The Strategies of Terrorism

Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter

Terrorism often works. Extremist organizations such as al-Qaida, Hamas, and the Tamil Tigers engage in terrorism because it frequently delivers the desired response. The October 1983 suicide attack against the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, for example, convinced the United States to withdraw its soldiers from Lebanon.[1] The United States pulled its soldiers out of Saudi Arabia two years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, even though the U.S. military had been building up its forces in that country for more than a decade.[2] The Philippines recalled its troops from Iraq nearly a month early after a Filipino truck driver was kidnapped by Iraqi extremists.[3] In fact, terrorism has been so successful that between 1980 and 2003, half of all suicide terrorist campaigns were closely followed by substantial concessions by the target governments.[4] Hijacking planes, blowing up buses, and kidnapping individuals may seem irrational and incoherent to outside observers, but these tactics can be surprisingly effective in achieving a terrorist group's political aims.

Despite the salience of terrorism today, scholars and policymakers are only beginning to understand how and why it works. Much has been written on the origins of terror, the motivations of terrorists, and counterterror responses, but little has appeared on the strategies terrorist organizations employ and the conditions under which these strategies succeed or fail. Alan Krueger, David Laitin, Jitka Maleckova, and Alberto Abadie, for example, have traced the effects of poverty, education, and political freedom on terrorist recruitment.[5]

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1. Thomas L. Friedman, "Marines Complete Beirut Pullback: Moslems Move In," *New York Times,* February 27, 2004.
2. Don Van Natta Jr., "The Struggle for Iraq: Last American Combat Troops Quit Saudi Arabia," *New York Times,* September 22, 2003.
3. James Glanz, "Hostage Is Freed after Philippine Troops Are Withdrawn from Iraq," *New York Times,* July 21, 2004.
4. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 65.
5. Alan B. Krueger and David D. Laitin, "Kto Kogo? A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and

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Jessica Stern has examined the grievances that give rise to terrorism and the networks, money, and operations that allow terrorist organizations to thrive.[6] What is lacking, however, is a clear understanding of the larger strategic games terrorists are playing and the ways in which state responses help or hinder them.

Effective counterstrategies cannot be designed without first understanding the strategic logic that drives terrorist violence. Terrorism works not simply because it instills fear in target populations, but because it causes governments and individuals to respond in ways that aid the terrorists' cause. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombed pubs, parks, and shopping districts in London because its leadership believed that such acts would convince Britain to relinquish Northern Ireland. In targeting the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, al-Qaida hoped to raise the costs for the United States of supporting Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab regimes, and to provoke the United States into a military response designed to mobilize Muslims around the world. That so many targeted governments respond in the way that terrorist organizations intend underscores the need for understanding the reasoning behind this type of violence.

In this article we seek answers to four questions. First, what types of goals do terrorists seek to achieve? Second, what strategies do they pursue to achieve these goals? Third, why do these strategies work in some cases but not in others? And fourth, given these strategies, what are the targeted governments' best responses to prevent terrorism and protect their countries from future attacks?

The core of our argument is that terrorist violence is a form of costly signaling. Terrorists are too weak to impose their will directly by force of arms. They are sometimes strong enough, however, to persuade audiences to do as they wish by altering the audience's beliefs about such matters as the terrorist's ability to impose costs and their degree of commitment to their cause. Given the conflict of interest between terrorists and their targets, ordinary communication or "cheap talk" is insufficient to change minds or influence behavior. If al-Qaida had informed the United States on September 10, 2001, that it would

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Targets of Terrorism," Princeton University and Stanford University, 2003; Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 119–144; and Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," Faculty Research Working Papers Series, RWP04-043 (Cambridge, Mass.: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2004).

6. Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco-HarperCollins, 2003).

kill 3,000 Americans unless the United States withdrew from Saudi Arabia, the threat might have sparked concern, but it would not have had the same impact as the attacks that followed. Because it is hard for weak actors to make credible threats, terrorists are forced to display publicly just how far they are willing to go to obtain their desired results.

There are five principal strategic logics of costly signaling at work in terrorist campaigns: (1) attrition, (2) intimidation, (3) provocation, (4) spoiling, and (5) outbidding. In an attrition strategy, terrorists seek to persuade the enemy that the terrorists are strong enough to impose considerable costs if the enemy continues a particular policy. Terrorists using intimidation try to convince the population that the terrorists are strong enough to punish disobedience and that the government is too weak to stop them, so that people behave as the terrorists wish. A provocation strategy is an attempt to induce the enemy to respond to terrorism with indiscriminate violence, which radicalizes the population and moves them to support the terrorists. Spoilers attack in an effort to persuade the enemy that moderates on the terrorists' side are weak and untrustworthy, thus undermining attempts to reach a peace settlement. Groups engaged in outbidding use violence to convince the public that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups, and therefore are worthy of support. Understanding these five distinct strategic logics is crucial not only for understanding terrorism but also for designing effective antiterror policies.[7]

The article is divided into two main sections. The first discusses the goals terrorists pursue and examines the forty-two groups currently on the U.S. State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).[8] The second section develops the costly signaling approach to terrorism, analyzes the five strategies that terrorists use to achieve their goals, discusses the conditions in which each of these strategies is likely to be successful, and draws out the implications for the best counterterror responses.

The Goals of Terrorism

For years the press has portrayed terrorists as crazy extremists who commit indiscriminate acts of violence, without any larger goal beyond revenge or a de-

7. Of course, terrorists will also be seeking best responses to government responses. A pair of strategies that are best responses to each other constitutes a Nash equilibrium, the fundamental prediction tool of game theory.

8. Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," fact sheet, October 11, 2005, http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/3719.htm.

sire to produce fear in an enemy population. This characterization derives some support from statements made by terrorists themselves. For example, a young Hamas suicide bomber whose bomb failed to detonate said, "I know that there are other ways to do jihad. But this one is sweet—the sweetest. All martyrdom operations, if done for Allah's sake, hurt less than a gnat's bite!"[9] Volunteers for a suicide mission may have a variety of motives—obtaining rewards in the afterlife, avenging a family member killed by the enemy, or simply collecting financial rewards for their descendants. By contrast, the goals driving terrorist organizations are usually political objectives, and it is these goals that determine whether and how terrorist campaigns will be launched.

We define "terrorism" as the use of violence against civilians by nonstate actors to attain political goals.[10] These goals can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. Individuals and groups often have hierarchies of objectives, where broader goals lead to more proximate objectives, which then become specific goals in more tactical analyses.[11] For the sake of simplicity, we adopt the common distinction between goals (or ultimate desires) and strategies (or plans of action to attain the goals).

Although the ultimate goals of terrorists have varied over time, five have had enduring importance: regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control, and status quo maintenance. Regime change is the overthrow of a government and its replacement with one led by the terrorists or at least one more to their liking.[12] Most Marxist groups, including the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) in Peru have sought this goal. Territorial change is taking territory away from a state either to establish a new state (as the Tamil Tigers seek to do in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka) or to join another state (as Lashkar-e Tayyiba would like to do by incorporating Indian Kashmir into Pakistan).

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9. Quoted in Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to the 'Human Bombs,'" *New Yorker,* November 19, 2001, p. 37.

10. For discussion of differing definitions of terrorism, see Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988), pp. 1–38. We do not focus on state terrorism because states face very different opportunities and constraints in their use of violence, and we do not believe the two cases are similar enough to be profitably analyzed together.

11. For the distinction between goals and strategies, see David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially chap. 1.

12. On revolutionary terrorism, see Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson, "The Concept of Revolutionary Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 383–396; Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson, *Revolutionary Terrorism: The FLN in Algeria, 1954–1962* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1978); and H. Edward Price Jr., "The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 1977), pp. 52–66.

