How Ideology Influences Terror

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5754-5
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5754-3

Daliah, Laith, and Mae, may you live in a safer world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

How does ideology affect terrorist group behavior? How does a guiding belief structure direct, or even compel groups? Can a worldview compel violence? Does it direct violence? Does it guide recruitment? What contextual factors may mitigate those actions? Is ideology simply a tool utilized by extremists to fulfill their goals? Do all members invest in group ideology equally?

This text aims to explain the role and significance of ideology in terrorism. Specifically, this text aims to explain how ideology shapes the decisions, actions, and attacks of terrorist groups. It speaks to how ideologies guide terrorist groups even when mitigating factors arise. Group beliefs, values, and guiding principles are synonymous with group identity, and that identity is the foundation for a political or social platform.

It would be naive to think that terrorist groups could truly be understood. Secretive organizations do not lend themselves to transparency. This is not to say that insight cannot be gained into the choices that these clandestine groups make. A better understanding of the role that ideology plays in groups' activities has been made possible with the compilation of extensive data; with the use of these data, tactics, targets, recruitment, promotional strategies, and even longevity may be predicted based on the ideological make-up of a group. This information empowers counterterrorism operations, and allows nations to better prepare for the threats they may face.

Before discussing the relationship between ideology and terrorism, these terms need to be defined. This chapter will define both terrorism and ideology within the scope of this text, and briefly preview the following chapters.

What is terrorism?

Based on global news coverage of events, it is glaringly clear that there is no concrete definition of terrorism.[1] There is no consensus with the academic community, or even among the counterterrorism community. There are over 150 definitions of terrorism even within American federal law alone.[2] Consequently, the term has an inherent fluidity which allows for conjecture, misunderstanding, and confusion.

In order to avoid confusion within this text, a single definition will be used. This definition is provided by the scholars Enders and Sandler (2000),

> The premeditated use or threat of violence by individuals or subnational groups to obtain a political or social objective through intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims.

Terrorist acts are unique because they are committed with political or social objectives in mind. They are not perpetrated for monetary gain. They are not perpetrated in isolation. There is a wider, often ambitious goal. They aim to create a long-term, palpable impact using their acts. This is why terrorist attacks are not simply considered as crimes. They are far more expansive. Terrorist acts have been parsed from crimes in legal systems across the world because they are indeed unique, as their effects, both tangible and intangible, are lasting to the global community.

Many argue that the roots of terrorism are, at their core, linked to grievances.[3] Essentially, individuals are brought together by a shared complaint, and seek violent means to reconcile their grievances. One could argue that the ultimate goal of terrorism is sowing fear and insecurity on a

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[1] Jack P. Gibbs, "Conceptualization of Terrorism," *American Sociological Review* 54, No. 3 (June 1989): 329-340; Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, "News Frames Terrorism: A Comparative Analysis of Frames Employed in Terrorism Coverage in U.S. and U.K. Newspapers," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, No. 1 (January 2008): 52-74.

[2] Nicholas J. Perry, "The Numerous Federal Legal Definitions of Terrorism: The Problem of Too Many Grails," *Journal of Legislation* 30, No. 2 (May 2004): 249.

[3] Ted Robert Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict since 1945," *International Political Science Review* 14, No. 2 (April 1993): 161-201.

mass scale. This environment of fear then creates the opportunity and space for perpetrators to demand concessions from governments; governments want to alleviate public fear and concern.

Terrorism is most effective when it creates a daily sense of insecurity for the broader public. Does it impact your daily life? Do you make decisions based on fear for your safety? Do you worry when you go to a major airport, government building, or large city? If you've answered yes to any of the questions above, then in a way, terrorism is making its desired impact. It has pushed itself to become a part of your life – and your decisions – and they hope, your respective government's decisions. Terrorism may not always assuage or scare governments into concessional behavior, but regardless, attacks impact the public long-term.

However, terrorists are not a monolithic grouping of organizations and individuals. Their motivations and goals vary – consequently, their means vary, their targets vary, and their levels of lethality vary.[4] Furthermore, their capacity varies; some groups have stable, consistent sources of income, and others survive with ad hoc fundraising, or criminal behavior such as smuggling or trafficking. This diversity among groups provides further evidence that we need to examine groups on a more granular level.

