Chapter 1
Terrorism Defined

Terrorism

What is Terrorism?

• “Whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom of his land . . . cannot possibly be called a terrorist . . .”
  – Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, November 13, 1974, addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations

What is Terrorism?
Why Does Terrorism Exist?

- Clifford Simonsen and Jeremy Spindlove attribute the existence of terrorism to its four basic goals
  1. To bring awareness to an alleged grievance by performing shocking acts
  2. To use the media to maximize people’s knowledge of the cause
  3. To influence the public’s reaction to acts of violence by spreading fear
  4. To produce policy changes through acts of violence that weaken the governments’ resolve

Terrorism: Keeping It in Perspective

- Terrorism is not a new phenomenon
  - It has been around for thousands of years
  - Why?
    - Because it works

Toward a Definition of Terrorism

- Two things that you need to know about terrorism
  - Terrorism is always a strategy, never a goal
    - It is a means to an end—nothing more
  - Terrorism is a word that is very hard to pin down and define
Terrorism: On Strategy and Causes

• Terrorism is never about the cause, but always about the strategy used to win it
  – Each side of a conflict is certain that it is right, which makes the meaning of “cause” nothing but a biased feeling
  – The only way to protect innocents from self-righteous parties is to place clear rules on the use of violence, excluding all “moral beliefs and sociological-political mumbo-jumbo”

The Pejorative Meaning of Terrorism

• No matter how it is defined it is a pejorative term
  – Dual standards and contradictions lead to confusion any time the term “terrorism” is employed

What is Terrorism?

• Alex Schmid
  – Terrorism is a social construct
    • Terrorism is defined by different people within vacillating social and political realities
What is Terrorism? (cont.)

• Also developed through the application of political power
  – A person is politically and socially degraded when labeled a terrorist
  – Routine crimes assume greater social importance when described as terrorism
  – Govt.s gain power when their enemies are called terrorists

What is Terrorism? (cont.)

• The political nature of the definition implies that any attempt to provide a common definition of terrorism will be filled with debates about the use of power

FBI and the Definition of Terrorism

• Official FBI definition of terrorism separates domestic and international terrorism
  – Domestic terrorism refers to activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal law of the U.S. or any state; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian populace, influence policy of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.
  – International terrorism involves violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the U.S. or any state, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the U.S. or any state
FBI and the Definition of Terrorism (cont.)

• The FBI’s social construction of reality deems that terrorism is a matter of criminal behavior

Islam and the Definition of Terrorism

• Some in the Muslim world believe that the values of Islam are threatened by the materialism of the West
  – This social construct differs from the FBI
• While some in the Muslim world have condemned terrorism in the name of religion, many also believe that oppressed people have a right to revolt against an occupying power and such a revolution constitutes military action, not terrorism

Terror and Terrorism

• Striking terror into the heart of the enemy is the object of military force
  – Systematic terror has been a basic weapon in conflict throughout history
• Questionable difference between military force and terrorism
  – Ready-to-use nuclear weapons viewed by some as an extension of terrorism
  – Same logic applied to gangs terrorizing neighborhoods
• Scope of potential definitions can be limitless
The Problem of Defining Terrorism

- Difficult to define because the meaning changes within social and historical contexts
- Changes in the meaning occur because terrorism is not a physical entity
  - Does not have dimensions that can be weighed, measured, and analyzed
- The social context surrounding the term terrorism influences the manner in which it is defined

The Contexts of Definitions – Historical Circumstances

- 1789–1795 French Revolution
  - Term was used to describe actions of the French government
- By 1848 it was used to describe violent revolutionaries who had revolted against governments

The Contexts of Definitions – Historical Circumstances (cont.)

- Late 1800s–Early 1900s
  - Terrorism used to describe violent activities of various groups:
    - Labor organizations
    - Nationalist groups revolting against foreign powers
    - Ultranationalist political organizations
- After WWII, some nationalist groups were viewed as terrorist groups
The Contexts of Definitions – Historical Circumstances (cont.)

- Mid-1960s – Early 1980s
  - Terrorism applied to nationalists and violent left-wing groups
- Mid-1980s
  - US - some of the violent activity of hate groups was defined as terrorism
  - Internationally – viewed as subnational warfare sponsored by rogue regimes

The Contexts of Definitions – Historical Circumstances (cont.)