Policy change is a broader category of lesser demands, such as al-Qaida's demand that the United States drop its support for Israel and corrupt Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia. Social control constrains the behavior of individuals, rather than the state. In the United States, the Ku Klux Klan sought the continued oppression of African Americans after the Civil War. More recently, antiabortion groups have sought to kill doctors who perform abortions to deter other doctors from providing this service. Finally, status quo maintenance is the support of an existing regime or a territorial arrangement against political groups that seek to change it. Many right-wing paramilitary organizations in Latin America, such as the United Self-Defense Force of Colombia, have sought this goal.[13] Protestant paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland supported maintenance of the territorial status quo (Northern Ireland as British territory) against IRA demands that the territory be transferred to Ireland.[14]

Some organizations hold multiple goals and may view one as facilitating another. For instance, by seeking to weaken U.S. support for Arab regimes (which would represent a policy change by the United States), al-Qaida is working toward the overthrow of those regimes (or regime change). As another example, Hamas aims to drive Israel out of the occupied territories (territorial change) and then to overthrow it (regime change).

A cross section of terrorist organizations listed in Table 1 illustrates the range of goals and their relative frequency. Of the forty-two groups currently designated as FTOs by the U.S. State Department, thirty-one seek regime change, nineteen seek territorial change, four seek policy change, and one seeks to maintain the status quo.[15] The list is neither exhaustive nor representative of all terrorist groups, and it does not reflect the frequency of goals in the universe of cases. None of the FTOs appear to pursue social control, but some domestic groups, which are by definition not on the list, are more interested in

13. This group has recently surrendered its weapons.

14. Some analysts argue that many terrorist organizations have degenerated into little more than self-perpetuating businesses that primarily seek to enhance their own power and wealth, and only articulate political goals for rhetorical purposes. See, for example, Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, pp. 235–236. This suggests that power and wealth should be considered goals in their own right. All organizations, however, seek power and wealth to further their political objectives, and these are better viewed as instrumental in nature.

15. A difficult coding issue arises in determining when a group is a nonstate actor engaged in status quo maintenance and when it is simply a covert agent of the state. Some death squads were linked to elements in the armed forces, yet were not necessarily responsive to the chief executive of the country. Others were tied to right-wing parties and are more clearly nonstate, unless that party is the party in power. See Bruce D. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner, eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Table 1. Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Their Goals

Name	Ultimate Goals	RC	TC	PC	SC	SQM
Abu Nidal Organization	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			
Abu Sayyaf Group	Secede from Philippines		X			
Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			
Ansar al-Islam	Evict United States from Iraq; establish Islamic state	X		X		
Armed Islamic Group	Establish Islamic state in Algeria	X				
Asbat al-Ansar	Establish Islamic state in Lebanon	X				
Aum Shinrikyo	Seize power in Japan; hasten the Apocalypse	X				
Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)	Secede from Spain		X			
Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army	Establish Communist state in Philippines	X				
Continuity Irish Republican Army	Evict Britain from Northern Ireland; unite with Eire		X			
Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group)	Establish Islamic state in Egypt	X				
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian Islamic state	X	X			
Harakat ul-Mujahidin	Evict India from Kashmir; unite with Pakistan		X			
Hezbollah (Party of God)	Originally: evict Israel from Lebanon; now: destroy Israel and establish Palestinian Islamic state	X	X			
Islamic Jihad Group	Establish Islamic state in Uzbekistan; reduce U.S. influence	X		X		
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Establish Islamic state in Uzbekistan	X				
Jaish-e-Mohammed (Army of Mohammed)	Evict India from Kashmir; unite with Pakistan		X			
Jemaah Islamiya	Establish Islamic state in Indonesia	X				
Al-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad)	Establish Islamic state in Egypt	X				
Kahane Chai (Kach)	Expand Israel		X			
Kongra-Gel (formerly Kurdistan Workers' Party)	Secede from Turkey		X			
Lashkar-e Tayyiba (Army of the Righteous)	Evict India from Kashmir; unite with Pakistan		X			
Lashkar i Jhangvi	Establish Islamic state in Pakistan	X				
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	Secede from Sri Lanka		X			
Libyan Islamic Fighting Group	Establish Islamic state in Libya	X				
Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group	Establish Islamic state in Morocco	X				
Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization	Overthrow Iranian government	X				
National Liberation Army	Establish Marxist government in Colombia	X				
Palestine Liberation Front	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			
Palestinian Islamic Jihad	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			

Table 1. *continued*

Name	Ultimate Goals	RC	TC	PC	SC	SCM
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command	Destroy Israel; establish Palestinian state	X	X			
Al-Qaida	Establish Islamic states in Middle East; destroy Israel; reduce U.S. influence	X	X	X		
Al-Qaida in Iraq (Zarqawi group)	Evict United States from Iraq; establish Islamic state	X		X		
Real Irish Republican Army	Evict Britain from Northern Ireland; unite with Eire		X			
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	Establish Marxist state in Colombia	X				
Revolutionary Nuclei (formerly Revolutionary People's Struggle)	Establish Marxist state in Greece	X				
Revolutionary Organization 7 November	Establish Marxist state in Greece	X				
Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front	Establish Marxist state in Turkey	X				
Salafist Group for Call and Combat	Establish Islamic state in Algeria	X				
Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso)	Establish Marxist state in Peru	X				
United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia	Preserve Colombian state					X
Total		31	19	4	0	1

SOURCE: Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," fact sheet, October 11, 2005.
NOTE: RC: regime change; TC: territorial change; PC: policy change; SC: social control; and SQM: status quo maintenance. Coding of goals is the authors'.

this goal.[16] What Table 1 reveals, however, is the instrumental nature of terrorist violence and some of the more popular political objectives being sought.

The Strategies of Terrorist Violence

To achieve their long-term objectives, terrorists pursue a variety of strategies. Scholars have suggested a number of typologies of terrorist strategies and tactics over the years. In a pathbreaking early analysis of terrorism, Thomas Thornton offered five proximate objectives: morale building, advertising, disorientation (of the target population), elimination of opposing forces, and provocation.[17] Martha Crenshaw also identifies advertising and provocation as proximate objectives, along with weakening the government, enforcing obedience in the population, and outbidding.[18] David Fromkin argues that provocation is *the* strategy of terrorism.[19] Edward Price writes that terrorists must delegitimize the regime and impose costs on occupying forces, and he identifies kidnapping, assassination, advertising, and provocation as tactics.[20] Although these analyses are helpful in identifying strategies of terrorism, they fail to derive them from a coherent framework, spell out their logic in detail, and consider best responses to them.

A fruitful starting point for a theory of terrorist strategies is the literature on uncertainty, conflict, and costly signaling. Uncertainty has long been understood to be a cause of conflict. Geoffrey Blainey argued that wars begin when states disagree about their relative power, and they end when states agree again.[21] James Fearon and other theorists built upon this insight and showed

16. The Taliban, which is not listed, does pursue social control; and the Israeli group Kach, which seeks to maintain the subordinate status of Palestinians in Israel and eventually to expel them, may also be considered to seek it. The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism maintains a database of terrorist organizations that includes more than forty groups based in the United States. Some of these can be considered to seek social control, such as the Army of God, which targets doctors who provide abortions. See http://www.tkb.org.

17. Thomas Perry Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," in Harry Eckstein, ed., *Internal War: Problems and Approaches* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 87.

18. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 13, No. 4 (July 1981), pp. 379–399.

19. David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 53, No. 4 (July 1975), pp. 683–698.

20. Price, "The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism," pp. 54–58. Other related discussions include Paul Wilkinson, "The Strategic Implications of Terrorism," in M.L. Sondhi, ed., *Terrorism and Political Violence: A Sourcebook* (New Delhi: Har-anand Publications, 2000); Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 110–118; and Schmid and Jongman, *Political Terrorism,* pp. 50–59.

21. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War,* 3d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1988), p. 122.

that uncertainty about a state's willingness to fight can cause conflict.[22] If states are unsure what other states will fight for, they may demand too much in negotiations and end up in conflict. This uncertainty could reflect a disagreement about power, as Blainey understood, or a disagreement over resolve, willpower, or the intensity of preferences over the issue. The United States and North Vietnam did not disagree over their relative power, but the United States fatally underestimated North Vietnamese determination to achieve victory.

