Contemporary Debates on Terrorism

Edited by Richard Jackson
and Samuel Justin Sinclair

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2012
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Contemporary debates on terrorism / edited by Richard Jackson and Samuel Justin Sinclair.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Terrorism. 2. Terrorism–Prevention. I. Jackson, Richard, 1966– II. Sinclair, Samuel J., 1975–
HV6431.C6528 2012
363.325–dc23
2011032277

ISBN13: 978–0–415–59115–7 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–415–59116–4 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978–0–203–13535–8 (ebk)

Typeset in Baskerville by
Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C004839
FSC www.fsc.org

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Dedication

Richard Jackson: This book is dedicated to my supervisor, colleague and friend, Professor Jacob Bercovitch (1946–2011).

Samuel Justin Sinclair: This book is dedicated to my mentor, colleague and, most importantly, my friend, Dr Mark Alan Blais.

interpretation and application of the divinely ordained scriptures). By appealing to political arguments and metaphysical justifications as it sees fit, it has managed to partially legitimize the use of discriminate violence against tribal leaders, renowned journalists, naval destroyers, as well as rather indiscriminate attacks on buses, trains, planes and weddings. Against these targets, locally and globally, al-Qaeda has employed a vast array of means that range from the dagger, the AK47 and the traditional bomb to rocket-propelled grenades, chlorine gas and idiosyncratic hybrids comprised of aircrafts, jet fuel and operatives willing to die in order to kill. On several occasions – just in case there were no journalists or anchors on hand – al-Qaeda members made sure to produce video recordings of their operations. They did so because this organization wants *both* more people watching and more people dead. Finally, al-Qaeda has not only managed to create a network of affiliates or provide an umbrella structure to several organizations, it has created an international brand name (for example, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, formerly known as al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda in Yemen; al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers or al-Qaeda in Iraq; al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb; and the less verifiable al-Qaeda in Lebanon, al-Qaeda Organization in the Levant and Egypt, al-Qaeda in Europe, al-Qaeda Organization for Jihad in Sweden, etc.). All of this has taken place because of intrinsic and extrinsic factors during a 20-year evolution – roughly coterminous with the time frame of the debate in question.

Third, contemporary terrorists are different, because their context – driving externalities or extrinsic factors – is also different and in flux. Among other things, the current context is an international setting pervaded by interacting, opposing and still unleashing forces. These forces include integration, fragmentation, hyper-information/communication, isolation, and state fragility – commonly associated with the era of globalization, the information age and the post-Cold War order. Groups that employ terrorism have benefited from several factors within this context (see Hanlon, 2008), including the ability to travel and move goods in ways and at a scale that is relatively unprecedented. Increasingly, current organizations have found what is best described, not as state-sponsors, but as safe havens. These safe havens are fragile states (or parts thereof) where government oversight is lacking. They are sanctuaries where terrorists can plan and act with relative impunity, and from which they can launch operations against other nation-states. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the current context also provides terrorists with greater access to certain tools, including highly disruptive/destructive weapons as well as enhanced means of communication and access to information.

Conclusion

In 2011 certain means of communication, namely the Internet and mobile phone technology, are said to have played a role in the revolutions that swept parts of Africa and the Middle East – leading to regime changes in Egypt and Tunisia, UN Sanctions for Libya, and serious turmoil in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. A different debate is underway on whether information technologies can be considered as a key component unleashing these changes or whether these new tools are simply accessories to conflict based on structural and long-standing regional problems. More research needs to be done to understand and measure the importance of information technologies in the transformation of social movements.

A few things are for certain: these technologies are new and they reach audiences, connect people, retrieve and transfer information on an unprecedented scale and with an unprecedented speed. Terrorist groups know this and have begun to try to maximize the opportunities provided by these new tools. For example, we know that al-Qaeda temporarily changed the location of some of its training camps from Tora Bora (Al Masada Camp), Kabul

(Al Ghuraba Camp), and Jalalabad (Al Farouq Camp), to different addresses – virtual ones: www.al-farouq.com/vb, www.alguraabah.co.uk, or www.alm2sda.net. Occasionally, one can detect online activity by individuals closely affiliated with terrorist organizations who – according to their own words – have a mission 'to implement and devise a strategy to exploit Facebook's advantages as distribution and network platforms' (SITE Intelligence Group, 2009). The degree to which these tools are going to fundamentally change terrorism and organized violence in the twenty-first century – if at all – is something that we need to explore in more depth.

