Generations and Waves: 
The Keys to Understanding Rebel Terror Movements

By David C. Rapoport

Terrorism authority David C. Rapoport traces the similarities in terror outbreaks from the Anarchists of Russia in the 1880s through the colonial revolutions, the New Left, and today's religious wave.

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[For a summary, see the book proposal at the end of this article]

Modern Terror: The Four Waves

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September 11 is the most destructive day in the long bloody history of terrorism. The casualties, economic damage, and outrage were unprecedented. It could be the most important day too, because it led President Bush to declare a “war (that) would not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”

However unprecedented the day was, President Bush’s declaration was not altogether unique. Exactly 100 years ago, when an Anarchist assassinated President William McKinley in September 1901, his successor Theodore Roosevelt called for a crusade to exterminate terrorism everywhere.

Will we succeed this time? No one knows, but we can more fully appreciate the difficulties ahead better by examining features of the history of rebel (non-state) terror. That history shows how deeply implanted in our culture terrorism and offers parallels worth pondering, and provides a perspective for understanding the uniqueness of 9/11 and its aftermath. To this end, I will examine the course of modern terror from its initial appearance some 125 years ago, emphasizing continuities and change, particularly with respect to international ingredients. I lack space to discuss the domestic sphere, which offers important parallels too.

The Wave Phenomena

Modern terror began in Russia in the 1880s, and within a decade appeared in Western Europe, the Balkans, and Asia. A generation later the wave was completed Anarchists initiated the wave
and their primary strategy, assassination campaigns against prominent officials, was adopted by virtually all the other groups of the time, even those with nationalist aims in the Balkans and India.

Significant examples of secular rebel terror existed earlier, but they were specific to a particular **time and country**. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), for example, made a striking contribution to the decision of the federal government to end Reconstruction, but the KKK had no contemporary parallels or emulators.iv

The “Anarchist Wave” was the first global or truly international terrorist experience in historyv and subsequently three similar, consecutive, and overlapping expressions followed. The “Anti Colonial Wave” began in the 1920s and lasted about 40 years. Then came the “New Left Wave”, which diminished greatly as the century closed leaving only a few groups active still today in Nepal, Spain, the UK, Peru and Columbia. In 1979 the “Religious Wave” emerged, and if the pattern of its three predecessors is relevant it could disappear by 2025 and make way for a new wave.vi The uniqueness and persistence of the wave experience indicates that terror is deeply rooted in modern culture.

The concept of wave as employed here is an unfamiliar notion and worth more attention before we examine the historical examples. Academics focus on organizations for good reasons. Organizations launch terror campaigns, and governments always are primarily concerned to disable those organizations.vii Academics, moreover, study contemporary groups and on contemporary event, those facts make us less sensitive to wavesviii because every wave requires time, a good deal of time, to complete its cycle. What is a wave? It is a cycle of activity in a given time period, a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases. A crucial feature is its international character; similar activities occur in many countries driven by a common predominant energy shaping participating groups and their mutual relationships. As their names suggest a different energy drives each wave.

It name reflects a wave dominant but not its only feature. Nationalist organizations for example appear in all waves but each wave shapes its national elements differently. In the first wave Anarchists gave nationalist groups tactics and often trained them too. Third wave nationalist groups displayed profoundly left-wing aspirations, and nationalism serves or reactions to religious pressures in the fourth wave. All groups in the second wave had nationalist aspirations but we call the wave “Anti-Colonial” because they struggled against colonial powers that had become ambivalent about retaining their colonial status. That ambivalence explains why the wave produced the first terrorist successes. In other waves that ambivalence is absent or very weak and nationalist groups always failed. . . A wave is composed of organizations, but the two have different life rhythms. Organizations normally break up before the initial wave associated with them does. “New Left” organizations were particularly striking in this respect, generally lasting two years. Nonetheless the wave contained sufficient energy to create new successor groups. When its energy cannot inspire new organizations a wave disappear. Resistance, political concessions and changes in the perception of generations are critical factors in explaining the disappearance.
Occasionally, an organization survives its original wave. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is the oldest modern terrorist organization emerging first in 1916, though not as a terror organization. It then fought five campaigns (the 1950 struggle used guerrilla tactics) in two successive waves. At least two of its various offshoots, the Real IRA and Continuity IRA are still active. The Palestine Liberation Organizations (PLO) founded in 1964 became active in 1967. Later it became the pre-eminent body of the New Left wave because of its international connections even though it was primarily a nationalist group. More recently, PLO elements (i.e. Fatah) became active in the fourth wave, even though the organization began as a wholly secular group. When an organization transcends a wave, it reflects the new wave’s influence, a change that may pose special problems for the group and its constituencies, as we shall later see.

The first three waves lasted about a generation each- a time frame, which is suggestive of a human life cycle where dreams inspiring parents lose their attractiveness for children. Although the resistance of those attacked is crucial in explaining why terror organizations rarely succeed, the time span of the wave also suggests that the wave has its own momentum. Over time there are fewer organizations because the enterprise’s problematic nature becomes more visible. The pattern is familiar to students of revolutionary states, i.e., France, Soviet Union, and Iran. The inheritors of the revolution do not value it in the same way that its creators did. In the anti-colonial wave, the process also seems relevant to the colonial powers. A new generation found it much easier to discard the colonial idea. The wave pattern calls our attention to crucial political themes in the general culture, themes that distinguish the ethos of one generation from another.

Why did the first wave occur when it did? There are many reasons, but two critical factors are conspicuous and facilitate successive waves. The first is the transformation in communication and transportation patterns. The telegraph, daily mass newspapers, and railroads flourished during the last quarter of the 19th century. Events in one country were known elsewhere in a day or so. Prominent Russian Anarchists traveled extensively helping to inspire sympathies and groups elsewhere, sometimes as the journeys of Michael Bakunin indicate they had more influence abroad than at home. Peter Proudhon spent more time in France than in Russia. Mass transportation made mass emigrations possible and created diaspora communities, which then became significant, both in the politics of their “new” and “old” countries. Subsequent innovations continued to shrink time and space.

A second factor is doctrine or culture. Russian writers created a strategy for terror, which became an inheritance for successors to use, improve and transmit. Sergei Nechaev was the leading figure in this effort; Nicholas Mozorov, Peter Kropotkin, and Serge Stepniak, and others made contributions. Why was this project significant? The KKK had no emulators partly because it made no effort to explain its tactics. The Russian achievement becomes even more striking when we compare it to the practices of the ancient religious terrorists who always stayed within their own religious tradition, the source of their justifications and binding precedents. Each religious tradition produced its own kind of terrorist, and sometimes the tactics within a tradition were so uniform that they appear to be a form of religious ritual.

A comparison of Nechaev’s Revolutionary Catechism with Bin Laden’s training manual, Military Studies in the Jihad Against The Tyrants shows that they share one very significant
feature—a paramount desire to become more efficient by learning from experiences of friends and enemies alike.xiv The major difference in this respect is the role of women. Nechaev considers them “priceless assets”; and indeed they were crucial leaders and participants in the first wave. Bin Laden dedicates his book to protecting the Muslim woman, but he ignores what experience can tell us about female terrorists.xv Women do not participate in his forces, and are virtually excluded in the fourth wave except in Sri Lanka and Chechnya. Each wave produces major technical works that reflect the special properties of that wave and contribute to a common modern effort to formulate a “science” of terror. Between Nechaev and Bin Laden, there were, inter alia, Georges Grivas, Guerrilla War and Carlos Marighella, Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla, in the second and third waves respectively.

“Revolution” is the over-riding aim in every wave, but revolution is understood in different ways.xvi Revolutionaries create a new source of political legitimacy, and more often than not that meant national self-determination. The anti-colonial wave was dominated by this quest, but it was present always. This principle, a people should govern itself, was bequeathed by the American and French Revolutions. (The French Revolution also introduced the term terror to our vocabulary.)xvii But since the definition of “the people” has never been (perhaps never can be) clear and fixed, it is a source of recurring conflict even when the sanctity of the principle is accepted everywhere. Revolution can also mean a radical reconstruction of authority to eliminate all forms of inequality, a cardinal theme in the first and a significant one in the third wave. A new source of legitimacy, a sacred text or revelation dominates the fourth wave. Our discussion treats the great political events precipitating each wave and the aims and tactics of participating groups. The international context is our focus, where we distinguish five principal ingredients: terrorist organizations, diaspora populations, states, sympathetic foreign publics, and supranational organizations. The last appears first in the second wave.xviii

THE FIRST WAVE: THE CREATION OF A DOCTRINE

The creators of modern terrorism inherited a world where traditional revolutionaries, who depended on pamphlets and meetings, suddenly seemed obsolete. The masses, Nechaev said, really regarded them as “idle word spillers”!xix A new form of communication (the Italian Anarchist Carlo Cafiero, 1880, named it “Propaganda by the Deed” was needed, one that would be heard and command respect because the rebel took action which involved serious personal risks signifying deep commitment. The Anarchist analysis of modern society contained four major points. 1) Society has huge reservoirs of latent ambivalence and hostility 2)-Social conventions were devised to muffle and diffuse antagonisms by generating guilt and providing channels for settling grievances and securing personal amenities. 3) But if one can demonstrate that these conventions are simply historical creations, acts now perceived as immoral our children will hail as noble efforts to liberate humanity. 4) Terror is the quickest and most effective means to destroy conventions. The perpetrators free themselves from the paralyzing grip of guilt to become different kinds of people, and force those who defend the government to respond in ways that undermine the rules governments claim to respect.xx Dramatic action repeated again and again would invariably polarize the society and revolution would inevitably follow.
An incident, which inspired the turbulent decades to follow, illustrates the process visualized. Vera Zasulich wounded a Russian police commander (1878) who abused political prisoners. Throwing her weapon to the floor, she proclaimed that she was a “terrorist not a killer”.xix The ensuing trial quickly became that of the police chief. When the court freed her, crowds greeted the verdict with thunderous applause.xx A successful campaign entailed learning how to fight and how to die, and the most admirable death occurred as a result of a court trial in which one accepted responsibility and used the occasion to indict the regime. Stepaniak, a major figure in the history of Russian terrorism, described the Russian terrorist as “noble, terrible, irresistibly fascinating uniting the two sublimities of human grandeur, the martyr and the hero.”xxi

Dynamite, a recent invention, was the weapon of choice because the assailant was usually killed too, and therefore it was not a weapon a criminal would use.xxiv Terror was violence beyond the moral conventions used to regulate violence, the rules of war and those of punishment. The first distinguishes combatants from noncombatants and the second the guilty from the innocent. Invariably, most onlookers would label acts of terror atrocities or outrages. The rebels described themselves as terrorists, not guerrillas, tracing their lineage to the French Revolution. They sought political targets or those that could affect public attitudes. xxv Terrorism was a strategy not an end. The tactics used depended upon the group’s political objective and on the specific context faced. Judging a context constantly in flux was both an art and a science.