Uncertainty about trustworthiness or moderation of preferences can also cause conflict. Thomas Hobbes argued that if individuals mistrust each other, they have an incentive to initiate an attack rather than risk being attacked by surprise.[23] John Herz, Robert Jervis, and others have developed this concept in the international relations context under the heading of the security dilemma and the spiral model.[24] States are often uncertain about each other's ultimate ambitions, intentions, and preferences. Because of this, anything that increases one side's belief that the other is deceitful, expansionist, risk acceptant, or hostile increases incentives to fight rather than cooperate.

If uncertainty about power, resolve, and trustworthiness can lead to violence, then communication on these topics is the key to preventing (or instigating) conflict. The problem is that simple verbal statements are often not credible, because actors frequently have incentives to lie and bluff. If by saying "We're resolved," the North Vietnamese could have persuaded the United States to abandon the South in 1965, then North Vietnam would have had every incentive to say so even if it was not that resolute. In reality, they had to fight a long and costly war to prove their point. Similarly, when Mikhail Gorbachev wanted to reassure the West and end the Cold War, verbal declarations of innocent intentions were insufficient, because previous Soviet leaders had made similar statements. Instead, real arms reductions, such as the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, were necessary for Western opinion to change.

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22. James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization,* Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414; and Robert Powell, "Bargaining Theory and International Conflict," *Annual Review of Political Science,* Vol. 5 (June 2002), pp. 1–30.
23. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin, [1651] 1968), pp. 184.
24. John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics,* Vol. 2, No. 2 (January 1950), pp. 157–180; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics,* Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; and Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics,* Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997), pp. 171–202.

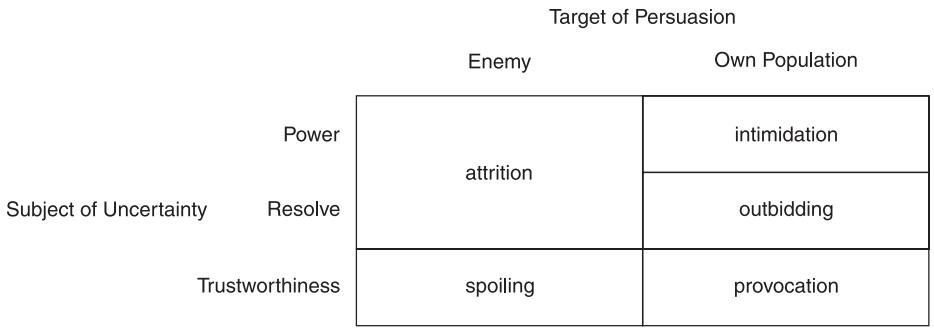
Because talk is cheap, states and terrorists who wish to influence the behavior of an adversary must resort to costly signals.[25] Costly signals are actions so costly that bluffers and liars are unwilling to take them.[26] In international crises, mobilizing forces or drawing a very public line in the sand are examples of strategies that less resolved actors might find too costly to take.[27] War itself, or the willingness to endure it, can serve as a forceful signal of resolve and provide believable information about power and capabilities.[28] Costly signals separate the wheat from the chaff and allow honest communication, although sometimes at a terrible price.

To obtain their political goals, terrorists need to provide credible information to the audiences whose behavior they hope to influence. Terrorists play to two key audiences: governments whose policies they wish to influence and individuals on the terrorists' own side whose support or obedience they seek to gain.[29] The targeted governments are central because they can grant concessions over policy or territory that the terrorists are seeking. The terrorists' domestic audience is also important, because they can provide resources to the terrorist group and must obey its edicts on social or political issues.

Figure 1 shows how the three subjects of uncertainty (power, resolve, and trustworthiness) combine with the two targets of persuasion (the enemy government and the domestic population) to yield a family of five signaling strategies. These strategies form a theoretically cohesive set that we believe represents most of the commonly used strategies in important terrorist campaigns around the world today.[30] A terrorist organization can of course pursue

25. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).
26. John G. Riley, "Silver Signals: Twenty-five Years of Screening and Signaling," *Journal of Economic Literature,* Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 2001), pp. 432–478.
27. James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands vs. Sunk Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 41, No. 1 (February 1977), pp. 68–90.
28. Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," *Perspectives on Politics,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2003), pp. 27–43; and Robert Powell, "Bargaining and Learning While Fighting," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 48, No. 2 (April 2004), pp. 344–361.
29. Rival terrorist or moderate groups are also important, but terrorism is not often used to signal such groups. Sometimes rival groups are targeted in an effort to eliminate them, but this violence is usually thought of as internecine warfare rather than terrorism. The targeted government may also be divided into multiple actors, but these divisions are not crucial for a broad understanding of terrorist strategies.
30. This list is not exhaustive. In particular, it omits two strategies that have received attention in the literature: advertising and retaliation. Advertising may play a role in the beginning of some conflicts, but it does not sustain long-term campaigns of terrorist violence. Retaliation is a motivation for some terrorists, but terrorism would continue even if the state did not strike at terrorists, because terrorism is designed to achieve some goal, not just avenge counterterrorist attacks.

Figure 1. Strategies of Terrorist Violence



more than one strategy at a time. The September 11 terrorist attacks, for example, were probably part of both an attrition strategy and a provocation strategy. By targeting the heart of the United States' financial district, al-Qaida may have been attempting to increase the cost of the U.S. policy of stationing soldiers in Saudi Arabia. But by targeting prominent symbols of American economic and military power, al-Qaida may also have been trying to goad the United States into an extreme military response that would serve al-Qaida's larger goal of radicalizing the world's Muslim population. The challenge for policymakers in targeted countries is to calibrate their responses in ways that do not further any of the terrorists' goals.

Below we analyze the five terrorist strategies in greater detail, discuss the conditions under which each is likely to succeed, and relate these conditions to the appropriate counterterrorism strategies.

ATTRITION: A BATTLE OF WILLS

The most important task for any terrorist group is to persuade the enemy that the group is strong and resolute enough to inflict serious costs, so that the enemy yields to the terrorists' demands.[31] The attrition strategy is designed to accomplish this task.[32] In an attrition campaign, the greater the costs a terrorist

31. Per Baltzer Overgaard, "The Scale of Terrorist Attacks as a Signal of Resources," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 38, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 452–478; and Harvey E. Lapan and Todd Sandler, "Terrorism and Signaling," *European Journal of Political Economy,* Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 383–398.

32. J. Maynard Smith, "The Theory of Games and Evolution in Animal Conflicts," *Journal of Theoretical Biology,* Vol. 47 (1974), pp. 209–211; John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca,

organization is able to inflict, the more credible its threat to inflict future costs, and the more likely the target is to grant concessions. During the last years of the British Empire, the Greeks in Cyprus, Jews in Palestine, and Arabs in Aden used a war of attrition strategy against their colonizer. By targeting Britain with terrorist attacks, they eventually convinced the political leadership that maintaining control over these territories would not be worth the cost in British lives.[33] Attacks by Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel, particularly during the second intifada, also appear to be guided by this strategy. In a letter written in the early 1990s to the leadership of Hamas, the organization's master bomb maker, Yahya Ayyash, said, "We paid a high price when we used only sling-shots and stones. We need to exert more pressure, make the cost of the occupation that much more expensive in human lives, that much more unbearable."[34]

Robert Pape presents the most thorough exposition of terrorism as a war of attrition in his analysis of suicide bombing.[35] Based on a data set of all suicide attacks from 1980 to 2003 (315 in total), Pape argues that suicide terrorism is employed by weak actors for whom peaceful tactics have failed and conventional military tactics are infeasible because of the imbalance of power. The strategy is to inflict costs on the enemy until it withdraws its occupying forces: the greater the costs inflicted, the more likely the enemy is to withdraw. Pape asserts that terrorists began to recognize the effectiveness of suicide terrorism with the 1983 Hezbollah attack against U.S. Marines in Beirut that killed 241 people. Since then, suicide terrorism has been employed in nationalist struggles around the world.

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO ATTRITION. A war of attrition strategy is more effective against some targets than others. Three variables are likely to figure in the outcome: the state's level of interest in the issue under dispute, the constraints on its ability to retaliate, and its sensitivity to the costs of violence.