While terrorism may be domestic or international in nature, this text will be largely focused on transnational terrorism, which is also referred to as international terrorism. Transnational terrorism is yet another vague term, but fortunately there are defining criteria which are widely accepted. These criteria were set by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), a widely used source of terrorist incident data, which is hosted by the University of Maryland.

A terrorist incident may be considered transnational if it meets the following criteria: 1. Perpetrators are nationals of countries other than where the incident took place, 2. Victims are nationals of various countries, and 3. The incident's orchestration and planning took place in a different country

[4] Ranya Ahmed, "Terrorist Ideologies and Target Selection," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 13, No. 3 (July 2018): 376-390.

from where the attack was perpetrated.[5] These criteria, while expansive, cover a more holistic picture of transnational terrorism. It is key to understanding another main difference: domestic terrorists seek a national, confined audience, while transnational terrorism seeks to speak to a wider audience. By this logic, insular groups which mostly seek a domestic based political end, may also be considered transnational. Even if it is unintentional, when groups perpetrate attacks which kill or injure foreign citizens, they become transnational by this definition (See Chapters 2 and 3). One may assert that the modern-day saliency of terrorism is due to transnational terror, even though domestic terror is more frequent and more commonplace,[6] it has not had an extreme global impact like the attacks of 9/11 in New York or the 7/7 attacks in London. On those days, the world stood at attention; the globe became a captive audience. To be clear, this does not diminish or dismiss the very real pain and anguish that come from acts of domestic violence. Attention does not mitigate severity or injury.

This text will frequently utilize data from the GTD, so it is important to clarify that the definition the GTD uses does differ from that of Enders and Sandler. However, the definitions are congruent. The GTD definition is as follows:

> the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.

The GTD definition adds economic and religious goals to the political and social factors espoused by Enders and Sandler. Otherwise, the definitions are very similar. To ensure this difference does not bias the narrative of this text, it will use replication data which has updated GTD data. The replication

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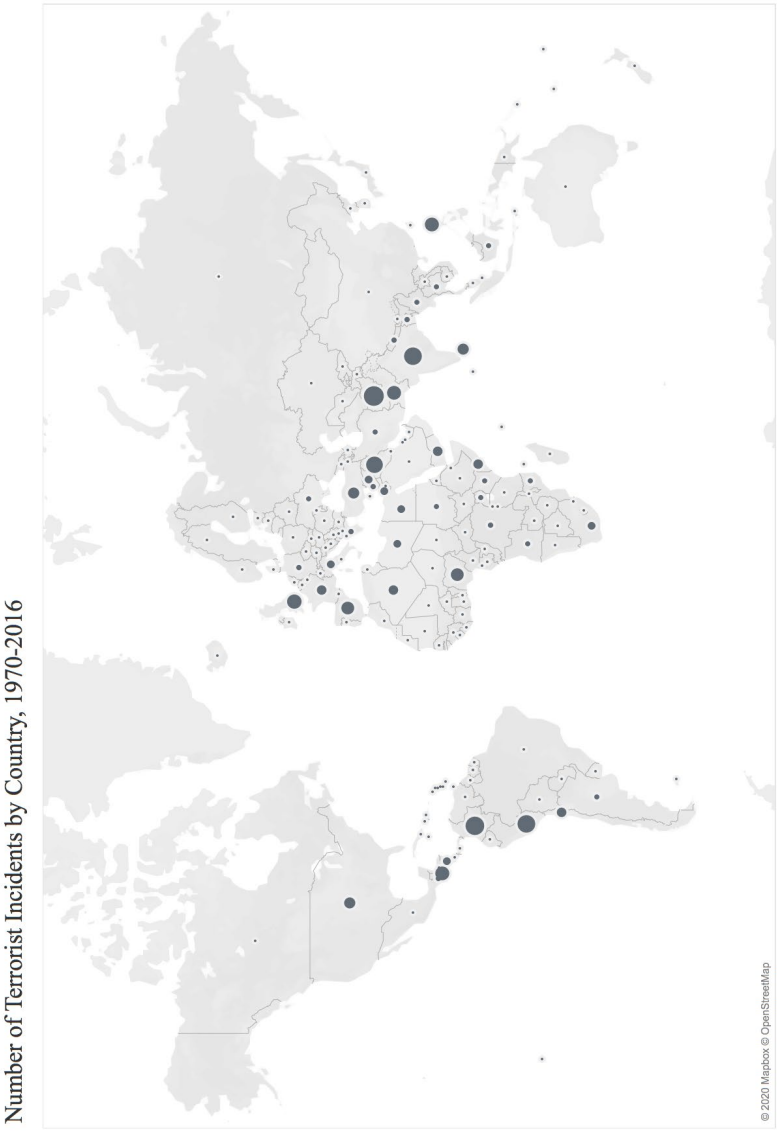
[5] University of Maryland, *Global Terrorism Database Code Book: Inclusion Criteria and Variables* (College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, October 2019), https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf.

