

# **The Psychology of Terrorism:**

*The Pathological Use of Ethnicity,  
Nationality and Religion*

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# OVERVIEW

- Definition
- Typologies
- Goal
- Tactics
- Effectiveness
- Ineffectiveness
- Predisposing Conditions
- Characteristics
- History
- Psychology
- Fighting Back

# DEFINITION

# Terrorist:



What comes to mind?

# Terrorism Defined

- **Webster's:** the use of force or threats to demoralize, intimidate and subjugate, especially as a political weapon
- **World Book:** the use or threat of violence to create fear and alarm

# What Is Terrorism?

- A complicated phenomenon
- Specialized form of political violence
- Viscous species of psychological warfare
- The target is different from the intended audience
- The goal is not to kill, but to make an impact on another
- The goal is symbolism

-Dr. Jerrold Post

## 4 Targets:

1. **Innocent victims:** WTC, people on planes
2. **The class:** terror of aviation industry, NY
3. **The coerced:** unless you do this, we'll . . .
4. **Target of influence:** the West or establishment



# TYPOLOGIES



**Q: How is terrorism different from other movements that have gained national control?**

*(e.g.. Nazis, Stalin, Italian fascists)*

**A: We need to think of terrorism as a spectrum.**

# The Spectrum of Terrorism



# The Spectrum of Terrorism

There are different ways to group them:

- International v. domestic
- Common goal v. lone offender
- Religious, political, socioeconomic, criminal or psychopathological

*(There is cross-over)*

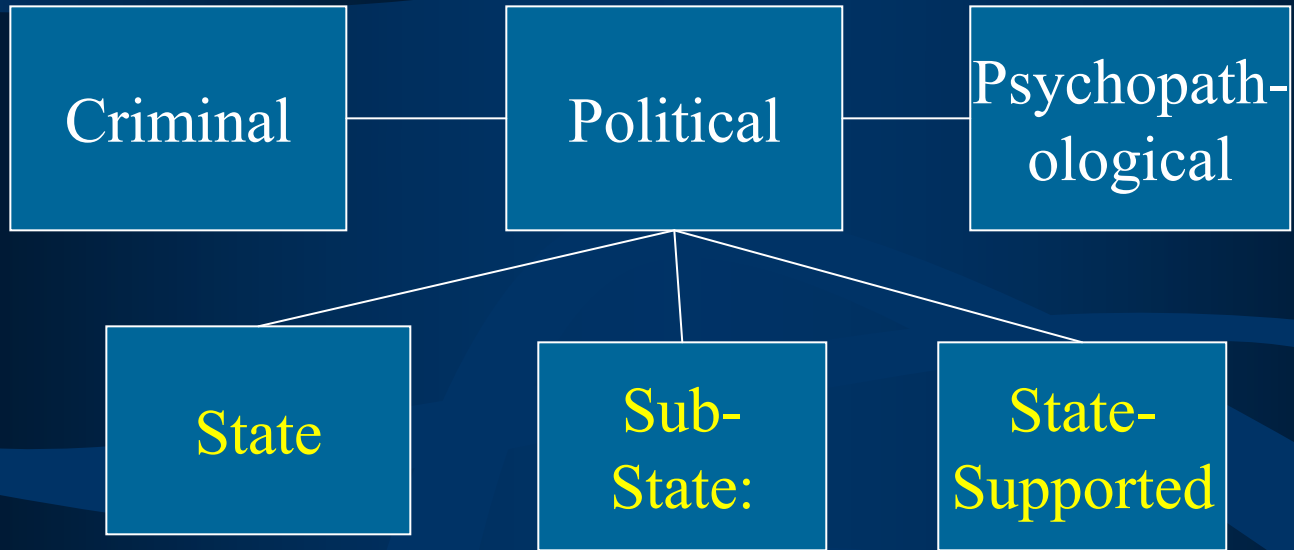
# Dr. Post's Classification System:

1. Political terrorists\*
2. Criminal terrorists
3. Psychopathological terrorists

# Political Terrorism:

1. State: The state uses weapons of the state against its own people. (Hitler, Saddam Hussein)
2. State-supported: The state uses its weapons to attack another country.
3. Sub-state:\* A small group within the state is trying to use violence to accomplish its own goal. (*6 kinds*)