The first variable, the state's degree of interest in the disputed issue, is fundamental. States with only peripheral interests at stake often capitulate to terrorist demands; states with more important interests at stake rarely do. The

N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 33–35; and James D. Fearon, "Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 269–305.

33. Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," *New Yorker,* November 19, 2001, p. 61.

34. Quoted in Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," p. 38.

35. Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 343–361; and Pape, *Dying to Win.*

United States withdrew from Lebanon following the bombing of the marine barracks because it had only a marginal interest in maintaining stability and preventing Syrian domination of that country. In that case, the costs of the attack clearly outweighed the U.S. interests at stake. Similarly, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000 because the costs of the occupation outstripped Israel's desire to maintain a buffer zone in that region. In contrast, the United States responded to the September 11 attacks by launching offensive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq rather than withdrawing U.S. troops from the region, as al-Qaida demanded (though U.S. troops did ultimately leave Saudi Arabia for Iraq). Similarly, Israel is unlikely to withdraw from East Jerusalem, much less allow itself to become an Islamic state as Hamas has demanded.

The second variable, constraints on retaliation, affects the costs paid by the terrorists for pursuing a war of attrition. Terrorist organizations almost always are weaker than the governments they target and, as a result, are vulnerable to government retaliation. The more constrained the government is in its use of force, the less costly an attrition strategy is, and the longer the terrorists can hold out in the hopes of achieving their goal. For instance, the Israelis have the military means to commit genocide against the Palestinian people or to expel them to surrounding Arab countries. Israel, however, depends for its long-term survival on close ties with Europe and the United States. Western support for Israel would plummet in response to an Israeli strategy designed to inflict mass casualties, making such a strategy prohibitively costly. This constraint makes a war of attrition strategy less costly (and more attractive) for the Palestinians.

Democracies may be more constrained in their ability to retaliate than authoritarian regimes. Pape finds that suicide bombers target democracies exclusively and argues that this is in part because of constraints on their ability to strike back.[36] Capable authoritarian regimes are able to gather more information on their populations than democracies and can more easily round up suspected terrorists and target those sympathetic to them. They are also less constrained by human rights considerations in their interrogation and retaliation practices.[37]

The ease with which a terrorist organization can be targeted also influences

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36. Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 44. Krueger and Laitin also find that targets of terrorism tend to be democratic. See Krueger and Laitin, "Kto Kogo?"
37. The U.S. program of extraordinary rendition, for example, is an effort to evade the restrictions usually faced by democracies by outsourcing the dirty work.

a country's ability to retaliate forcefully. Terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida that are widely dispersed, difficult to identify, or otherwise hard to target are at an advantage in a war of attrition because their enemies will have difficulty delivering punishment. Israel has, through superior intelligence gathering, been able to assassinate top members of Hamas's leadership at will, including its founder and spiritual leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, as well as his successor, Abdel Aziz Rantisi. The United States, by contrast, has been unable to locate Osama bin Laden and his top deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The third variable is a target's cost tolerance. Governments that are able to absorb heavier costs and hold out longer are less inviting targets for an attrition strategy. Terrorist organizations are likely to gauge a target's cost tolerance based on at least two factors: the target's regime type and the target's past behavior toward other terrorists. Regime type is important because democracies may be less able to tolerate the painful effects of terrorism than nondemocracies. Citizens of democracies, their fears stoked by media reports and warnings of continued vulnerability, are more likely to demand an end to the attacks. In more authoritarian states, the government exerts more control over the media and can disregard public opinion to a greater extent. The Russian government's heavy-handed response to hostage situations, for example, suggests a higher tolerance for casualties than a more fully democratic government would have. Additionally, because terrorist organizations operate more freely in democracies and politicians must interact with the public to maintain political support, terrorists have an easier time targeting prominent individuals for assassination. Of four leaders assassinated by terrorists in the past quarter century—Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Yitzak Rabin, and Anwar Sadat—three were leaders of democracies.

Among democratic states, sensitivity to costs may vary with the party in power. When more dovish parties are in charge, the target may be perceived to have lower cost tolerances than if a more hawkish party were at the helm. The dove-hawk dimension may correlate with the left-right dimension in domestic politics, leading left-wing parties to be more likely to grant terrorist demands. This traditional divide between peace and security has characterized Israeli politics for years. Labor Party Prime Minister Ehud Barak was elected on a platform of withdrawing Israeli forces from Lebanon and making peace with the Palestinians; in contrast, Likud Party Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was elected on a platform of meeting terrorists with military force. Hoping for greater concessions, terrorists may preferentially attack dovish parties.

The number of prior concessions made to other terrorists is also likely to

influence perceptions of the target's cost tolerance. Governments that have already yielded to terrorist demands are more likely to experience additional terrorist attacks. Evidence abounds that terrorists explicitly consider the prior behavior of states and are encouraged by signs of weakness. Israel's precipitous withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 convinced Hamas that the Israeli leadership's resolve was weakening and encouraged Hamas leaders to initiate the second intifada in September 2000.[38] Israelis fear the same inference will be drawn from their withdrawal from Gaza. A Hamas leader interviewed in October 2005 declared, "When we took up arms and launched [the second intifada], we succeeded in less than five years to force the Israelis to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. This fulfilled everyone's dream. I think we have to benefit from this experience by applying it accordingly to the West Bank and other occupied areas."[39] The past behavior of a targeted government, therefore, also provides important information to terrorist groups about its likely future behavior and the success of this particular strategy.

Perhaps the most important example of a terrorist group pursuing an attrition strategy is al-Qaida's war with the United States. In a November 2004 broadcast, bin Laden boasted, "We gained experience in guerilla and attritional warfare in our struggle against the great oppressive superpower, Russia, in which we and the mujahidin ground it down for ten years until it went bankrupt, and decided to withdraw in defeat. . . . We are continuing to make America bleed to the point of bankruptcy."[40] Al Qaida's goal—policy change—is well suited to an attrition strategy. Bin Laden has frequently argued that the United States lacks the resolve to fight a long attritional war, as in his February 1996 declaration of jihad:

> Where was this false courage of yours when the explosion in Beirut took place in 1983 A.D.? You were transformed into scattered bits and pieces; 241 soldiers were killed, most of them Marines. And where was this courage of yours when two explosions made you leave Aden in less than twenty-four hours!
>
> But your most disgraceful case was in Somalia; where, after vigorous propaganda about the power of the U.S. and its post–cold war leadership of the new world order, you moved tens of thousands of international forces, including twenty-eight thousand American soldiers, into Somalia. However, when tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American pilot was

38. Debate Goes On Over Lebanon Withdrawal, *Haaretz,* May 23, 2001; and Daoud Kuttab, "The Lebanon Lesson," *Jerusalem Post,* May 25, 2000.
39. Interview with Mahmoud Khalid al-Zahar, *Al Jazeera,* October 22, 2005.
40. Osama bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden,* trans. James Howarth, ed. Bruce Lawrence (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 241–242.

dragged in the streets of Mogadishu, you left the area in disappointment, humiliation, and defeat, carrying your dead with you. Clinton appeared in front of the whole world threatening and promising revenge, but these threats were merely a preparation for withdrawal. You had been disgraced by Allah and you withdrew; the extent of your impotence and weaknesses became very clear.[41]

Although difficult to prove, it also appears that bin Laden believed that he and his organization would be hard to target with counterattacks, making a war of attrition strategy even more appealing. In 2001 the Taliban was on the verge of eliminating armed resistance in northern Afghanistan; and, as a landlocked country, Afghanistan must have seemed relatively invulnerable to a U.S. invasion. The United States had bombed al-Qaida camps before to no effect. Even if the United States invaded, Afghanistan was both costly and difficult to conquer, as the Soviets discovered in the 1980s. In the end, of course, the Taliban would have been well advised to insist that the September 11 attacks be delayed until the Northern Alliance was defeated, but the latter's dramatic success with U.S. help was perhaps difficult to anticipate.

