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The Transformation of Terrorism

The "New Terrorism," Impact Scalability and the Dynamic of Reciprocal Threat Perception

Inhaltsverzeichnis

List of Abbreviations

ABC weapons	Atomic, Biological and Chemical weapons
ASU	Active Service Unit, smallest quasi-independently operating combat unit of the Provisional Irish Republican Army
Black Ops	Black Operations, i.e. covert military operations
CIA	United States Central Intelligence Agency
CSA	The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, Paramilitary Survivalist Group active in the United States
FBI	United States Federal Bureau of Investigations
HAMAS	Harakat al-Muqwawanah al-Islamiyya, Sunni Palestinian PVM
KGB	Soviet Committee of State Security (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti)
MAK	Maktab al-Khidamat, Mujahedeen Office of Services
MCT	Mass Casualty Terrorism
MOIS/VEVAK	Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar), successor to SAVAK
PA	Palestinian Authority, the official governing body of autonomous Palestinian territories in Gaza and the West Bank after 1993
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PVM	Political Violence Movement

RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion, Red Army Faction
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
SAVAK	Iranian Ministry of Security under Shah Pahlavi until 1979
STASI	East German State Security Service (Staats-sicherheitsdienst)
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the centuries-old historical record covering both insurgent and incumbent use of terrorist tactics, the distinction between the older terrorism and the "New Terrorism" is artificial at best. This is because the differentiation it seeks to create is subjective and likely event-and interest-driven. A reappraisal of the "New Terrorist" paradigm is necessary.

Two new trends in terrorism introduced in this essay – *impact scalability*, defined as the trinity of the will, ability and capability to quantitatively manipulate conventional or unconventional mass casualty terrorism, and the *dynamic of reciprocal threat perception*, here identified as a likely catalyst for the future political violence movements' (PVM) use of unconventional mass casualty terrorism – are intricately linked to the terrorist actors as the terminus a quo of terrorism. Both conceptions lend themselves to the conclusion that terrorism has become *even more dangerous* than suggested, and for reasons not addressed, by the proponents of the "New Terrorism."

In a near future, PVMs' capability of almost limitless "*impact scalability*" due to the development of precision delivery systems will be, and is already taking shape as, the single most important contributing factor to a radical transformation of terrorism, and indeed of warfare, that will give new meaning to the conception of "strategic asymmetry." Moreover, the author proposes that it is the "*reciprocal dynamic of threat perception*" that acts as the principal structural catalyst in the reification of mass casualty terrorist attacks with conventional or unconventional weapons.

In the light of a seemingly inexorable proliferation of ABC weapons that will likely not stop at the state level, and especially once weapons of mass destruction (WMD) become available to

the future perpetrator, knowledge of his psychological individual or group profile – of the way his mind works – will become the most powerful asset in the service of those forces opposing him. On the side of prevention, academic risk analysis and operational intelligence analysis, as shown in an example on the protection of critical infrastructures (CIP), will have to review the importance of qualitative research and the methodological aspects this involves – not least in the case of actor-centered analysis.

"The gravest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology – when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends – and we will oppose them with all our power."
President George W. Bush, West Point, New York, 1 June 2002[1]

"One source of tension, however, is some policymakers' insistence on the possibility of a fixed and unambiguous "terrorist profile," a list of characteristics that permit identification of actual or potential terrorists."
Martha Crenshaw[2]

1 Questions, Uncertainties and Ambiguity: Discussing the Phenomenon of Terrorism

Has terrorism undergone substantial change in recent years? Is the "New Terrorism" really new? What makes the "New Terrorism" a novel phenomenon? To begin with, what exactly constitutes the "New Terrorism"? If there is, indeed, a new breed of terrorism, then in what way does it differ from the old kind? Is the greatest differ-

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1   Quoted in *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* (September 2002), p. 13. This document is available as html or PDF file at the website of the White House: http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html.
2   Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (June 2000), pp. 405–420, 407.

ence between the old type of political violence and the "New Terrorism" that the latter has worse consequences in store than the former – that it is more dangerous? Is the "New Terrorism" synonymous with the sub-state actor application of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), much apprehended by the international community after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Ought it, therefore, to be equated with the mass casualty terrorism (MCT) that in recent years has continuously made for much publicity in the mass media?

This essay will attempt to answer the above queries to some extent, and most likely not in a conclusive manner. After all, this subject is not only controversial because it presupposes unethical practices, implies violated standards of morality, is predicated upon the flagrant breach of international norms and constitutes a frustrating field of inquiry, to boot: The "New Terrorism" – terrorism as such – is first and foremost an ambiguous phenomenon resisting any kind of universally applicable definition.

Before we ask how new or dangerous it really is, we would probably first want to know what the "New Terrorism" is. In order to adequately answer this question, however, we have to backtrack and take a close look at "traditional" terrorism. And this is where the trouble with this equivocal phenomenon begins. The former is still in the making; the latter became prominent in the wider context of the process of decolonization and the attendant national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa for some three decades after 1945. Subsequently, it achieved infamy in the age of European student protest during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As is the case with the earlier and "traditional" type of substate political violence, there is no single definition of, and no unchallenged consensus on, what the so-called "New Terrorism" actually is.[3] Notably, Christopher

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3 For problems in the general definitional debate on terrorism, cf. Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman et al., *Political Terrorism. A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*, 2nd edition (Amsterdam & New Brunswick: North-Holland Publishing Company & Transaction Books, 1988), pp. 1–38.

Daase maintains that, concerning the various conceptions of the "New Terrorism, the definitional issue is even more acutely contentious."[4]

In spite of the many premature obituaries written for political terrorism in the later 1980s, when Action Directe, the Brigate Rosse and the Rote Armee Fraktion appeared feeble at best and were evidently at the verge of collapse, terrorism as an operational adjunct to political violence movements and its latest, recycled and tremendously mediagenic manifestation, the so-called "New Terrorism," are regnant today and continue to haunt international relations more than ever before. Hyperbolized and consequently portrayed as "super terrorism" and even inflated to "hyper terrorism," the "New Terrorism" has been deeply impressed in the popular mind in the course of the past ten years – courtesy of the mass media.

Furthermore, the intensely discussed concept of the "New Terrorism" has wreaked havoc in an otherwise levelheaded academic community. And all the while it continues to elude pundits and "experts" (with the latter group having undergone a veritable "inflation of honors"), government analysts and journalists alike. Even with the emergence of the alleged new developments of terrorism since the 1990s, the definitional debate on the "traditional" and the "New" terrorism has only generated one conclusive result: That there is still no agreement on any meaningful level about what constitutes terrorism.

Conceivably, the problem is not primarily situational but structural, in that some of the participants of this debate are driven by incentives that call for an *instrumental* definition legitimizing counter-measures (e.g. "terrorism is an intrinsically evil practice and it needs to be cut off at its roots by any means available") rather than being motivated by a desire to identify a *functional* common

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4   A lucid and critical article on the subject of the definitional debate was written by Christopher Daase, "Terrorismus – Begriffe, Theorien und Gegenstrategien. Ergebnisse und Probleme sozialwissenschaftlicher Forschung," *Die Friedens-Warte*, 76 (2001) 1, pp. 55–79, pp. 77–79.

denominator that would help to better explain this elusive phenomenon (e.g. "the fundamental design of terrorists is to intimidate the target audience"). Therefore, if to some participants in the debate the objective is the justification of countermeasures against the perpetrators of terrorism, and to others it is a better understanding of the problem, then one should not be surprised at the current, inconclusive state of the definitional debate on terrorism, which is but a reflection of a more general conflict between diametrically opposed interests and perceptions.[5] The present condition of the debate is therefore best described as making matters terribly unwieldy.[6]

Indubitably, the manner in which this debate is conducted is not productive and has not made much headway since a much younger chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) took to the stage at the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 and called himself a "freedom fighter."[7] Yet Yassir Arafat's speech was not only an historic assertion of the rights of his people to armed resistance in pursuit of independence and self determination: It also left the world with a seemingly insoluble quandary, which is encapsulated in the adage that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist, and vice versa.

Arafat's irritating bequest continues to bedevil forces opposed to terrorism in the present day, and, for all intents and purposes, it makes any attempt at a hard distinction between the licit use of *force* and the illegitimate use of *violence* with respect to terrorism

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5 Governments that rank the battle against political violence movements high up on the national security agenda, for example the Sri Lankan government, have been vocal critics of "sterile philosophical debate" on the subject of terrorism in international organizations. David J. Whittaker, ed., *The Terrorism Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 87.

6 Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," p. 406.

7 For the full text of PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat's address to the UN General Assembly, cf. http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/arafat74-en. The actual quote referred to in the text is: "Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."

quite impossible. When is it force and when is it violence? States do not always employ their legitimate monopoly on force in the pursuit of vital national interest (e.g. "black ops"); similarly, rebels frequently claim to use violence in the name of a higher, or even in the service of a publicly mandated, cause (the "counter-state" of guerilla warfare).[8]

In the context of the present essay, the broader definitional debate – a field unto itself – will therefore not feature prominently, at least to the extent that it pertains to instrumental definitions; its terms of reference will be largely ignored. Instead, a functional approach to the definition of terrorism, as employed by political violence movements (PVMs) in the past and the present, will take precedence.[9] "Terrorism can be demystified," the historian Everett Wheeler argues, "when *method* is found in the madness of the 'crazies' and terrorism stands revealed as a rational (if certainly radical) strategy of *psychological warfare* and coercion."[10] Terrorism,

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8 Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little Brown, 1987), pp. 147–149.
9 The terminology used in this essay, specifically the term "political violence movement," (PVM) is an effort at creating a functional, and hopefully clearer, nomenclature by removing value-laden, pejorative and stigmatizing connotations inherent in the popular use of the ill-defined and instrumental term "terrorism." The term "political violence movement" subsumes religiously or politically ideologized and/or radicalized sub-state actors employing *terrorist tactics* in pursuit of their strategic (i.e. single-issue, political and/or religious) objectives. On this point cf. Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism*, p. 149. Furthermore, David Tucker has observed: "To the extent that terrorists with religious motivations also have political and social agendas – for example the establishment of an Islamic state – they will labor under the same kinds of constraints that terrorists with political and social agendas labor under as they struggle to achieve their political goals." David Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism and How Dangerous is It?," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp. 1–14, p. 7.
10 Everett L. Wheeler, "Terrorism and Military Theory: An Historical Perspective," in Clark McCauley, ed., *Terrorism Research and Public Policy*, (London: Frank Cass, 1991), pp. 6–33, 11 (my italics).

then, incorporates and employs a variant or mode of, or even only elements of, psychological operations (PSYOPS). In any event and whatever the impact, terrorism certainly is manifest as *methodical* violence on the physical and psychological planes.[11]

For clarity's sake and somewhat modestly, terrorism will here be treated as an operational method – a *tactic* –, not as an illegitimate, insidious and potentially conspiratorial *strategy* or policy shunned by some and embraced by others – although it might in certain cases also be that. While not denying the legitimacy of a moral component and its proper place in the overall discussion of the topic, the general question asked here is not: Right or wrong? Instead, we would do well to ask questions such as: What, why, how and who? By extension, this also applies to the discussion on the so-called "New Terrorism." If meaningful answers are to result from this inquiry, the separability of the two sets of research questions is a prerequisite and key premise to this effort.

