

CHAPTER- 1

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF TERRORISM:

Terrorism is a dark feature of human behaviour since the dawn of recorded history. Great leaders have been assassinated, groups and individuals have committed acts of incredible violence, and entire cities and nations have been put to the sword-all in the name of defending a greater good. Terrorism, however defined, has always challenged the stability of societies and the peace of mind of everyday people. In the modern era, the impact of terrorism-that is, its ability to terrorize- is not limited to the specific locales or regions where the terrorists strike. In the age of television, the internet, satellite communications, the global news coverage, graphic images of terrorist incidents are broadcast instantaneously in to the homes of hundreds of millions of people. Terrorist groups understand the power of these images, and they manipulate them to their advantage as much as they can. Terrorist states also fully appreciate the power of instantaneous information, and so they try to control the "spin" on reports of their behaviour. In many respects, the beginning of the 21st century is an era of globalized terrorism.

Some acts of political violence are clearly acts of terrorism. Most people would agree that politically motivated planting of bombs in market places, massacres of "enemy" civilians, and the routine use of torture by governments are terrorist acts. However, our study of terrorism as it is important to appreciate that we will

encounter many definitional “gray areas.” Depending on which side of the ideological, racial, religious, or national fence one sits, political violence can be interpreted either as acts of unmitigated terrorist barbarity or as freedom fighting and national liberation. These gray areas will be explored in the chapters that follow.

September 11, 2001: The dawn of a New Era. The September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland were seen by many as a turning point in the history of political violence. In the aftermath of these attacks, journalists, scholars, and national leaders repeatedly described the emergence of a new international terrorist environment. It was argued that within this new environment, terrorists were now quite capable of using- and very willing to use- weapons of mass destruction to inflict unprecedented casualties and destruction on enemy targets. These attacks seemed to confirm warnings from experts during the 1990s that a new Terrorism,¹ using “asymmetrical” methods, would characterize the terrorist environment in the new millennium.

The modern era of terrorism is primarily a conflict between adversaries who on one side are waging a self-described war on terrorism and on the other side are waging a self-described holy war in defense of their religion. It is an active confrontation, as evidenced by the fact that the incidence of significant terrorist attacks often spikes to serious levels. For example, the number of significant terrorist attacks more than tripled from the 175 in 2003 to 655 in 2004.²

Although such trends are disturbing, it is critically important for one to keep these facts in perspective, because the modern terrorist environment is in no manner a unique circumstance in human history.

It will become clear in the following pages that the history of terrorist behavior extends into antiquity and that common themes and concepts span the ages. State terrorism, dissident terrorism, and other types of political violence are found in all periods of human civilization. It will also become clear to readers that there are many common justifications rooted in basic beliefs that have been used to rationalize terrorist violence throughout history. For example, the following concepts hold true regardless of the context of history, culture, or region:

- * Those who practice revolutionary violence and state repression always claim to champion noble causes and values.
- * Policies that advocate extreme violence always cite righteous goals to justify their behaviour – such as the need to defend a religious faith or defend the human rights of people.
- * The perpetrators of violent acts uniformly maintain that they are freedom fighters (in the case of governments).

Historical perspectives on terrorism:

It is perhaps natural for each generation to view history narrowly, from within its own political context. Contemporary commentators and laypersons tend to interpret modern events as though they have no historical precedent. However,

terrorism is by no means a modern phenomenon, and in fact it has a long history. Nor does terrorism arise from a political vacuum. The present author will explore the cause of terrorism in detail afterwards; let us submit now a brief summary of several historical periods to illustrate the global and timeless sweep of terrorist behaviour.

A. Antiquity:

In the ancient world, cases and stories of state repression and political violence were common. Several ancient writers championed tyrannicide (the killing of tyrants) as for the greater good of the citizenry and to delight the gods some assassins were honored by the public. For example, when Aristogeiton and Hermodius assassinated the tyrant Hipparchus, statues were erected to honor them after their executions. Conquerors often set harsh examples by exterminating entire populations or forcing the conquered into exile. An example of this practice is the Babylonian Exile, which followed the conquest of the kingdom of Judea. Babylon's victory resulted in the forced removal of the Judean population to Babylon in 598 and 587 B.C.E. Those in authority also repressed the expression of ideas from individuals whom they deemed dangerous, sometimes violently.

