The Strategy of Terrorism

How it works, and why it fails

Peter R. Neumann and
M.L.R. Smith

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This is the first book to set out a comprehensive framework by which to understand terrorism as strategy. It contends that even terrorism of the supposedly nihilist variety can be viewed as a bona fide method for distributing means to fulfil the ends of policy, that is, as a strategy.

The main purpose of the work is to describe the dynamics of terrorism and evaluate their effectiveness, as well as to theorize upon, and clarify the correlation between, political ends and terrorist means. The text explains the modus operandi of terrorism, and demonstrates how terrorism relies on manipulating the psychological impact of (usually) relatively small-scale attacks. Using a variety of case studies, *The Strategy of Terrorism* shows how many campaigns of terrorism end in failure when they lose their power to terrify. The authors spell out what a proper understanding of terrorism as a strategy implies for those who want to make terrorism ineffective, and offer a number of policy recommendations derived directly from their critique.

This is the first contribution of strategic theory to the study of terrorism, and will be of much interest to students of terrorism, strategy and security studies, as well as military professionals and policymakers.

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Foreword

Over the past few decades the British people have had to cope with two campaigns that sought to achieve radical political goals through coercive violence, largely directed against civilians, and two minor ones. From the start of the 1970s to the late 1990s, Irish Republicans explored most forms of irregular violence, ambushing troops and civilians, assassinating public figures and bombing public buildings, disrupting transport and generally adding to the burdens and inconvenience of everyday life. The aim was to unify Ireland. The end result, hardly anticipated during the violence, is that the political wing of the Provisional IRA has renounced violence and is entering into government with its most extreme political opponents in a Northern Ireland that is still a part of the United Kingdom. As IRA violence subsided, radical Islamism was stirring. On 7 July 2005 bombs on three London underground stations and one bus caused considerable death and destruction. Two weeks later another attempt to replicate these attacks failed as a result of faulty explosives, but the effect was still alarming as it suggested that the country was about to experience a regular series of outrages and that the instigators would be UK residents. Thus far there have been no further attacks, although that is not for want of plots and preparations. The two minor campaigns involved pathetic attempts by extreme leftists to mimic their more vicious and effective comrades in Europe in mounting attacks on the capitalist state, and a nasty, and a more successful campaign, by 'animal rights' activists to intimidate anybody having a remote connection with animal experimentation, even if this was largely for medical purposes.

The net effect on Britain's economy, society and politics, which have been otherwise transformed over the past three decades, might be judged to have been slight. The terrorist campaigns had occasional tactical successes but they were also largely strategic failures, at least in terms of their self-proclaimed goals. It would be wrong nonetheless to dismiss their significance or trivialize their impact. Apart from the human cost and the immediate economic disruption, they challenged successive governments to demonstrate that they could meet their core task of providing for public safety. Preventing attacks and mitigating their effects has become an expensive and arduous activity for both the public and private sectors, and absorbs disproportionate resources in doing so. While Britain's experience has many unique features in this respect it is shared

by other Western countries. Ever since the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001, there has been constant debate about the phenomenon of terrorism – root causes and immediate triggers, historical precedent and contemporary character, threat posed and appropriate response.

My colleagues Peter Neumann and Michael Smith perform a valuable service in this book by demonstrating how to take the phenomenon seriously without overstating its effects or becoming solely obsessed by Islamist terrorism. They avoid the trap of getting bogged down in definitions or dismissing terrorism as an irrational activity indulged in only by wild-eyed zealots or individuals with deeply flawed personalities. Their analysis is lucid and cogent, developed by reference to a wide range of examples from different times and places.

By stressing the need to take a strategic view of terrorism they focus attention on what these acts might be supposed to achieve and – as a result – provide guidance for those trying to frustrate them. If, as they argue, one objective might be to trigger exaggerated responses from government, thereby revealing its true 'repressive' character, then they might well be frustrated by a calm approach, emphasizing the importance of the rule of law. The more governments learn to talk sensibly about the threat, warning of the menace but keeping it in context, then the public will be stronger in the face of attacks and the less disoriented they will become. Once the underlying ideological message is better understood then it can be assessed on its own terms, rather than political debate being diverted into efforts to address supposed influences that make scant actual difference to terrorist motivations.

As the authors acknowledge a strategic approach it can appear to be lacking in moral indignation. Yet there is no need to stop despising an enemy that resorts to cruel methods when seeking to explain how it might be assumed that such methods can advance particular political goals, and it is much more likely to support the adoption of effective counter-terrorism strategies.

Lawrence Freedman

Dedication and acknowledgements

1 Introduction

You see, strategic analysis is vicarious problem-solving.[1]
Thomas Schelling

In late November 2006, in a rare public speech, Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller the Director General of the British Security Service, MI5, spoke of the 'realities of the terrorist threat facing the United Kingdom'. Her speech was aimed at relating her service's appreciation of the security condition since the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and the London transport bombings in July 2005, which were both carried out by Islamic extremists. She highlighted 'the threat to the United Kingdom from Al-Qaida-related terrorism', saying that 'the struggle will be long and wide and deep.'[2] She was, of course, saying little that was unusual or provocative in giving expression to the heightened state of public consciousness that most people felt towards the threat posed by militant Islamism. Significantly, though, like many politicians, security analysts and other officials and commentators, she chose to characterize this particular danger to society as 'the terrorist threat' and went on to relay her concerns about 'what motivates those who pose that threat; and what my Service is doing, with others, to counter it.'[3]

As a civil servant charged with protecting society the public could expect no less from her. At the same time, her speech encapsulated the current discourse on terrorism since 9/11 in viewing terrorism as an amorphous, but existential, phenomenon. But, what are the precise 'realities' of what we so often call 'terrorism'? We know that the dangers posed by radical Islamists are real enough, as are other threats from groups that have, past and present, sought to use violence to prosecute their struggles. However, are we necessarily being intellectually coherent in describing such threats as terroristic in nature? Does terrorism exist, as many public statements like those of Dame Eliza imply, as an observable material fact in itself, or is it, as this book contends, a misunderstanding of the term that obscures 'the reality' of what terrorism means as a concept?

The popular articulation of the notion of terrorism as if it were a clearly observable fact however leads to severe conceptual problems that frequently impair rather than assist the understanding of the nature of the phenomenon.

Simply, terror is a description of a particular kind of extreme fear. 'Terrorism' thus refers to the creation, or attempted creation, of that sense of fear. Semantically speaking, then, the word terrorism is an abstract noun. Intrinsically it defines no material action or actors. Despite this, much public commentary, as indicated, routinely talks of the 'terrorist threat' as if it were self-evident to any disinterested onlooker. What analysts usually mean when they refer to the terrorist threat, of course, is the danger posed by specific groups (e.g. Al Qaeda, the Irish Republican Army, the Tamil Tigers, animal rights protestors and so forth) that are assumed to use particular kinds of violent methods to advance their cause, often irrespective of whether or not their actions are explicitly intended to induce fear and terror.[4]

Thus, the promotion of terrorism as an omnibus term to cover a spectrum of violent activity often leads to a confusing and incoherent public debate about the actual nature of the threat in the current security environment. The price of analytical and semantic laxity in academic and popular discourse has been that the word terrorism has become infused with negative moral connotations that undermine its descriptive utility. The message conveyed is that terrorism is symptomatic of the behaviour that falls below standards of decency or may exist beyond the pale of ethical conduct entirely. Rightly or wrongly, those who are labelled as terrorists and are more often than not seen to exist in an ethical void characterized by criminality and pathology. To be called a terrorist is therefore taken to condemn an actor's ends and means, even though such valuations have no intrinsic etymological foundation.[5]

When a descriptive word becomes permeated by implicit moral assumptions it distorts what is fundamentally a value-neutral term. This has certainly undermined all attempts to define terrorism on the basis of this flawed and arbitrary combining of two philosophically and linguistically separate ideas, something which philosophers of language call a category mistake.[6] In particular, the morally ascriptive undertones that surround terrorism renders the term malleable, which leads to two kinds of intellectual problems that, past and present, have afflicted attempts to analyse and understand the phenomenon.

The first problem is that the assumption that terrorism is inherently immoral leads to the belief that it exists beyond the realms of rational activity. Since its inception as a field of inquiry in the 1960s, there is a strand within terrorist studies that has perceived terrorism as an aberrant form of violence devoid of any meaning, at best only comprehensible via the psychiatric analysis of psychopathology.[7] In the age of so-called new terrorism, characterized by suicide attacks aimed at creating mass casualties, this view is more prevalent than ever. Terrorism is seen as nihilistic and irrational and any attempt to understand its logic inherently redundant.[8] It was a sentiment expressed by Bruce Cumings, who declared in the wake of the 9/11 attacks:

> In its utter recklessness and indifference to consequences, its crave anonymity, and its lack of any discernible 'program' save for inchoate revenge, this was an apolitical act. The 9/11 attack had no rational military purpose [because] they lacked the essential relationship between violence

means and political ends that, as Clausewitz taught us, must govern any act of war.[9]

Certainly, in the wake of catastrophic attacks like those on urban cityscapes that took place on 11 September 2001 in New York and the Pentagon, our emotional responses are always likely to be pulled in this direction. In this respect, we should have sympathy with the views of those like Cumings who voice their dismay and incomprehension at the minds that are prepared to commit such atrocities. But we should recognize that these are emotional reactions, not analytical ones.

We shall return to the assertions about the relationship between means and ends to which Cumings alludes later. What we can note here is the extent to which the assumption that terrorism is, *ipso facto*, fundamentally abnormal, can lead to a skewed research agenda that often focuses on the control and prevention of terrorism. To an extent, this is understandable. Those who live in environments afflicted by terroristic violence will be cognizant of its destructive, disruptive and murderous effects. The inclinations of most people will be to want rid of the problem – not understand it. It is natural that much public policy should concentrate on the prevention of terrorism and the interdiction of those deemed to be terrorists. Therefore we should recognize that policy prescriptions that dwell on the tactical and operational details of countering terrorism are inevitably going to be reflected in the research agenda of analysts, while focusing on the collective minds of official bodies.

Even before the 9/11 critics of terrorist studies pointed to what they believed was an over-emphasis by analysts on the violent symptoms of terrorist events, to the exclusion of more-considered assessments of the sources of conflict.[10] Undoubtedly, we can observe that casual understandings of terrorism that assume its inherent immorality and irrationality can lead to highly questionable policy positions based on the simple eradication of what is seen to be the 'terrorist threat'. For example, the current notion of the so-called global war on terrorism is, sometimes rightly, seen as an overly simplistic phrase and unduly influential on the construction of US foreign policy, which some commentators would argue, *inter alia*, led the United States and its allies into the deeply misguided invasion of Iraq in 2003.[11] A war against 'terror' ultimately has no more meaning than a 'war against war', a 'war against poverty' or a 'war against drugs' in that it defines no tangible, material threat.[12] It is difficult, if not impossible, to wage war against an abstract noun.

Whatever one's stance towards notions like the 'war on terror', an analytical over-concentration on responses to terrorist incidents and treating the symptoms of what is invariably a complex set of circumstances can lead us, too easily, to conceive terrorism simply as a behavioural problem. The difficulty is that if one assumes that terrorism is irrational then one rules out all other attempts to evaluate the phenomenon that might lead to a more sophisticated analysis of the threat that, in itself, might assist in a more-effective combat of the danger.

Most knowledgeable commentators do not go so far to dismiss the idea of terrorism as merely the product of mental dysfunction. However, even those

who are more attuned to the complexities surrounding notions of terrorism, frequently fall victim to a second set of equally simplistic and flawed assumptions, which is the belief that terrorism has 'causes'. The search for causal theories of terrorism has a long and not very venerable lineage, and has been notable usually only for its sophistry. Walter Laqueur has observed that ever since the phenomenon of terrorism was identified as an object of political concern in Europe in the later nineteenth century, with the rise in anarchist violence in the 1880s, many commentators have advanced often crude, naïve, tendentious or downright strange ideas. One such was the criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, who maintained there was a causal connection between terrorism and vitamin deficiencies most commonly associated with the maize-eating peoples of Southern Europe, thus held to explain why the incidence of violence supposedly lessened in Northern Europe. Other investigations sought to link terrorism with cranial measurements, alcoholism, air pressure and moon phases.[13]

As the discipline of terrorist studies evolved from the late 1960s onwards, somewhat more sophisticated but no less problematic investigations into the 'causes of terrorism' were explored. The methodology to find explanations for the widespread outbreak of Marxist revolutionary or nationalistically inspired urban violence that spanned Latin America, the Middle East, Western Europe, North America, Japan and further afield gave rise to much theorizing about the origins, motivation and causes of 'international terrorism'.[14] Such research often betrayed an excessive concern for tying together very disparate conflicts, with complex and multiple origins, solely on the basis of tactics – usually bombings, assassinations and kidnappings – used by certain protagonists. Attempting to generalize across such a wide geographical, political and sociological spectrum of conflict merely on the basis of a similarity in tactics, was bound to produce superficial results, and commentators noted at the time that academic research was characterized by dull typologies, shallow statistical comparisons and repetitive historical catalogues.[15]

More virulent critics who denounced the study of terrorism during the 1970s and 1980s frequently accused the discipline of advancing a right-wing security agenda that exploited the value-laden assumptions around the idea of terrorism to condemn groups or causes which states sought to outlaw. This agenda, it was held, also justified wide extensions of state power through draconian anti-terror legislation intended to curtail legitimate political dissent.[16] The critique focused on the presumption that terrorist groups were almost always non-state actors challenging state authority. This view as a matter of course, critics perceived, cast a light hand over the fact that states were themselves responsible for, and often the most effective practitioners of, terrorism: state terrorism.[17] Consequently, this slanted pro-state agenda, embedded in conventional terrorist studies, devalued its worth as a disciplinary inquiry. In contrast, critics necessarily sought contending causal explanations to reveal that anti-state violence was the result of reflexes against oppression and material inequalities.[18]

In the current era many of these criticisms resurfaced in response to the upsurge in interest in terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 and in particular the

political and normative implications that analysts identified in the US-sponsored global war on terrorism. Many of those opposed to the direction of US foreign and counter-terrorism policy contended that instead of looking for a solution to the threat of violent Islamic militancy through the hardening of state borders and authoritarian legislation, which impinged on civil liberties, that terrorism must possess 'root causes' which should be addressed.[19] The 'root causes' hypothesis attracted, and continues to gain, adherents in the new academic field of 'critical terror studies' quite like former anti-terrorist studies, focuses less on the phenomenon of terrorism itself but on the Western democratic response to it as a purportedly more objective, second-order approach.[20] The root causes thesis is concerned primarily with the identification of grievances that sees terror largely as an effect of an external and oppressive cause emanating from ethical, material or structurally unequal power relationships international system.

Despite its essentially Marxist provenance, the notion of root causes has been influential in framing perceptions of the problem, which invariably views terrorism as a product of relative deprivation. For example, one of Manningham-Buller's predecessors as head of MI5, Stella Rimington, pronounced that 'Terrorism is going to be there for a long time. It's going to be there as long there are people with grievances that they feel terrorism will help solve'.[21] The problem with the search for root causes is that causes are – like grievances – infinitely divisible and therefore inherently contestable. In other words, those who seek the 'root causes' of anti-state violence represent an antithesis to the perceived agenda embedded in conventional terrorist studies that concentrates upon state-centric counter-terror policy.[22] Simply, critics present a mirror image of those whom they criticize and, thereby, replicate their analytical weaknesses. In particular, it is clear that they are equally guilty of the political manipulation of the malleable, value-connotations of the term terrorism.

In either case, then, those who either promulgate the idea of a war against terrorism or argue for the root causes of terrorism have lost interest in trying to evaluate the phenomenon objectively. Instead, terror is transvalued to serve the political preferences that are intended to facilitate not analytical inquiry, but the advancement of a particular pro- or anti-state agenda that necessarily seeks to exclude contending explanations. What we can deduce from this is that the search for the 'causes of terrorism' is fundamentally flawed as a starting point for any inquiry into terrorism. The phrase 'causes of terrorism' is as logically redundant as that describing a 'war on terrorism'. Abstract nouns have no causes.

What is strategy?

Defining the strategic approach

What is not in doubt is that despite the problematic understandings of terrorism the topic has generated huge public interest, especially, after 9/11. Thousands of studies have been produced ranging from survival guides to

post-modern analyses.[23] We have indicated, though, that the available literature on terrorism has done little to advance our comprehension of the phenomenon. Rarely have works on terrorism, both past and present, been able to get past the two major sets of intellectual obstacles that we have identified above, which continue to trip up commentators who have attempted to grapple with the issue. In our view what stands out among the proliferation of books is the scarcity of any meaningful examination of terrorism as a strategy, that is, as a *bona fide* method of distributing military means to fulfil the ends of policy.[24] It is our contention in this book that terrorism – even that of the supposedly nihilist variety – does not necessarily fall within the realm of the abnormal. Neither is terrorism simply an outgrowth of grievance. Instead, a better starting point for any assessment of terrorism should be to consider its utility a military strategy employed by actors who believe, rightly or wrongly, that through such means they can advance their goals. The main purpose of this book is therefore to describe the military dynamics of terrorism and evaluate their effectiveness, as well as theorize upon – and clarify the relationship between – political ends and terrorist means.

By arguing that terrorism constitutes a strategic practice we put ourselves at odds with those analysts who believe that the phenomenon defies rational analysis. In contrast, we maintain that there is no inherent reason why terrorism – the attempt to create fear – cannot be evaluated as an instrumental activity pursued by political actors. This constitutes our understanding of a strategic approach to the notion of terrorism. Our first task is therefore to be clear about what we mean throughout this book by 'strategy'. Straightforwardly, we can define strategy as the endeavour to relate ends to means, or as Michael Howard states, the 'use of available resources to gain any objective'.[25] As such definitions disclose, as a concept strategic theory does not imply any intrinsic link with military power, which is but one means to achieve given aims.[26] Nevertheless, the way that the strategic approach has evolved as a methodology usually denotes the study of the use, or threat of use, of organized armed force in politics, particularly in times of war. The reason for the association of strategy with war is simply that the choices and outcomes in war are invariably stark, involving matters of life and death, victory and defeat, and are thus easier to analyse.

If we relate the violent acts that most of us conceive as terrorism to military power, then such activity clearly, and logically, yields to our understandings of war as a goal-oriented enterprise. To use the standard Clausewitzian dictum, 'war is a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.'[27] War is, thereby, a rationally purposive effort,[28] where the deed of violence itself is *'an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will'*.[29] War is thus intimately bound up in the idea of strategy as one possible set of means to attain designated objectives. Clearly, then, if war is a political act it must follow that terrorism is an active force within it as one set of methods designed to achieve certain ends. In this respect, terrorism in its theoretical essence is no different from any other tactic in war.

One of the essential elements of the strategic approach is that it attempts to practice a value-neutral stance towards its object of inquiry. This is of obvious analytical utility in divorcing the word terrorism as a description of a particular form of activity from the value judgments that have grown up around it. Despite the revulsion that many exhibit towards the notion of terrorism and the derogatory way in which it is employed in public discussion, strategic theory is intellectually disinterested in the moral validity of the means and ends of any political actor. Evaluations and judgements are reserved only to comment on the capacity and ability of the chosen means to achieve given objectives. This may seem excessively pitiless, but it is a necessary premise from which to proceed. Thomas Schelling suggests that there are two primary reasons why strategic analysis 'tends to be neutral, even cold-blooded, toward parties in a situation'. First, he explains, 'is that the analysis is usually about the situation, not the individuals – about the structure of incentives, of information and communication, the choices available, and the tactics that can be employed'.[30] Second, according to Schelling, strategic analysis 'cannot proceed from the point of view of a single favoured participant. It deals with situations in which one party has to think about how the others are going to reach their decisions.'[31]

By seeing terrorism in instrumental (rather than judgemental) terms as part of a strategy to gain certain ends we can detach the normative implications that have grown up around terrorism from the separate attempt to reflect upon its presumed utility in the eyes of those who employ its methodology.[32] Compared to emotive expressions against terrorism, even of the apparently apocalyptic mass-casualty variety, as existing beyond the bounds of rational analysis, the strategic approach is instructive because it provides insight into the motivations of the actors involved. It lays to one side the viewer's moral position on such situations, and seeks to establish what means are deployed to achieve particular goals and the role that violence plays for each actor.[33] It seeks not to apportion blame or condemn, but to analyse within a framework that places the conscious choices of actors above any singular focus on the morality or causality of the violence itself.

Is terrorism definable?

Having identified what we mean by strategy, we also need to clarify further what we mean by terrorism, and the way it will be used throughout this book. The trouble is that most people have some conception of what the phenomenon is but few can adequately define it. As we have intimated above, the most important reason for the definitional problem is that terrorism is not considered to be a value-neutral expression. As a result the word itself becomes an object for contention amongst analysts and conflicting parties. Political conflicts are struggles for power and political influence, and part of that struggle is invariably about who labels who. Since power tends to be largely concentrated in the hands of states, it is normally they who are able to attach the meaning to

certain forms of political behaviour, which is why state terror has often been ignored in studies of terrorism.[34]

   The conceptual confusions surrounding terrorism also stems from other sources. First, the actual activities we commonly associate with terrorism appear to bear many similarities with forms of guerrilla warfare. Such activities may, for the political actor who employs such tactics, possess much the same objectives such as aiming to divert enemy forces away from the main theatre of battle; to harass the enemy to a point where it believes that control of a certain piece of territory is too expensive or too politically embarrassing; and forcing the adversary to negotiate favourable terms.[35] It is also true that terrorism can form an adjunct to a number of so-called conventional practices of war. Yet there are distinct differences between guerrilla warfare and strategic terrorism, and, as will be explained in this study, it is important not to describe all insurgency warfare as terrorist in character.[36] Second, the distinctive methods that many of us associate with terrorism involves often the wilful taking of human life and the infliction of severe mental distress, sometimes entailing, whether randomized or calculated, attacks on those deemed to be 'innocent'. For many this introduces the intrinsic ethical dimension to terrorism, which raises questions relating to concepts like just war and non-combatant immunity, but from which source of much debate and definitional difficulty arises.[37]

   Attempting to define what terrorism might be in a way that incorporates value judgments on the morality of a combatant's cause or methods or conflating terrorist tactics with other forms of so-called unconventional conduct in war, is bound to frame an insecure, if not impossible, basis for adequate definition. The many attempts to develop a definition on these uncertain premises have often resulted in the word being all but defined out of existence.[38] There have been well over 100 different definitions of terrorism documented, and certainly the writers of this study know of no meaningful, settled or robust conclusions reached using these approaches.[39]

   We do not believe that the definitional problem, which has haunted, as well as hindered, research on the subject for many decades, can be resolved by our contribution. Nevertheless, what we can do is advance a definition that is both logical and coherent within the parameters of strategic theory. In this respect, we have suggested above that strategic theorists can see terrorism as a value-neutral practice that involves the creation of fear. Therefore, we would contend that – strictly for the purposes of the analysis pursued in this book – it is possible to describe terrorism as *the deliberate creation of a sense of fear, usually by the use or threat of use of symbolic acts of physical violence, to influence the political behaviour of a given target group*. This definition draws on the work by T.P. Thornton, whose main study – although over 40-years old – still forms one of the most informative and insightful analyses of terrorism to date.[40] It highlights several important facets of the phenomenon:

1   the violent quality of most terrorist acts, which distinguishes a programme of terror from other forms of non-violent propagation, such as

mass demonstrations, leafleting, etc. Indeed, although people will sometimes experience fear and anxiety without the threat of physical harm being present, it appears to be the case that the most common vehicle for the inducement of terror are forms of physical violence,

2   the nature of the violence itself. Thornton called this violence 'extra-normal', that is, for a certain level of organized political violence to be called terrorism it must go beyond the norms of violent political agitation accepted by a particular society,

3   the symbolic character of the violent act. The act of terror will imply a broader meaning than the immediate effects of the act itself, that is to say, the damage, deaths and injuries caused by the act are irrelevant to the political message that the actor who employs such methods will hope to communicate. For this reason, the terrorist act can only be understood by appreciating its symbolic nature.[41]

The strategy of terrorism

While a definition may help us to identify some of the essential constituents of terrorism, it still tells us little about its dynamics as a military enterprise. In this book we will attempt to expand on our definition by describing how movements that employ terrorism seek to manipulate particular variables in order to satisfy their political demands. To show how this process is distinctive, it is worth outlining what we consider to be the place of strategic terrorism within the broader spectrum of military strategy.

As we have indicated, in our view, terrorism, like most forms of organized political violence, is employed to produce certain effects on a specific set of people in order to attain an objective of policy. Unlike much of what we consider conventional warfare, however, the aim of a strategy of terrorism is not to kill or destroy but to break the spirit and create a sensation of fear within a target group, which will cause it to initiate political change. Terrorism, therefore, is a particular form of psychological warfare; a battle of wills played out in people's minds.[42] It can be regarded as a prime example of coercive diplomacy where the terrorist group seeks to deprive the enemy of things which he holds dear, not necessarily in terms of material resources, but those more-elusive aspects of life such as a relatively peaceful, stable and law-abiding society.[43]

Strategic terrorism, we shall endeavour to show, is dedicated to triggering the asking of a question on the part of the target group: 'is it worth paying the price to maintain the present situation?' The aim will be to raise this 'price' to a level whereby the opponent returns to re-examine the notion of vital interests.[44] Historically, this process could be observed in many anti-colonial conflicts in which violence was to trigger a reassessment of values in the colonial metropolis. As the cost of maintenance came to outweigh the benefits, the target's perception changed from a determination to preserve what was considered to be an asset to a willingness to give it up. Indeed, this idea has been embodied in the concept of the 'asset to liability shift', whereby the 'asset' at the

centre of a conflict does not inevitably relate to some territorial possession, but can also refer to something more intangible, such as a policy or an ideology.[45]

Whereas terrorism and guerrilla warfare often share the same methods, and while both are commonly seen as members of one strategic family loosely referred to as 'irregular warfare', it is possible to discern a unique terrorist *modus operandi*. Much guerrilla-warfare theorizing, particularly those ideas that have been filtered through Maoist and Leninist understandings, emphasize the involvement of the masses through political organization which in many respects is considered even more important than the military struggle itself.[46] Moreover, Maoist theory postulates the slow accumulation of military assets to meet enemy forces on equal terms in set piece battles of a conventional nature in the final phase of the confrontation.[47] By contrast, those groups which employ terrorism as the main plank of their strategy invariably seek to bypass both mass agitation and major military confrontation, believing that symbolic acts of violence alone will be sufficient to achieve the desired ends.[48]

Elucidating the process whereby actors seek to achieve their ends through strategic terrorism forms the key purpose of this book. Our intention is first to elaborate upon the relationship between strategy and terrorism in conceptual terms (Chapter 2). Second, we aim to analyse the different stages through which a campaign of strategic terrorism needs to pass before reaching a successful conclusion (Chapter 3). Third, we will demonstrate that strategic terrorism is a potentially flawed strategy, which – except in the most favourable circumstances – is unlikely to achieve the political ends for which it is used (Chapter 4). Our argument is that political actors who see fit to use terrorist methods need to generate considerable strategic momentum in order to trigger the processes which they hope to exploit. The need to escalate, however, will expose the groups to a number of adverse responses, preventing them from acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of their target audience or even cause their own destruction (Chapter 5).

Before proceeding to the substance of our argument, it seems useful to clarify some of the assumptions that underpin our methodological approach. This is necessary especially in view of the numerous misconceptions that have been filtered through the popular – as well as some of the more serious – literature. The theoretical model of strategic terrorism that will be pursued in this study will assume that of a non-state political actor competing for absolute power with a government against which its efforts are targeted. This is not to say that the so-called single-issue groups that may seek, or in the past have sought, to employ terrorist methods (such as anti-abortionists, animal rights campaigners, etc.) are less important.[49] It just so happens that the ideas and concepts involved remain much the same in each case, and that constantly to separate out each type would make the analysis unnecessarily abstruse.

Furthermore, we think that – for analytical as well as practical reasons – it makes sense to begin our evaluation of terrorism by looking at its military content. The starting point will, therefore, be the assumption that actors who seek to implement a campaign of strategic terrorism are, in the first instance,

seeking to achieve their political aims primarily through terrorist violence. While there is a substantial number of contemporary political actors to which our theoretical model of strategic terrorism can be applied (the most obvious being that of the Al Qaeda variety, for example), we are conscious that there are many other groups who combine terrorism with other methods of warfare as well as forms of non-violent social or political agitation. We are of the opinion that only by examining the dynamics of strategic terrorism is it possible to create the necessary conceptual basis from which to arrive at a fuller understanding of the role played by terrorist violence in the campaigns of some of the groups that have gone beyond the use of strategic terrorism in advancing their aims. In fact, we believe that outlining some of the flaws and limitations of strategic terrorism goes some way to explaining why some groups have chosen to broaden their strategy beyond the singular focus on terrorist violence to encompass some of the other methods mentioned above.

Finally, we explicitly reject popular notions that terrorism is, *ipso facto*, a strategy of the 'weak' and 'illegitimate'. These ideas are often taken as matters of fact without further exploring them. We believe that legitimacy and relative military weakness are important variables in strategic terrorism, and they will play a central part in our analysis. However, instead of assuming these variables to be a conceptual given, we shall demonstrate how they relate to, and originate from, the military dynamics of strategic terrorism, thus providing a solid theoretical rationale for their inclusion in a general strategy of terrorism rather than proceeding on the basis of supposedly objective *a priori* notions of important concepts, which frequently, as we have tried to show already, lead only to conceptual confusion.

Overall, our contention is that it is possible to present a coherent framework for initiating an understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism free from the over-determining influence of the value assumptions that have afflicted both former and the current debate on the subject. We do not expect to radically overturn popular conceptions of terrorism but aim, instead, to provide an objective starting point to comprehend the notion of terrorism in as dispassionate a way as possible and from which others can dispute or refine.