The creators of this strategy took confidence from contemporary events. In this case, and in all subsequent ones, major unexpected political events occurred which dramatized new government vulnerabilities. Hope was excited, and hope is always an indispensable lubricant of rebel activity.xxvi The turn of events that suggested Russian vulnerability was the dazzling effort of the young Czar Alexander II to transform the system virtually overnight. In one stroke of the pen (1861), he freed the serfs (one-third of the population) and promised them funds to buy their land. Three years later he established limited local self-government, “westernized” the judicial system, abolished capital punishment, relaxed censorship powers and control over education. Hopes were aroused but could not be fulfilled quickly enough; as indicated by the fact that the funds the serfs received to buy the lands were insufficient. In the wake of inevitable disappointments, systematic assassination strikes against prominent officials began, culminating in the death of Alexander II himself.

Russian interests in encouraging and training other groups, even those with different political aims, bore fruit quickly. Armenian and Polish nationalist groups emerged in Russia committed to assassination and robbing banks to finance their activities. Then the Balkans exploded, where many groups found the boundaries of states recently torn out of the Ottoman Empire unsatisfactory.xxvii In the West, where Russian Anarchists fled and found refuge in diaspora colonies and among other elements hostile to the Czarist regime, a campaign of Anarchist terror developed that influenced activities in India too. xxviii The efforts did produce some surprising results for groups still struggling in Russia. The Terrorist Brigade in 1905 had its headquarters in Switzerland, launched strikes from Finland, an autonomous part of the Russian Empire, got arms from an Armenian terrorist group Russians helped train, and were offered funds by the Japanese to be laundered through American millionaires!xxix

The high point of international terrorist activity in first wave occurred in the 1890s, sometimes called the “Golden Age of Assassination”, when monarchs, Prime ministers, and presidents were
struck down one after another usually by assassins who moved easily across international borders to assassinate foreign leaders. The most immediately affected governments clamored for international police cooperation and for better border control, a situation President Theodore Roosevelt thought ideal for launching the first international effort to eliminate terrorism. Anarchy is a crime against the whole human race, and all mankind should band together against the Anarchist. His crimes should be made a crime against the law of nations...declared by treaties among all civilized powers. But the consensus lasted three years only. The U.S. refused to send a representative to a St. Petersburg signing ceremony for a German/Russian sponsored protocol to meet these objectives. In a second chapter of this story, the Americans refused to adhere to it even when asked to do so later. They feared that an extensive involvement in European politics might be required and had in any case no federal police force. Italy refused, too, for a very different and revealing concern. If Anarchists were returned to their original countries, Italy’s domestic troubles might be worse than its international ones!

The first great effort to deal with international terrorism failed because the interests of states pulled them in different directions, and the divisions developed new expressions as the century developed. Bulgaria gave Macedonian nationalists sanctuaries and bases to aid operations in the Ottoman Empire. The suspicion that Serbia helped Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s assassin precipitated World War I. An unintended consequence of the four terrible years that followed was a dampened enthusiasm for the strategy of assassination.

THE SECOND WAVE: MOSTLY SUCCESSFUL AND A NEW LANGUAGE

A wave by definition is an international event; oddly, however, the first one was sparked by a domestic political situation. A monumental international event, the Versailles Peace Treaty that concluded World War I, precipitated the second wave. The victors applied the principle of national self-determination to break up the mostly European empires of the defeated states. The non-European portions of those defeated empires, which were deemed not yet ready for independence, became League of Nations “mandates” administered directly by victorious powers until the territories were ready for independence.

Whether the victors fully understood, the implications of their decisions or not, they undermined the legitimacy of their own empires. The IRA achieved limited success in the 1920s, and terrorist groups developed in all empires after World War II except the Soviet Union, which did recognize itself as a colonial power. Terrorist activity was crucial in establishing new states Ireland, Israel, Cyprus, Algeria, etc. As empires dissolved, the wave receded.

Most successes occurred some 25 years after Versailles, and the time lag requires explanation. World War II reinforced and enlarged the implications of Versailles. Once more the victors compelled the defeated to abandon empires, and this time the colonial territories were overseas (Manchuria, Korea, Ethiopia, Libya, etc.) and not made mandates. The victors began liquidating their own empires as well, and in doing so they generally were not responding to terrorist activity, i.e., India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, the Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria, etc., which indicated how firmly committed the Western world had become to the principle of self-determination. The U.S. had become the major Western power and pressed
hardest for eliminating empires. As the Cold War developed, the process was accelerated because the Soviets were always poised to help would-be rebels.xxxiii

The terror campaigns were fought in territories where special political problems made withdrawal a less attractive option. Jews and Arabs in Palestine, for example, had dramatically conflicting versions of what the termination of British rule was supposed to mean. The considerable European population in Algeria did not want Paris to abandon its authority, and in Northern Ireland the majority wanted to remain British. In Cyprus, the Turkish community did not want to be put under Greek rule, the aim of EOKA, and Britain wanted to retain Cyprus as a base for Middle East operations. The problem of conflicting aspirations was reflected in the way the struggles were or were not settled. The terrorists did get the imperial powers to withdraw, but that was not the only purpose of the struggle. Menachem Begin’s Irgun fought to gain the entire Palestine mandate but settled for partition.xxxiv IRA elements have never accepted the fact that Britain will not leave Northern Ireland until the majority of the territory’s population consent. EOKA fought to unify Cyprus with Greece (enosis), but accepted an independent state that EOKA tried to subvert it for the sake of an ever-elusive enosis. Algeria seems to be the chief exception, because the Europeans all fled. But the initial manifesto of the Front de Liberation Nationale Algeria (FLN) proclaimed that it wanted to establish a democratic state and to retain the Europeans; and neither objective was achieved.xxxv

Second wave organizations understood that they needed a new language to describe themselves because the term terrorist had accumulated so many negative connotations that those who identified themselves as terrorists incurred enormous political liabilities. The Israeli group Lehi was the last self-identified terrorist group. Begin, leader of the Irgun (Lehi’s Zionist rival), concentrating on purpose rather than means, described its members as “freedom fighters” struggling against “government terror”.xxxvi So appealing was this self-description that all subsequent terrorist groups followed suit; and because the anti-colonial struggle seemed more legitimate than the purposes served in the first wave the “new” language became attractive to potential political supporters as well. Governments appreciated the political value of “appropriate” language too, and began to describe all violent rebels as terrorists. The media, hoping to avoid being seen as blatantly partisan, corrupted language further. Major American newspapers, for example, often described the same individuals alternatively as terrorists, guerrillas, and soldiers in the same account.xxxvii

The tactics changed also. Because diaspora sources contributed more money bank robberies were less common. The first wave demonstrated that assassinating prominent political figures could be very counterproductive, and few assassinations occurred in the new wave. The Balkans was an exception, an odd place when one considers where World War I started.xxxviii Elsewhere, only Lehi (the British renamed it the Stern Gang) remained committed to a strategy of assassination. Lehi was much less effective, however than its two competitors, which may have been an important lesson for other anti-colonial movements. Martyrdom often linked to assassination seemed less significant as well.

The new strategy was more complicated than the old, because there were more sorts of targets chosen, and it was important to strike them in proper sequence. Eliminate the police a government’s eyes and ears, first through systematic assassinations of officers and/or their
families. The military units replacing them would prove too clumsy to cope without producing counter atrocities that would increase social support for the terrorists. If the process of atrocities and counter-atrocities was well planned, it could work favor those perceived to be weak and without alternatives. xxxix. (By way of contrast, one should note that although Anarchists in the Latin countries of Europe did have support of the working classes by the 1890s, during the Golden Age of Assassination onlookers in were inclined to think that the Anarchists were simply bizarre and unable to live in peace in any society.)

Major energies went into guerrilla-like (hit and run) actions against troops, attacks that still went beyond the rules of war because weapons were concealed and the assailants had no identifying insignia.xl Some groups (i.e. the Irgun) made efforts to give warnings in order to limit civilian casualties. In some cases (i.e., Algeria), terror was one aspect of a more comprehensive rebellion that included extensive guerrilla forces. Second wave terrorists used the four international ingredients in much more productive ways than their predecessors did. Leaders of different national groups still acknowledged the common bonds and heritage of an international revolutionary tradition, but the heroes invoked in the literature of specific groups were overwhelmingly national heroes.xli The underlying assumption seemed to be that if one strengthened ties with foreign terrorists, other international assets would become less useful.

