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TERRORISM IS NOT ABOUT TERROR

Terrorists act irrationally from a rational activism perspective (sociology, politics)

created: 09 Apr 2009;

status: *finished*; belief: *likely*

The problem

Terrorist
ineffectiveness

The solution

O RLY?

Terrorism
does too
work!

NO
WAI

Statistical analysis of terrorist groups' longevity, aims, methods and successes reveal that groups are self-contradictory and self-sabotaging, generally ineffective; common stereotypes like terrorists being poor or ultra-skilled are false. Superficially appealing counter-examples are discussed and rejected. Data on motivations and the dissolution of terrorist groups are brought into play and the surprising conclusion reached: terrorism is a form of socialization or status-seeking.

There is a commonly-believed "strategic model" of terrorism which we could describe as follows: terrorists are people who

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are ideologically motivated to pursue specific unvarying political goals; to do so, they join together in long-lasting organizations and after the failure of ordinary political tactics, rationally decide to efficiently & competently engage in violent attacks on (usually) civilian targets to get as much attention as possible and publicity for their movement, and inspire fear & terror in the civilian population, which will pressure its leaders to solve the problem one way or another, providing support for the terrorists' favored laws and/or their negotiations with involved governments, which then often succeed in gaining many of the original goals, and the organization dissolves.

Unfortunately, this model, is in almost every respect, empirically false. Let's look in some more detail at findings which cast doubt on the strategic model.

THE PROBLEM

From "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy", Max Abrahms 2008:

Does the terrorist's decision-making process conform to the strategic model? The answer appears to be no. The record of terrorist behavior does not adhere to the model's three core assumptions. Seven common tendencies of terrorist organizations flatly contradict them. Together, these seven terrorist tendencies represent important empirical puzzles for the strategic model, posing a formidable challenge to the conventional wisdom that terrorists are rational actors motivated foremost by political ends...The seven puzzles...are:

1. terrorist organizations do not achieve their stated political goals by attacking civilians;
2. terrorist organizations never use terrorism as a last resort and seldom seize opportunities to become productive nonviolent political parties;
3. terrorist organizations reflexively reject compromise proposals offering significant policy concessions by the target government¹;
4. terrorist organizations have protean political platforms;
5. terrorist organizations generally carry out anonymous attacks, precluding target countries from making policy concessions;
6. terrorist organizations with identical political platforms routinely attack each other more than their mutually professed enemy; and
7. terrorist organizations resist disbanding when they consistently fail to achieve their political platforms or when their stated political grievances have been resolved.

Terrorism hasn't impressed many observers both on case-studies & in general².

On statistical grounds, it's incontrovertible that terrorism is a shockingly ineffective strategy; from Abrahms 2012:

Jones and Libicki (2008) then examined a larger sample, the universe of known terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006. Of the 648 groups identified in the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident database, only 4% obtained their strategic demands. More recently, Cronin (2009) has reexamined the success rate of these groups, confirming that less than 5% prevailed...Chenoweth and Stephan (2008, 2011) provide additional empirical evidence that meting out pain hurts non-state actors at the bargaining table. Their studies compare the coercive effectiveness of 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006. Like Gaibullov and Sandler (2009), the authors find that refraining from bloodshed significantly raises the odds of government compliance even after tactical confounds are held fixed. These statistical findings are reinforced with structured in-case comparisons highlighting that escalating from nonviolent methods of protest such as petitions, sit-ins, and strikes to deadly attacks tends to dissuade government compromise. Chenoweth and Stephan employ an aggregate measure of violence that incorporates both indiscriminate attacks on civilians and discriminate attacks on military personnel or other government officials, which are often differentiated from terrorism as guerrilla attacks (Abrahms 2006; Cronin 2009; and Moghadam 2006). Other statistical research (Abrahms, 2012, Fortna, 2011) demonstrates that when terrorist attacks are combined with such discriminate violence, the bargaining outcome is not additive; on the contrary, the pain to the population significantly decreases the odds of government concessions.³

Guerrilla warfare's effectiveness is its own topic; we can note that many of the same cognitive biases like the availability heuristic that skew our beliefs on terrorism also apply to guerrilla warfare as well - everyone remembers the successful American Revolution, but who ever invokes the scores or hundreds of other revolts & failed revolutions in the British Empire which involved guerrilla tactics? (Or in the American empire, for that matter - eg. Shays' Rebellion, the Whiskey rebellion, or Nat Turner? How well did the American South succeed in seceding, in a conflict with quite as many irregular forces as the American Revolution?) Does a close examination of the Vietnam War, where the much-heralded Vietcong were destroyed after the Tet Offensive and before the North Vietnamese army crushed the ARVN and conquered South Vietnam, reveal it to have been more effective than conventional warfare? A cursory look through any somewhat comprehensive list of guerrilla movements does not reveal it to be a list of luminaries. "Nobody likes a loser", least of all in war. But to return to terrorism.

Worse, terrorism - of any kind like hostage-taking⁴, and including conventional warfare tactics like civilian atrocities or strategic bombing - reliably produces a political backlash towards conservatism and bolsters hardliners' approaches to terrorism⁵⁶, possibly due to a horns effect/fundamental

attribution bias where the usage of violence is inferred to indicate a group is intrinsically vicious/intransigent/hateful⁷, so there's a double-whammy - the terrorism makes any kind of compromise harder to reach, and if there is danger of an agreement, the extremists will try to sabotage it, which intransigence naturally makes any future agreements less likely.

To this we could add that there are *many* fewer terrorists than one might expect, even for the most apparently successful and globally popular groups like Al Qaeda⁸.

TERRORIST INEFFECTIVENESS

In a [previous study of mine]⁹ assessing terrorism's coercive effectiveness, I found that in a sample of 28 well-known terrorist campaigns, the terrorist organizations accomplished their stated policy goals 0% of the time by attacking civilians.

The al-Qaida military strategist, Abul-Walid, complained that with its "hasty changing of strategic targets", al-Qaida was engaged in nothing more than "random chaos". Other disgruntled al-Qaida members have reproached the organization for espousing political objectives that "shift with the wind".

Who is effective? How could terrorists be more effective? *Easily*. (See my Terrorism is not Effective essay.) The strange thing is that we know, and they know, perfectly well that there are attacks which do the US tremendous damage, yet they hardly ever use them. Why are there so few Operation Bojinka, so few 9/11s, so few Operation Hemorrhages? Their economic multiplier is tremendous:

'In his October 2004 address to the American people, bin Laden noted that the 9/11 attacks cost al Qaeda only a fraction of the damage inflicted upon the United States. "Al Qaeda spent \$500,000 on the event," he said, "while America in the incident and its aftermath lost – according to the lowest estimates – more than \$500 billion, meaning that every dollar of al Qaeda defeated a million dollars."¹⁰

The cargo airplane plot?

"Two Nokia mobiles, \$150 each, two HP printers, \$300 each, plus shipping, transportation and other miscellaneous expenses add up to a total bill of \$4,200. That is all what Operation Hemorrhage cost us," the [AQ] magazine [*Inspire*] said.¹¹

Ironically, it was cheaper for Palestinians to launch suicide attacks:

"Hassan cites one Palestinian officials prescription for a successful mission:"a willing young man. . . nails, gunpowder, a light switch and a short cable, mercury (readily obtainable from thermometers), acetone. . . . The most expensive item is transportation to an Israeli town" (30). The total cost is about \$150.¹²

Other airline plots?

“It is recognized that the cost of the actual equipment used in an attack can be quite low. For example, the ingredients used to build each bomb intended to blow up airliners bound for the United States from the United Kingdom in 2006 are estimated to have cost only \$15.¹³ The cost of an IED has been estimated to be \$25 to \$30.¹⁴ Similarly, the material cost for conducting a suicide bomb has been estimated at only \$150.¹⁵...the FATF estimated that the bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998 had direct costs of \$50,000.”¹⁶ Other estimates, even for car-bomb suicide terrorists, are in similar ranges, although prices vary greatly over time and so all of the above is out of date.¹⁷

Funding seems to be a constant issue for spree killers or terrorists, even when objectively there is no reason to think about it:

- Who knows what to make of Jared Lee Loughner being a cheap-skate on his taxi driver's tip and making the driver go into the store get change - right before he injured or killed a crowd of 20 people? Why did he waste time on that when he expected to be arrested? “He received a few bills for the \$20 and handed Mr. Loughner a \$5 bill - meaning his tip was 75 cents. The cabdriver would later wonder why, considering what was about to happen, his passenger didn't just let him keep the \$20.” Indeed.
- Why did would-be *suicide* bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab - not a lone actor but sponsored by Al Qaeda in Yemen - choose to attack a flight to Detroit rather than Houston or Chicago? Because the tickets were cheaper.¹⁸
- Why do terrorist organizations systematically underspend on terrorism? Skimming by middlemen, the researchers suggest, part of the systematic principal-agent conflicts which lead to micromanagement by terrorist leaders (Ayman al-Zawahiri criticizing his Yemeni operatives for buying a new fax machine rather than a perfectly serviceable & cheaper used fax, overly-detailed Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq ledgers, Red Brigaders spending more time doing paperwork than terrorism or training, internal disputes over missing receipts, etc).