2 Terrorism and strategic theory

> If you want to overcome your enemy you must match your effort against his power of resistance, which can be expressed at the product of two inseparable factors, viz. the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will. The extent of the means as his disposal is a matter – though not exclusively – of figures, and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it.[1]
>
> Carl von Clausewitz

The surge in interest in the notion of terrorism in academic and popular debate in the post-9/11 era has, as we have indicated in the introduction, enabled the term to gain wide currency as a way of describing all manner of primarily non-state threats. We suggested that the use of terrorism in a broad and all-embracing manner to delineate certain kinds of actors gives rise to the idea that terrorism is itself an existential phenomenon and contributes to the disputatious nature and definitional confusion that surrounds most discussion of the subject. Popular imagery of terrorism means that many associate it with a particular form of violent insurgent activity, usually signifying indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians. We would maintain that terrorism does not, *ipso facto*, delineate any precise *modus operandi* (such as random bombings or shootings) or particular kinds of political actors (like non-state, religious, revolutionary or ethno-nationalist groups), but should more properly be regarded as a strategy or set of tactics: a means of achieving political ends, irrespective of the morality of the cause for which it is employed or the specific operations mounted.

From a strategic-theory perspective, as we have intimated, terrorism is a relatively unproblematic notion to define. Simply, it is the use of violence to create fear for political ends. As a tactic it can be employed by state or non-state actors alike, and is not necessarily indiscriminate in that attacks will invariably be chosen specifically for their political and psychological impact rather than their capacity for physical destruction.[2] This is not to say that acts of terrorism cannot also be hugely destructive as was demonstrated by the attacks

of 11 September 2001 in the United States which resulted in the loss of some 3,000 lives. Likewise it can be plausibly maintained that the counter-city targeting strategies practiced by Allied aerial bombardment during World War II, which carried an explicit rationale to shatter enemy morale, would also constitute the terroristic use of violence under the strategic definition. As we shall elucidate later on, terrorism as a strategy is about attempting to induce a particular reaction in a target group, and is not intrinsically connected with any statement about the morality of a political actor's ends or means.

It is our contention that an objective appreciation of terrorism as a strategic phenomenon has been undermined largely by mixing up terrorism as a coherent description of a particular tactic – the use of violence to instil fear for political ends – with a moral judgment on the actor's methods and objectives. Once a descriptive term becomes wrapped up with judgmental connotations any hope for an effective meaning has been lost.[3] The conceptual confusion leads to the classic category mistake embodied in the much-cited phrase, 'one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.' Logically, you can actually be both without contradiction. For example, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), which fought against the French occupation of Algeria between 1954 and 1962, were undoubtedly practitioners of terrorism, and could therefore by implication, be accurately described as terrorists. The group planted bombs in cafés frequented by *colon* youths and explicitly set out to terrorize both the European-settler community and to secure the compliance of other sections of the Algerian Arab population.[4] Equally, by any moral calculation (which we must recall is a separate intellectual question) few would likely dispute that the FLN's struggle for Algerian independence against the often highly repressive and discriminatory French colonial regime would qualify for the category of 'freedom fighter'.

The occlusion of different meanings within common understandings of terrorism leads to much misunderstanding. The result is, as this chapter will illustrate, that terrorism is also used as a synonym for, or mistakenly elided with, many other types of conflict, such as guerrilla war, revolutionary war, low-intensity conflict and insurgency, to name only a few of the possible terms. Superficially terrorism and these other forms of war and conflict may seem to bear similarity with each other, but in practice all they do is invite further definitional and categorical confusion. This is particularly notable in writings on the subject which will rarely offer a precise definition of terrorism/guerrilla warfare (and its many supposed variants). Instead, terrorism will be located within a tradition of the anti-state/anti-authority violence that, it is maintained, can be identified as a distinctive practice in war extending back through time.[5] The implication is that although the term may defy easy definition, we know what it is when we see it.

The problem is that by locating terrorism within a tradition of anti-state violence and guerrilla warfare rather than offering a precise definition writers are asking their readers to accept a series of assumptions about terrorism that while seeming superficially plausible, are not necessarily logical or coherent.

In the first instance, implicit in much writing about terrorism is the idea that it connotes a weaker side confronting a more powerful adversary,[6] thus leading to claims that terrorism is 'weapon of the weak'. Thus the weaker side attempts to compensate for its material inferiority by employing terrorism. On the surface this may seem a plausible generalization, and indeed, in practice inferior opponents may well choose to select a campaign of terror to prosecute their struggle, but it does not follow that terror is the weapon of choice. The difficulty is that in no war can there ever be exact parity between the combatants. One side will always be, or appear to be weaker than the other. All strategies are to a greater degree about maximizing one's strengths and minimizing weaknesses, and to this extent just because one side resorts to terror methods does not denote anything about the relative weakness of a combatant, as the many instances of state-directed terrorism testify. Likewise, the methods that we associate with terrorism, such as ambushes, sabotage, bomb attacks and assassinations have all been established as adjuncts of what we call regular/ conventional warfare between states.[7]

To reiterate, from the viewpoint of strategic theory, terrorism is simply a set of tactics, a form of fighting, that can intrinsically be employed by any belligerent actor, be it state on non-state, in any type of conflict. In contrast to much of the literature on the subject, terrorism does not inherently connote a weapon of the weak or the presence of non-state actors. The preceding discussion might suggest that while strategic theorists are able to resolve many of the dilemmas associated with defining and understanding terrorism, everyone else is mired in confusion. Yet the reality is that historically strategists, with very few exceptions, have been extremely poor in their appreciation of the relationship between terrorism and strategic theory; something which this book hopes to address. This chapter will therefore regard how strategic analysis has in the past often contributed to the unresolved issues of categorization and academic uncertainty surrounding, not simply terrorism, but the whole ambit of non-state insurgent-based activity. The chapter endeavours to show why the relationship between terrorism and strategic theory has proved so problematic in the past, and why it presents us with an interesting set of intellectual puzzles that demand redress through a systematic theoretical study of terrorism from a strategic perspective. We maintain that the crucial reason why strategists have had little to contribute is precisely because they abandoned the utilization of Clausewitzian logic and methodology that otherwise informed most of their analysis. In effect, terrorism and most other insurgent activity came to be regarded as a separate, often mysteriously complex, form of war that existed beyond the realm of strategic activity. The notion of terrorism came to be subsumed within broad, though inaccurate, categories such as low-intensity conflict, political violence, guerrilla warfare and revolutionary war. A final aim of this chapter will be to articulate the case for the inclusion of terrorism within traditional understandings of war and strategy.

On confusion I

Terrorism, low-intensity conflict and political violence

Historically, the academic study of strategy evolved out of the debates surrounding the development of atomic, and later nuclear, weapons in the era after World War II.[8] The nuclear standoff between the United States and Soviet Union ensured that the intellectual efforts of strategists were devoted to analysing the significance of the defence postures of these two superpower states. All other strategic phenomena below the threat of superpower confrontation, involving either nuclear or non-nuclear forces, were very much subordinated to this all-pervasive concern. To the extent that strategic analysts theorized about issues such as terrorism and insurgent activity, they often chose to group terrorism within the broader categories of non-state violence.[9] Perhaps the two most popular terms for capturing terrorist-related activity have been 'low-intensity conflict' and 'political violence'. However, these terms were, and continue to be, an unstable basis for describing terrorist violence and, consequently, possess only limited explanatory value.

Low-intensity conflict was regarded initially as potentially useful in categorizing various forms of war phenomena that existed below the threshold of state-based warfare. In the 1980s, the United States Chiefs of Staff defined low-intensity conflict as:

> Political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low-intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed forces.[10]

Writers on military affairs, including a few contemporary critical strategic analysts like Harry Summers, contended that this was not a definition, but merely 'a description masquerading as an explanation'[11] which according to Mitchell M. Zais, could encompass almost any level of military campaigning: 'Even the massive commitment of US forces in the Vietnamese war could be characterized as low intensity conflict.'[12] The analytical weakness in the term low-intensity conflict is simply that the classification of 'low intensity' is highly subjective and observer oriented. Many combatants caught up in most conflicts are unlikely to characterize their experiences as low intensity. Nor does the term lend itself to straight forward quantitative assessments. If one tries to calculate the scale of intensity on the basis of the use and attrition of resources this is still likely to involve arbitrary and relative judgment. As the quotes from Summers and Zais illustrate, while the US involvement in the war in Vietnam might be regarded as a case of low-intensity conflict, and considered on one set of calculations to constitute a limited and lower-intensity commitment

by the Americans themselves, (in comparison to say the country's involvement in World War II) for the opposing side and from the point of view of much of Vietnamese populace the war was likely to have been regarded as an all-encompassing deluge of great intensity.[13]

While low-intensity conflict reveals itself as a nebulous and less-than-convincing analytical tool to categorize and expound upon activities like terrorism, the expression political violence is similarly undermined by its aspirations to be inclusive. The notion of 'political violence' has been in regular usage in academic debate to characterize anything from civil disorder to large-scale insurgencies. The term, however, is very much a truism, at least from the standpoint of strategic theory given that all war arises from political circumstances: to use the standard Clausewitzian refrain, war is a continuation of politics by other means. 'Policy', as Clausewitz observed, 'will permeate all military operations and in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence upon them.'[14] In considering the forms of organized armed activity, therefore, all violence is political in that it will be carried out with some goal or rationale in mind.[15] As a result, the phrase 'political violence' is essentially redundant in that it provides no clarity into the use of armed force of any kind, low intensity, terroristic or otherwise.

Even more seriously, the notion of political violence merely delivers the analyst back into the web of disputed definitions and category mistakes; the traditional vice of terrorist studies. Attempts to differentiate between politically inspired and, say, criminal activity can, in conditions of insurgency, be highly contentious. The assumption, implicit or explicit, in this phrase is that politics relates only to the ordering of government and national affairs, and that any violent activity that falls outside that category cannot be regarded as politically instrumental, but instead should be viewed as criminal or pathological. Again, perhaps we can discern how subjective and contingent notions of political violence can therefore be. Who defines what does or does not constitute political violence may itself be a deeply political act. Seeing politics only in terms of governance contains the possibility of interpreting all violent actions by non-state entities as 'criminal' in nature. Indeed, it is standard for many states that confront insurgent challenges to describe their opponents as 'criminal' (and of course to conflate criminal with being a terrorist) as a method for delegitimizing their adversaries. This may be a perfectly rational and logical thing for states to do against their enemies, but the acceptance of such political labelling in scholarly discourse is likely to hinder any attempt to examine objectively what individual political actors are seeking to achieve through violence. The British government, for example, embarked upon a policy of 'criminalization' of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the mid-1970s with the intention of highlighting the illegitimacy of its campaign.[16] From a moral standpoint the activities of the IRA, and similar organizations that have used violence in ostensibly democratic societies, may rightly be regarded as illegitimate, but from an analytical point of view their violence is not any less political for it. The aim of organized armed force is, to use Clausewitz's phrase, 'an act of

force to compel the enemy to do our will'.[17] Politics is thus the act of seeking to fulfil one's will through violence or other means. In that respect violence is designed to be rationally instrumental and can therefore be construed as political in nature.

Apart from a propensity to categorical confusion in such terms, there is also another serious analytical shortcoming that arises from grouping terrorism within vague classifications of non-state warfare. Subsuming insurgent operations, including terrorism, under umbrella terms like low-intensity conflict, guerrilla war or political violence leads to the attempt to connect a diverse range of conflicts and political actors as if they were comparable primarily on the basis of the tactical similarity of the methods used by one or more of the combatants. If one were to proclaim that the political origins of World War II, the Arab–Israel Six Day War in 1967 and the India–Pakistan War of 1971 could be usefully compared because the belligerents used tanks and machine guns it would be soon pointed out that such a basis for comparison would be fundamentally flawed, incapable of providing useful insights into each conflict, apart possibly from the relative performance of individual weapons systems. Yet uniting often radically different types of wars merely because they have been regarded as 'terrorist' conflicts has been a historic failing of terrorist studies.[18] Rather than treat the practitioners of organized armed force, and the conflicts of which they are a part, as uniquely individual objects of study, they are instead drawn together as if they were in some way analogous merely on the basis of their *modus operandi*.[19]

In this manner, specific contexts become decontextualized, which not only has damaging effects on sophisticated understandings of individual conflicts, their causes, origins and impact, but can have equally harmful implications for policy making. Focusing on tactical modality as the principal defining element of 'terrorist conflicts' can lead both politicians and military practitioners to assume that they are facing an existential terrorist threat, which, as we have argued, is a misleading way to articulate and analyse terrorism as a phenomenon. Critics might allege that just such policy failings have been inherent in ideas surrounding concepts like current understandings of the 'war on terror' and argue that such notions were directly or indirectly responsible for ill-conceived foreign policy adventures, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq by Western armed forces and its aftermath.

While this contention may still be debatable, it is certainly true that past precedents have suggested that the dangers of decontextualizing insurgent-based conflicts can lead to an obsessive concern for the development of counter-measures against vague and ethereal threats informed primarily by the tactics employed by one side. The resulting potential for perceptions of the 'threat' and the measures to combat it can develop into a rigid and incoherent doctrine. This can be seen clearly in the rise of 'counter-insurgency' theory in the United States during the 1960s. The belief that the Western world was facing a global challenge from communism led policy-makers to equate nearly all forms of anti-Western insurgency with terrorism or guerrilla warfare. Consequently, it

was the tactics, rather than the motive of the combatants themselves that was described as the problem. Famously, President John F. Kennedy asked his subordinates, 'What are we doing about guerrilla warfare?'[20] Literally, of course, one cannot do anything about guerrilla warfare. Like terrorism, guerrilla warfare is a theoretical set of tactics that can be employed by any combatant if they so chose. What Kennedy meant was how should communist-sponsored insurgencies, most notably those in Southeast Asia, be combated? The distorting effect of such misleading language, however, was to create the belief that the 'guerrilla warfare' problem could be dealt with by universalizing ideas of 'counter-guerrilla' or counter-insurgency. In the words of Summers, 'Counterinsurgency became not so much the [US] Army's doctrine as the Army's dogma, and stultified military strategic thinking for the next decade.'[21]

On confusion II

The impact of the counter-insurgency era

Indeed, if we are to trace the vexed relationship between terrorism and strategic theory, and understand how terrorism came to be seen as separate from strategy, compartmentalized within broad, indistinct ideas of low-intensity conflict, guerrilla warfare and political violence we need to begin with the rise and precipitate the fall of counter-insurgency doctrine in the 1960s. In the aftermath of World War II, and coinciding with the era of the decolonization of the European empires, an entirely new facet of warfare was believed to be emerging, that of 'revolutionary war', sometimes also referred to 'wars of national liberation'. Revolutionary war encompassed the idea that guerrilla and terrorist tactics could be fused with an overt propaganda campaign and employed by sub-state actors to win over the masses through political agitation, while simultaneously eating away at the moral and physical authority of the state through violence, leading to the eventual overthrow of the government.

The catalyst that gave rise to the idea of revolutionary war lay in the victory of the communist forces in China in 1949 led by Mao Tse-tung. Mao combined the Leninist principles of the organization and mobilization of the masses with the tactics of guerrilla warfare – small unit hit and run operations, incorporating them into a theory of protracted people's war.[22] The strategy emphasized close coordination of political activities and yielding space for time, exploiting the rural and underdeveloped hinterland to establish base areas where parallel communist administrations would capture the allegiance of the people. Base areas would enable the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to organize the masses to expand the military campaign.

The military component of the theory elaborated three stages of revolutionary warfare; the defensive guerrilla-war phase, the consolidation phase and the final open mobile war phase, where, having neutralized the superior resources of the Chinese nationalist government, the communists would mount a direct bid for power through a conventional military confrontation.[23] Mao's often

rigorous analysis of the application of Marxist–Leninist doctrines towards specific conditions pertaining in China, dominated as it was by a rural peasantry, rather than an urban proletariat, enabled the development of a reasoned advocacy of the use of a guerrilla campaign, integrated with a sustained effort at political agitation that could potentially overcome the superior forces of an adversary.[24]

Mao's doctrine stressed the importance of the military instrument, though the communist People's Liberation Army was strictly subordinated to the dictates of the CCP and emphasized the importance of 'correct' behaviour by his troops as a means of gaining the confidence and loyalty of the masses.[25] He deplored any inclinations towards using the military as the sole vehicle in the revolutionary process and attacked what he called 'guerrillaism' (acts of violence disconnected from the political campaign). However, he reserved a specific role for the use of terror within his people's-war construct. He was careful to stress that it was to be employed only in an auxiliary role, complementary to the broader strategy. In particular, he saw it could be used to coerce 'unresponsive' regions (normally through the assassination of landlords). Although allotted a limited role within the wider strategy, the use of terrorism did become an actual element in the revolutionary process.

Though Mao opposed the slavish application of the exact military formula he employed in China, he nevertheless maintained that his fundamental idea of protracted people's war had a general applicability for those seeking social revolution and national liberation.[26] The subsequent outbreak of mainly rural insurgencies in places such as Malaya, French Indochina, Latin America, that ostensibly attempted – if only at first – to follow the Maoist road to power, prompted thinkers in the United States and Europe to consider that they were facing a new and prolific form of war, stoked up by a global communist conspiracy, aimed at subverting pro-Western regimes.[27]

The term 'revolutionary war', then, was an analytical and political response to the fear of communist insurgency, in which the use of terror was seen as intrinsic, during the 1950s and 1960s. This fear generated an opposing body of military thought that came to be known generically as counter-insurgency (though was sometimes called counter-terrorism or counter-revolutionary war). A severe tension existed, however, between counter-insurgency theory as a political understanding of combating insurgent challenges and counter-insurgency doctrine as operationalized by the armed forces. Counter-insurgency military doctrines were often logical and consistent within their own terms of reference (to eliminate 'guerrillas' and 'terrorists') and invariably met with considerable tactical success on the ground. But, two bitter insurgent confrontations, the first in Algeria and then Vietnam, brought this tension to the fore, devastating the reputation of much counter-insurgency thinking, the effect of which was to initiate and reinforce the process of isolation of analytical appreciations of insurgency and terrorism from strategic theory.

During the Cold War a number of counter-insurgency methods were developed. The British evolved an *ad hoc* counter-insurgent/terrorist practice

based on their tradition of colonial policing.[28] This tradition emphasized civil and military coordination, anti-guerrilla/terrorist interdiction through intelligence operations and, most importantly, a willingness to negotiate limited political compromises with adversary groups from a position of strength or stalemate. It was an approach that met with some success in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and later in Northern Ireland.[29] However, it was in French and American military thinking that counter-insurgency strategizing reached its most formidable expression.

Following its defeat in Indochina by the Vietminh in 1954, the French military establishment set about constructing a counter-revolutionary war doctrine to explicitly oppose protracted communist insurgencies based on the Maoist model of guerrilla campaigning. French doctrines adopted advanced anti-guerrilla military techniques that in operational terms were to prove devastatingly successful in destroying FLN forces. Even so, French strategy was permeated by a strong element of ends-justifying-the means, the principal effect of which was to mould an ideological view within elements of the French armed forces that any methods were permissible and that the French political establishment should demonstrate unswerving support of the armed forces. In framing their doctrines, French military officers had studied extensively the writings of communist theorists, especially those of Mao and of their Indochinese nemesis in the Vietminh, concluding, in an inversion of Maoist principles, that the armed forces along with rest of French society as a whole had to be as ideologically committed to defend the West against communist subversion in exactly the same way as they perceived their opponents in pursuit of their goals.[30] While reaping tactical success, the effect of such a construct in the Algerian war was a human and political catastrophe. Torture and atrocity against FLN suspects became routine, if not institutionalized within sections of the armed forces, most notably after the FLN initiated a campaign of urban terrorism in 1957, in the so-called Battle of Algiers. Moreover, so radicalized did elements of the French military become, when the politicians in Paris were seen as weakening in their resolve to prosecute the war, French forces in Algeria mutinied in May 1958. This was followed later by violent internal subversion by renegade sections of the armed forces, and eventually national humiliation when the French decided to quit Algeria in 1962.[31]

French strategy during the Algerian war caused controversy within France itself and incurred much international opprobrium, and certainly damaged the reputation of counter-terrorist thinking generally. Despite the consternation surrounding French methods, contemporary American thinking toward counter-insurgency/counter-terrorist operations was influenced by many aspects of French thinking (far more so than British traditions), most notably its emphasis on search and destroy operations against the enemy.[32] American thinking also drew on other sources of established strategic thinking that encompassed containment doctrine and ideas of limited war derived from nuclear deterrence theories, which posited that the United States should be prepared to show resolve – and thereby uphold general deterrence between both superpowers – by confronting communist-inspired challenges below the

nuclear threshold,[33] as well as encompassing nation-building enterprises to stabilize pro-American regimes both economically and politically.[34] While, like the French in Algeria, American methods achieved some success on the ground, it was, of course, the experience of Vietnam that undermined the reputation of counter-insurgency strategy after it became evident that the doctrine itself, and especially the political thinking that underpinned it, could comprehend neither the resilience of an enemy capable of absorbing massive sacrifices, the weakness of the South Vietnamese regime the US was trying to bolster, nor the consequences for the American domestic polity arising from the failure to win quickly.

The weaknesses inherent in counter-revolutionary-war thinking was one that was to repeat itself in later understandings of terrorist studies in that individual wars were decontextualized from their historical, geographical and politically contingent settings and regarded as a uniform threat to be combated through an equally universalized set of strategic and operational principles. The bipolar nature of the Cold War and the fear of communism led to a belief that almost any outbreak of localized violence was communist inspired and an example of revolutionary war to be countered, despite the fact that in Algeria, and even South Vietnam, this was not intrinsically the case. Nationalistic factors and a desire for independence, or in Vietnam's case an aspiration for national unity, were sometimes far more significant explanations for the growth of anti-authority resistance movements. In Vietnam, the US strategy, according to Colin Gray, bore the hallmarks of 'counter-insurgency faddism' that was naïvely captivated by the 'cult of the guerrilla' and the 'aura of Special Forces'.[35] The resulting preoccupation with military technique came at the expense of an acute appreciation of the social and political conditions stoking the violence, causing, in particular, the weakness and corruption of the South Vietnamese state to be overlooked and the populist appeal of elements of the Vietnamese communist message to be misunderstood.

Part of the complexity of American involvement in the whole Vietnam entanglement was precisely the slack use of terminology that has been employed in the past to cover non-state insurgent challenges. Like other terms we have already discussed, low-intensity conflict and political violence, the notion of revolutionary war was an equally ambiguous label. Such terms do not describe any strategic activity. They are simply labels of arbitrary categorization. In the case of the term 'revolutionary war' this was simply a politically contrived category (rather than a strategically accurate one) to append to certain kinds of conflict that were perceived to be injurious to Western interests. Thus, they contained within them the dangerous capacity to misapprehend the specific conditions that caused internal instability in places like South Vietnam.

For those sceptical that accurate description, categorization and definition matter in strategy, the counter-insurgency era of the 1960s provides a salutary lesson that trying to describe a rigorous theory of terrorism and its relationship to strategy (and by implication other forms of insurgency) is a policy imperative, not merely a question of academic semantics. The failure to gain an accurate appreciation of particular kinds of strategic practice can lead to the development

of incoherent counter-measures to combat an ambiguous and equally incoherent idea of insurgency, like revolutionary war or indeed terrorism itself.

The *dénouement* in Vietnam illustrated the intellectual disjunction at the heart of strategic theorizing about insurgent conflicts. Instead of analysing the failures of categorization and labelling inherent in such indistinct ideas like revolutionary war, guerrilla war, terrorism, counter-revolutionary war and so on, strategic analysts merely distanced themselves further from the study of insurgent warfare. Critics argued that strategists themselves, hidebound by esoteric ideas of theories of nuclear deterrence, escalation dominance and flexible response, were partly responsible for the misguided application of military power in Vietnam.[36] A sense of disciplinary guilt may therefore have asserted itself over contemporary strategists for influencing official policy, with such disastrous results. Certainly, one of the major strategic commentators of the period, Herman Kahn, was moved to acknowledge that during the Vietnam era strategists had little to say about how to fight such wars and 'what they did say was often misleading and irrelevant.'[37]

In analytical terms, as Richard Betts observed, 'Vietnam poisoned the academic well,' causing strategic studies to retreat further into a world that was largely 'ahistorical and technical'.[38] The scholarly discipline further entrenched itself in narrow, managerial issues of arms control, deterrence theory and other bureaucratically enclosed mattes of national defence policy. After Vietnam, according to one critic, most strategic thinking centred on 'Elaborate debates between rival schools of nuclear deterrence and hair-splitting, abstruse exchanges between analysts over the relative merits of competing nuclear weapons systems to maintain the balance of terror'.[39] In the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Indochina, the feeling within the scholarly realm was that dealing with insurgent-based conflicts was an impenetrable fog through which little good came.[40] It meant having to comprehend the unbearably complex social, cultural, economic and political conditions that informed regional conflicts and drove political actors to engage in anti-authority resistance.

In such ways strategic analysis became further removed from any inclination to study terrorism and insurgency in any consistent manner, which entrenched and further added to the categorical and definitional confusion. There is no better illustration of the distorting effects of the isolation of insurgency/terrorism than the growth of the term 'unconventional warfare' to describe anti-state violence. Conventional war is taken to mean classical warfare between states. Yet statistical assessments of warfare indicate that only 18–20 per cent of wars since 1945 can be accurately classified as inter-state wars. The study of warfare conducted by K.J. Holsti suggested that over 75 per cent of the 164 cases of warfare identified since the end of World War II involved armed conflict within states.[41] Given the relative lack of inter-state war and the proliferation of violent sub-state actors it becomes evident that the incidence of insurgency and civil wars, contexts in other words that the use of terrorism is more likely to be present, constitutes the dominant pattern of warfare over the previous 60 years. This, it can be contended, represents the norm.

On confusion III

The unconventional convention

The fact that unconventional warfare represented the convention in war demonstrates the linguistic distortion wrought by such terminology. In practical terms, though, the segregation of insurgent-related activities into broad, indistinct categories enabled strategic analysts to explain away their neglect of the area. In describing the principal object of their concern as 'conventional war', strategists could rationalize the orientation of the discipline towards the concentration on the prospects for inter-state conflict.[42] In particular, by focusing on nuclear and defence policy issues they could convince themselves that they were dealing with vital concerns of world survival. 'This seemed to be', according to one strategic commentator, 'where the action was, literally and academically'.[43] Thus, such wars were described as 'conventional', not because they were the convention, but because they were seen as 'more important' from the standpoint of contemporaneous Western strategic analysis that had been conditioned by the trauma of the Vietnam era to steer clear of the study of insurgency-based warfare. As Betts notes, strategists were not necessarily interested in 'war *per se* than in cataclysmic war among great powers, wars that can visit not just benighted people far away.'[44]

In this way, strategic studies during the remainder of the Cold War was very much content to view itself as supporting counsellor to an established defence policy agenda. Unlike theorists of insurgency and the counter-insurgency, strategic analysts could ponder the issues of deterrence theories and the probabilities of general war between the United States and the Soviet Union, safe in the knowledge that there was little prospect that their theories would be tested in practice. At the same time, by holding forth on nuclear policy, arms control and East–West diplomacy, analysts could maintain that these issues were more significant than actual, but lesser – unconventional – wars going on the rest of the world. Arguably, within the academic realm, this largely passive role adopted by strategists in the Cold War inhibited them from extending their horizons to examine issues related to terrorism and insurgency. As Fred Halliday declared, 'in terms of shaping the post-war world, guerrilla warfare, in its revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forms, was at least as influential as nuclear weapons: yet hardly figured in the orthodox curriculum of strategic studies.'[45]

Altogether, it seemed easier for strategists to analyse the hypotheticals of nuclear conflict and national defence policy which often possessed a more quantifiable and empirical base (making it relatively straightforward to count warheads, throw-weights, tanks and troop levels) than it was to deal with the more difficult issues concerning the struggles for 'hearts and minds' in far-flung conflicts.[46] As Betts pointed out, the complexity of such wars, evidently lay in the 'the relative salience of concerns about political values, as opposed to material power, is usually greater than in international wars'.[47] Intellectually, then, issues revolving around revolutions, rebellion and civil wars were cast off

from mainstream strategic analysis. Instead of applying strategic theory to analyse the distorted levels of categorization and to reveal issues and problems inherent in the ends and means of these kinds of conflicts, theorists simply ignored them. Multifariously different conflicts and their individual strategic practices were further thrust into inappropriate categories, such as guerrilla warfare and low-intensity conflict, or alternatively, simply dismissed as wars in the 'Third World'.[48]

In effect, the minimal interest evinced by strategists in the areas of insurgency during the 1950s and 1960s was killed off almost in its entirety by the impact of the Vietnam era. This was somewhat ironic because this was the period from the late 1960s onwards in which political developments, stemming not least from the era of anti-Vietnam war protests, were to give rise to what is now commonly understood to be the academic discipline of terrorist studies.[49] Theoretically, these developments were signposted by thinking dating from the Cuban revolution. The victory of Fidel Castro against the seemingly invincible power of the established government in 1959 gave rise to the belief that political power could be won without either the presence of a political party to mobilize the masses, or the extensive use of force. The idea came to be known as *focoquismo* or *foco*, which was the term used to encompass the idea that armed actions could crystallize popular discontent against an unpopular regime and rouse the masses to join the rebellion.[50] Although partly inspired by Maoist ideas of rural rebellion, the *foco* idea held, contrary to the stipulations of both Maoist and Marxist–Leninist thinking, that armed acts could form the 'focus' of the revolution, functioning as a substitute for the long-term political organization.