If we discard the "instrumental" dimension of the terrorism research agenda, then what constitutes terrorism in a functional sense? In a purely functional sense, terrorism is a deliberately chosen means to an end: a tool, a tactic and a method. But as the method of terrorism does not exist in a vacuum, its relationship with the actor and his environment constitutes a significant dimension in the study of political violence. The juxtaposition of the motives underlying the actor's choice of terrorism and the method itself largely corroborates the productive value of a functional view of terrorism.

While the methodical aspect of terrorism itself as such does not give rise to grave contention, the interrelationship between the actors' manner of reasoning, his motives and objectives that represent the intellectual framework underpinning the use of terrorism

11   An excellent exposition of the psychological warfare dimension of terrorism is Dr. Schleifer's as yet unpublished piece. Ron Schleifer, "Terror – The Psychological Warfare Perspective," (unpublished draft essay in the author's possession), pp. 7–8.

is subject to intense debate, and has even given rise to questions about the mental soundness of "terrorists." The circumstance that at least in the Western world indiscriminate violence is presently not readily associated with premeditation and careful planning, partially accounts for the Western portrayal of terrorism – especially suicide terrorism – as "madness." Arguably, the application of a value system beyond the Western world is the result of inappropriate intercultural transposition.[12] At the end of the day, however, terrorist violence constitutes unacceptable behavior in clear breach of Western civilizational values: It is beyond the normative pale of behavioral codes prevalent in Western society.

In spite of Western normative behavioral strictures, most users of terrorism are perfectly calculating and rational. Ironically, selecting terrorism as a means to an end bears this out, but the causal (and unreliable) cost-benefit calculation alone cannot fully account for its widespread and long-standing use. To complicate matters, there is more than one manner of reasoned thought leading to the choice of terrorism as an adequate method. Significantly, the various "rationalities" that come into play in the formation of motive and definition of objectives that culminate in acts of terrorism do not always originate in the narrow conceptual confines of the Cartesian dictate and its Kantian causal corollary.

Conceptions of "rationality" are not necessarily the exclusive product of early modern Western history and its culture of political thought; the processes leading to the constitution, and the criteria governing the present boundaries, of the Western system of reasoned thought are almost certainly not identical with those of other cultures. Beyond the narrow theoretical conception of rationalism, "rationalities" in the sense of consistent systems of reasoned thought are as a rule the result of formative processes informed, even conditioned and instilled by a culturally and historically imprinted social

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12 Schleifer, "Terror – The Psychological Warfare Perspective," pp. 13–14.

environment – just as has been the case in the West. In the final analysis, context does shape the rationale of terrorism.

At the same time, terrorism is still the choice tactic of *various* types of "rational" actors. The basic proposition here is that when all is said and done, especially as it pertains to the use of terrorist violence against noncombatants, there is no such thing as a single rational system of reasoned thought in an *applied sense* that accounts for terrorism. Rational reasoning itself is subject to interpretation, especially by those employing it to arrive at decisions to kill and maim their victims and draw up justifications for their actions. This also applies to their apologists. Hence the differentiation between "rational" and "irrational" terrorists is either moot, definitional hair-splitting, or politically expedient. Even if there are indeed "irrational," pathological terrorists acting out their compulsive fantasies, both the "sane" and the "insane" have at least one good reason to use terrorism that obviates this distinction: It usually works – at least in the short term.

To some extent, the disproportionately powerful short-term effect, or shock value, of terrorist attacks on the hearts and minds of target audiences explains the resilience and pervasiveness of terrorism around the globe (causal value/cost-benefit). It also evinces an incredulity among witnesses that frequently accompanies dramatic terrorist attacks, and which is encapsulated in the words: "How could they do it?" The central problem of our inability to see terrorism for what it is – a deliberately chosen "weapon" or method of warfare in the hands of determined men and women –, can be found in the collective refusal of Western society to believe in the rational decision-making capability of those who use terrorism, not the terrorist activists' lack of it; in our proclivity to apply our measure to their deeds (incompatibility of norms).

To complicate matters still further, the "rational," or reasoned, choice of terrorism as a mode of low-intensity warfare with a tremendous psychological impact is not always the result of readily comparable motives. As we have seen, the choice of terrorism as

a type of warfare is not necessarily informed by identical or even similar contextually defined value systems. Admittedly, on a fundamental and purely pragmatic level there may be similarities and recurring traits among the criteria that lead to such a decision; that still does not allow for unqualified comparison of motives. As James Dingley and Michael Kirk-Smith have argued: "Terrorist acts of violence are incomprehensible in purely rational terms of 'means-end' analyses, but are redolent of cultural imagery..."[13]

As mentioned above, the reason *why* terrorism is used by PVMs is thus intricately linked to the questions of *what* terrorism and the "New Terrorism" constitute in a subjective sense *to the actors* and their target audience. Hence, the reason why, in the final analysis, is also a matter of how terrorism is perceived and understood by its perpetrators and its victims against the highly idiosyncratic backdrop of their respective social, political, cultural and even historical environments. For this reason, a digression into the anatomy of motive – the question *why* – seems appropriate, before we ask *what* terrorism is beyond its purely functional aspect and look into the question of *how new* and *how dangerous* a phenomenon the "New Terrorism" really is.

Why use terrorism in the first place? There are likely more possible answers than can be suggested here. Nevertheless, one answer probably is that the tactic of terrorism usually is not exclusively a matter of *preference*, but frequently also a matter of *perceived necessity* resulting, for example, from an authentic imparity of capabilities in any given conflict to wage high-and low-intensity war. Usually, such decisions are shaped in the context of an "incumbent versus insurgent" setting. In such a scenario, the resulting asymmetric relationship between the contending forces is one of the determinants that usually create incentives for the side with the lesser combat capabilities to adopt terrorist tactics. Viewed

13 James Dingley and Michael Kirk-Smith, "Symbolism and Sacrifice in Terrorism," *Small Wars and Insurgencie*s, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 102–128, p. 115.

from this angle, pragmatic reasons should be cited in support of an externally conditioned rational choice for terrorist tactics over a different mode of combat. Terrorism frequently constitutes the weaker party's only feasible means of waging war against a more powerful enemy – the "poor man's coercive diplomacy."[14]

At the same time, it is not unheard of for the stronger side, for example an incumbent, to take recourse to terrorism in the functional sense in order to either successfully cow or more effectively combat the opposition; to fight fire with fire. Characteristically, this appears to be the case in situations in which internal security is jeopardized, or about to be compromised, although the use of terrorism also seems to have found a role in the area of clandestine foreign policy operations.[15] Terrorism is therefore not the exclusive

14 James K. Campbell, "On Not Understanding the Problem," in Brad Roberts, ed., *Hype or Reality?: The "New Terrorism" and Mass Casualty Attacks*, (Alexandria, VA: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2000), pp. 17–45, p. 26.

15 Totalitarian regimes, such as were in power in National Socialist Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union from the late 1920s and early 1930s onward, were wont to employ terrorism in pursuit of controlling, intimidating, or even wholly eradicating their respective political opposition, for example in the course of the "Night of Long Knives" directed against Adolph Hitler's erstwhile confidant Ernst Roehm and his "Sturmabteilung" (SA) in 1934 and the Stalinist purges beginning in 1935/1936, for which see http://www.spartac us.schoolnet.co.uk/GERnight.htm and http://www.fordham.edu/ halsall/mod/1936purges.html. For an example from the later Cold War period in Europe, cf. Thomas Auerbach, *Einsatzkommandos an der unsichtbaren Front*, (Berlin: Links Verlag, 2001). More recent examples would include the "death squadrons" employed throughout Latin America during the 1980s, especially in El Salvador. For reference, see: http://www.geocities.com/~virtualtruth/avengers.htm and http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/publicaciones/ministerio/espanol/ autodefensas.pdf (in Spanish). A very good syllabus on the subject of vigilante right-wing organizations in Latin America, such as the Grupos de Autodefensa in Colombia, can be found at http://ladb.unm.edu/ retanet/plans/search/retrieve.php3?ID[0]=465. Of especial interest in regard to incumbent use of, or, in the least, connivance at the use of terrorist tactics, see House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Resolution*

preserve of rebel movements and other insurgent sub-state actors.[16] Moreover, if this observation about the "bipartisan" application of terrorism in a functional sense is only partially correct, it goes a long way to exemplify the limited usefulness of, and biases inherent in, any instrumental definition of terrorism.

What makes the application of terrorism attractive to its perpetrators? At least for the insurgent side, an attempt at a response can be risked. The single most compelling argument for terrorism as a tactic to advance interests or, in Clausewitzian terms, as a continuation of policy by other means, is that it is less resource-dependent and logistics-intensive than conventional warfare, intensely mediagenic and low-cost to boot. The most attractive asymmetric feature of terrorist tactics is its exponential disseminative yield and communicative force, largely enabled by the bizarre, symbiotic relationship between the perpetrator and the mass media of open societies. By committing a symbolic deed, PVMs repeatedly and successfully co-opt the mass media in a deliberate effort to intimidate the wider audience, by delivering a *proof of concept.* Ideally for the PVM, the concept that is proven is simple: "We can do this again, and again, and again…you are vulnerable and nobody can protect you against the kind of threat that we represent."

In medieval and early modern European history, a good example of a symbolic deed illustrative of a cause – a pseudo-violent *Ersatz* act –, is the burning of effigies as a substitute for killing a real person – usually himself or herself a representative or figure head of the opposing side. More current is the ramming of the World Trade

of Inquiry Concerning Death Squads in El Salvador: Report (to accompany H. Res. 463), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1984) and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Resolution of Inquiry Concerning the Central Intelligence Agency and Death Squads in El Salvador: Adverse Report* (to accompany H. Res. 467), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1984).

16 Cf. Wardlaw's definition of "repressive terrorism." Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism. Theory, Tactics, and Counter-Measures*, 2nd edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 14–15.

Center in New York with commercial airliners. The events of 11 September 2001 were not only a religio-political statement, but also substituted for a proof of concept of a successful war waged against a United States vulnerable to asymmetric enemy attack. Moreover, "9/11" functioned as a simultaneous morale-building measure deriving much force from its unique and therefore exemplary quality. Another well-known example is the staging of televised mass hijackings and suicide attacks that are clearly intended to galvanize and inspire partisans. Or undertaking a mission with limited objectives of a symbolic and/or representative character in mind, e.g. the attacks on the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972 and the capture of Israeli athletes in order to demand the release of members of the Black September Organization.[17]

Indubitably, in open societies the preferable channel of dissemination – the vehicle for this powerful yet simple message of fear – is the mass media. "Getting the attention of the mass media, the public, and the decision makers is the raison d'etre behind modern terrorism's increasingly shocking violence."[18] The intended target group of such performance violence, however, is only indirectly the wider audience of broadcast media customers, i.e. the public at

17 For the strange relationship between terrorism and the mass media see Murray Sayle, "Terror and Television. Re-Thinking the Day When Made-For-Television Terrorism was Born," *Prospect Magazine*, (October 2001), [n.p.]. On the power of symbolism to boost morale, foster cohesion and cement solidarity among supportive "constituent" communities in the context of PVM terrorist tactics, cf. Dingley and Kirk-Smith, "Symbolism and Sacrifice in Terrorism," pp. 122–124.