In sum, we could play with the different meanings of the adjective 'new' and with all the definitions provided at the beginning of this chapter. Recalling that new has subtler meanings, including something 'resurgent' or something more or less 'different', and considering the reasons provided in the immediately preceding paragraphs, we could conclude that contemporary cases of terrorism deserve the qualifier 'new.' Yet I want to close this chapter by emphasizing that we will probably be better off by focusing on trying to understand terrorism, not by adding adjectives to it, but by carefully examining its subtle and not so subtle adaptations for what they are and within their current context. We will most certainly be more accurate in our understanding if we are properly acquainted with historical lessons and previous dynamics of terrorism. We may benefit by being honest about the limitations of our research and the motivations that drive us to entertain certain debates, because whether academics and analysts like it or not and whether they do so intentionally or not, their conclusions about the 'newness' or 'oldness' of terrorism might end up shaping more than the academic debate.

NO: The fallacy of the new terrorism thesis

Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Leena Malkki

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, it has been popular to view terrorism as substantially different from everything that went on before. The Oklahoma City bombing and the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995 had proven, according to several notable experts, that terrorism had crossed a new boundary (see Simon and Benjamin, 2000). This was again confirmed by the 9/11 attacks (Laqueur, 2001, 2003; Tucker, 2001). The use of information technology, weapons of mass destruction, the desire to kill as many people as possible and the religious and vague goals of the perpetrators were, among others, deemed to hail a new era. The claims of innovation in terrorism practices did not stand alone. There have been debates in adjacent academic fields such as war studies and counter-insurgency, where similar claims about newness have also surfaced (van Creveld, 1991; Kaldor, 1999; Duyvesteyn and Angstrom, 2005; Kilcullen, 2010; MacKinlay, 2009). In particular, the latter field of study currently witnesses an interesting debate about whether the transnational nature of insurgency is truly a constitutive and new feature (see Jones and Smith, 2010).

The new terrorism argument has been particularly popular among policy circles in Washington (Copeland, 2000). Its popularity has declined a little in the past few years, but it

still appears now and then in publications (Kurtulus, 2011). One cannot help but suspect that the popularity was linked to its two most important consequences. First, it would relieve scholars of the arduous task of a study of the rich history of terrorism. Second, it would mean more funding would have to be made available to dissect the new features and possible answers to the challenges of the new terrorists. This, of course, would be to the benefit of the research community. Indeed, the production of terrorism-related publications has augmented steeply. As Andrew Silke has calculated, every six hours a book is published in the English language about terrorism, leaving out articles and anything published in other languages (Silke, 2008: 28–29). Few of these studies on terrorism have taken a serious look at the history of the phenomenon, using historical description as an obligatory opening in many publications and then quickly moving on to a purely contemporary focus. The historical investigations that are worthwhile remain largely limited to single case studies and in-depth analyses of a handful of familiar Western cases, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the Red Army Faction (RAF).

The discussion about whether terrorism is new is complicated by the description and delimitation of the concept of terrorism. Without wanting to regurgitate the definitional debate, many studies into terrorism have started to incorporate what analytically needs to be distinguished as 'insurgency'. What has occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan should not be seen as terrorism per se. Within the context of these two civil wars, militant groups have applied terrorist tactics while pursuing a subversion and insurgent strategy against foreign occupying forces (Duyvesteyn and Fumerton, 2009). As a matter of fact, many scholars have overlooked the fact that during most of the twentieth century, terrorism has been used within the context of insurgency struggles in the non-Western world, which has traditionally witnessed the most armed conflict. A campaign in which terrorism is a strategy in its own right hardly occurs in the non-Western world. Factors that explain this phenomenon include, for example, the firm control most Western states manage to exert over their territory which precludes the safe havens or liberated zones that are the lifelines of many insurgency organizations. Other distinguishing criteria are targets (non-military versus military), organizational features (political front organizations and shadow states) or number of victims (see Duyvesteyn and Fumerton, 2009). Instead, the control of Western states makes the strategy of terrorism, relying on an avant-garde of activists living underground and committing acts of violence, more feasible as a way of advancing political agendas.