Diaspora groups regularly displayed abilities not seen earlier. 19th century Irish rebels received money, weapons, and volunteers from the Irish-American community, but in the 1920s the exertions of the latter went further and induced the U.S. government to exert significant political influence on Britain to accept an Irish state.xlii Jewish diaspora communities, especially in the U.S., exerted similar leverage as the horror of the Holocaust was finally revealed.

Foreign states with kindred populations were also active. Arab states gave the Algerian FLN crucial political support and those adjacent to Algeria offered sanctuaries from which groups could stage attacks. Greece sponsored the Cypriot uprising against the British and against Cyprus when it became a state. Frightened Turkish Cypriots in turn looked to Turkey for aid. Turkish troops then invaded the island (1974) and are still there.

Outside influences obviously change when the purpose of the terrorist activity and the local context are perceived differently. The different Irish experiences illustrate the point well. The early effort in the 1920s was seen simply as an anti-colonial movement, and the Irish American community had its greatest or most productive impactxliii. The diaspora was less interested in the IRA’s brief campaigns to bring Northern Ireland into the Republic during World War II and in 1950 during the Cold War. Conflicting concerns weakened overseas enthusiasms and influences.

As the second wave progressed, the new fifth ingredient, i.e. supra-national organization, came into play. When Alexander I of Serbia was assassinated in Marseilles (1934), the League of Nations tried to contain international terror by drafting two conventions, including one for an international court (1937). Neither came into effect.

Two League members (Hungary and Italy) apparently encouraged the assassination and blocked the anti-terror efforts.xliv After World War II, the UN inherited the League’s ultimate authority
over the colonial mandates, territories now scenes of extensive terrorist activity. When Britain decided to withdraw from Palestine, the UN was crucial in legitimizing the partition; and subsequently all anti-colonial terrorists sought to interest the UN in their struggles. The new states admitted to the UN were nearly always former colonial territories, and they gave the anti-colonial sentiment in that body more structure, focus, and opportunities. More and more participants in UN debates regularly used Begin’s language to describe anti-colonial terrorists as “freedom fighters.”

THIRD WAVE: EXCESSIVE INTERNATIONALISM?

The major political event stimulating the “New Left wave” was the agonizing Vietnam War. The effectiveness of the Vietcong’s “primitive weapons” against the American Goliath’s modern technology rekindled radical hopes that the contemporary system was vulnerable. Groups developed in the Third World and in the Western heartland itself, where the war stimulated enormous ambivalence among the youth about the value of the existing system. Many Western groups (i.e., American Weather Underground, the West German RAF, the Italian Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army, the French Action Directe,) saw themselves as vanguards for the Third World masses. The Soviet world encouraged the outbreaks, and offered moral support, training, and weapons.

As in the first wave, radicalism and nationalism often were combined, i.e., the Basques, Armenians, Corsicans, Kurds, and Irish. Every first wave nationalist movement failed, but the linkage was renewed because ethnic concerns always have larger constituencies than those with radical aspirations. Although self-determination ultimately obscured the radical programs, and nationalist groups were much more durable than other groups in the third wave, none succeeded and those still struggling are likely to fail. The countries concerned (i.e. Spain, France, UK, and Turkey) simply do not consider themselves as colonial powers now, and the ambivalence necessary for nationalist success is absent.

When the Vietnam War ended (1975), the PLO replaced the Viet Cong as the heroic model. Originating after the extraordinary collapse of three Arab armies in the Six-Day War (1967), its existence and persistence gave credibility to supporters who argued that only terror could remove Israel. Its centrality for other groups was strengthened because it got strong support from Arab states and the Soviet Union, and made training facilities in Lebanon available to the other groups. The first and third waves had some striking resemblances. Women in the second wave had been restricted to the role of messengers and scouts; but now they became leaders and fighters again.

“Theatrical targets,” comparable to those of the first wave, replaced the second wave’s military targets. International hijacking is one example. Terrorists understood that the some foreign landing fields were accessible. Some seven hundred hijackings occurred during the first three decades of the third wave.

Planes were hijacked to secure hostages. There were other ways; however, to generate hostage crises, and the hostage crisis became a wave characteristic. The most memorable was the 1979 kidnapping of former Italian Prime Minister Moro by the Red Brigades. When the government
refused to negotiate, Moro was brutally murdered and his body dumped in the streets. The Sandinistas took Nicaragua’s Congress hostage in 1978; an act so audacious that it sparked the popular insurrection that brought the Somoza regime down a year later. In Columbia (1985) the M-19 tried to duplicate the feat by seizing the Supreme Court, but the government refused to yield and in the struggle nearly a100 people, including 11 justices.

Kidnappings occurred in 73 countries, especially in Italy, Spain, and Latin America. From 1968 to 1982 there were 409 international kidnappings incidents yielding 951 hostages.xlix Initially, hostages gave their captors political leverage, but soon another concern became more dominant. Companies insured their executives, and kidnapping became lucrative. When money was the principal issue kidnappers found that hostage negotiations were easier to consummate on their terms too. Informed observers estimate the practice “earned” $350 million.l

The abandoned practice of assassinating prominent figures was revived. The IRA and its various splinter organizations, for example, assassinated the British ambassador to Ireland (1976), Lord Mountbatten (1979), and attempted to kill Prime Ministers Thatcher (1984) and Major (1991).li The Palestinian Black September assassinated the Jordanian Prime Minister (1971) and attempted to assassinate Jordan’s King Hussein (1974). Black September killed the American Ambassador when it took the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum (1973). ETA killed the Spanish Prime Minister in the same year. First and third wave assassinations had a different logic however. A first wave victim was assassinated because he/she held a public office. New Left wave assassinations more often were “punishments”. Jordan’s Prime Minister and King had forced the PLO out of their country in a savage battle. Similarly, the attempt against the British Prime Minister Thatcher occurred because she was “responsible” for the death of the death of the 9 IRA hunger strikers who refused to treated as ordinary criminals.lii Aldo Moro was assassinated because the Italian government refused to enter hostage negotiations. The German Red Army Faction provided another common pattern. 15% of its strikes involved assassination. Although the RAF did not seek most prominent public figures, it did kill the head of the Berlin Supreme Court and a well-known industrialist.lii For good reason, the abandoned term “international terrorism” was revived. Again the revolutionary ethos created significant bonds between separate national groups; bonds that intensified when first Cuban and then PLO training facilities were made available. The targets chosen reflected international dimensions as well. Some groups conducted more assaults abroad than on their home territories; the PLO, for example, were more active in Europe than on the West Bank, and sometimes more active in Europe than many European groups themselves were! Different national groups cooperated in attacks, i.e. the Munich Olympics massacre (1972), the kidnapping of OPEC ministers (1975) to Uganda (1975) and Somalia (1977).

On their own soil, groups often chose targets with international significance. Strikes on foreign embassies began when the PLO attacked the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum (1973). The Peruvian group Tupac Amaru, partly to gain political advantage over its rival Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path) held 72 hostages in the Japanese Embassy for more than four months (1996-7) until a rescue operation killed every terrorist in the complex.

One people became a favorite target of most groups. One third of the international attacks involved American targets, a pattern reflecting the United States’ new importance. American
targets were visible in Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East, where the U.S. supported most governments under terrorist siege. Despite its pre-eminent status as a victim, Cold War concerns led the U.S. sometimes to ignore its stated distaste for terror. In Nicaragua, Angola, and elsewhere the U.S. supported terrorist activity, an indication of how difficult it was to forgo a purpose deemed worthwhile even when deplorable tactics had to be used.

Third wave organizations discovered that they paid a large price for not being able to negotiate between the conflicting demands imposed by various international elements. The commitment to a revolutionary ethos alienated domestic and foreign liberal elements, particularly during the Cold War. The IRA forfeited significant Irish-American diaspora support during the third wave. Its initial goal during the third wave was a united socialist Ireland and its willingness to accept support from the Libya and the PLO created problems were factors. Most of all, the Cold War had to end before the Irish diaspora and an American government showed sustained interest in the Irish issue again and assisted moves to resolve some conflict.

Involvement with foreign groups made some terrorist organizations neglect domestic constituencies. A leader of the 2nd of June, a German Anarchist body suggests that its obsession with the Palestinian cause induced it to attack a Jewish synagogue on the anniversary of Kristall Nacht, a date often considered the beginning of the Holocaust. Such “stupidity” he says alienated potential German constituencies. When the power of the cooperating terrorist entities was very unequal, the weaker found that its interest did not count. Thus, the German Revolutionary Cells, hijacking partners of the Palestine Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), could not get help from their partners to release German prisoners. “(D)ependent on the will of Wadi Haddad and his group,” whose agenda was very different than theirs after all, the Revolutionary Cells terminated the relationship and soon collapsed.