18 Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media. From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 8. Also see by the same author, "Accomplice or Witness? The Media's Role in Terrorism," *Current History*, (April 2000), pp. 174–178. Another good article on the responsibility of the mass media is Virginia Held, "The Media and Political Violence," *Journal of Ethics*, (1997) 1, pp. 187–202. A strident critic of unfettered reporting on terrorism is Grant Wardlaw. See his chapter entitled "Terrorism and the media: a symbiotic relationship?" in Grant Wardlaw, *Political Terrorism,*. pp. 76–86.

large. It is frequently the people's custodians in the government, the decision-makers, who are exposed as impotent in the face of terrorist attack, and who are therefore usually the ultimate target of terrorism – with the public doubling as an audience and as a lever against the government. In a crisis, public insecurity and the resulting pressures on the authorities to either provide adequate protection against PVMs, or otherwise to give in to terrorist demands, render the government in its capacity as the decision-making authority especially vulnerable – even more so in the face of an increasingly risk-averse public.

For the incumbent, the use of terrorist tactics is attractive because it frees its operatives from moral and legal constraints and therefore affords a state greater operational latitude and room for maneuver. If a policy of targeted assassination indeed qualifies as a form of terrorism, then the CIA-coordinated "Phoenix Program" undertaken by the United States with the declared goal of eliminating Vietcong and North Vietnamese officers during the Vietnam War in clear violation of the Geneva Convention may here serve as an illustrative example.[19] Similarly, the KGB's persecution of, and efforts at discrediting, Soviet dissidents at home and abroad, closely seconded by the East German ministry for state security's ("Stasi") terrorist capability for deployment in West Germany, was no less a program devised to effectively terrorize the opposition during the Cold War.[20] Israel has repeatedly engaged in concerted efforts

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19 Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* ([n.p.]: iUniverse.com, 2000); Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*, (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1997).

20 This is impressively described in Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, transl. by Thomas P. Whitney, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1919–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1997). For Stasi capabilities to employ terrorism in West German during the Cold War, cf. Auerbach, *Einsatzkommandos an der unsichtbaren Front*.

at preemptively eliminating hijackers, suicide attackers and their suppliers and support networks in the course of so-called "initiated attacks".[21] As of October 2001, and following a 25-year-long hiatus, U.S. President George W. Bush has explicitly advised the CIA to eliminate designated targets implicated in terrorist activity in an effort to "take the battle to them."[22]

But ultimately, and also for the purpose of the present discussion, it does not matter which side to a conflict is using terrorist tactics. The point is that terrorist tactics have a long historical record and in the past have been used to devastating immediate effect on the ground, albeit mostly with little success in terms of achieving a stated strategic long-term objective – with only a few exceptions to the rule. What matters is that terrorist tactics do enjoy considerable popularity among a number of PVMs in the present, especially with such that struggle with situations of *adverse asymmetry* resulting from incumbent conventional military superiority. And they will likely be used in the near future for reasons that have nothing to do with morals and ethics, or any other kind of normative behavioral or legal code, but, conversely, are closely linked to the dictates of circumstance and necessity. In the final analysis, the reasons why terrorist tactics will continue to represent an attractive choice to ethnic-separatists, political extremists and religious fanatics alike are, as stated above, predominantly pragmatic.[23]

21 A comprehensive and detailed description of Israeli counter-terrorism strategy, including "strikes against terrorist leaders" is available on the counter-terrorism link of http://www.ict.org.il/. For a recent example of "initiated attacks" cf.: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/middle_east/2305481.stm.
22 David Gow, "Bush gives green light to CIA for assassination of named terrorists," *The Guardian*, (29 October 2001).
23 Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pp. 59–62. As van Creveld incisively commented: "Their [i.e. the guerillas' and terrorists'] methods were, admittedly, not nice." p. 60.

Labeling the use of terrorism "irrational" is in fact more than the result of inappropriate cultural and intellectual transposition: It is an act of self-deception. If Clausewitz did make a valid observation when he contended that the objective of waging war is the breaking of the enemy's will, then it follows that in an age of waxing low-intensity conflict, of rising defense expenditure and the relatively unchecked proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, heavy military ordnance and small arms, terrorism constitutes a cost-effective, efficacious, advantageous and, most importantly, *perfectly rational* asymmetric mode of warfare that has the credible potential to achieve victory in the spirit of the Clausewitzian postulate.

2 Adumbrating the "New Terrorism"

If terrorism and the "New Terrorism" cannot be properly defined, both can – however sketchily – be described. In the case of the latter phenomenon, a number of researchers have arrived at more or less divergent conclusions about what constitutes the "New Terrorism." Harvey Kushner, for example, states that the "New Terrorism" has its origins in the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979. Following the Revolution, according to Kushner, "Iran embarked on a systematic campaign of supporting militant Islamic fundamentalist movements throughout the Muslim world."[24] In the same vein, the inauguration of the "New Terrorism" was heralded by an act redolent of the symbolic closure of the "old terrorism": Sudan's extradition of the archetypical terrorist of the "traditional" stamp, Illich Ramirez Sanchez, also known by his theatrical epithet, the "Jackal," in 1994.

Moreover, this view suggests that the "New" terrorists differ from their predecessors in that they are less educated, usually quite poor and are frequently the victims of repression; their militancy is steeped in Islamic orthodoxy (and other denominational, dogmatic thought), they are possessed of religious zeal, and while they are less sophisticated in terms of their methods (e.g. suicide attacks), they are also less organized (i.e. a network structure, as opposed to a rigid form of organization). Finally, their objectives are diffuse. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, "the new terrorism… appears pointless since it does not lead directly to any strategic goal…"[25]

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24 Harvey W. Kushner, "The New Terrorism," in Harvey W. Kushner, ed., *The Future of Terrorism: Violence in the New Millenium*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 10.
25 Mark Juergensmeyer, "Understanding the New Terrorism," *Current History*, (April 2000), pp. 158–163, p. 158.

Accordingly, these last two characteristics mentioned render the "New Terrorism" still more of an amorphous threat – a veritable wild card – and commensurately harder to combat. At the same time, this development enables the "New" terrorists to surprise intended targets and audiences with greater facility.

Alternatively, the doyen of terrorism studies, Walter Laqueur, emphasized different aspects of a "New Terrorism" and has recently argued that:

> Terrorism has been with us for centuries, and it has always attracted inordinate attention… seen in historical perspective it seldom has been more than a nuisance… This is no longer true today, and may be even less so in the future. Yesterday's nuisance has become one of the gravest dangers facing mankind. For the first time in history, weapons of enormous destructive power are both readily acquired and harder to track… In the near future it will be technologically possible to kill thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, not to mention the toll in panic that is likely to ensue may take. In brief, there has been a radical transformation, if not a revolution, in the character of terrorism, a fact we are still reluctant to accept.[26]

Closer to Kushner's position, Laqueur also acknowledges a significant shift in the nature of the perpetrator:

> The traditional, "nuisance" terrorism will continue. But fanaticism inspired by all kinds of religious-sectarian-nationalist convictions is now taking on a millenarian and apocalyptic tone. We are confronting the emergence of new kinds of terrorist violence, some based on ecological and quasireligious concerns, others basically criminal in character, and still others mixtures of these and other influences. We are also witnessing the rise of small sectarian groups that lack clear

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26 Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism. Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, (London: Oxford University Press/Phoenix Press, 2001), pp. 3–4.

political or social agendas other than destroying civilization, and in some cases humankind.[27]

According to Laqueur, the novelty of the "New Terrorism" therefore derives from three factors: first, the type of advanced weaponry that has only recently come within reach of PVMs; second, the coming to the fore of new patterns of PVM motive and new types of PVMs; and, finally, the increasing diffusion of PVM objectives.

Bruce Hoffman of the RAND Corporation points to the key transitional characteristic of terrorism that evolved since 1991.

…Many of our old preconceptions, as well as government policies, date from the emergence of terrorism as a global security problem more than a quarter of a century ago. They originated, and took hold, during the Cold War, when radical left-wing terrorist groups … were widely regarded as posing the most serious threat to Western security… In no area, perhaps, is the potential irrelevance of much of this thinking clearer… than with regard to the potential use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction.[28]

Moreover, the convergence of two new characteristics, according to Hoffman, necessarily results in mass casualty terrorism. Hoffman reasons that

The growth of religious terrorism and its emergence in recent years as a driving force behind the increasing lethality of international terrorism shatters some of our most basic assumptions about terrorists and the violence they commit… Few terrorists, it was argued, knew anything about the technical intricacies of developing or dispersing such [WMD] weapons. Political, moral and practical considerations were also perceived as important restraints on terrorist use of such weapons. Terrorists, we assured ourselves, wanted more people watching than dead.[29]

27 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
28 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 196.
29 Ibid., pp. 204–205.

In support of his argument, Hoffman cites a number of incidences, which provide the basis for his "disquieting trajectory":

- The first, abortive attack with explosives on the World Trade Center in New York in 1993 by militant Islamists
- The Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in March 1995 by members of the Aum Shinrikyo Cult
- The destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City in April 1995.

The double attack on the US embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in August 1998, then, appeared to corroborate this ostensible convergence of religiously motivated violence and mass casualties.

Brian Jenkins, another member of the RAND Corporation's terrorism research unit, expanded the range of culprits of mass casualty terrorism somewhat, stating that "the lethality of terrorist attacks gradually increased over time as terrorists motivated by ethnic hatreds *or* religious fanaticism revealed themselves to be demonstrably less constrained, more inclined to carry out large-scale indiscriminate attacks."[30] The mass casualty terrorist attacks of the recent past, especially those against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 (i.e. "9/11"), have added still more weight to this position. And even more recent events appear to corroborate projections prognosticating increased mass casualty terrorism. Attempted, and in one case successful, mass casualty terrorism incidences in the second half of 2002 were carried out in the shape of attacks against tourist resorts on Bali and in Kenya. In both cases, al-Qaida is the prime suspect.

In summary, and on the basis of the various portrayals reviewed above, the "New Terrorism" is presented as predominantly religiously motivated; its objectives are apparently diffuse and its members are organized in a loose, decentralized manner. In addi-

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30 Ian O. Lesser, et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1999), foreword by Brian Michael Jenkins, vii (my italics).

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tion, ABC weapons are understood to be high on the wish list of the "New Terrorists" (or, more pessimistically, have already been acquired and await deployment). Last but not least, and in contrast to earlier incidences, according to the proponents of the "New Terrorism," recent terrorist attacks are increasingly more lethal, for today's PVMs prefer to kill and maim many people, over drawing large crowds (or, conversely, maybe it is precisely because they want to increase their audience that they murder great numbers of people indiscriminately).