It was the *foco* strategic construct that a number of communist theorists believed accounted for the success of the Cuban revolution and influenced radicals across Latin America to attempt uprisings in the countryside in the early- and mid-1960s. These rural rebellions were easily quelled by the established regimes on the continent.[51] This, however, did not deter other revolutionary theorists, most notably the Brazilian, Carlos Marighela from advocating that the Cuban model should lay more emphasis on exploiting the military potential of the cities to attack governmental authority, thus giving rise to the concept of urban guerrilla, from which much of the popular imagery of 'terrorism' emerged.[52] Other Latin American revolutionary groups, most notably the *Tupamaros* in Uruguay, subsequently employed the methods of urban guerrilla violence with some measure of success. Thus, combined with developments in the theory and practice of insurgent violence in Latin America, along with evolving theories of 'direct action' arising out of the anti-Vietnam war protest movements in North American and Western Europe, coupled with the actual example of the US superpower itself being humbled by a collection of Vietcong peasants, motivated a generation of radicals, both of an ideological and nationalist/separatist provenance, to challenge state power through mainly urban guerrilla and terrorist methods. By the early 1970s such challenges spanned the globe, including Palestinian resistance against Israel in the

Middle East, separatist campaigns in Northern Ireland and Spain, along with a plethora of left-revolutionary (and sometimes fascist right) violence from West Germany and Italy in Europe, to the United States and Japan. So alienated from issues of insurgency had strategic studies become that analysts scarcely moved a muscle away from their principal concerns of nuclear deterrence and 'conventional' defence planning. Policy and analytical responses to the rise of urban-based insurgent violence were considered to reside in the areas of policing and public order rather than having any wider strategic interest. Any residual scholarly interest in such matters was therefore cast off into the new discipline of terrorist studies, which was treated as a narrow sect, mainly a British, West German and Israeli pastime, possessing next to no relationship to the wider field of strategic studies.[53]

If the study of terrorism had become isolated from the mainstream academic strategic thinking through the intellectual reaction to the Vietnam era, a similar process could be observed in Western military establishments, most obviously those of the United States, which, obviously, further alienated the notion of terrorism from any systematic strategic inquiry. Given that much academic theorizing in itself reflected official military orthodoxy, the effect was to reinforce scholarly neglect. From the early 1970s onwards Western military thought reversed whatever enthusiasm it once had in matters of revolutionary war and counter-insurgency doctrines. With some relief armed forces could turn their attention back towards what they did best, which was to plan for wars that could be clearly won (or lost). Thus, they readily reordered their attention back towards 'normal wars' that could be more easily understood within conventional military operations and practice, such as the contingency planning for warfare on the Central European front.[54] Other more-limited military contingencies could be regarded as distractions and therefore grouped under the less-important category of 'unconventional war'. As Douglas Porch observed:

> . . . after the experience of two World wars, together with a Cold War stalemate in Europe, most Western armies viewed small wars as missions to be avoided. Most proved unwilling to alter force structures[s] designed for conventional conflict in Europe to face the challenges of unconventional warfare in distant lands. None of these factors made indigenous resistance unbeatable. It simply meant that small wars remained very much a minority interest in military establishments.[55]

In effect, the relative neglect of insurgent-based violence within both the academic and military realms, meant that analysts and armed-force practitioners found it difficult to comprehend three crucial points integral to many asymmetrical challenges, namely, that

1   they do not necessarily involve state actors;
2   they do not necessarily threaten national survival;
3   they do not necessarily culminate in big battles.

This thinking was very much a legacy inherited from the experience of World War II, and the titanic struggle for national survival involving, above all, the material application of resources and military power. This military-intellectual legacy had transferred easily into the Cold War era dominated by the threat of nuclear confrontation between two competing ideological blocs. The post-Vietnam disillusion merely reinforced this commitment to a state-orientated, means-addicted strategic mentality that was ill at ease in coming to terms with anything that did not encompass the massive clash of organized armed forces.

In tracing the evolving reactions to insurgent warfare within both strategic thinking and military circles it becomes easier to see how the study of terrorism became intellectually compartmentalized, thereby denuding any concerted attempt to theorize upon it. One of the most graphic manifestations of strategic neglect during this era was that Clausewitzian ideas, which expressed the timeless dynamics of war and in particular the relationships between politics and war, were rejected during the Cold War period. In the early 1970s, for example, Senator William Fulbright declared: 'There is no longer any validity in the Clausewitzian doctrine of "carrying out policy by other means". Nuclear weapons have rendered it totally obsolete.'[56]

The rejection of Clausewitzian thinking as dangerously anachronistic was characteristic of the Cold War years,[57] but it was to have profound effects for the post-9/11 era when issues relating to terrorism displaced many former plans and assumptions about future threats. For if one's mind is set against understanding the correlations between politics and war in favour of the essentially dry, apolitical and technical obsessions of 'conventional' defence planning, then one is likely to be poorly placed to appreciate the additional complexity of the so-called terrorist challenges. Instead of trying to dissect the dynamics of terrorist strategies, such unconventional methods came to be regarded as literally incomprehensible, existing beyond the strategic paradigm. Here, the violence of such protagonists is seen not as an instrument of policy but as the product of irrational or primordial urges that are entirely resistant to any considered analysis.

In the policy-making realm the shortcomings of this outlook began to be revealed in the years shortly after the end of the Cold War, when it became evident that much established strategic and military thought was unable to comprehend how to deal with contingencies below the 'conventional' threshold. Theorists and planners were constrained within their self-imposed intellectual boundaries, and thus had great difficulty contemplating solutions other than strategies for the total destruction and overthrow of the opposing armed forces.[58] As Paul Beaver put it, military planners had inordinate difficulty contending with asymmetrical threats because established 'staff college and command school solutions just [did] not work.'[59] Initially, these limitations were exposed when ethnic warfare broke out in the early 1990s in the Balkans and Transcaucasia in the early 1990s and a few years later in Rwanda. Effective peace-enforcement operations were hindered because other than major battle plans many armed forces of developed states had little notion of how to handle complex emergencies.[60] This lack of understanding and planning was

fundamentally an outgrowth of the wider military-intellectual edifice that conceived such conflicts as 'ancient in origin' and examples of 'primitive war'.[61] These conflicts, it was held, were characterized by methods of terror, guerrilla tactics and paramilitary organizations, and 'fed by passions and rancours that do not yield to rational measures of persuasion or control: they are apolitical to a degree for which Clausewitz made little allowance.'[62]

The return to Clausewitz

Terrorism and the Clausewitzian paradigm of war

Yet in actual fact, Clausewitzian thought yields easily to all ideas of warfare, be they so-called conventional or unconventional conflicts, low-intensity war, guerrilla war, revolutionary war and any other category of war. So it is with the notion of terrorism. As we have described, an appreciation of terrorism and its strategic dimension became detached from the mainstream study of war and strategy through the over-determining impact of conventional thinking derived from World War II and the Cold War, but substantially reinforced by the baleful experience of the counter-insurgency era and Vietnam. These influences combined to undermine the systematic study of terrorism as a strategic phenomenon, thus contributing to the numerous errors of classification outlined in this study so far. However, there is nothing innate in strategic methodology or Clausewitzian thought that impedes any such understandings of actors who employ terrorism or any other insurgent design. It is merely an intellectual limitation that strategic and military analysts have imposed upon themselves. In the past, as Honig states, these analysts found such conflicts in which insurgent tactics were employed extremely worrying because of 'the seemingly irrational motivations' of those conflicts and their participants 'which originate in the murky deepest depths of history'.[63] The essential unwillingness among strategists to consider these 'complex wars' legitimated the rhetoric of evasion by which analysts could avoid studying such conflicts through the construction of dismissive labels (unconventional war, irregular war, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, etc.). At the same time, the historic neglect of terrorism within strategic theorization merely reinforced the failings of terrorism studies, most notably in allowing numerous definitional, analytical, categorical and linguistic errors to go unchallenged. This is especially notable in the post-9/11 era when the issues of terrorism have taken centre stage, yet the mainstream strategic analysis has had surprisingly little to contribute.[64]

If we revert to classic Clausewitzian principles to initiate an examination of the relationship between terrorism and strategy, we can clearly discern their relevance. While some commentators have dismissed the ability of Clausewitz's thinking to provide insight because such conflicts are supposedly 'apolitical',[65] this both misunderstands his thinking and merely entrenches the questionable belief that terrorism is something that cannot be understood as a rational, politically purposive strategic enterprise. In the first instance, Clausewitz well

understood that war, no matter its manifestation, arose from the same social and political sources as all warfare.[66] Within the Clausewitzian paradigm war is an extension of policy, where the act of violence is intended to fulfil one's will. Thus, the tactics one uses, be they the methods of 'conventional war' or terrorism are to be judged only to the extent that they help or hinder the attainment of objectives. The increased notoriety of terrorism in the current era, and its association of its use with non-state actors does not confound Clausewitzian understandings of war. As Honig suggests, Clausewitzian notions are 'easily adaptable to forms of warring social organizations that do not form states… any community has its leaders, fighters and common people.'[67] What confuses many analysts when considering such wars involving terrorist methods and sub-state actors, causing them to see such conflicts as altogether different from established understandings of strategy, is that while the objective is the same in all wars (to achieve one's ends), the strategic calculus in such clashes of violence involving insurgency and terrorism are likely to be more complex than merely the head-on clash of combatants in a face-to-face battle.

The interactions in wars that take place between manifestly unequal combatants are likely to produce greater strategic complexity. War is a reactive environment. It is, as Clausewitz stated, 'a contest between independent wills'.[68] The will of each combatant responds reciprocally to the actions of its opponents. This establishes one of Clausewitz's most crucial observations that 'wars should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy.' Wars will always therefore 'vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which gave rise to them.'[69] The course of war will, thereby, be affected in part by the relative power of each combatant, which will, in turn, influence the tactics they select to prosecute their struggle. Thus, a combatant may decide to avoid or delay open battle, engage in evasion, sabotage, hit and run operations or engage in a campaign of terrorism. These tactics are determined purely in order to maximize its advantage *vis-à-vis* an opponent at any given point in time, and will consequently affect the direction and duration of a war.

As Clausewitz noted, war always 'moves on its own goal with varying speed'.[70] War is never an isolated act but consists of a series of engagements, which may, therefore, make particular conflicts protracted.[71] Certain kinds of combatant, most obviously those that are disproportionately and materially inferior to their opponent, may wish to manipulate the military instrument in order not to destroy the enemy's armed forces but to influence the enemy behaviour to facilitate the attainment of political goals. The inferior side may not physically be able to achieve tangible military objectives, such as occupying territory or annihilating large segments of the enemy's armed forces and society. Instead, as Clausewitz explained 'another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purposes and symbolize it in peace negotiations.'[72] What Clausewitz suggests is that war is not always about the straightforward application of material might on the battlefield, but is often a more calculating, psychological environment (a 'battle of wills').

Here, we can discern the relevance of his thinking for any strategic appreciation of terrorism. For if a belligerent feels that, for example, given its inferiority relative to that of its opponent, a campaign of terrorism to demoralize the enemy is a more-feasible course of action. Through such a campaign the belligerent will hope to induce enemy compliance under the threat of coercion rather than physical destruction. Terrorism as a strategy, therefore, is the supreme battle of wills.

* * * * *

This chapter has sought to elucidate the relationship between strategic theory and terrorism. We argued that the manner in which mainstream strategic studies evolved resulted in a curiously weak, even non-existent relationship between the two. Traditional strategic thought evolved from the influence of conventional thinking about war fighting stemming from World War II and the nuclear standoff between the Cold War superpowers that followed. Matters involving strategies that existed below the threshold of superpower confrontation were seen as of lesser priority and largely disregarded as an object of inquiry. The putative attempts to initiate an understanding of insurgent-based conflicts and strategies during the 'counter-insurgency era' was undermined by the defeat and humiliation of the United States in Vietnam. Thus terrorism became divorced from mainstream work in strategic theory.

In fact, so estranged did terrorism become that it was considered as having next to no strategic resonance at all. To the extent that any attention was given to terrorism and insurgent-based violence generally, such matters were invariably subsumed under vague, problematic categorizations such as guerrilla warfare, revolutionary war and low-intensity war in order primarily, we would contend, as a means to rationalize the avoidance of conflicts that in their origins and strategies were far more complex, but which did not yield easily to the established concerns of strategic thinking, shaped as they were by simple calculations of military power and state-based defence policies. The reluctance to evaluate terrorism as a strategic practice has meant that matters relating to terrorism were cast off into an autonomous disciplinary activity (terrorism studies) that saw, and indeed, had an interest in promoting the idea of terrorism as an independent and universalized phenomenon. The neglect of terrorism as a valid strategic practice has, thereby, contributed to the numerous conceptual, linguistic and analytical problems surrounding this area.

By contrast, we maintain that terrorism is, above all, a supremely strategic activity that possesses its own distinctive dynamics, as the following chapters will elucidate. Here, we should emphasize that while this chapter has explained the evolution of strategic thinking in relation to terrorism with reference to insurgent-based violence generally, of which terrorism is often regarded being one form, it would be wrong to believe that they are all one and the same thing. Guerrilla strategies and the so-called revolutionary warfare strategies, as practised by the late twentieth-century luminaries like Mao Tse-tung in China and the *foco* theorists arising out of the Cuban revolution, aimed essentially at

equalizing the power differential between the insurgents and their materially stronger opponents, eroding state power through campaigns of small-scale 'hit and run attacks' over a long period of time to a point where the revolutionaries themselves possessed conventional armies of similar size and quality that would compete directly for power in face-to-face battles.[73]

Strategic terrorism does not necessarily seek to eliminate the inequality of power, but instead, as we shall show, attempts to elicit a reaction in a target group that will facilitate the achievement of political goals. Terrorism therefore contains unique characteristics that can be explicitly drawn out and illustrated with reference to strategic theory. For these reasons, as we suggested above, terrorism in fact can only be understood properly within the Clausewitzian paradigm of war that conceives the use of organized armed force primarily to further political goals. This has been primary purpose of this chapter, to establish that terrorism does have the potential to yield itself to rigorous strategic analysis. It is not a separate category of violence. It is a strategy. It exists as a set of means within warfare and therefore deserves to be accorded the same recognition as a strategic activity as any other within the study of war. This fundamental point is one that Clausewitz acknowledged. One should not mistake the nature of war, he stated, by 'trying to turn it into something that is alien to its nature' (such as subsuming terrorism within inaccurate categorizations like low-intensity war, political violence, revolutionary war and so on). 'That,' he continued, is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.'[74]

3   The strategy of terrorism

> War appears to be, or threatens to be, not so much a contest of strength as one of endurance, nerve, obstinacy, and pain. It appears to be, and threatens to be, not so much a contest of military strength as a bargaining process – dirty, extortionate, and often quite reluctant bargaining on one side or both – nevertheless a bargaining process.[1]
>
> Thomas Schelling

In the previous chapters, we explained what terrorism is not. Considering how even informed observers tend to confuse concepts like low intensity conflict, guerrilla warfare and terrorism, we believe it was essential to distinguish terrorism from other forms of organized violence, defining the distinct location of terrorism on the 'strategic map' both in conceptual and evolutionary terms. In particular, it was important, in our view, to demonstrate how terrorism is different from guerrilla warfare, arguably its closest 'irregular' cousin. We showed that, whereas terrorism and guerrilla warfare often share the same objectives and while both are frequently seen as members of one strategic family, the means to those ends differ radically. Much guerrilla-warfare theorizing, particularly those ideas that have been filtered through Maoist and Leninist understandings, emphasize the involvement of the masses through political organization which in many respects is considered even more important than the military struggle itself. Equally important, Maoist theory postulates that the slow accumulation of military assets is necessary in order to meet enemy forces on equal terms in set-piece battles of a conventional nature in the final phase of the confrontation. By contrast, those groups which employ terrorism as the main plank of their strategy – strategic terrorism – seek to bypass both the mass agitation and conventional military elements of guerrilla warfare theory, believing that the use of symbolic violence alone will be sufficient to achieve the desired political ends.

Saying what terrorism is *not* may provide some clues, but it still seems difficult to grasp exactly what the concept stands for. After all, if strategic terrorism relies neither on mass agitation nor on conventional military confrontation, how do its practitioners ever hope to achieve political change? What

makes terrorists believe they can bring down governments or alter established policies with a few acts of symbolic violence? How exactly are they trying to achieve their aims? What is the nature of the process they hope will unfold? In this chapter, we will try to identify the distinctive, fundamental *modus operandi* of strategic terrorism, hoping to set out a framework by which those who utilize a campaign of terrorism seek to attain their ends. We believe that this *modus operandi* can be conceptualized as a process that consists of three stages. The first – disorientation – seeks to alienate the authorities from their citizens by reducing the government to impotence in the eyes of the population and creating the impression that 'those in power' are unable to cope with a situation of evolving chaos. The second – target response – aims to induce the government to respond in a manner that is favourable to the insurgent cause. The third – gaining legitimacy – serves to exploit the emotional impact of the violence to insert an alternative political message as well as broaden the terrorists' support base, often through the media or political front organizations. What this chapter will show, then, is that strategic terrorism, especially compared to more 'conventional' military strategies, critically relies on provoking the target into responding in ways that inadvertently undermine its authority, and that it aims to do so by exploiting the psychological rather than the destructive effects of armed action. It will also show that, paradoxically perhaps, a campaign of strategic terrorism can only achieve victory if – at the third stage – it reverts to more conventional political action, and that this represents one of the greatest challenges for those involved in strategic terrorism.

Stage 1: Disorientation

Terrorism as a set of tactics is as old as warfare itself, but one needs to go back no further than the late nineteenth century to find the first strategic terrorists of the modern age. In 1878, a small group of Russian anarchists got together to form a group whose aim was to topple the Tsarist monarchy. Called *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), they embarked on a series of assassinations of what, in their view, were symbols of an oppressive, authoritarian regime. Their victims were mainly members of the aristocracy and senior government bureaucrats. Unsurprisingly, the most sought after target was Tsar Alexander II. In the first three years of its existence, the group attempted to kill the monarch eight times, but none of the attempts had come even close. When, on 1 March 1881, they launched their ninth, they had equipped four members with four bombs each, covering every possible route of the Tsar's carriage on that day. Although the first bomber missed his target by just one inch – prompting the Tsar to declare 'Thank God, I am safe' – the second succeeded, killing the Tsar as well as himself. The operation was a tactical success, but a strategic failure. Almost immediately, the secret police was instructed to mobilize all its resources to find the perpetrators, and indeed within a year of the assassination, most of the group's members had been arrested and executed. By 1883, *Narodnaya Volya* had practically ceased to exist.[2]

Narodnaya Volya's quest to trigger a revolution was crude, and it did not work. What made it significant is that it was the first systematic attempt to implement a strategy based on the belief that an entire nation's political discourse could be transformed through a series of acts of symbolic violence. The leaders of *Narodnaya Volya* did not believe that killing the Tsar would, by itself, bring about the end of the Russian monarchy. Rather, they calculated that the assassination would generate interest and publicity, destabilize the regime, frighten the ruling classes and incite those who shared their ideas but were too timid to take up arms to join the movement. This, indeed, was the concept of the 'propaganda of the deed', which had first been articulated by the Italian republican Carlo Pisacane, who argued that no amount of leafleting and peaceful agitation was capable of transforming people's mindsets in quite the same way as an act of violence. He wrote: 'Ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but educated when they are free.'[3] It is this belief in the transformative power of symbolic violence which lies at the heart of the strategy of terrorism.

Like the Russian anarchists of *Narodnaya Volya*, the starting point which eventually leads many insurgents to adopt a strategy of terrorism is a deep sense of frustration about their message 'not getting through'. Most of the groups which have engaged in terrorism did not start out with the intention of employing such means, but chose to adopt a strategy of terrorism when their political ambitions failed. The case of contemporary Islamist terrorism is typical. In the early 1990s, the movement still hoped it could rally the 'Arab street' and dispose of many of the hated secular regimes in the Middle East through popular mobilization. However, in places like Algeria, the government prevented a peaceful transition once the Islamists seemed likely to win the elections. And in Egypt, people simply failed to respond in numbers large enough to make a popular takeover effective. The conclusion drawn by influential figures like Ayman al Zawahiri – later to become Osama bin Laden's deputy – was that people had failed to realize the true extent to which they were being oppressed, or that – even when they shared the Islamists' worldview – they were too phlegmatic to do anything about it. In other words, the leaders of the movement lost confidence in the masses, and decided that the situation could only be changed if they – the self-declared revolutionary vanguard – took dramatic steps to fundamentally alter the parameters within which their attempts to bring about political change were taking place.[4]

The problem encountered by the Islamists was the same that Narodnaya Volya had struggled with more than a hundred years earlier. It was the realization that even the most despotic governments appear to generate enough support and acquiescence for most challenges to their power to remain ineffective. Some of the reasons are obvious. Most dictatorial regimes are skilful manipulators of religious and ethnic divides; they know how to use patronage in exchange for loyalty; and, not least, they often control the media and much of civil society. Yet, even where governments do not resort to the tactics of 'divide and rule', insurgents have found it difficult to convince the masses to

switch their allegiance. So, the question asked not only by aspiring insurgents but by opposition activists of any kind is why people keep on supporting their rulers. Why are they reluctant to embrace radical change even in the most oppressive conditions?

More than four decades ago, T.P. Thornton argued that the explanation for people's seemingly unshakable loyalty to those in power goes far beyond the tangibles of patronage and state control. In his view, there appears to be a strong psychological bond that ties the people to their government. A majority will see the state as a guarantor of societal cohesion and stability, because its conduct – however corrupt or otherwise flawed – is sufficiently known for societal interaction to continue in a predictable way. From this perspective, then, the insurgents' challenge is not merely to convince the people of the righteousness of their cause, but – more importantly even – to remove the 'structural supports' which give a society its strength and cohesion and allow the government to exploit people's natural desire for security and stability.[5]

Based on Thornton's analysis, the first and most immediate goal for the insurgents is to shatter the conventional patterns of societal interaction in the hope that this will isolate and alienate the individual from the government. The aim is to replace any notion of stability and security with a widespread sense of panic, confusion and mounting chaos. Significantly, the objective is not only to discredit the idea of the government as a guarantor of basic security, but also to disorient the individual, making them unable to locate the source of their fears. In the insurgents' mind, it is only then – when the society's 'structural supports' have been destroyed and the individual has been detached from their social moorings – that the insurgents will have a chance to reconstruct people's collective identities and preferences in their favour. The method through which to achieve this state of collective confusion is a programme of terrorism or, to be more precise, a systematic campaign of symbolic acts of violence that will trigger an exaggerated sense of fear, panic and chaos, and prompt the state authorities to respond in ways that unwittingly undermine their own authority.

The scenario may sound far fetched, but there are plenty of examples – both historical and current – which illustrate the effectiveness of strategic terrorism in causing chaos, disorientation and fear displacement. Take, for example, a minor incident that occurred in Iraq in July 2004 in which US forces were blamed for the bombing of a police station in Baghdad. Though it quickly emerged that the attack had been carried out by an insurgent group that wanted to deter Iraqis from joining the police force, residents of the area claimed that they had seen American planes flying over the city at the time of the explosion. Within minutes, crowds assembled, 'appearing angry and aggrieved, insisting that those killed were martyrs of American aggression'. Even when it had become obvious that the Americans had nothing to do with the bombing, Arabic television reports continued to include interviews with witnesses who mentioned seeing the US planes. Moreover, many commentators decided to broaden the discussion, arguing that – 'whoever was responsible' – the incident

showed that the Americans could not be relied upon to provide security for the people of Baghdad.[6] As a result, rather than causing a backlash against the terrorists, the bombing had deepened the population's sense of alienation from the authorities and increased their suspicion of the Coalition forces.

An earlier example shows that even the most blatant acts of terrorism can be made to work in the insurgents' favour. In May 1957, the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) killed 300 male inhabitants of a village near the town of Melouza for supporting a rival nationalist group, which competed with the FLN for leadership in the fight against French rule in Algeria. When details of the massacre emerged, the FLN denied all responsibility, saying that the French had carried out the executions in order to discredit the FLN. Despite overwhelming photographic evidence to the contrary, most of the population preferred to believe the FLN's version of events, because the French were widely believed to be involved in a ruthless campaign against anyone associating with Algerian nationalists.[7] Again, the seemingly paradoxical result was that an atrocity, which had been carried out by a rebel group as part of an internal power struggle, came to undermine the legitimacy of the then government.

The two examples demonstrate that it would be mistaken to assume that strategic terrorism is primarily aimed at gaining the support of the masses. At this, the first stage of a programme of strategic terrorism, it clearly is not. As mentioned above, the terrorists' immediate priority is not to win 'hearts and minds', but to disorientate people through acts of symbolic violence in the hope that this will destroy the structural supports on which the government's authority rests. Of course, even terrorists recognize that most societies put a premium on the sanctity of human life, and those who employ terrorist methods will therefore invariably attempt to distinguish between 'illegitimate' violence and a series of 'legitimate' targets. In most campaigns of strategic terrorism, legitimate targets typically include all the institutions and representatives of the state which can somehow be portrayed as agents of repression, such as the military, paramilitary forces, armed police and other 'combatants', but also the civilian representatives of the state, for example, politicians, officials, judges and other professions involved in the administration of the political system, sometimes even teachers and journalists. Some groups go even further. For the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the workers and contractors who helped maintain police stations in Northern Ireland qualified as legitimate targets. And for Osama bin Laden, the idea of aiming at the 'supporters of the state' extended to anyone paying taxes, thus making virtually every American a legitimate target. The idea of 'legitimate targets', therefore, is not firmly grounded in any definition or even international convention. Depending on how far certain political actors are prepared to stretch their ideology, it can be anything and everything.[8] Indeed, it is not uncommon for terrorists and their supporters to rationalize the legitimacy of an attack only after it has taken place.

Narodnaya Volya insisted that 'not one drop of superfluous blood' be spilled in pursuit of its aims,[9] and perhaps it is this highly restrictive targeting policy

which explains the Russian anarchists' failure in creating an atmosphere of chaos and panic terrifying enough for people to sever their ties to the regime. Indeed, it is our contention that, for strategic terrorism to be effective, the methods need to cross the line between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' targets and extend the range of targets to those not normally seen to be agents of repression. Continual attacks against a narrow range of specific targets will tend to make the threat predictable, diminishing the sense of fear and potential disorientation as the bulk of the population will feel sufficiently removed from the campaign of violence to experience a high degree of threat. If, for example, it becomes obvious that through a campaign of terror only politicians and senior bureaucrats are attacked, the 98 per cent of the population who do not belong to either category will come to re-establish the sense of stability and security which the campaign had set out to undermine. Hence, some indiscrimination – or at least the appearance of indiscrimination – is essential in shattering the psychological defences of those who have escaped the physical consequences of a terrorist attack. It is precisely in order to create an atmosphere of terror and disorientation, to get an audience and to gain political leverage, that terrorists will have to transcend established ethical barriers. Put simply, what terrorists need to accomplish is a breaking of the notion that 'it couldn't happen to me,' and it is for this reason that a degree of indiscrimination is inherent in the strategy of terrorism (see also Chapter 6).[10]

Success at this first stage of a terrorist campaign, however, is not exclusively – or even primarily – related to the targeting policy. In our view, the principal factor, which determines whether the campaign will manage to sever the bond between the government and the people, is the degree to which the government has popular legitimacy. Clearly, when a government enjoys little popular legitimacy and is widely suspected of acting contrary to the interests of the population, an insurgent group will find it much easier to replace the idea of the government as a provider of security and stability. It is beyond the scope of this book to develop a theory of the various factors – or combination of factors – that lead governments to win or lose popular legitimacy. Yet it seems obvious that foreign rule, open repression and corruption, as well as social and economic failure are not conducive to inspiring a great degree of loyalty and trust amongst the public. In fact, the various studies carried out by Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank clearly show that, while democracies are more vulnerable to the emergence of movements that employ terrorism than authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, no democracy has ever been overthrown by any such group.[11] Though Weinberg and Eubank's research may not capture the phenomenon fully, it indicates that regimes which are – by definition – based on popular legitimacy will be more resistant to attempts at shattering the society's 'structural supports', and thus pose far greater problems for a campaign of strategic terrorism to be effective.

The idea of popular legitimacy as the key variable in the first phase of a terrorist campaign explains not only why particular regime types have been resistant to strategic terrorism but also why others have not. In particular,

strategic terrorism has been successful where the target government was an occupying power, and we believe it will be useful to examine the strategic trajectory in this particular case more closely, not least because it highlights all the themes previously raised. The success of terrorist campaigns aimed at foreign powers is, no doubt, related to the strength of nationalism as an ideology and, partly at least, to the fact that colonies rarely represent an existential interest which needs to be maintained at any cost. Fundamentally, though, colonies – no matter how well or badly governed – will rarely ever generate sufficient popular legitimacy for people to establish a lasting psychological bond to the regime. Arguably, in most people's view, foreign rule represents an abnormality whose very nature contradicts the idea of an environment which people perceive as secure. To paraphrase one of the IRA's stock phrases, 'how can you feel safe in your house knowing that a burglar sits in your kitchen?'[12] And indeed, as some of the examples cited earlier showed, it did not take much for the FLN to disabuse the Algerians of their loyalty to the French state. Nor, in the current era, has it been particularly difficult to undermine the psychological bond between the Iraqi people and the United States, despite the American claim that the Coalition was determined to bring democracy and good government to the country.

In practical terms, those insurgent groups who have chosen to employ terrorism enjoy two important advantages when confronting an adversary that is an occupying power. First, a foreign enemy allows for a less-discriminate targeting policy. When a terror campaign is directed at a foreign power, it is 'one of them' rather than 'one of us', with the result that there is less of a popular backlash to guard against. Second, under the conditions of foreign occupation, it will be possible for a terror campaign to pursue a two-pronged strategy, which consists of attacks in the occupied territory as well as attacks against the colonial metropolis. In both cases, the purpose is similar, but the emphasis and audience are somewhat different. When attacking at home, the main audience – in the first instance at least – are the local people whose loyalty to the regime they hope to undermine. Another aim is, of course, to prompt an 'asset to liability shift' within the occupation government by making its continued presence more costly. At the same time, this change in the foreign power's cost–benefit calculation can be achieved more directly – as well as more powerfully – by launching operations against the colonial metropolis itself. Such attacks against targets in the colonial metropolis are also likely to have a profound effect on those sympathizers back in the colony, who will be impressed by an insurgent group's strength and reach, and who may, as a result, be persuaded to take up arms. In that sense, direct attacks against the colonial metropolis could prompt the mobilization of supporters along the lines of what Pisacane and the first practitioners of the 'propaganda of the deed' had imagined.