# Classifications of Terrorism:



1. Social revolutionary
2. National separatist
3. Religious Fundamental
4. New Religious
5. Right wing
6. Single issue

# Sub-state Terrorism

(Loyalty of family to regime)

**Loyalty (L)**

**Disloyalty (D)**

(Loyalty  
of youth **L**  
to  
family)

LL:  
-at one with regime  
-no terrorism

LD:  
**National separatists:**  
-loyalty to disloyalty  
-family mission

DL:  
**Social revolutionaries:**  
-disloyalty to loyalty  
-rebel against old way

DD: ?  
-rebellious children of  
liberal parents

**D**

# Sub-state Terrorism:

1. Social revolutionaries: rebel against corrupt old ways (e.g. Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany)

- "Our youth is turning on us!"

- In 1971, German authorities printed millions of these wanted posters.





# Sub-state Terrorism:

2. National separatists: trying to carry on the family mission (e.g. Palestinian terrorists, Northern Irishers)



# Sub-state Terrorism:

3. Religious Fundamentalists: They kill in the name of God. (e.g. Usama Bin Laden, abortion clinic bombers)

*" You shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed."*

-Leviticus 19:16



*" You shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed."*

-Leviticus 19:16



## Sub-state Terrorism:

4. New Religion: cults defending new religions, e.g. Shinrikyo in Japan (sarin gas in subway)

Thousands were injured in the gas attack.



## Sub-state Terrorism:

5. Right Wing: They see the government as the enemy and illegitimate. (e.g. Neo-Nazis, Timothy McVeigh, Klu Klux Klan)



## Sub-state Terrorism:

- Single Issue: e.g. animal rights, ecologic terrorism  
(Usually single people willing to kill.)

South Korean  
animal rights  
activists protest in  
Seoul .





**GOAL**

# What is the goal of terrorism?

## “The cause is not the cause”

- They are convinced that they’re acting on behalf of the moral character of their group.
- They are “agents of righteousness” in the battle between darkness and “truth.”
- The cause is the justification for violence.
- The cause is an outlet for anger.



# Psychological Goals:

- Outlet for anger
- Convenient vehicle for change
- Stirs up enthusiasm & excitement
- Source of hope for the future
- Provides a sense of power
- A sense importance & purpose by an identification with a holy cause
- Overcoming feelings of incompetence: feeling potent/ strong.

# Psychological Goals:

“Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves.”

- Eric Hoffer, The True Believer

- When we lose faith in ourselves, we give ourselves over to the group.
- This “Self = bad, Group =good” thinking gives way to self-sacrifice.

# The Goal of Jihad:

- **“jihad:”** "holy war," "righteous struggle" against the Western world.
  - To endeavor, to strive, to struggle
- Fundamentalist Islamic hatred for the West
- They see Western civilization as the greatest challenge to the way of life that they wish to retain or restore for their people.
- Islamic fundamentalists are ultimately struggling against the dramatic changes brought about by secularism and modernism

## The Goal of Jihad:

“And what is wrong with you that you fight not in the Cause of Allah, and for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women, and children, whose cry is: ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help.’ ”

[Soorah an-Nisaa'(4): 75]

# The Goal of Jihad:

- **Bin Laden:** “The mission is to fight the Pagans all together, and fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression.”
- **Bin Laden, 1998:** “In compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim . . . This is in accordance with the words of the Almighty God.”

# Islam Shuns Suicide-Bombing:

“Whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, then the iron weapon will remain in his hand, and he will continuously stab himself in his belly with it in the Fire of Hell eternally, forever and ever.”

-from a sacred Muslim commentary

Thus, suicide bombers would blow themselves up through eternity.

# TACTICS

# How do they accomplish this goal?

- They call attention to their cause.
- Weapon of the weak. Anyone can be a terrorist.
- One could say that the violence of the Palestinians is helping them to move closer to their own state.
- **Question:** Is it random violence and striking out, or a directed movement towards a cause?