3 Reappraising a "New" Kind of Terrorism

Are we to fundamentally revise our conception of the terrorism paradigm because a considerable number of analyses of contemporary terrorism argue that "different motives, different actors, different sponsors, …and demonstrably greater lethality" exemplify this supposed new breed of political violence?[31]

Probably it is not wise to accept the "New Terrorism" at face value. Upon closer inspection, the so-called "New Terrorism" is not as deserving of the designation "new," as may appear to be the case on first sight; and a skeptical treatment of the "New Terrorist" paradigm is required – it is suggested here – for a number of reasons. The most important argument militating against the reviewed conception of the "New Terrorism" is the simple fact that it is potentially distorted, in that it almost invariably conveys an impressionist image of post-Cold War PVMs.

By way of introduction, it must be clearly understood that the mere existence of weapons of mass destruction, even the knowledge of how to construct, and the perceived possibility of acquiring weapons grade materials illegally in order to build crude atomic, biological and chemical devices (ABC), are not new phenomena and by themselves do certainly not justify the appellation of the "New Terrorism." The awareness among government analysts of the danger of ABC weapons in the hands of substate actors may be as recent as the end of the Cold War, but calling the problem novel for this reason is to confuse its appearance on the perceptive radar with its actual inception; or to think that "terrorists" are as a rule slow-witted dullards and uncreative, chronic underachievers.

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31 Ian O. Lesser, "Changing Terrorism in a Changing World," in *Countering the New Terrorism*, pp, 1–5, p. 1.

Nor is modern history marked by an absence of religious fanaticism. In the light of the historical track record of religious militancy, its recent recrudescence as embodied in Islamism therefore fails to surprise those sensitive to the currents of the past. Finally, on the score of advanced organizational principles among the "New Terrorists," it remains to be said that the terrorist groups of the 1970's were exemplars of highly sophisticated organizational structures and, if anything, have proven resourceful, inventive, resilient and *sufficiently flexible* in the face of the combined repressive force applied by the governments they opposed.

To recall additional characteristics put forward by its proponents in the media and academia: The recent and widespread evocation of this new breed of PVM is suggestive of terrorist groups operating free from previously valid motivational constraints, with an unprecedented potential for access to ABC weaponry and/or advanced military-grade hardware, all of which are – ostensibly – all the sudden unleashed upon a defenseless public in pursuit of some obscure, irrational and utterly arcane agenda. The problem with this image of the "New Terrorism" is that it conveys an undifferentiated and incomplete perspective of the matter at hand. To date, one of the more convincing (and partially implied) explanations for the appearance and mushrooming of the "New Terrorist" industry is the following by Martha Crenshaw:

> Both the study of terrorism and counterterrorism policy have been event-driven. Why has the notion of a "new," dangerous, and uncontrollable terrorism become so compelling? Is the perception driven by the shock of a series of events closely related in time but not necessarily caused by the same factors? Is the perception of threat driven by public opinion, the news media, or elites in the government and scientific community?[32]

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32 Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," 415.

If Crenshaw's assumption of the driving factors behind the "New Terrorism" is valid, which appears plausible, then the circumstance that research on terrorism is event-driven could conceivably give rise to a more disquieting question; namely, whether the definitional debate is the only one suffering from likely instrumentalization by vested interests from among the powers that be. Should the response be in the negative, this would also seriously call into doubt the academic quality of the "New Terrorism" paradigm, and raise the issue of whose interests it serves. More generally, to what extent can the perception of a threat be generated, induced and manipulated? Even if terrorism by insurgents of all stamps is only partially based on the precepts of psychological warfare, it follows that the means to combat it are probably not dissimilar. Unfortunately, it lies in the nature of such questions that they are not only instrumental, but also highly political.

A dimension of terrorism research that is also disadvantaged due to the sensationalist value of terrorist attacks, and the mass media-shaped perception of the threat represented by PVMs, as well as governments' manic occupation with defensive measures at the expense of preventive endeavors, is the terrorist actor himself, his organization, his motives and the cosmology and physical environment that spawned them. Once actor-centered and actor-related issues replace the highly visible blood and gore of terrorist attacks, there is very little that is authentically novel concerning the agenda and the motivational, organizational and even elements of the methodical aspect of the "New Terrorism".

First, the supposed novelty of the "New Terrorist" political, religious or social program is also largely dependant on the time frame involved in an analysis of terrorism, "terrorists" and terrorist acts. For what, except time and place, distinguishes the objectives (or methods) of the Sicarii of the Jewish Zealot movement from the ends pursued (and means used) more recently by supporters of the relatively obscure MAK (Maktab al-Khidamat, the Mujahedeen "Office of Services," which subsequently gained notoriety in the

guise of al-Qaida)?[33] In principle, and to some extent even in practice, there are similarities, for both movements have stated their aim to cleanse hallowed soil of foreign desecrators by forcefully ejecting all unbelievers.

In the first example, the Romans under the emperors Nero and Vespasian occupied parts of biblical Israel, thereby provoking the second of three Jewish revolts from c. 66–73 A.D. The militant Zealot movement, whose corps of knife-wielding Sicarii publicly slaughtered legionaries and their officers in bloodcurdling and spectacular ways, ambushed Roman patrols in the countryside, poisoned wells with rotting animal corpses and, more generally, fiercely resisted the vastly superior Roman war machine as irregular combatants using irregular, "asymmetric" tactics. The second example concerns the Western coalition troops after the Second Gulf War (1990–1991), who had made their presence felt in the Saudi peninsula – "the land of the two Holy Places" (Medina and Mecca) – and in due course became subject to attack by radical Islamist forces, for instance at Al-Khobar in 1998.[34]

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33   For one of the better essays on the development and use of terrorism throughout the ages, cf. Wheeler, "Terrorism and Military Theory: An Historical Perspective." The Maktab al-Khidamat has been described by a former member of the CIA's Directorate of Operations as "a holy-war clearinghouse for several thousand ragtag Arab volunteers in the Soviet-Afghan War…" Reuel Marc Gerecht, "The Gospel According to Osama Bin Laden," *The Atlantic Monthly Online*, (January 2002), p. 1. The article can be found in the January 2002 issue of the online version at http://www.theatlantic.com.

34   To be more precise, bin Laden clearly states that it is "the inability of the [Saudi] regime to protect the country, and allowing the enemy of the Ummah, the American Crusader forces, to occupy the land for the longest of years," which constitutes a core grievance against the West. Usama bin Laden, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," (23 August 1996), p. 3. The full document is available at http://www.meij.or.jp/new/Osama bin Laden/jihad1.htm. For the Zealots, cf. Flavius Josephus, transl. by G.A. Williamson, *The Jewish War*, (New York: Viking Press, 1984).

Neither case is illustrative of a PVM motive that is in any manner diffuse or new. Nor, for that matter, does Usama bin Laden's religio-irredentist objective of resurrecting the splendor of the Caliphate of the 7th and 8th centuries, including the reestablishment of its geographic boundaries, in place of the present regimes in the Arab world exactly serve for an illustrative example of a *revolutionary* enterprise.[35] Judged by any standard, Bin Laden's vision of the future is *reactionary* to an extent that is rare indeed.

By extension, it could be argued that Islamism merely seeks to succeed at an undertaking in the present (i.e. uniting Islam) in pursuit of conservative ideals, at which Pan-Arabism has demonstrably failed in the past for revolutionary ideals (i.e. uniting the Arab world and freeing it from Western dominance). The point is that ideologies employed to mobilize social forces in each of these two cases might differ (religious radicalism, as opposed to secular nationalism), but the mechanism underlying both historical processes – the structural component, as it were – is essentially the same, and therefore not unprecedented. The purpose of the exercise in both cases is to rally the people around the flag by violently proposing a new social or political order by means of sabotaging and impugning the old system; and to evoke the magnificence of a bygone golden age as an emotive harbinger of a desired near future.

Conflicts of a bewildering variety have at some stage in their development followed this template in the course of human history. But to also give an example of an increasingly probable new motive, not only for PVMs, but also for other actors in international politics, we may want to imagine the opening stages in an unfolding future drama, at the heart of which will be the long-term risks of *absolute* resource depletion.[36] In its entire history, the human race has never

35 Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetnam, *Usama bin Laden's Al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network*, (Ardsley, NY: Transnational Publishers, 2001), p. 2.
36 Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 166–167.

had to face planetary overpopulation or resource scarcity equally affecting all parts of the globe as an existential threat.

That the goals of the "New Terrorists" are not as diffuse as they are made out to be can even be seen in instances of extreme motive. For example, in the case of apocalyptic cults with a predilection for terrorist tactics, it is possible to identify not only the motive but also the objective. If the stated motive and/or the objective of a PVM happen to be to end the world as we know it, the trick is not to get sidetracked by debating the sanity of such a position and plan, but to take it seriously and make it part of the strategic deliberations on counter-terrorist measures. This understanding is vital if the means by which such a group attempts to bring about the end of days involve ABC weapons. Today, the destruction of the world, or large parts of it, by substate actors for whatever reason is no longer the exclusive preserve of science fiction; it has become an international security political risk that will stop at no door.

Millenarian fanatics, eschatological sects and other kinds of apocalyptical movements have been around for a long time. Their frame of reference is very different from the mainstream perception of reality, indeed. But to believe that this makes them any less rational and calculating in pursuit of their goals, or determined to realize their objective, is a grave mistake. The history of the past thirty-odd years bears this out and requires no further explanation. While they certainly do not abound, there have been precedents for such events including attempted, but largely foiled or otherwise unsuccessful, mass casualty attacks by apocalyptic (and in the United States also by right-wing) groups.[37]

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37 Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 60–68. Paul de Armond, "Right Wing Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Motives, Strategies and Movements," in Brad Roberts, ed., *Hype or Reality? The "New Terrorism" and Mass Casualty Attacks*, (Alexandria, VA: The Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2000), pp. 49–68.

Second, the proposition that the "New Terrorist" groups are organized along innovative lines cannot be upheld in the face of a past record that flatly contradicts it. Even the role model of the "New Terrorist" organizations, the operationally decentralized cell structure with its independent commands that has been successfully applied in the shape of Active Service Units (ASUs) by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) against the British armed forces and intelligence services in the past three decades is still predicated upon the principle of a traditional hierarchical military chain of command.[38] Louis Beam's idea of "leaderless resistance" as an organizing principle of PVMs might indeed apply to exceptions to the rule – as has been apprehended by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) in relation to right-wing and religious Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States –, but it certainly does not apply to an alliance system of PVMs based on a culturally ingrained pecking order originating in a quintessentially hierarchic Islamic creed, such as al-Qaida.[39]

As David Tucker has shown, the "striking thing about the networked structure of the new terrorism is that it differs little from the structure of the old terrorism," and goes on to cite the well-known example of the PLO, the exemplar of a terrorist umbrella organization, if there ever was one, drawing together a multiplicity of Palestinian secular political movements and their respective military wings.[40] More generally, terrorist alliance systems in the shape of stable and ephemeral marriages of convenience, instrumental and ideological coalitions, umbrella organization and other forms of organizational superstructures are not at all new to PVMs.