[6] Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca and Luis de la Calle, "Domestic Terrorism: The Hidden Side of Political Violence," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (June 2009): 31-49.

Figure 1-1: Terrorist incidents over time



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[7] Source: Ahmed, "Terrorist Group Types and Tactic Choice."

data have categorized each incident and group into the ideological group types discussed in the coming chapters.[8]

Changing circumstances

Previous scholarly works suggest that terrorist acts have occurred in a number of different circumstances: countries at peace, countries experiencing some armed conflict, and countries at war. Countries at war generally faced the highest level of terrorist activity, but that distribution has fluctuated over time. Recently, the trend has taken a dramatic turn.

Since 2012, there has been a steep incline in terrorist activity within active war zones.[9] Countries at war now experience the overwhelming majority of terrorist activity. This is unsurprising, as the instability of war creates a vacuum of power and border insecurity.

Terrorism: A global, yet concentrated, phenomenon

Terrorism has become a broad, global phenomenon, but its impacts are not equally distributed; the effects are especially concentrated in a small group of countries. In 2017, the Deadly Four (Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, the Taliban, and ISIS – also known as Daesh/IS/ISIL) were responsible for the majority of deaths resulting from terrorism. While these groups are less active than they were in 2016, their effect remains poignant and lethal. The five most impacted nations in 2017 were Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Syria, and Pakistan.[10]

Since 2014, Iraq has been the recipient of the most frequent terrorist attacks, with 1956 incidents in 2017. In 2016, Iraq experienced almost ten thousand deaths from terrorism, and in 2017, experienced approximately four thousand deaths. Even with this decline, largely due to

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[8] Ranya Ahmed, "Terrorist Group Types and Tactic Choice," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 13, No. 1 (January 2018): 89-110.

[9] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, November 2018), http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018.pdf.

[10] Ibid; Close behind were the nations of Somalia, Egypt, DRC, the Central African Republic, and India.

the government reclaiming Mosul from ISIS, they remain atop the rankings. More specifically, in 2017, the majority of the deaths (approximately 83%[11]) were caused by ISIS.

Although Iraq experienced the most frequent terrorist attacks, Afghanistan experienced the deadliest attacks in 2017, with 4653 deaths and 5015 injuries.[12] The overwhelming majority of these deaths were due to the Taliban's activities. Unlike Iraq, where ISIS concentrated its efforts in specific cities, the Taliban operates in approximately 70% of Afghanistan's territory, making their defeat especially challenging. Unlike other groups, the Taliban has historically also had a governing role in Afghanistan. This grants the Taliban greater influence, control, and leverage in making gains and sowing fear.