The PLO, always a loose confederation, often found international ties expensive because they complicated serious existing divisions within the organization. In the 1970s, Abu Iyad, PLO founding member and intelligence chief, wrote that the Palestinian cause was so important in Syrian and Iraqi domestic politics that those states felt it necessary to capture organizations within the PLO to serve their own ends. That made it even more difficult to settle for a limited goal, as the Irgun and EOKA had done earlier. Entanglements with Arab states created problems for both parties. Raids from Egyptian occupied Gaza helped precipitate a disastrous war with Israel (1956), and the fidayeen were prohibited from launching raids from that territory ever again. A Palestinian raid from Syria brought Syria into the Six-Day War, and ever afterwards Syria kept a tight control on those operating from its territories. When a PLO faction hijacked British and American planes to Jordan (1970) in the first effort to target non-Israelis, the Jordanian army devastated the PLO, which then lost its home. Finally, an attempted assassination of an Israeli diplomat in Britain sparked the 1982 invasion of Lebanon forcing the PLO to leave the home that gave it so much significance among foreign terrorist groups. (Ironically, the assassination attempt was organized by Abu Nidal’s renegade faction associated with Iraq, which had made two previous attempts to assassinate the PLO’s leader Arafat!) Afterwards Tunisia (the PLO’s new host) prohibited the PLO from training foreign groups and to a large extent the PLO’s career as an effective terrorist organization seemed to be over. Paradoxically, the Oslo Accords demonstrated that the PLO could achieve more of its objectives when it seemed less dangerous.
To maintain control over their own destiny, states again began to “sponsor” groups (a practice abandoned in the second wave); and once more the sponsors found the practice costly. In the 1980s, Britain severed diplomatic relations with Libya and Syria for sponsoring terrorism on British soil, and France broke with Iran when it refused to let the French interrogate its embassy staff about assassinations of Iranian émigrés. Iraq’s surprising restraint during the 1990 Gulf War highlighted the weakness of state sponsored terror. Iraq did threaten to use terror, a threat that induced Western authorities to predict that terrorists would flood Europe. If terror had materialized, however, it would have made bringing Saddam Hussein to trial for crimes a war aim, and the desire to avoid that result is the most plausible explanation for the Iraqi dictator’s uncharacteristic restraint. The third wave began to ebb in the 1980s. Revolutionary terrorists were defeated in one country after another. Israel’s invasion of Lebanon (1982) eliminated PLO facilities to train terrorist groups, and international counter-terrorist cooperation became increasingly effective.

As in the first wave states cooperated openly and formally in counter terror efforts. The U.S. with British aid bombed Libya (1986) its role as a state sponsor, and the European Community imposed an arms embargo. The international cooperation of national police forces sought at (1904) began to materialize as Trevi was established in the mid 1970s was joined and Europol in 1994. Differences between states remained; even close allies could not always cooperate. France refused to extradite PLO, Red Brigade, and ETA suspects to West Germany, Italy, and Spain respectively. Italy spurned American requests to extradite a Palestinian suspect in the seizure of the Achille Lauro cruise ship (1984), and Italy refused to extradite a Kurd (1988) because Italian law forbids capital punishment whereas Turkish law does not. The U.S. has refused to extradite some IRA suspects. Events of this sort will not stop until that improbable day when the laws and interests of separate states are identical.

The UN’s role changed dramatically. Now “new states”, former colonial territories, found terrorism threatened their interests and they particularly shunned nationalist movements. Major UN conventions from 1970 through 1999 made hijacking, hostage taking, attacks on senior government officials, “terrorist bombing” of a foreign states facilities, and financing of international activities crimes. A change of language is some indication of the changed attitude. “Freedom Fighter” was no longer a popular term in UN debates, and the term terrorism actually was used for the title of a document. I.e., “International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing” 1997. Evidence that Libya’s agents were involved in the Pan Am Lockerbie crash produced a unanimous Security Council decision obliging Libya to extradite the suspects (1988), and a decade later when collective sanctions had their full effects Libya complied. In 2003 Libya paid compensation to the families of victims.

Yet very serious ambiguities and conflicts within the UN remained, reflecting that ever-present fact that terror serves different ends and some of those ends are prized. Ironically, the most important concerned the third wave’s major organization the PLO. It received an official UN status and was recognized as a state by more than a hundred states. The explicit reason was that it was entitled to receive a share of the Palestine Mandate.

THE FOURTH WAVE: HOW UNIQUE AND HOW LONG?
As its predecessor began to ebb, the “religious wave” gathered force. Religious elements have always been important in modern terror because religious and ethnic identities often overlap. The Armenian, Macedonian, Irish, Cypriot, French Canadian, Israeli, and Palestinian struggles illustrate the point. In these cases, the aim however, was to create secular states.

Today, religion has a vastly different significance, supplying justifications and organizing principles for a state. The religious wave has produced an occasional secular group, a reaction to excessive religious zeal. Buddhists in Sri Lanka tried to transform the country, and a terrorist response among the largely Hindu Tamils tried to transform the country, and a terrorist response among the largely Hindu Tamils aims at creating a separate secular state.

Islam is at the heart of the wave. Islamic groups have conducted the most significant deadly and profoundly international attacks. Equally significant, the political events providing the hope for the fourth wave originated in Islam, and the successes achieved apparently influenced religious terror groups elsewhere. Although there is no direct evidence for the last connection, the chronology is suggestive. After Islam erupted, Sikhs sought a religious state in the Punjab. Jewish terrorists attempted to blow up Islam’s most sacred shrine in Jerusalem, and waged an assassination campaign against Palestinian mayors. One Jew murdered twenty-nine Muslim worshippers in Abraham’s tomb (Hebron, 1994), and another assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin (1995). Aum Shinrikyo, a group that combined Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian themes, released nerve gas on the Tokyo subway (1995) killing 12 and injuring 3000, creating a worldwide anxiety that various groups would soon use chemo-bio weapons too. Christian terrorism, based on racist interpretations of the Bible, emerged in the amorphous American “Christian Identity” movement. In true medieval millenarian fashion, armed rural communes composed of families withdrew from the state to wait for the Second Coming and the great racial war. Although some observers have associated “Identity” with the Oklahoma City bombing (1995), the Christian level of violence has still been minimal—so far.

Three events in the Islamic world provided the hope or dramatic political turning point that was vital to launch the fourth wave. 1979 was the significant date. In that year the Iranian Revolution occurred, a new Islamic century began, and the Soviets made an unprovoked invasion of Afghanistan.

Iranian street demonstrations disintegrated the Shah’s secular state. The event also was clear evidence to believers that religion now had more political appeal than did the prevailing third wave ethos, because Iranian Marxists could only muster meager support against the Shah. “There are no frontiers in Islam” Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed, and “his” revolution reshaped relationships among all Muslims as well as between Islam and the rest of the world. Most immediately, the Iranians inspired and assisted Shiite terror movements outside of Iran, i.e., Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon. In Lebanon Shiites (influenced by the self-martyrdom tactic of the medieval Assassins) introduced suicide bombing with surprising results, ousting American and other foreign troops who had entered the country on a peace mission after the 1982 Israeli invasion.

The monumental Iranian revolution was unexpected, but some Muslims had always believed that the year would be very significant because a new Islamic century began then. One venerable
Islamic tradition is that a redeemer would come when a new century started, an expectation that had regularly sparked uprisings at the turn of Muslim centuries earlier. Muslims stormed the Grand Mosque in Mecca in the first minutes of the new century in 1979, and 10,000 casualties resulted. Whatever the specific local causes, it is striking that so many examples of Sunni terrorism appeared at the same time in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The Soviet invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Resistance, strengthened by volunteers from all over the Sunni world subsidized by U.S aid, forced the Soviets out by 1989—a crucial step in the stunning and unimaginable disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. Religion had eliminated a secular super-power, an astonishing event with important consequences for terrorist activity. The third wave received a decisive blow. Lands with large Muslim population formerly part of the Soviet Union, (i.e., Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, etc.) became important new fields for Islamic rebels. Conflict in Bosnia attracted Islamic forces from the outside. Kashmir again became a critical issue and the death toll since 1990 has been more than 50,000. Trained and confident Afghan veterans were major participants in both the new and ongoing conflicts.

“Suicide bombing”, reminiscent of Anarchist bomb-throwing efforts, was the most deadly tactical innovation. Despite the conventional wisdom that only a vision of rewards in Paradise could inspire such acts, the secular Tamil Tigers were so impressed by the achievement in Lebanon that they used the tactic in Sri Lanka to give their movement new life. From 1983 to 2000 they used “suicide bombers” more than all Islamic groups put together, using women often, a very unusual event in the fourth wave. Partly to enhance their political leverage at home, Palestinian religious elements began to use “suicide bombing”, compelling secular PLO elements to emulate them. The fourth wave has displayed other distinctive international features. The number of terrorist groups declined dramatically. About 200 were active in the 80s but in the next decade the number fell to 40. The trend appears to be related to the sizes of the primary audiences (nation vs. religion). A major religious community such as Islam is much larger than any national group. Different cultural traditions also may be relevant. The huge number of secular terrorist groups came largely from Christian countries; and the Christian tradition always generates many more religious divisions than the Islamic tradition has.

Islamic groups are more durable than their third wave predecessors; the major groups in Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria have persisted for some two decades and are still functioning. These groups are large organizations and Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda was the largest, containing 5,000 members perhaps with cells operating in 72 countries. Larger terrorist groups earlier usually have nationalist aims- with a few hundred active members and a few thousand available for recruitment. The PLO was a special case at least in Lebanon where it had around 25,000 members and was trying to transform itself into a regular army. Likewise, most al-Qaeda recruits served with the Taliban in the Afghan civil war.

The American role changed too. Iran called America the “Great Satan.” Al Qaeda regarded America as its chief antagonist immediately after the Soviet Union was defeated, a fact not widely appreciated until 9/11. From the beginning, Islamic religious groups sought to destroy their American targets usually military or civilian installations, an unknown pattern in the third wave. The aim was U.S. military withdrawal. U.S. troops were driven out of Lebanon and forced to abandon a humanitarian mission in Somalia. Attacks on military posts in Yemen and Saudi
Arabia occurred. The U.S.S. Cole (2000) experienced the first terrorist strike against a military vessel ever. The attacks on the military in the Arabian Peninsula and Africa drew military responses and the Americans did not withdraw. After the strikes against American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (1998) inflicted heavy casualties, futile cruise missile attacks were made against Al Qaeda targets, the first time missiles were used against a group rather than a state. In Peter Bergen’s words, “The attacks had a major unintended consequence: they turned Bin Laden from a marginal figure in the Muslim world to a global celebrity.”