# EFFECTIVENESS

# What makes terrorism so effective?

- Captures our attention
- A small group is able to throw our nation into a recession
- Violence as communication
- Viscous species, a virus



The background is a dark blue gradient with several lighter blue, wavy, ribbon-like shapes that create a sense of movement and depth. A small, bright cyan rectangle is positioned on the right edge of the image.

**INEFFECTIVENESS**

# What makes terrorism ineffective?

- **Virus analogy:** eventually burn themselves out
  - The WTC center attack is even more so a virus analogy.
  - The terrorists literally used our own technology against us. [*New York Times analogy*]
- They can't win militarily, so they try to win by calling attention to self/ scaring/ wounding.





# PREDISPOSING CONDITIONS

# Predisposing Conditions:

- “There are **NO** mass movements of hatred in prosperity.” -Dr. Post
- Factors that generate groups striking out:
  - Low economic progress
  - Controlling government
  - No equal opportunity
  - Oppression, humiliation



# Imagine . . .

“You are brought up from childhood in a culture where there is total poverty, a medieval set of surroundings with not even a decent toilet, repression of your racial and religious group, and all the adults around you filled with hatred of those whom they are convinced are the oppressors, riots, lack of proper schooling, nothing to do, no hope and observing your older brothers brutalized, beaten, seriously injured, and incarcerated by the police or occupying soldiers. Immersed in that milieu will you not begin viewing the world as consisting of “we” and “they” in which “they” are no longer thought of as human but as monsters who should be destroyed? Remember ‘zap the Jap’ from WWII? Did this not lead to the bombing of Hiroshima? . . . **Are you then not ready for a ‘holy war’ even if it costs your life?”**

-Richard Chessick, *Archaic Sadism*

# Is there another solution?

- **“The Birds of Cypress”**
  - This was a phenomenon in 1971.
  - From 1963-1968 the Green Cypriots forced the Turks in Cypress to live in Ghettos, a 5-year imprisonment.
- Symbolic, non-violent, inanimate object
- Peaceful, sublimated means of dealing with oppression, humiliation and political stress





# CHARACTERISTICS

# Characteristics:

- Small, with seldom more than 100 members.
- Tight-knit, radical organizations.
- Today, we see more loosely knit groups with branches in other countries (Taliban).
- Ethnically and politically homogenous.
- Often made up of friends & relatives, thus difficult to infiltrate.
- Seldom operate from one location.
- Relatively little training and use of unsophisticated equipment.
- Funded by crime and/or drugs.

# HISTORY

# A Bloody History:

- **1800s:** Terrorism emerged in Europe. Early anarchists zeroed in on symbols of state power by throwing bombs at czars.
- **1901:** An anarchist killed Pres. McKinley in NY, leading to the swearing in of Theodore Roosevelt.
- **1914:** A Serbian terrorist killed Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, resulting in WWI.
- **Since the 1960s and 1970s:** terrorism re-emerged in 3 waves:
  - 1960s and 1970s: IRA, Focus on a single nation.
  - 1970s and 1980s: International, sponsored by Libya, Iran, Syria. Took hostages for demands (1972 Munich Olympics massacre).
  - 1990s to present: Private organizations (bin Laden), international. Unlike predecessors, use suicide bombers, not hostages. Seldom claim responsibility. The audience is Allah.

# PSYCHOLOGY

# Psychology of Terrorism:

**1. Theories on Aggression**

**2. Terrorist Profile**

# Freud:

## *“Homo homini lupus”*

- There is a powerful instinctual aggressiveness in humans.
- “The satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment.”
- All humans are born with a primal biological archaic aggressive-destructive drive, the gratification of which gives satisfaction just like the sexual drive.

• **Freud (1930):** Civilization is charged with helping the individual sublimate this drive.

• **Spengler (1962):** Faustian projects, such as building skyscrapers or sending men to Mars.



# Chessick:

- Our society encourages hostile control fantasies.
- Why do torturers often have orgasms and ejaculations while torturing their victims?
- The victim is an “object” of sexual sadism.
- This sadism, sexual or otherwise, is present in us all.
- War is a socially accepted form of discharging it.