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38   John Bowyer Bell, *IRA Tactics & Targets*, (Swords, Co. Dublin: Poolbeg, 1993), pp. 11–17; Ibid., *The IRA 1968–2000. Analysis of a Secret Army*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), pp. 126–147.
39   Louis Beam,"Leaderless Resistance," *The Seditionist* 12 (February 1992), available at www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.html.
40   David Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism," pp. 3–4.

One cluster of terrorist organizations, featuring complex, conflictive, hierarchical and decentralized interrelationships, and which has been active in the greater Middle East since the early 1980s, may here serve as a contemporaneous example; it is here proposed as an alternative to the lurid conception of the ostensibly novel "global terrorist network." According to the intelligence sources that are largely in line with a historically recurring terrorist alliance-thesis, it is the Islamic Republic of Iran (specifically its secret services MOIS/VEVAK, the successor to the Shah's dreaded SAVAK, and the elite Jerusalem Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the Pasdaran) that is expanding its managerial and leadership role in the coordination of PVMs in the greater Middle East.

Through the good offices of Imad Fayez Mugniyah, whose occupation is that of Hezbollah's director of foreign operations, the Iran connection links al-Qaida to the Shiite militia organization Hezbollah, and – in an unholy coalition – to the predominantly Sunni Palestinian group Harakat al-Muqwawanah al-Islamiyya (HAMAS), Jihad al Islami, and the Sunni radical group Usbat al Ansar ("Federation of Partisans") operating in southern Lebanon. The alliance of PVMs supported by Iran has also gained notoriety as an accessory to the smuggling of military contraband on behalf of Yassir Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA) aboard the freighter *Karine-A* in the Red Sea of January 2002.[41]

41 Yoni Fighel and Yael Shahar, "The Al-Qaida-Hizballah Connection," available at www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid+425; Rolf Tophoven, "Iran koordiniert offenbar Terrorkoalition in Nahost," *Die Welt*, (25 March 2002); Ibid.,"Im Libanon formiert sich die Al Qaida neu," *Die Welt*, 1 February 2002; Ibid.,"Geheimdienste: Teheran bildet Palästinenser an Raketen aus," *Die Welt*, (28 February 2002); Isabel Kershner,"The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniyah," The Jerusalem Report Magazine, (25 March 2002), available at www.jrep.com/Mideast/Article-2.html. Rolf Tophoven,"Mann ohne Gesicht: Topterrorist Imad Fayez Mugniyeh," *Die Welt*, (9 September 2002). The following article is tendentious, but interesting: Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Lebanese Madman Leaves Trail of Terror," available at http://www.vfw.org/magazine/apr02/hezbollah.htm.

An alliance of sub-state actors employing terrorist tactics, supported by a state-sponsor and operating out of a defined region is a far cry from the aggressively promoted image of a global conspiratorial network, such as al-Qaida. But at least it exists. Conversely, even if Al-Qaida encompasses the occidental and oriental civilizations in terms of its documented operational reach, this at best makes it a "trans-regional terrorist network" in Southeast and Central Asia, the Mediterranean including North Africa, the greater Middle East, Western Europe and the US. And that is still a long way from being an organization that is active on a truly global scale, which, in turn, indicates that the net of its deployable operatives does not (yet) span the globe.

Third, if there are indeed substantive differences between the older kind of terrorism and the "New Terrorism," as it has been described by its proponents, they are, if anything, not qualitative, but quantitative – with exclusive reference to the dimensions of an attack and its consequences. The ability to inflict greater casualties by deploying ABC weapons can be understood as constituting a quality all by itself, but, again, the point is that this is not a new phenomenon in the history of armed conflict; only the potential scale of the destructivity of modern ABC weaponry in the hands of PVMs itself is truly unprecedented. For example, the conscious deployment of biological weapons, resulting in mass casualties has precedents in the later Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Early Modern period in Europe and the Americas.[42]

Admittedly, in the centuries prior to the twentieth century the efficiency of non-conventional warfare and weapons, such as the premeditated spread of endemic pathogens was, to cite only one example, nowhere close to the ghastly death toll exacted by mustard

42 Mark Wheelis, "Biological Warfare Before 1914," in Erhard Geissler and John Ellis van Courtland Moon, eds., *Biological and Toxin Weapons: Research, Development and Use from the Middle Ages to 1945*, SIPRI Chemical & Biological Warfare Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 8–34.

gas in the course of the First World War. But in essence crudely weaponized pathogens did exist in the past and they were applied by a variety of actors. The "political terrorists" of the 1970s and 1980s prevalent in the Western world were also sensitized toward the potential uses of non-conventional weapons; those having shown an interest in chemical and biological weapons include a staggering variety of PVMs, from the Weather Underground, the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) to the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA).[43]

Therefore, the threat of "loose nukes," and that posed by other poorly protected non-weaponized, but weapons-grade nuclear materials has been *exacerbated and not initiated* by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Equally, more recent apprehensions about the deployment of radiological bombs can be traced to the growing awareness of states and, hence, substate actors of the crude weapons-potential inherent in low-enriched uranium and spent fuel, and to the knowledge of how inadequately such materials are currently protected against theft.[44]

What does set the PVMs of the 21st century apart from their predecessors, I will argue, is not the threatened, or even the effective, use of ABC warfare agents. Instead, it is the scale and, more

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43 Jonathan B. Tucker, introduction to Jonathan B. Tucker, ed., *Toxic Terror. Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), p. 1. For the individual groups cited in the text see the pertinent essays in this volume; Kenneth Alibek, "Testimony of Dr. Kenneth Alibek," available at www.fas.org/irp/congress/2000_hr/00-05-23alibek.htm, p. 2.

44 Stern, *Ultimate Terrorists, 98*; Robert W. Ahrens, "No One Knows How Much Nuclear Material is Missing Around the World," *USA Today*, 27 February 2003, p. 1A et seq.; Log In Productions, "Nuclear Nightmares for Sale – History," available at www.logtv.com/tv/nuclear1.htm; Mansoor Ijaz and R. James Woolsey, "How Secure is Pakistan's Plutonium?" 28 November, 2001 available at www.house.gov/markey/iss_nuclear_taskforce_ed011128.htm; U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "Fact Sheet on Dirty Bombs," available at www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/dirty-bombs.html

critically, the *scalability*, of conventional and unconventional mass destruction and disruption by PVMs, and how this threatened or actual use of it *translates into psychological leverage.* Put differently, and rather more pertinent to our present times, the combination of, on the one hand, the technology to inflict mass casualties measured in the hundreds of thousands, or even in the millions, and, on the other, the increasing likelihood of the acquisition of the means to bring about such a massive destruction of life by sub-state actors, constitutes the only evident innovative aspect in the development of contemporary terrorism.

This last point is especially relevant when juxtaposed with the often-repeated assertion that the objectives of the "New Terrorists" are less clearly delineated than those pursued by their predecessors. Flatly contradictory to such a view, the desire and the will to hasten the coming of Armageddon exhibited by some millenarian cults (e.g. Aum) in the age of ABC weapons proliferation has in the course of the 1990s been transformed into a very concrete course of action in pursuit of a final objective: It therefore represents an immediate threat.[45] Ultimately, the means and ends of even the most radical PVMs are as clear today as was the case some twenty years ago. But today's PVMs are even more dangerous than their antecedents, precisely because they have *not* changed their values in relevant ways, i.e. their outlook, their motives and their interpretation of their religious, political and social environments.

If we accept the proposed criticism made so far vis-à-vis the conception of the "New Terrorism," it may at the first glance appear as if only the perpetrators' "tools of the trade" have undergone change – their arsenal having grown from automatic rifles, explosives and grenades to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but also conventional heavy military-grade equipment –, but not

45   Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "The Terror," *Survival*, Vol. 43, No. 4, (Winter 2001–02), pp. 5–18, p. 5. An interesting case is made by Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, pp. 274–275. Also see Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 94–95, 208.

the terrorists themselves.[46] Admittedly, in some instances, terrorist target selection has become bolder in the last few years, as was evidenced by the incidents of 11 September 2001; in other cases, their objectives have become more ambitious, such as the acceleration of Armageddon. Simultaneously, this can be at least partially explained by the circumstance that the potential to inflict a higher quantity of casualties also gives them more leverage to realize their respective demands, or to achieve their objectives in the face of, and despite, overwhelming incumbent military superiority, as exemplified by the US' conventional military forces.

Hence, it is a potentially costly misconception to assume that PVMs themselves are fundamentally changed, that they have substantially revised their psychological make-up and reshaped their motivational landscape; or even to question that they do remain organized in groups, albeit more or less immediately subject to central control, and all of this because of accessibility of ABC weapons following the end of the Cold War and the recrudescence of religious fervor after 1979. This analysis holds true, if only because the PVMs of our own day and age remain subject to the restraints imposed by the bounds of their own rationality, whatever they may be. That a rational system of thought, including highly idiosyncratic, radical variants thereof, is also subject to change over time is not disputed here, nor is it denied that PVM decision-making processes and factors did very likely undergo some change under the impact of the exacerbation of ABC weapons proliferation.

Conversely, PVMs are indubitably products of their own environment. It follows that they are not alien to the reality we share with them and that their reasoning is therefore also not beyond comprehension. The PVM perception of reality represents a valu-

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46 The exclusion of scalable weapons of mass disruption, such as electronic attacks on computer networks, various types of information operations and high-energy pulse, blast, or focal weapons, is intentional.

able inferential basis for actor-centered analysis.[47] While calling terrorists and their organizations "new" or irrational will not make them go away or attenuate the threat they represent, the challenge rests in second-guessing them on their own intellectual turf. This is a feasible course of action, but only if we commit resources to qualitative research with a view to achieve some measure of understanding of what makes them "tick" – of investigating what Martha Crenshaw referred to as an "autonomous logic that is comprehensible, however unconventional."[48] And if PVMs' motives, objectives and modi operandi can be fathomed, then they can be defeated.

In the light of the centuries-old historical record covering both insurgent and incumbent use of terrorist tactics, the distinction between the older terrorism and the "New Terrorism" is artificial at best, and the conception itself tautological and probably quite otiose. On the one hand, this is because the differentiation it seeks to create is a matter of perspective and in some cases, as has been pointed out previously, may serve as a definitional "Trojan Horse" to an instrumental set of values advocated by insurgents or incumbents. It is therefore potentially interest-driven, and hence not beyond suspicion. On the other hand, if we scrutinize some of the key arguments quoted in support of the "New Terrorist" thesis, i.e. the absence of clearly identifiable groups among new actors on the international stage of terrorism, unclear or new motives, diffuse objectives and a high frequency of greater lethality in recent attacks, then the attempted delineation from earlier variants of

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47 Laila Bokhari, Magnus Norell, and Doron Zimmermann, "Actor-Centered Analysis and Profiling in Terrorism Research: Challenges, Methods and Possibilities," unpublished slide presentation presented on the occasion of the *5th International Security Forum*, Zurich, 14–16 October 2002.