Al Qaeda was responsible for attacks in Arabian Peninsula, Africa and the American homeland. Its initial object was to force evacuation of military bases in Saudi Arabia, the land containing Islam’s two holiest sites. The Prophet Muhammad had said that only one religion should be in the land, and Saudi Arabia became a land where Christians and Jews could reside only for temporary periods. Al Qaeda’s aim resonates in the Sunni world and is reflected in its unique recruiting pattern. Most volunteers come from Arab states, especially Egypt Saudi Arabia and Algeria, and the Afghan training camps received Sunnis from at least sixty countries Muslim and non-Muslim. Every previous terrorist organization, including Islamic groups, drew its recruits from a single national base. The contrast between PLO and al-Qaeda training facilities reflects this fact; the former trained units from other organizations and the latter received individuals only.

Beyond the evacuation of bases in Islam’s Holy Land, Al-Qaeda later developed another objective a single Islamic state under the Sharia. He gave vigorous support to active Islamic groups in various states of the Sunni world, states that many Muslims understand as residues of collapsed colonial influence. The U.S. refused to leave Saudi Arabia, and helped the states attacked. Could 9/11 be understood as a desperate attempt to rejuvenate a failing cause, by triggering indiscriminate reactions? The response to 9/11 was as unprecedented as the attack itself was. Under UN auspices, more than 100 states (including Iran) joined the attack on Afghanistan in various ways. Still, no one involved expected the intervention to be so quick and decisive. Afghanistan had always been difficult for invaders. Moreover, terrorist history demonstrates that even when anti-terrorist forces were very familiar with territories containing terrorists (this time they were not) entrenched terrorists had considerable staying power, i.e., Cyprus, Algeria, Northern Ireland, and Sri Lanka.

Why did al-Qaeda collapse so quickly in Afghanistan? There are many reasons. It violated a cardinal rule for terrorist organizations, which is to remain underground always. Al Qaeda stayed visible to operate its extensive training operations, and as the Israelis demonstrated in ousting the PLO from Lebanon, visible groups are vulnerable ones. Also Al Qaeda and the PLO were foreign elements in lands uncomfortable with their presence. Moreover, al Qaeda and the PLO were foreign elements in lands that resisted their presence. Finally al-Qaeda id not plan for an invasion possibility. The reason is not clear, but there is evidence that its contempt for previous American reactions convinced it that the “paper tiger” would avoid difficult targets and not go to Afghanistan.

The PLO regrouped in Tunisia, on condition that it would abandon its extensive training mission. Could al Qaeda could accept such limits; and if it did would any state risk playing Tunisia’s
role? Pakistan’s revolving door policy suggests a much more likely reaction. Once al Qaeda’s principal supporter, Pakistan switched under U.S. pressure to give the Coalition indispensable aid.

As of this writing, the world does not know what happened to al-Qaeda’s leadership, but even if the portion left can be re-assembled, how can the organization function without a protected sanctuary? Al Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s likely successor, warned his comrades before the Afghan training grounds were lost that “the victory…against the international alliance will not be accomplished without acquiring a…base in the heart of the Islamic world,” a point emphasized by Peter Bergen’s admirable study.

The disruption of al Qaeda in Afghanistan has altered the organization’s previous routine. Typically sleeper cells remained inactive until the moment to strike materialized, a moment normally designated by the senior leadership. Operations were planned from above and then and then rehearsed several times back in Afghanistan. The process both increased the probability of success against difficult or “hard” targets and lengthened the time necessary between strikes. A precondition was having sleeper cells inactive until the moment to strike materialized. It was an unusual pattern in terrorist history. Normally, cells are active and, therefore, need more autonomy so that police penetration in one cell does not go beyond that unit. “Normal” cells have more freedom to strike and they generally do so more quickly and frequently. But the numbers and resources available to a cell constantly in motion limit it to softer or less protected targets. If the supervision from the top can no longer be a feature of al Qaeda, the striking patterns will necessarily become more “normal”. Since the Afghan rout, strikes have been against “softer” or largely unprotected civilian targets. As the destruction of tourist sites (i.e. the ancient synagogue in Tunisia and the resort club in Indonesia 2002) suggests, however, the organization displays its trademark by maximizing casualties.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Unlike crime or poverty, international terrorism is a recent phenomenon. Its continuing presence for 125 years, however, means that it is rooted in important features of our world. We discussed the relevance of technology and doctrine. The latter reflects a modern inclination to rationalize activity or make it efficient, which Max Weber declared a distinctive feature of modern life. A third and only briefly noted factor is the spread of democratic ideas, which shapes terrorist activity in different ways and suggested by the fact that nationalism or separatism is the most frequently espoused cause. To explain that, one must remember that the principle democracy is based on is a conception of “the people” principle that cannot be made permanently clear, one produced by the French Revolution which also first conceptualized the idea and vocabulary of terror as well.

The failure of a democratic reform program inspired the first wave, and the main theme of second was national self-determination. A dominant, however confused, third wave theme was that existing systems were not truly democratic. The spirit of the fourth wave appears explicitly anti-democratic, because the democratic idea is inconceivable without a significant measure of secularism.
For many reasons, terrorist organizations often have short lives; sometimes their future is determined by devastating tactical mistakes. A decision to become visible is rare in the history of terror, and the quick success of the Coalition’s Afghan military campaign shows us why. If Al Qaeda successfully reconstructs itself, it may discover that it must become an “ordinary” terrorist group living underground among a friendly local population. That suggests, but alas does not demonstrate, that its strikes will become more “ordinary” too.

No matter what happens to Al Qaeda, this wave will continue but how long will it last? The life cycle of its predecessors may mislead us. Each was inspired by a secular cause, and a striking characteristic of religious communities is how durable some are. Thus, the fourth wave may last longer than its predecessors did, but the course of the Iranian revolution suggests something else. If history repeats itself, the fourth wave will be over in two decades. But, alas, history also demonstrates that the world of politics always throws up large issues to stimulate terrorists who regularly invent new ways to deal with them. What makes the pattern so interesting and frightening is that the issues emerge unexpectedly, or at least no one has been able to anticipate their tragic course. The Coalition assembled after 9/11 was extraordinary for several reasons. 9/11 was not only an American catastrophe, but the World Trade Center housed numerous large foreign groups, and there were many foreign casualties. The UN involvement climaxed a transformation; it is hard to see it as the same organization that regularly referred to terrorists as freedom fighters 40 years ago.

The only other Coalition against terrorism was initiated a century ago. It aimed to make waves impossible by disrupting vital communication and migration conditions. Much less was expected from its participants, but it still fell apart in a decade (1914). Will ours last longer? 9/11 will not be forgotten easily, and our effort is focused on an organization, a much easier focus to sustain. If al Qaeda collapses will its special vision survive? Can such an extraordinary organization be reproduced easily?

When the present campaign against al-Qaeda and the small groups in Asia loosely associated with it concludes, what happens next? No organization has been identified as the next target, and until that happens one suspects that the perennial inclination for different states to distinguish groups according to the ends sought rather than the means used may reappear. Kashmir and Palestine are the two most important active scenes for terrorist activity now. In Kashmir, Islamic insurgents are seriously dividing two important members of the Coalition. India considers them terrorists, but Pakistan does not. War between those states, both possessing nuclear weapons, will push the Coalition’s war against terror aside. Successful outside mediation may produce a similar result, because that would require some acceptance of the insurgents’ legitimacy. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a similar meaning; so many important states understand the issue of terror there differently.

Islam fuels terrorist activity in Kashmir, but the issue is a local one as it is in Palestine where religious elements are less significant. To what extent are other organizations in the 4th wave local too? How deeply can the Coalition afford to get involved in situations where it will be serving the interests of local governments? Our experience supporting governments dealing with “local” terrorists has not always served our interests well especially in the Islamic world.
When the war against terror began, governments aiding terrorists were warned that they would share the fate of those they helped. In the Afghanistan context, that meant one thing. But the warning now seems to mean something very different, and is much more troubling. Initially, an “evil axis” was identified of governments that “might” aid terrorists and should therefore be struck before “their” terrorists struck us. Those governments (North Korea, Iran, and Iraq) have weapons of mass destruction, weapons we believe terrorists want. Each aided terrorists earlier, and more recently Iraq and Iran aided Palestinian terrorists. Iraq is the focus now, but the argument for attacking it because it might help terrorists has convinced few allies and potential supporters; and if an attack becomes the second phase of the campaign, will the Coalition survive? The efforts of Aum Shinrikyo to use weapons of mass destruction has made American officials feel that the most important lesson of this wave is that those weapons will be used by terrorists against us.lxxxiii 9/11 intensified this anxiety even though that catastrophe was produced by “suicide-bombers” armed with box cutters, and the history of terrorism demonstrates that cheap, easy to produce, and simple to use weapons have always been the most attractive.

The fourth wave’s most distinctive weapon is the “suicide bomber”. The victory in Lebanon was impressive, and the tool that made it possible has been enormously destructive in Sri Lanka and Israel as well. Driving foreign troops out of a country, however, is one thing, compelling a people to give a portion of its own country (Sri Lanka) or leave its own land (Israel) and the supporters of the “suicide bombers” in both cases seem to be suffering much more than their enemies are.

How does 9/11 effect our understanding about foreign threats, a serious question, which needs more discussion than it has received? Nechaev stressed that the fear and rage rebel terror produced undermined a society’s essential moral conventions or ways of thinking. He was thinking of the domestic context, and indeed the history of terror shows that domestic responses are very often indiscriminate and self-destructive.lxxxiv Can the same theme be observed on the international scene?