Well below the lethal threshold of Iraq and Afghanistan sits Nigeria, with 1532 fatalities in 2017.[13] This represents a notable drop from previous years, largely due to the national counter-insurgency response.[14] Two terrorist groups are responsible for 88%[15] of the deaths related to terrorism within Nigeria: Boko Haram and the Fulani extremists. As in Iraq, terrorist activity is limited to certain areas, most notably the Borno state (northeastern Nigeria), the area which Boko Haram calls home; it is an unfortunate irony that Borno's motto is "Home of Peace".[16]

Syria is close behind Nigeria with a death toll of 1096 people in 2017 due to terrorist activity. Syria has been involved in a protracted conflict since 2011, and while the death toll from the war is unknown, the conflict has ravaged the country's infrastructure, both institutionally and physically. The borders have become porous, and terrorist groups have taken advantage. ISIS, Hayat Al Tahrir Al Sham, and Jaysh Al Islam were responsible for the majority of deaths within Syria.

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[11] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018.*
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] "Unrest in the Home of Peace: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency," *The Economist*, September 27, 2014, https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2014/09/27/unrest-in-the-home-of-peace.

Following Syria, Pakistan was the 5th most impacted country by terrorism in 2017. However, 2017 was in fact the least deadly year since 2006[17] for Pakistan, with 852 casualties. Three groups, the TPP (Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan), the Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, were responsible for two-thirds of these deaths. As with Iraq and Nigeria, Pakistan experiences the majority of terrorist activity in limited areas, most notably the Balochistan province.[18]

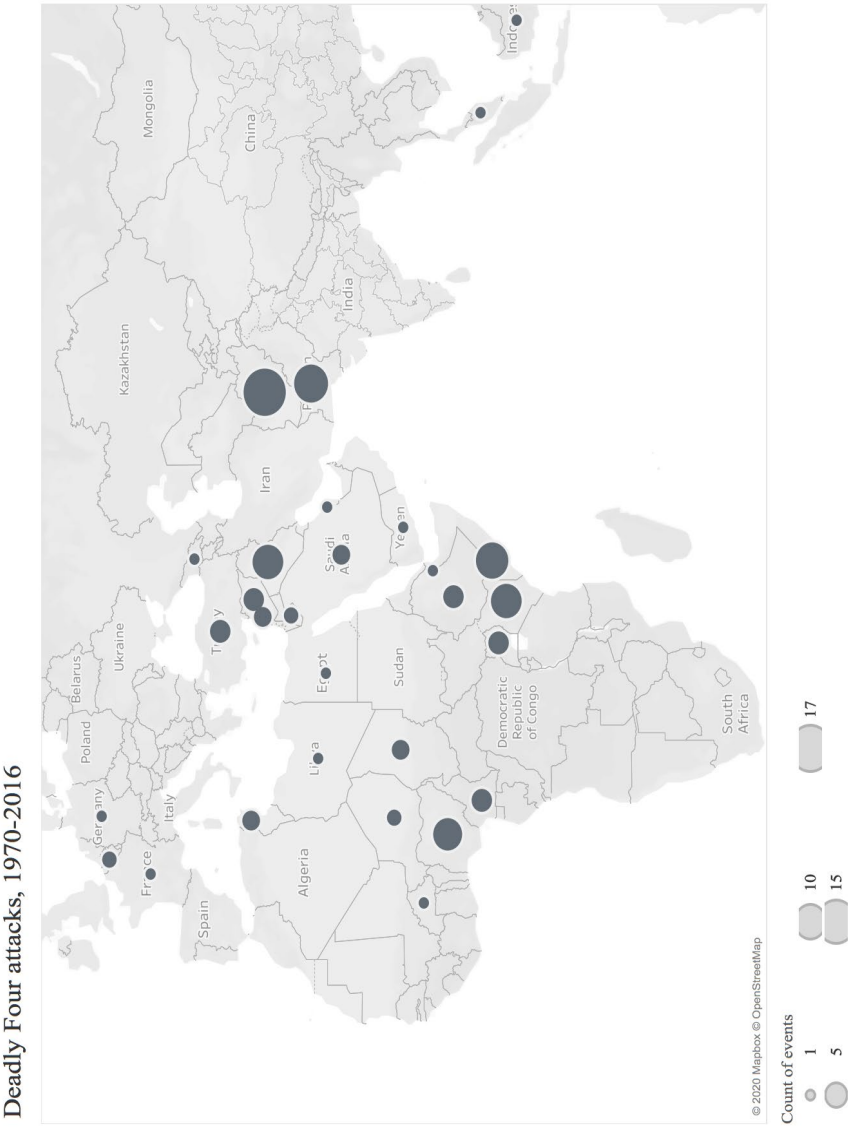
Three of the Deadly Four groups are accounted for within the top five most affected nations, so it is unsurprising that the 6th most affected nation is Somalia, as that is where Al-Shabaab (the fourth member of the Deadly Four) operates.[19] See Figure 1-2 for an illustration of the Deadly Four attacks.