In ancient Greece, Athenian authorities sentenced the great philosopher Socrates to death in 399 B.C.E. for allegedly corrupting the city-state's youth and

meddling in religious affairs. He drank hemlock and died in front of his students and followers.

B. The Roman age:

During the time of Roman Empire, the political world was rife with many violent demonstrations of power, which are arguably examples of what we would now term state terrorism. These include the brutal suppression of Spartacus's followers after the servile war of 73-71 B.C.E., after which the Romans crucified surviving rebels along the Appian Way's route to Rome. Crucifixion was used as a form of public execution in Rome, and involved affixing condemned persons to a cross or other wooden platform. The condemned were either nailed through the wrist or hand or tied on the platform; they died by suffocation as their bodies sagged.

Warfare was waged in an equally hard manner, as evidenced by the final conquest of the north African city-state of Carthage in 146 B.C.E.. The city was reportedly allowed to burn for 10 days, the rubble was crushed; the salt was symbolically ploughed into the soil to signify that Carthage would forever remain desolate. During another successful campaign in 106 C.E., the Dacian nation (modern Romania) was eliminated, its population was enslaved, and many Dacians perished in gladiatorial games. In other conquered territories, conquest was often accompanied by similar demonstrations of terror, always with the

intent to demonstrate that Roman rule would be wielded without mercy against those who did not submit to the authority of the empire.

Regicide (the killing of kings) was also fairly common during the Roman age. Perhaps the best-known political incident in ancient Rome was the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E. by rivals in the senate. Other Roman emperors also met violent fates: Caligula and Galba were killed by the Praetorian Guard in 41 and 68 C.E. respectively; Domitian was stabbed to death in 96 C.E. a paid gladiator murdered Commodus in 193 .C.E. and Caracalla, Elagabalus, and other emperors either were assassinated or died suspiciously.³

C.The Ancient and Medieval Middle East:

Cases exist of movement in the ancient and medieval Middle East that what modern analysts would consider to be terrorist tactics .For example, in *History of the Jewish War*— a seven volume account of the first Jewish rebellion against Roman occupation (66-73 C.E) the historian Flavius Josephus describes how one faction of the rebels, the *sicarii*(named after their preferred use of *sica*, or short, curved daggers), attacked both Romans and members of the Jewish establishment.⁴ They were masters of guerrilla warfare and the destruction of symbolic property and belonged to a group known as the Zealots (from the Greek *zelos*, meaning ardor or strong spirit), who opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. The modern term zealot, used to describe uncompromising devotion to radical change, is derived from the name of this group. Assassination was a

commonly used tactic. Some *sicarii* zealots were present at the siege of Masada, a hilltop fortress that held out against the Romans for three years before the defenders committed suicide in 74 C.E. rather than surrender.

D.The French Revolution: Prelude to Modern Terrorism.

During the French Revolution, British statesman and philosopher Edmond Burke coined the word terrorism in its modern context. He used the word to describe the regime de la terrier, commonly known in English as the Reign of Terror (June 1793 to July 1794).⁵ The Reign of Terror, led by the radical Jacobin-dominated government, is a good example of state terrorism carried out to further the goals of a revolutionary ideology.⁶ During the terror, Thousands of opponents to the Jacobin dictatorship –and others merely perceived to be enemies of the new revolutionary republic —were arrested and put on trial before a revolutionary Tribunal. Those found to be enemies of the Republic were beheaded by a new instrument of execution –the guillotine .The guillotine had the capability to execute victims one after the other in assembly –line fashion and was regarded by Jacobins and revolutionaries at the time as an enlightened and civilized tool of revolutionary justice.