This chapter is intended to reflect on the arguments the new terrorism thinkers have brought forward in the debate. It aims to provide evidence to substantiate the argument that there is indeed nothing new under the sun. To be sure, the purpose of this chapter is not to argue that *nothing* has changed; quite the contrary. The main ideas on which this contribution rests are, first, as outlined, the idea that terrorism should be seen as a strategy; and, second, that terrorism is a social phenomenon. Social phenomena are dependent on, and products of, their social environment. It would have been highly surprising if terrorists had not adapted and started using the products of modern society and the fruits of globalization: the freely accessible ideas about alternative visions on life, action and effect made available through increased information technology. An entirely different question, however, is whether these changes warrant the term 'new terrorism' as a category and do indeed 'render much previous analysis of terrorism based on established groups obsolete' (Lesser *et al.*, 1999: 2).

The definition of 'new' that we use is:

> can signify that a phenomenon has not been witnessed before, such as the discovery of a new star in a far-away galaxy. Alternatively, the label 'new' can rightly be applied when it concerns seen before phenomena but an unknown perspective or interpretation is developed, such as the theory of relativity or the idea that the earth is round.
>
> (Duyvesteyn, 2004)

Terrorism: old and new

Contemporary terrorism, it is claimed, is new due to five main characteristics. These will be elaborated and dissected in turn.

Organisation

First, it is argued that the organizational structure of terrorist groups has developed from hierarchical organizations to fluid network organizations. That is, while traditional terrorist organizations such as the IRA and the RAF operated largely as hierarchical organizations with a top leadership directing cadres below, the new terrorists are said to operate in a loose network structure. More recently, it has been argued that the current operating mechanism is a 'leaderless jihad' (Sageman, 2008). Furthermore, lone wolf terrorism perpetrated by individuals who have self-radicalized has been added as a supposedly new feature of the practice of terrorism.

These ideas, however, are too simplistic to describe a complex and variegated reality. First, the traditional terrorists also used network structures. Anarchism, one of the most important sources of terrorist violence in the nineteenth century, was by definition organized as a loose network (Bach Jensen, 2004). In more recent history, the PLO and Hezbollah have operated fundamentally as networks with only rudimentary central control (Tucker, 2001: 3–4).

The organizational format that terrorist groups adopt is often a function of the environment, and importantly, the counter-measures the state enacts against it. For example, the IRA, as its name implies, used to be organized according to an army model, with regiments and brigades. This structure allowed the British to relatively easily infiltrate the organization. As a consequence of the counter-measures, the IRA adapted its structure to become more immune to infiltration. This could also be argued for the case of Israeli counter-measures against the PLO and Hezbollah, such as the decapitation strategy which robbed these organizations of their leadership. This necessitated organizational changes, which were a result of state action rather than a wilful or conscious choice of these groups. Similar developments have inspired the idea of leaderless resistance among the American far right (Beam, 1992; Kaplan, 1997). We can also witness this development in several currently active groups which have become increasingly fluid and intangible to such an extent that some experts prefer to describe al-Qaeda as an ideology rather than an organization.

It may also be that there is a tendency to assume that groups in the past have been more tightly and rigidly organized than they actually were because of the way the groups described themselves. Terrorist groups have often presented themselves as small armies, consisting of different units, having their own rules and military ranks for their members. While this corresponded with the way the groups would have liked to be, it did not necessarily reflect reality. The Symbionese Liberation Army, a radical leftist group which was active in California in 1973–1974, is an extreme example of this. It had the entire blueprint drafted for an armed revolutionary federation, complete with codes of war and military ranks. In reality, this 'army' consisted of a dozen members who lived together (Malkki, 2010).