BEST RESPONSES TO ATTRITION. There are at least five counterstrategies available to a state engaged in a war of attrition. First, the targeted government can concede inessential issues in exchange for peace, a strategy that we believe is frequently pursued though rarely admitted.[42] In some cases, the terrorists will genuinely care more about the disputed issue and be willing to outlast the target. In such cases, concessions are likely to be the state's best response. Other potential challengers, however, may perceive this response as a sign of weakness, which could lead them to launch their own attacks. To reduce the damage to its reputation, the target can vigorously fight other wars of attrition over issues it cares more deeply about, thus signaling a willingness to bear costs if the matter is of sufficient consequence.

Second, where the issue under dispute is important enough to the targeted state that it does not want to grant any concessions, the government may engage in targeted retaliation. Retaliation can target the leadership of the terrorist group, its followers, their assets, and other objects of value. Care must be taken, however, that the retaliation is precisely targeted, because the terrorist

41. Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi,* August 1996, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html.
42. Peter C. Sederberg, "Conciliation as Counter-terrorist Strategy," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 32, No. 3 (August 1995), pp. 295–312.

organization could simultaneously be pursuing a strategy of provocation. A harsh, indiscriminate response might make a war of attrition more costly for the terrorists, but it would also harm innocent civilians who might then serve as willing recruits for the terrorists. The Israeli policy of assassination of terrorist leaders is shaped by this concern.

Third, a state can harden likely targets to minimize the costs the terrorist organization can inflict. If targeted governments can prevent most attacks from being executed, a war of attrition strategy will not be able to inflict the costs necessary to convince the target to concede. The wall separating Israel from the West Bank and Gaza is a large-scale example of this counterstrategy. The United States has been less successful in hardening its own valuable targets, such as nuclear and chemical plants and the container shipping system, despite the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.[43] Protecting these types of targets is essential if one seeks to deter additional attacks and discourage the use of attrition.

Fourth, states should seek to deny terrorists access to the most destructive weapons, especially nuclear and biological ones. Any weapon that can inflict enormous costs will be particularly attractive to terrorists pursuing a war of attrition. The greater the destruction, the higher the likelihood that the target will concede increasingly consequential issues. Particular attention should be placed on securing Russian stockpiles of fissile material and on halting the spread of uranium enrichment technology to Iran and North Korea. No other country has as much material under so little government control as Russia, and Iran and North Korea are vital because of the links both countries have to terrorist organizations.[44]

Finally, states can strive to minimize the psychological costs of terrorism and the tendency people have to overreact. John Mueller has noted that the risks associated with terrorism are actually quite small; for the average U.S. citizen, the likelihood of being a victim of a terrorist attack is about the same as that of being struck by lighting.[45] Government public education programs should therefore be careful not to overstate the threat, for this plays into the hands of

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43. Stephen Flynn, *America the Vulnerable: How Our Government Is Failing to Protect Us from Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
44. Graham T. Allison, Owen R. Coté Jr., Richard A. Falkenrath, and Steven E. Miller, *Avoiding Nuclear Anarchy: Containing the Threat of Loose Russian Nuclear Weapons and Fissile Material* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); and Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 2004).
45. John Mueller, "Six Rather Unusual Propositions about Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 487–505.

the terrorists. If Americans become convinced that terrorism, while a deadly problem, is no more of a health risk than drunk driving, smoking, or obesity, then al-Qaida's attrition strategy will be undercut. What the United States should seek to avoid are any unnecessary costs associated with wasteful and misguided counterterror programs. The more costs the United States inflicts on itself in the name of counterterrorism policies of dubious utility, the more likely a war of attrition strategy is to succeed.

intimidation: the reign of terror

Intimidation is akin to the strategy of deterrence, preventing some undesired behavior by means of threats and costly signals.[46] It is most frequently used when terrorist organizations wish to overthrow a government in power or gain social control over a given population. It works by demonstrating that the terrorists have the power to punish whoever disobeys them, and that the government is powerless to stop them.

Terrorists are often in competition with the government for the support of the population. Terrorists who wish to bring down a government must somehow convince the government's defenders that continued backing of the government will be costly. One way to do this is to provide clear evidence that the terrorist organization can kill those individuals who continue to sustain the regime. By targeting the government's more visible agents and supporters, such as mayors, police, prosecutors, and pro-regime citizens, terrorist organizations demonstrate that they have the ability to hurt their opponents and that the government is too weak to punish the terrorists or protect future victims.

Terrorists can also use an intimidation strategy to gain greater social control over a population. Terrorists may turn to this strategy in situations where a government has consistently refused to implement a policy a terrorist group favors and where efforts to change the state's policy appear futile. In this case, terrorists use intimidation to impose the desired policy directly on the population, gaining compliance through selective violence and the threat of future reprisals. In the United States, antiabortion activists have bombed clinics to prevent individuals from performing or seeking abortions, and in the 1960s racist groups burned churches to deter African Americans from claiming their

46. The literature on deterrence is vast. See, for example, Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966); and Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics,* Vol. 41, No. 2 (January 1989), pp. 143–169.

civil rights. In Afghanistan, the Taliban beheaded the principal of a girls school to deter others from providing education for girls.[47]

An intimidation strategy can encompass a range of actions—from assassinations of individuals in positions of power to car bombings of police recruits, such as those carried out by the Zarqawi group in Iraq. It can also include massacres of civilians who have cooperated with the government or rival groups, such as the 1957 massacre at Melouza by the National Liberation Front during the Algerian war for independence.[48] This strategy was taken to an extreme by the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria's civil war of the 1990s. In that war, Islamist guerrillas massacred thousands of people suspected of switching their allegiance to the government. Massacres were especially common in villages that had once been under firm rebel control but that the army was attempting to retake and clear of rebels. Stathis Kalyvas argues that these conditions pose extreme dilemmas for the local inhabitants, who usually wish to support whoever will provide security, but are often left exposed when the government begins to retake an area but has not established effective control.[49]

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO INTIMIDATION. When the goal is regime change, weak states and rough terrain are two factors that facilitate intimidation. James Fearon and David Laitin argue that civil wars are likely to erupt and continue where the government is weak and the territory is large and difficult to traverse. These conditions allow small insurgent groups to carve out portions of a country as a base for challenging the central government.[50] Intimidation is likely to be used against civilians on the fault lines between rebel and government control to deter individuals from supporting the government.

When the goal is social control, weak states again facilitate intimidation. When the justice system is too feeble to effectively prosecute crimes associated with intimidation, people will either live in fear or seek protection from nonstate actors such as local militias or gangs. Penetration of the justice system by sympathizers of a terrorist group also facilitates an intimidation strategy, because police and courts will be reluctant to prosecute crimes and may even be complicit in them.

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47. Noor Khan, "Militants Behead Afghan Principal for Educating Girls," *Boston Globe,* January 5, 2006.
48. Crenshaw Hutchinson, "The Concept of Revolutionary Terrorism," p. 390.
49. Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria," *Rationality and Society,* Vol. 11, No. 3 (August 1999), pp. 243–285.
50. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 75–90.

BEST RESPONSES TO INTIMIDATION. When the terrorist goal is regime change, the best response to intimidation is to retake territory from the rebels in discrete chunks and in a decisive fashion. Ambiguity about who is in charge should be minimized, even if this means temporarily ceding some areas to the rebels to concentrate resources on selected sections of territory. This response is embodied in the "clear-and-hold strategy" that U.S. forces are employing in Iraq. The 2005 National Strategy for Victory in Iraq specifically identifies intimidation as the "strategy of our enemies."[51] The proper response, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated in October 2005, "is to clear, hold, and build: clear areas from insurgent control, hold them securely, and build durable national Iraqi institutions."[52] If rebels control their own zone and have no access to the government zone, they will have no incentive to kill the civilians they control and no ability to kill the civilians the government controls. In this situation, there is no uncertainty about who is in control; the information that would be provided by intimidation is already known. The U.S. military developed the clear-and-hold strategy during the final years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. A principal strategy of the Vietcong was intimidation—to prevent collaboration with the government and build up control in the countryside. In the early years of the war, the United States responded with search and destroy missions, essentially an attrition strategy. Given that the insurgents were not pursuing an attrition strategy, and were not particularly vulnerable to one, this initial counterstrategy was a mistake. Clear-and-hold was the more appropriate response because it limited the Vietcong's access to potential targets and thus undercut its strategy.[53]

Clear-and-hold has its limitations. It is usually impossible to completely deny terrorists entry into the government-controlled zones. In 2002 Chechen terrorists were able to hold a theater audience of 912 people hostage in the heart of Moscow, and 130 were killed in the operation to retake the building. The Shining Path frequently struck in Lima, far from its mountain strongholds. In such situations, a more effective counterstrategy would be to invest in protecting the targets of attacks. In most states, most of the time, the majority of state agents do not need to worry about their physical security, because no one

51. United States National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (*Washington, D.C.: White House, November 2005), p. 7.
52. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, "Iraq and U.S. Policy," testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, October 19, 2005, 109th Cong., 1st sess., http://www.foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2005/RiceTestimony051019.pdf.
53. See Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and the Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt, 1999). This thesis is not without controversy. See Matt Steinglass, "Vietnam and Victory," *Boston Globe,* December 18, 2005.

wants to harm them. However, certain state agents, such as prosecutors of organized crime, are more accustomed to danger, and procedures have been developed to protect them. These procedures should be applied to election workers, rural officials and police, community activists, and any individual who plays a visible role in the support and functioning of the embattled government.