The strategic thinking behind such campaigns may sound rather complex. In practice, though, most groups that practice terrorism will – sometimes instinctively – follow the patterns and calculations described above. Take, for example, Al Qaeda and its ongoing efforts to expel foreign troops from Iraq.

Though, obviously, the insurgency in Iraq is fractured, it seems reasonable to say that Al Qaeda-inspired attacks within Iraq fall within two broad categories. On the one hand, they have aimed at making the continued presence of the Coalition countries costly through direct attacks against foreign troops, as well as by undermining all efforts to shift the burden of maintaining security to local forces, such as with the frequent bombings of police recruitment centres. On the other hand, Al Qaeda's campaign has consisted of seemingly random attacks – often suicide operations – against civilian (mostly Shiite) targets, including shopping centres, mosques and public celebrations. The objective of this second category of attacks has been to foster the impression of chaos and insecurity, which it hoped would disorient Iraqis, make them reassess their attitude towards the present constitutional arrangement and, most importantly perhaps, identify the continued presence of foreign troops on Iraqi soil as the primary cause of the instability.

The strategic trajectory is also evident in Al Qaeda's foreign operations, such as the train attacks in Madrid in March 2004. In Al Qaeda's view, Madrid qualified as a colonial metropolis because Spanish troops were part of the Coalition, and the Spanish government was widely believed to be an essential contributor to the international effort, both politically and in terms of manpower. In a 'policy document' discovered by two Norwegian researchers on a jihadist web site, the reasons for attacking Spain were explained in the plainest possible terms. The document argued that an immediate, full US withdrawal was unlikely, and that efforts should therefore be directed at America's allies. The aim, according to the authors of the document, was 'to make one or two of the US allies leave the Coalition, because this will cause others to follow suit and the dominos will start falling.'[13] Analysing the domestic situation in three Coalition countries, the document concluded that Spain represented the 'weakest link', because 'public opposition to the war is almost total, and the government is virtually on its own on this issue.'[14] Though the two researchers stressed that a direct link between the document and the Madrid attacks was impossible to prove, it provides an excellent insight into the thinking of terrorist strategists when contemplating attacks against a colonial metropolis.

The Madrid attacks – greatly helped by the government's initial ineptitude in identifying the perpetrators of the bombings – not only triggered Spain's exit from the Coalition, they also became a major inspiration for jihadists across the world, especially because of their perceived success in dislodging a major Western European government. In their view, the attack proved that this type of warfare worked, and that major changes in policy could be brought about through the determined actions of a few. In that sense, the Madrid attacks came to be a textbook example of the 'propaganda of the deed', exceeded in their impact perhaps only by the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, Dhiren Barot, who was convicted by a British court in November 2006 for plotting to kill thousands by launching explosive attacks on the London underground, had told associates that he had been stirred by the Madrid bombings, which he regarded as the 'perfect operation'.[15] Al Qaeda's leaders – whether directly involved in the planning of the

Madrid attacks or not – seem to be conscious of this effect. Al Zawahiri, in one of his video messages, invoked the 'glorious predecessors in New York, Washington and Madrid' when calling upon the Muslim youth to rise up.[16]

In summary, it is worth reiterating that, at its first stage, the strategy of terrorism primarily aims at overturning the most basic expectations of order and societal interaction, leaving the individual confused, fearful and alienated. Having managed to confuse people about the source of their fears is not, however, sufficient to bring about the desired change of the status quo. To further the process, those who employ strategic terrorism crucially depend on the inadvertent help of the target government, which they hope will respond in ways that are favourable to their objectives. This represents the second stage of a terrorist campaign, which will be examined in the following section.

Stage 2: Target response

Terrorism is frequently described as a strategy chosen by the 'weak', because its proponents realize that they lack the firepower necessary to stand a chance in a direct, conventional confrontation.[17] As we pointed out in previous chapters, such characterizations are highly problematic, because terms like weakness are too broad to capture what is unique about the strategy of terrorism. It is hard to think of any military confrontation – conventional or irregular – in which the opposing sides would have enjoyed exact parity in terms of firepower. Even more misleading is the assumption that – since firepower is not going to deliver the terrorists' objectives – campaigns of strategic terrorism must therefore be aimed at winning people's hearts and minds. This not only ignores the fact that much of what a terror campaign does can hardly be described as popular, but it also prevents a full understanding of the strategic dynamics of terrorist violence, such as the need to undermine the perception of security amongst the target population which we elaborated upon in the previous section.

In formulating a theory of terrorism based on such obviously flawed assumptions, many traditional accounts of the phenomenon are missing out on one of the essential components of any strategy of terrorism, which is to set the target government a series of dilemmas and then challenge it to react. Indeed, we hope to demonstrate in the following argument that terrorism is a strategy of provocation which relies on the government to respond in ways that unwittingly undermine its authority. This is not a novel idea. More than two decades ago, N.O. Berry formulated a set of hypotheses that explained both what effects the a campaign of terrorism might hope to achieve in trying to influence their adversary's response, and also why governments would engage in behaviour that is so contrary to their interests. More specifically, Berry argued that the key variables that a terrorism campaign could manipulate are the strength of the government's response and its attitude towards 'moderates'.[18] We believe that this basic conceptual framework continues to be valid, and it is consequently along the lines of Berry's typology that we will explore the various responses which a strategy of terrorism aims to inspire.

The response, which most acts of terrorism intend to elicit in their target, is overreaction. Prompting the government to lash out against its opponents – or, rather, anyone it *perceives* as its opponents – perfectly complements the process of disorientation, which aims to confuse people about the source of their fears. In particular, terrorist violence aims to goad the government into operating beyond the legally constituted methods and into using extra-legal action, with the result that such acts will often be committed with the express purpose of triggering responses of a heavy-handed and possibly illegal nature,[19] sometimes with the knowledge (and, indeed, intention) that the government's reprisals are directed against the people in whose name the terrorists claim to act. One may argue that this reasoning constituted a core element of the strategy adopted by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in its campaign against the Yugoslav government of Slobodan Milosevic. Counting on the Serbian security forces' tendency to retaliate indiscriminately, the group succeeded not only in radicalizing large parts of the Kosovar population but even in triggering a military intervention by the international community.[20] Yet, even if a government is wise enough not to get drawn into deploying excessive force, a political movement that employs terrorism will hope that the government will have to rely on special police and other emergency measures that will impinge on everyday life and inconvenience the ordinary citizen, making life more difficult and reinforcing the impression that the government has lost control.

First mentioned in the previous chapter, the arch exponent of overreaction as a strategic objective was Carlos Marighela, the Brazilian Communist Party leader and author of the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla*. He believed that curfews, road blocks, house searches, internment, state-sponsored death squads, executions and 'disappearances' would make life intolerable for ordinary people and cause them to turn against the government. In his view, it was essential for the insurgent to be on the side of the population, but gaining popular support and sympathy would not be accomplished through mass agitation but, rather, through sustained attacks against the government system and the consequent overreaction this would trigger. It was, from Marighela's perspective, important to bring about a situation in which the government's response to a campaign of terrorism so surpassed accepted notions of normality that it would be the government – not the political group behind the terrorist attacks – whose actions would be regarded as excessive. In this respect, a vital element was to get the government to militarize the situation, as soldiers on the street were the most powerful sign that society had entered a state of emergency. In Marighela's words, the objective was to encourage – through a strategy of provocation – the perception 'that this government is unjust, incapable of solving problems, and that it resorts simply to the physical liquidation of its opponents'. At this point, he argued, 'the political situation in the country is transformed into a military situation in which the "gorillas" [the government's security forces] appear more and more to be the ones responsible for violence, while the lives of the people grow worse.'[21]

Berry claims that most governments will be tempted to overreact to a terrorist campaign because they have an acute self-image, viewing all those who challenge state authority as evil and having convinced themselves that not only do they possess overwhelming power but also the legitimacy to crush any challenge to their authority. Such reactions were clearly evident in the responses of some Latin American governments during the 1960s and 1970s. In Uruguay, for example, a number of kidnappings by the Marxist *Tupamaros* triggered a bloody campaign of mass arrests and 'disappearances', which – in many respects – made the *Tupamaros* look like innocent victims. And in Argentina, the activities of the *Ejército Revolucionaria del Peublo* (People's Revolutionary Army) (ERP) and the *Montoneros* led to a *coup d'état* by the military and caused the so-called dirty war during which thousands of alleged communist sympathizers were killed.[22] The tendency to overreact could, however, also be detected in the American and Soviet reactions to the insurgencies they faced in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively. In both cases, the enemy was conceptualized in, and reduced to, simple ideological terms – 'communists' and 'imperialists' – which contributed to the process of dehumanization that came to justify free-fire zones and village-razing. Still, and despite the massive resources fielded against the insurgents, neither the United States in Vietnam nor the Soviet Union in Afghanistan were able to bring the conflict to a satisfactory conclusion. Instead, the over-reactive nature of their counter-insurgency campaigns had delegitimized the cause for which they fought, increasing popular support and sympathy for the rebels in ways that echoed Marighela's theory.[23]

The second type of response, which a campaign of strategic terrorism could hope to provoke, is the opposite of overreaction. Labelled 'power deflation', this is a scenario where a government loses support because it appears incapable of dealing adequately with a terrorist threat. The government believes it lacks a public consensus for its policy in dealing with a campaign of terrorist attacks. The government perceives its enemy to be cunning, formidable and even possessing a degree of legitimacy. Typically, policymakers will have come to the conclusion that – though they are unjustified in their use of violence – the terrorists' campaign articulates some legitimate grievance, and that this is likely to attract a degree of sympathy from parts of the population, especially if the authorities would be seen to use excessive force. Although the government possesses greater coercive means than the insurgents, the authorities will therefore be wary of taking a hard line, assuming them to be skilful and audacious – ready to match any counter-terrorist action with an even more spectacular reaction that will increase their standing and decrease that of the authorities. In effect, the government has become a prisoner of its own conscience. It desperately wants to be seen to be acting correctly and not overreacting; yet by doing so, it prevents the implementation of an adequate anti-terrorist programme which could deal effectively with the threat.

A good example of this type of response would be the attitude of some European governments towards the activities of Islamist extremists before the 9/11 attacks in the United States (and, in a number of cases, for some

time thereafter). Places like the Finsbury Park mosque in London had been allowed to become virtual terrorist-training camps without triggering any intervention from the authorities. At Finsbury Park, not only was it possible to for 'hate preachers' like Abu Hamza to spread his message and indoctrinate thousands of young Muslims, the mosque also served as a refuge for jihadi operatives on the run and provided the funds and logistics for those keen to learn the terrorist trade at training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, or join the insurgencies in Bosnia, Algeria, Kashmir and Chechnya. No doubt, part of the rationale for not interfering was the so-called covenant of security – a tacit understanding according to which the authorities would turn a blind eye as long as radicals like Hamza restricted their activities to foreign countries. Hamza, however, had been flouting the covenant quite openly, encouraging his followers to 'attack infidels anywhere' and plotting to carry out terrorist atrocities in the United Kingdom. Still, the authorities could not bring themselves to close down the mosque or move against Hamza and his followers, believing that violating the sanctity of a mosque would unite the Muslim community against the government, strengthen Hamza's standing within the community and trigger a backlash against the police and the authorities generally.[24] Hence, rather than dealing with what had long been known to be a hotbed of terrorist activity, the authorities chose to let Hamza's activities go unchecked for fear of overreaction.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the case of Finsbury Park mosque occurred in a liberal democracy. Power deflation is the classic dilemma which many liberal democratic states are faced with in dealing with a terrorist challenge: how to balance civil liberties and accepted norms of legitimate conduct with adequate security measures that deal with a significant threat to their authority. Policymakers in liberal democracies are often conscious of the need not to overreact. While the population at large tends to approve of tough security measures, especially in the wake of terrorist attacks, the political, academic and media elites – which tend to be more liberal in their political attitudes than the population as a whole – generally urge caution, arguing that a 'tough' response will alienate those whose freedoms are being constrained and help generate new recruits for the terrorist group. In principle, of course, there is nothing wrong with this view. Indeed, it is precisely because liberal democracies allow such arguments to be made that they are more successful at preventing the security forces from responding to terrorism in an exaggerated, paranoid fashion. At the same time, this type of political discourse may, at times, give rise to the view that *any* action aimed at combating any terrorist threat constitutes an overreaction, and that *any* change in the rules and practices that govern the security forces' activities represents an unacceptable violation of essential freedoms. Such liberal dogmatism not only ignores that any movement that practices terrorism itself constitutes a grave violation of essential freedoms (albeit one that is inflicted, in most cases, by non-state actors), it also risks producing a kind of 'reverse paranoia' – a state of paralysis in which the government feels it is powerless to disrupt the terrorist campaign, and that any action

it might take would only increase the fervour with which the terrorists are conducting their operations.

Berry's second key variable – the government's attitude towards 'moderates' – is closely related to the first. Needless to say, the term 'moderate' is very broad and ill-defined, and it would be beyond this book to provide a thorough discussion of what precisely it implies. For the purpose of this study, we will simply assume 'moderates' to represent all those political activists who – whilst perceiving a degree of association with, or sympathy for, the terrorists and their cause – have chosen not to resort to violence but hope to bring about political change through non-violent means.

The first type of response, which terrorists may intend to bring about, is the so-called 'failed repression of the moderates'. During a terrorist campaign, the government may decide to suppress not only those deemed to be responsible for carrying out terrorist operations but also the non-violent opposition, for example, by banning political parties, closing critical newspapers, or even by arresting, interning, torturing and killing its representatives. The problem with such a course of action is that if the repression is not efficient, ruthless and total,[25] there is a risk that the surviving moderates will become more extreme.[26] Believing that there will be little value in seeking compromise within the present system, they may be driven into joining those members of the opposition who seek a violent solution. In other words, the failed repression of the moderates will contribute to the radicalization of the opposition; and – rather than dividing its opponents – the government's actions will compel them to unite behind their most extreme representatives, with the likely result that the terrorist campaign will gain in strength.

The most rational explanation for pursuing a policy of repressing the moderates is the fear of an emerging coalition between the extremists and the moderates, which the government believes it can forestall while the relative capabilities are still in its favour.[27] However, one may argue that, in suppressing the moderates – and in doing so inefficiently – the government helps to turn this scenario into a self-fulfilling prophecy by making the moderates believe that they have nothing to gain from seeking an accommodation with the regime. Though not necessarily prompted by strategic terrorism, the Shah of Iran's response to the campaign aimed at his overthrow provides a good illustration, because SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, proved to be thoroughly inefficient in repressing the regime's opponents, and it was this 'failed repression' which fuelled much of the opposition campaign. By mid-1978, the popular discontent with the regime had become widespread, and the Shah believed it necessary to attack a moderate protest rally in central Tehran, presumably hoping that this show of strength would deter some of the 'soft' opposition from participating in further shows of discontent. Up to 100 protesters were killed during the event which became known as Black Friday. Yet, instead of splitting the opposition and weakening their campaign, the attacks caused outrage, crystallizing all factions – even those which had merely called for reform rather than revolution – against the regime and alienating much of the rest of the population.

In December of the same year, a further demonstration mobilized more than two million people. Less than a month later, the Shah's position had become untenable.[28]

An equally plausible explanation for why governments may choose to adopt a policy of 'repressing the moderates' relates to what we said earlier about governments' acute self-image, and their assumption that anyone who opposes the regime must somehow be guilty of helping the terrorists. Combined with a degree of incompetence, again, the likely result is the radicalization of the moderates. One of the best examples in this respect was the introduction of internment without trial in Northern Ireland in August 1971. Faced with civil unrest and an escalating campaign by the IRA, Northern Ireland Prime Minister Brian Faulkner believed that introducing internment was his government's last card. When he discussed the measure with the British government, whose military would be deployed in the operation, he proposed a 'wide swoop' which, according to Faulkner, would ensure that no IRA operators would be left to roam the streets of the province. As it turned out, while the leaders of the IRA avoided arrest by fleeing across the border to the Republic of Ireland, many of those who were interned had no connections with the IRA at all. Drawing on outdated police intelligence files, some of those arrested had not been involved in paramilitary activities for decades; others were Catholic civil rights activists with a spotless record of non-violent opposition. Out of the 1,590 people who had been interned between 9 August, when the policy was introduced, and 15 December 1971, only 18 were eventually charged with criminal offences. The misguided introduction of the measure – as well as the use of 'tough' interrogation techniques – turned the hitherto moderate Catholic political parties against the status quo, led to a massive rates and rent strike which paralysed the entire province, and provided the IRA with an opportunity to escalate its campaign. In the 6 months before internment, there were 25 conflict-related deaths, whereas in the following 6 months, there were 185.[29] Arguably, it was internment rather than the tragic events of Bloody Sunday (when British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed protesters in Londonderry in January 1972), which sealed the fate of the Protestant-dominated administration and resulted in the introduction of direct rule from London in March 1972.

The final type of response is what Berry calls the 'appeasement of the moderates'. Most counter-insurgency strategies are based on the idea that the government should separate the population from the insurgents. The rationale is that, as long as the insurgents cannot appeal to, and embed themselves in, the population, they will remain isolated, ineffective and easy to target. Some governments have taken the notion of separation quite literally, moving entire villages from one place to another. The creation of such 'new villages' or 'strategic hamlets' was practised by the British in Malaya, the Americans in Vietnam, and even until very recently by the Turkish government in its campaign against the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdish Workers Party) (PKK). More commonly, though, the idea is understood to refer to political rather than physical separation. In this scenario, the government

concludes that a terrorist insurgency is fuelled by legitimate grievances. It therefore attempts to introduce reforms aimed at redressing these grievances in the hope that doing so will undercut support for the terrorists and dissuade the moderates from being attracted to violent action. In this way, it is argued, the government will not only reduce the terrorists' popular appeal, but also make it easier to crack down on the terrorists, as they will be deprived of the shelter they have been afforded by the population.[30]

A policy of separating the insurgents from the more-hardline elements who might be wedded to terrorist violence by introducing political reform sounds like a sensible – even liberal – idea. However, it also entails a number of dangers. First, the reforms may come to be interpreted as a sign of weakness, with an insurgent stepping up its campaign to force the government to capitulate to all of its political demands. Robert Taber, one of the most important theorists of insurgency, argued that any concessions that try to accommodate the insurgents can be regarded as surrender because the government is an agent and protector of the status quo. In his view, therefore, anything which forces an alteration of the status quo should be considered a defeat.[31] This viewpoint is mirrored in the long-standing debate about how best to deal with the terrorist campaigns against Israel. The more liberal-minded commentators believe that the best way of draining support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas is for Israel to unilaterally withdraw from its occupied territories, thereby driving a wedge between the hardliners and the moderates for whom a viable Palestinian state – not the wholesale destruction of Israel – is the principal goal. The hawks, on the other hand, argue that the logic of 'land for peace' only encourages such groups to push harder and escalate their terror attacks. They point out that the Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank, South Lebanon and – most recently – Gaza has not brought peace but, rather, made these political movements hungry for more. Indeed, Israeli intercepts suggest that the rationale behind Hezbollah's and Hamas' missile attacks against Israeli territory – launched from territory previously occupied by Israel – was that terrorism had worked on previous occasions, and that further victories were down the line if only one succeeded in keeping up the pressure. According to a secretly taped conversation, one of the leaders of Hamas suggested, 'Let's go back into the terror business and then try and wrestle concessions from the Israeli government.'[32]

The second reason for caution in 'appeasing the moderates' is the possibility of alienating the traditional supporters of the regime who may believe that introducing political reform is tantamount to giving in to the terrorists. The result could be the emergence of so-called pro-state terrorists, who may launch campaigns of violence in order to force the government to reverse the reforms and restore the status quo ante.[33] Such a scenario would complicate the government's overall position immeasurably, not least by draining its resources and reinforcing the sense of chaos which the insurgents hope to create. This could be seen not only with the Loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, which gained support in response to British efforts to strengthen the position of

Catholics in Northern Ireland, but also in the case of the *Organisation Armée Secrète* (Secret Armed Organisation) (OAS), a group led by French officers that opposed the decision by President Charles de Gaulle to move towards self-determination for Algeria. The most prominent contemporary example of pro-state terrorism, however, are the Colombian paramilitaries. Their initial aim was to 'protect' locals from insurgent attacks, but they have since developed into a national organization – the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) (AUC) – whose demands require much attention by the government, and which have repeatedly made it clear that attempts to appease the left-wing *Fuerzas Armados Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) (FARC) rebels would result in fierce resistance. As a result, the Colombian government's position has become far more difficult, both by limiting its room for manoeuvre in finding a political accommodation with the FARC, and also by diverting resources which could otherwise be used against the insurgents.

Needless to say, in most situations, the government would be well-advised to avoid both over and underreaction, and neither repress nor appease the moderates. This, however, is easier said than done. Whenever governments are challenged by a terrorist campaign, they need to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the insurgent movement, and – because their authority is being challenged – they must also examine their own vulnerabilities and calculate the likely effects of the options open to them. Of course, this greater intellectual burden for the government means that the potential to make analytical and policy mistakes is greater too. It is these opportunities that groups adopting terrorist tactics will be waiting to exploit. At the same time, having discredited the government, the terrorists themselves will be faced with a considerable challenge, namely how to translate people's loss of faith in the government into support for their own vision of how society should be run. This, indeed, is the key dilemma with which the terrorists will be confronted in the third phase of their campaign.

Stage 3: Gaining legitimacy

No doubt, a terrorist campaign which manages to cause disorientation and prompt the government to respond in ways that inadvertently undermine its position should be considered a partial success. But success in the first two stages of a terrorist campaign does not equal victory. Having alienated the individual and discredited the government, any campaign of terrorism needs to hold out an attractive vision of a 'new' legitimacy. In many ways, this represents the most important, yet also most difficult, stage in a campaign of strategic terrorism. After all, most regimes will be able to withstand the attacks of a small band of conspirators, and they will at some point recover from the loss of credibility that came with the misguided response – it is only when the majority of people transcend the state of disorientation and begin to transfer support from the government to the terrorists that terrorism becomes an

existential threat to the regime. Indeed, it is only then that the terrorists could declare victory.

From an insurgent perspective, one of the main obstacles in effecting the shift from old to new legitimacy is the transmission of their political message. Where a society does not permit the free and uninhibited transmission of information, the insurgents will be unable to advertise their vision of a new society, as all the channels of mass communication are controlled by the authorities. In some cases, the terrorist acts themselves will go unreported, thus negating the psychological effect of terrorism beyond those directly affected. Considering that terrorism is, in essence, a form of communication which aims to convey a political message through acts of violence, this will make terrorism virtually ineffective. In strategic terms, there simply is no point in engaging in terrorism unless its effects are felt by an audience much wider than those directly affected.

Even in democracies, though, it is not all plain sailing. The vast bulk of the media is likely to be concentrated in the hands of a few media entrepreneurs who have – by and large – benefited from the status quo and are unlikely to desire any change. Also, with its accumulated expertise and free access to the media, the government will be able to put its 'spin' on events while an insurgent-terrorist group may be in no position to answer any of the charges thrown at them. Not least, governments can operate openly while the terrorists need to take precautions whenever making contact with members of the media. In other words, even in the world's most-advanced democracies, access to the media is highly unequal, and there is no guarantee that the terrorists will be afforded opportunities to communicate their political message.[34]

In general, there are three ways in which the terrorists can overcome the barrier between themselves and the people. The first is through skilful manipulation of the established media. It may be true that access to the media is unequal, and that media proprietors' loyalties are likely to be with the status quo. At the same time, media outlets are competing with each other for market share, and it is this commercial dynamic which offers an opportunity for the terrorists. According to Grant Wardlaw, there is a potentially symbiotic relationship between the media and the terrorists:

> The presumed primary aim of the media is to inform. However, it is at least as important in practice to entertain, shock, amuse or otherwise affect the emotions of the audience. This is particularly true of the medium of television. Competition between media organizations seems to heighten the necessity to focus on the emotion-gathering as opposed to the purely informational aspects of news reporting. Terrorists are well aware of this phenomenon and consciously script what has been termed 'live-action spectaculars' – news events which cannot be ignored by the media.[35]

Terrorists' success in keeping the media's attention and creating opportunities for transmitting their message depends on whether they can provide the 'mystery, quick action, tension [and] drama' for which the big television networks

are longing.[36] It will, however, also be important to manipulate the act of violence in ways that compel the media – and, by extension, the viewers – to want to understand the reasoning behind it. It is against this background that phenomenon like the deployment of female suicide bombers by some Palestinian groups can be rationalized. According to the scholar Clara Beyler, who analysed public reactions to suicide bombings, 'female kamikazes' tended to be portrayed as 'the symbols of utter despair...rather than the cold-bléooded murderers of civilians'. If a woman was involved, the media focused on 'what made her do it', not the carnage that she had created. In other words, if the attacker was a woman, it was the bomber who – in the eyes of the media – became the victim and whose grievances needed to be addressed.[37]

Considering the media impact, it is no longer a coincidence that kidnappings and hostage-takings have proved such a popular terrorist tactic. While inducing a high and sustained level of terror, they rarely end up with large numbers of casualties. Most importantly, kidnappings provide days – if not weeks – of prime-time news coverage. During this period, the terrorists may be granted endless opportunities to explain the rationale of their campaign. One of the best examples of successful media manipulation is the 1970 October crisis, when the Canadian *Front de Libération du Québec* (Québec Liberation Front) (FLQ) kidnapped a British diplomat as well as the Dépúty Prime Minister of Québec.[38] By issuing a series of communiqués to the media, which (apparently) leapt at the chance to broadcast them, the terrorists were able to gain maximum publicity for their demands. The FLQ deliberately ignored the Canadian government's request to negotiate through an intermediary, preferring to communicate to the authorities via the media, thus ensuring the highest possible profile for the negotiations which in itself appeared to offer a degree of recognition and legitimacy of the FLQ. Moreover, the group's manifesto struck an emotional chord among many ordinary citizens of the province. More than 50 per cent of callers on Radio Canada were sympathetic. Influential intellectuals issued a statement giving implicit support for the FLQ's aims. Thousands of students in the province staged rallies and demonstrations. The original issue – the kidnappings of the two men – had become secondary to a much-wider debate concerning the limits of provincial government and the legitimacy of Quebec's nationalist aspirations.[39]

A second way in which terrorists may choose to communicate with the people is by seeking to address the population through alternative media, especially the Internet.[40] There can be no doubt that the rise of the Internet has provided terrorists with a number of distinct advantages. Electronic communication between members of groups that practice terrorism, often based in different countries, plays an important role in holding together disparate networks, as well as in the planning and execution of terrorist operations. Also, extremist web sites – especially their message boards and chat rooms – serve as points of contact through which prospective terrorists are radicalized and linked up with likeminded activists. From the perspective of political communication, however, the most important function of the Internet is to enable

the terrorists to transmit their message with no interference from the established media. In that sense, the Internet represents a virtual soap box, which allows the terrorists to explain their actions, publish announcements and – in general – give the public a chance to see their side of the story. It comes as no surprise, then, that many if not all major organizations that have utilized terror campaigns are now maintaining their own, highly professional web sites, whose design, content and technical sophistication easily competes with commercial providers. Hamas' web site, for example, provides information in seven different languages, including the latest stories regarding the Palestinian struggle, biographies of suicide bombers, pictures of Israeli 'atrocities', a short history of the conflict and links to numerous associated sites.[41]

Even so, it is easy to exaggerate the impact of the Internet, especially when it comes to swaying the public's views of a particular terrorist campaign. Even in Western societies, traditional media remain dominant. And in developing countries, where many terrorist campaigns are taking place, Internet access is too limited to have any tangible impact on public opinion at large – certainly not when compared to satellite news channels such as Al Jazeera. Terrorist group web sites represent a valuable source of information for supporters and sympathizers, and they may be a useful tool for keeping diaspora communities engaged with the 'struggle' back in the homeland. But there is little evidence that they are of any great consequence beyond those already converted to the cause. At the same time, some of the secondary (or indirect) effects may indeed be significant. For example, the frequency with which such groups' statements are now cited in news reports most certainly relates to the fact that reporters can simply go to the website rather than having to wait for conspicuous calls or arrange secret meetings with the groups' spokespeople. Likewise, many web sites sponsored by groups that employ terrorist methods now feature video recordings from terrorist attacks, which are frequently picked up by major television networks. In many cases, not only do these video clips – when shown on mainstream television – contribute to the sense of chaos and disorientation among the population, they also often help to contradict the governments' version of events, thus helping the terrorists to discredit their opponents by raising doubts about their sincerity.

The third way in which the terrorists' message can be communicated is by disseminating it through grassroots political agitation. This will require the creation of open political structures, working towards broadening the support for the insurgent group through active involvement in the community. Therefore, in addition to keeping one's existing supporters engaged, political front groups seek to mobilize sections of the population that had previously not been thought of as susceptible to the group's ideology. These people may be drawn into the movement by a charismatic local leader or, in most cases, through the services provided by the political front organization. From the insurgent group's perspective, the advantage of maintaining a political front group lies not only in the opportunity to transmit one's message and create a loyal following, but also in the possibility of creating support structures which

sustain the group's military campaign, for example, by providing intelligence, shelter and supplies. If the support is concentrated in particular regions or areas of a city, these locations may turn into 'no go' areas in which the terrorists can organize and recruit freely. In that sense, engagement in mass agitation promises to be beneficial in the military as well as the political arena, though the political motive generally tends to be decisive.