The individuals participating in today's networks are argued to constitute a virtual community, which is supposed not to have existed before. The experts claiming this overlook

the fact that 'imagined communities' were a crucial factor in the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century. It is not a new phenomenon in the realm of terrorist movements either. Such imagined communities existed within the European and American leftist groups of the 1970s. While some of them were more internationally oriented than others, their worldview and strategy was strongly based on the idea that they were part of a revolutionary movement against capitalism and imperialism, with national liberation struggles in the Third World presenting the frontline of this struggle (Malkki, 2011).

Another related claim is that the role of the media has changed substantially and that this has changed the organizational parameters of terrorist activity considerably (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003). Now, the terrorist movements are no longer dependent on the conventional media, but instead the Internet serves as the main conduit for terrorist messages and recruitment. Furthermore, the Internet has allegedly opened whole new avenues for interaction across boundaries and with minimal risk of getting caught. It is true that the medium has changed; the Internet is an important channel for communication and distribution of information in many fields of life, and again, terrorism is a product of society. However, one has to be careful not to overestimate the benefits that the recent changes have brought to terrorist movements. While the possibilities for virtual communication may have been extended, the real life communication and building of underground movements seems to have become exceedingly difficult in the West. Online communication is not without its difficulties; it does leave traces and building trust and alliances with the sole means of digital communication is risky (Innes, 2007).

Lone wolf terrorism cannot be seen as a fundamentally new organizational aspect of terrorism either (Stewart and Burton, 2008). There are many examples historically where individuals without any clear organizational structures behind them were responsible for terrorist acts (Spaaij, 2010). The nineteenth-century anarchists are again an important example, as is the decade-long struggle of the FBI to try to find the UNA bomber, Ted Kaczinsky (Chase, 2004). Lone wolfs are of all ages, and this claim that new terrorism is primarily perpetrated by amateurs and self-radicalizers might again be linked to the effect of the state's counter-measures.

Scope

A second argument is that terrorist actors have shifted from a purely national and territorial focus to a transnational and non-territorial focus in their operations. The central claim here is that traditional terrorist organizations have operated largely within one national territory with a national focus and agenda. New terrorist organizations, on the contrary, no longer limit themselves to addressing a national audience and a national agenda; instead, they operate on a worldwide scale and pursue an international agenda.

This argument overlooks important features of traditional terrorist organizations. First, the national and territorial focus does apply mainly to those terrorist organizations focusing on decolonization and nationalism, such as the campaign by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria and the IRA in Northern Ireland. However, even these organizations operated internationally with significant support bases in France and the United States, respectively. Terrorist groups pursuing left-wing agendas had, of course, a variety of Marxist ideals, which shared a common vision that was not limited to national states or to territory, but instead focused on a worldwide revolutionary struggle.

Second, these older terrorist groups possessed important transnational links themselves. Traditional terrorists practiced international exchange and cooperation, within the limits of

what was feasible at the time. In the nineteenth century, there was an international anarchist movement whereby individuals would travel to several countries and circulate within anarchist circles. In more recent times, there were strong links between Marxist-inspired groups around the world, including those involved in terrorism. To give some examples of the transnational contacts in the 1970s, several European activists traveled to China where they met other like-minded activists from other countries. The Weather Underground key members, for example, met with representatives of the Vietnamese people. While these contacts involved primarily information exchange, there were also more substantial contacts. It is well known that many German and Dutch left-wing radicals followed guerrilla training organized by Palestinian groupings in Jordan and South Yemen. There were allegedly also logistical support networks between the German Red Army Faction and the Dutch radicals (Malkki, 2010). Joint operations by people of different citizenship is not a novelty: the group that executed the OPEC attack in Vienna in 1975 serves as an example, as does the so-called Euro-terrorism of the mid-1980s, which was an attempt by the left-wing terrorist movements to combine forces.