The recent invasion of Iraq suggests that Nechaev’s observation is apt for international politics too. The justifications were that Iraq might give terrorists weapons of most destruction and/or use them itself against the U.S., considerations applicable to a variety of states as the “new “language ‘axis of evil’ suggests. The deterrence doctrine, which served us well for fifty years, was scrapped. Preemption was deemed to fit the new age better. Deterrence worked because states knew that they were visible and would be destroyed if they used the dreaded weapons. Underground terrorist groups do not have this vulnerability, which is why preemption has always been an import part of police strategy since the first wave. Deterrence is linked to actions, while preemption is more suitable when assessing intentions are the crucial issue, a task shrouded in grave ambiguities. Bus is there any reason to think the crucial distinction between states and terrorist groups has disappeared, and that we should put war and peace decisions largely in the hands of very imperfect intelligence agencies?

The significance of the invasion of Iraq for the war against terrorism is still unclear. The Coalition’s cohesion has been weakened and the flagging fortunes of Islamic group could be
revived. Both possibilities are more likely if preemption is employed against another state and/or if the Iraq victory is understood ultimately as an occupation.

NOTES

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS BOOK

The Four Waves of Modern Terror: A Generational Theory

The volume has two purposes. One is to provide a short history of modern rebel terror from its Russian origins in 1879, a history largely ignored. Schmidt and Jongman’s Political Terrorism (1988), the monumental study of the academic literature does not even list a history. The two studies closest to filling that gap are A. Parry, Terrorism: From Robespierre to Arafat (1976) and W. Laqueur, Terrorism (1977). Yet each author denies he has produced a history. Perry describes his work as a collection of “selected episodes” in chronological order and includes both state and rebel experiences. Anticolonial materials are ignored perhaps because he emphasizes the crucial significance of the terrorists’ “aberrant mental traits,” hardly an appropriate description for people like Michael Collins and Menachem Begin who became respected political leaders. Laqueur discusses doctrinal developments, recruitment patterns, literary and academic interpretations. But the waxing and waning of terrorist activity over time is not a concern. He refers to “terrorist waves” occasionally, but does not convert the metaphor into an analytic term.1

My second purpose, as the title of this proposal indicates, is to explain the “wave phenomena” and show that it is the crucial distinguishing feature of modern terror conspicuously absent in earlier forms. A wave of terror is a cycle of activity in a given time period, a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases. The pattern is then repeated again and again. A crucial feature of the wave is that it has an international character for similar activities occur in a number of countries, activities driven by a common predominant purpose or energy that shapes both the characteristics and mutual relationships of participating groups. As their respective names suggest, the form of the energy varies in each wave. The first three waves are the “Anarchist”, “Anti-Colonial” and “New Left”. Each lasted a generation or some 40 years. In 1979 a fourth (“Religious”) wave began. Will its cycle be different from those driven by secular fuels?

1 The book will not dwell on other academic accounts; it will use them only to illustrate relevant points.

Pre-modern secular terror is not characterized by waves; the unit of analysis is the individual group. The American Sons of Liberty organized mobs to burn barns and “tar-and-feather” suspected Loyalists, driving many to Canada. KKK terror ended post Civil War Reconstruction efforts. As successful as the American groups were, their influence was specific to a single time and place; they had neither emulators nor successors. The initial Russian experience, on the other hand, stimulated groups in Western Europe, the Balkans and Asia, and then that wave shaped the three that followed. Ironically, in dramatic contrast to their two American predecessors, the Russians failed to achieve their own national objectives, a failure very conspicuous too in the three waves that followed.
Waves are composed of organizations, but the two have different life rhythms. On the odd occasion, an organization survives the wave that initially contained it. The IRA has operated over 80 years, and the PLO (a third wave creation) now exists in the fourth. Predictably, both organizations developed new features, common to groups in the next wave. But the normal pattern is that organizations disappear before the initial wave associated with them does. “New Left” organizations are particularly striking in this respect; they generally lasted two years only. But sufficient energy remained in the wave to create a generation of successor and/or new groups. When its energy cannot inspire new organizations, the wave disappears. Resistance, political concessions, and changes in the perceptions of generations are critical in explaining how waves recede. Three critical ingredients explain the timing of the first wave—technology, doctrine, and hope.

1. During the last quarter of the 19th century, a massive transformation in communication and transportation patterns occurred as the telegraph, daily mass newspapers, and railroads developed. Events in one country could be known elsewhere in a day. Russian Anarchists traveled extensively helping to inspire sympathies and groups elsewhere, often spending more time abroad than at home. Mass transportation enabled mass migrations creating diaspora communities that became political elements in both their “new” and “old” countries.

2. Russian writers first explained the logic of terror. They identified vulnerabilities and appropriate strategic principles creating a “tradition” of terror, one in which their successors felt free to learn from anyone, a “tradition” without binding precedents, and one that caricatures the larger society’s tendency to subject all activities to standards of utility and efficiency.

3. Hope, the indispensable ingredient of terrorist activity, was excited by major dramatic and unanticipated political events. The dazzling massive reform efforts of Czar Alexander II offered “convincing evidence” that the existing system was not supported. In subsequent waves technology continued to shrink time and space and the tradition simultaneously expanded the range of purposes and targets. A different major political watershed precipitated each wave. The “Anti-Colonial” wave was inspired by the international recognition of a new principle of legitimacy at Versailles, and the “New Left” wave was a by-product of the Vietnam War, which showed how technological giants could be defeated. The Iranian Revolution demonstrated that religion was more useful than New Left sentiments in rallying enthusiastic constituencies.

The book will contain six chapters. The first discusses “pre-modern” terror to make the differences between earlier and modern forms clearer especially with respect to the absence of waves. Ancient sacred terror, the first subject, is a distinctive product of four religious traditions, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu. Each religion produces a particular terrorist type, one that exaggerates or distorts crucial themes or expectations within the larger tradition. Terrorists do no borrow from other religions or try continuously to make rebel activity more “rational”, a crucial reason for the absence of waves. (The discussions are based on my published articles, i.e. “Fear and Trembling,” “Messianic Sanctions” etc.) The second subject discussed will be “pre-modern” secular terror i.e., Sons of Liberty and KKK.
The next four extensive chapters (40 to 50 pp. each) focus on individual waves. Beyond the three critical ingredients enumerated above, domestic and international contexts, organizational and tactical features will be discussed. Special attention will be given to the climaxes of each wave (they occur at different times) and to the factors shaping how waves recede. (International dimensions have been discussed in an article to be published this spring, “The Four Waves of Modern Terror”. Each chapter treats all themes, but the space limitations imposed on this proposal, require me to concentrate on political events and wave rhythms here.

Chapter II: Russian Anarchists inspired and sometimes trained foreign groups, even when groups with nationalist aims, i.e., Armenia, Macedonia, Poland, etc. The principal tactic was assassination; and in the “Golden Age of Assassination” during the 1890s, monarchs, prime ministers and presidents were assassinated one after another often by foreigners crossing international borders. Governments clamored for international police cooperation and better border control, an opportunity President Theodore Roosevelt seized after his predecessor was assassinated in 1901 to launch the first international effort to eliminate terrorism. It lasted three years before collapsing under the conflicting pressures of different states. Most affected countries created plainclothes police forces, which are still with us, i.e., the FBI and the British Special Branch. The U.S. made serious revisions of its immigration policy. Millions of Jews fled Russia and the Ottoman massacres of Armenians began as the two governments blamed the two minorities for the terror and encouraged civilian groups to take the law into their own hands. The last feature is a recurring one in all waves, but not in all states. Chapter III: The victors at Versailles applied the principle of national selfdetermination to break up the defeated empires, and willy-nilly they undermined their own as well. The IRA, the first “successful” group ever (1922), set an important precedent, but the reinforcement of the principle of self-determination after World War II when the victors began dissolving their own empires was more significant. In unusual cases, apprehensions about serious international complications induced a colonial power to hold on, and the rebels used terror. The wave produced the most “successes”. But considering the objective sought, those “successes” were always incomplete, i.e., Ireland, Israel, Cyprus and Algeria.

One lesson of the first wave was that assassinating prominent individuals was extremely costly, and in the second wave a more complicated strategy was invented that contained more targets to be struck, all in proper sequence. Eliminate the police first, a government’s eyes and ears, through systematic assassinations of officers and/or their families. Military replacements would prove too clumsy to cope with the uprising without producing counter atrocities, which increased the terrorists’ social support. A well executed process of atrocities and counter-atrocities favored those perceived to be weak or without alternatives, a better public image of terrorists than the first wave could create. Terrorists stopped calling themselves terrorists; they were now “freedom fighters”, emphasizing ends and obscuring means. Major energies went into “guerrillalike” actions against troops, attacks beyond the rules of war because weapons and identities were concealed. Some groups, such as the Irgun in Israel, usually gave warnings to limit civilian casualties. In other cases, (the FLN in Algeria) terror was one aspect of a more comprehensive rebellion that included extensive guerrilla forces.
Chapter IV: The agonizing Vietnam War stimulated hopes that audacity and conviction could overwhelm advantages modern technology provided, and third wave groups often resembled those in the first. Most first wave organizations either lacked or forfeited their constituencies quickly, a pattern exhibited in the third wave too, i.e. Weather Underground, German Red Army Faction and Action Directe, a striking pattern in the first wave. First wave nationalist groups had left-wing aspirations, and so did most in the third too, i.e. Basques, Irish, Corsicans, and Kurds. Although nationalists were the most durable third wave groups, they struggled against states that did not see themselves as colonial realms, and therefore lacked the ambivalence rebels need to succeed. By limiting their purpose to independence alone, second wave groups enhanced their possibilities for success.