There are different ways through which groups that employ terrorism can mobilize popular support. Many groups have decided to set up political parties. This seems an obvious choice, considering how, in most political systems, parties are the predominant channel through which political ideas are formed and articulated. It is worth noting that, as Leonard Weinberg points out, many groups emerged as splinters of political parties, and that party political activism is something with which many terrorist leaders are familiar.[42] The two most prominent instances of terrorism and party political mobilization going hand in hand are undoubtedly the IRA and Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, as well as *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque Homeland and Freedom) (ETA) and Heri Batasuna in the Basque Country. Both cases demonstrate the advantages of mobilizing popular support. Through Sinn Féin and Batasuna, the IRA and ETA respectively were given the opportunity to set up open structures and convey their message to potential supporters as well as the media. They have also managed to draw in a much larger constituency, which included all those who, for whatever reason, could not participate in the 'armed struggle' but were sympathetic, able and willing to help in other ways. In the case of the IRA, this included large segments of the population, such as women, older people, professionals and university students, whose skills and potential utility to the movement had previously been untapped. Furthermore, both Sinn Féin and Batasuna successfully participated in elections through which their military wings gained some legitimacy as political actors. In fact, Sinn Féin has now become the strongest party among Catholics in Northern Ireland, sidelining the moderate nationalists of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).[43]

Another way of mobilizing popular support is through welfare networks. Political front parties such as Sinn Fein frequently act as welfare networks too, for example, by representing constituents in dealings with welfare agencies, or by setting up community networks on social and economic issues. The practice is more distinct, though, in countries where the state fails to provide basic welfare, and where offering such services represents a formidable opportunity for the terrorists to win the 'hearts and minds' of the population. Many Palestinians in Gaza, for instance, think of Hamas not primarily as a terrorist organization but as a provider of kindergartens, schools and care homes. The same is true for Hezbollah, which has replaced the state as a provider of services in many areas of Lebanon. In the southern suburbs of Beirut, for instance, the organization not only set up a system of water reservoirs and reconnected people to the electricity grid, it also took over the collection of rubbish when the local authorities proved incapable of doing so. Hezbollah's hospital is the only place in Beirut to provide healthcare at subsidized rates, with the result that the group has established a virtual monopoly over health services for the poor.[44]

It should come as no surprise, then, that all this has inspired a strong sense of loyalty (and even admiration) among Hezbollah's core Shiite constituency, and it may explain the sense of outrage many Lebanese felt when – during the recent war in 2006 – Israel destroyed some of the social infrastructure that had been established by the group.

No doubt, grassroots agitation is the most promising way of disseminating one's message and creating large and stable constituencies, who will support and protect the terrorists, as well as provide them with a degree of legitimacy. However, it is also the hardest and most expensive way of gaining support. A political party may be easy to create, but to recruit the activists and supporters needed to make it a serious political force can take many years. The party's association with terrorism may, in some cases, be an advantage, depending on how discriminately and against whom it is used. Frequently, though, it is likely to be divisive and will deter potential supporters from joining. Also, unless the party is immediately driven underground, the authorities will attempt to make life difficult for its supporters, which may include measures of harassment and discrimination. Moreover, the building of a political party and – even more so – the creation of a welfare network necessitates substantial material resources. The enthusiasm of the group's leading activists may go a long way, but building and maintaining a network of constituency offices, schools or even hospitals requires money on a scale not usually available to small conspiratorial groups. It is for this reason that terrorist groups with the aim of engaging in grassroots agitation often need to choose from two alternatives. Either they align themselves with a state sponsor, who – as in the case of Hezbollah – will fund most of their activities. Or they expand their criminal activities, including racketeering, bank robberies, smuggling, etc. Neither of the two options is likely to excite their potential constituency. State sponsorship will question the group's independence and lay them open to the charge that they are the agents of a foreign government. Increased involvement in crime may create a public backlash and alienate the very people they are hoping to attract as supporters.

At a conceptual level, grassroots political agitation raises the question if, at this stage, the activity of a terrorist group can still be described as strategic terrorism. After all, one of the central tenets of the strategy of terrorism is that symbolic acts of violence alone are sufficient in bringing about political change. By engaging in long-term grassroots activism, however, the terrorists implicitly suggest that violence may not be sufficient after all, but that mass organization – as proposed by Mao and others – represents a requirement for political success. By shifting their focus from acts of terrorism to political agitation, they are conceding that strategic terrorism can destroy the legitimacy of the existing regime and create an opening for new political actors, but that it will at some point have to give way, allowing more conventional forms of struggle to emerge. If this is true, terrorism may be a very crude door opener, but in order to achieve victory – that is, to gain power – it will be necessary for the insurgents to cultivate the means which they initially thought had become unnecessary. It is perhaps for this reason that some of the most long-standing movements that have employed terrorism around the world have never been

practitioners of strategic terrorism but always chosen a mixed strategy of terrorism and mass agitation. The bargaining power of groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, for example, derives not exclusively from their capacity to carry out devastating acts of violence but from the fact that they have managed to combine military prowess with popular appeal to an extent that they have become virtually impossible to sideline.

Even the most seamless dissemination of one's political message, however, will not guarantee success. Just because a terrorist group succeeds in transmitting its message to the general public through the media, the Internet, open political structures or any other channel does not mean that anyone will be persuaded. In other words, if the aim is to gain legitimacy and political credibility amongst the population, disseminating one's message is not sufficient – people actually have to like what they hear. It is for this reason that ideology becomes a crucial factor in the third phase of a campaign of strategic terrorism. The ideology of an insurgent movement, then, offers a critique of the existing order, and it articulates an alternative set of values and beliefs. It makes sense of grievances against the prevailing order, and it legitimizes the use of violence against it. Most importantly, in relation to the insurgents' aims, it is key to determining the potential level of popular support, and will ultimately affect the ability of those who employ terrorism to gain sufficient legitimacy to be recognized as an alternative provider of authority.[45] In practical terms, therefore, unless people identify with the terrorist group's ideology and come to believe that it can provide for a society that better satisfies their needs, there is a good chance they will conclude that – however corrupt and chaotic – the status quo still represents the lesser of two evils.

The most advantageous scenario for the terrorists occurs when the alternative ideology it represents is already widely disseminated amongst the population, so that – when the revolt breaks out – the insurgents' political programme strikes an instant chord with the people whose allegiance they hope to gain. This tends to be the case when the terrorists' ideology is based on strong pre-existing sources of identity such as nationality or ethnicity, which may explain why many of the anti-colonial guerrilla campaigns that took place during the 1950s and 1960s were so spectacularly successful.[46] The insurgents' message of national freedom, independence and self-determination immediately resonated with the population whose grievances could be rationalized by the insurgents with reference to colonialism, exploitation and foreign rule. Also, and significantly, nationalism represented an ideology which united the entire population behind the insurgents' cause. In this respect, the anti-colonial campaigns of groups like the FLN in Algeria differed from the insurgencies that were waged on behalf of ethnic minority groups. The ideologies of both ETA and the IRA, for example, have come to be identified with the aspirations of particular ethnic groups rather than those of the population as a whole. While this meant that they were accorded instant legitimacy by the people they were believed to represent, there was little scope for reaching beyond these groups. Despite the insistence of both ETA and IRA leaders throughout their respective campaigns

that they were articulating universal values, ETA has hardly gained any support amongst the Basque Country's ethnic Spaniards, nor is Irish Republicanism ever likely to attract many Protestant Unionists. In that sense, centring one's ideology around a pre-existing source of identity – whilst guaranteeing a stable constituency as well as instant recognition and legitimacy – may also be a barrier to gaining wider support.

Gaining legitimacy has proved even more difficult when the terrorists have espoused 'artificial' political ideologies. The 'red' terrorists in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, failed not because they would have had no access to the media or because their message would have been misrepresented, but simply because not enough people were attracted to their cause. In fact, the 'red' terrorists were extremely skilful at manipulating the media, with some of the hostage-takings and kidnappings by groups like the Italian Red Brigades and the West German Red Army Faction (RAF) designed to be elaborate pieces of theatre. The problem was that their purist, and often highly abstract, interpretation of Marxism struck no chord with the population, least of all with the working classes on whose behalf they claimed to act. Members of the RAF, for example, believed that prisoners' hunger strikes would make people identify with their plight, highlight the regime's repressive attitudes and mobilize supporters on a scale similar to the Irish Republican hunger strikes, which crystallized Sinn Féin as an electoral force. In reality, though, people could not care less, with vast majorities opposed to making any concessions.[47]

The same could be said for Theodore Kaczynski, the American terrorist who became known as the Unabomber. Kaczynski's mail-bombing campaign, which killed 3 and wounded 29 people over the course of nearly 2 decades, was directed mainly against scientists, airlines and other symbols of modern technology, which he considered to be undermining the human spirit and leading to a society dominated by 'great machines'. The bombings, Kaczynski explained, served to draw attention to the dangers of industrial society, and indeed communicating his political message was central to his campaign. In the early 1990s, he promised to end his campaign if a major American newspaper published his 35,000-word manifesto entitled *Industrial Society and Its Future.*[48] After some discussion, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* agreed to print the paper. Yet, rather than triggering a great uprising against industrial society, the text was immediately disregarded and sparked interest mostly in relation to its author, not its content. In fact, Kaczynski's brother recognized the writing style and contacted the police, resulting in the Unabomber's arrest.

At the third stage, therefore, a campaign of strategic terrorism moves into more conventional political territory. Unlike conventional politics, the process of gaining legitimacy is assisted and facilitated by the use of violence, which – the terrorists hope – will create an environment in which people are more receptive to challengers of the status quo. Violence alone, however, will by no means guarantee victory. Like any political party or pressure group, the terrorists need to identify and activate channels through which to communicate their political message, and they will have to do so in the ideological terms that

appeal to a wider audience. It is at this point that the terrorists are faced with their greatest challenge. They have to stop employing terrorism and become conventional political activists once more. For many insurgents, who – at this point – will have absorbed themselves fully in the mechanics of their campaign of violence, this change of *modus operandi* represents a considerable challenge. Arguably, it is here that most terrorist campaigns ultimately fail.

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As we have shown in this chapter, a strategy of terrorism can be broken down into three distinct stages. In the first, the aim is to undermine the 'structural supports' which bind people to the regime. Rather than winning hearts and minds, the objective is to disorient the population, so that they no longer perceive those in authority as providers of stability and security. At the second stage, the aim is to provoke a response through which the target government unwittingly undermines its own authority. It is worth stressing that the strategy of terrorism crucially depends on the target to react in ways that erode its grip on power, be it by overreacting, under-reacting, repressing or appeasing the moderates. Third, the terrorists have to present themselves as providers of an alternative legitimacy. Having destroyed the credibility of the old order, it is vital at this stage to establish that they can fill the vacuum of power and legitimacy that they created. For the population to learn about the terrorists' message and come to embrace their leadership, however, people need to be able to access and understand their message, and – not least – they have to like what they hear. This means the insurgents will have to exploit the communicative aspects of terrorist violence, but it may also compel them to revert back to more conventional forms of political activism.

Of course, dividing a terrorist campaign into three distinct phases is, to some extent, arbitrary. And indeed, the three phases we have described in this chapter are not necessarily meant to be executed one after the other. For example, stages one and two – disorientation and target response – are likely to overlap, if not occur at the same time. After all, it would be strange for the government to wait for the terrorist campaign to finish before responding. In turn, the government's reaction often represents a vital part of the chaos and alienation which the terrorists hope to cause. In that sense, the two phases of disorientation and target response constitute a unit, divided for analytical purposes only. Likewise, one may argue that, in practical terms, the third stage of the campaign – gaining legitimacy – needs to precede the first two if those insurgents that employ terrorist violence wish to stand any chance of success. Unless the terrorists have done some groundwork in introducing themselves and their message to the public as well as in mobilizing potential supporters, they will stand little chance of being recognized and accepted as credible providers of new authority once the armed campaign has begun. The third stage – rather than simply following the first two – may therefore be thought of as a continuous process, which takes place before, during and after the first two stages of a terrorist campaign.

What we hoped to do in this chapter is not only to explain what the strategy of terrorism is about, but also indicate some of the problems that may be associated with executing such a strategy. Some of the challenges in carrying out a strategy of terrorism have become very plain, such as the potential difficulties in communicating a message that persuades people to accept the terrorists as providers of a new authority. We would argue, however, that the contradictions of terrorism as a strategy go far deeper than some of the purely technical or practical problems associated with communicating one's message. They are systemic problems, which question the viability of terrorism as a *bona fide* strategy, and the following two chapters will make some of them obvious. The 'escalation trap' is one of the key contradictions, which we believe merits a chapter in its own right. First, though, the following chapter will deal with some of the flawed assumptions on which the promise of terrorism as a strategy rests.

4   Flawed assumptions

> There is a difference between taking what you want and making someone give it to you.[1]
>
> Thomas Schelling

Campaigns of terrorist violence attract much attention, and they often succeed in creating chaos, upheaval and instability. The noise they generate, however, conceals the fact that they rarely achieve their aims. Setting aside Robert Taber's notion of 'relative success' (see previous chapter), we can think of only two campaigns of strategic terrorism to have prompted the fundamental political change envisaged by the insurgents. One is the Irgun's campaign to end the British mandate in Palestine in favour of a Jewish homeland. The other is the FLN's campaign for Algerian independence from France. Even here one might dispute the exact nature and outcome of these campaigns. No doubt, some terrorist groups have survived, gained public recognition and thrived as political parties or social movements – Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), ETA or the IRA, for example – but their fundamental aims and stated objectives remain unfulfilled. The vast majority have disappeared without attaining any of their objectives. Some were crushed by their opponents, others simply lost momentum and, having exhausted their resources, decided to wind down. In his 1991 landmark study, Leonard Weinberg found that none of the 75 terrorist groups he studied had achieved their political objectives, and only those which had established links to a political party stood a decent chance of surviving for more than 10 years. He concluded that the most common experience for groups that utilize terrorism is not one of success or even partial success, but one of failure and disappearance.[2] A more recent study, carried out by Max Abrahms, arrived at a similar conclusion, namely that merely 7 per cent of terrorist campaigns could be regarded as 'successful'.[3]

   The previous chapter explained what the strategy of terrorism is, and it also gave some of the reasons why it may be difficult to implement. We concluded that – since terrorism relies on exploiting the psychological rather than the more tangible effects of violent action – it is more demanding intellectually

than other strategies. In order to be successful, a political movement not only needs to be capable of carrying out a few highly symbolic acts of violence, but construct and maintain a fully fledged campaign aimed at a number of different audiences. The insurgents must not only transform the political discourse, but also manage to communicate a message which allows them to be perceived as alternative providers of authority. In fact, they not only have to be masters of violent communication, but also manage and direct the process of political agitation and mobilization that will facilitate their rise to power. A strategy of terrorism, therefore, expects the insurgents to handle an immensely complex set of processes, often simultaneously.

Does that mean that it is impossible for a campaign of strategic terrorism to succeed? Were the victories of the Irgun and the FLN exceptions from the rule? Or did the terrorists whose campaigns ended in failure simply not appreciate the complexity of their undertaking? In other words, is strategic terrorism merely difficult, or is it systemically flawed? It is this question which we hope to explore in this and the following chapter.

From a conceptual point of view, the main problem with the strategy of terrorism concerns the very element which is meant to make terrorism such as a potent weapon, the manipulation of the psychology of fear. We will argue that terrorism is based on a series of assumptions about individual, collective and institutional behaviour which are either false or wholly unproven. We will address the assumptions we believe to be the most doubtful and show why, as a result, terrorist strategies are likely to end up in either defeat or irrelevance. In particular, we will show that outcomes contradicting the terrorists' objectives are just as probable as the ones which the insurgents rely on in order for their strategy to become effective. This chapter aims to show, therefore, that the scenario on which those who employ strategic terrorism pin their hopes is tied to a specific set of circumstances. This does not mean that it is impossible for a strategy of terrorism to succeed, but it will demonstrate quite how limited its utility is in the vast majority of cases

The myth of disorientation I: terrorism and stress

We should begin our critical review by looking at the immediate consequences of strategic terrorism. First among those are, of courses, the people that are killed in acts of terrorism. Yet, in spite of the horrific images of carnage and mayhem, the statistics show that terrorist acts kill much fewer people than some more so-called conventional strategies, or indeed many other forms of 'risky behaviour'. As John Mueller points out:

> Even with the September 11 attacks included in the count ... the number of Americans killed by international terrorism since the late 1960s (which is when the US State Department began its accounting) is about the same as the number killed over the same period by lightning – or by accident-causing deer or by severe allergic reactions to peanuts. In almost all years

the total number of people worldwide who die at the hands of international terrorists is not much more than the number who drown in bathtubs in the United States.[4]

This should come as no surprise. Indeed, saying that terrorism is 'over-rated' because it does not kill huge numbers of people misses the point of what the strategy is meant to achieve. As we showed in previous chapters, terrorism is *not* a 'conventional' strategy which aims to achieve tangible military goals, such as killing people, destroying things or holding territory. It is a form of psychological warfare that seeks to influence and manipulate an audience's attitudes and perceptions of interest. In the process of doing so, killing people can be helpful, even instrumental, but it is not usually an end by itself.

Among many observers – Mueller included – it is understood that acts of terrorism produce a variety of costs, and that the immediate, direct costs – that is, people killed and property destroyed – are not necessarily the most important. Arguably, the popular fixation on body counts has prevented us from understanding the many indirect costs of terrorism. Paul Pillar, for instance, lists such indirect costs as additional security measures, foreign policy related 'costs' (e.g., troop redeployments, the destabilization of peace processes, etc.),[5] and also 'the fear instilled in individual citizens, and what it leads those citizens to do':

> The fear itself – the sheer mental discomfort – is a cost. So is the economic effect of fearful citizens not taking trips or not patronizing certain businesses. And so is the social effect of those citizens arming themselves or ostracizing fellow citizens of particular ethnic backgrounds that are associated with terrorism, or doing any of a number of other dysfunctional things that less fearful citizens would not do.[6]

This last point is the most significant, because it is the ability to divide communities and change people's attitudes towards each other which terrorists hope to engender and exploit above all others.

Pillar's analysis is entirely correct, yet – in our view – it is also important to differentiate between levels of fear and the consequences induced by them. For a campaign of strategic terrorism to be successful, we believe, it needs go far beyond causing a degree of 'mental discomfort' and prompting people to do 'dysfunctional things'. Strategic terrorism assumes that people's sense of stability and security will be completely shattered, and that, consequently, a radical transformation in their relationship to the status quo will take place. It postulates, in other words, that acts of terrorism can cause no less than complete despair and disorientation, removing the structural supports that allow societies to function in predictable ways. The question we need to assess, therefore, is not just whether terrorism is capable of causing mental discomfort but if it can produce disorientation on a scale that would make it impossible for a society to continue to function, because it is only at this point at which the strategy of

terrorism can begin to unleash the processes that may lead to the terrorists emerging as alternative providers of safety and stability.

As an analytical category, disorientation will be difficult, if not entirely impossible, to measure. What we can do, however, is to look at whether people have suffered from the more-modest indicators of disorientation, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which consists of symptoms such as avoiding trauma reminders, hyper-arousal and emotional numbing.[7] Taken together, these symptoms may not amount to 'disorientation', but it would be reasonable to argue that they constitute necessary – albeit insufficient – preconditions for the breaking of people's sense of security and stability. After all, if terrorism does not even disturb people enough to make them avoid reminders of the attack, how can it hope to break them altogether? Furthermore, from a practical point of view, the advantage of looking at the occurrence of PTSD as an indicator for mild forms of 'disorientation' is that psychologists have studied the phenomenon at length, and that numerous surveys of PTSD amongst people affected by terrorism have been carried out. Indeed, one of the most systematic as well as interesting examinations has been produced by a team of researchers led by James Rubin at King's College London in the wake of the 2005 London-transport bombings, and it is this case study on which we will be drawing in the following.[8]

The London bombings, which killed 56 people and wounded more than 700, was the most devastating terrorist attack ever to have taken place in England. Significantly, all the bombings were directed against the transport system – three on underground trains, one on a bus – which is used by 3.5 million Londoners a day. Considering not only the death toll but also how closely the attacks were linked to people's everyday routine of getting to work, one would have expected to find very substantial amounts of stress and anxiety amongst the population, at least in the first few days immediately following the attack. In reality, though, according to the King's study, which is based on a representative survey of Londoners and was carried out just 11 days after the attacks, less than a third of the population suffered from PTSD-related symptoms. Most reported 'feeling upset when something reminds [me] of what happened' (25 per cent), but only very small minorities displayed severe signs of stress that border on disorientation, such as having 'trouble falling or staying asleep' (4 per cent). Only 12 participants (1 per cent) said that they needed professional help to deal with their emotional response to the attacks. Furthermore, whilst a vast majority (86 per cent) of respondents felt that another attack on London was likely in the near future, only little more than half (55 per cent) believed that their own life was in danger from terrorism. Even more surprisingly, perhaps, just about a third (33 per cent) stated that they felt unsafe when going into central London. This indicates that the attacks failed to achieve the 'it could happen to me' effect: less than two weeks after the attacks – when many underground lines were still closed and bodies continued to be recovered from the wreckage – two-thirds of the population already felt sufficiently confident to go back to central London.

In early 2006, the King's team carried out a follow-up study,[9] which makes it possible to differentiate between the short- and medium-term effects of the attacks. This second survey confirmed many of the findings that had been made in the first, and it also showed how short lived the psychological impact of the attack was. Six months on, the percentage of people suffering from substantial PTSD-related symptoms had decreased from a around a third to just eleven, meaning that the bombings were no longer causing any substantial stress to nearly 90 per cent of Londoners. Interestingly, the proportion of people who thought that another attack was likely had increased to 90 per cent in the follow-up survey, whereas the share of respondents who thought that their own life was in danger went down to just over 40 per cent. These results reinforced the researchers' initial impression that the attacks had been ineffective in shattering people's sense of stability and security. On the one hand, they showed that Londoners felt that there was an ongoing threat from terrorism, which – according to the study's authors – reflected a 'residual level of disquiet' that constitutes part of a 'normal response to what is perceived by many to be an ongoing threat'. On the other hand, the threat perception had become increasingly divorced from feelings about one's own safety and security. While four out of ten people saying that they believed their life to be in danger from terrorism may still represent a substantial minority, the substantial decrease in this number – in spite of daily reports about new terrorist plots – indicates how badly the London bombings had failed in causing disorientation.

A further indicator of how well Londoners seem to have coped with the fallout from the London bombings was their willingness to use public transport. In the days immediately following the attacks, it was widely reported how passenger numbers, especially on the underground system, had decreased by up to a third, and that those who were travelling were experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety.[10] This was confirmed by the first survey, though it is worth stressing that two-thirds reported no difference in their travel behaviour in relation to the tube, and even less in respect to other forms of transport such as buses and overland trains. In fact, only 23 responded positively to the question 'Do you feel very unsafe when travelling by tube, train, bus, car, going into central London, going elsewhere in the United Kingdom?'. Hence, rather than spreading paranoia and paralysing the city altogether, people's fears – even in the short term – were limited to one particular mode of transport. Furthermore, by the time of the second survey, the share of people feeling 'very unsafe' about using any of the forms of transport enumerated in the question had decreased to just 12 per cent. Indeed, London Transport reported that passenger numbers had almost returned to normal a month after the attacks, and that there were no longer any obviously detectable differences in travel behaviour.[11]

In media reports, much continues to be made of Londoners' supposed resilience – 'their reserved stoicism [and] dogged determination to keep going – without making too much of a fuss'.[12] In that sense, one may argue that the London bombings represented an exceptional case and should therefore not be generalized. And indeed, a similar study which was carried out four days after the

9/11 attacks in the United States showed higher rates for stress-related symptoms. Using the same questionnaire as the London survey, a team led by Mark Schuster at the RAND Corporation found that 44 per cent of Americans displayed stress-related symptoms, with 30 per cent reporting 'feeling upset' when reminded of the attacks and 9 per cent having trouble falling asleep.[13] Comparing the American results with their own findings in the case of the London attacks, Rubin argued that the higher stress rate amongst Americans had little to do with the 'Blitz spirit' or any particularly British character trait, but could be explained by the greater rate of casualties in the American case, the 'massive visual terror' created by planes crashing into some of the most iconic symbols of national power, and the fact that there had been little, if any, expectation of terrorist attacks against the 'homeland' before 2001.[14] In light of these factors, the relatively modest increases in stress-related symptoms (measured just a few days after the 9/11 attacks) may, in fact, be seen as confirmation for our idea that the disorientation caused by acts of terrorism is very limited.

Another study, which surveyed symptoms of stress as a result of the Madrid train bombings in March 2004 (led by researchers at the Complutense University in Madrid), showed even lower levels of stress than those found in the British study. Though the survey used a different methodology and can therefore not be directly compared to Rubin's or Schuster's research, it is notable that the Spanish researchers found less than 12 per cent of the Spanish population displaying symptoms that would meet the diagnostic criteria of 'panic attack'.[15]

It is entirely plausible to say that terrorism causes people a degree of mental discomfort, and even that people may engage in dysfunctional behaviour as a result. However, the assumption on which the strategy of terrorism rests is that terrorist attacks produce not only discomfort but that they disorient people to the extent that they feel completely alienated from society and lose all confidence in the status quo. The examples looked at in this section clearly show that this is not the case. Even the very modest indicators of disorientation such as stress-related symptoms are far from universal amongst those exposed to terrorist attacks. The emotional and psychological responses to the London and Madrid bombings – as well as, to a lesser extent, the reactions to the 9/11 attacks in the United States – demonstrate that people are coping relatively well with terrorist violence, even when it involves dramatic, large-scale attacks against civilians. There is very little in the data that we have examined that would support the idea of people being permanently damaged by terrorism, nor indeed can it be argued that even the short-term impact would be devastating. Whether this holds true not only for individual acts of terrorism but also in the case of continuous terrorist campaigns will be examined in the following section.

The myth of disorientation II: terrorism and resilience

With the possible exception of the London attacks (which were followed by a series of attempted attacks two weeks after the initial bombings), the terrorist

attacks and response patterns cited in the section above all refer to one-off events. For this reason, the sceptics would claim that we have failed to capture the full psychological impact of terrorism. Disorientation, they would say, will be more pronounced when terrorist acts are not one-offs but part of an ongoing campaign, making the threat a permanent feature of people's lives and creating a firm expectation that 'it will happen again.' Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman emphasize this point in their efforts to construct a consensus definition of terrorism. They state that, for acts of violence to become terrorism, the target group needs to be 'put in a state of chronic fear ... [through] previous use of violence or [the] credible threat of violence' in the future.[16] In other words, disorientation can be expected to occur only when the practitioners of terrorist violence have shown that they are capable of sustaining an entire campaign of terrorism.

Arguably, both the London bombings and the 9/11 attacks managed to create the expectation of further attacks, and should therefore not be counted as one-off events. The Madrid attacks, in turn, were viewed by the Spanish population as one-offs, though the terrorists had in fact planned an entire campaign. More fundamentally, though, we would challenge the very assumption that repetition is likely to cause disorientation. No doubt, terrorist acts of violence are shocking and disturbing, and it would seem logical to assume that the more terrorism people experience, the more shocked and disturbed they become. In reality, though, terrorism is shocking and disturbing not because of the violence involved but primarily because it is extra-normal (see Introduction). A degree of violence is prevalent in all societies, yet most people learn to cope relatively well with pub brawls, car accidents and other forms of 'normalized' violence and trauma. Even in the most crime-ridden cities, most people have developed ways of managing their fears. Repetition, therefore, may not amplify the effect of disorientation, but – on the contrary – it may lead to diminishing returns by 'normalizing' the expectation of terrorism and encouraging people to develop coping mechanisms similar to other forms of 'normalized' violence. Rather than disorientation, the most likely effect of repetition would thus be resilience, if not indifference.

Wardlaw's reflections on the psychology of terrorism support the idea that repetition can lead to indifference as much as disorientation, highlighting that 'the targets may become numbed by the violence [and develop] a psychological tolerance' for terrorism.[17] However, he introduces an important qualification. He argues that that the decisive factor tipping the balance between disorientation and indifference is the extent to which the terrorist campaign becomes predictable. When terrorist attacks occur in regular intervals and hit the same type of targets over and over again, the likely result will be for people to become used to the threat and develop coping mechanisms. If, however, a terror campaign manages to break any emerging pattern and continually defy people's expectations, they will be more likely to succeed in shattering people's sense of security.[18] From the terrorists' perspective, it seems obvious that the second scenario is the one for which to aim. However, this is also the one which is the

most difficult to realize. The longer a terrorist campaign continues, the more difficult will it be to maintain the momentum of surprise and unpredictability. Furthermore, unpredictability makes it necessary for the terrorists to change tactics and locations all the time, which will increase their rate of failure and make them vulnerable to detection and arrest.[19] Hence, while it may be possible to achieve disorientation through a campaign of strategic terrorism, it requires a high degree of sophistication, psychological insight and technical flexibility.

It is not difficult to identify instances in which campaigns of terroristic violence have led to numbing and indifference rather than disorientation. Wardlaw cites studies of the psychological impact of German air raids during World War II, when it was found that people learned to cope with even the most destructive raids.[20] Similar effects were reported during the 1991 Gulf War, when Israelis became habituated to Iraqi missile attacks and displayed few signs of psychiatric stress.[21] A similar – albeit more anecdotal – observation can be made for contemporary Iraq. In the first few months following the invasion of the country, every terrorist attack attracted huge public attention, dominating the newspaper headlines in Western countries and filling hours of news coverage on television. The longer the campaign went on, however, the impact of suicide bombings decreased, with items covering the latest incidents being relegated to the 'foreign news' sections of the papers. Despite the steadily increasing number of suicide attacks (rising from twelve in all of 2003 to 173 in the first six months of 2005),[22] the population in Coalition countries such as Britain and the United States had become indifferent towards the seemingly never-ending stream of bad news from Iraq. Of course, the terrorist campaign did help reinforce the perception that there was chaos in Iraq, but it is equally true that the impact of individual attacks had decreased, and that a substantial degree of emotional numbing had set in amongst one of the terrorists' key audiences.

The most powerful illustration of the idea that extended campaigns of terrorism do not necessarily lead to widespread disorientation is the most recent period of confrontation between Palestinians and Israel, the so-called Second Intifada. It began in September 2000 and reached its peak in the first half of 2002, though major attacks continued throughout the year 2003 and in early 2004. During this period, various Palestinian organizations (in particular, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades) managed to carry out thousands of terrorist attacks – including 132 suicide bombings – against Israeli targets, killing nearly 1,000 Israeli citizens.[23] However, what makes the Second Intifada such a promising case study is not just its longevity and intensity but also the fact that its psychological impact on the Israeli population has been the subject of numerous academic studies. In fact, in psychological terms, it is hard to think of any other prolonged terrorist campaign whose consequences have been as well documented as the Second Intifada, and it is two of these studies that we will be drawing on in the following.