So terrorists want to hurt the US, they know many effective ways to do so, and... hardly anything happens. The work of rational actors?

THE SOLUTION

So, then, what is the explanation for such self-defeating, irrational actions? Can we explain the self-defeating as deliberate, due perhaps to false flag attacks? No; even if false flag attacks were more common than everyone believes and made up - a universal century-long strategy of tension in every country (despite the absence of evidence) - say 20% of the scores of thousands of terrorist attacks in the 20th & 21st centuries, that still leaves countless organizations & terrorists inexplicably incompetent¹⁹ & ignorant²⁰. In the spirit of Robin Hanson's X Is

Not About X posts (see [“Politics isn’t about Policy”](#)), I’d like to offer one of my own: terrorism is *not* about terror; it’s not even about politics. It’s about socializing.

There is comparatively strong theoretical and empirical evidence that people become terrorists not to achieve their organization’s declared political agenda, but to develop strong affective ties with other terrorist members. In other words, the preponderance of evidence is that people participate in terrorist organizations for the social solidarity, not for their political return.

In [Marc Sageman’s](#) [“Understanding terror networks”](#) (summary), he writes:

Ibrahim commented on the superior attractiveness of a religious revivalist organization over a secular political one, namely the strong sense of communion that Muslim groups provided for their members....“The militant Islamic groups with their emphasis on brotherhood, mutual sharing, and spiritual support become the functional equivalent of the extended family to the youngster who has left his behind. In other words, the Islamic group fulfills a de-alienating function for its members in ways that are not matched by other rival political movements’ (Ibrahim, 198: 448).” “The Saidi branch was composed of several groups, based in provincial university towns. They recruited heavily according to kinship and tribal bonds.

...Friendships cultivated in the jihad, just as those forged in combat in general, seem more intense and are endowed with special significance. Their actions taken on behalf of God and the umma are experienced as sacred. This added element increases the value of friendships within the clique and the jihad in general and diminishes the value of outside friendships. To friends hovering on the brink of joining an increasingly activist clique, this promised shift in value may be difficult to resist, especially if one is temporarily alienated from society...once they become members, strong bonds of loyalty and emotional intimacy discourage their departure.

From Scott Atran’s 2003 review (*ibid*):

Studies by psychologist Ariel Merari point to the importance of institutions in suicide terrorism (28). His team interviewed 32 of 34 bomber families in Palestine/Israel (before 1998), surviving attackers, and captured recruiters. Suicide terrorists apparently span their population’s normal distribution in terms of education, socioeconomic status, and personality type (introvert vs. extrovert). Mean age for bombers was early twenties. Almost all were unmarried and expressed religious belief before recruitment (but no more than did the general population). Except for being young, unattached males, suicide bombers differ from members of violent racist organizations with whom they are often compared (29: R. Ezekiel, *The Racist Mind*). Overall, suicide terrorists exhibit no socially

dysfunctional attributes (fatherless, friendless, or jobless) or suicidal symptoms. They do not vent fear of enemies or express “hopelessness” or a sense of “nothing to lose” for lack of life alternatives that would be consistent with economic rationality. Merari attributes primary responsibility for attacks to recruiting organizations, which enlist prospective candidates from this youthful and relatively unattached population. Charismatic trainers then intensely cultivate mutual commitment to die within small cells of three to six members. The final step before a martyrdom operation is a formal social contract, usually in the form of a video testament.

Psychologist Brian Barber surveyed 900 Moslem adolescents during Gaza’s first Intifada (1987-1993) (31: B. Barber, *Heart and Stones*). Results show high levels of participation in and victimization from violence. For males, 81% reported throwing stones, 66% suffered physical assault, and 63% were shot at (versus 51, 38, and 20% for females). Involvement in violence was not strongly correlated with depression or antisocial behavior. Adolescents most involved displayed strong individual pride and social cohesion. This was reflected in activities: for males, 87% delivered supplies to activists, 83% visited martyred families, and 71% tended the wounded (57, 46, and 37% for females). A follow-up during the second Intifada (2000-2002) indicates that those still unmarried act in ways considered personally more dangerous but socially more meaningful. Increasingly, many view martyr acts as most meaningful. By summer 2002, 70 to 80% of Palestinians endorsed martyr operations (32)...In contrast to Palestinians, surveys with a control group of Bosnian Moslem adolescents from the same time period reveal markedly weaker expressions of self-esteem, hope for the future, and prosocial behavior (30). A key difference is that Palestinians routinely invoke religion to invest personal trauma with proactive social meaning that takes injury as a badge of honor. Bosnian Moslems typically report not considering religious affiliation a significant part of personal or collective identity until seemingly arbitrary violence forced awareness upon them.

Consider data on 39 recruits to Harkat al-Ansar, a Pakistani-based ally of Al-Qaida. All were unmarried males, most had studied the Quran. All believed that by sacrificing themselves they would help secure the future of their “family” of fictive kin: “Each [martyr] has a special place-among them are brothers, just as there are sons and those even more dear” (34: D. Rhode, A. Chivers, *New York Times*, 17 March 2002, p. A1).

From the RAND study “Deradicalizing Islamic Extremists”, Rabas et al 2010 (emphasis added):

In a study of Colombian insurgent movements, Florez-Morris found that members who remained in the group until it collectively demobilized did so as a result of *social and practical needs*, shared beliefs, and the group’s role in boosting their self-identity by *making*

them feel important. In addition to these benefits, insurgents were also deterred from leaving by the lack of other options, a result of the clandestine nature of the organization (Mauricio Florez-Morris, “Why Some Colombian Guerrilla Members Stayed in the Movement Until Demobilization: A Micro-Sociological Case Study of Factors That Influenced Members’ Commitment to Three Former Rebel Organizations: M-19, EPL, and CRS”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 2 March 2010, p. 218.)²¹

That study mentions some interesting datapoints from the Saudi rehabilitation programs:

The second study - which focused on individuals who had allegedly participated in violence in Saudi Arabia - revealed an equally interesting set of factors. Most significantly, the data show greater domestic problems and troubled homelives for this group. Approximately half came from homes with a father over the age of 50, and one-quarter (26%) came from polygamous households. Saudi authorities stress that they believe there is a correlation between less attention received at home and trouble later in life. Similarly, over a third (35%) of the second study’s subjects came from homes with “family problems”, and one-fifth were identified as orphans with no traditional parental oversight.

Another RAND study (Rand 2010) examines detailed financial records of al-Qaeda in Iraq, finding that personnel represent a major cost of branches, which were highly profitable as they engaged in theft & extortion, but not enough to compensate for the risk - even taking into account AQI’s policy of paying salaries to the families of dead or imprisoned members, members were forfeiting at least half their lifetime income. But the RAND researchers also discuss how US Army enlisted personnel - presumably better educated and trained than AQI members - have discount rates as flabbergastingly high as 57.2%²², and that their data did not allow them to estimate the education or skills of the AQI members or how much the members might be skimming off the multifarious criminal activities. Given that the central Anbar AQI group had to transfer \$2,700 on average for one of the local groups to launch one attack and the raw materials, as quoted previously, are so cheap, one wonders at the efficiency of AQI in turning dollars into attacks; how much of the overhead is truly necessary with members dedicated to the *cause*?

Increased spending from the AQI Anbar administration to its sectors increases the number of attacks in those sectors, with one additional attack occurring for every additional \$2,700 transferred...Putting together an IED or buying a mortar for an attack is cheap. However, our findings add to the mounting evidence that militant group operations involve far more than just one-time costs. Maintaining a militant organization can be quite expensive. For AQI, personnel costs for members constituted the bulk of these expenses. Without such recurring payments, it is unlikely that AQI could maintain its effectiveness in committing violence. The group incurred large costs

keeping imprisoned members on the payroll as an obligation to their families and paying the families of dead members. Although such payments likely increased the loyalty of members, they also diverted large amounts of money that could have otherwise been used to attack Coalition and Iraqi forces.