The ferocity of the reign of terror is reflected in the numbers of victims: Between 17,000 and 40,000 persons were executed and perhaps 200,000 political prisoners died in prisons from disease and starvation.⁷ Two incidents illustrate the communal nature of this violence: In Lyon 700 people were massacred by

cannon fire in the town square, and in Nantes thousands were drowned in the Loire River when the boats they were detained in were sunk.⁸ The revolutionary tribunal is a symbol of revolutionary justice and state terrorism that has its modern counterparts in 20th century social upheavals. Recent examples include the “struggle meetings” in revolutionary china (public criticism sessions, involving public humiliation and confession) and revolutionary Iran’s Komitehs (ad hoc “people’s committees”.)⁹

E.Nineteenth- century Europe: Two Examples from the Left.

Modern left-wing terrorism is not a product of the 20th century .Its ideological ancestry dates to the 19th century, when anarchist and communist philosophers began to advocate the destruction of capitalist and imperial society- what Karl Marx referred to as the “spectre...haunting Europe.”¹⁰ Some revolutionaries readily encouraged the use of terrorism in the new cause. One theorist, Karl Heinzen in Germany, anticipated the late -20th-century fear that terrorist might obtain weapons of mass destruction when he supported the acquisition of new weapons technologies to utterly destroy the enemies of the people. According to Hansen, these weapons should include poison gas and new high –yield explosive. During the 19th century, several terrorist movements championed the rights of the lower classes. These movements were prototypes for 20th century groups and grew out of social and political environments that were unique to their countries.

To illustrate this point, the following two cases are drawn from early industrial England and the semi feudal Russia context of the late 19th century.

The Luddites were English workers in the early 1800s who objected to the social and economic transformations of the industrial revolution. Their principal objection was that industrialization threatened their jobs, and so they targeted the machinery of the new textile factories. Textile mills and weaving machinery were disrupted and sabotaged. For example, they attacked stocking looms that mass-produced stockings at the expense of skilled stocking weavers who made them by hand.

A mythical figure, Ned Ludd, was the supposed founder of the Luddite movement. The movement was active from 1811 to 1816 and was responsible for sabotaging and destroying wool and cotton mills. The British government eventually suppressed the movement by passing anti-Luddite laws, including establishing the crime of "machine breaking," which was punishable by death. After 17 Luddites were executed in 1813, the movement gradually died out. Modern anti-technology activists and terrorists, such as the Unabomber, Theodore "Ted" Kaczynski, in the United States, are sometimes referred to as neo-Luddites.

People's Will (Narodnaya Volya) in Russia was a direct outgrowth of student dissatisfaction with the czarist regime in the late 19th century. Many young

Russian university students, some of whom had studied abroad, became imbued with the ideals of anarchism and Marxism. Many of these students became radical reformists who championed the rights of the people, particularly the peasant class. A populist revolutionary society, Land and Liberty (Zemlya Volya), was founded in 1876 with the goal of fomenting a mass peasant uprising by settling radical students among them to raise their class-consciousness. After a series of arrests and mass public trials, Land and Liberty split into two factions in 1879. One faction, Black Repartition, kept to the goal of a peasant revolution. The other fraction was People's will, which fashioned itself into a conspiratorial terrorist organization.

People's Will members believed that they understood the underlying problems of Russia better than the uneducated masses of people did, and that they concluded that they were therefore better able to force government change. This was, in fact, one of the first examples of a revolutionary vanguard strategy. They believed that they could both demoralize the czarist government and expose its weakness to the peasantry. People's Will quickly embarked on a terrorist campaign against carefully selected targets. Incidents of terror committed by Peoples Will members and revolutionaries who emulated them –included shooting, knifings, and bombings against government officials .In one successful attack, Czar Alexander II was assassinated by a terrorist bomb on March 1, 1881. The immediate outcome of the terrorist campaign was the installation of a

repressive police state in Russia that, although not as efficient as the police states would be in the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany, succeeded in harassing and imprisoning most members of people's will.