The first study was a national survey carried out by a team of researchers at Tel Aviv University in April–May 2002, when the campaign of suicide bombings

had just reached its peak.[24] In the first four months of the year, 33 suicide bombings had taken place, of which 17 happened in the month of March alone. Naturally, one would have expected to see high levels of stress and anxiety amongst the population, not least because 45 per cent of those interviewed had directly experienced a terrorist attack or knew of a family member or friend who had been exposed. In reality, however, less than one in ten (9.4 per cent) met symptom criteria of PTSD, and even fewer (5.2 per cent) said they needed professional help. As the authors of the study point out:

> For all the distress… the emotional impact seems to have been fairly moderate. At the time of the study, the participants had faced 19 months of terrorist attacks marked by steadily increasing frequency. The terrorism reached almost all parts of the country. In addition, news of the terrorist attacks was repeatedly covered by television and radio. Considering the high levels of direct and indirect exposure to trauma in the sample, much more distress might have been expected than was actually found.[25]

Indeed, the level of stress caused by the Second Intifada was lower than that found among Americans in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, despite the fact that most Americans were hundreds, if not thousands, of miles from the places in which the atrocities had taken place.

It is also worth noting that – as in the case of the London bombings – people in Israel were able to distinguish between the immediate threat and their future generally. Though many respondents reported feeling gloomy or even depressed about the security situation (59 per cent), the overwhelming majority expressed optimism about their personal future (82 per cent) and the future of the country (67 per cent). These numbers demonstrate that even a terrorist campaign as prolonged and intense as the Second Intifada failed to achieve its primary objective, namely, to undermine the society's structural supports. On the contrary, the authors of the study argue that Israelis' response to the campaign had been enhanced by previous traumatic experiences, such as earlier terrorist campaigns, wars and the Holocaust, and that its drawn-out nature had encouraged people to develop systematic coping behaviours (talking to others, self-distraction, etc.), which lessened the emotional impact of individual attacks.[26] It would, of course, be completely mistaken to describe this type of response as indifference, but it clearly shows that repetition – far from spreading 'chronic fear' – may produce the exact opposite: instead of increasing disorientation, it seems to have contributed to the development of collective resilience.

Another study was conducted in the summer of 2001 by a team of researchers led by Arieh Shalev at the Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem.[27] It examined the responses to continuous terror in two suburbs of Jerusalem. Whereas the first had not been exposed to any terrorist activities and the roads leading to it remained open, the second had been virtually under siege for eight months before the data collection. According to Shalev's team, the directly

affected town had experienced a wide range of violence, which included frequent shootings, the stoning of cars and numerous sniper attacks. Some residents had died as a result of the violence, and there was virtually no one who would not have witnessed some of the violence. Given the high amount of exposure, the researchers' expectation was to find elevated levels of stress and trauma-related symptoms among the inhabitants of the second suburb. As it turned out, the rates of stress and PTSD-related symptoms were similar among the inhabitants of the first and second town. Whereas in the first, 21 per cent met at least one symptom associated with PTSD (such as avoidance, arousal, etc.), the rate in the second was 26 per cent. PTSD with significant distress was found amongst 7 per cent of the population in the first and 10 per cent in the second suburb. Both differences are non-significant.[28]

In discussing the findings, Shalev states that part of the reason for not finding more substantial differences between the two towns may be the fact that both were similarly affected by their proximity to Jerusalem – a major target for terrorism during the Second Intifada. Based on this observation, he postulates that there may be a 'ceiling effect', that is, a saturation point at which the intensity and level of direct exposure to terrorist activities no longer has any significant impact on the overall rate of stress incurred by the population.[29] Not only would this be a plausible explanation for the similar rates of PTSD in the two towns, but it would also confirm our idea that continuous terror leads to diminishing returns. Indeed, like the researchers at Tel Aviv University, Shalev believes that higher rates of exposure to continuous terrorism are more likely to result in improved coping behaviour than increased disorientation: '[T]he many ways in which residents of the directly exposed community had to concretely cope with the terror threat could have contributed to a better perception of controllability and self-efficacy, and thereby to a reduction in symptoms.'[30] Again, the overall conclusion appears to be that the threat of repetition does not profoundly alter the target's emotional response, and that the terrorists' hope of completely shattering people's defences could not be substantiated.

In summary, then, we have found little evidence for the idea that terrorist activities – whether single, dramatic acts of terrorism or entire campaigns – are likely to disorient people to the extent that they lose their sense of safety and stability and begin to feel alienated from the society in which they live. Disorientation may not be completely impossible to achieve, but the cases we have examined demonstrate that it is not the most-likely outcome. Even when confronted with continuous terror, only a minority of the target population was significantly affected, whereas the majority did not display any of the symptoms that are normally associated with stress-related disorders. While most people experience significant levels of mental discomfort and their attitude towards terrorism may be far from indifferent, it is far from clear whether this mental discomfort can ever be translated into the disorientation which a campaign of terrorist violence hopes to trigger. Rather, terrorist campaigns seem to result in diminishing returns, with people adapting to the new environment and developing better coping mechanisms. This will affect not only their individual

reaction but also the environment in which the government formulates its response.

Blaming the government?

As important as it is for a programme of terrorism to spread disorientation, much of its success will depend on whether it succeeds in provoking the government into (unintentionally) undermining its own authority. Most practitioners of terrorism aim to provoke repression, because they believe that – by goading the authorities into using extra-legal methods – they can confuse the distinction between victim and aggressor, militarize the situation and bring about a state of emergency. Equally, though, the terrorists may hope to 'deflate' the authorities' power by demonstrating that the government is incapable of dealing with a terrorist challenge. Whether it is the former or the latter, the idea in both cases is to get people to blame the government rather than the terrorists for their predicament. When the strategic objective is over-reaction, the hope is that people will come to regard the government as brutal and oppressive. When the goal is under-reaction, the loss of legitimacy occurs because the government will be perceived to have failed in its core task of protecting the people. In theory, both these scenarios appear to make perfect sense, yet quite how plausible are they in practice?

To address this question, it will be useful to draw on the insights provided by similar strategies. To our knowledge, the only other military approach in which the primary objective is to persuade people to blame their government rather than the actual perpetrators of the violence is strategic bombing. The Italian General Giulio Douhet – the first strategist to develop a comprehensive theory of air power – argued that the massive aerial bombardment of towns and cities could cause such fear and dread amongst the civilian population that people would rise up against their government. In contrast to terrorism, the purpose of strategic bombing was not to provoke any particular reaction by the government, but – like terrorism – the idea was to cause disorientation and get people to blame the government rather than those who had carried out the bombardment.[31] Douhet's ideas have been criticized as unethical,[32] but it is also their lack of efficacy for which they have come under fire. The German air raids against London, Coventry and many other British cities during World War II clearly failed to undermine the British public's morale. Nor was the aerial bombardment of German cities by the Royal Air Force a great success. The strategic bombing of North Vietnam by the Americans even undermined American morale more than it weakened the North. Having reviewed all major strategic bombing campaigns until the mid-1990s, Robert Pape concluded that 'no coercive air strategy based on threatening or killing civilians has ever succeeded.'[33]

Notwithstanding the empirical evidence, the debate about strategic bombing provides some useful pointers for assessing the likely impact of strategic terrorism. Two arguments are particularly noteworthy. The first maintains that – instead

of undermining public morale – strategic bombing causes a 'rally around the flag' effect, which will be exploited by the authorities in order to unite the population against the enemy.[34] The second holds that the degree and immediacy with which people will be siding with the authorities is determined by the government's legitimacy: when regime legitimacy is high, people will not be intimidated by any amount of aerial bombardment, and support for the government is likely to increase, not decline.[35] If these insights apply not just to strategic bombing but also to strategic terrorism, this would mean that terrorists will only stand a chance of 'shifting the blame' if the regime's legitimacy is very low. Indeed, based on the strategic-bombing debate, the more likely outcome would be for people to identify the source of their fears correctly, blame the terrorists for the deteriorating situation, and support even repressive measures to have them defeated.

The IRA encountered some of these dynamics during its so-called England campaign. Irish Republicans had always believed that English people were ignorant and apathetic about the conflict in Northern Ireland because they were untouched by the violence. As Gerry Adams put it, 'English people should be interested in what their country's army is doing in Ireland ... Sadly this interest had only come when the problem had involved them directly.'[36] By 'involving them directly', Adams implied that it was essential for the IRA to engage in operations on the British mainland, so that the English would be knocked out of their complacency. This was thought to be good in propaganda terms (one bomb in London was believed to be worth ten in Belfast). More importantly, though, Irish Republicans believed that 'bringing the conflict home' would cause the population in England to turn against their government and pressure politicians in London to change their policy on Northern Ireland. In Adams' words, 'The English people have a responsibility for Ireland's British problem. They have the power to persuade their government to withdraw [from Northern Ireland].'[37] In this respect, of course, the rationale behind the IRA's England campaign was perfectly in line with the idea of strategic terrorism: it was to make sure that the population in England could never feel immune from the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that, ultimately, their perception of insecurity would translate into public pressure on the government to abandon its long-standing policy in relation to Northern Ireland.

The IRA's strategists were completely right in assuming that British public opinion was highly ambiguous when it came to Northern Ireland, and indeed this had caused British policymakers great concern throughout the conflict. As early as February 1971, members of the Cabinet worried that 'public opinion in Great Britain was beginning actively to resent the situation which was developing in Northern Ireland; and many people would favour abandoning the Province to its fate.'[38] Rather than reinforcing this latent dissatisfaction with government policy, however, the IRA's atrocities in England had the opposite effect. When asked what the government should do in response to the latest IRA bombings in England, only 28 per cent of the respondents to a 1984 MORI poll declared that they supported British withdrawal, whereas a

majority (53 per cent) favoured 'tougher action'.[39] Following the Bishopsgate bombing in London nearly a decade later, the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral even likened the IRA's England campaign to the Blitz, declaring that the Republicans had 'no more hope of killing the spirit of London than Adolf Hitler had'.[40] Instead of increasing the momentum for withdrawal, the IRA's England campaign had created a situation in which people became more, not less determined to 'defy the terrorists', and where any open political concession by the government would have been interpreted as betrayal.

More evidence for the futility of terrorists' attempts to 'shift the blame' can be found in Latin America. The most poignant example is undoubtedly that of Uruguay, where the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Movement) (MLN), also known as the *Tupamaros,* waged a violent campaign to replace the country's democratic government with a socialist regime. Originally, the Tupamaros – a mixture of Maoists, dissident socialists and revolutionary nationalists – had tried to stoke up anti-government sentiment among sugar-cane workers in the rural areas of the country, but they soon realized that it was in the capital, Montevideo, that they needed to make their influence felt. In the late 1960s, they undertook a hugely successful campaign of armed propaganda that humiliated the authorities and highlighted the corruption and social injustices of the political and business oligarchies. On numerous occasions, they seized food and other goods and distributed them to the poor, thereby garnering the reputation of latter- day Robin Hoods. They enjoyed considerable sympathy, particularly from young, educated members of the middle classes, with more than 20 per cent of the population believed to be supporters of the movement.[41] Significantly, the *Tupamaros* also succeeded in provoking government repression. After a peaceful, day-long occupation of the town of Pando in September 1969, some activists and their supporters were ruthlessly attacked by the government's security forces, resulting in three deaths and the arrest of hundreds more. Unofficial death squads started springing up, and the torture of suspects in police custody became widespread. In June 1970, an inquiry into the treatment of suspects concluded that torture was 'normal, frequent and habitual'.[42]

Rather than helping the *Tupamaros* to turn people against the government, however, the deterioration of the security situation played into the authorities' hands. Increasingly, the *Tupamaros* got drawn into a war of vengeance with the security forces. They carried out a series of assassinations of government officials, and kidnapped the British Ambassador, holding him for over a year in a 'people's prison'. They also abducted and killed an American government advisor, who was suspected of training the security forces in counter-insurgency techniques. While their campaign involved no random or indiscriminate killings, people became disillusioned with a campaign of violence that seemed to destabilize society for no apparent good. With the confrontations between the rebels and the authorities becoming ever more vicious and chaotic, people started to long for order, and this preference was reflected in the presidential elections of November 1972, which resulted in a major defeat for the parties of the Left. Indeed, much of the population supported the Uruguayan President

when he decreed the closure of parliament and assumed quasi-dictatorial powers in the summer of 1973, leading to more than a decade of military rule.[43] By then, much of the *Tupamaros'* organization had already been wiped out, with only a handful of their leaders escaping the brutal effectiveness of the security apparatus. In the end, the *Tupamaros'* campaign had not only failed to convince the Uruguayan people to turn against the government, it gave rise to their own destruction and ended democracy in what had been one of the most stable and pluralistic Latin American countries at the time.

A similar – albeit far more vicious – set of events ensued in Argentina at about the same time. In the late 1960s, the country saw the emergence of several left-wing insurgent groups. The most significant were the small People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), which was linked to the Argentinean Communist Party, and the much larger *Montoneros*, who represented the radical wing of the populist Péronist movement. The *Montoneros* aimed to destabilize the country through a series of bombings and assassinations, demanding radical social reforms and the return from exile of the country's former President, Juan Perón.[44] However, when Perón did return, assuming the Presidency in 1973, they soon became disillusioned with his lack of enthusiasm for social reform. In 1974, his government effectively declared war on the *Montoneros* and other leftist revolutionary groups, including the ERP. One of the ministers in his government even set up a death squad – the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (which became known as Triple-A) – that targeted members of the *Montoneros* along with suspected leftists generally. Following Perón's death in the same year, Argentina gradually slid into chaos, with the *Montoneros'* campaign and the government's efforts to counter the insurgency steadily escalating. In the years 1975 and 1976, the *Montoneros* killed about 300 people, particularly members of the Federal Police. On many occasions, gun battles took place in the streets of Argentinean cities.[45]

No doubt, the insurgents succeeded in causing chaos and instability and provoking a degree of repression. Again, though, the popular reaction to the *Montoneros'* campaign turned out very different from what the terrorists had expected. Instead of condemning the government's heavy-handed methods and its tacit support for death squads, people demanded even tougher action to restore peace and order. Indeed, there was widespread public support when the armed forces deposed the civilian government and introduced military rule in 1976. Once in power, the military junta cracked down on industrial unrest and curbed media freedoms. Most significantly, they set about a massive programme of counter-terror that came to be described as the 'dirty war'.[46] Over three hundred secret prisons were set up. Suspects were lifted off the streets and taken to one of the detention centres where they were tortured into revealing the names of their acquaintances and associates. Forty-eight hours after capture, they were then 'transferred' and 'disappeared' – euphemisms for the process whereby detainees were injected with tranquilisers, thrown into helicopters and pushed out over the sea. As one commander involved in the campaign admitted, 'We are going to have to kill 50,000 people: 25,000

subversives, 20,000 sympathisers, and we will make 5,000 mistakes.'[47] By 1978, the Montoneros were shattered, having suffered an estimated loss of 4,500 people. In addition, there were 18,000 political prisoners and up to 30,000 who had been 'disappeared'.[48] As in the Uruguayan case, the terrorists had failed to achieve their objective of persuading the people to blame the government for the repression they had provoked. Instead, their campaign prompted the rise to power – initially at least with the support of the population – of a military junta which came to be responsible for the worst human rights abuses imaginable.

Whether regime legitimacy played a significant role in any of the cases described above is difficult to say. As an institution, the British government enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy, but its Northern Ireland policy did not. Uruguay had been considered so stable it was referred to as the Switzerland of Latin America, yet latent tensions about the distribution of resources were never far from the surface, especially in the decade following the Cuban revolution. Argentina, on the other hand, had gone through long periods of instability and civil unrest, yet it was here that people united against the terrorists with the most vigour. Significantly, none of our cases involved foreign occupation, where regime legitimacy can generally be assumed to be very low. Whilst we cannot therefore come to any final judgement about the influence of regime legitimacy, the idea that terrorist campaigns *necessarily* induce a loss of authority for the government has been disproved. Furthermore, not only is terrorism unlikely to undermine governments' authority, it rather seems to contribute to the creation of a political environment in which repressive measures to fight terrorism become acceptable. Paradoxically, one could argue therefore that the terrorists unwittingly help to prepare the ground for their own destruction, and indeed this is one of the main themes to which we will return in the next chapter.

Governments' breaking points

Ultimately, of course, a campaign of strategic terrorism will be intended to generate sufficient momentum for the government to give in to the demands of the insurgents. The fundamental assumption inherent in the notion of strategic terrorism is, in other words, that all governments have a psychological breaking point that can be reached through a sustained campaign of terrorist violence. Indeed, not only do its practitioners tend to presume that all governments have a breaking point, the idea that even the smallest band of insurgents can cause a situation in which governments will reconsider their fundamental interests suggests that they believe this breaking point to be very low. There is an assumption, therefore, that governments are inherently weak, that they do not know how to deal with a violent challenge and that it will require little effort to dispose of them. Simply put, from the terrorists' perspective, all governments are paper tigers, which – though imposing from the outside – are likely to fall as soon as violence has escalated to a particular level.

In our view, this assumption is based on a reading of historical precedents which is both selective and simplistic. It originated mainly in the colonial experience, when terrorists demonstrated that the will of the target group could be undermined, government repression induced and support for the terrorist cause gained. Yet, as we showed in the previous chapter, colonial situations and foreign occupations are by far the most favourable from the insurgents' perspective. Occupations enjoy little legitimacy amongst the population they govern, and people can easily be mobilized around a nationalist message. Most importantly, colonies may not be regarded as vital possessions by the colonial power, making them vulnerable to shifts in the 'asset to liability' calculus. Removing an independent, indigenous government, however, will be less clear-cut. The government will be more determined to resist, as its core interest (i.e. its survival) will be at stake. Also, in contrast to the colonial scenario in which a wide cross-section of the community can be expected to sympathize with the terrorists, the population will be divided between opponents and backers of the terrorist cause, with the latter likely to encourage the government to take harsh measures, hold out and see off the terrorist campaign. In this type of situation, it will be far more difficult, if not impossible, to reach the government's psychological breaking point through a campaign of terrorism.

There are numerous instances in which those who have sought to practise campaign of terrorism have failed to make this distinction, and in which – consequently – false analogies have misled them into making the wrong assumptions about their respective campaigns. Take, for instance, the PLO's campaign against Israel, which – in its early days – drew inspiration from two main sources. The first were the events leading to the foundation of Israel, which many Palestinian nationalists believed demonstrated that even a powerful country like Britain could be pushed to change its policies by the determined actions of a few. And indeed, the British government's decision to give up its international mandate to rule Palestine had unquestionably been influenced by the Irgun's campaign, which created chaos and instability and raised the cost of the British presence to what many people in Britain regarded as an unacceptable level, especially after the bombing of the British administration's headquarters (located in the King David Hotel) in Jerusalem in July 1946.[49] The second precedent was the FLN's campaign in Algeria. When Yassir Arafat developed the strategy for Fatah – the group which came to be the dominant faction within the PLO – he spent much time studying the events that led to the withdrawal of France from Algeria, and he consciously tried to model his own campaign on the FLN's. In fact, following an invitation by the newly independent Algerian government, Arafat jumped at the opportunity to set up an office in Algiers in 1963, which became a popular destination for young Palestinian cadres eager to learn about the strategy of national liberation which had proved to be so effective.[50]

What had not occurred to Arafat was that the British in Palestine and the French in Algeria had been in a fundamentally different position from the Israeli government. Both Palestine and – to a lesser extent – Algeria (see below)

had been colonial possessions, which could be dispensed with when the cost of occupation had risen beyond what the government and the population in the colonial metropolis believed to be an acceptable price worth paying for the continued retention of a particular territory. The colonial 'settlers' were offered the possibility of return, and the rest would – sometimes more, sometimes less happily – accept integration into the new state. In the case of Israel, however, the government was not a colonial satellite. It was the very existence of the state which had been challenged by the insurgents, and the Israelis had no homeland to go back to (arguably, the whole point of Israel was to create one). The idea that a campaign of strategic terrorism could coerce the government into agreeing to its own destruction must have sounded ridiculous even then, yet – in essence – this was the rationale on which Fatah's (and later the PLO's) campaign rested. Its only major 'success' was to trigger the interventions of conventional Arab armies in 1967 and 1973, which resulted in the ongoing occupation of core Palestinian territories by Israel.

In the first years of its campaign, the IRA's strategy was based on similar calculations. Irish Republicans believed themselves to be part of an anti-colonial struggle, with Britain as the aggressor illegally occupying part of the island of Ireland and maintaining a quasi-colonial relationship with its Western neighbour. It came as no surprise, therefore, that IRA strategists saw their own campaign in similar terms to those which had been waged by anti-colonial movements across the world. According to Maria McGuire, a defector who was close to the IRA's leadership in the early 1970s, members of the group's Army Council had keenly studied recent conflicts such as those in Palestine, Cyprus and Aden, where guerrilla campaigns had resulted in a British withdrawal. McGuire claimed that the Army Council set an initial target to kill 36 British soldiers because it was thought that this figure matched the number of troops killed in Aden and would impose enough pressure on the British to get them to the negotiating table.[51] The IRA's strategic outlook and its overly optimistic assumptions about the prospects for a swift victory, therefore, resulted not from an in-depth analysis of the situation in Northern Ireland but from a crude reading of the successful insurgency campaigns in other parts of the world. There was absolutely no evidence that the British government would respond to the IRA's campaign in Northern Ireland in the same way in which it had responded to the insurgencies in Palestine, Cyprus and Aden, but this did not prevent the group's strategists from transferring these insights to their situation.

In reality, there were numerous – and, some, very obvious – reasons why the British government's response to the IRA's campaign in Northern Ireland was different from its previous, colonial experiences. In particular, while Irish Republican ideology dictated that the British were foreign oppressors bent on colonial exploitation, this was not the way in which the government had conceptualized the conflict. Policymakers in London viewed the confrontation as an inter-communal confrontation between (pro-British) Unionists and Irish Nationalists in which the British government had to play the role of peacekeeper.

By the time the most recent IRA campaign started, in early 1970, Britain had long ceased to have a strategic interest in maintaining its link to Northern Ireland, and few – if any – politicians felt any emotional attachment to a place that was considered foreign and whose 'primordial passions' were seen as alien to the British way. Echoing many of his colleagues' sentiments, Lord Gowrie, a Conservative Northern Ireland Minister in the early 1980s, commented that 'if the people of Northern Ireland wished to join with the South of Ireland, no British government would resist it for twenty minutes.'[52] The rationale for staying was that any British withdrawal from Northern Ireland would result in a prolonged civil war, involving not only the different factions in the province, but drawing in the Irish Republic and spilling over into mainland Britain. The 'horror scenario' of a civil war engulfing large parts of the British Isles created an incentive for policymakers to distance Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, yet it also prevented the government from responding to the IRA campaign in the same way in which it had reacted to some of the anti-colonial insurgencies in far-flung corners of the world, that is, to extricate itself at the first sign of trouble.

Failing to appreciate the difference between colonial and indigenous governments explains the failure of many terrorist campaigns. The more general point, though, goes beyond this simple dichotomy. Even during the period of decolonization, contexts varied widely, and even then, the insurgents' success depended on a full appreciation of the specific political and cultural circumstances within which these campaigns were taking place. It would have been totally inadequate, for instance, had the Algerian FLN calculated that all they needed to do to get the French to leave Algeria was to increase the violence to the level inflicted by the Irgun on the British in Palestine. Palestine had only come under British rule following the end of World War I; and rather than forming a full part of the British Empire, it was – in legal terms – a territory which Britain administered on behalf of the League of Nations. Arguably, it was this (rather tenuous) relationship between colony and motherland that determined the relative ease with which Britain could be persuaded to exit from Palestine. No doubt, Palestine was situated in a strategically important location, and there were commercial interests which justified holding on to the territory. At the same time, there had not been a large settler population, and few people in Britain regarded Palestine as essential to the continuation of the imperial project, never mind the British nation. The relationship between Britain and Palestine was, in other words, a largely instrumental one, with the result that the asset versus liability calculus was easy to manipulate in the insurgents' favour.

In contrast, the nature of the relationship between France and Algeria was different not just from Britain's position in Palestine, but even from France's attitude towards its other North African possessions. From the first half of the nineteenth century, French settlers had made their way to Algeria in large numbers, and by the time the FLN launched its campaign, Algeria's white European minority numbered more than a million. Algeria, in fact, had been

considered an extension of metropolitan France rather than a colony, and it was fully integrated into the homeland both administratively and legislatively. Indeed, not only were the settlers fiercely loyal to France, there had also developed a strong emotional attachment to Algeria amongst the metropolitan French, finding expression in the popular slogan *Algérie Française* (French Algeria). Though some of the more recent, revisionist literature seeks to downplay the extent to which people in France subscribed to the idea of maintaining Algeria as part of the French nation,[53] there can be no doubt that the fate of Algeria aroused patriotic sentiments on a far greater scale than any of the overseas possessions which France had lost either before or afterwards. The day after the FLN had launched its campaign, France's socialist Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès France, declared in parliament: 'One does not compromise when it comes to defending . . . the integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments . . . have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French . . . Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession.'[54] According to historian Serge Berstein, Mendès France articulated what was seen as a national consensus at the time.[55] From the insurgents' point of view, then, the challenge was not simply to escalate the violence to a particular level, but to break this national consensus, and with it the whole idea of French Algeria. In military terms, this required the FLN to sustain a high and widespread level of violence for a considerable period of time whilst being prepared to endure enormous losses themselves.

Hence, the idea that a government's breaking point can always be reached with little effort is a delusion. The strategy of terrorism falsely suggests that all campaigns can be modelled on the 'best-case scenario' of an occupation government with few interests and no real reason for maintaining its presence. In reality, of course, this type of situation is very rare. Moreover, not only is the strategy based on an overly optimistic set of assumptions, it is also wrong in supposing that governments' breaking points are uniform across time and space. As we have shown, the drawing of such false analogies has led many terrorists to conclude that the strategies that were successfully applied by insurgents in vastly different historical and political circumstances could be transferred to their own situation. While there may indeed be a breaking point for every government, identifying this point requires more than the crude application of military mechanics. It depends, first and foremost, on a full understanding of the political and even cultural conditions in which a particular campaign is taking place and how the government's response is likely to be fashioned by these.

* * * * *

It is easy to see why terrorism continues to be an attractive proposition to insurgents across the world. It promises that even the smallest group of conspirators can bring down an established government if only certain military mechanics are applied correctly. Neither is it necessary to develop mass appeal, nor will the insurgents have to spend much time on planning and

organization – terrorism seems to deliver the hoped-for results far quicker and with less effort than most other strategies. However, as we have demonstrated, many of the assumptions on which the promise of terrorism rests are highly dubious. Most fundamentally, terrorism presumes that people's sense of security and stability – the structural supports on which regular societal interaction depends – can easily be shattered. Reviewing the impact of both individual acts of terror and continuous terrorism, we have found little evidence to support this proposition. No doubt, terrorism causes mental discomfort and it may prompt people to do 'dysfunctional things'. But, on the whole, people cope with the psychological consequences of terrorism remarkably well. When confronted with campaigns of continuous terrorism, there even seems to be a point at which terrorist violence – no matter how sustained and unpredictable – no longer makes any great difference. The assumption that terrorist campaigns will lead governments to unwittingly undermine their own authority is equally doubtful. In the cases we looked at, terrorism appeared to have the opposite effect, namely to unite the population behind the government and allow the authorities to implement highly repressive counter-terrorism programmes with public support. The ultimate test, of course, is whether terrorism can generate sufficient pressure to 'break' a government, that is, to coerce it into giving in to its demands. And again, we believe that terrorists' optimism is largely unfounded, because their assumptions about government behaviour are based on a simplistic and selective reading of the colonial history, which is neither relevant nor applicable in most of the situations in which the strategy of terrorism is used.

None of this may be conclusive evidence that terrorism is unworkable, nor did we ever claim it was. There may be a narrow set of circumstances in which a campaign of terrorism can succeed in manipulating the political and social environment in ways in which the strategy suggests it can. The cases of Algeria and Palestine, which we mentioned at the outset, are examples that in situations of foreign occupation of colonialism where regime legitimacy is low, there may be a window of opportunity. What we are saying is that, in the vast majority of cases, the applicability of terrorism as a strategy is extremely limited. In fact, we would go even further by arguing that the processes which terrorism aims to unleash are more likely to be counter-productive than lead to the effects which its practitioners had envisaged. A realistic scenario of what terrorism entails and the outcomes it is going to result in will therefore have to be based on different assumptions. Indeed, as we will show in the next chapter, we believe that the military dynamics of terrorism will make it impossible for terrorists to communicate their message, trap them in a spiral of escalating violence and invite their destruction.