In other words, not only were the traditional terrorist organizations more transnational and non-territorial than has often been allowed for, but the so-called 'new' organizations are in fact more focused on national and territorial aspects than is frequently acknowledged. First, the al-Qaeda ideology explicitly strives for the unification of all states with a majority of Muslims, stretching from North Africa to South East Asia, realizing the partly territorial ideal of a Caliphate. Second, an important agenda point is the removal of Western influence from the land of the three holy places and the ridding of the Middle East of regimes that are corrupted by the West. Third, the state is still seen as the most important vehicle for realizing these theocratic ideals. This can among others be witnessed in the co-opting of Sudan and Afghanistan as staging bases for the al-Qaeda struggle. Recently, the tribal regions of Pakistan and Yemen seem to have taken over this function.

Aims

A third argument about the new terrorism is that the aims of the actors have moved from political agendas to a religious focus. Traditional terrorist movements are considered to have espoused nationalist or left-wing ideologies. This has recently shifted to religious inspiration and therefore the label 'new' has been applied (Ranstorp, 1996; Juergensmeyer, 2001). These arguments are in themselves highly contentious, because they imply mono-causality, which is of course a fallacy. Detailed case study analysis reveals that most terrorist organizations have multiple, overlapping and highly changeable goals. Notwithstanding this serious shortcoming, two questions are in order here: to what extent can the traditional terrorist organizations be considered non-religious or secular; and to what extent are the new terrorist organizations inspired by religion?

First, traditional terrorist movements were hardly non-religious or purely secular. Some examples include the IRA with an almost exclusive Catholic following, Irgun which was exclusively Jewish, and EOKA in Cyprus with a Greek Orthodox membership. In pre-modern times, as argued by David Rapoport (1984: 658), the most prevalent justification for terrorism was in fact religion. Second, the new terrorist organizations are also influenced by secular and more mundane considerations. We have already argued that national and territorial issues play a key role for new terrorist organizations; having a long-term religiously inspired goal does not exclude the possibility of having short-term political objectives (Sedgwick, 2004). Important examples are the nationalist agendas of Hamas and Hezbollah (see Gunning, 2007).

An entirely different question is what kind of sociological/socio-psychological significance this alleged shift in objectives has. It has often been claimed that the religious motive makes the terrorist movement behave and think along different lines. The religious terrorists are arguably engaged in a 'cosmic war' (Juergensmeyer, 2001). However, it should be noted that religious movements do not have a monopoly on apocalyptic or utopian thinking. Jeremy Varon, for example, argues that the RAF and the Weather Underground had an apocalyptic dimension, including the idea that existing society is corrupt and must be destroyed and that this would make the emergence of something new and better possible. This thought, in its turn, made it possible for these groups to 'take their violence out of the realm of political calculation' and see it as a struggle between good and evil (Varon, 2008: 35–37).

Methods

A fourth argument regarding new terrorism is that the means with which terrorist attacks are carried out are shifting from conventional explosives to weapons of mass destruction. The most important instrument used to carry out a terrorist attack remains the bomb; in particular, the car bomb enjoys unprecedented popularity (Hoffman, 2001). Paradoxically, the most important instrument before the advent of dynamite, the nitroglycerine bomb, has been enjoying a small renaissance. The substance was used mostly because of a lack of alternatives but is notorious because of its instability.

Weapons of mass destruction, or to be more precise, so-called NBCR (nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological) weapons, and the risks of them falling into the hands of terrorist organizations, have received a lot of attention from academics, think tanks and the popular press. Almost 20 percent of the literature on terrorism focuses on weapons of mass destruction (Lum, Kennedy and Sherley, 2006a: 493). The fear of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists has been discussed for a very long time: 'warnings about the possibility that small groups, terrorists and errant states could fabricate nuclear weapons have been repeatedly uttered at least since 1947' (Mueller, 2005: 489; Jenkins, 1975, 1985). However, there are only two confirmed examples of the use of such weapons with potential for mass destruction: the sarin gas attack by the Aum Shinrikyo sect in the Tokyo underground in 1995, and the anthrax letters sent in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. Although they were highly threatening, two examples hardly constitute a trend.