“Psychology of Terrorism”, Borum 2004

A similar mechanism is one in which a desperate quest for personal meaning pushes an individual to adopt a role to advance a cause, with little or no thoughtful analysis or consideration of its merit. In essence, the individual resolves the difficult question “Who am I?” by simply defining him or herself as a “terrorist,” a “freedom fighter,” “shahid” or similar role (Della Porta, 1992 ; Knutson, 1981). Taylor and Louis (2004:53) describe a classic set of circumstances for recruitment into a terrorist organization: “These young people find themselves at a time in their life when they are looking to the future with the hope of engaging in meaningful behavior that will be satisfying and get them ahead. Their objective circumstances including opportunities for advancement are virtually nonexistent; they find some direction for their religious collective identity but the desperately disadvantaged state of their community leaves them feeling marginalized and lost without a clearly defined collective identity” (p. 178).

Belonging: In radical extremist groups, many prospective terrorists find not only a sense of meaning, but also a sense of belonging, connectedness and affiliation. Luckabaugh and colleagues (1997) argue that among potential terrorists “the real cause or psychological motivation for joining is the great need for belonging.” For these alienated individuals from the margins of society, “joining a terrorist group represented the first real sense of belonging after a lifetime of rejection, and the terrorist group was to become the family they never had” (Post, 1984). This strong sense of belonging has critical importance as a motivating factor for joining, a compelling reason for staying, and a forceful influence for acting. “Volkan (1997) .. argued that terrorist groups may provide a security of family by subjugating individuality to the group identity. A protective cocoon is created that offers shelter from a hostile world” (Marsella, 2003). Observations on terrorist recruitment show that many people are influenced to join by seeking solidarity with family, friends or acquaintances (Della Porta, 1995), and that “for the individuals who become active terrorists, the initial attraction is often to the group, or community of believers, rather than to an abstract ideology or to violence” (Crenshaw, 1988). Indeed, it is the image of such strong cohesiveness and solidarity among extremist groups that makes them more attractive than some prosocial collectives as a way to find belonging (Johnson & Feldman, 1982).

Conclusion: These three factors - injustice, identity, and belonging - have been found often to co-occur in terrorists and to

strongly influence decisions to enter terrorist organizations and to engage in terrorist activity. Some analysts even have suggested that the synergistic effect of these dynamics forms the real “root cause” of terrorism, regardless of ideology. Luckabaugh and colleagues (1997), for example, concluded “the real cause or psychological motivation for joining is the great need for belonging, a need to consolidate one’s identity. A need to belong, along with an incomplete personal identity, is a common factor that cuts across the groups.” Jerrold Post (1984) has similarly theorized that “the need to belong, the need to have a stable identity, to resolve a split and be at one with oneself and with society- ... is an important bridging concept which helps explain the similarity in behavior of terrorists in groups of widely different espoused motivations and composition.”

...Della Porta (1992), for example, notes that among Italian extremists, “the decision to join an underground organization was very rarely an individual one. In most cases it involved cliques of friends. In some cases recruitment was determined by the individual’s solidarity with an “important” friend who was arrested or had to go underground.” More recently, using open source material, Marc Sageman (2004) analyzed the cases of approximately 172 global Salafi mujahedin and found that nearly two thirds “joined” the jihad collectively as part of a small group (“bunch of guys”) or had a longtime friend who already had joined.

One last quote (from Abrahms again):

Second, members from a wide variety of terrorist groups...say that they joined these armed struggles...to maintain or develop social relations with other terrorist members. These are not the statements of a small number of terrorists; in the Turkish sample, for instance, the 1,100 terrorists interviewed were 10 times more likely to say that they joined the terrorist organization ‘because their friends were members’ than because of the ‘ideology’ of the group.

There are other interesting points; both of Abrahms’s papers are well worth reading, as is Abrahms 2012:

A final explanation is that terrorists derive utility from their actions regardless of whether governments comply politically. This interpretation is consistent with the emerging body of evidence that although terrorism is ineffective for achieving outcome goals, terrorism is indeed effective for achieving process goals (e.g., Abrahms 2008; Arce and Sandler, 2007, 2010; Bloom, 2005; Kydd and Walter 2002). Whereas terrorist acts generally fail to promote government concessions, the violence against civilians can perpetuate the terrorist group by attracting media attention, spoiling peace processes, and boosting membership, morale, cohesion, and external support...Indeed, terrorists tend to ramp up their attacks during peace processes, precluding concessions (see Kydd and Walter, 2002).

- Arce, Daniel. and Sandler, Todd. (2007) “Terrorist Signaling and the Value of Intelligence”. *British Journal of Political Science* 37 576-586
- Arce, Daniel. and Sandler, Todd. (2010) “Terrorist Spectaculars: Backlash Attacks and the Focus of Intelligence”. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 354-373.
- Bloom, Mia M. (2004) “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding”. *Political Science Quarterly* 119 61-88
- Kydd, Andrew H. and Walter, Barbara F. (2002) “Sabotaging the peace: The politics of extremist violence”. *International Organization* 56 263-296

With this perspective, many things fall into place. For example, in the RAND Corporation’s *In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad*, the authors remark:

The Internet offers another example. It is awash in jihadi web sites, and there is little question that it is being exploited for training, fundraising, recruitment, and coordination. Yet again, when browsing the blogs and chat rooms, one gets the impression that what is being witnessed is largely a form of “fantasy jihad.” It is not comforting to see so many obviously educated²³ young Muslims playing the game, but their participation does not mean that each log-on represents a sleeper cell.

Certainly not; indeed, one could well predict that ‘e-jihad’ users will tend to be rather harmless. It’s rather harder for online peers (compared to meatspace friends) to guilt one into action, after all. And one could well predict that more material factors would, say, influence which clerics tend to become radicalized and jihadist, like career success in working for a government (Nielsen 2012).

O RLY?

The foregoing was originally posted to LessWrong.com, where it was energetically critiqued.

TERRORISM DOES TOO WORK!

There are multiple memorable instances where terrorism seems to work. This should be no surprise; after all, if terrorism never worked, would we ever be concerned about it? Of course not. Terrorism works, darn it!²⁴

Cited examples include the IRA, the PLO, Hezbollah, and Hamas. As one commentator wrote:

“Let’s stop pretending that terrorism doesn’t work. Do you think England would ever have talked with the IRA, or that Israel would have given territory to the Palestinians, if not for terrorism?”

NO WAI

There are several possible replies. For example, Pape's work is focused pretty much only on suicide attacks; his findings on effectiveness, even if correct, may not generalize to the many non-suicide attacks. Further, Abrahms consider it unclear how reasonable his specific analysis is:

“Not only is his sample of terrorist campaigns modest, but they targeted only a handful of countries: ten of the eleven campaigns analyzed were directed against the same three countries (Israel, Sri Lanka, and Turkey), with six of the campaigns directed against the same country (Israel). More important, Pape does not examine whether the terrorist campaigns achieved their core policy objectives. In his assessment of Palestinian terrorist campaigns, for example, he counts the limited withdrawals of the Israel Defense Forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 as two separate terrorist victories, ignoring the 167% increase in the number of Israeli settlers during this period—the most visible sign of Israeli occupation. Similarly, he counts as a victory the Israeli decision to release Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin from prison in October 1997, ignoring the hundreds of imprisonments and targeted assassinations of Palestinian terrorists throughout the Oslo “peace process.” Pape's data therefore reveal only that select terrorist campaigns have occasionally scored tactical victories, not that terrorism is an effective strategy for groups to achieve their policy objectives.”

Another is that this is an essentially statistical argument, over dozens or hundreds of terrorist groups. Adumbrating 4 somewhat successful groups would invalidate an assertion along the lines of “*All* terrorist groups are unsuccessful”, but of course no one is making that claim. (Just that *most* are.)

The previously quoted 0% success rate figure is a bit low. “Why Terrorism Doesn't Work” backtracks a little, and considers a larger group (42, not 20). This larger group has a 7% success rate.

As frequently noted, Hezbollah successfully coerced the multinational peacekeepers and Israelis from southern Lebanon in 1984 and 2000, and the Tamil Tigers [1976-2009] won control over the northern and eastern coastal areas of Sri Lanka from 1990 on. In the aggregate, however, the terrorist groups achieved their main policy objectives only 3 out of 42 times—a 7% success rate. Within the coercion literature, this rate of success is considered extremely low. It is substantially lower, for example, than even the success rate of economic sanctions, which are widely regarded as only minimally effective.