When the terrorist goal is social control, the best response is strengthening law enforcement. This may require more resources to enable the government to effectively investigate and prosecute crimes. More controversial, it may mean using national agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation to bypass local officials who are sympathetic to the terrorist group and investigating law enforcement agencies to purge such sympathizers if they obstruct justice. The state can also offer additional protection to potential targets and increase penalties for violence against them. For instance, the 1994 federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, passed in the wake of the 1993 killing of a doctor at an abortion clinic in Florida, prohibits any violence designed to prevent people from entering such clinics.

PROVOCATION: LIGHTING THE FUSE

A provocation strategy is often used in pursuit of regime change and territorial change, the most popular goals of the FTOs listed by the State Department. It is designed to persuade the domestic audience that the target of attacks is evil and untrustworthy and must be vigorously resisted.

Terrorist organizations seeking to replace a regime face a significant challenge: they are usually much more hostile to the regime than a majority of the state's citizens. Al-Qaida may wish to topple the House of Saud, but if a majority of citizens do not support this goal, al-Qaida is unlikely to achieve it. Similarly, if most Tamils are satisfied living in a united Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers' drive for independence will fail. To succeed, therefore, a terrorist organization must first convince moderate citizens that their government needs to be replaced or that independence from the central government is the only acceptable outcome.

Provocation helps shift citizen support away from the incumbent regime. In a provocation strategy, terrorists seek to goad the target government into a military response that harms civilians within the terrorist organization's home territory.[54] The aim is to convince them that the government is so evil that the

54. Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism."

radical goals of the terrorists are justified and support for their organization is warranted.[55] This is what the Basque Fatherland and Liberty group (ETA) sought to do in Spain. For years, Madrid responded to ETA attacks with repressive measures against the Basque community, mobilizing many of its members against the government even if they did not condone those attacks. As one expert on this conflict writes, "Nothing radicalizes a people faster than the unleashing of undisciplined security forces on its towns and villages."[56]

David Lake argues that moderates are radicalized because government attacks provide important information about the type of leadership in power and its willingness to negotiate with more moderate elements.[57] Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Eric Dickson develop this idea and show that if the government has the ability to carry out a discriminating response to terrorism but chooses an undiscriminating one, it reveals itself to be unconcerned with the welfare of the country's citizens. Provocation, therefore, is a way for terrorists to force an enemy government to reveal information about itself that then helps the organization recruit additional members.[58]

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO PROVOCATION. Constraints on retaliation and regime type are again important in determining when provocation is successful. For provocation to work, the government must be capable of middling levels of brutality. A government willing and able to commit genocide makes a bad target for provocation, as the response will destroy the constituency the terrorists represent. At the opposite pole, a government so committed to human rights and the rule of law that it is incapable of inflicting indiscriminate punishment also makes a bad target, because it cannot be provoked. Such a government might be an attractive target for an attrition strategy if it is not very good at stopping attacks, but provocation will be ineffective.

What explains why a government would choose a less discriminating counterstrategy over a more precise one? In some instances, a large-scale military response will enhance the security of a country rather than detract from it. If the target government is able to eliminate the leadership of a terrorist orga-

55. Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," p. 387; and Price, "The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism," p. 58.
56. Paddy Woodworth, "Why Do They Kill? The Basque Conflict in Spain," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 7.
57. David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century," *Dialog-IO*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 15–29.
58. Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and Eric S. Dickson, "The Propaganda of the Deed: Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Mobilization," Washington University and New York University, 2005. Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson also argue that government violence lowers economic prosperity, which favors extremists in their competition with moderates.

nization and its operatives, terrorism is likely to cease or be greatly reduced even if collateral damage radicalizes moderates to some extent. A large-scale military response may also enhance the security of a country, despite radicalizing some moderates, if it deters additional attacks from other terrorist groups that may be considering a war of attrition. Target governments may calculate that the negative consequences of a provocation strategy are acceptable under these conditions.

Domestic political considerations are also likely to influence the type of response that the leadership of a target state chooses. Democracies may be more susceptible to provocation than nondemocracies. Populations that have suffered from terrorist violence will naturally want their government to take action to stop terrorism. Unfortunately, many of the more discriminating tools of counterterrorism, such as infiltrating terrorist cells, sharing intelligence with other countries, and arresting individuals, are not visible to the publics these actions serve to protect. Bueno de Mesquita has argued that democratic leaders may have to employ the more public and less discriminating counterterror strategies to prove that their government is taking sufficient action against terrorists, even if these steps are provocative.[59] Pressure for a provocative counterresponse may also be particularly acute for more hard-line administrations whose constituents may demand greater action.[60] Counterstrategies, therefore, are influenced in part by the political system from which they emerge.

The United States in September 2001 was ripe for provocation, and al-Qaida appears to have understood this. The new administration of George W. Bush was known to be hawkish in its foreign policy and in its attitude toward the use of military power. In a November 2004 videotape, bin Laden bragged that al-Qaida found it "easy for us to provoke this administration."[61] The strategy appears to be working. A 2004 Pew survey found that international trust in the United States had declined significantly in response to the invasion of Iraq.[62] Similarly, a 2004 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies found that al-Qaida's recruitment and fundraising efforts had been given a

59. Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, "Politics and the Suboptimal Provision of Counterterror," *International Organization* (forthcoming).
60. On the other hand, more dovish regimes might feel political pressure to take strong visible actions, whereas a regime with hawkish credentials could credibly claim that it was pursuing effective but nonvisible tactics. For a similar logic, see Kenneth A. Schultz, "The Politics of Risking Peace: Do Hawks or Doves Deliver the Olive Branch?" *International Organization,* Vol. 59, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 1–38.
61. Bin Laden, *Messages to the World,* pp. 241–242.
62. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Pew Global Attitudes Project: Nine-Nation Survey, "A Year after the Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists," March 16, 2004.

major boost by the U.S. invasion of Iraq.[63] In the words of Shibley Telhami, "What we're seeing now is a disturbing sympathy with al-Qaida coupled with resentment toward the United States."[64] The Bush administration's eagerness to overthrow Saddam Hussein, a desire that predated the September 11 attacks, has, in the words of bin Laden, "contributed to these remarkable results for al-Qaida."[65]

BEST RESPONSES TO PROVOCATION. The best response to provocation is a discriminating strategy that inflicts as little collateral damage as possible. Countries should seek out and destroy the terrorists and their immediate backers to reduce the likelihood of future terror attacks, but they must carefully isolate these targets from the general population, which may or may not be sympathetic to the terrorists.[66] This type of discriminating response will require superior intelligence capabilities. In this regard, the United States' efforts to invest in information-gathering abilities in response to September 11 have been underwhelming. Even the most basic steps, such as developing a deeper pool of expertise in the regional languages, have been slow in coming.[67] This stands in contrast to U.S. behavior during the Cold War, when the government sponsored research centers at top universities to analyze every aspect of the Soviet economic, military, and political system. The weakness of the U.S. intelligence apparatus has been most clearly revealed in the inability of the United States to eliminate bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, and in the United States' decision to invade Iraq.[68] Faulty U.S. intelligence has simultaneously protected al-Qaida leaders from death and led to the destruction of thousands of Muslim civilians—exactly the response al-Qaida was likely seeking.