Even if the terrorists were looking at causing more destruction than before, it does not mean that the use of weapons of mass destruction would be imminent. Noteworthy is the observation of John V. Parachini that those who wish to inflict mass casualties, especially those with some level of professionalism, have tended to opt for conventional means, presumably because of the unpredictability that unavoidably comes with using the so-called NBCR material (Parachini, 2001).

The discussion also suffers from terminological imprecision. The term 'weapons of mass destruction' seems to increasingly relate more to the effect of mass casualties rather than the composition of the specific weapon used. To talk about NBCR weapons (and even less NBCR material as such) as weapons of mass destruction is hardly more precise, because they are not always weapons of mass destruction by their effect. The influence of the non-proliferation think tanks, so prominent during the Cold War period and still in existence today, can be felt in this area.

Means

Finally, it is argued that the means used by terrorists have changed in the effect they seek, from small-scale bomb attacks and airplane hijacking to mass casualty attacks. This contention is based on two false premises. First, small arms can have large-scale effects. Even small explosives can produce large numbers of victims. Carried out with a truck load of conventional explosives, the 1983 attack on a United States barracks in Lebanon, which cost the lives of over 200 American marines, was at the time described as beyond all boundaries (Fisk, 1990). Also a conventional bomb attack in Omagh, carried out with a truck load of conventional explosives in 1998 managed to kill 28, the largest number in one incident of Northern Irish terrorism (Dingley, 2001).

Second, mass casualties are not a recent phenomenon. It is a consistent feature of discussions about terrorism to describe the effect as boundless and inhuman. This applies to the nineteenth century as much as today (Miller, 1995: 31). Scholars have found time and again that the number of victims per terrorist attack is on the increase since the start of the 1980s (Hoffman, 1998: 94, 201). This trend does not coincide with the supposed development of the new terrorism since the mid-1990s. Furthermore, it has been argued that the choice of targets of the new terrorists is increasingly indiscriminate. It is true that the last decade of the nineteenth century has been described as the decade of political murder with attacks focusing on individuals, in particular heads of state. However, both the old and the new terrorists seek highly specific and individual targets, as well as more symbolic and general targets. The plots to kill President Bush and the detonation of bombs on the Madrid and London public transport systems could purportedly have had the same effect.

What seems to be overlooked in many of these claims is the so-called law of diminishing returns, whereby every subsequent attack has to strike harder in order to attain the same effect (Laqueur, 2001: 108). The shift from highly specific to more indiscriminate targeting may also occur because security arrangements have made it increasingly difficult to target high-level politicians and public figures. This is called the substitution effect, which plays a major role in terrorism (Arce and Sandler, 2005; Enders and Sandler, 2005). Statistical studies have indicated that the 'war on terror' has already given rise to shifts in types of attacks, namely, less sophisticated bombings and shifts from American targets to Western allies, as seen in the London, Madrid and Bali bombings (Enders and Sandler, 2005; Rosendorf and Sandler, 2004).

Observations and conclusions

What is truly new in the field of terrorism is the huge impetus scholarship has received since 2001. While not all of it is top quality, substantial progress has been made in our understanding of terrorism and its related phenomena (Pape, 2009). The key question is whether the combination of the developments examined above deserves the label 'new'? The trends brought up by new terrorism thinkers may exist in some form, but they do not form such dramatic developments as is suggested, and therefore do not add up to a phenomenon we might call 'new terrorism'. The trends are not as intertwined as the argument tends to portray. While Aum Shinrikyo was fascinated with weapons of mass destruction, the organizational form it adopted was decidedly hierarchical and did not take the flat, diffuse network shape. Furthermore, Hamas, an example of an allegedly religiously motivated movement active today, does not share the main characteristics and aspirations ascribed to the new terrorism thesis (Gunning, 2007).

