Conceptualizing Terrorism:
Criminological, Political, and Religious Underpinnings

Chapter 2

Terrorism as a Social Process:
Two Frameworks

- Two schools of thought dominate the scholarly literature on terrorism
    - One group tends to focus on the *meaning* of the activity
    - The other school looks at the *structure* of the activity

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Meaning Framework

- Many social scientists study group behavior by looking at the meaning of actions
- Social scientist who study group and individual behavior this way believe the way we interpret the world motivates the actions we take
    - Meanings drive actions

Meaning Framework (cont.)

▮ When this method is used to study terrorist organizations it can be called a <u>meaning framework</u>
▮ Theories about meaning frameworks focus on the interpretation individuals and groups give to the actions of others as well as their own actions
  – Different meanings can be attached to the same event or physical object because the definitions are influenced by interpretations

Meaning Framework (cont.)

▮ Mark Jurgensmeyer's view
  – The clash between modern values and traditional culture is one of the reasons for terrorism
  – Terrorism is created by the meanings subjects attach to social situations

Meaning Framework (cont.)

▮ Bernard Lewis' view
  – Trouble between Islam and Western modernity can be attributed to the meanings each groups attributes to historical change

Meaning Framework (cont.)

- Samuel Huntington's and Thomas Barnett's view
  - A new political order emerged at the end of the cold war, and future conflicts will take place between the world's major civilizations
    - Barnett believes the world is divided into three economic groupings, and conflict will be based on the distribution of wealth
  - Both political scientists argue that the social meanings groups of people give to the world explain political behavior

Meaning Framework (cont.)

- Samuel Huntington's and Thomas Barnett's view (cont.)
  - Social action is based on social meaning
  - When applied to terrorism, terrorist organizations are the result of subjective meanings
  - Thus, any strategy designed to confront and destabilize terrorist organizations must include an aggressive effort to introduce alternative meaning frameworks

Meaning Framework (cont.)

- Malcolm Nance's view
  - Theory of action
    - Terrorists take action based on an ideological desire for change
    - Terrorism results from the meanings terrorists apply to the modern world

Structural Framework

- Approaches to understanding terrorist behavior by looking at the way organizations function can be called a <u>structural framework</u>
- Structural framework refers to the idea that social constructs are based on systems that provide order
- Social scientists from this tradition feel that a group's structure and purpose cause it to act and that groups are created for specific functions

Structural Framework (cont.)

- Donald Black's view
  - All groups, including terrorist organizations, take action because they belong to a structure that operates for a specific purpose
    - Black calls this "<u>social geometry</u>"
  - The structure and movement of groups can explain terrorism
    - When an inferior group moves against a superior group inducing mass casualties, terrorism develops
  - The process of terrorism is seen as violent self-help
    - Terrorists organize in quasi-military units fighting outside the norms of war and criminal law

Structural Framework (cont.)

- Vito Latora's and Massimo Marchiori's view
  - Terrorist organizations are structured in the same manner as communication and transportation systems
  - Composed of networks that move in patterns (similar to telephone lines or highways) to critical points and <u>nodes</u>

Structural Framework (cont.)

- Vito Latora's and Massimo Marchiori's view (cont.)
  - <u>Netwar</u>:
    - Subnational criminal, terrorist, or revolutionary groups organize themselves in a network of smaller logistical structures, groups or command posts
    - Any point where information, weapons, or personnel are gathered or exchanged is called a node
    - The node becomes a critical target for counterterrorist operations

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches

- Tanja Ellingsen
  - Religion has always been an important factor in the history of humanity
  - Modernization tends to breakdown communities, families, and social orientation
    - People seek a deeper meaning to their lives
- According to Ellingsen, the impact of religion on terrorism is more important than political and economic factors

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

- Susanna Pierce
  - Strong religious beliefs not only increase the likelihood of religious conflict, but they also increase the intensity of the fighting

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

▥ Marvin Harris
- Killing religions developed during the food-gathering cycle of pre-agrarian and early agricultural societies
  - ▣ Were based on the premise that a deity would help the community during a time of crisis
- Non-killing religions embraced enemies and developed elaborate theologies to justify violence as a last resort
  - ▣ Non-killing transcendence is often transformed into a militant ideology designed to protect a state or some other social group by this rationalizing of the use of violence as a last resort