...This study analyzes the political plights of 28 terrorist groups—the complete list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) as designated by the U.S. Department of State since 2001. The data yield two unexpected findings. First, the groups accomplished their 42 policy objectives only 7% of the time.

Perhaps these studies are simply too harsh and demanding?

Using this list provides a check against selecting cases on the dependent variable, which would artificially inflate the success rate because the most well known policy outcomes involve terrorist victories (e.g., the U.S. withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 1984²⁵). Furthermore, because all of the terrorist groups have remained active since 2001, ample time has been allowed for each group to make progress on achieving its policy goals, thereby reducing the possibility of artificially deflating the success rate through too small a time frame. In fact, the terrorist groups have had significantly more time than five years to accomplish their policy objectives: the groups, on average, have been active since 1978; the majority has practiced terrorism since the 1960s and 1970s; and only four were established after 1990.

A third counters the appeal with Pape's authority with the observation that "terrorism doesn't work" is an old vein of thought; in 1976, Walter Laqueur argued in "The Futility of Terrorism" that terrorism is an ineffective strategy, and Thomas Schelling said it "almost never appears to accomplish anything politically significant."²⁶, and Loren Lomasky concurs in this pessimistic take²⁷; Lomasky goes so far as to argue that terrorism is outright counterproductive in strengthening the targeted government.

One last consideration is that the listed groups may not've been very successful at all.

HITTING THE BROAD SIDE

The follow quotes are from Wikipedia, about the previously cited groups. Where possible, I quote the summary of that group's aims.

1. "The IRA's stated objective is to end"British rule in Ireland," and according to its constitution, it wants "to establish an Irish Socialist Republic, based on the Proclamation of 1916." Until the 1998 Belfast Agreement, it sought to end Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom and bring about a united Ireland by force of arms and political persuasion."
2. "In 1988, the PLO officially endorsed a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side contingent on specific terms such as making East Jerusalem capital of the Palestinian state and giving Palestinians the right of return to land occupied by Palestinians prior to the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel."
3. " Hamas wants to create an Islamic state in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, a goal which combines Palestinian nationalism with Islamist objectives. Hamas's 1988 charter calls for the replacement of Israel and the Palestinian Territories with an Islamic Palestinian state."

4. “Hezbollah’s 1985 manifesto listed its three main goals as”putting an end to any colonialist entity” in Lebanon, bringing the Phalangists to justice for “the crimes they [had] perpetrated,” and the establishment of an Islamic regime in Lebanon. Recently, however, Hezbollah has made little mention of establishing an Islamic state, and forged alliances across religious lines. Hezbollah leaders have also made numerous statements calling for the destruction of Israel, which they refer to as a “Zionist entity... built on lands wrested from their owners.””

One striking thing about the goals of these groups is how few of them have been accomplished, and how often they seem to have sabotaged and undone real progress towards resolution of their grievances. Anyone familiar with Palestine and Israel in particular will wonder whether Hamas or the PLO have helped the Palestinian cause more than they’ve hurt (an observation equally applicable to Ireland).

BIASES

These ideas and analyses can make people quite angry. They view the previously mentioned organizations, as well as al-Qaeda, as being such obvious examples that anyone suggesting that terrorism may be useless is seen as being a naive idiot or perhaps being dishonest. The level of emotion seems quite unwarranted, and makes me think that there may be cognitive biases at play.

The availability heuristic (when “people base their prediction of the frequency of an event or the proportion within a population based on how easily an example can be brought to mind”) seems to apply here. It is much easier to think of claimed attacks than anonymous ones, even though it was hinted at the beginning that terrorist attacks for which the group claims responsibility are actually in the minority! This very counter-intuitive claim seems to be borne out:

“Since the emergence of modern terrorism in 1968, 64% of worldwide terrorist attacks have been carried out by unknown perpetrators. Anonymous terrorism has been rising, with 3 out of 4 attacks going unclaimed since September 11, 2001. Anonymous terrorism is particularly prevalent in Iraq, where the US military has struggled to determine whether the violence was perpetrated by Shiite or Sunni groups with vastly different political platforms.”²⁸

(Inasmuch as people read about identified attacks and ignore anonymous attacks, there may also be some confirmation bias at work as well.)

IT’S ABOUT FEELING BETTER

“Isn’t it possible that many terrorist acts are really for the purpose of making the terrorists feel better about themselves and their in-groups? Like teenagers playing pranks, only with often-lethal consequences.”

This is somewhat different from the suggestion that terrorists join for a group to spend time with; this hypothesis is about social networks, self-esteem, and repairing injuries to it. Terrorists are not mad²⁹³⁰³¹ (despite an occupation conducive to it³²), nor are they demonic agents of destruction.

That said, the data on terrorist recruitment suggests that prestige & power of the group or prominent members has more to do with the attractiveness of being a terrorist than whether a recruit's ingroup has recently been humiliated by an outgroup. Consider the 9/11 attacks. Were Muslims deeply offended by the economic embargoes directed against Saddam Hussein (and the consequent Iraqi suffering and deaths), or by the Palestinian situation, then logically they would join *before* 9/11 so as to aid al-Qaeda in striking back against the USA. Of course, recruitment picked up *after* 9/11, in the face of enormous international pressure on anything that even was rumored to have Al Qaeda links³³. Promising young students drop their studies to go fight in Somalia - as a group, not one by one.³⁴ This is perfectly logical and even predicted by both the prestige and social-ties theories, but it is harder to make it consistent with the self-esteem theory.

Social networks can also be woven through the Internet. It can be easy to miss this even when the evidence is staring one in the face. From *Foreign Policy*, "The World of Holy Warcraft: How al Qaeda is using online game theory to recruit the masses":

The counterterrorism community has spent years trying to determine why so many people are engaged in online jihadi communities in such a meaningful way. After all, the life of an online administrator for a hard-line Islamist forum is not as exciting as one might expect. You don't get paid, and you spend most of your time posting links and videos, commenting on other people's links and videos, and then commenting on other people's comments. So why do people like Abumubarak spend weeks and months and years of their time doing it? Explanations from scholars have ranged from the inherently compulsive and violent quality of Islam to the psychology of terrorists.

But no one seems to have noticed that the fervor of online jihadists is actually quite similar to the fervor of any other online group. The online world of Islamic extremists, like all the other worlds of the Internet, operates on a subtly psychological level that does a brilliant job at keeping people like Abumubarak clicking and posting away – and amassing all the rankings, scores, badges, and levels to prove it...It turns out that what drives online jihadists is pretty much exactly what drives Internet trolls, airline ticket consumers, and World of Warcraft players: competition....Points can result in an array of seemingly trivial rewards, including a change in the color of a member's username, the ability to display an avatar, access to private groups, and even a change in status level from, say, "peasant" to "VIP." In the context of the gamified system, however, these paltry incentives really matter.

But for a select few, the addiction to winning bleeds over into physical space to the point where those same incentives begin to

shape the way they act in the real world. These individuals strive to live up to their virtual identities, in the way that teens have re-created the video game Grand Theft Auto in real life, carrying out robberies and murders.

One man in particular has been able to take advantage of the incentives of online gamification to pursue real-life terrorist recruits: Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born al Qaeda cleric hiding in Yemen, famous for having helped encourage a number of Western-based would-be jihadists into action. Nidal Malik Hasan, the alleged Fort Hood shooter, for example, massacred a dozen soldiers after exchanging a number of emails with Awlaki. Faisal Shahzad, the Times Square bomber, admitted Awlaki influenced him, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was one of Awlaki's students prior to attempting to blow up an airplane on Christmas Day 2009...His supporters vie for the right to connect with Awlaki, whether virtually or actually – a powerful incentive that, from our observation, drives many of them into, at the very least, more active language about jihad.

A user who called himself “Belaid” on Awlaki's now-defunct blog boasted to others about what he perceived to be a response to his email in Awlaki's latest blog post, saying: “S. Anwar Al-Awlaki i sincerely love u for the Sake of Allah for what you are doing, I think you answered my e-mail by giving us this document.” He then followed up by expressing his desire to transition from virtual communication to real communication. “I ask Allah to make me go visit you so I can see you in real and we in sha Allah go together do jihad insha Allah in our life time!!!” he wrote in January 2009.