Instead, we are dealing with a series of developments that have not affected the phenomenon of terrorism as a concept and as a strategy in any uniform or universal manner (see for example, Neumann, 2009). These developments reinforce the need to refine our understanding of terrorism. This contribution has attempted to show that when taking a much needed and closer look at the history of terrorism, there is nothing that suggests that we are dealing with an entirely new phenomenon that makes all previous research on terrorism redundant. The realities of terrorism remain more complex than the policy-makers would like to have it, but refusing to pay attention to historical parallels and diversity in terrorist movements may lead to grave misjudgements and wasted resources.

Discussion questions

1 What are some of the 'new' features of terrorism?
2 Is religion a new and dominant feature of terrorism?
3 If the motivations and choices of the 'new terrorist' groups are based on religious belief and appear broad and diffuse, does this mean that they are irrational?
4 What are some of the intrinsic or extrinsic factors that can cause transformations among terrorist organizations?
5 What are some of the current trends and elements of terrorism that can lead to future challenges for nation-states and for the international community?
6 Do the detractors and proponents of the new terrorism thesis agree on anything? Why?
7 What can history teach us about the evolution and nature of terrorism?
8 Are fears of terrorists using nuclear weapons justified?
9 To what extent does terrorism derive its power from the law of diminishing returns and the substitution effect?
10 What are some of the academic and political implications of arguing that there is a new terrorism in existence?

Further readings

Crenshaw, M., ed., 1995. *Terrorism in Context*, University Park, Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Duyvesteyn, I., 2004. 'How New is the New Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27(5): 439–454.
Hanlon, Q., 2008. 'Globalization and the Transformation of Armed Groups', in Horowitz, J., ed., *Armed Groups*, Newport, RI: US Naval War College.
Lesser, I., Arquilla, J., Ronfeldt, D., Hoffman, B., Zanini, M., and Jenkins, B., 1999, *Countering the New Terrorism*, Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation.
Neumann, P., 2009. *Old and New Terrorism*, Cambridge, UK: Polity.
Rapoport, D., 1984. 'Fear and Trembling; Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *American Political Science Review*, 78(3): 658–677.
Rapoport, D., 2004. 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism', in Cronin, A., and Ludes, J., eds, *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
Sedgwick, M., 2007. 'Inspiration and the Origins of Global Waves of Terrorism', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30: 97–112.

3 Can states be terrorists?

YES: State terror: the theoretical and practical utilities and implications of a contested concept

Michael Stohl

Introduction

> If the basis of a popular government in peacetime is virtue, its basis in a time of revolution is virtue and terror – virtue, without which terror would be barbaric; and terror, without which virtue would be impotent . . . Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible.
>
> (Robespierre, 1794)

In this chapter, I will confront the question 'can states be terrorists?' in the affirmative. I also will address the main arguments put forth by those who argue the negative. In addition to explaining why and how states can be terrorists, this also requires an explanation of how certain forms of state violence amount to terrorism. Finally, I will examine the negative implications of excluding states from the study of terrorism, both for confronting reality and for assisting our understanding of non-state political actors' decisions to employ terrorism.

The etymology of terrorism

The term 'terrorism' entered the English language in the aftermath of *La Terreur* (The Reign of Terror) to refer to the revolutionary state's systematic use of violence against French citizens. The term 'terrorist' was applied to Robespierre, Saint Just and others of the committee of Public Safety (Kropotkin, 1927; Bienvenu, 1970: 228–230). The French word for terror itself had ancient roots. It was derived from the Latin verb *terrere*, which meant 'to frighten'. The term was applied to the *terror cimbricus*, as a panic and state of emergency in Rome in response to the approach of warriors of the Cimbri tribe in 105 BC. The Romans employed the specter of terror themselves as a core component of their power in the aftermath of conquest, as a response to slave uprisings and rebellion and towards criminals through the use of crucifixion, which was intended not only as a punishment of the victim but as a message to the audience that bore witness. The concept itself had an ancient lineage and