Although these groups are the deadliest, and these specific nations experience the majority of terrorist attacks, terrorism remains widespread nonetheless (see Figure 1-2). In fact, a new hotspot emerged in 2017: Southeast Asia. Myanmar and the Philippines both reported the highest number of terrorist casualties since 2002.

One should recognize that as counterterrorism forces become more proficient and informed, they have been able to combat terrorism on a greater scale. Consequently, one must keep in mind that the figures describing incidents are relative to the number of potential attacks. These numbers are tracked by various agencies, including the FBI, Europol, and Interpol.

[17] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018*.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

Figure 1-2: Location and density of Deadly Four attacks over time, 1970-2016



[20]

[20] Source: Ahmed, "Terrorist Group Types and Tactic Choice."

What is ideology?

Ideology is the lens through which one sees and interprets one's surroundings. It is a framework that shapes thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. It is a worldview. Ideologies can be held by individuals, and by collectives – including terrorist groups.

The power of ideology lies in its completeness. It is a totalitarian force which rules over every aspect of one's life and choices. It provides an answer to any question. It provides a guide when one is conflicted. It is such a wholesome force that it compels people to act within restricted boundaries and shifts perspectives. Loyalty to an ideology is often so complete, as in the case of many terrorists, that it allows for, or even encourages, violence to ensure complete compliance. People willingly follow and adhere to ideologies, making this force an unparalleled power.

Within this text, ideology is asserted as a *key* driver of terrorist operational behavior. Only key, because ideology is not the *only* driver. Snow and Byrd (2007) state that ideology presents us with an "analytical utility" to study terrorist group choices and decisions. Not only is ideology a guiding force for beliefs or values, but rather it provides us with a means to examine any given group.[21]

This text focuses on six ideological group types: 1. Nationalist/Separatist (NS), 2. Left Wing (LW), 3. Right Wing (RW), 4. Religious, 5. Environmental, and 6. Mixed groups. Specifically, two mixed group types will be profiled, NS/LW and NS/Religious.[22]

The groups are defined in the following manner. Nationalist/separatist groups seek to overtake the system of government currently in place, or they are groups which seek self-determination and territorial autonomy from a given established, recognized country. Left-wing groups are defined as groups with revolutionary, and at times, communist ideologies; these groups generally support a socialist form of government. Right-wing groups defy left-wing concepts like communism and socialism, and lean toward fascist,

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[21] David Snow and Scott Byrd, "Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12, No. 2 (July 2007): 119-136.

[22] Right-wing/Religious groups will also be discussed within this chapter, although the focus of the chapter will be NS/LW and NS/R groups.

and at times, racist ideology. Religious groups claim to be guided in their actions by their given religion; this includes a wide spectrum of religions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism. Environmental groups are guided by their missions to end any perceived animal cruelty or ecological destruction. Mixed groups are groups which hold more than one ideology, and in this text, two of these mixed typologies are discussed at length, as they are the most frequent combinations within the sphere of international terrorism:[23] nationalist/separatist and left-wing and nationalist/separatist and religious. For example, Séléka, a terrorist group operating in the Central African Republic, is guided both by the pursuit of a new government which would not oppress the Muslim community, as well as the desire to assert and impose their religious identity; their dual goal requires their classification as NS/Religious (see Chapter 7).

Nonetheless, one must acknowledge that there are flaws with this categorization method. This categorization does not consider sub-groups of group types; for instance, this text considers right-wing groups, but it does not classify right-wing sub-groups of "racist" or "anti-communist" groups. Although this limits classification to broad groups, this was a deliberate choice, as it provides us with a more general frame to understand the variation among groups. These types allow us to delve into the role of ideology on groups' decisions, actions, and operations.