5   The escalation trap

> If the political aims [in war] are small, the motives slight and the tensions low, a prudent general may look for any way to avoid major crises and decisive actions, exploit any weaknesses in the opponent's military and political strategy, and reach a peaceful settlement. If his assumptions are sound and promise success we are not entitled to criticize him.[1]
>
> Carl von Clausewitz

It has been emphasized throughout this study so far that terrorism, like most forms of organized violence, is used to produce certain effects in order to attain some objective.[2] Specifically, terrorism is a strategy that aims to create a sense of fear amongst a particular target group for the purposes of communicating a political message.[3] Unlike other conventionally understood strategies, or indeed, other insurgent-based strategies of guerrilla warfare, it does not seek to physically deny tangible assets to an enemy, such as a piece of territory, nor attempt the attrition of material resources. At base, a strategy of terrorism is intended not to kill or destroy for the sake of depriving a combatant of anything. Inherently, it is a strategy of inflicting costs.[4] Terrorism is thus intended to effect political influence, a means of persuasion. The content of terrorist communication therefore normally involves the infliction or threat of violence to indicate to the target group that the costs of not acquiescing to political demands will outweigh the costs of concession.[5] For the reasons we have outlined in this study already, a strategy of terrorism is, therefore, a kind of psychological warfare; a battle of wills played out in people's minds.[6]

Indeed, for all these reasons it might be thought that terrorism is a rather distinctive, if not unique strategy. As the second chapter argued, this has been for many years exactly how the subject has been regarded, as something almost alien from the mainstream strategic thought and practice. Yet, as some of the more-perspicacious strategists like Thomas Schelling have acknowledged over the years, terrorism is not a unique or alien form of strategic enterprise: it was the very foundation of most Anglo-American nuclear deterrence policy during the Cold War. It was not for nothing that the theory of mutually assured destruction was referred to as a 'balance of terror'. As Schelling stated

unequivocally: 'The concept of "massive retaliation" is terrorist'.[7] In saying this, all he was suggesting was that ideas of nuclear deterrence conformed to a straightforward descriptive understanding that had at their core the intention to intimidate to achieve an end. He went on: 'I imply nothing derogatory or demeaning about strategic nuclear forces by emphasizing the traditional expectation that their primary use is to deter or intimidate, and thereby to influence behaviour, through the threat of enormous civilian damage.'[8]

Terrorism, in other words, has been a core, if underrecognized, strategic concept for decades. One of the reasons a sophisticated appreciation of terrorism has been historically disregarded as significant within strategic analysis was implicit in the final few words from Schelling's quote above, namely, that the terroristic component within notions of nuclear deterrence lay in the threat of massive human and material destruction. The very high levels of expenditure and commitment of resources to sustain the terror threat of massive physical damage appeared to correspond with accepted notions of 'conventional' war fighting with the emphasis on battles of annihilation through the attrition of resources. Hence, apart from a handful of thinkers as honest and rigorous as Schelling, few strategists cared to view nuclear deterrence as essentially terrorist in nature. In some contrast, the sporadic nature and relatively low physical impact of the attacks most people associate with terrorism in the current era has traditionally seen to reside outside the mainstream of established strategic concerns.

Terrorism, coercion and escalation

Although he may not necessarily have intended, Schelling's insights on the nature of nuclear strategy enable us to appreciate many other fundamental characteristics of terrorist-based strategies. In particular, his thinking on the possibilities of waging 'limited war' in the nuclear age facilitates a deeper understanding into the persuasive intentions that govern the rationale behind most forms of terrorism. Schelling drew a distinction between what he perceived as the passive forms of terrorism implied in theories of deterrence, by which he understood as inducing an adversary to not do something under the threat of duress, from 'compellence', by which he meant inducing 'a person to do something through fear, anxiety and doubt'.[9] Undoubtedly, terrorism is a strategy of compellence. It is aimed at persuading the target to do something in your favour. Schelling emphasized that 'on the only occasion of the hostile use of nuclear weapons, they were used in a fashion that has to be considered "terrorist".'[10] The surrender of Japan in 1945 was induced, not by the physical defeat and occupation of the country (as was the case with Germany) but by an act of compellence. The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was intended to communicate the message that surrender would be preferable to the continuation of war under the threat of more devastation in the future.[11]

Elaborating further on this theme Schelling drew out a further important set of characteristics that we can apply to terrorism. A strategy of deterrence, he

argued, was relatively simple as all it required of the adversary was not to do something, and 'to keep on not doing something is timeless.' 'Acquiesence to a compellent threat', he went on, 'is visibly responsive' while 'doing nothing in the face of a deterrent threat is not so obvious.' Crucially, he observed: 'Acquiescence to a compellent threat invites another demand; complying with a deterrent leaves things unchanged and leads to no sequel'.[12] The fundamental point Schelling established, and which he developed in other seminal publications, was the idea that conflicts very often involved what he termed 'coercive bargaining' where the 'ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will make'.[13]

This point underlines, in both theory and practice, that war is a reactive environment. The idea is fundamental to any understanding of war. 'War', Carl von Clausewitz noted, 'is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass but always a collision between two living forces'.[14] In considering the effectiveness of any strategy of terrorism we should not merely focus on simply what seems logical, consistent and efficacious for the practitioner of such a campaign. We also have to take into account how the target is likely to react. Clausewitz's philosophy of war necessarily anticipated the theoretical implications of this understanding: 'war is an act of force,' he argued, 'and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes.'[15]

The doctrine of reciprocal action in war, where each side responds to the blows of the other, leads in theory to a position where each side will be exerting itself to the maximum. War in reality, as Clausewitz went onto illustrate, never reaches this theoretical absolute but is limited from the extreme by any number of variables both tangible and intangible (limitations of time, resources, geography, political will and so forth). For that reason, Clausewitz also recognized that war could be characterized by forms of coercive bargaining (as opposed to the simple annihilation of the enemy's armed forces in the battle), typified by the kind of cost–benefit calculation that Schelling was later to make explicit in his own writings. 'If the enemy is to be coerced', Clausewitz stated, 'you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of that situation must not of course be merely transient – at least not in appearance.'[16]

In stating this Clausewitz raised something both profound and, given the absence of any serious consideration of terrorism as a subject of inquiry in his own day, prophetic for any current appreciation of terrorism as a strategic phenomenon. For in order to coerce an enemy one needs to gauge the strength of his will and confront him with a level of hardship that will compel him to accede to your objectives. But, because war is a reactive environment, the enemy will be intending to do the same to its adversary, namely, to match or exceed its level of resistance. Therefore, how does one continue to ensure that the level of coercive pressure is maintained? The answer is, in theory, simple: you escalate.

Escalation has been a key concept in strategic studies, especially in nuclear deterrence theory. A key question throughout the Cold War was how to ensure the credibility of the deterrent threat.[17] In particular, it was felt that to do this one should be able to demonstrate the commitment to escalate a conflict through various thresholds up to the use of ballistic nuclear weapons. This led to many, often abstruse, debates, but at its centre the principle was a simple one: namely that deterrence was maintainable because of the innately terroristic nature of nuclear weapons. As Schelling observed above, it was because of the physical ability of both superpowers to threaten 'enormous civilian damage' on each other that the intimidatory effect of the balance of terror was preserved.

But the problem for a strategy of terrorism as practised by a non-state entity, and as popularly conceived, and the subject of this study, is how to escalate a campaign without possessing the ability to inflict massive and severe damage. This produces a paradox that inexorably leads to what we could call the 'escalation trap'.

Being a coercive strategy, a group that institutes a campaign of terrorism seeks often to deprive its adversary of that which it might hold dear, not in terms of material resources, but more intangible aspects of life to which people attach value such as a relatively peaceful, law-abiding society.[18] Logically, this is all very well as far as it goes but the threat that a campaign of terror produces can still be vague. As we saw in the previous chapter, just because an organization carries out a series of violent acts does not necessarily mean that it will succeed in inducing terror. Thresholds of fear may vary widely. So what scares one person, may not have the same effect in another. Violent acts can elicit any manner of responses. It may produce feelings of defiance and anger rather than fear and terror.

Thornton posits that there are different forms of fear that may be induced by acts of terror. The lowest level of fear, he suggested, is the negative reaction of fright. Fright is experienced by almost everybody in human society, no matter what their environment. It encompasses those dangers which someone may encounter on an everyday basis, and will to a degree be predictable (and potentially avoidable) and conform to familiar norms of expectation, such as the apprehension that might be experienced crossing a particularly dangerous section of road. A second, higher level of fear, is anxiety, which is characterized by a fear of the unknown and unpredictable. Here, the level of danger transcends any idea of normality, creating disorientation in the target, increasing susceptibility to an alternative political message or a programme of action. Third, the most extreme level of fear is despair, which denotes an intensified form of anxiety. Some people may perceive a situation as so dangerous and unavoidable, with little prospect of relief that they try to withdraw from the situation and detach themselves from the sources of support and security that may once have been provided by the state but which is now unable to afford the basic level of protection necessary for an ordered existence.[19]

The logic of indiscriminate action

Central to any strategy of terrorism, then, is the manipulation of the psychology of fear through a systematic campaign of violence. The violent nature of the actions is intended to affect the perceptions of the target group by arousing a state of fear amongst people not trained to cope with a high degree of anxiety. The aim is to produce a disproportionate effect to convince the target audience of a serious threat to them even though the actual physical damage caused and overall level of threat may only be limited. To generate an atmosphere of terror thus requires an acute understanding of the ways in which people may respond to a campaign of terrorism. Yet, as we observed in the last chapter, an intended act of terrorism does not always succeed in engendering feelings of fear and anxiety. As a campaign of terror persists, the dangers may become more predictable and knowable, and therefore a person's initial fright and anxiety may recede to a level of caution and stoicism or perhaps, if the level of destruction is very slight, even nonchalance.

The question is: if a strategy of terrorism fails to sustain an adequate level of fear, how does it escalate to attain a higher level of fright if it does not have further recourse to the capacity for physical destruction? Organizations that practise terrorism are unlikely to possess the necessary capabilities to increase the scale of violence to a truly unacceptable intensity because they will lack the personnel, logistical and financial support to maintain the military momentum. Therefore, most groups will have to seek an alternative way to escalate in order to sustain the necessary degree of fear. In most cases, the only way they will be able to do so will be to extend the level of indiscrimination, which as we shall show, is the key to understanding the nature of the escalation paradox inherent in a strategy of terrorism.

Although many popular conceptions of terrorism assume that it is characterized by an innately indiscriminate targeting policy, in many cases this is not so. At least in its initial stages a terrorist campaign will invariably attempt to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate targets. Often the object of terrorist actions will be geared specifically to the undermining of the institutional structures of the state and the violence may well in the first instance be directed at the representatives and symbols of the status quo. These may encompass members of the armed forces, police personnel, politicians, government officials, as well as notable industrialists and legal figures. These targets can be rationalized as discriminate in the sense that in the struggle for legitimacy, they can be portrayed as agents of repression.

However, the point of any terrorist operation is that its psychological impact should be wider than the violent act itself. Therefore, although a degree of fear may be instilled within specific symbolically significant representatives of state institutions and structures, the fear needs to be imputed to the rest of the people in the target group as a whole if the necessary political pressure is to be exerted. Yet continual attacks against specific targets will tend to make the threat more predictable, which will diminish the sense of fear as the bulk of

the target audience may come to feel sufficiently removed from the campaign of violence to feel or experience a high degree of threat. Moreover, those who are liable to attack can often be protected, making them more difficult to approach. Therefore, in order to both heighten the sense of fright and to maintain the military momentum, a terror campaign must look for ways to make the threat more unpredictable.

Since terrorism as a strategy is not a weapon of physical denial, and is not intended to wage an offensive campaign to destroy enemy resources, any attempt to attack targets that are solely of symbolic value will inevitably be subject to a law of diminishing returns, where the publicity and fear generated in each subsequent attack lessens in impact. Added to the likelihood of being unable to attack better-protected targets, a campaign will inexorably seek to widen its targeting attacks toward softer, more-vulnerable targets in order to maintain an atmosphere of intimidation, and this must entail a move toward targeting the civilian populace at large.

Brian Jenkins postulated that terrorists would rather have a lot of people watching than a lot of people dead.[20] This statement intimates the fundamental difficulty confronting a strategy of terrorism. As we have elucidated in the previous chapters, if we assume rationality on the part of those conducting a terror campaign, we must imagine that they are interested in gaining the support of a substantial part of the population at large and would, therefore, prefer not to deliberately attack those deemed to be innocent civilians, unconnected with the institutions of authority. Yet, it is precisely in order to sustain the terror, to get an audience, to gain political leverage, that those who practise terrorism will feel the need to escalate in this manner, not by committing significantly more resources to the fight, but by transcending ethical barriers that involve attacking non-combatant groups.[21]

It was argued in the preceding chapters that a measure of indiscrimination is integral to any campaign of strategic terrorism because it is this element that creates a level of anxiety. The threat will thus appear indeterminate and unquantifiable making the individual feel insecure, contributing to a feeling of confusion and helplessness, thereby heightening the sense of disorientation.[22] It is the unpredictable nature of the attacks that is the key psychological weapon that can be exploited, putting those who have escaped the immediate physical consequences of any attack under severe duress.[23] The intention here is to intimidate the target population sufficiently to make them more compliant with the demands of the insurgents. The unsettling feeling that no one is safe will give people an interest and a desire to end quickly the state of instability by conceding to their demands.[24] Furthermore, the higher the level of indiscrimination, the greater will be the communicative impact of the violent act.

There is, then, a tension in a strategy of terrorism. Through a wish to gain legitimacy the strategy will wish to maximize the impact of attacks, yet minimize death and injury to the target audience. Yet, if a campaign of terrorism is to be taken seriously it must prove that it has the capacity to generate a state of crisis and fear which may well, in part, require a programme of indiscriminate

attacks against uninvolved civilians. Therefore, exactly in line with Clausewitzian thinking, there is an inherent impulse to escalate any campaign. As J. Bowyer Bell noted, a terrorist campaign will gain the most recognition and publicity 'when the number and categories of victims escalate as the targets become more random and more distant from repressive functions'.[25] The danger is, though, that the more indiscriminate the violence becomes, the more public sympathy or quiescence will be eroded. If the various stages of a terrorist campaign are designed to overcome the latent contradiction between engaging in more-or-less indiscriminate attacks and the attempt to gain legitimacy, the need for escalation is bound to intensify this paradox.

The inherent theoretical dynamic towards escalation that pushes a strategy of terrorism towards greater indiscrimination is to a significant degree premised on the assumption that the target group is not responding in the manner expected. That is, we assume that the target becomes indifferent to the level of violence being inflicted on society. Terroristic acts become internalized within the body politic and accepted as part of the everyday risk. Strikes against symbolic targets become repetitious, rendering the violence increasingly predictable. In this context, terrorism as a strategy loses its psychological impact, namely, its unpredictability, and thus loses the power to terrify.

However, we might posit another practical reason why a strategy of terrorism would seek to escalate, which is that the target is responding in the manner deemed favourable to the insurgent group, which then proceeds to escalate in the belief that a final intensification of the violence will lead to the capitulation to their demands. For example, a group may decide that a further escalation is called for because the target authority may be showing a willingness to concede political ground in order to appease those executing the terror attacks or hoping to remove the discontents believed to be fuelling the violence. Such measures might be interpreted as a sign of weakness and lack of resolve.[26] In a not-dissimilar vein, the target might be seen to be responding incompetently, seeking to suppress moderate and non-violent opposition, arresting the wrong people, closing down avenues of legitimate political expression and dissent. Conversely, a target may respond in a highly repressive manner, but in a way that the terrorists believe is merely demonstrating the loss of its ability to control events. Target responses that are seen to violate accepted standards of behaviour can lead to the belief that the target is over-reacting, using excessively repressive measures not commensurate with the general perception of the threat, thereby risking a loss of support to the insurgents.[27]

In all cases, the impulse to escalate a terror campaign will potentially be present in the belief that a further rise in violence will induce the target to take actions that will undermine its authority and legitimacy in a manner that will advance the insurgent cause. As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, war is a reactive environment, where each side responds to the actions of the other. A strategy of terrorism is premised on the belief that a target will react in ways that will negate its own authority. The target, especially if it is an established government, is likely to face a considerable legitimacy dilemma of

its own in deciding how effectively it can respond to a campaign of terrorism. It must respond in such a way that it retains sufficient support to maintain its authority while minimizing the disruption caused by the violence and neutral- izing the terrorist challenge. Once a campaign is initiated the onus is placed on the target to react in a way that does not inadvertently play into the hands of those conducting the terror campaign. Arguably, the target faces the greater analytical burden in that it has to determine not only the relative strengths and weaknesses of the threat, but because its authority is being challenged directly, it must also examine its own vulnerabilities and calculate the likely political effects of all the potential options to eradicate the threat. This burden of responsibility for the target means that the potential to make analytical and policy mistakes is significant. It is the mistaken reactions of the target that those who employ a strategy of terrorism will be trying to exploit, and it is for these opportunities that they will be hoping and waiting.

While the target undoubtedly faces all manner of problems and challenges, practitioners of terrorism also have to live and deal in the reactive environment that characterizes all conflicts. The problem for a campaign of terrorism, as we have suggested, is not creating fear, but in sustaining it. In terms of military dynamics, for a group that practises strategic terrorism to achieve maximum effectiveness, its operations must be sudden, brutal, unpredictable and indis- criminate. The aim must be to shock, disorientate and psychologically bludgeon the target group into submission in the shortest-possible time. To allow a cam- paign to become extended or escalate incrementally may provide enough time for the target to reorientate itself and to adapt and accept a new level of vio- lence. Therefore, if a campaign of terrorism becomes prolonged there is only one option open to maintain the coherence of the strategy, and that is to esca- late the campaign to new, higher levels of destruction and indiscrimination sufficient to maintain the sense of terror. If those conducting a strategy of ter- rorism have any expectation of victory, they must be prepared to escalate the conflict continually at each stage in order to prevent reorientation.

We have referred already to certain barriers to escalation for the terror campaign in terms of limited logistical and material resources along with the profound legitimacy dilemmas inherent in any decision to extend the level of indiscrimination. However, the most significant danger is that any effort to escalate a terrorist campaign may provoke counter-escalation from the target government, which will result in the destruction of the insurgent movement. This is the escalation trap. The predicament is that while a strategy of terrorism needs to elicit an inefficient act of repression that will highlight the 'unjust' nature of the regime, any belligerent that faces a militarily more potent adversary has to take extreme care not to push the enemy into such a corner where it feels sufficiently desperate to escalate the war to a level at which the repression becomes ruthless and total, thus threatening the terrorist group's very existence.

The terrorist experience in Latin America in the later twentieth century provides some poignant examples of how insurgent groups fell into the

escalation trap. In the previous chapters we alluded to the cases of Uruguay and Argentina where terrorist campaigns were initiated and provoked an incompetent as well as inefficient response on behalf of their respective governments. Yet, in both countries, a tipping point was reached where continuously rising levels of terrorist violence resulted in an inefficient response being turned into a policy of brutal repression. Fearful of the deteriorating security situation and of the revolutionary goals of the terrorists, important interest groups – normally the armed forces backed by large sections of the community – took over and carried out a more rigorous counter-terrorist policy that literally wiped out the terror movements. Undoubtedly the level of repression was extreme across society as a whole. But, even if some people disapproved of government methods, the terrorist movements in question were unable to survive the concerted onslaught in response to their continually escalating campaigns.[28]

The cases of terrorism in Latin America graphically illustrate the problems terrorist strategies have in surviving in non-pluralistic environments where avenues of political expression are radically curtailed. Access to media outlets is likely to be severely restricted in authoritarian states, thereby depriving the strategy of the means of conveying and amplifying its message to a wider public.[29] Moreover, unlike liberal-democratic societies, such regimes are unlikely to be as inhibited by the expectation to conform to legal and humanitarian norms in the treatment of those suspected of carrying out terrorist operations. This permits the exploitation of wide powers to suppress any challenge to the authority of the regime. Theoretically, a terror campaign could be sustained against a totalitarian state if operations were conducted against the interests of the target regime abroad (such as hijacking of aeroplanes or kidnapping diplomats in third-party states), but any operations carried out in the home country are liable to be ruthlessly crushed.[30]

Indeed, both logical deduction and empirical evidence suggests that where there is more tyranny and repression, the less likely will be the incidence of terrorist violence. In the words of Walter Laqueur: 'Terrorism succeeds only against non-terrorists, namely groups or governments which refrain from responding to indiscriminate murder with equally indiscriminate repression.'[31] Even so, we would be wrong to think that the escalation trap is something that is only likely to befall those groups that seek to practise a strategy of terrorism in highly controlled, undemocratic environments. The dangers of the escalation trap can be just as pronounced in less-severe circumstances, with even liberal-democratic societies showing the resolve to face down a terror challenge in order to recontain the threat at a lower level of disturbance.

For evidence, we might point to the Canadian government's reaction to the upsurge in violence by the FLQ in October 1970. Following the kidnappings of a British trade representative, James Cross, and the provincial government politician, Pierre Laporte (who was subsequently murdered by his captors), the government invoked the War Measures Act that enabled troops to be sent out onto the streets of Québec, while the police, armed with wide powers of search and arrest were able to root out the FLQ cells.[32] Similarly, the actions of the West

German government in 1977 also attests to how a democratic government can take stern measures in the face of an escalation of a terror campaign. Following a sporadic campaign of violence the left-wing revolutionary group, the Red Army Faction (RAF), escalated its campaign in the summer of 1977. The group killed Juergen Ponto, a bank executive and political advisor, and later kidnapped and killed Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the head of the West German Employers Federation. Events were to culminate in October when members of the RAF hijacked a Lufthansa jet, killed the captain and forced the plane to fly to Mogadishu in Somalia.[33] The West German authorities launched a daringly successful rescue mission that freed nearly all of the passengers unharmed, while killing three of the four hijackers. In both the Canadian and West German cases liberal-democratic governments were inspired to defend themselves robustly against an escalation in terrorist violence. Furthermore, the scale of the operational defeats inflicted on the FLQ and the RAF devastated the morale and effectiveness of the movements to a point where subsequent violence never reached the same intensity again.[34]

What this indicates is that in most cases, the utility of a strategy of terrorism ultimately rests on the self-restraint of the target. This explains why the incidence of terrorist violence tends to occur in places where political latitude is greatest, which means either in democratic societies that are constrained by legal frameworks, liberal constitutions and public opinion, or in inefficient authoritarian states. In the end, however, all regimes, regardless of their political complexion or sense of legitimacy will seek to defend themselves because, as Brian Jenkins comments, 'nations maintain their credentials in the last resort by maintaining their monopoly over the means of violence.'[35] In this regard, those who practise a strategy of terrorism always have to be mindful that their existence is usually contingent on certain conditions that prevent the target government from exercising its full powers. Terroristic violence in varying degrees can invariably be tolerated by most societies, but should the impression be created that such violence is a real menace to a point where serious insecurity is spreading and the authority of the regime severely challenged, the chances are that the authority in question – usually the state – will move to eradicate the threat. Moreover, a target government will not necessarily be blamed for implementing harsh measures, or in some instances even disregarding fundamental ideas of human rights in the course of any counter-terrorist response, because national security considerations will be placed above concerns for the retention of civil liberties. In pluralistic societies, so long as terrorist violence can be tolerated at a 'nuisance' level, more sophisticated political and military techniques, rather than outright repression, are likely to be implemented if the liberal ethos of the state is not to be undermined. But, even here, if the threat progresses beyond this point, even liberal-democratic polities are likely to deal harshly with the threat. For the question for most societies afflicted by terroristic violence is usually, not 'can terrorism be defeated?' but, 'is one prepared to pay the price for terrorism to be defeated?'[36]

The escalation trap is, therefore, a real paradox with which a strategy of terrorism has to contend. So far, this chapter has sought to elucidate the notion of the escalation dilemma as a theoretical and practical problem that grows out of the inexorable dynamic inherent in any armed conflict. The chapter has endeavoured to emphasize this with a number of allusions to historical examples along the way. However, in order to clarify and add empirical depth to the discussion, we have chosen two specific case studies drawn from Egypt and Northern Ireland that will be elaborated to indicate how the escalation trap lies at the heart of many conflicts that have witnessed campaigns of strategic terrorism. The cases below demonstrate the pervasive impulse to escalate a campaign and illustrate the varied nature of the target response to recontain the violence at a more acceptable level of violence. Invariably, it is the culmination of these campaigns in the escalation trap that frames the subsequent direction of the conflict itself.

Egypt, 1992–97

The failed campaign of the Egyptian *Gamaat Islamiya* (Islamic Group) (GI) in the 1990s is a textbook example of the escalation trap. The GI emerged from the break-up of the militant Islamist movement in Egypt in the 1980s. At the time, the movement had been weakened by the wave of repression that followed the assassination of President Anwar al Sadat in 1981. Many concluded that the 'decapitation' strategy – which postulated that one simply had to take out the country's secular political leadership in order to prompt a popular Islamist uprising – was not working. Rather, the movement's strategists believed that a campaign of 'jihad' aimed at undermining the state and its institutions had to be accompanied by the creation of 'liberated zones' from which the movement would draw resources and popular support. This faction, which became the GI and had its strongholds in the Upper Nile region of central Egypt, would dominate the confrontation with the Egyptian state in the years 1992–97.[37]

The GI's campaign began to pick up in the late 1980s, when members of the group started attacking government officials and 'un-Islamic' enterprises (video rentals, shops selling alcohol, etc.) in two towns in central Egypt. They also engineered confrontations between Muslims and the Christian Copts, who comprised nearly 20 per cent of the population in the region. The campaign, however, was not confined to the group's traditional strongholds. GI's greatest success was the setting up of a 'liberated zone' in the Embaba suburb of Cairo. Embaba, which has a population of around one million, used to be one of the most impoverished parts of the Egyptian capital. For decades, the state had been virtually absent from Embaba, and it was the local mosques and clan-based networks which served as the main providers of security and social services. By 1992, not only had the GI taken over the mosques, it had forged alliances with cooperative tribal leaders and struck down the reluctant ones. According to Gilles Kepel, 'Before long they were organizing everything: sporting activities,

schools, [and] militias that maintained Islamic order in the quarter and opposed any attempt by the police to assert control.'[38] Indeed, in late November 1992, the GI's military leader declared Embaba to be an Islamic Republic.

Whereas the Egyptian government had initially attempted a mix of modest repression and secret dialogue ('mediation') in dealing with the problem, the 'Embaba takeover' prompted the regime of President Hosni Mubarak to cease all efforts at accommodation. Less than four weeks after the GI had declared Embaba an Islamic Republic, 14,000 soldiers were mobilized to occupy and 're-take' the suburb from the Islamists. Some 5,000 suspected sympathizers were arrested and taken away.[39] Similar swoops were carried out in central Egypt and other areas of the country where the GI was believed to be strong. Little consideration was given to the notions of due process and the rule of law, nor did it seem important to Mubarak that his government's actions might alienate – and potentially radicalize – large parts of the population, which sympathized with the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, rather than 'appeasing the moderates', the government set out to suppress the more moderate expressions of Islamist activism *in addition* to destroying GI. As Kepel put it: 'The purpose... was to smash the Islamist groups' military arm and repress the Muslim Brothers politically and legally, while making no overtures to the devout middle class until the battle against extremism had been won on the ground.'[40]

The massive wave of repression began in 1992 and prompted the GI to escalate its campaign. The group targeted not only government officials but also prominent secular figures. Most significantly, the GI launched a terrorist campaign against targets related to the tourism industry. Not only was the killing of non-Muslim foreigners regarded as sound from an ideological point of view, it also promised to undermine one of the principal sources of income for the Egyptian state. Furthermore, the GI assumed that such attacks – especially when they were directed against American and Israeli targets – would be popular amongst the population. In reality, though, the terrorist campaign turned the population against GI. There was a genuine outcry, for example, when the GI killed 18 Greek tourists (who were mistaken for Israelis) in April 1996. Moreover, whilst the campaign succeeded in bringing about a sharp decline in the number of foreign visitors, this affected not only the Egyptian state but also hundreds of thousands of ordinary Egyptians whose livelihoods depended on the income generated by the tourism industry. The GI came to be isolated even amongst Islamist sympathizers, which meant that the government encountered little opposition when implementing some of its harshest and most repressive counter-terrorism policies.

Guido Steinberg's analysis of the reasons for GI's failure echoes many of the themes that we have highlighted in this chapter:

> The [GI] campaign demonstrated how even a small group of militants can shatter the economic viability of a state through terrorist means. However, it also revealed the limitations of terrorism as a strategy. [As a result of its campaign, the GI] forfeited all sympathies amongst the population,

especially because many Egyptians lost their jobs or were affected by the collapse of the tourism industry in other ways. Moreover, many people opposed Islamist violence against civilians and completely rejected the Islamist rule of terror in GI strongholds such as Embaba. The [GI] never succeeded in conveying the idea that they were an acceptable alternative to President Mubarak's regime. Furthermore, its campaign triggered a ruthless war against the rebels, which was carried out with great brutality...The insurgents had no realistic chance of success once the state had unleashed its full apparatus of repression.[41]

Indeed, in July 1997, the GI's imprisoned leadership declared a unilateral ceasefire. A dissident faction decided to attempt 'one last push', massacring nearly 60 (mostly Swiss) tourists in Luxor in November 1997, but this remained the last significant act of terrorism carried out by the group.

Northern Ireland, 1972

An equally dramatic example can be found in the early years of the Northern Ireland conflict. Despite the obvious mayhem the IRA's campaign produced, the organization had to pursue a careful strategy if its violence was to be politically efficacious. This required the manipulation of its military actions to induce a degree of coercive pressure in order to wear down the British will to retain Northern Ireland as a constituent part of the United Kingdom. In this respect, the IRA had to recognize that, as a small, sub-state grouping, it did not have the power to impose its will through force, but could seek only to recast the political atmosphere in which British calculations were made. Although never explicitly stated, it seemed that while the IRA accepted that it could not physically defeat the security forces, the movement felt it could wage a form of limited war until the government was forced to the conference table. Most certainly, the majority of IRA leaders understood that, in military terms, the British were far superior. In the words of one, the IRA could 'of course be beaten. If the British Army put the boot in they could be flattened. But will they do it?'[42] It seems clear, therefore, that both sides were functioning in what was essentially a tacit bargaining situation, that is, they were trying to manoeuvre to attain their goals within the unspoken but mutually accepted boundaries as opposed to seeking outright military victory. However, as events in the summer of 1972 showed, whereas the British seemed to recognize the ultimate limits of these implicit boundaries, the IRA did not.

In the first few months of 1972, the IRA campaign had achieved significant successes. In March, the British government abolished the province's regional parliament by introducing Direct Rule from London. And in early July, an IRA delegation was invited to a first round of negotiations with representatives of the British government. The meeting broke up in acrimony after the IRA presented a list of demands on which they were not prepared to give any ground. It was at this point that the IRA took a fateful decision that was to

destroy the process of incipient political dialogue. Angered at the failure of the meeting, the IRA decided to escalate its military campaign. According to the IRA's Chief of Staff, Séan MacStíofáin, it was essential to prove that the 'movement was as tough a fighting force as ever and was speaking from strength'.[43] In the following days, nine members of the security forces were killed. As part of the renewed offensive, on 21 July 1972, 21 bombs were planted in Belfast city centre. The intention was 'to impose a sudden and severe load on the British and Unionist system'.[44] The atmosphere in the city that afternoon was described in press reports: 'It was impossible for anyone to feel perfectly safe. As each bomb exploded there were cries of terror from people who thought that they had found sanctuary but were in fact just as exposed as before.'[45] Nine people were killed on that day which came to be known as Bloody Friday.