F. The modern Era and the War on Terrorism:

From the viewpoint of human history, it is clear that terrorism is deeply woven into the fabric of social and political conflict. This quality has not been changed, and in the modern world states and targeted populations are challenged by the new terrorism, which is characterized by the following:

- * Loose, cell-based networks with minimal lines of command and control
- * Desired acquisition of high-intensity weapons and weapons of mass destruction
- * Politically vague, religious, or mystical motivations
- * "Asymmetrical" methods that maximize casualties
- * Skillful use of the Internet and manipulation of the media

The new terrorism should be contrasted with traditional terrorism, which is typically characterized by the following:

- * clearly identifiable organizations or movements.
- * Use of conventional weapons, usually small arms and explosives.
- * explicit grievances championing specific classes or ethno-national groups.
- * Relatively "surgical" selection of targets.

New information technologies and the Internet create unprecedented opportunities for terrorists groups, and violent extremists have become adept at bringing their wars into the homes of literally hundreds of millions of people. Those who specialize in suicide bombings, car bombs, or mass casualty attacks correctly calculate that carefully selected targets will attract the attention of a global audience. Thus, cycles of violence not only disrupt normal routines, but they also produce long period of global awareness. Such cycles can be devastating. For example, during the winter and spring of 2005, Iraqi suicide bombings increased markedly in intensity and frequency, from 69 in April 2005 (a record rate) to 90 in May.¹¹ These attacks resulted in many casualties, including hundreds of deaths, and greatly outpaced the previous cycle of car bombings by more than two or one.

All of these threats offer new challenges for policy makers about how to respond to the behaviour of terrorist states, groups, and individuals. The war on terrorism launched in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, seemed to herald a new resolve to end terrorism. This has proven to be a difficult task. The war has been fought on many levels, as exemplified by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the disruption of terrorist cells on several continents. There have been serious terrorist strikes such as those in Madrid, (Spain); Bali, (Indonesia), London, (England) and Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt. In addition, differences have arisen within the post September 11

alliance, creating significant strains. It is clear that the war will likely to be a long-term prospect with many unanticipated events.

G. Exploring Definitions and Sources:

At the outset it is very important to develop a basic understanding of several issues underlying the study of terrorism. These issues are ongoing topics of research and debate among scholars, officials, the media, and activists, and all of them will be explored in greater detail in later chapters. The discussion here profiles the following:

1. First Definitions: Extremism and Terrorism
2. Sources of Terrorism

1. First Definition: Extremism and Terrorism

Extremism is a quality that is “radical in opinion, especially in political matters; ultra; advanced.”¹² It is characterized by intolerance towards opposing interests and divergent opinions, and it is the primary catalyst and motivation for terrorist behaviour. Extremist who cross the line to become terrorists always develop noble arguments to rationalize and justify acts of violence directed against enemy nations, people, religions, or other interests.

It is important to understand that extremism is a radical expression of one’s political values. Both the content of ones beliefs and the style in which one

expresses those beliefs are basic elements for defining extremism. Laird Wilcox summed up this quality as follows:

Extremism is more an issue of style than of content.... Most people can hold radical or unorthodox views and still entertain them in a more or less reasonable, rational, and nondogmatic manner. On the other hand, I have met people whose views are fairly close to the political mainstream but were presented in a shrill, uncompromising, bullying, and distinctly authoritarian manner.

Thus a fundamental definitional issue for extremism is how one expresses an idea, in addition to the question of which belief one acts upon. Both elements—style and content- are important for our investigation of fringe beliefs and terrorist behaviour. We will build on these themes when the extremist foundations of terrorism are explored in the forthcoming.

Terrorism would not, from a layman's point of view, seem to be a difficult concept to define. Most of the people hold an instinctive understanding that terrorism is

*Politically motivated violence.