## Volkan (1985):

- Man's need to identify some people as allies and others as enemies
- A need to protect the individual's sense of self
- This is intertwined with his experiences of ethnicity, nationality and religion

# Radical Islam: Terrorist Profile



©Reuters

# Are they crazed psychotics?

- Could a normal person do this?
- The Al Qaeda terrorists were all psychologically “normal.”
- Terrorist groups expel emotionally disturbed people – they are a security risk. (Dr. Post)

# Are they crazed psychotics?

- When asked how they could justify killing innocent victims, one interviewed terrorist said:
- “I am not a murderer. A murderer is someone with a psychological problem; our actions have a goal. Even if civilians are killed it is not because we like it or are blood thirsty. It is a fact of life in a people’s struggle. The group doesn’t do it because it wants to kill civilians, but because the jihad must go on.”

# What draws them in?

- “It’s not a phenomenon of individual psychology, it’s an organizational phenomenon.”

–Ariel Merari, professor

- What we need to understand is not *why* bombers do it but *how* they are recruited and trained.
- Bottom Line: A meaningful death is better than a pointless life.
- “His life is not cheap because he is fearless and brave. He offers the only thing he has.”

-Muslim Engineering student

# Motivation:

- Keys to paradise
- Direct path to heaven
- Promise of no pain
- Rewards to family
- Fame and glory
- Martyrdom





"OUR SECURITY IS BETTER THAN THE AIRPORTS..."



# 72 Black-Eyed Virgins

*Await the martyrs in paradise.*

# The Wedding:

- The death of a martyr is routinely announce in the Palestinian press not as an obituary but as a wedding:

“The Wedding of the Martyr Ali Khadr Al-Yassini to the Black-Eyed in Eternal Paradise.”

-Palestinian Press

- “You should feel complete tranquility because the time between you and your marriage in heaven is very short.”  
-Mohammed Atta, eve of battle instructions for Sept. 11

# “Istishad”

“This is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, reflects mental weakness. This is “*istishad*” (martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah.”

-Interviewed terrorist

# Terrorist Profile: Old vs. New

- Israel Bombers

- 17-22 yrs old
- Male, single, young
- Uneducated
- Unemployed
- Unmarried
- Dispirited youth
- Bleak future
- Recruited hours before
- “Brainwashed” for honor and family status
- Not left alone until act complete

- New Terrorists

- 28-35 yrs old
- Male, married, older
- Had higher education
- Financially comfortable
- From middle class families
- Lived in West (sometimes for years) exposed to opportunity
- Blended in with society
- Ignored the dress, customs and grooming of traditional Muslims
- Left alone, far away, for years. Not “brainwashed,” but rather “true believers”

# What makes them kill after they have tasted the American life?

- “Necessity permits the forbidden.”
- Al Queda operations manual says: Allah will forgive you for not living the good life of a Muslim if it is in the service of Jihad.
- Thus, once they have tasted the American good life, and “bitten from the forbidden fruit” so to speak, they are bound to carry out the mission – their only salvation for paradise.



**FIGHTING BACK**

# Fighting Back:

What can we, as psychiatrists,  
and more generally, as a society do to counter  
the psychological weapons of the terrorists?

# Fighting Back:

1. Group psychology: inhibit joiners in the first place. Give people a space/ place to voice frustrations.
2. Produce distention within the group.
3. Facilitate exit from the group
4. Discredit group: marginalize people out of it



# “Breaking the Triangle”

- The media provides the international, dramatic stage for terrorism.
- It becomes a sensational media event.
- Thus, it facilitates a triangle between the terrorists, the media and us. The terrorist’s threat is broadcast into our living room.
- Terrifying fantasies and “what if” scenarios add to their power.



# “Breaking the Triangle”

- By participating in the media frenzy, we become part of the triangle.
- We become a tool used by the terrorists to promote themselves.
- The terrorized as the terrorist: The terrorized paradoxically functions as a terrorist when he/she joins the triangle, propagating fear.

***Thank You!***



**Dedicated to September 11 Victims**

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