From the British government's perspective, Bloody Friday removed the basis of self-restraint in the British position, creating a strategic opportunity to move against the so-called no go areas in Belfast and, especially, Londonderry in which the IRA had established safe havens. These areas were the IRA's most vital military asset, as they provided sanctuaries from where it could plan attacks while remaining immune from the security forces. The government recognized the 'no go' areas' value to the IRA, and it understood that their removal was vital to facilitating a political solution. At the same time, before Bloody Friday, British policymakers had maintained that taking the 'no go' areas by force would – in the words of Northern Ireland Secretary William Whitelaw – 'cause a bitterness which would not be redeemed for a long time'.[46] Following Bloody Friday, this assessment changed. At Cabinet level, there was an immediate realization that the IRA's decision to escalate had fundamentally changed the political and military parameters within which British strategy operated. Whitelaw pointed out that the IRA bombings had 'aroused feelings of extreme revulsion...in the Roman Catholic community also'.[47] He noted: 'The present climate of public opinion, while the events of Friday 21 July were still fresh, was opportune for the government to take action, as was its duty, to show that it could no longer tolerate the existence of barricaded areas to which the security forces had only limited access.'[48] He made it explicit that a massive military operation had now become possible, and that 'its successful execution could produce substantial political advantages and help to open the way for political discussions'.[49]

On 31 July 1972, under the codename Operation Motorman, the British Army moved into the IRA strongholds in Belfast and Londonderry. The scale of the operation was immense, involving over 30,000 armed service personnel, making Motorman not only one of the biggest deployments of British forces since the World War II but, remarkably, the largest troop concentration in Ireland in the twentieth century.[50] The consequences were soon evident. In the three weeks before and after Operation Motorman there was a sharp fall in the number of bomb attacks from 180 to 73. Shooting incidents declined dramatically from 2,595 to 380.[51] The scale of violence in Northern Ireland remained at a relatively high level for a modern democratic society, but it was

to decline in absolute terms over the next decade and beyond. It was never again to exceed the level of July 1972. We are not implying that Motorman was the essential turning point of the conflict, but it seems clear that it resolved the essential security dilemma in Northern Ireland. Motorman broke up the hard core of IRA operatives in Belfast and Londonderry and severely eroded the organization's operational capacity. It reasserted the British will to govern the province and brought down the level of violence to a point which enabled the attitudes of constitutional Unionism and Nationalism to slowly become more tractable towards each other. This new atmosphere was initially to lead to the abortive Sunningdale Executive in 1974 in which much of the political architecture that was to feature in the Belfast Agreement of 1998 that led to the eventual end of the armed conflict was originally constructed.[52]

The analytical problem

These examples of the escalation trap lead us to an important insight, which helps to establish a fundamental correlation between the military and political dynamics in any campaign of strategic terrorism. Those who undertake such a campaign have to exercise caution for the fear of inducing a response that will destroy them and this necessitates a clear appreciation of the enemy in order to understand the sort of pressures which impinge upon its decision making. The practitioners of terrorism need to assess the limit to which a target might be able to concede without alienating important political constituencies and consider how favourably an adversary is likely to respond to compromise, and what its reactions to increased military pressure are likely to be. In other words, they have to engage in a continuous analysis of their own strategic position and be ready to adjust their means, and possibly their ends, in the light of the changing military and political conditions. While some sub-revolutionary movements that employ terrorism may be capable of forming such judgements (indeed, they may have adopted sub-revolutionary goals precisely because they realize that they are unlikely to win against a stronger opponent), many revolutionary terrorists – especially those of an absolutist variety, such as religiously inspired insurgents, like the GI in Egypt – are not. For them, there can be no question of compromise within the prevailing order. The only satisfactory outcome is complete victory and the transformation of the political system.[53] However, even those movements with more tractable demands, as in the case of the IRA, can be carried away with the presumed efficacy of their campaign and indulge in hasty and ill-thought-out escalation.

Just as a strategy of terrorism aims, *pace* Schelling, to impose a cost-benefit analysis on the target, so must the practitioners of terrorism engage in a similar assessment, both of their own position, and that of the target adversary. A campaign of strategic terrorism is about effecting the asking of a question on the part of the target group: is it worth paying the price to maintain the present situation? Essentially, the notion of 'price' refers to the costs involved in the suppression of the terrorist violence. Likewise, the proponents of a campaign of

terrorism will also need to address themselves as to exactly how the instruments of violence will be employed: against whom, for how long, to achieve what? In particular, they need to be acutely sensitive as to what price the enemy is likely to be prepared to pay to maintain its authority. These questions are likely to vary considerably with the individual circumstances surrounding any conflict. But specifically, those who advocate employing a strategy of terrorism need to be mindful that while the costs they are able to inflict on a target may be high or low, rarely will they be intolerable. Yet the more successful such a campaign becomes, and the closer the terrorists come to their political goals, the more likely it will be that the target will choose to resist vigorously the challenge to its power and authority.

In essence, the likely efficacy of any campaign of terrorism is a contingent issue that is largely about the quality of the terrorists' own analysis of the situation. It is incumbent upon those who conduct such a campaign to gain an appreciation of the exact circumstances in which they choose to fight. Therefore, it is vital that the proponents of a strategy of terrorism should understand the nature of their enemy they are dealing with and the possible reactions it will have to any increased violence and instability. Above all, an analytical appreciation has to take into account the weaknesses inherent in a terrorist strategy. How far can such a strategy be employed in pursuit of certain ends before the target begins to react in ways that are inimical to the interests of the insurgents? At what point should the limits of terrorist methods be recognized and the pursuit of political ends be carried on through other means? Especially, any analysis requires an appreciation that to speak of 'winning' or 'victory' against a more potent adversary solely through a campaign of terrorism may be an inappropriate framework in which to view the utility of any strategy.[54]

A sophisticated awareness of the strengths and weakness of a strategy of terrorism is likely to reveal that the prime utility of terrorism is its ability to affect the perceptions of a target audience. It may be able to weaken political resolve but in all likelihood it will be unable to destroy it completely. This highlights the basic Clausewitzian principle, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, that the potential of any belligerent to resist is going to be a combination of the physical tangibles of power in terms of resources available to any combatant and the psychological intangibles of will and determination to fight. If either of these determinants can be nullified, then a belligerent will have gained victory over its opponent. In practice, the will to resist is likely to be dependent to an important degree on the physical, material, resources at the disposal of a combatant. That is to say, the more resources one has, the greater the confidence one is likely to possess in committing those resources to a conflict. The collapse of an enemy's will to resist is likely to flow from the depletion of their resources above anything else.

The moral and physical elements in war are closely intertwined, as those like Clausewitz stressed in his general thinking about war. A strategy of terrorism, though, is a far more delicate design because it relies almost exclusively on

trying to nullify the enemy's will to resist. Therein lies the main weakness of strategic terrorism. Just because a group can mount a series of effective terrorist operations that succeed in inducing feelings of fear and anxiety in the target audience does not necessarily mean that they are winning. The belief among the practitioners of terrorism that they are winning, however, can lead them to ignore the correlation between the physical and moral elements of war, thus exposing them to the danger that one day they will escalate their campaign to a point where the opponent decides to view the resolution of the conflict purely in terms of the tangibles of military power.

Consequently, without an adequate analysis of the circumstances and limitations of the strategy, terrorist campaigns are likely to take one of two possible turns. Those which are incapable of increasing the violence or careful not to fall into the 'escalation trap' are likely to lose strategic momentum and get bogged down in drawn out low-level campaigns that will lose the impetus to achieve political change. Those, on the other hand, who manage to escalate their campaigns will likely face internal divisions, a hostile reaction from the population in whose name the terrorists claim to act, and may invite their own destruction by provoking a ruthless and effective campaign of repression from the target government.

* * * * *

A strategy of terrorism is not concerned directly with any attempt to physically deny or destroy an enemy's material resources. It is a coercive strategy that is intended to compel the enemy to take actions that advance the cause of the insurgent group. Specifically, it aims to impose a cost-benefit analysis on the adversary by setting the target a series of dilemmas to which it then has to respond. Because war is always a reactive environment and because most societies are likely to feel vulnerable to a seriously violent challenge, a political authority is bound to take action to deal with any terrorist campaign. Even if the threat to the target's authority is minimal, the price of allowing terrorist acts to continue is potentially high. To permit a campaign to become prolonged could seriously damage the credibility of the target amongst its supporters, resulting in the destabilization of society and the negation of its authority and legitimacy.[55] Practitioners of terrorism, of course, hope that the target's response will be viewed either as weak and vacillating, or incompetently repressive.

While a strategy of terrorism is premised on the assumption that the target's response will be ineffective, those who undertake such a campaign must always bear in mind that theirs is a delicate strategy, and not a weapon of physical denial.[56] The potential of a more-powerful adversary to recontain any violent challenge can lead the proponents of terrorism into a faulty and inappropriate action to escalate the campaign, notably by extending the degree of indiscrimination in their operations. Such a decision always contains the latent possibility that this will merely provoke the target into actions that severely damage or even wipe out the insurgent movement.

As in all war, the impulse towards escalation is always present. Relatively small-scale violent terroristic operations will always have some capacity to spread a degree of fear and anxiety, but it would be wrong for the practitioners of terror to assume that this automatically denotes the efficacy of such a strategy. For this reason, insurgents who employ terrorism as their principal means to attain their objectives need to engage in a systematic analysis of their political and strategic situation and be prepared to recognize the point at which a campaign of terrorism has outlasted its utility. Failure to appreciate the limits inherent in a strategy of terrorism is likely to lead in one direction only, towards the escalation trap.

If undertaken effectively, a campaign of terrorism can generate considerable coercive pressure.[57] It can create a media clamour, horrify and panic the public, and in some cases seriously alarm the political establishment. If harnessed properly, and given the right conditions, this can be translated into considerable political pressure that compels the target adversary to concede in part, or very occasionally, in whole to insurgent demands. Nevertheless, to generalize from this fairly modest premise that a programme of terrorist actions can always attain major political goals is highly problematic. A strategy of terrorism is not about trying to neutralize the power of a stronger opponent, but about attempting to influence its behaviour in a manner that favours the goals and interests of the insurgents. However, time and again, those who have sought to implement a strategy of terrorism have chosen to ignore the fundamental power correlations that usually exist between the target and the terrorists, leaving them prone to ill-considered acts of escalation, and where a political and military failure is the most frequent outcome.

6 Conclusion

[The General] must never forget he is moving on a devious path where the god of war may catch him unawares.[1]

Carl von Clausewitz

Alex Schmid may be correct in saying that terrorism has become 'the most important word in the political vocabulary'.[2] Yet this word is often employed either as an empty rhetorical noun or dismissed as an aberrant form of behaviour without any rational explanation. As we have demonstrated in this study, the heavily distorted idea of what terrorism constitutes has not emerged by accident. The term is both popular and its meaning is hotly contested amongst political actors, giving rise to sensationalism and political name-calling which rarely serves the cause of defining an intellectual concept. Furthermore, and perhaps paradoxically, the phenomenon has been given little attention by scholars in the discipline in which it is most naturally rooted, namely that of strategic studies. Indeed, we showed that the sidelining of terrorism as a matter of concern for strategic theorists has a long history. During the Cold War, many strategists believed that the issues below the threshold of nuclear Armageddon were of little importance. Also, the American defeat and humiliation in Vietnam led to a distancing by scholars in the discipline from the study of insurgent warfare (with consequences that became evident, most recently, in Iraq).

As a result, attempts to develop strategic understandings of insurgent strategies – including terrorism – remained underdeveloped. Clearly, there was no lack of creativity when it came to inventing labels that would describe the forms of armed conflict which strategists knew were different from conventional war and the nuclear stand-off but whose properties and dynamics could not be fully grasped. Yet the plethora of new labels – revolutionary war, low-intensity conflict, unconventional war, political violence, to name but a few – rarely added much insight. Arguably, in most cases, they were simply a convenient way of avoiding an intellectual engagement with something that did not fit in with a traditional (yet misguided) understanding of strategy that was based on large-scale military confrontations.

Terrorism, in particular, was considered as having a next-to-no strategic resonance. Few major strategists devoted much time to the study of the phenomenon. Instead, the issue was pushed aside and left to so-called terrorism experts to make sense of. Terrorism, thus, came to be seen as an independent and universalized phenomenon, giving rise to a distorted consensus – both in popular discourse and amongst strategists – according to which the practice of terrorism could not be understood in terms of the pure calculation of rational interests. Yet, as we showed in this study, the employment of organized armed force, no matter how deviant or apolitical it may appear, will invariably be undertaken to achieve a particular set of goals. In that sense, it is rational, though rationality – in terrorism as in more 'conventional' forms of war – is never absolute or unchanging.

This analysis has sought to construct a strategic framework by which those who utilize a campaign of terrorism seek to attain their ends through military means. In doing so, this study has identified a distinctive *modus operandi* that points at the dynamics a strategy of terrorism will seek to unleash in order to further political and military objectives:

1   Disorientation: to alienate the authorities from their citizens, reducing the government to impotence in the eyes of the population, which will be perceived as unable to cope with a situation of evolving chaos.
2   Target response: to induce a government to respond in a manner that is favourable to the insurgent cause, such as provoking it into actions that are illegal or regarded as repressive overreactions which destroy the political middle ground.
3   Gaining legitimacy: to exploit the emotional impact of the violence to insert an alternative political message in order to seek to broaden support, often through the media and political front organizations.

In highlighting the dynamics that arise during each of these phases, we were able to derive some of the key variables that interact with the terrorist application of military force, and shed some light on the relationship between ends and means in the strategy of terrorism. For example, rather than stating that terrorism is a strategy of the 'weak' and 'illegitimate' as a matter of fact, our analysis made it possible to explain how legitimacy and relative military weakness determine the military dynamics of a group that employs terrorism at the different stages of its strategic evolution, but also how they may condition its overall success. In this regard, we were also able to explain why groups that have resorted to terrorism may, at some point, need to involve themselves in grassroots agitation in order to gain legitimacy, thus diluting the reliance on strategic terrorism as the main plank of their strategy.

Throughout this assessment we have endeavoured to show that this framework does not exist purely as a theoretical hypothesis. We have sought to empirically validate our ideas by demonstrating that groups have employed terrorist means in the manner described above to facilitate their goals through a rational

calculation of the utility of their methods. In doing so, we have drawn on case studies from across the world. They included not only the so-called old terrorists, such as the ethnic-nationalist and Marxist groups from Western Europe which are often cited in some of the earlier literature. We accounted for groups from the Middle East, Latin America and even Asia. We also included in our sample the actions of what many authors refer to as the 'new' terrorists, that is, the emergence of transnational networks such as Al Qaeda, which may not necessarily be based in one single geographical location but operate and recruit across the globe.[3]

What immediately struck us in this wide-ranging examination is how little the various campaigns of groups that employ terrorist means had in common. They were driven by vastly different motivations, ranging from single-issue anti-abortionists in North America to separatists in Sri Lanka. Many of these groups used terrorism in completely different ways – for some, it was the main plank of their campaign, whereas for others it was one of a number of instruments in their strategic arsenal. Some combined the use of violence and terror with political agitation, whereas others did not. Indeed, the diversity of strategies in which terror can play a role increased our doubts about terrorism as a unique and universalized phenomenon to be treated separately form other discourses in the area of strategic studies. It even made us question whether the term terrorism has any meaning at all except as a method of applying armed force.

By elucidating the strategy of terrorism, our analysis revealed not only the instrumentality of terrorist methods but also their inherent limitations. The potential fallacies stem primarily from the fact that terrorism relies on inducing a reaction in the target that is favourable to the terrorists' goals. Strategic terrorism, therefore, rests on a series of assumptions about how a target audience will respond to a campaign of terrorist violence. The success of a terrorist strategy is thus crucially dependent on the wider context of a conflict. If the target population is prepared to endure a campaign of terror, then its potency will be eroded – terrorism, quite simply, will lose its power to terrify. Or, even worse for the terrorists, the lack of target reaction leads to an escalation in the terror campaign which provokes a backlash of such ferocity that the terrorists themselves are unable to survive the 'overreaction' that they wish to induce in their opponent. This, indeed, is what we described as the escalation trap, a new idea to be taken into account in further studies of terrorist behaviour.

At a more general level, the main weakness in any terrorist campaign is that it seeks to overcome deficiencies in military power by the manipulation of the emotional impact of (usually) relatively small-scale attacks. The strategy rests on the premise that a militarily more-powerful adversary will in some way feel restrained, either for political or moral reasons, from bringing the full force of its military superiority to bear on its inferior enemy. Herein lies one of the main flaws in the strategy of terrorism: it relies exclusively on the exploitation of the psychological rather than the destructive effects of armed action, thereby

rendering it vulnerable to those who are willing to view the resolution of clashes of interest principally in terms of the tangibles of military power.

This study has focused primarily on elaborating a theoretical framework for understanding terrorism as a strategic concept. What, however, are the policy implications of our analysis. In particular, what does this mean for how 'terrorism' should be fought? Based on the understanding of terrorism developed in this study, it should become possible to avoid some of the most obvious traps in the debate about counter-terrorism. One of the greatest fallacies is to assume that – simply because they use the same methods – vastly different groups and individuals can be countered in similar ways. In fact, even the proposition that there exists a specific 'terrorist modus operandi' could be challenged. The methods through which particular political actors choose to induce fear vary depending on self-imposed political and ideological restraints as well as the resources and skills available to them. It is true, of course, that 'terrorist groups' often study each other's campaigns, and that there is a degree of learning evident in the way in which particular tactics – most prominently, the use of suicide attacks – have spread across countries and continents. Equally, though, 'terrorist groups' have learned from actors and entities not normally associated with terrorism. The multi-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Afghan Jihad*, for example, which became Al Qaeda's main operational handbook, was based on the field manuals of various Special Forces units from Western and Middle Eastern countries with whom some members of the network had trained prior to joining the network.[4] Hence, looking at 'terrorist tactics' as if they represented a coherent, self-contained and completely distinctive phenomenon is bound to result in errors.

In addition, there are obvious limitations to what can be done in the name of counter-terrorism. Some of these limits are practical. In a city like London, where the public transport system is used by millions of people every day, it will never be possible to search every passenger before entering a bus or the underground system, as doing so would bring the city to a halt and impose financial costs that would make the use of public transport unaffordable. Other limitations are self-imposed. Even if it was possible to search every passenger on a public transport system, policymakers – or indeed judges – may conclude that this would constitute an excessive intrusion into people's privacy. Likewise, a Big-Brother-type computer system through which to monitor and record the movements of every citizen may at some point become feasible, but most modern democratic societies would consider this to be neither proportionate nor desirable. In practice, therefore, governments need to make smart choices about the particular kinds of threats against which they wish to protect themselves. Excessive protection against the full range of so-called terrorist tactics will be expensive and wasteful, because the group which is believed to represent a threat may never employ them. Especially in democratic states, excessive protection may also undermine the public consensus, giving rise to the notion that the government is using the 'terrorist menace' as a pretext for tearing down civil liberties.

Rather than implementing measures against all kinds of 'terrorist tactics', governments need to identify the specific *modus operandi* of the entity against which their efforts are directed. This requires a sophisticated understanding not just of terrorism *per se*, but – perhaps more importantly – of the capabilities, intentions and even the ideological foundations which facilitate the particular campaign that is to be countered. For instance, though some insurgent groups may be interested in acquiring weapons of mass destruction, clearly not all of them are. It may, of course, be impossible to exclude the theoretical possibility that Marxist groups like the Revolutionary Organization November 17 in Greece will at some point turn to nuclear terrorism, but it is safe to say that – based on the past actions and the ideological outlook – the chances of this happening are very slim. On the other hand, if certain tactics, such as suicide attacks, are known to be part of the insurgents' arsenal, specific defensive measures – for example, erecting concrete barriers which will stop the bombers from reaching their target – may well turn out to be effective.[5] It is worth noting, for instance, that the single most significant reason for the rapid decrease in 'international terrorism' from the mid-1970s was the introduction of metal detectors and X-ray machines at airports, which prevented aerial hijackings – then the preferred tactic of Palestinian groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the PLO.[6] The key point here is not to deny that anti-terrorism measures can have a tangible impact, but that, in constructing them, governments should be guided less by a supposedly universal notion of 'what terrorists do' but rather by a careful analysis of the threat at hand.

A similar argument applies to the idea of addressing the so-called root causes of terrorism, which we raised at the beginning of this study. Even if we argued in the most general terms, saying that all terrorism is 'caused' by a general sense of alienation, frustration or psychological and/or material deprivation, it is doubtful whether the idea of terrorism having root causes would produce any meaningful insights. As Louise Richardson, perhaps the world's leading authority on roots and causes, explains:

> One of the most obvious difficulties in identifying a cause or causes of terrorism is that terrorism is a micro-phenomenon. Meta-explanations cannot be used successfully to explain micro-phenomena. Take the case of social revolutionary movements in Europe in the 1970s for example. Their behaviour was attributed to the alienation of the young whose post-war idealism was thwarted by capitalist materialism. But if this alienation was the cause, then why were there not many more terrorists? Alienation was widespread, but terrorism, fortunately, had relatively few adherents. Alienation alone, therefore, cannot stand as the cause of their terrorism.[7]

Richardson's argument is equally relevant to the current debate about the 'root causes' of the current threat from militant Islamism. In European countries, there may be hundreds of thousands of young Muslims who feel alienated from, and angry at, secular Western society, but only a very small minority

will ever engage in acts of terrorism. In other words, while it may well be true that all terrorists are alienated, if this condition also applies to hundreds of thousands of people who will never do anything unlawful, how can it be useful in constructing counter-*terrorism* policy?

Of course, the more fundamental objection to the notion of root causes is that it falsely suggests a causal link between motivation and method. If we accept that terrorism is a method that can be employed by anyone and for any reason, all efforts to identify a universal set of root causes are doomed to fail. Methods do not have causes, and to lump together and prescribe standardized solutions for vastly different situations of violent conflict merely on the basis of tactical similarities would be to miss the point altogether. It would strike anyone as absurd, for example, if we suggested that the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States were driven by the same – or even remotely similar – motivations as the campaign of the Animal Liberation Front in the United Kingdom. Both have used terror in order to intimidate and frighten their perceived opponents, but clearly this is the point at which the parallels end. Indeed, we would maintain that the 'root cause' of Ku Klux Klan activity in the United States is more likely to be found in the history and politics of the American South than in the obscure world of British animal liberationists, and it is with the careful study of the former that the search for long-term policy prescriptions in this particular case should begin.

Again, the terrorism label – when applied beyond the narrow confines of strategy – will prevent rather than aid the formulation of policy in relation to conflicts in which terrorism has played a role. This is not to say that looking for root causes is futile, but that it is the particular conflict – not terrorism *per se* – which should be the focus of analysis. We are not denying that conflicts may, at times, be connected, and it seems obvious that learning from similar experiences can be useful. But in doing so, we should be careful not to draw parallels merely on the basis of tactical similarities, which tell us very little about the motivations of the actors involved. For example, there may be something to learn from conflicts that are inspired by the same ideology, or whose political dynamics are determined by similar societal cleavages. But if the only parallel consists of people blowing up things, one is unlikely to discover any meaningful insights beyond the level of tactics. On the contrary, one's conclusions are bound to get diluted by the multitude of factors and conditions that have affected the use of terrorism in different cases, leading to policy prescriptions that are either overly general or grossly misleading.

Hence, while the first policy implication of our study is to exercise caution when subsuming all kinds of conflicts and confrontations under the terrorism label, the second – and perhaps more positive – proposition is to develop the idea of 'resilience' into a practical and meaningful concept. References to resilience turn up in virtually every strategy paper or policy speech dealing with terrorism, mostly – one suspects – because the word sounds sophisticated and suggests long-term thinking. In reality, though, most politicians and government bureaucrats who are using the term seem to have no proper understanding of

what it entails and why it should be central to any counter-terrorism strategy. This, we believe, is unfortunate because there may be no other concept that better describes the type of response that is necessary in order to neutralize the threat from terrorism. If terrorism is about inducing fear in order to achieve political outcomes, the principal aim for anyone hoping to counter this strategy would be to increase one's ability to resist being affected by the psychological effects which terrorism aims to bring about. Thus defined, resilience is the exact antithesis to terror.

Regrettably, the literature and academic debate about resilience focuses almost exclusively on technical issues. 'Resilience experts' are people who advise governments and businesses on how to maintain operations in case of great external shocks, such as accidents, natural disasters or terrorist attacks. There can be no question that such preparations are important and relevant, and that they constitute an important function of resilience, especially in highly complex societies where the ability to recover from shocks is inextricably linked to one's ability to restore complex technical systems. At the same time, this popular understanding of resilience is based on a narrow and partial interpretation of the concept, which confuses ends and means and thus diverts attention away from the core purpose of resilience. As we demonstrated in this study, continued disruption of daily life may not necessarily undermine people's psychological defences, whereas even the rapid restoration of basic services does not preclude the possibility of sustained trauma. In our view, therefore, resilience is not primarily – or even mostly – about building redundancies into technical systems but should be conceived of as an all-embracing effort to strengthen a society's psychological ability to cope with stress and fear.

If the aim is to strengthen people's psychological defences, the task of building resilience needs to be primarily educational and technical only in the second instance. For example, in order to cope with the stress and fear likely to be produced by a terrorist attack, it will be essential for governments to appreciate the consequences and dynamics of the strategy of terrorism. As we showed in this study, to become effective, terrorism relies on the target to respond in ways that inadvertently undermine its own authority. In most cases, groups that employ terrorism hope to provoke a repressive overreaction which amplifies the military effects of the terrorist operation, disorients people, divides society and radicalizes hitherto moderate sympathizers. It seems obvious, therefore, that a government's ability to cope with the situation will be enhanced by the realization that a repressive overreaction is, in fact, what the terrorist attack was intended to provoke. Likewise, governments will benefit from knowing that campaigns of terrorism – shocking and brutal as they may seem – rarely succeed in achieving their stated objectives, and that the gradual escalation of a terrorist campaign may indicate weakness as well as strength. The mindset of government ministers who believe their country to be under existential threat will be profoundly different from ones who understand that the terrorist campaign may succeed in disrupting everyday life but that there is virtually no chance it will destroy it altogether. Technical capabilities – such as the Israelis'

well-known (and much-admired) ability to clean up the scene of a suicide bombing and restore normal traffic within hours of an attack – play an important role, but they matter little if the policymakers in charge are unprepared and ill-trained for a situation in which their psychological defences are likely to be tested.

Policymakers' psychological resilience is of supreme importance, given that it is in situations of extreme stress that terrorist attacks are most likely to achieve 'relative successes'.[8] The best example of this scenario are the Hezbollah attacks against the multilateral peacekeeping forces in Beirut in 1983, which resulted in the deaths of 241 American and 56 French soldiers and prompted the withdrawal of all international forces within less than a year. Hezbollah never succeeded in its ambition of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, but the ending of the international mission undoubtedly constituted a 'victory for terrorism'. In fact, the decision to withdraw was taken by US President Ronald Reagan within days of the attack, reeling from the heavy loss of life, shocked by the use of suicide bombers, and subject to immense public pressure. It is, of course, impossible to say with any degree of certainty what would have happened had the American leadership been better prepared for this eventuality. Arguably, the deployment to Lebanon had been ill-conceived and badly executed from the start, and it was merely a matter of time for the multilateral troops to be forced out.[9] At the same time, the attack represents a textbook example of how to capitalize on psychological vulnerabilities. Perhaps a more resilient US President would have come to the same conclusion – namely that an ending of the peacekeeping mission had become inevitable – but he might have weighed his options more carefully, considering the wider consequences and making sure that the timing and manner of withdrawal would be seen less as a concession to the 'terrorists'.

Needless to say, it would be short-sighted if, in applying the concept of resilience, we restricted ourselves to governments. The case of the American withdrawal from Lebanon demonstrates that decision-makers rarely operate in a vacuum, especially when terrorist attacks manage to turn out as devastating as the ones in Beirut in 1983. Throughout this study, we have emphasized that terrorism is a form of communication that requires actions to be conveyed to particular audiences. It is obvious that such communication can take different forms, and that those who do the communicating can play a significant role in determining whether the terrorist attack achieves its purpose, namely to create fear in order to influence a political outcome. Resilience, therefore, needs to be consciously built not only among politicians and government officials but also among members of the media. In free societies, reporting restrictions – or any other attempts by the government to influence journalists to report particular events in certain ways – are unworkable and would be counter-productive even if possible. As a result, responsible reporting needs to be encouraged through voluntary means, which – yet again – is primarily an educational task. Journalists need to understand that terrorism is about the deliberate creation of fear, and that they are the vehicles through which this psychological effect is

being conveyed. They have to appreciate, in other words, that terrorist groups are dependent on their unwitting support in order for their strategy to become effective. And, like government ministers, they need to be able to recognize the military weakness which the resort to terrorist means signifies. Only a correct understanding of the threat posed by terrorism will make it possible for them to contextualize the impression of carnage and mayhem they are likely to encounter when reporting from the scene of an attack.

Lastly, the most significant task is to strengthen the resilience of the population at large. As we have shown in this study, people are more resilient than is commonly assumed. Even when confronted with large-scale, drawn-out campaigns of terrorism, most people are unlikely to change their daily routines for very long. In some cases, long-term exposure to terrorist events even seems to produce defiance. The emphasis, therefore, should be on strengthening people's short-term psychological defences, that is, their capacity to survive the immediate shock of a devastating attack. Most governments' policies in this respect are utterly contradictory. People are told that there is no significant threat whilst colour-coded warning schemes urge constant readiness, suggesting that 'it can happen anytime'. A more sensible and realistic approach would be to communicate to the public that absolute security can never be achieved, but that terrorism is unlikely to achieve its aims so long as people refuse to act out of fear. After all, once people begin to understand that terrorism and fear are one and the same thing, the 'terrorists' will have lost.

Notes

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6 Conclusion

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