*Usually directed against "Soft targets" (i.e., civilian and administrative government targets), and*With an intention to affect or terrorize a target audience.This instinctive understanding would also hold that terrorism is a criminal, unfair, or otherwise illegitimate use of force. Layman might presume that this is an easily understood concept, but defining terrorism is not such a

simple process. Experts have for some time grappled with designing (and agreeing on) clear definitions of terrorism; the issue has, in fact, been at the center of an ongoing debate. The result of this debate is a remarkable variety of approaches and definitions. Walter Laqueur noted, “more than a hundred definitions have been offered,” including several of his own.¹³ Even within the U.S. government, different agencies apply several definitions. These definitional problems are explored further in the next chapter.

2. Sources of Terrorism:

The underlying causes of terrorism have also been the subject of extensive discussion, debate, and research. This is perhaps because the study of the sources of terrorism spans many disciplines including sociology, psychology, criminology, and political science. Now, a general model will serve as a starting point for developing our understanding factors, which lead to terrorist violence. To begin, we must understand that political violence, including terrorism, has systematic origins that can be ameliorated. Social and economic pressures, frustrated political aspirations, and in a more proximate sense, the personal experiences of terrorists and their relations, all contribute to the terrorist reservoir.

Nehemia Friedland designed “a convenient framework for the analysis of the antecedents of political terrorism,”¹⁴ outlined as follows:

First, terrorism is a group phenomenon...perpetrated by organized groups whose members have a clear group identity-national, religious or ideological. *Second*, political terrorism has its roots in intergroup conflict.... *Third*, “insurgent terrorism,”...is a “strategy of the weak.”(P.82, italics added)

One should appreciate that these issues continue to be a source of intensive debate. Nevertheless, working definitions have been adopted as a matter of logical necessity. Let us presume then that terrorist acts are grounded in extremist beliefs that arise from group identity, intergroup conflict, and a chosen strategy.

H. THE MORALITY OF TERRORIST VIOLENCE:


The term terrorism has acquired a decidedly pejorative (negative) meaning in the modern era, so that few if any states or groups who espouse political violence ever refer to themselves as terrorist. Nevertheless, these same states and groups can be unabashedly extremist in their beliefs or violent in their behaviour. They often invoke- and manipulate-images of a malevolent threat or unjust conditions to justify their actions .The question is whether these justifications are morally satisfactory (and thereby validate extremist violence), or whether terrorism is inherently wrong.It is helpful to review two concepts that are used in the study of criminal justice .In criminal law, the terms *mala prohibita* and *mala in se*¹⁵ are applied to behaviours that society defines as deviant acts. They represent concepts that are very useful for the study of terrorism.

Mala prohibita acts are “crimes that are made illegal by legislation.”¹⁶ These acts are illegal because society has declared them to be wrong; they are not inherently immoral, wicked, or evil. Examples include laws prohibiting gambling and prostitution, which are considered to be moral prohibitions against socially unacceptable behaviours rather than prohibitions of fundamental evils.

Mala in se acts are crimes “that are immoral or wrong in themselves.” These acts cannot be justified in civilized society, and they have no acceptable qualities. For example, premeditated murder and forcible rape are mala in se crimes. They will never be legalized.

Are terrorist methods fundamentally evil? Perhaps so, because terrorism commonly evokes images of maximum violence against innocent victims carried out in the name of a higher cause. However, is terrorist violence always such a bad thing? Are not some causes worth fighting for? Killing for? Dying for? Is not terrorism simply a matter of one’s point of view? Most would agree that basic values such as freedom and liberty are indeed worth fighting for, and sometimes killing or dying for. If so, perhaps “where you stand depends on where you sit.” Thus, if the bombs are falling on your head, is it not an act of terrorism? If the bombs are falling on an enemy’s head in the name of your freedom, how can it possibly be terrorism? Morality is not always a relative consideration, for many behaviors are indeed mala in se. However, this is not always an easy analysis

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because violence committed by genuinely oppressed people can arguably raise questions of mala prohibitum as a matter of perspective.

Critical evaluation of the following quotations would help to address these difficult moral issues:

“One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.”

“One man willing to throw away his life is enough to terrorize a thousand.”

“Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice.”

“It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.”