Second wave groups did not cooperate with each other. First and third wave elements did, and in the new wave, one people-the Americans- became the principal international target though foreign groups did not attack the American homeland. The Soviets provided inspiration and help, and until 1982 the PLO in Lebanon provided extensive training facilities for other groups. But the international ties weakened the more necessary domestic ones. Third wave tactics, like those of the first, focused on spectacular acts. But this time they involved hijackings, hostage taking, etc activities that induced the significant international police cooperation that eluded governments in the first wave. Though favorably disposed to second wave groups, the UN became increasingly hostile to those in the third wave. The PLO, which appealed to deeply embedded anti-colonial sentiments, was the principal exception. The wave receded dramatically when the unexpected Iranian Revolution in 1979 revealed that religion had become a more viable political force.

Chapter V: Earlier a wave appeared only after its predecessor disappeared, but the fourth wave emerged long before the third wave completed its cycle. The greater effectiveness of religion was first evident in the competitions with the New Left to overthrow the Shah, Muslim groups then succeeded in Lebanon after the PLO was driven out, and subsequently defeated a major third wave supporter, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Religious groups, though most profound in Islam, developed elsewhere among Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and in the curious Aum Shinkyo organization that mixed themes from different religious traditions.

Religion and ethnicity are so often linked that all waves had religious elements, but the object now was a religious not a secular state. Still the attitude towards strategy and tactics was not new. Al Qaeda’s *Training Manual* reminds one of Nechaev’s *Revolutionary Catechism*, the founding text of modern terror, and the third wave’s search for spectacular targets was replaced by a desire to inflict significant casualties, a result which helped revive Vietnam anxieties among Americans. The most distinctive fourth wave tactic was “suicide bombing”. The weapons were simple, inexpensive, easy to get and easy to conceal, weapons which gave one great advantages in choosing a time and place for an attack. Beyond that, the assailant will not be left alive interrogate and a martyr will be created. Used mostly in the Islamic world, the weapon has been particularly effective against military targets first in Lebanon forcing U.S troops to withdraw after the first attack. More than a decade later after numerous attacks, Israeli troops withdrew. Strikes on American forces in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait followed. The 9/11 attacks, the most devastating in terrorist history, demonstrated that difficult civilian targets could be hit
simultaneously. The new tactic increases propensities to indiscriminate attacks when assailants desire that effect.

Earlier groups drew recruits from a national or ethnic base; but religion can offer much larger constituencies, and some Islamic groups recruit from an extraordinarily wide geographic range. The number of groups declined dramatically from the previous wave’s record number, yet at the same time Islam has produced the largest groups ever known. *Al Qaeda*’s unique organizational frame (a network of “sleeper cells” in numerous countries directed by a central apparatus far away) reflected the possibilities of the new constituency pattern. The Afghan facilities trained largely unaffiliated individuals, and offered a striking contrast to those of the PLO in Lebanon, which trained units from foreign groups. Third wave groups cooperated easily even when their purposes were different, but fourth wave groups limited themselves to those within the same religious tradition.

The response to 9/11 was as unique as the attack. The UN established an extraordinary precedent, authority to conquer a state harboring terrorists. A new view of the international world, where preemption replaces containment, may be created, or so the invasion of Iraq suggests. That view is fueled by the assumptions that states will give terrorists weapons of mass destruction (WMD), that terrorists can use them and will want to do so. Perhaps, but the irony is that the 9/11 “success” was a victory for “simple” weapons. In the light of previous wave experiences, serious restrictions on civil liberties (i.e., the Patriot Acts) could be expected, but the refusal to treat captured terrorists either as criminals or prisoners of war seems unusual and especially counterproductive. The chapter will reflect on three concluding themes. By extending a previous publication, (“Terrorism and Weapons of the Apocalypse”) I will pursue the wmd issue, ask whether the Iraqi attack is likely to intensify or dilute the energy of the current wave, and try to put the civil liberties issue in some historical perspective.

Beyond the expected summary, a brief Chapter VI will discuss why academic preoccupations with organizations and current events obscure the uniqueness and persistence of modern terror.

1 An earlier version of this essay was published in *Current History*. Dec 2001, 419-25. Another version was delivered at the annual John Barlow Lecture, University of Indiana, Indianapolis. I am indebted to Jim Ludes, Lindsay Clutterbuck, Laura Donohue, Clark McCauley, Barbara Rapoport, and Sara Grdan for useful comments, even those I did not take. The problems in the essay are my responsibility.

2 On September 20, the President told Congress that “any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded as a hostile regime. (T)he war would not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.” (My emphasis).


ii No good history of terrorism exists. Schmid and Jongman’s monumental study of the terrorism literature does not even list a history of the subject! See *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to*
iii The unusual character of terrorist activity made an enormous impact on national life in many countries beginning in the latter part of the 19th century. Every state affected in the first wave radically transformed its police organizations, as tools to penetrate underground groups. The Russian Okhrana, the British Special Branch, and the FBI are conspicuous examples. The new organizational form remains a permanent, perhaps indispensable, feature of modern life. Terrorist tactics, _inter alia_, aim at producing rage and frustration, often driving governments to respond in unanticipated, extraordinary, illegal, socially destructive ways and shameful ways. Because a significant Jewish element, for example, was present in the several Russian terrorist movements, the Okhrana organized pogroms to intimidate Russian Jews, compelling many to flee to the West and to the Holy Land. Okhrana fabricated _The Protocols of Zion_, a book that helped stimulate a virulent anti-Semitism that went well beyond Russia. The influence of that fabrication continued for decades, and still influences Christian and Islamic terrorist movements today. Democratic states “over-reacted” too. President Theodore Roosevelt (1901) proposed sending all Anarchists back to Europe. Congress was more restrained and simply barred foreign anarchists from entering the country. More than a decade later President Wilson’s Attorney-General Palmer implemented a proposal similar to Roosevelt’s and rounded up all Anarchists to ship them back “home”, regardless of whether they had committed crimes. That event produced the 1920 Wall Street Bombing, which in turn became the justification for an immigration quota law making it much more difficult for persons from Southern and Eastern European states (the original home of most Anarchists) to immigrate for decades, a law Adolph Hitler praised highly.

It is still too early to know what the domestic consequences of 9/11 will be. The very first reactions suggested that we had learned from past mistakes. The federal government made special efforts to show that we were not at war with Islam, and it curbed the first expressions of vigilante passions. The significance of subsequent measures seems more problematic. Our first experience with terror led us to create important new policing arrangements. Congress established a Department of Homeland Security with 170,000 employees, clearly the largest change in security policy in our history. No one knows what that seismic change means. One casualty could be the Posse Comitatus law, which prohibits the military forces from administering civil affairs, a law that ironically was passed because we were unhappy with military responses to KKK terrorist activity after the Civil War! A policy of secret detentions, a common reaction to serious terrorist activities in many countries has been implemented. Extensive revisions of immigration regulations are being instituted. Prisoners taken in Afghanistan are not being prosecuted under the criminal law, reversing a long-standing policy in virtually all states including our own. Previous experiences suggest that it will take time for the changes to have their effect because so much depends upon the scope, frequency, and duration of future terrorist activity.


v The activities of the Thugs and Assassins had international dimensions but were confined to specific regions; more important there were no comparable groups operating at the same time in
this region or elsewhere. See my “Fear and Trembling” Terror in Three Religious Tradition” American Political Science Review (78:3) 1984 658-77.

vi The lineage of rebel terror is very ancient going back at least to the first century. Hinduism, Judaism and Islam produce the Thugs, Zealots, and Assassins respectively; names still used to designate terrorist. Religion determined every purpose and each tactic of this ancient form. See Rapoport “Fear and Trembling” (note 7).

vii By far most published academic articles on terrorism deal with organizations and counter-terrorism. Judged by my experience as an editor of TPV, the proportions are increased further in this direction if we consider the articles submitted for publication too.

viii See note 2

ix The rebels fought in uniform and against soldiers. George Barnard Shaw said “My own view is that the men who were shot in cold blood…after their capture were prisoners of war “. Prime Minister Asquith said that by Britain’s own standards, the rebel’s were honorable, that “they conducted themselves with great humanity…fought very bravely and did not resort to outrage” The Manchester Guardian declared that the executions were “atrocities”. See my Introduction to Part III of Morality of Terrorism Eds. with Yonah Alexander 2nd. Ed. (New York: Columbia University. Press) 219-27.

x Guerrillas carry weapons openly and wear an identifying emblem, circumstances that oblige a state to treat them as soldiers.

xi Any one who has tried to explain the intensity of the 60s experience to contemporary students knows how difficult it is to transmit a generation’s experience.


xiii See Rapoport “Fear and trembling… (Note 7).

xiv It took time for this attitude to develop in Islam. If one compares Bin Laden’s work with Faraj’s Neglected Duty a work primarily written at the beginning of the fourth wave to justify the assassination of Egyptian President Sadat (1981) the two authors seem to be in two different worlds. Faraj cites NO experience outside the Islamic tradition, and his most recent historical reference is to Napoleon’s invasion of Europe! See my “Sacred Terror: A Case from Contemporary Islam” in Walter Reich ed. Origins of Terrorism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1990) pp.103-130. I am grateful to Jerry Post for sharing his copy of the Bin Laden treatise. An edited version is on the Department of Justice website, Http:www.U.S.DaJgov/e/training manuals.htm
Bin Laden’s dedication reads

“Pledge, O Sister
To the sister believer whose clothes the criminals have stripped off:
To the sister believer whose hair the oppressors have shaved.
To the sister believer whose body has been abused by the human dogs.