- Present day
  - Terrorism encompasses such groups as:
    - Large groups who are independent from a state
    - Violent religious fanatics
    - Violent groups who terrorize for a particular cause
      - Environmental groups
      - Narco-terrorism

The Contexts of Definitions – War and Violence

- Meaning of terrorism fluctuates around various types of war
  - Commando tactics can sometimes look like terrorism
  - Guerrilla warfare
    - May use terrorist tactics against enemies and supporters
- Used to describe violent activity that explodes during a peaceful period
  - Insurrection in Iraq after 2003 U.S. invasion
The Contexts of Definitions – Political Power

• The definition of terrorism depends on political power
• Governments can increase their power when they label opponents as terrorists
  – More public acceptance of governmental power
  – Terrorists are not deserving of humanitarian privileges
    • Guantanamo Bay

The Contexts of Definitions – Repression

• Related to the issue of power is repression
• Routinely used by some governments to keep citizens in line
  – Joseph Stalin
  – Saddam Hussein
  – Latin America
• Repression developed outside formal political structures is called extra-judicial repression
  – Repressive groups who use terrorism as a means of creating conforming behavior

The Contexts of Definitions – Media Coverage

• Journalists and television reporters frequently use the term terrorism to define political violence
  – However, there is no consistent standard guiding them in the application of the definition
The Contexts of Definitions – Crime

• Except in times of conflict or government oppression, all terrorism involves criminal activity

The Contexts of Definitions – Religion

• Extreme religious beliefs provide a context for defining terrorism
• Religious violence centers around three sources
  1) Some religious groups feel that they must purify the world for a new epoch (violent eschatology)
  2) Some groups feel that they are chosen and may destroy other people in the cause of righteousness
  3) Other people may become so consumed with a particular cause that they create a surrogate religion and take violent action to advance their belief

Specific Forms of Terrorism

• Sometimes terrorism can be defined within a specific context
  – Technological terrorism
  – Cyberterrorism
  – Narcoterrorism
  – Ecoterrorism
  – Nuclear terrorism
  – Agriterrorism
A Range of Definitions

• The wide range of definitions for terrorism can be viewed as problematic
  – Walter Laqueur’s simple definition
    • “Terrorism constitutes the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective by targeting innocent people.”
    • He promotes the simple definition because the meaning of terrorism changes constantly as social contexts change

A Range of Definitions (cont.)

• Legal definitions
  – These give govt.’s specific crimes that can be used to take action against terrorist activities
  – However, these definitions do not take into account the social/political nature of terrorism
    • American Revolution
    • Also contain internal contradictions
      • Tupameros vs. The Contras

Range of Definitions (cont.)

• Alex Schmid’s academic consensus definition:
  – A number of elements are common to leading definitions, and most definitions have two characteristics:
    1) Someone is terrorized
    2) The meaning of the term is derived from the targets and victims of terrorists
  – He sees terrorism as a method of combat in which the victims serve as symbolic targets
    • Violent actors are able to produce a chronic state of fear by using violence outside of the realm of normative behavior
Range of Definitions (cont.)

• Thomas Badey:
  – Governments must:
    • Look at the intent and motivation of terrorists, and consider whether the event can be repeated
    • Examine the terrorists themselves to determine whether they work with state support or if they exist outside the boundaries of govt.
    • Consider the effects of terrorism
  – He argues that by dividing the problem into functional areas, govt.’s can develop a pragmatic response

The Components of Terrorism: An Operational Model

• Cindy Combs:
  – Four parts essential to identifying terrorism
    1) Is an act of violence
    2) Has a political goal
    3) Is carried out against innocent people
    4) Is intended to frighten the larger audience

Applying the Model: Case #1

• The Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA)
  – 15 AUG 1998, Omagh, Northern Ireland
  – Car bomb detonated
  – 29 civilians killed and approximately 220 wounded, many of them women and children
Applying the Model: Case #2

- The American bombing of Mage el-Deeb in Northwestern Iraq
  - 19 MAY 2004
  - US warplanes mistakenly attack a “wedding party”
  - Scores are killed or wounded

Typologies of Terrorism

- A typology is a classification system
- Strengths:
  - A typology captures the range of terrorist activities better than most definitions
  - The scope of the problem allows the level of the problem to be introduced
    - Local, national, international
  - When the level of terrorism is identified, the level of response can be determined
    - By focusing on types of violence and the social meanings of tactics, typologies avoid the heated debates about the meaning of terrorism

Typologies of Terrorism (cont.)

- Problems with typologies
  - The process of terrorism is in a constant state of change
    - Typologies describe only patterns among events
      - The are generalizations that describe extremely unstable environments
  - Typologies can lead to a distortion of reality
    - Some people will try to alter what they see in order to fit into a particular typology
Developing Typologies of Terrorism

• Attempts to approach classifying terrorism through typologies include:
  – Behavioral profiling
  – Social or political power
  – Criminal law and law enforcement
  – Distribution of political power
  – Social structure involved in terrorism and counterterrorism
  – Purpose of terrorism

Developing Typologies of Terrorism (cont.)