The right interpretation is almost too obvious to give. *World of Warcraft* is not about competition any more than those forums are; the literature on MMORPGs and MUDs since the 1980s (and even video games³⁵) in general have concentrated on the *social* aspects³⁶ of online interactions. It's a commonplace that long-term players of *Ultima Online* - no, *Everquest*, no, *World of Warcraft* - do so not in order to compete for the highest player level³⁷ but in order to continue playing with their guild. (In line with the following section, marriages between players who met in guilds are far from unheard of; they are no longer even news.)

If we see terrorism as more of a tribal or gang activity than political activism or warfare, then online connections become especially important to our analysis, otherwise we will be fooled by so-called lone wolves. Earlier 'lone wolves' like bombers Timothy McVeigh or Eric Robert Rudolph turn out on closer inspection to have ties, social & otherwise, to like-minded people; McVeigh lived with several other extremists and was taught his bomb-making skills by the Nichols, who also built the final bomb with him, while Rudolph remained on the run for several years in a community that wrote songs and sold t-shirts to praise him and was ultimately caught clean-shaven & wearing new sneakers. Lone wolves who genuinely had no contact with their confreres, such as Ted Kaczynski, are vanishingly rare exceptions among the dozens of thousands of terrorist attacks in the 20th century, and as rare exceptions, otherwise implausible explanations

like mental disease account for them without trouble.

ABOUT THE CHICKS, MAN

One commenter suggested that Abrahms *almost* has it right. Terrorists are seeking social ties, but only as a substitute for female companionship. The specific example was the American novel/movie *Fight Club*; certainly, when one thinks about it, it's hard to not notice that the narrator goes—thanks to leading a terrorist organization—from being a single loser who has to pretend to be ill (mentally and physically) to get any attention or social interaction, to being an incredibly popular guy with dozens of subordinates to hang out with day and night and a girlfriend.

But an even better example might be Fatah's Black September cell.

In *The Atlantic's* "All You Need Is Love", Bruce Hoffman writes that a senior Fatah general told him of how they decided that Black September had outlived its usefulness, and needed to be dissolved. But that was problematic. Black September likely would not take dissolution lying down:

"It was the most elite unit we had. The members were suicidal – not in the sense of religious terrorists who surrender their lives to ascend to heaven but in the sense that we could send them anywhere to do anything and they were prepared to lay down their lives to do it. No question. No hesitation. They were absolutely dedicated and absolutely ruthless."

What, then, did Fatah do? They must've succeeded; we all know Black September is ancient history.

"My host, who was one of Abu Iyad's most trusted deputies, was charged with devising a solution. For months both men thought of various ways to solve the Black September problem, discussing and debating what they could possibly do, short of killing all these young men, to stop them from committing further acts of terror.

Finally they hit upon an idea. Why not simply marry them off? In other words, why not find a way to give these men – the most dedicated, competent, and implacable fighters in the entire PLO - a reason to live rather than to die? Having failed to come up with any viable alternatives, the two men put their plan in motion."

And it worked!

"So approximately a hundred of these beautiful young women were brought to Beirut. There, in a sort of PLO version of a college mixer, boy met girl, boy fell in love with girl, boy would, it was hoped, marry girl. There was an additional incentive, designed to facilitate not just amorous connections but long-lasting relationships. The hundred or so Black Septemberists were told that if they married these women, they would be paid \$3,000; given an apartment in Beirut with a gas stove, a refrigerator, and a television; and employed by the PLO in some nonviolent capacity. Any of these couples that had a baby within a year would be rewarded with an additional \$5,000.

Both Abu Iyad and the future general worried that their scheme would never work. But, as the general recounted, without exception the Black Septemberists fell in love, got married, settled down, and in most cases started a family...the general explained, not one of them would agree to travel abroad, for fear of being arrested and losing all that they had – that is, being deprived of their wives and children. ‘And so’, my host told me, ‘that is how we shut down Black September and eliminated terrorism. It is the only successful case that I know of.’”

Of course, the base rate for becoming a dispossessed young man becoming a terrorist is so low that it wouldn't be a good use of young women to try to prevent terrorism by marrying them off, while if you can target the marriages to known terrorists, you have enough information that you would be better off just imprisoning or executing them. Similarly, cases of women falling in love with jihadis online or through Twitter and traveling in groups to the Middle East are not important in an absolute numbers sense but for the implications about their psychology.

Black September is interesting for what the effect of marriage says about the *motivations* of their members, not as a prototype of a useful suppression strategy - most countries do not have the same relation to terrorist groups that Fatah had to Black September, and can adopt more effective strategies.

EXTERNAL LINKS

- Timothy Noah, [“The Terrorists-Are-Dumb Theory: Don't mistake these guys for criminal masterminds”](#); *Salon.com*; see also his [“The Time-Space Theory: Is a rational al-Qaeda merely biding its time?”](#)
- Bruce Schneier, [“The Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Terrorists”](#)
- Max Abrahms:
 - [“Does Terrorism Ever Work”](#) (on whether the Spanish government's Iraq withdrawal subsequent to the [2004 Madrid train bombings](#) controverts his theories)
 - [“Al Qaeda's Scorecard: A Progress Report on Al Qaeda's Objectives”](#)
 - [“Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists”](#); David Brin comments that Abrahms “leaves out several added reasons why democracies are better at counter-terror... and should be vastly better still. E.g. the ability to rapidly enlist a skilled populace in sophisticated reserve behaviors, detection, prevention and amelioration. But at least he says the emperor has no clothes!” (personal communication, 2009)
- [Loretta Napoleoni: “The intricate economics of terrorism”](#) - (TED talk; most terrorists are ignorant of ideology & spent most of their time searching for money)
- *Hacker News* discussions: [1](#), [2](#)

- “Hatred and Profits: Getting Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan”, Fryer & Levitt 2007 (excerpts; discussion)
- “Notes on Brainwashing & ‘Cults’”
- “What makes a terrorist stop being a terrorist?”, John Horgan
- “On the Trail of Britain’s Homegrown Jihadis”

1. As well as deliberate sabotage of productive peace proposals (to which decision theorists might react in horror, after all, one can always *break* a peace if it no longer seems like the course of action with the highest marginal return): Kydd, Andrew H. and Walter, Barbara F. (2002) “Sabotaging the peace: The politics of extremist violence”. *International Organization* 56 263-296. __
2. “Does Terrorism Really Work? Evolution in the Conventional Wisdom since 9/11”, Max Abrahms 2012:

In the 1980s, Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1988, 15) likewise observed that terrorists do not obtain their given political ends, and “Therefore one must conclude that terrorism is objectively a failure.” Similarly, the RAND Corporation (Cordes et al., 1984, 49) remarked at the time that “Terrorists have been unable to translate the consequences of terrorism into concrete political gains. . . [I]n that sense terrorism has failed. It is a fundamental failure.” In the 1990s, Held (1991, 70) asserted that the “net effect” of terrorism is politically counterproductive. Chai (1993, 99) declared that terrorism “has rarely provided political benefits” at the bargaining table. Schelling (1991, 20) agreed, proclaiming that “Terrorism almost never appears to accomplish anything politically significant.” Since the September 11 attacks, a series of large-n observational studies has offered a firmer empirical basis. These indicate that although terrorism is chillingly successful in countless ways, coercing government compliance is not one of them.⁶...Hard case studies (Abrahms, 2010; Cronin, 2009; Dannenbaum, 2011; Moghadam, 2006; Neumann and Smith, 2007) have inspected the limited historical examples of clear-cut terrorist victories, determining that these salient events were idiosyncratic, unrelated to the harming of civilians, or both.

- Crenshaw, M. (1988). “The subjective reality of the terrorist: Ideological and psychological factors in terrorism”. In R. Slater and M. Stohl (Eds.), *Current perspectives on international terrorism* (pp. 12-46)
- Held, Virginia. (1991) “Terrorism, Rights, and Political Goals”. In *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, edited by R.G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris

- Chai, Sun-Ki. 1993. "An Organizational Economics Theory of Anti-Government Violence", *Comparative Politics* 26(1): 99-110.
- Schelling, Thomas C. (1991) "What Purposes Can International Terrorism Serve?" In *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, edited by Raymond Gillespie Frey and Christopher W. Morris
- Moghadam, Assaf. (2006) "Suicide terrorism, occupation, and the globalization of martyrdom: A critique of dying to win". *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 707-729

3. References:

- Cronin, Audrey Kurth. (2009) *How Terrorism Ends*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Neumann, Peter R. and Smith, Michael L.R. (2007) *The Strategy of Terrorism: How It Works and Why It Fails*. New York: Routledge.
- Chenoweth, Erica and Stephan, Maria J. (2011) *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: Columbia Press. Chenoweth, Erica and Lawrence, Adria. (2010) "Mobilization and Resistance: A Framework for Analysis". In *Rethinking Violence: States, Non-State Actors in Conflict*, edited by Erica Chenoweth and Adria Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press
- Fortna, Page (2011) "Do Terrorists Win? Rebels' Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes". Paper presented at the Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

4. Abrahms 2012:

Gaibullov and Sandler (2009) analyze a dataset of international hostage crises from 1978 to 2005. They exploit variation in whether the hostage-takers escalate by killing the hostages instead of releasing them unscathed. The study finds that hostage-takers significantly lower the odds of achieving their demands by inflicting physical harm in the course of the standoff. The authors conclude that terrorists gain bargaining leverage from restraint, as escalating to "bloodshed does not bolster a negotiated outcome" (19).