...Covenant, O Sister...to make their women widows and their children orphans....”.

I ignore right-wing groups because more often than not they are associated with government reactions and single issue” groups, i.e., the contemporary anti-abortion and green movements.

The term terror originally referred to actions of the Revolutionary government that went beyond the rules regulating punishment in order to “educate” a people to govern itself.

Vera Figner, the architect of Narodnaya Volya’s foreign policy identifies the first four ingredients. The fifth was created later. For a more extensive discussion of Figner, see my “The International World as Some Terrorists Have Seen It: A Look at a Century of Memoirs” in my Inside Terrorist Organizations (London: Frank Cass, 2001) 2nd Ed. pp. 125 ff.

“Revolutionary Catechism” in my Assassination and Terrorism, (note 14).

An equivalent for this argument in religious millennial thought is that that the world must become impossibly bad before it could become unimaginably good.

Adam B. Ulam, In the Name of the People (New York Viking Press, 1977) p. 269,(emphasis added)

Newspaper reports in Germany the next day interpreted the demonstrations to mean that a revolution was coming. New York Times April, 4, 1878


The bomb was most significant in Russia. Other terrorists used the bomb extensively, but chose other weapons as well.

A guerrilla force has political objectives, as any army does, but it aims to weaken or destroy the enemy’s military forces first. The terrorist, on the other hand, strikes directly at the political sentiments that sustain the enemy.

Thomas Hobbes may have been the first to emphasize hope as a necessary ingredient of revolutionary efforts. The first chapter of Menachem Begin’s account of his experience in the Irgun, contains the most moving description of the necessity of hope in terrorist literature. The Revolt: Story of the Irgun, (Jerusalem: 1997 Steinmatzky’s Agency).
There were many organizations, i.e., the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, Young Bosnia, and the Serbian Black Hand.

See Peter Heehs, *Nationalism, Terrorism, and Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998) Chapter 2

The Japanese offer to finance Russian terrorists during the Russo-Japanese War (1905) encouraged Indian terrorists to believe that the Japanese would help them too. Heehs, (note 8) p. 4. The Russians turned the Japanese offer down fearing that knowledge of a transaction during a time of war would destroy their political credibility.

Italians were particularly active as international assassins, crossing borders to kill four heads of state or holders of principal political offices in different countries, i.e. the French President Carnot (1894), Spanish Premier Casnovas (1896), and the Austrian Empress Elizabeth 1898. In 1900 an Italian Anarchist Gaetano Bresci a member of the Anarchist community in Patterson New Jersey, the capital of Italian Anarchism in North America returned to Italy to assassinate King Umberto I. Several other attempts failed. The “war” of the Italian Anarchists against the U.S. is described by Nunzio Pernicone, “Luigi Galleani and Italian Anarchist Terrorism in the United States” Studi Emigrazione/Edtudes Migrations, 30, n 111, 1993 pp. 469-89. See also Lowell Blaisdell, “The Assassination of Humbert I” Prologue. The Quarterly of the National Archives (Fall, 1995) Vol. 27, No. 3 241-247. Thanks to Richard Jensen who supplied the Blaisdell reference.


The IRA’s success in 1921 occurred when the British recognized the Irish State. Northern Ireland, however, remained British, and the civil war between Irish factions over the peace settlement ended in a defeat for those wanting to continue until Northern Ireland joined the Irish State.

For an interesting useful account of the decolonialization process, see Robert Hager Jr. and David A. Lake “Balancing Empires: Competitive Decolonization in International Politics” *Security Studies* 9:3. (Spring 2000) 108-48. They emphasize that the literature on decolonization “has ignored how events and politics within the core (metropolitan area) shaped the process.” p. 145.

Begin said that his decision was determined by the fact that if he pursued it, a civil war among Jews, would occur, indicating that most Jews favored partition. *The Revolt* (note 31) pp.


xxxviii Alexander I of Yugoslavia (1934) was the most prominent victim, and historians believe that Hungary and Italy were involved in providing help for Balkan terrorists. Begin points out in The Revolt that it was too costly to assassinate prominent figures.

xxxix The strategy is superbly described in the film “Battle of Algiers” based on the memoirs of Yaacev Saadi who organized the battle. Attacks against the police occur whose responses are limited by rules governing criminal procedure. In desperation, the police set a bomb off in the Casbah inadvertently exploding an ammunition dump killing Algerian women and children. A mob emerges screaming for revenge, and at this point the FLN has the moral warrant to attack civilians.

There is another underlying element which makes rebel terrorism often has special weight in a democratic world. The atrocities of the strong always seem worse than those of the weak because people believe the latter have no alternatives.

xl See note 12

xli See my “The International World…” (note 34).

xlii Irish-Americans have always given Irish rebels extensive support. In fact, the Fenian movement was born in the American Civil War. Members attempted to invade Canada from the U.S. and then went to Ireland to spark rebellion there.

xliii World War I of course increased the influence of the U.S., and Wilson justified the war with the selfdetermination principle.


xlvi i.e. Basque Nation and Liberty (ETA), the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Corsican National Liberation Front (FNLC), and the IRA.

xlvii During the periods of the first and third waves the rights of women were asserted more strenuously in the general society.


xlix Although bank robbing was not as significant as in the first wave, some striking examples materialized. In January 1976 the PLO together with their bitter enemies the Christian Phalange hired safe breakers to help them loot the vaults of the major banks in Beirut. Estimates range
between $50 and a $100 million stolen. “Whatever the truth the robbery was large enough to earn a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the biggest bank robbery of all time.” James Adams, The Financing of Terror (New York: 1986, Simon and Schuster) p.192.

1 Adams, (note 51) p. 94.

li The attack on Major actually was an attack on the cabinet, so it is not clear whether or not the Prime Minister was the principal target, Lindsay Clutterbuck tells me in a personal note.

lii The status of political prisoner was revoked in March 1976. William Whitelaw who granted it in the first place ranked it as one of his “most regrettable decisions.”

liii Anderson and Sloan, (note 50) p. 303.

liv Sometimes there was American support for terrorist activity, i.e. the Contras in Nicaragua.

lv When a disappointed office seeker assassinated President Garfield, Figner’s sympathy letter to the American people said that there was no place for terror in democratic states. The statement alienated elements of her radical constituency in other countries.


lviii Abu Nidal was himself on a PLO list of persons to be assassinated.


lx In addition to four UN conventions there are eight other major multi-lateral terrorism conventions starting with The Tokyo Convention of 1963 dealing with the aircraft safety. http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/conven.htm and http://untreaty.un.org/English/Terrorism.asp.


lxiii To those in the West the most familiar was the 19th century uprising in the Sudan, which resulted in the murder of legendary British General “Chinese” Gordon.
This was not the first time secular forces would help launch the careers of those who would become religious terrorists. Israel helped Hamas to get started, thinking that it would compete to weaken the PLO. To check left-wing opposition, President Sadat released religious elements from prison who later assassinated him.


In the period specified, Tamils suicide bombers struck 171 times and the combined total for all 13 Islamic groups using the tactic was 117. Ehud Sprinzak cites the figures compiled by Yoram Schweitzer in “Rational Fanatics” *Foreign Policy*, Oct. p.69 2001. The most spectacular Tamil act was the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi. (Religion did not motivate the notorious Kamikaze attacks during World War II either.) The example of the Tamils has other unusual characteristics. Efforts to make Sri Lanka a Buddhist state stimulated the revolt. Although Tamils largely come from India, there are several religious traditions represented in the population, and religion does not define the terrorists’ purpose.


The relationship between different religious terror groups is unusual. Groups from different mainstream traditions (i.e. Christianity, Islam, etc) do not cooperate. Even traditional cleavages within a religion- as in Shiite and Sunni Islam, for example, sometimes are intensified. Shiite terror groups generally take their lead from Iran regarding aid to Sunnis. Iran has helped the Palestinians and hostile to al-Qaeda and the Saudi religious state.

I have no statistical evidence on this point.


The stated object of al Qaeda is to recreate a single Muslim state, and one could argue that if the US had withdrawn military units from the Muslim world, the attacks would have ceased. What if the issue was really the impact of American secular culture on the world?

Bergen, (note 66) p. 225

Those attacks, as well as the expected ones that did not materialize, are discussed in a special volume of *TPV* (14:1) Spring 2002 edited by Jeffrey Kaplan entitled *Millennial Violence: Past, Present, and Future*. The issue was also published as a separate volume with the same title by Frank Cass, London, 2002.


For a very interesting discussion of the circumstances which provoke American military responses to terrorist attacks, see Michelle Mavesti, “Explaining the United States’ Decision to Strike Back at Terrorists” *TPV*, 13,2 (Summer, 2001) 85-106.
If the organization understood its vulnerability, it might have thought that an attack on the sovereignty of the state protecting it was unlikely. One reason the Taliban government refused a repeated UN demand to expel Al Qaeda because without Al Qaeda support it could not survive local domestic opposition. Since most Al Qaeda recruits served in the Taliban forces in the ongoing civil war, the Taliban must have felt that it had no choice. Clearly there was no plan for an invasion possibility; the failure to resist is astonishing otherwise.

Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*: (note 71)


Bergen (note 66) p. 234

We lack a systematic comparison of the aims sought by organizations in the history of modern terror.

Austria-Hungary, Germany and states they had diplomatic relations with in World War I continued the police cooperation.

9/11 has had an impact on at least one terrorist group The Tamils found diaspora financial support suddenly disappearing for suicide bombing, an opportunity the Norwegians seized to bring them to the bargaining table again.


See (note 5)