weapons and nerve gas. They believed that only members of their organization, those with proper spiritual training, would survive. Some argue they conducted the nerve gas attack on the subway system to fulfill their own prophesy of Armageddon or to symbolize its results.

Christian Identity: On June 15, 1985, Richard Wayne Snell was sentenced to death for the separate murders of a pawn shop owner and a police officer in Arkansas in 1983 and

1984. He also bombed a natural gas pipeline, robbed a pawn shop, and had made plans to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Snell, who was executed by lethal injection on April 19, 1995, apologized for none of his crimes. According to him, they were part of a just revolution against the U.S. federal government.

Snell was a member of the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), a militant right-wing group that seeks to overthrow the federal government and create a new state governed by Christian religious law. The CSA's beliefs are based on the Christian Identity movement, a system of religious beliefs that blends white supremacy with extreme political and religious conservatism. Its followers believe that the government is run by a Jewish-liberal conspiracy that is determined to deprive citizens of their freedoms and to institute a secular world government. They are often fierce defendants of citizens' right to own



Dale Summers in *The Orlando Sentinel*. Reprinted with permission.

firearms, believing that gun control legislation is one of the government's most offensive means of depriving citizens of their freedom.

Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on the day Snell was executed, had ties to Christian Identity followers both in Michigan and in Oklahoma. The attack killed 168 and injured more than 800 people. McVeigh never expressed religious motivations for bombing the Murrah building, but he shared many of Christian Identity's pro-gun and anti-government convictions. He was heavily influenced by *The Turner Diaries*, a novel popular among Christian Identity followers, which describes in detail blowing up a federal building with a fertilizer-gasoline bomb similar to the one McVeigh used. In fact, McVeigh had a passage from the book with him when he was arrested.

Why did U.S. officials grow increasingly concerned about terrorism?

As the violence caused by terrorism grew, U.S. government officials became increasingly alarmed during the 1990s. It seemed that

terrorists did not only want a lot of people watching their acts of terrorism—they wanted a lot of people dead as well. Law enforcement officials in the United States and around the world noted with alarm cases of groups and individuals who had attempted to acquire the ingredients to make nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

“The acquisition, proliferation, threatened or actual use of weapons of mass destruction constitutes one of the gravest threats to the United States.”

—Louis Freeh, former director of the FBI,
May 1997

In this section of the reading, you have examined the historical origins and purposes of terrorism as well as its evolution over the years. The next section explores the threats from terrorism today. As you read, keep in mind that when you have finished the reading you will be asked to formulate your own response to terrorism.