SPOILING: SABOTAGING THE PEACE

The goal of a spoiling strategy is to ensure that peace overtures between moderate leaders on the terrorists' side and the target government do not suc-

63. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 2003/4: An Evaluation and Forecast of World Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2005).
64. Quoted in Dafna Linzer, "Poll Shows Growing Arab Rancor at U.S.," *Washington Post,* July 23, 2004.
65. Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 21–23; and bin Laden, *Messages to the World,* pp. 241–242.
66. A program of economic and social assistance to these more moderate elements would provide counterevidence that the target is not malicious or evil as the terrorist organizations had claimed.
67. Farah Stockman, "Tomorrow's Homework: Reading, Writing, and Arabic," *Boston Globe,* January 6, 2006.
68. For an analysis of obstacles to innovation in U.S. intelligence agencies, see Amy B. Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies," *International Security,* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 78–111.

ceed.[69] It works by playing on the mistrust between these two groups and succeeds when one or both parties fail to sign or implement a settlement. It is often employed when the ultimate objective is territorial change.

Terrorists resort to a spoiling strategy when relations between two enemies are improving and a peace agreement threatens the terrorists' more far-reaching goals. Peace agreements alarm terrorists because they understand that moderate citizens are less likely to support ongoing violence once a compromise agreement between more moderate groups has been reached. Thus, Iranian radicals kidnapped fifty-two Americans in Tehran in 1979 not because relations between the United States and Iran were becoming more belligerent, but because three days earlier Iran's relatively moderate prime minister, Mehdi Bazargan, met with the U.S. national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the two were photographed shaking hands. From the perspective of the radicals, a real danger of reconciliation existed between the two countries, and violence was used to prevent this.[70] A similar problem has hampered Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, as well as talks between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

A spoiling strategy works by persuading the enemy that moderates on the terrorists' side cannot be trusted to abide by a peace deal. Whenever two sides negotiate a peace agreement, there is uncertainty about whether the deal is self-enforcing. Each side fears that even if it honors its commitments, the other side may not, catapulting it back to war on disadvantageous terms. Some Israelis, for example, feared that if Israel returned an additional 13 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, as mandated by the 1998 Wye accord, the Palestinian Authority would relaunch its struggle from an improved territorial base. Extremists understand that moderates look for signs that their former enemy will violate an agreement and that targeting these moderates with violence will heighten their fears that they will be exploited. Thus terrorist attacks are designed to persuade a targeted group that the seemingly moderate opposition with whom it negotiated an agreement will not or cannot stop terrorism, and hence cannot be trusted to honor an agreement.

Terrorist acts are particularly effective during peace negotiations because opposing parties are naturally distrustful of each other's motives and have limited sources of information about each other's intentions. Thus, even if moderate leaders are willing to aggressively suppress extremists on their side,

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69. Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 5–53.
70. Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," p. 54.

terrorists know that isolated violence might still convince the target to reject the deal. A reason for this is that the targeted group may not be able to readily observe the extent of the crackdown and must base its judgments primarily on whether terrorism occurs or not. Even a sincere effort at self-policing, therefore, will not necessarily convince the targeted group to proceed with a settlement if a terrorist attack occurs.

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO SPOILING. Terrorists pursuing a spoiling strategy are likely to be more successful when the enemy perceives moderates on their side to be strong and therefore more capable of halting terrorism.[71] When an attack occurs, the target cannot be sure whether moderates on the other side can suppress their own extremists but choose not to, or are weak and lack the ability to stop them. Israelis, for example, frequently questioned whether Yasser Arafat was simply unable to stop terrorist attacks against Israel or was unwilling to do so. The weaker the moderates are perceived to be, the less impact a terrorist attack will have on the other side's trust, and the less likely such an attack is to convince them to abandon a peace agreement.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in particular the Oslo peace process, has been plagued by spoilers. On the Palestinian side, Hamas's violent attacks coincided with the ratification and implementation of accords—occasions when increased mistrust could thwart progress toward peace. Hamas also stepped up its attacks prior to Israeli elections in 1996 and 2001, in which Labor was the incumbent party, in an effort to persuade Israeli voters to cast their votes for the less cooperative and less trusting hard-line Likud Party.[72] Terrorism was especially effective after Arafat's 1996 electoral victory, when it became clear to the Israelis that Arafat was, at the time, a popular and powerful leader within the Palestinian community.[73] This in turn suggested to the Israelis that Arafat was capable of cracking down aggressively on terrorist violence but was unwilling to do so, a sign that he could not be trusted to keep the peace.

BEST RESPONSES TO SPOILING. When mutual trust is high, a peace settlement can be implemented despite ongoing terrorist acts and the potential vulnerabilities the agreement can create. Trust, however, is rarely high after long conflicts, which is why spoilers can strike with a reasonable chance that their

71. Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence," *International Organization,* Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 263–296.
72. Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, "On Terrorism and Electoral Outcomes: Theory and Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," Princeton University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004.
73. Kydd and Walter, "Sabotaging the Peace," pp. 279–289.

attack will be successful. Strategies that build trust and reduce vulnerability are, therefore, the best response to spoiling.

Vulnerabilities emerge in peace processes in two ways. Symmetric vulnerabilities occur during the implementation of a deal because both sides must lower their guard. The Israelis, for example, have had to relax controls over the occupied territories, and the Palestinians were obligated to disarm militant groups. Such symmetric vulnerabilities can be eased by third-party monitoring and verification of the peace implementation process. Monitoring can help reduce uncertainty regarding the behavior of the parties. Even better, third-party enforcement of the deal can make reneging more costly, increasing confidence in the deal and its ultimate success.[74]

Vulnerabilities can also be longer term and asymmetric. In any peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, the ability of the Palestinians to harm Israel will inevitably grow as Palestinians build their own state and acquire greater military capabilities. This change in the balance of power can make it difficult for the side that will see an increase in its power to credibly commit not to take advantage of this increase later on. This commitment problem can cause conflicts to be prolonged even though there are possible peace agreements that both sides would prefer to war.[75]

The problem of shifting power can be addressed in at least three ways. First, agreements themselves can be crafted in ways that limit the post-treaty shift in power. Power-sharing agreements such as that between the Liberals and Conservatives to create a single shared presidency in Colombia in 1957 are one example of this. Allowing the defeated side to retain some military capabilities, as Confederate officers were allowed to do after the surrender at Appomattox, is another example.[76] Second, peace settlements can require the side about to be advantaged to send a costly signal of its honorable intentions, such as providing constitutional protections of minority rights. An example is the Constitutional Law on National Minorities passed in Croatia in 2002,

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74. Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Holger Schmidt, "When (and Why) Do Brokers Have To Be Honest? Impartiality and Third-Party Support for Peace Implementation after Civil Wars, 1945–1999," Georgetown University, 2004.

75. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; James D. Fearon, "Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, eds., *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Robert Powell, "The Inefficient Use of Power: Costly Conflict with Complete Information," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (May 2004), pp. 231–241.

76. As part of the terms of surrender, Confederate officers were allowed to keep their sidearms and personal property (including their horses) and return home.

which protects the right of minorities to obtain an education in their own language. Finally, parties can credibly commit to an agreement by participating in international institutions that insist on the protection of minority rights. A government that is willing to join the European Union effectively constrains itself from exploiting a minority group because of the high costs to that government of being ejected from the group.

outbidding: zealots versus sellouts

Outbidding arises when two key conditions hold: two or more domestic parties are competing for leadership of their side, and the general population is uncertain about which of the groups best represents their interests.[77] The competition between Hamas and Fatah is a classic case where two groups vie for the support of the Palestinian citizens and where the average Palestinian is uncertain about which side he or she ought to back.