- Gaibullov, Khusrav. and Sandler, Todd. (2009) "Hostage Taking: Determinants of Terrorist Logistical and Negotiation Success". *Journal of Peace Research* 46 739-756

5. Abrahms 2012:

In a couple of statistical papers, Berrebi and Klor (2006, 2008) demonstrate that terrorist fatalities within Israel significantly boost local support for right-bloc parties opposed to accommodation, such as the Likud. Other quantitative work goes even further, revealing that the most lethal terrorist incidents in Israel are the most likely to induce this rightward electoral shift. The authors (Gould and Klor, 2010, 1507) conclude that heightening the pain to civilians tends to “backfire on the goals of terrorist factions by hardening the stance of the targeted population.” These trends do not appear to be Israel-specific. [Gassebner, Jong-A-Pin, & Mireau 2008 find that escalating to terrorism or with terrorism helps non-state actors to remove incumbent leaders of target countries from political office. Unfortunately for the terrorists, however, target countries tend to become even less likely to grant concessions.] Chowanietz (2010) analyzes variation in public opinion within France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States from 1990 to 2006. For each target country, terrorist attacks have shifted the electorate to the political right in proportion to their lethality. More anecdotally, similar observations (Mueller, 2006, 184; Neumann and Smith, 2005, 587; Wilkinson, 1986, 52) have been registered after mass casualty terrorist attacks in Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, the Philippines, Russia, and Turkey. Hewitt (1993, 80) offers this syllogism of how target countries typically respond: “The public favors hard-line policies against terrorism. Conservative parties are more likely to advocate hard-line policies. Therefore, the public will view conservative parties as the best.” In a more recent summary of the literature, RAND (Berrebi, 2009, 189-190) also determines: “Terrorist fatalities, with few exceptions, increase support for the bloc of parties associated with a more-intransigent position. Scholars may interpret this as further evidence that terrorist attacks against civilians do not help terrorist organizations achieve their stated goals (e.g., Abrahms, 2006).” Psychologists (e.g., Jost 2006, Jost 2008) have replicated these results in laboratory experiments, further ruling out the possibility of a selection effect driving the results. Consistent with these quantitative studies, historical research (e.g., Cronin, 2009; Jones and Libicki, 2008) on terrorism is also finding that the standard governmental response is not accommodation, but provocation particularly after the bloodiest attacks.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most notorious rebel leaders in modern history from Abdullah Yusuf Azzam to Regis

Debray, Vo Nguyen Giap, Che Guevara, and Carlos Marighela admonished their foot-soldiers against targeting the population since the indiscriminate violence was proving counterproductive (Rapoport, 2004, 54-55; Weinstein, 2007, 30-31; and Wilkinson, 1986, 53, 59, 100, 112). In the months leading up to his death, even Osama bin Laden commanded his lieutenants to refrain from targeting Western civilians because in his view the indiscriminate violence was not having the desired effect on their governments (["Bin Laden against Attacks on Civilians, Deputy Says," Reuters, 25 February 2011](#)). According to contemporary news accounts (["For Arab Awakening, Bin Laden Was Already Dead," Radio Free Europe, 4 May 2011](#)), this growing consensus is behind the primacy of nonviolence over terrorism in the Arab Awakening engulfing the Middle East and North Africa...More systematically, Pape (1996) surveys the universe of strategic bombing campaigns from the First World War to the 1990 Persian Gulf War. His analysis reveals that governments reach an inferior bargain when their campaigns target the population, an assessment reaffirmed in independent statistical analysis. In the most comprehensive and recent study, Cochran and Downes (2011) exploit variation in the use of civilian victimization campaigns on interstate war outcomes from 1816 to 2007. Their research shows that military leaders and politicians err in thinking that civilian victimization pays. Though obviously successful in stamping out countless civilians, indiscriminate bombings, sieges, missile strikes, and other painful methods against the population do not yield a superior settlement regardless of the costs.

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- Chowanietz, Christophe. (2010) "Rallying Around the Flag or Railing Against the Government? Political Parties' Reactions to Terrorist Acts". *Party Politics* 2 111-142
- Mueller, John. (2006) *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats and Why We Believe Them*. New York: Free Press
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- Weinstein, Jeremy. (2007) *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Pape, Robert A. (1996) *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Cochran, Kathryn McNabb, and Alexander B. Downes 2011. "It's a Crime, but Is It a Blunder? The Efficacy of Targeting Civilians in War". Working paper: Duke University

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6. This backlash effect seems to've been deliberately exploited on occasions; "When It Pays to Talk to Terrorists", *NYT*:

Most scholars of the Palestine Liberation Organization now agree that attacks like the one in Munich were designed by Yasir Arafat's rivals to shift power away from moderates and into the hands of more radical factions. The string of attacks attributed to the Palestinian Black September Organization between November 1971 and March 1973, of which Munich was the most dramatic, were actually an indication of the rifts within the P.L.O. While events like Munich seized headlines, a growing number of moderates within the P.L.O. - most notably Arafat - were putting out feelers about the prospect of a two-

state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Although their rhetoric continued to call for Israel's destruction, moderate leaders sent private signals indicating a willingness to compromise. "We need a change of tactics," Arafat told Soviet officials in 1971. "We cannot affect the outcome of the political settlement unless we participate in it." He then drew a map outlining a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. As State Department officials recognized in June 1972, the "young wolves" in the movement had forced Arafat to "back off" from serious peace overtures in order to remain in power.

Munich was also engineered to elicit violent reprisals from the Israeli government - which it did in the form of airstrikes against Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria that killed hundreds, mostly civilians. Persuaded of the fundamental evil that Palestinian militants represented, American leaders remained steadfast in their refusal to condemn Israel for its attacks on Syria and Lebanon, choosing instead to cast America's first lone veto of a Security Council Resolution on Sept. 10, 1972. The veto affirmed Washington's position on the P.L.O.: no recognition, no negotiation and no legitimacy for terrorists.

One suspects that this backfire effect is the reason so many false flag have been conducted or planned by governments, as epitomized by the "strategy of tension". _

7. "The Credibility Paradox: Violence as a Double-Edged Sword in International Politics", Abrahms 2013 _
8. "Why Is It So Hard to Find a Suicide Bomber These Days?", Charles Kurzman, September 2011:

"Recruitment difficulties have created a bottleneck for Islamist terrorists' signature tactic, suicide bombing. These organizations often claim to have waiting lists of volunteers eager to serve as martyrs, but if so they're not very long. Al Qaeda organizer Khalid Sheikh Mohammed made this point unintentionally during a 2002 interview, several months before his capture. Mohammed bragged about al Qaeda's ability to recruit volunteers for "martyrdom missions," as Islamist terrorists call suicide attacks. "We were never short of potential martyrs. Indeed, we have a department called the Department of Martyrs." "Is it still active?" asked Yosri Fouda, an Al Jazeera reporter who had been led, blindfolded, to Mohammed's apartment in Karachi, Pakistan. "Yes, it is, and it always will be as long as we are in jihad against the infidels and the Zionists. We have scores of volunteers. Our problem at the time was to select suitable people who were familiar with the West." Notice the scale here: "scores," not hundreds - and

most deemed not suitable for terrorist missions in the West. After Mohammed's capture and "enhanced interrogation" by the CIA, using methods that the U.S. government had denounced for decades as torture, federal officials testified that Mohammed had trained as many as 39 operatives for suicide missions and that the 9/11 attacks involved 19 hijackers "because that was the maximum number of operatives that Sheikh Mohammed was able to find and send to the U.S. before 9/11." According to a top White House counterterrorism official, the initial plans for 9/11 called for a simultaneous attack on the U.S. West Coast, but al Qaeda could not find enough qualified people to carry it out. Mohammed's claim that al Qaeda was "never short of potential martyrs" seems to have been false bravado.