“One Persons Terrorist Is Another Persons Freedom Fighter.”

The authorship of this statement is unknown; it most likely originated in one form or another in the remote historical past. The concept embodied in this quotation is, very simply, perspective. It is a concept that will be applied throughout our examination of terrorist groups, movements, and individuals. As it will become abundantly clear, terrorists never consider themselves to be the “bad guys” in their struggle for what they would define as freedom. They might admit that they have been forced by a powerful and ruthless opponent to adopt terrorist methods, but they see themselves as freedom fighters. Benefactors of terrorists always live with clean hands, because they present their clients as plucky freedom fighters. Likewise, nations that use the technology of war to attack

known civilian targets justify their sacrifice as incidental to the greater good of the cause.

“One Man Willing to Throw Away His Life Is Enough To Terrorize a Thousand.”

This quotation was written by the Chinese military philosopher Wu Ch’I, who wrote, “Now suppose there is a desperate bandit lurking in the fields and one thousand men set out in pursuit of him. The reason all look for him as they would a wolf is that each one fears that he will arise and harm him. This is the reason one man willing to throw away his life is enough to terrorize a thousand.”¹⁷ This quotation is the likely source for the better-known statement “kill one man, terrorize a thousand.” The authorship of the latter is undetermined but has been attributed to the leader of the Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong, and to the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu. Both Wu ch’I and Sun Tzu are often discussed in conjunction with each other, but Sun Tzu may be a mythical figure. Sun Tzu’s book *The Art of War* has become a classic study of warfare. Regardless of who originated these phrases, their simplicity explains the value of a motivated individual who is willing to sacrifice him or her when committing an act of violence. They suggest that the selfless application of lethal force- in combination with correct timing, surgical precision, and an unambiguous purpose- is an invaluable weapon of war. It is also an obvious tactic for small,

motivated groups that are vastly outnumbered and outgunned by a more powerful adversary.

“Extremism in Defense of Liberty Is No Vice”¹⁸

Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona made this statement during his bid for the presidency in 1964. The theme of his campaign was very conservative and anti-communist. However, because of the nations rivalry with the Soviet Union during this period in American political history, every major candidate was overtly anti –communist. Thus, Goldwater tried to outdo incumbent President Lyndon Johnson, his main rival on this issue. This quotation represents an uncompromising belief in the absolute righteousness of a cause .It defines a clear belief in good versus evil and a belief that the end justifies the means .If one simply substitutes any cause for the word liberty in the quotation, one can fully understand how it lends itself to the legitimization of uncompromising devotion to the cause. Terrorists use this reasoning to justify their belief that they are defending their championed interest (be it ideological, racial, religious, or national) against all perceived enemies –who are, of course, evil. Hence, the practice of ethnic cleansing was begun by Serb militias during the war in Bosnia in 1991-1995 to forcibly remove Muslims and Croats from villages and towns. This was done in the name of Bosnian Serb security and historical claims to land

occupied by others.¹⁹ Bosnian and Croat paramilitaries later practiced ethnic cleansing to create their own ethnically “pure” enclaves.

“It Became Necessary to Destroy the Town to Save It.”²⁰

This quotation has been attributed to a statement made by an American officer during the war in Vietnam. When asked why a village thought to be occupied by the enemy had been destroyed, he allegedly replied that American soldiers had destroyed the village to save it.²¹ The symbolic logic behind this statement is very seductive: If the worst thing that can happen to a village is to be occupied by an enemy, then destroying it is a good thing. The village has been denied to the enemy, and it has been saved from the horrors of enemy occupation. The symbolism of the village can be replaced by any number of symbolic values.

Terrorist uses this kind of reasoning to justify hardships that they impose not only on a perceived enemy but also on their own-championed group. For example, the nihilist dissident terrorists, who are content to wage “revolution for revolution’s sake.” They have no concrete plan for what kind of society will be built upon the rubble of the old one-their goal is simply to destroy an inherently evil system. To them, anything is better than the existing order. A historical example of this reasoning on an enormous scale is found in the Great War between two totalitarian and terrorist states-Germany and the soviet union- from

July 1941 to May 1945. Both sides used scorched-earth tactics as a matter of policy when their armies retreated, destroying towns, crops, roadways, bridges, factories, and other infrastructure as a way to deny resources to the enemy.