However, this is not the only means in which scholars have distinguished group types.

Vasilenko (2005)[24] categorizes terrorist organizations into five group types: (1) political, (2) separatist, (3) nationalist, (4) religious, and (5) criminal. Although Vasilenko's categories are quite comprehensive, they are missing an important category: environmental groups. Although environmental groups are less numerous than other groups, they still perpetrate attacks and should be acknowledged. Increased counterterrorism efforts directed towards environmental groups further convey the seriousness

[23] Ahmed, "Terrorist Ideologies and Target Selection."
[24] V. I. Vasilenko, "The Concept and Typology of Terrorism," *Statutes & Decisions* 40, No. 5 (September-October 2004): 46-56.

of the threat of environmental terrorism; since 2002, the FBI has had a dedicated joint task force to combat these groups.[25]

Boaz Ganor (2008)[26] created another classification system, using terrorist motivation and organizational capability to perpetrate attacks, rather than ideology. Ganor assumes that *terrorism = motivation + operational capability.*[27] Ganor suggests that, given a terror threshold period (which accounts for a period in time where an attack is more likely), the previously noted factors can predict terrorist attacks. Essentially, the suggestion is that these variables limit the operations of terrorist groups, so they are the best factors to classify groups. This classification system is highly focused on counterterrorism, but one must consider that terrorism is a clandestine activity, and this system is only effective with accurate and available information – which is quite frankly, rare.

Wilkinson (1976)[28] argues that groups should be divided into four group types: (1) criminal, (2) psychological, (3) war, and (4) political. Criminal groups are those which use terrorist acts as a way to build material wealth, psychological groups are led by extreme religious beliefs, war groups attack ruthlessly to defeat an enemy, and political groups are described as groups which will use systematic violence to achieve their political goals. Wilkinson's (1976) classification system does not solely conclude with these initial categories; he also introduces sub-types. For instance, political groups are further disaggregated into three group sub-types: (1) revolutionary, (2) sub-revolutionary, and repressive. While Wilkinson's classification system is highly methodical and detailed, its greatest weakness is its complexity. His system requires a great deal of information and insight to work effectively, and given that terrorist groups are covert in nature, much of this information will be unavailable, or

[25] James F. Jarboe, "Testimony Before the House Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health," *FBI*, accessed April 8, 2020, https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/the-threat-of-eco-terrorism.
[26] Boaz Ganor, "Terrorist Organization Typologies and the Probability of a Boomerang Effect," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, No. 4 (April 2008): 269-283.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Liberal Democracy: The Problems of Response* (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1976).

unreliable. Moreover, the inclusion of a criminal classification contradicts much of the scholarly work defining the scope of terrorism.

Although the classification systems noted above have their strengths and weaknesses, one could argue that the system used in this text – a general frame – allows one to examine group types only in a broad frame. A plethora of scholars have classified groups, and those classifications have largely been guided by their questions, as is the case in this text. This text seeks to examine the role of ideology on terror, and therefore the classification system is based on ideology.

Other mitigating factors

Terrorists have political and social goals, and they are therefore established with an objective or set of goals in mind. However, unlike other groups, they have chosen to deal with their grievances using violence. This distinguishing factor leads to many questions, one of which is *what are the mitigating factors that drive groups to use these means to achieve their goals?*

It could be argued that it is the founding zealousness of their ideology. However, this is only a deciding factor as there are mitigating factors. One could argue that terrorist actors decide to employ violence because they are often outmatched by their opposition. One possibility is the absence of political means to achieve their goals because the given group lives within a non-democracy. Above, ideology was introduced as a key, guiding driver. However, one must acknowledge that there are additional drivers. While this text adamantly asserts that ideology is the main driver of operational behavior and choices, one must recognize that there are other mitigating factors that drive decision-making, both tangible and intangible. These are discussed at greater length below.

Colonial legacy. The influence of colonial rule, and the legacy therein should be considered when examining terrorism. Violent terrorist action is not justifiable behavior, but to understand the root of the grievances listed by groups like the OPM (Free Papuan Movement), an NS group fighting perceived occupying, colonial powers (for further detail, see Chapter 2), one must recognize history. Understanding this context also allows for the assessment of risk. Post-colonial states or regions within

states, may be at greater risk; terrorist groups seeking to rectify perceived past wrongs may be more likely to emerge.