48 Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," 410; Jean-Francois Meyer, "Cults, Violence and Religious Terrorism: An International Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 24, (2001), pp. 361–376, p. 372.

terrorism is also not convincing in terms of the evidential basis provided in support thereof.[49]

Aside from its evocative force, the "New Terrorism" concept does not offer an added value to the way we think about terrorism. Moreover, the circumstances that gave rise to the concept are problematic. The issue of vested interests as a driving force behind the propositioning of the "New Terrorism" has also been addressed by the late Ehud Sprinzak, who bluntly contended that "the threat of superterrorism is likely to make a few defense contractors very rich and a larger number of specialists moderately rich as well as famous." To Sprinzak, "the debate [on the "New Terrorism"] boils down to money."[50]

49 David Tucker is a strident critic of the lethality-proposition. David Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism and How Dangerous is It?", pp. 3–9. For another proponent of the differential criteria of a new kind of terrorism, cf. Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism Trends and Prospects," in Ian O. Lesser, et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, pp. 7–38, pp. 8–10; and Bruce Hoffman, "Change and Continuity in Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 24, No. 6 (November-December 2001), pp. 417–428; Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," pp. 411, 415.
50 Ehud Sprinak, "The Great Superterrorism Scare," *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1998), pp. 6, 7. I used a version of this article available at www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1181/1998_Fall/56021078/print.jhtml

4 The Double-edged Nature of Impact Scalability and the Dynamic of Reciprocal Threat Perception

As shown in the preceding pages while reflecting upon the motives, objectives, organizations and means of PVMs in the past, nothing really is *intrinsically* new about the "New Terrorism" paradigm – excepting the *consensus* among experts in the field of terrorism research that ABC weapons in our day and age are more likely to be deployed by sub-state actors than in the past. Even so, the question of whether such a perspective is a mass media driven figment of public imagination that suits certain vested political interests of the day that have their own budgetary agendums, would almost certainly further dilute the above outlined paradigmatic project and the expert consensus on the PVM-WMD threat to a merely conjectural supposition. Again, the expert assessment prevails because weapons of mass destruction certainly *appear* to have become increasingly accessible in the post-Cold War period. On this issue, Morten Bremer Maerli asserts that "the overwhelming majority of incidents… do not reflect any significant escalation of the mass destruction threat, but rather a *growing interest* in non-conventional weaponry among politically and religiously motivated groups and individuals."[51]

This is not to say that there is no substance to the fears expressed by the proponents of the "New Terrorism." Even if the interest of such groups has not yet been successfully acted upon with respect to modern ABC weapons, the threat remains. This is true in spite

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51 Morten Bremer Maerli, "Relearning the ABCs: Terrorists and 'Weapons of Mass Destruction,'" *The Nonproliferation Review*, (Summer 2000), pp. 108–119, p. 110 (my italics). On this issue in regard to chemical and biological weapons cf. note 43, *supra*.

of massive counter-proliferation endeavors, such as the Nunn-Lugar Act passed in the United States Congress in 1991; and due to the fact that PVMs might consider them an acceptable, even attractive and "prestigious" means to an end, especially in the shape of a credible threat or deterrent vis-à-vis a more potent opponent.[52] Indeed, in the wake of the Cold War, apprehensions concerning PVM acquisition of modern ABC weapons are not without substance.[53] While the Third Gulf War has recently been fought with the objective of stripping Iraq of its alleged WMD capabilities, apprehensions are rising amid controversial reports of the successful acquisition of weaponized chemical warfare agents produced in Iraq by al-Qaida via Usbat-al Ansar, an affiliated Lebanese Sunni PVM.[54]

This threat-appraisal deriving from the "New Terrorism" paradigm is probably somewhat accurate, albeit with a single exception and corollary to the argument concerning weapons of mass casualty developed in this essay, and in the context of the wider debate on terrorism: PVMs' awareness of a newfound, potentially unfettered capability to size the scale of the impact of their attacks. To date, the currently feasible trinity of the convergent *will*, *ability and capability* of PVMs to inflict mass casualties, bring about the destruction of entire urban areas, and occasion immeasurable trauma in the public psyche on a scale hitherto only conceivable in an armed conflict beyond the threshold of interstate war, has indeed no parallel: This condition constitutes a significant historical singularity. In a near

52 On the Cooperative Threat Reduction program introduced to the U.S. legislature by Senators Samuel Nunn and Richard Lugar cf. http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/NonProliferation/docs/kelly_wasteful_solution.htm and http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c102:H.R.3807. ENR:. For further information on Nunn-Lugar programs cf. http://www.ucsusa.org/global_security/nuclear_weapons/page.cfm?pageID=639.
53 Walter Schilling, "Der islamische Terrorismus als Sicherheitsproblem," *Der Mittler-Brief. Informationsdienst zur Sicherheitspolitik*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Fall 2000), pp. 1–8, pp. 6–7.
54 Barton Gellman, "Report Cites Al Qaeda Deal For Iraqi Gas," *Washington Post*, 12 December 2002; Brian Whitaker, "The Papers That Cried Wolf," *The Guardian*, (16 December 2002).

future (for which the present is somewhat indicative), PVMs' capability of almost limitless "*impact scalability*" will be, and is already taking shape as, the single most important contributing factor to a radical transformation of terrorism, and indeed of warfare. It will give new meaning to the conception of "strategic asymmetry."

In order to better envision this idea, imagine a band of radical militants successfully forcing the most powerful nation on this planet to its knees by threatening to deploy a substantial ABC weapon in the wake a number of successful minor attacks with WMD that cause mass casualties. If anything, it is this "impact scalability" at the beck and call of terrorist actors that would, and to some extent already does, make PVMs more dangerous now than ever before: Impact scalability expands the spectrum of terrorist tactics' asymmetric property in that it allows PVMs to calibrate even their attacks with WMD according to their requirements.

But while the queries and issues concerning the means – finances, logistics, weapons, etc. – have been discussed at large in the debate on the "New Terrorism" and nonproliferation, the multiple non-material factors, such as the specifics of background, environment, and other idiosyncrasies informing motives and perceived reality, as well as the resulting political and strategic priorities of PVMs' currently coalescing in the will to deploy weapons of mass destruction, have not yet been exhaustively investigated. And although some have ventured into this terra incognita of the violent PVM mindset, a not insignificant development responsible for the shaping of the terrorism risk perception has been largely neglected: The *dynamic of reciprocal threat perception* between perpetrators and victims of PVM mass casualty attacks.

The nature of the relationship between the waxing willingness of PVMs to use conventional or non-conventional mass casualty weapons, and the fearful expectation of ever more destructive mass casualty attacks involving ABC weapons, engendered by the mass media-induced "superterrorism scare" (to borrow Ehud Sprinzak's wording) in the wider context of the public discourse, is what also

makes today's' PVMs more dangerous than before. The reason for this, I argue, is banal. In an age, in which the "superterrorism scare" reigns supreme and has successfully undermined governmental and public confidence in the past decade, most PVMs very likely are under increasing pressure to reify the popular nightmare of mass casualty terrorism that is the obsession of Western governments, their allies and the mass media alike.

This absurd situation prevails precisely because, in a bizarre way, the power to immobilize a powerful state by issuing the threat of deploying mass casualty weapons is not only a critical asset to PVMs, but has also been at the center of public expectation for at least a decade, and is considered even more probable today. And the reservoir of public expectation/apprehension continues to grow. This condition insidiously correlates with the rising pressure on PVMs to deploy mass casualty weapons in order "comply" with public apprehensions and thus to *maintain their own credibility* vis-à-vis their audience.[55] Conversely, PVMs are also subject to pressures building due to the opportunity presented to them by, and resulting from the impact of, the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception.

To summarize: Because PVMs themselves have not fundamentally changed in terms of their motives and objectives, the question of whether terrorism is more dangerous today or not has very little to do with the body of analyses that gave birth to the conception and recent rendition of the so-called "New Terrorism." Instead, this critical query is intricately linked with the interdependent problems of the long-term failure of nonproliferation; with the consequent increased probability that ABC weapons will sooner or later come within reach of terrorist actors; with the concomitant new development of PVMs of adjusting their strategy and objectives to include the augmented "impact scalability" of unconventional means at their disposal; and with the perceived threat that they represent, as

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55 James K. Campbell, "On Not Understanding the Problem," p. 28.

well as with the general sense of insecurity this situation fosters. Most importantly, the danger of mass casualty terrorism in the present has become more tangible and acute because of the resulting "reciprocal dynamic of threat perception." In contrast to the mere hypothetical threat, as it is perceived by expert participants integral to this process, it is here proposed that it is the "reciprocal dynamic of threat perception" which acts as the principal structural catalyst in the triggering of mass casualty terrorist attacks with conventional or unconventional weapons.

Considering the discussion so far, it would probably be more productive and sensible to refer to a recrudescence, or reanimation of preceding types of terrorism-user (e.g., the Zealot Sicarii referred to earlier in this essay, or the Islamic sect of Assassins, who already instrumentalized premeditated, systematic murder as a means of terrorizing their enemies and of cowing their opponents into submission – even at the cost of their own lives, not unlike their modern Middle Eastern counterparts), than to portentously proclaim the advent of the "New Terrorism."[56] The bottom line really is that certain things do not change much. Perpetrators still intend to generate fear by using terrorist tactics. Whether this be the aggravation of fear among the few or among the many is a completely different issue and effectively has always been constrained by the means at the actors' disposal. And only to a lesser degree has the use of terrorism been dependent upon grand strategy and optimistic operational planning. The reason for this is that PVM arsenals have hitherto proved no match for those at the disposal of their opponents.

With the advent and recent exacerbation of ABC weapons proliferation, terrorism's fortunes may have undergone an advantageous reversal; the very circumstance of ABC weapon accessibility could be responsible for such a development, but certainly not to

56 For a concise and classic history of the Assassins cf., Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins. A Radical Sect in Islam*, (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

the exclusion of other reasons. Now that maximum firepower in the broadest sense is no longer out of reach, motive, as opposed to hardware, may in the future assume *the* determining position in the PVM framing of strategy, and in the decision-making process concerning the deployment of mass casualty weapons.

In other words, it is not exclusively the circumstance that these weapons have become available that makes contemporary PVMs more dangerous; it is the realization by PVMs in the past decade of what they can achieve by credibly threatening their deployment in pursuit of even the most audacious, but highly specific, objective, such as the destruction of a state's capital, or the end of the world. More critical still is the fact that in order to achieve "ABC credentials," PVMs will almost certainly have to deploy these fearsome weapons as proof of their determination. Unpredictable "ego-trips," impulsive revenge, competitive "showing-off": A whole range of unfathomable, diacritic and spontaneous internal group dynamics and other inter and intra-PVM motives also enter the purview of this scenario as probable factors in the non-premeditated category.