I. Terrorism and Criminal skill:

Terrorism is condemned internationally as an illegal use of force and an illegitimate expression of political will. Applying this concept of illegality, one can argue that terrorists are criminals and that terrorist attacks require some degree of criminal skill. For example, the radical Islamic network Al Qaeda set up an elaborate financial system to sustain its activities. This financial system included secret bank accounts, front companies, offshore bank accounts, and charities.²¹ Al Qaeda is an example of a stateless movement that became a self-sustaining revolutionary network. It is also an example of a sophisticated transnational criminal enterprise.

Terrorist attacks involve different degrees of criminal skill. The following cases are examples of the wide range of sophistication found in incidents of political violence. These are viz.,

*Richard Baumhammers, an American neo-Nazi who went on a killing spree near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in April 2000.

*Ted Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber, who was famous for sending mail bombs to his victims and who eluded capture for 18 years, from 1978 to 1996.

*RamziYousef, an international terrorist who was the mastermind behind the first World Trade Center bombing in February 1993.

J. Terrorist Symbolism: Oklahoma City and September 11, 2001.

Symbolism is a central feature of terrorism. Most terrorist targets at some level symbolize the righteousness of the terrorist's cause and the evil of the opponent they are fighting. Symbolism can be used to rationalize acts of extreme violence and can be manipulated to fit any number of targets into the category of an enemy interest. Terrorists are very mindful of their image and skill-fully conduct public relations and propagananda campaigns to "package" themselves. Modern terrorist and their supporters have become quite adept at crafting symbolic meaning from acts of violence.

Symbolism can create abstract ideological linkages between terrorists and their victims. This process was seen during the wave of kidnappings by Latin American leftists during the 1970s, when terrorists seized civilian businessmen and diplomats who the kidnappers said symbolized capitalism and exploitation. Symbolic targets can also represent enemy social or political establishments, as in the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) assassination of Lord Louis Mountbatten (the uncle of prince Philip Mountbatten, Queen Elizabeth II's husband) in 1979

and the IRA's attempted assassination of Prime Minister Thatcher in 1984. In some cases, entire groups of people can be symbolically labeled and slaughtered, as during the genocides of the Nazi Holocaust (pseudo-racial), in the killing fields of Cambodia (social and political), in Rwanda (ethnic and social), and in the Darfur region of Sudan (racial).

Two examples of deadly domestic terrorism in the United States demonstrate the important role of symbolism in the worldview of terrorists. The first example is an act of terrorism perpetrated by an American terrorist in Oklahoma City. The second example is the series of attacks on September 11, 2001, by international terrorists in New York City, Washington, D. C., and in the skies over rural Pennsylvania.

The Oklahoma City Bombing

On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh drove a rented Ryder truck to the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. He deliberately chose April 19, as a symbolic date for the attack-It was the 220th anniversaries of the battles of Lexington and Concord and the second anniversary of the law enforcement disaster in Waco, Texas. McVeigh was a hard-core devotee of the patriot movement and a believer in New World Order conspiracy theories. He was almost certainly a racial supremacist, having tried to solicit advice from the neo-Nazi National Alliance and the racial separatist Elohim City group about going

underground after the bombing. McVeigh had also visited the Branch Davidian site at Waco, Texas,²² where about 75 members of the Branch Davidian cult died in a fire that was ignited during a paramilitary raid by federal law enforcement officers.

Mc Veigh had converted the Ryder truck in to a powerful mobile ammonium nitrate and fuel oil (ANFO)-based bomb. He used “more than 5,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer mixed with about 1,200 pounds of liquid nitromethane, [and] 350 pounds of Tovex.”²³ When he detonated the truck bomb at 9:02a.m.it destroyed most of the federal building and killed 168 people, including 19 children. More than 500 hundred others were injured.