...However, all these estimates must be regarded as exaggerations. By the U.S. Justice Department's count, approximately a dozen people in the country were convicted in the five years after 9/11 for having links with al Qaeda. During this period, fewer than 40 Muslim Americans planned or carried out acts of domestic terrorism, according to an extensive search of news reports and legal proceedings that I conducted with David Schanzer and Ebrahim Moosa of Duke University. None of these attacks was found to be associated with al Qaeda. A month after Taheri-Azar's attack in Chapel Hill, Mueller visited North Carolina and warned of Islamist violence "all over the country." Fortunately, that prediction was also wrong. To put this in context: Out of more than 150,000 murders in the United States since 9/11 – currently more than 14,000 each year – Islamist terrorists accounted for fewer than three dozen deaths by the end of 2010."

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9. That previous study is Max Abrahms's "Why Terrorism Does Not Work"; *International Security* 31.2 (2006) 42-78.
 10. "Death by a Thousand Cuts", *Foreign Policy*
 11. "Qaeda Branch Aimed for Broad Damage at Low Cost", *New York Times*
 12. Scott Atran 2003, "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism" review
 13. "Craig Whitlock, "Al-Qaeda Masters Terrorism on the Cheap," *The Washington Post*, August 24, 2008."
 14. "David Axe, "Soldiers, Marines Team Up in 'Trailblazer' Patrols," *National Defense: NDIA's Business and Technology Magazine*, April 2006."
 15. Bjorn Lomborg, "Is Counterterrorism Good Value for Money?" *The Mechanics of Terrorism, NATO Review*, April 2008.
 16. pg 91, "An Economic Analysis of the Financial Records of al-Qa'ida in Iraq", RAND 2010.

17. Wired, “\$265 Bomb, \$300 Billion War: The Economics of the 9/11 Era’s Signature Weapon”, sourcing 2011 estimates from Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization:

“...according to the Pentagon’s bomb squad, the average cost of an IED is just a few hundred bucks, pocket change to a well-funded insurgency. Worse, over time, the average cost of the cheapo IEDs have dropped from \$1,125 in 2006 to \$265 in 2009. A killing machine, in other words, costs less than a 32-gig iPhone...On average, a “victim-operated” bomb - one set to explode when its target or a civilian inadvertently sets it off - cost a mere \$265...The next most plentiful category of bomb, those set off with command wires leading from the device, also cost \$265 on average in 2009, accounting for another 23.8% of attacks...Bombs activated with a remote detonator like a cellphone cost a mere \$345 and accounted for a surprisingly small - 12.6% - of attacks, perhaps owing to the U.S.’ hard-won ability to jam the detonator signal...For insurgents to turn a car into a bomb or convince someone to kill himself during a detonation - or both - the cost shoots up into the thousands: \$10,032 for a suicide bomber; \$15,320 for a car bomb; nearly 19 grand to drive a car bomb....Most of those bombs have gotten cheaper to produce. In 2006, victim-operated IEDs cost an average of \$1,125. Command-wire bombs were \$1,266. Remote detonation bombs? The same...Car bombs cost \$1,675 on average in 2006 - which seems absurdly low, given the cost of one involves acquiring and then tricking out a car. And the going rate on suicide bombers appears to have risen, from \$5,966 in 2006 to nearly double that in 2009. Accordingly, both accounted for over 16% of IED attacks in ’06. And JIEDDO says it has preliminary reporting indicating that suicide bombers cost \$30,000 as of January.”

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18. “AP sources: Christmas bomber considered Houston, Chicago, then picked cheapest option: Detroit”, *Washington Post*
19. From the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting; “12 people killed, 11 injured, in attack on Paris offices of satirical newspaper”:

It is understood the gunmen initially burst into number 6 rue Nicolas-Appert in a Paris neighbourhood, where the archives of the *Charlie Hebdo* are based, shouting “is this *Charlie Hebdo*?” before realising they had got the wrong address.

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20. “Two British men admit to linking up with extremist group in Syria: Yusuf Sarwar and Mohammed Ahmed, who were reported to police by family member, plead guilty to terrorism offences”:

Two Birmingham men admitted on Tuesday to linking up with an extremist group fighting jihad in Syria, after a family member reported them to the police...Police did not know the men had travelled to Syria, where they spent eight months, until one of their mothers contacted detectives in May last year, shortly after the pair had left. She had found a note written by her son saying he had gone to fight and wished to “die as a martyr”. The men were arrested on their return to Britain in January and detectives found pictures of them posing with weapons and believe the pair had been in or around Aleppo, the scene of heavy fighting between forces loyal to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and rebel groups, among whom are organisations the west now considers as extremist....Their path to radicalisation involved inspiration from material from Osama bin Laden’s mentor, Abdullah Azzam, online material, and using the internet to chat with extremists overseas. As part of their preparations they ordered books online from Amazon, including titles such as *Islam For Dummies*, the *Koran For Dummies* and *Arabic For Dummies*.

21. Quoted from footnote 81, page 23__
22. A rate that may reflect various assumptions the researchers made or cultural differences, as a 2011 Danish paper found discount rates closer to 5%.__
23. Atran 2003:

Research by Krueger and Maleckova suggests that education may be uncorrelated, or even positively correlated, with supporting terrorism (26). In a December 2001 poll of 1357 West Bank and Gaza Palestinians 18 years of age or older, those having 12 or more years of schooling supported armed attacks by 68 points, those with up to 11 years of schooling by 63 points, and illiterates by 46 points. Only 40% of persons with advanced degrees supported dialogue with Israel versus 53% with college degrees and 60% with 9 years or less of schooling. In a comparison of Hezbollah militants who died in action with a random sample of Lebanese from the same age group and region, militants were less likely to come from poor homes and more likely to have had secondary-school education....A Singapore Parliamentary report on 31 captured operatives from *Jemaah Islamiyah* and other Al-Qaida allies in Southeast Asia underscores the pattern: “These men were not ignorant, destitute or disenfranchised. All 31 had received secular education. . . . Like many of their counterparts in militant Islamic organizations in the region, they held normal, respectable jobs. . . . As a group, most of the detainees

regarded religion as their most important personal value. . . secrecy over the true knowledge of *jihad*, helped create a sense of sharing and empowerment vis-a-vis others.” (35; “White Paper - The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests”, Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, 9 January 2003)...in Pakistan, literacy and dislike for the United States increased as the number of religious madrasa schools increased from 3000 to 39,000 since 1978 (27, 38).

24. See, for example, Robert Pape’s *Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Terrorism* or “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”, *American Political Science Review*, 97(3); August 2003, pg 13. __
25. See 1983 Beirut barracks bombing
26. Schelling. “What Purposes Can ‘International Terrorism’ Serve?”, *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* 1991 __
27. “In almost none of the instances of terrorist activity is there any genuine likelihood that the assault on person or property will serve to advance the claimed political ends.” from “The Political Significance of Terrorism”, *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* __
28. Abrahms references his analysis of a RAND dataset, and also Bruce Hoffman’s “Why Terrorists Don’t Claim Credit” (in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 9 #1 1997). __
29. “Does Terrorism Really Work? Evolution in the Conventional Wisdom since 9/11”, Max Abrahms 2012:

A theoretical possibility is that terrorists are simply irrational or insane. Yet psychological assessments (see Atran 2004; Berrebi 2009; Euben 2007; Horgan 2005; Merari 2006; and Victoroff 2005) of terrorists indicate that they are cognitively normal. An alternative explanation with superior empirical support is that terrorists simply overestimate the coercive effectiveness of their actions. By most definitions, terrorism is directed against civilian targets, not military ones (Abrahms 2006; Ganor 2002; Goodwin 2006; Hoffman 2006; Schmid and Jongman 2005).¹² When bargaining theorists point to cases of successful terrorist campaigns, however, their examples are usually of guerrilla campaigns, such as the U.S. and French withdrawals from Lebanon after the 1983 Hezbollah attacks on their military installations. Interestingly, Osama bin Laden also referenced historically successful guerrilla campaigns as proof that terrorist campaigns would prevail. Content analysis of bin Laden’s statements reveals that the 9/11 attacks were intended to emulate three salient guerrilla victories in particular: the aforementioned U.S. and French withdrawals from Lebanon in the early 1980s, the

Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in the late 1980s, and the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia in 1994, despite the fact that these campaigns were directed against military personnel, not civilians. Hamas leaders make the same mistake; they often cite the U.S. and French withdrawals from Lebanon as evidence that blowing up Egged buses in Jerusalem will likewise force the Israelis to cave. According to Wilkinson (1986, X, 53, 85), international terrorism began in the late 1960s because emulators tried to replicate the political successes of the anti-colonial struggles.