• Law enforcement typologies
  – Focus on political motivation
  – Geographical locations
• FBI typologies focus on:
  – Leadership capabilities of terrorists
  – Willingness to follow a leader
  – Ideological commitment
• Typology of the Secret Service includes:
  – Crusaders
  – Political terrorists
  – Anarchists
  – Religious fanatics
  – Criminals

Toward a Tactical Typology of Terrorism

• Humans live in a constant state of conflict
  – Impossible to have a human social organization without conflict
    • Organizations’ rules
• Spectrum of conflict is a continuum ranging from low-intensity conflict to full-scale war
  – Terrorism is a form of violent civil disobedience – can therefore be placed on the continuum
• Terrorism can be viewed as a form of conflict between civil disorders and guerrilla warfare
Spectrum of Conflict

The Civil State: Guarantees the strong and the weak limited freedom

State of Nature
The strongest have complete freedom, but the weak have none

Cf the Civil State

Normal social conflict
Civil struggle
Low-level criminal activity, normal crime
Organized crime, gang violence
Guerrilla war
Limited or unlimited war
War of limited mass destruction
War of unlimited mass destruction

Clausewitz
Sun Tzu
Determine the level and type of conflict

Tactic Typology

Level of Terrorist Activity
Criminal Activity
Type of Activity
Type of Response
Low
Serial activity for economic or psychological gratification
Rioting, disruption, civil disorders
Oriented to law enforcement

High
Organized crime
Organized terrorism
Law enforcement augmented with military force

Political Activity
Small groups with foreign support
Law enforcement augmented with military force

Gangs
Large groups with foreign support

Serial activity for economic or psychological gratification

Oriented to law enforcement

Toward a Tactical Typology of Terrorism

• The level of activity is correlated with group size
  – Generally, the larger the terrorist group – the greater the potential for terrorist violence

• Terrorists move between political and criminal activities
  – Groups may become so large that the group may act as terrorist groups; conversely, small groups may become focused on crime thereby acting as criminal gangs as opposed to terrorists groups

• Does not solve definitional problems; however, tactical typology aids in the conceptualization of counterterrorism
Tactical Typology and Counterterrorism

- Tactical typology illustrates two important aspects of counterterrorism
  1) Terrorism is primarily a problem for law enforcement and the justice system
     - Augmented by intelligence activities and military force
  2) Terrorists have acted outside the law
     - 4th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution allows for the use of force necessary to stop terrorist activities
       - However, it does not allow the government to violate the law

A Brief Reminder of International Law

- A clear difference exists between guerillas and terrorists—their policy regarding the international law of war
- To be considered guerillas:
  - Fighters must set themselves apart from the non-combatants by wearing uniforms, armbands, or other symbols that identify them as combatants
  - They must also carry their arms in the open, not hidden
  - They have to honor the rules of war, such as:
    - No deliberate hurting of civilians
    - Treating enemy POWs according to the Conventions on Warfare signed in Geneva and The Hague between 1860 and 1949

Defining the War on Terrorism

- War declared on a concept such as the “war on terrorism” is not possible under the U.S. Constitution
- However, federal and local bureaucracies have embraced the concept
Defining the War on Terrorism (cont.)

• Arguments accepting the “war on terrorism” include:
  – Thomas Friedman: The third great struggle against totalitarianism in the past 100 years
    1) Nazis (1939-1945)
    2) Cold War (1945-1991)
    3) Militant groups who hate America more than they love life (present day)

Defining the War on Terrorism (cont.)

• Arguments accepting the “war on terrorism” include:
  – Stephen Blank: Believes terrorism is caused by radical groups driven by economic, social and political pressures
    • The new war differs from conflicts of the past
    • America’s best weapon is providing military assistance to legitimate governments and pressuring repressive governments to reform

Defining the War on Terrorism (cont.)

• Arguments accepting the “war on terrorism” include:
  – Ariel Cohen and Fiona Hill: Both indicate that the US must:
    • Project military power in the face of these terrorist groups
    • Identify militant groups and select proper tactics that will destroy them
Defining the War on Terrorism (cont.)

- Argument that does not accept the war on terror
  - Michael Howard
    - Views terrorism as an emergency situation that should be handled by law enforcement and intelligence
    - Military forces may be used, but they serve as reinforcements for law enforcement or as special operations units for intelligence organizations
  - When called war, counterterrorism evokes an image that is not the nature of terrorism