If citizens had full information about the preferences of the competing groups, an outbidding strategy would be unnecessary and ineffective; citizens would simply support the group that best aligned with their own interests. In reality, however, citizens cannot be sure if the group competing for power truly represents their preferences. The group could be a strong and resolute defender of the cause (zealots) or weak and ineffective stooges of the enemy (sellouts). If citizens support zealots, they get a strong champion but with some risk that they will be dragged into a confrontation with the enemy that they end up losing. If citizens support sellouts, they get peace but at the price of accepting a worse outcome than might have been achieved with additional armed struggle. Groups competing for power have an incentive to signal that they are zealots rather than sellouts. Terrorist attacks can serve this function by signaling that a group has the will to continue the armed struggle despite its costs.

Three reasons help to explain why groups are likely to be rewarded for being more militant rather than less. First, in bargaining contexts, it is often useful to be represented by an agent who is more hard-line than oneself. Hard-line agents will reject deals that one would accept, which will force the adversary

77. For the most extensive treatment of terrorism and outbidding, see Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). See also Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," *International Security,* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 108–138.

to make a better offer than one would get by representing oneself in the negotiations.[78] Palestinians might therefore prefer Hamas as a negotiating agent with Israel because it has a reputation for resolve and will reject inferior deals.

Second, uncertainty may also exist about the type of adversary the population and its competing groups are facing. If the population believes there is some chance that their adversary is untrustworthy (unwilling to compromise under any condition), then they know that conflict may be inevitable, in which case being represented by zealots may be advantageous.[79]

A third factor that may favor outbidding is that office-holding itself may produce incentives to sell out. Here, the problem lies with the benefits groups receive once in office (i.e., income and power). Citizens fear that their leaders, once in office, may betray important principles and decide to settle with the enemy on unfavorable terms. They know that holding office skews one's preferences toward selling out, but they remain unsure about which of their leaders is most likely to give in. Terrorist organizations exploit this uncertainty by using violence to signal their commitment to a cause. Being perceived as more extreme than the median voter works to the terrorists' benefit because it balances out the "tempering effect" of being in office.

An interesting aspect of the outbidding strategy is that the enemy is only tangentially related to the strategic interaction. In fact, an attack motivated by outbidding may not even be designed to achieve any goal related to the enemy, such as inducing a concession or scuttling a peace treaty. The process is almost entirely concerned with the signal it sends to domestic audiences uncertain about their own leadership and its commitment to a cause. As such, outbidding provides a potential explanation for terrorist attacks that continue even when they seem unable to produce any real results.

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO OUTBIDDING. Outbidding will be favored when multiple groups are competing for the allegiance of a similar demographic base of support. In Peru, the 1970s saw the development of a number of leftist groups seeking to represent the poor and indigenous population. When the military turned over power to an elected government in 1980, the Shining Path took up an armed struggle to distinguish itself from groups that chose to pur-

78. Abhinay Muthoo, *Bargaining Theory with Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 230.

79. Rui J.P. de Figueiredo Jr. and Barry R. Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261–302.

sue electoral politics.[80] It also embarked on an assassination campaign designed to weaken rival leftist groups and intimidate their followers. When organizations encounter less competition for the support of their main constituents, outbidding will be less appealing.

BEST RESPONSES TO OUTBIDDING. One solution to the problem of outbidding would be to eliminate the struggle for power by encouraging competing groups to consolidate into a unified opposition. If competition among resistance groups is eliminated, the incentive for outbidding also disappears. The downside of this counterstrategy is that a unified opposition may be stronger than a divided one. United oppositions, however, can make peace and deliver, whereas divided ones may face greater structural disincentives to do so.

An alternative strategy for the government to pursue in the face of outbidding is to validate the strategy chosen by nonviolent groups by granting them concessions and attempting to satisfy the demands of their constituents. If outbidding can be shown to yield poor results in comparison to playing within the system, groups may be persuaded to abandon the strategy. As in the case of the Shining Path, this may require providing physical protection to competing groups in case the outbidder turns to intimidation in its competition with less violent rivals. In general, any steps that can be taken to make the non-outbidding groups seem successful (e.g., channeling resources and government services to their constituents) will also help undermine the outbidders. The high turnout in the December 2005 Iraqi election in Sunni-dominated regions may indicate that outbidding is beginning to fail in the communities most strongly opposed to the new political system.[81]

Conclusion

Terrorist violence is a form of costly signaling by which terrorists attempt to influence the beliefs of their enemy and the population they represent or wish to control. They use violence to signal their strength and resolve in an effort to produce concessions from their enemy and obedience and support from their followers. They also attack both to sow mistrust between moderates who

80. James Ron, "Ideology in Context: Explaining Sendero Luminoso's Tactical Escalation," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 38, No. 5 (September 2001), p. 582.
81. Dexter Filkins, "Iraqis, Including Sunnis, Vote in Large Numbers on Calm Day," *New York Times,* December 16, 2005.

might want to make peace and to provoke a reaction that makes the enemy appear barbarous and untrustworthy.

In this article, we have laid out the five main goals terrorist organizations seek and the five most important terrorist strategies, and we have outlined when they are likely to be tried and what the best counterstrategies might look like. What becomes clear in this brief analysis is that a deeper study of each of the five strategies is needed to reveal the nuanced ways in which terrorism works, and to refine responses to it. We conclude by highlighting two variables that will be important in any such analysis, and by a final reflection on counterterror policies that are strategically independent or not predicated on the specific strategy being used.

The first variable is information. It has long been a truism that the central front in counterinsurgency warfare is the information front. The same is true in terrorism. Costly signaling is pointless in the absence of uncertainty on the part of the recipient of the signal. Attrition is designed to convince the target that the costs of maintaining a policy are not worth the gains; if the target already knew this, it would have ceded the issue without an attack being launched. Provocation is designed to goad the target into retaliating indiscriminately (because it lacks information to discriminate), which will persuade the population that the target is malevolent (because it is uncertain of the target's intentions). The other strategies are similarly predicated on uncertainty, intelligence, learning, and communication. Thus, it bears emphasizing that the problem of terrorism is not a problem of applying force per se, but one of acquiring intelligence and affecting beliefs. With the right information, the proper application of force is comparatively straightforward. The struggle against terrorism is, therefore, not usefully guided by the metaphor of a "war on terrorism" any more than policies designed to alleviate poverty are usefully guided by the metaphor of a "war on poverty" or narcotics policy by a "war on drugs." The struggle against terrorism can more usefully be thought of as a struggle to collect and disseminate reliable information in environments fraught with uncertainty.

The second important variable is regime type. Democracies have been the sole targets of attritional suicide bombing campaigns, whereas authoritarian regimes such as those in Algeria routinely face campaigns by rebel groups pursuing an intimidation strategy. Democracies also seem to be more susceptible to attrition and provocation strategies. This type of variation cries out for deeper analysis of the strengths and weakness of different regime types in the

face of different terrorist strategies. Our analysis suggests that democracies are more likely to be sensitive to the costs of terrorist attacks, to grant concessions to terrorists so as to limit future attacks, to be constrained in their ability to pursue a lengthy attritional campaign against an organization, but also to be under greater pressure to "do something." This does not mean that all democracies will behave incorrectly in the face of terrorist attacks all the time. Democratic regimes may possess certain structural features, however, that make them attractive targets for terrorism.

Finally, we realize that our discussion is only a beginning and that further elaboration of each of the strategies and their corresponding counterstrategies awaits future research. We also understand that not all counterterrorism policies are predicated on the specific strategy terrorists pursue. Our analysis is at the middling level of strategic interaction. At the tactical level are all the tools of intelligence gathering and target defense that make sense no matter what the terrorist's strategy is. At the higher level are the primary sources of terrorism such as poverty, education, international conflict, and chauvinistic indoctrination that enable terrorist organizations to operate and survive in the first place. Our aim in this article has been to try to understand why these organizations choose certain forms of violence, and how this violence serves their larger purposes. The United States has the ability to reduce the likelihood of additional attacks on its territory and citizens. But it will be much more successful if it first understands the goals terrorists are seeking and the underlying strategic logic by which a plane flying into a skyscraper might deliver the desired response.