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30. Borum 2004:

Psychology, as a discipline, has a long history of (perhaps even a bias toward) looking first to explain deviant behaviors as a function of psychopathology (i.e., mental disease, disorder, or dysfunction) or maladjusted personality syndromes. As

Schmid and Jongman (1988) noted, “The chief assumption underlying many psychological ‘theories’...is that the terrorist in one way or the other not normal and that the insights from psychology and psychiatry are adequate keys to understanding.” In reality, psychopathology has proven to be, at best, only a modest risk factor for general violence, and all but irrelevant to understanding terrorism. In fact, “the idea of terrorism as the product of mental disorder or psychopathy has been discredited” (Crenshaw, 1992).

...Nevertheless, the research that does exist is fairly consistent in finding that serious psychopathology or mental illnesses among terrorists are relatively rare, and certainly not a major factor in understanding or predicting terrorist behavior (McCauley, 2002 ; Sageman, 2004)...In the opinion of Friedland (1992), “as for empirical support, to date there is no compelling evidence that terrorists are abnormal, insane, or match a unique personality type. In fact, there are some indications to the contrary.” The two most significant scholarly reviews of the “mental disorder” perspective on terrorism are that of Ray Corrado (198178) and Andrew Silke (1998). Although written nearly twenty years apart, both reached similar conclusions. Acknowledging that some studies have found psychopathological disorders among some terrorists, Silke (1998), summarized his review of the literature with the following conclusions: “The critique finds that the findings supporting the pathology model are rare and generally of poor quality. In contrast, the evidence suggesting terrorist normality is both more plentiful and of better quality.” An even more recent review of the scientific and professional literature by Ruby (2002) similarly “concludes that terrorist are not dysfunctional or pathological; rather, it suggests that terrorism is basically another form of politically motivated violence that is perpetrated by rational, lucid people who have valid motives.”

...Israeli psychology professor Ariel Merari is one of the few people in the world to have collected systematic, empirical data on a significant sample of suicide bombers. He examined the backgrounds of every modern era (since 1983) suicide bomber in the Middle East. Although he expected to find suicidal dynamics and mental pathology, instead he found that “In the majority, you find none of the risk factors normally associated with suicide, such as mood disorders or schizophrenia, substance abuse or history of attempted suicide .”

...Nearly a decade later, psychologist John Horgan (2003) again examined the cumulative research evidence on the search for a terrorist personality, and concluded that “in the context of a scientific study of behaviour (which implies at

least a sense of rigour) such attempts to assert the presence of a terrorist personality, or profile, are pitiful.” This appears to be a conclusion of consensus among most researchers who study terrorist behavior. “With a number of exceptions (e.g., Feuer 1969), most observers agree that although latent personality traits can certainly contribute to the decision to turn to violence, there is no single set of psychic attributes that explains terrorist behavior” (McCormick, 2003).

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31. “MI5 report challenges views on terrorism in Britain: Sophisticated analysis says there is no single pathway to violent extremism”:

It concludes that it is not possible to draw up a typical profile of the “British terrorist” as most are “demographically unremarkable” and simply reflect the communities in which they live. The “restricted” MI5 report takes apart many of the common stereotypes about those involved in British terrorism. They are mostly British nationals, not illegal immigrants and, far from being Islamist fundamentalists, most are religious novices. Nor, the analysis says, are they “mad and bad”. Those over 30 are just as likely to have a wife and children as to be loners with no ties, the research shows....Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious households, and there is a higher than average proportion of converts. Some are involved in drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes. MI5 says there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalisation. The “mad and bad” theory to explain why people turn to terrorism does not stand up, with no more evidence of mental illness or pathological personality traits found among British terrorists than is found in the general population. Far from being lone individuals with no ties, the majority of those over 30 have steady relationships, and most have children. MI5 says this challenges the idea that terrorists are young men driven by sexual frustration and lured to “martyrdom” by the promise of beautiful virgins waiting for them in paradise. It is wrong to assume that someone with a wife and children is less likely to commit acts of terrorism. Those involved in British terrorism are not unintelligent or gullible, and nor are they more likely to be well-educated; their educational achievement ranges from total lack of qualifications to degree-level education. However, they are almost all employed in low-grade jobs.

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32. “Are Terrorists Mentally Deranged?”, Ruby 2002:

Specifically, any psychopathology demonstrated by terrorists at a higher rate than nonterrorists may be the *effect* of terrorist behavior, not its cause. In fact, the unique demands of a terrorist lifestyle are likely to engender the subsequent development of psychological idiosyncrasies, which could then influence the terrorist’s behavior. These idiosyncrasies can become pathological, just as any intense and unconventional lifestyle can lead to psychological peculiarities. For instance, it is reasonable to assume that a terrorist will want to avoid detection and apprehension as he/she goes about the planning and execution of terrorist acts. This surely would lead to an increased level of awareness, in order to detect any surveillance. Such a heightened level of awareness, depending on how intense and chronic, could develop into noticeable suspiciousness of others and a certain level of rigidity of actions. The accompanying thought processes and behaviors could be described as paranoid, obsessive, and compulsive. Moreover, if the terrorist maintains a high level of interpersonal caution and significantly reduces emotional and social connection with others, subsequent behaviors and thought processes could meet the DSM-IV criteria for paranoid, obsessive-compulsive, or schizoid personality disorders.

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33. This is said to be a major factor behind US support of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia; the invasion crushed the moderate Islamic Courts Union which had been restoring order & justice to the famously anarchic country. The results can be judged for oneself. _

34. “A Call to Jihad, Answered in America”, *The New York Times* 2009 (background):

For a group of students who often met at the school, on the University of Minnesota campus, those words seemed especially fitting. They had fled Somalia as small boys, escaping a catastrophic civil war. They came of age as refugees in Minneapolis, embracing basketball and the prom, hip-hop and the Mall of America. By the time they reached college, their dreams seemed within grasp: one planned to become a doctor; another, an entrepreneur. But last year, in a study room on the first floor of Carlson, the men turned their energies to a different enterprise. “Why are we sitting around in America, doing nothing for our people?” one of the men, Mohamoud Hassan, a skinny 23-year-old engineering major, pressed his friends. In November, Mr. Hassan and two other

students dropped out of college and left for Somalia, the homeland they barely knew. Word soon spread that they had joined the Shabaab, a militant Islamist group aligned with Al Qaeda that is fighting to overthrow the fragile Somali government.

...For many of the men, the path to Somalia offered something personal as well - a sense of adventure, purpose and even renewal. In the first wave of Somalis who left were men whose uprooted lives resembled those of immigrants in Europe who have joined the jihad. They faced barriers of race and class, religion and language. Mr. Ahmed, the 26-year-old suicide bomber, struggled at community colleges before dropping out. His friend Zakaria Maruf, 30, fell in with a violent street gang and later stocked shelves at a Wal-Mart. Mr. Hassan, the engineering student, was a rising star in his college community... "Now they feel important," said one friend, who remains in contact with the men and, like others, would only speak anonymously because of the investigation.

...At the root of the problem was a "crisis of belonging," said Mohamud Galony, a science tutor who was friends with Mr. Ahmed and is the uncle of another boy who left. Young Somalis had been raised to honor their families' tribes, yet felt disconnected from them. "They want to belong, but who do they belong to?" said Mr. Galony, 23. By 2004, Mr. Ahmed had found a new circle of friends. These religious young men, pegged as "born-again" or "fundis," set themselves apart by their dress. Their trousers had gone from sagging to short, emulating the Prophet Muhammad, who was said to have kept his clothes from touching the ground... The full dimensions of the recruitment effort also remain unclear. A close friend of several of the men described the process as "a chain of friendship" in which one group encouraged the next. "They want to bring people they are close with because they need that familiarity," the friend said. "They created their own little America in Somalia."

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35. One did not play Spacewar by *oneself*; one played it with others. And to a considerable degree, one built and hacked on Spacewar as much as one competed with other players. __
36. One of the most cited essays in the literature is "A Rape in Cyberspace". __
37. Competing for the highest level is actually impossible in those MMORPGs which implement a level cap. __

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