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

▥ Jessica Stern
- People around the world are returning to their religious roots as a means of escaping the complexity of modern life
- Old truths in one society may collide with truths of another society
  - ▣ When mythological truths compete, violence often results
- Stories change the nature of terrorist organizations and aid in producing a number of different group organizations and styles

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

▥ Jessica Stern (cont.)
- Individuals come to the group because they believe they have been called to the story of an entire people
  - ▣ They join a cosmic struggle, a holy cause
- Many times people become disillusioned and leave the group
  - ▣ They still may be sympathetic to the cause, but they become disillusioned with leaders who fail to live up to the mythical standards

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

- Jessica Stern (cont.)
  - To maintain power formally given by the sacred story, leaders may develop internal enforcement mechanisms
    - Rewards are given and withheld to encourage correct behavior within the group
    - When ideology breaks down, leaders may find themselves in alliances with enemies
    - At this point, behavioral patterns of religious terrorists cease to matter
      - They eventually become long-term professional leaders who only know one kind of work, terrorism for hire

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

- Jessica Stern (cont.)
  - Most sacred stories emphasize self-sacrifice and in some, death
    - This results in terrorists seeking a path of martyrdom
      - Facing great dangers
      - Committing suicide to destroy enemies
  - Religion may also produce the "lone wolf avenger"--a person striking out with an ideology but no group
    - Need justification for actions, religion providing the perfect path
    - Most difficult targets to deter or detain

Terrorism as a Religious Process: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches (cont.)

- Mark Juergensmeyer
  - Believers must identify with a deity and think they are participating in a struggle to change history
  - This struggle must be a cosmic struggle
    - The outcome to the struggle will lead to a new relationship between good and evil
    - Violence is a call to purify the world from the nonbeliever and the incorrect interpretations in a holy war
  - The holy terrorist is victorious either by killing the enemy or by dying in the struggle

Criminological Views of Terrorism: Crime for a Cause

- Terrorists have organizational structures, belief systems, and motivational values that separate them from ordinary criminals
- To effectively deal with terrorism, law enforcement personnel must recognize the differences between typical criminal behavior and terrorist activity
  - Animal Liberation Front

Criminological Views of Terrorism: Crime for a Cause (cont.)

- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has created localized terrorism task forces--Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF)--around the country
  - Allows the FBI to coordinate law enforcement resources in the face of domestic terrorism and to expand investigations
- Internationally, the FBI also provides investigative resources when Americans are victimized by terrorism in other countries

Criminological Views of Terrorism: Crime for a Cause (cont.)

- Terrorist investigations do not follow the pattern of most criminal investigations because terrorists seldom behave like normative street criminals

Criminological Views of Terrorism (cont.)

- Ideology and religion may influence individuals who become terrorists for a single event
  - Buford Furrow
    - Lone wolf or "berserker"
      - Trained or not, lone wolves are attack oriented
    - Not an uncommitted opportunistic criminal
    - Agent of an ideology on a divine mission

Terrorists v Criminals: Douglas Bodrero

- Terrorists
  - Find strength in a cause and the ideology behind the cause
    - Team oriented even when acting as individuals
  - Focused and plan extensively
  - Dedicated to a particular cause
  - Disciplined, trained, targets have symbolic value related to a cause

- Criminals
  - Usually uncommitted, crime is a method for obtaining goods
  - Opportunistic and rarely plan
  - Undedicated to a cause
  - Undisciplined, untrained, self-centered

Criminological Views of Terrorism: Crime for a Cause (cont.)

- To successfully investigate terrorism, law enforcement, military, and security officials need to focus on:
  - Ideology
  - Group and individual behavior
  - Sharing information over broad geographic regions

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence

- Terrorists must feel they are justified in their behavior, but to do this, they must look outside normative social channels to gain approval
- Terrorist group becomes primary source of social reality
  - Provides social recognition and reinforcement for its members

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence

- For social acceptance to work, the terrorist group must be isolated from mainstream society
- A terrorist must be isolated before beginning a mission, only interacting with others directly involved with the mission
- During this period, the terrorist is constantly indoctrinated in the importance of the mission and reminded that the goal is more important than human life

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Early studies on group reinforcement and isolation: **Paul Wilkerson**
  - Terrorist groups reinforce individual loyalty through the process of justification
  - Terrorism may be justified as the only available course of action
  - Terrorist groups must develop their own parameters of ethical normalcy and go through a process of moral justification