Mc Veigh’s attack was in large part a symbolic act of war against the federal government. He had given careful consideration to achieving a high casualty rate, just as “American bombing raids were designed to take lives, not just destroy building.”²⁴ The deaths of the 19 children were justified in his mind as the unfortunate “collateral damage” against innocent victim’s common to modern warfare.²⁵ Timothy Mc Veigh was tried and convicted, and he was executed in a federal facility in Terre Haute, Indiana, on June 11, 2001.His execution was the first federal execution since 1963.

September 11, 2001.

The worst incident of modern international terrorism occurred in the United States on the morning of September 11, 2001. It was carried out by 19 Al Qaeda terrorists who were on a suicidal "martyrdom mission." They committed the attack to strike at the symbol of American (and western) interests in response to what they perceive to be a continuing process of domination and exploitation of Muslim countries. They were religious terrorists fighting in the name of a holy cause against perceived evil emanating from the west. Their sentiments were born in the religious, political, and ethno-national ferment that has characterized the politics of the Middle East for much of the modern era. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attack. The sequence of events occurred as follows:

7:59 am. American Airlines Flight 11, carrying 92 people, leaves Boston's Logan International Airport for Los Angeles..

8:14 a.m. United Airlines Flight 175, carrying 65 people, leaves Boston for Los Angeles.

8:20 a.m. American Airlines Flight 77, carrying 64 people, takes off from Washington's Dulles Airport for Los Angeles.

8:42 a.m. United Airlines Flight 93, carrying 44 people, leaves Newark, New Jersey, International Airport for San Francisco.

8:46 a.m. American Flight 11 crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Centre.

9:03 a.m. United Flight 175 crashes into the south tower of the World Trade Centre.

9:37 a.m. American Flight 77 crashes in to the Pentagon. Trading on Wall Street is called off.

9:59 a.m. Two World Trade Centre- the south tower- collapses.

10:03 a.m. United Flight 93 crashes 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

10:28 a.m. One World Trade Centre- the north tower- collapses.²⁶

The United States had previously been the target of international terrorism at home and abroad, but the American homeland had never suffered a terrorist strike on this scale. The most analogous historical event was the Japanese attack on the Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. The last time so many people had died from an act of war committed on American soil was during the civil war in the mid-19th century.

After the Al Qaeda assault and the subsequent anthrax crisis (in October-December 2001, more than 20 people were infected with anthrax in the United States; 5 died), ordinary American culture shifted away from complete openness to a period of high security. The adaptation of the American people and political establishment to this new environment was a new experience for the nation. The symbolism of the attack, combined with its sheer scale, drove the United States to war and dramatically changed the American security environment. Counter

terrorism in the United States shifted from a predominantly law enforcement mode to a security mode. Security measures included unprecedented airport and seaport security, border searches, visa scrutiny, and immigration procedures. Hundreds of people were administratively detained and questioned during a sweep of persons fitting the terrorist profile of the 19 attackers. These detentions set off a debate about the constitutionality of these methods and the fear by many that civil liberties were in jeopardy. In October 2001, the USA PATRIOT act was passed. The new law granted significant authority to federal law enforcement agencies to engage in surveillance and other investigative work. On November 25, 2002, seventeen federal agencies (later increased to 22 agencies) were consolidated to form a new department of homeland security.

The symbolism of a damaging attack on homeland targets was momentous because it showed that the American superpower was vulnerable to attack by small groups of determined revolutionaries. The twin towers had dominated the New York skyline since the completion of two-world trade centre in 1972. They were a symbol of global trade and prosperity and pride of the largest city in the United States. The Pentagon, of course, is a unique building that symbolizes American military power, and its location across the river from the nation's capital showed the vulnerability of the seat of government to attack.

On May 30, 2002, a 30 foot long steel beam was ceremoniously removed from the ‘ground zero’ site in New York City. It was the final piece of debris to be removed from the September 11 homeland attack.

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