The glaring asymmetry of impact scalability in the service of PVMs comes to the fore in scenarios in which the effective use of ABC is not even necessary. Because of the widespread fear of the recently perceived mass casualty terrorist threat, PVMs might not have to do their worst in order to achieve their end, always provided that the objective is not the destruction of life on this planet. Bruce Hoffman believes that

> …even the limited terrorist attack involving a chemical, biological or radiological weapon on a deliberately small scale could therefore have disproportionately enormous consequences, generating unprecedented fear and alarm and thus serve the terrorists' purpose just as well as a larger weapon or more ambitious attack with massive casualties could.[57]

57 Bruce Hoffman, "New Forms of Terrorism and The Threat of Terrorist Use of Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological Weapons,"

Although Hoffman's observation is highly significant in itself, it does raise some issues. To begin with, such an operational implementation of sophisticated high-tech ABC weapons presupposes considerable expertise on the part of the deploying party, as well as the availability of advanced weapons technology in the field of delivery systems, which is indispensable to control the dimensions of an attack. Second, and more pertinent to the present purpose, Hoffman's observation raises the point of reciprocity in the idea of the reciprocal dynamic of threat perception: Not only does the fear of mass casualty terrorism pressure terrorists into complying with the public "standard" or "benchmark" of fear, but also maximizes the effects of the threatened use of, or the deployment of, a comparatively small ABC weapon.

This dangerous dynamic therefore constitutes a development that is beyond anybody's control and threatens to continue of its own volition. Its driving forces – impelling public fears of WMD terrorism and terrorists' appraisal of the largely untouched and highly attractive leverage against governments represented by the mere threat of ABC weapons' induced mass casualty terrorism –, are very difficult, if not impossible, to interrupt.

A first step to counter some of the worst effects of the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception beyond government organizations could be taken by the proactive sensitization of the mass media, and especially the broadcast media, to the destabilizing potential of the dynamic of reciprocal threat perceptions; and the curbing of economic incentives and pressures in the mass media, as well as the reduction of their adverse impact on the manner and quality of reporting among journalists. And, more controversially, the institution of self-censorship and the imposition of stringent restrictions on irresponsible, sensationalist reporting through leading members

in Kai Hirschmann, Peter Gerhard, eds., *Terrorismus als Weltweites Phänomen*, (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2000), pp. 37–44, p. 43.

of the various media branches in the interest of public safety ought to be evaluated anew.

Impact scalability and the pressures on the perpetrators and victims of terrorism that arise from the self-sustaining dynamic of reciprocal threat perceptions ought to be priority issues in the field of contemporary terrorism research. In the light of purported advanced weapons research involving the development of sophisticated and controllable delivery systems for chemical and biological weapons, such as dirigible and spatially limitable aerosols, and incrementally deployable viruses (infector and trigger viruses), work on the effects of impact scalability of terrorist attacks becomes even more pressing. Atomic weapons research, for example, has culminated in the development of precision low-yield nuclear weapons.[58] Moreover, the proliferation problems with special reference to the former Soviet Union may here serve as an example of how advanced weapons technology in the shape of its products, the weapons, and its creators, the scientists, have in the meantime become, not only accessible, but available to sub-state actors.[59] Once out of the control of the government responsible for their development, either by design or by mistake, advanced precision delivery systems would draw even such PVMs to ABC weapons as vehicles to threaten mass casualty terrorism, as have hitherto shied away from considering them as an option because of their dependency upon "constituencies." To continue this train of

58 Robert W. Nelson, "Low-Yield Earth-Penetrating Nuclear Weapons," *Federation of American Scientists Public Interest Report*, Vol. 54, No. 1, (January/February 2001), pp. 1–5, p. 1. Concerning precision delivery systems for tactical ABC weapons, I have profited from private correspondence and conversations with Dr. David Humair, who is working on bioterrorism related issues at the Defence Strategy Section of the Swiss General Staff, and Dr. Morten Bremer Maerli, who specializes in terrorism and nuclear proliferation, at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). I would like to thank them both for their kind and expert advice on this issue.

59 Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists*, p. 62.

thought, such new "customers" of B and C weapons would likely be those with the most operational experience in applying conventional terrorist tactics and asymmetric warfare: The long enduring, undefeated nationalist-irredentist and ethnic-separatist groups.

Yet still worse is the idea that controllable delivery systems for B and C weapons in the hands of PVMs would *lower* the threshold to use weapons of mass destruction in fulfillment of the "proof of concept" criteria that a terrorist group is in possession of an operational unconventional mass casualty weapon: The damage would not be as indiscriminate as with "ordinarily" deployed biological or chemical weapons. If such were indeed the case, it follows that the deterrent value represented by the risk of endangering one's own constituents would be considerably diminished.

In evident contrast to established usage in the tradition of top-down policy analyses, the twin concepts of impact scalability and the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception, previously identified as a likely catalyst for the future PVM use of unconventional mass casualty terrorism, strive to approximate the bottom-up nature of asymmetric warfare and are thus intricately linked to the terrorist actors as the terminus a quo of terrorism. Once the means become available to the WMD perpetrator, knowledge of his psychological individual or group profile – of the way his mind works – will become the most powerful asset in the service of those forces opposing him.

This actor-centered position also differs from a widespread emphasis on the consequences of terrorist acts and the interpretation thereof by the mass media, or representations of PVM attacks generated in the broader context of the public discourse on the terrorist threat; it has little patience with the evanescent, faceless threat encountered on the policy level. After all, just how much of al-Qaida has really been authored by Usama Bin Laden, Muhammed Atef and Ayman al Zawahiri (all members of al-Qaida's guiding *shura* council), and to what extent is the public perception of this organization driven by the absence of a serious

antagonist to the West following the cession of Cold War tensions, Western governments' sudden awareness of new vulnerabilities and incentive-driven reporting by the broadcast media?

5 Understanding Impact Scalability, the Dynamic of Reciprocal Threat Perception and their Strategic Implications: The Case for an Actor-Centered Approach to Terrorism Research

I want to close this essay with a few thoughts on the manner in which we conduct research on, and how it affects our perception of, PVMs and terrorism. In an era of possible, even probable, deployment of ABC weapons, the impact of which is in some manner controllable and at the disposal of sub-state actors with known terrorist track records, a stringent appraisal of such PVMs that are potential perpetrators of conventional and, especially, unconventional mass casualty attacks, is vital. Arguably, it constitutes a sine qua non.

The urgency of the problem in the near future may increase dramatically, because of the very likely development of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) with respect to dirigible and spatially limitable delivery systems for non-atomic weapons of mass destruction. If we consider strategic scenarios for contemporary states' foreign and security policy, one possibility that cannot escape the detachedly paranoid imagination of the defense analyst is that of the sub-state actor armed with WMD provoking an international crisis by taking the offensive against a state with a scaled, surgical attack with unconventional WMD possibly on behalf, and with the clandestine support, of another state. The likely consequence of such an event is a minor to major destabilization or even disruption of the global strategic security environment.

The potential capability of PVMs to calibrate the impact of an A, B or C attack exacerbates this situation: It would mean that perpetrators of future terrorist acts could scale an attack to their utmost advantage in a precisely calculated way in order to provoke

desired responses from states, to cow governments and to surgically stimulate, aggravate and exploit panic among the population.[60] The impact scalability of unconventional weapons further refined by the RMA in the field of delivery systems, once their proliferation had begun, would put a powerful "surgical" weapon in reach of PVMs around the globe that is readily translatable into considerable political capital and military leverage. For the stricture and disadvantage to PVMs of indiscriminate destruction caused by ABC weapons systems of the Cold War era would in such a case no longer apply in the way of a self-deterrent. PVMs that could even in a limited way influence the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception to their end – both public fears and the disposition of their members to deploy ABC weapons – through the credible employment of impact scalability, would be in a position to dictate their terms to any government in the world.

The threat emanating from PVMs willing to use WMD is probably even greater now and is, of course, not exclusively subject to influence by the RMA and technology. For today, the disciplining force of the bipolar system, the oppressive awareness, and the brooding reality, of nuclear holocaust lurking around the corner, the "red telephone"-fail-safe mechanisms established following the Cuban missile crisis in the Cold War, are no more. Due to the weight currently attached to the threat scenario in private, public and government circles of sub-state actors seeking to acquire ABC weapons, the actual threat itself may well become a self-fulfilling prophecy according to the dictates of the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception: The more we achieve or manufacture consensus

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60 I have excepted radiological dispersion devices from the list because they are weapons of mass disruption rather than weapons of mass destruction and cannot be surgically applied by definition. This is not to suggest that they could not be instrumentalized at all in such a scenario: Their value to the perpetrators could be that of a positively scaled impact. Cf. Michael A. Levi and Henry C. Kelly, "Weapons of Mass Disruption," *Scientific American*, (November 2002), pp. 59–63.

on being afraid of PVMs possibly deploying WMD – discriminately or indiscriminately – and the more we discuss and disseminate knowledge about this issue in the public domain and the corridors of power, the more we become accessories in the creation of a multilaterally perceived "merit" of the psychological potential of a weapon that can panic entire populations and hold to ransom governments; the more attractive we make the ABC option for terrorists; and the more likely the prospect of an PVM attack involving WMD becomes.

Therefore, an analysis of which PVMs are noted for their predilection toward the use of unconventional weapons, and which are less inclined to use them, is a prerequisite for the establishment of priorities in the combating of terrorism and must serve as a road map for future policy making in the area of national and multilateral counter-terrorism programs. Evidently, if we wish to pinpoint potential perpetrators of terrorist attacks involving ABC weapons, there is no way around actor-centered analysis. This is especially relevant if we accept that the kind of intelligence and threat analysis that helps establish the identity of potential WMD terrorist perpetrators in the present is also critical to the overall effort of thwarting unconventional mass casualty attack in the future.[61]

Conversely, generalizing the terrorist threat by abstracting it or quantifying data on PVMs, invites the likelihood of an exponential

61 Jean Pascal Zanders, "Assessing the Risk of Chemical and Biological Weapons Proliferation To Terrorists," *The Nonproliferation Review*, (Fall 1999), pp. 17–34, pp. 26, 30. Although clearly lacking actor-centered analysis as a focus in his investigation, Zanders does review the "social environment and norms" of a PVM, but focuses on the "assimilation model for studying the demand side of the proliferation process in states." States and sub-state actors usually have different priorities and models generally disregard exceptions to the rule. Both implicit assumptions – that state and sub-state actors are comparable in relation to PVM use of WMD and that PVM behavior per se can be modeled – ignore the established diacritic nature of PVMs at the peril of voiding their very premises. PVMs tend to be unpredictable and hence exceptions to most rules.

trajectory of analytical error. The nomenclature of the generalization of terrorism in the shape of sweeping, impersonal categories is symptomatic of its reductionist mindset (e.g. "the global terrorist network," "Middle Eastern terrorism," terrorism as a national-level *risk*, as opposed to a documented *threat* etc.); reductionism, in turn, constitutes an invitation to deterministic thought; and determinism, by virtue of its model-like, teleological nature, is frequently quite removed from the nuts and bolts of reality.