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Early studies on group reinforcement and isolation: **Jerrold Post**
  - There is no single terrorist personality, but terrorists do follow similar behavior patterns
  - The most important pattern has to do with group and individual acceptance
  - Terrorist groups are very much like criminal groups in having been rejected by mainstream society
  - The group becomes the only source of social reward because of its members' isolation
    - Terrorists reinforce one another

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Early studies on group reinforcement and isolation: **Jerrold Post** (cont.)
  - The rejection of external authority results in the acceptance of internal authority because behavior must be reinforced somewhere
  - The key point for conversion in terrorist organizations is when the group shifts from violent rhetoric to action
    - Once the group engages in criminal activity, a distinct split with society occurs
    - The crimes required by terrorism become the final gestures of social rebellion

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **Randy Borum**
  - The decision to join, remain in, or leave a terrorist group cannot be summarized with a set of psychological factors
  - Rather it is a process beginning when a potential terrorist believes that social, and political conditions are not morally correct
  - Justification is a process involving the constant assessment of morality

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **Jeff Victoroff**
  - Terrorism is caused by a variety of social and psychological factors, including biological predisposition to violence
  - Terrorists operate and justify violence because they:
    - Emotionally attach themselves to an ideology
    - Will not tolerate moral ambiguity
    - Have a capacity to suppress instinctive and learned moral limitations on behavior
  - There is a need to study the impact of leadership on group behavior

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **H.H.A. Cooper**
  - Terrorists would justify more destruction because it is required for televised drama

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **Brock Bloomberg, Gregory Hess, and Akila Weerapana**
  - Economic factors play a role in justifying terrorist violence
  - Terrorist groups form because they are not happy with the economic status quo
  - Terrorists see denial of economic opportunity as a justification for their actions

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **Stern**
  - Believes several factors must be in place for group cohesion
    - Group must identify an enemy
    - Group must have a story
    - Group needs its own language or symbolic words to demonize the enemy

The Process of Moral Justification of Terrorist Violence (cont.)

- Recent studies on the justification of violence: **Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons**
  - Groups first look for conspiracies and then blame (or scapegoat) a particular group for the conspiracy
  - Eventually they demonize the scapegoats for being the primary cause of social injustice

Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

- Many law enforcement agencies, including the FBI Behavioral Science Unit, have attempted to develop profiles of terrorists based on individual psychological characteristics
- Although such profiling has practical applications in law enforcement, the larger question remains:
  - Is it possible to profile the terrorist personality?

Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

▮ Rejecting terrorist profiles: **Walter Laqueur**
  – Terrorism fluctuates over time and the profile of terrorism changes with historical, political, and social circumstances
  – Other group characteristics can be discerned through the type of movement
  – Individual and group profiles are the result of political and social conditions
  – It is impossible to profile a terrorist personality because terrorism is not the subject of criminology

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Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

▮ Rejecting terrorist profiles: **Randy Borum**
  – The is no single terrorist personality
  – Terrorists represent a variety of physical types

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Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

▮ Arguments against the effectiveness of profiling terrorists include:
  – Profiling has so many different meanings, practical use has become useless
  – Terrorist groups will select an operative not fitting the profile if they learn that members are being profiled
  – Suicide bombers, for example, come from varying backgrounds with no single description
  – No pattern of psychological disorders
  – Different ethnic backgrounds

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Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

- Proposing a multivariate profile: **Jeffrey Ian Ross**
  - It may be possible to conceptualize terrorism in a model that combines <u>social structure</u> with <u>group psychology</u>
  - There are five interconnected processes involved in terrorism:
    1) Joining the group
    2) Forming the activity
    3) Remaining in the campaign
    4) Leading the organization
    5) Engaging in acts of terrorism

Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

- Proposing a multivariate profile: **Jeffrey Ian Ross** (cont.)
  - There are two factors involved in the rise of terrorism at any point in history
    - The first centers around social structure
      - Modernization, democracy, and social unrest create the structural conditions that facilitate terrorism
    - Five psychological factors involved in the development of terrorism:
      1) Facilitating traits: fear, anger, depression, guilt, etc.
      2) Frustration/narcissism-aggression
      3) Associated drives: perceived benefits from joining a group
      4) Learning opportunities
      5) Cost benefit calculations

Classification System: Can the Terrorist Personality Be Profiled?

- Proposing a multivariate profile: **Jeffrey Ian Ross** (cont.)
  - Ross' ideas explain the transformation of terrorism across history and provide social and psychological indicators of terrorism