> Too often we are removed from the violent field. We need to interact with those who are violent. The best research on small-group political violence is undertaken by researchers who, on some level, interact with the people being researched. Sampling is important. With every research method there is the possibility that respondents will tailor what they say, for a number of reasons… Immersion in the research field and regular interaction with activists often allows one to overcome problems that plague the journalist, as well as the one-shot survey approach.[62]

It is evident that the consequences deriving from an analytical mistake caused by the exclusion the evident idiosyncratic psychological backdrop of PVM use of terrorist tactics and the diacritic property of PVM decision-making, including the situational specificity of implementing impact scalability, would likely be catastrophic well beyond the benchmark of destructivity established on 11 September 2001 in New York and in Washington D.C. And to be certain of one thing: All attacks carried out on 11 September bear the imprint of the traditional, and not the "New," terrorism. In terms of the psychological impact and the economic disruption, but not necessarily the volume of casualties caused, 11 September will almost certainly

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62 Robert W. White, "Issues in the Study of Political Violence: Understanding the Motives of Participants in Small Group Political Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 95–108, pp. 100–101.

be overshadowed by a PVM attack with ABC weapons.[63] The next attack is a virtual reality.[64]

On a fundamental level, the ability to learn how *to think the way that terrorists do* is the key to any sensible analysis of the terrorist threat. There are no objective indicators in aid of an assessment of the terrorist threat. *Ex post facto* examples too numerous to be listed here illustrate the preeminence of non-linear and non-quantifiable determinants in the decision-making processes of PVMs. Likewise, the accuracy of prognostication is dependant upon the specificity, and not any presumed objective character, of the intelligence and its contextualist interpretation, which, in turn, rests upon a solid understanding of the subjective reality of the actors.

The rationale behind the use of terrorism is conditioned by a multiplicity of influences, some of which are likely not to be factored in by analysts due to lacking information or understanding. Where the determinism germane to game theory and rational choice models will almost certainly fail to adequately capture the peculiar nature of the PVM phenomenon, the situational experience of role-play and other scenario-techniques still have a chance to succeed at producing insight, capturing unpredictable behavior and opening up new perspectives.

An understanding of the PVM mindset is the best source for inferential analysis, which is especially important and practicable, for example, in the devising of guidelines for protective measures and countermeasures. This approach promises to produce the best clues about PVM decision-making processes and the mechanisms

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63 Thomas Isler and Martin A. Senn, "Der 11. September war noch eine Form des altmodischen Terrorismus," interview with Walter Laqueur in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Sunday Paper Edition, 20 October 2002, p. 27.

64 This author understands that his assessment cannot escape being integral to the process of the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception, too, but feels that tabling the issues addressed in this work outweighs other considerations.

at work in the formation of objectives. C.J.M. Drake points to the significance of understanding this key lesson of PVM analysis:

> A group's ideology is extremely important in determining target selection. It defines how the groups' members see the world around them. Events and the actions of various people – both potential targets and other actors – are interpreted in terms of the terrorists' cause… When a group takes the decision to use violence, an early step is to determine who or what will be attacked. The ideology of a terrorist group identifies the 'enemies' of the group by providing a measure against which to assess the 'goodness' or 'badness', 'innocence' or 'guilt' of people and institutions.[65]

One lesson of the attacks of 11 September is the necessity of moving away from making assumptions about PVMs according to the dictates of the policy of the day, or on the basis of the questionable value of statistical evidence on an issue that is intrinsically non-quantifiable. Countermeasures ought to follow understanding established by *qualitative*, as opposed to *quantitative*, research and thus emphasize detailed actor-centered analysis. Terrorism is a "people business," full stop. In its most pronounced form, the argument raised here is to the academic sector what the increasingly urgent call for the augmentation of human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities is to the world of secret services.[66]

Frequently, government organizations remain unreformed, despite the self-evident fact that a more successful counter-terrorism policy is to a large extent predicated upon realizing the critical-

65 C.J.M Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 23.
66 On the analogous character of the problems faced in academia and intelligence services described in the text, cf. Bruce Berkowitz, "Intelligence and the War on Terrorism," *Orbis*, (Spring 2002), pp. 289–300, pp. 295–297; and Reuel Marc Gerecht (writing under the pseudonym of Edward G. Shirley), "Can't Anybody Here Play This Game?," *Atlantic Monthly Online*, (February 1998) available online at www.theatlantic.com/issues/98feb/cia.htm.

ity, and the mastering, of the analytical challenges as determined by an hitherto underrated qualitative research. Reform also hinges upon a sensitization vis-à-vis the inherently questionable value of abstracted risk analyses, and an appreciation of the dangerous margins of error created due to their approximate nature in their function as determinants in the policy-formation processes.

We should first know who (actors, motives and objectives) and what (organizations and capabilities) we are dealing with, before jumping to conclusions, comparing and referencing with a known, but possibly inapplicable, body of knowledge and committing resources to protect and counteract on that basis. Here introduced by way of a consultative theme, albeit sotto voce, is the warning not to make any assumptions about PVMs based on abstractions of terrorism. This is especially important as such assumptions may enter governmental decision-making processes conducted by people with no, or only little, experience with terrorism, which, in turn, may translate into policy directives, gargantuan fiscal commitments and superfluous exertions – and likely in the wrong places at the wrong time.

A case illustrative of government spending on the basis of originally quite pragmatic, but somewhere along the line generalized and abstracted, renditions of a perceived endemic terrorist threat is that of the U.S.' sudden concern with its critical infrastructures. Massive government funds are being mobilized on behalf of Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) programs, which have been enacted on the legal basis of the Clinton Administration's Presidential Decision Directive Number 63 (PDD-63), signed in May 1998.

The US federal government is presently confronted with the challenge of having to "minimize, with a limited amount of resources, the expected impact on the nation's critical infrastructure of any future terrorist attack."[67] In spite of the wide scope of identi-

67　John Moteff, Claudia Copeland, and John Fischer, "Critical Infrastructures: What Makes an Infrastructure Critical?," *Report for Congress by the Congressional Research Service*, (Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress, 30 August 2002), p. 12.

fied critical infrastructures to be protected, the US government's inquiry has noted that "there will be a need to prioritize effort, to allocate limited resources in a way that can minimize the impact of any future terrorist attacks on the nation's infrastructure…"[68] A report to Congress of August 2002 distinguishes three criteria for determining allocation of federal funds in the spirit of PDD-63:

- Lack of redundancy, criticality of service provided and robustness of a critical infrastructure
- Cross-cutting vulnerabilities and potential solutions in infrastructures
- Identification and determination of the quality of interdependencies between infrastructures

About the last criteria, the authors of the report write: "Identifying and focusing on those assets that connect one infrastructure to another may be a cost-effective way to reduce the overall impact of an attack."[69] The irony of such a view is that, sensible though it may be with respect to cost-benefit arguments, it implicitly *assumes* that PVMs will also recognize and identify the *same* interdependent infrastructures as priority targets. An error in this assessment would potentially offset any gain – financial and otherwise – in security to critical infrastructures. Significantly, the criteria established by the authors of the reports tasked with measuring the exposure and vulnerability of critical infrastructures exclude the one determining factor that could possibly allow them to assess the actual threat level and, hence, determine the degree and particular means of protection required: the terrorist actor.

A major problem with assessing vulnerabilities is that they seem to proliferate the closer one looks; threats, though dynamic and amorphous, are not as prone to spontaneously reproduce. While the definition of the former is an arbitrary exercise of questionable value and its only test is a terrorist attack, the analysis of latter

68   Ibid., pp. 11–12.
69   Ibid., p. 12.

constitutes a feasible enterprise with a considerable likelihood of situational gains and the possibility of supporting proactive intervention efforts (counter-terrorist operations).[70]

Assessing exposure and vulnerability to terrorist attack without considering the origin of the threat, i.e. the actor, is hence at best a questionable pursuit costly to the taxpayer. A couple of years prior to the publication of this Congressional report, an expert statement to the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations expounded in no uncertain terms:

> Making decisions without commonly agreed upon threat and risk assessment curries the chance that important resource allocation decisions will be based on current beliefs and not on a well grounded understanding of the problem at hand. The apparent over reliance on worst-case scenarios shaped primarily by vulnerability assessment rather than an assessment that factors in the technical complexities, *motivations of terrorists and their patterns of behavior* seems to be precisely the sort of approach we should avoid.[71]

When reading John Parachini's critical statement, briefly reflect upon the point raised by Martha Crenshaw about how terrorism research may be event-driven and ponder Ehud Sprinzak's skeptical remarks about the "great superterrorism scare."[72] Can we, therefore, allow "current beliefs" to exacerbate an "event-driven" approach to terrorism research that, in turn, opens up the possibility of an

70 Ian O. Lesser, et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, foreword by Brian Michael Jenkins, p. x.

71 Statement of John V. Parachini, Senior Associate, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Before the House Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations. *Combating Terrorism: Assessing the Threat*, (20 October 1999), p. 9 (my italics). The full text of the statement is available at the website of the Federation of American Scientists: http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1999_hr/991020-test2.htm.

72 Martha Crenshaw, op. cit., p. 21; Ehud Sprinzak, op. cit., p. 33.

exponential trajectory of analytical error? Can we afford to finance the protection of all identifiable critical infrastructures against all and sundry, more or less probable, threats emanating from PVMs? Finally, can we allow ourselves to exclude the actor as the central piece of any threat analysis?

The unqualified answer to all these rhetorical questions is: No. In the sense that it has less "ground" to cover than vulnerability and exposure analysis, actor-centered analysis is probably more efficient in the CIP context because it is geared toward the identification of the source of the threat. Common sense suggests that any CIP response must be calibrated in proportion to the effective PVM threat and relative to its target selection criteria. Defending critical infrastructures against all known factors contributing to its vulnerability renders the task of creating adequate protection complex and thereby opens up previously inexistent vulnerabilities. Seen this way, vulnerability analysis-based critical infrastructure protection may be instrumental in creating new vulnerabilities.

Also consider Parachini's remark on worst-case scenarios derived from vulnerability assessments as a benchmark for protective measures, and juxtapose it with the conception of impact scalability. PVMs might just succeed at destroying or impairing critical infrastructures because they decide *not* to play along with the CIP scenario "scriptwriter," deriving his assessment from a "vulnerability perspective," but instead "undercut" the expected intensity of an attack by selecting an atypical, hard target and attacking it with cutting-edge conventional means. Imagine that the critical infrastructure involved is a military installation, for example a silo housing mirved intercontinental ballistic missiles.

On the general level, the overall objective of methodological advances in the study of terrorism will eventually have to be a consolidation of analytical methods and practices – a convergence of risk analysis and intelligence analysis. Actor-centered analysis, however, must become central to both, for if we desire to both understand the threat and extrapolate the risks emanating from

PVMs, we are compelled to understand their idiosyncratic "logic," which is inarguably the inferential basis relative to their modi operandi, objectives and motives.

In pursuit of this task, we do not have to reinvent the wheel and may take recourse to the existing methodological wealth: From intelligence analysis practices, such as the Analysis of Competing Hypotheses, to micro-historical approaches, to case studies, to Behavioral Evidence Analysis in the field of criminal investigative psychology. Because any profile of a PVM hinges upon the perspective (i.e. threat perception) we adopt, we must be careful not to portray static images, but rather endeavor to create dynamic motion pictures sustained by a multi-disciplinary feed from monitoring activities in the study and insight gained in the field. Permitting ourselves to better understand the context within which, and out of which, PVMs operate constitutes our best hope of interdicting future attack and damaging PVMs' personnel base and their capabilities. Learning how the authors of terrorism think and make decisions is our best line of defense against the augmented terrorism of the future.

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