Interestingly, two of the most formidable colonizers of the 19th and 20th centuries – the French and British, face the greatest modern-day concentration of NS terrorist actions, according to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report compiled by Europol.[29] There has been little systematic research regarding a colonial legacy's correlation with terrorist activity,[30] but there are a plethora of theoretical studies, based on case studies, that assert a positive relationship.[31]

Group age. Some terrorist groups are infamous and known worldwide, but many go unnoticed on a global scale. Groups are forming on a regular basis, but most of them do not survive for long. Most groups, approximately 68%, do not even survive more than one year after their initial attack, and only two-thirds of the survivors make it to their fifth year.[32] While it is true that young groups can be highly effective, historical evidence has shown a trend that groups need to pass the one-year critical time nexus to survive longer term.

Competition. Within every ideological group type, there are a plethora of groups competing for attention, resources, and dominance. Groups need to assert their dominance and voice. Consequently, operational decisions may be made to send signals to other groups. Related closely to group age, group survival rates convey the competitive space in which

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[29] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017* (The Hague: Europol, 2017), https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat/2017/; Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018* (The Hague: Europol, 2018), https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018; Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019* (The Hague: Europol, 2019), https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat.

[30] Kelsey Renee Stephens, "Colonial History, Modernization and Terrorism: The Effect of Colonialism and Modernization on Transnational Ethnoseparatist Terrorism, 1968-2002" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2010).

[31] David Gandolfo, "The Past, Present and Future of Globalization: Colonialism, Terrorism, and the Need for Democratic Supranational Governance," *Review Journal of Political Philosophy* 7, No. 1 (2009): 45-74.

[32] Joseph K. Young and Laura Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest: Why Terrorist Groups Endure," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, No. 2 (April 2014): 2-23.

terrorist groups operate. Scholars argue that this is likely to be explained by the theory of outbidding. Outbidding essentially argues that groups, in an effort to gain the support of a target audience, seek to outperform other groups. Accordingly, groups which are in less competitive environments, are also more likely to survive longer; this effect varies by ideology.[33]

It must be noted that while groups sometimes jockey for dominance, they have also been known to work together.[34] Groups learn from each other, share resources and information, and create formal alliances when group goals align. Consider Al-Shabaab's open declaration of loyalty to Al Qaeda. The two groups' worldviews and goals align, so they declared a formal alliance. Not much is known about the details of the alliance but given the open declaration to news outlets and social media, the global audience as well as their target audience was made aware of their newly founded partnership.

Group capacity. To survive, groups need both financial and human resources. Terrorists, like any other politically motivated group, have a target audience. Their choices are guided by their audience. With audience approval or sympathy, they are able to collect financial resources. Operational decisions would rationally be guided by the latter. When groups cannot gain enough resources from their target audiences, they resort to other means of collecting resources, including trafficking (both goods and people), smuggling, and other criminal activities.

Furthermore, continued operations require personnel, so terrorist organizations also prioritize recruitment. Recruitment is sometimes more selective, for example, Hezbollah will only accept recruits from southern Lebanon – they consider this exclusivity an asset to group unity as they are based in that area, and they assume that recruits from the area are truly dedicated and loyal to their mission. In fact, the group sends recruiters to each village, house by house, within their operating base to convince individuals to join the group.[35] Hezbollah also considers this make-up of

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[33] Ahmed, "Terrorist Ideologies and Target Selection."
[34] Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Modern Worldwide Extremists and Extremist Groups* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 87.
[35] "Lebanon: Recruitment Practices of Hezbollah," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, accessed September 14, 2015, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/pages/attachments/2015/09/29/lbn104638.e.pdf.

recruits as an asset to cohesiveness within the group. Other organizations are much less discriminatory, such as ISIS, which takes to social media to promote their ideas and ask for recruits to join them or take action. ISIS even claims credit for an attack perpetrated by a follower without guidance from the organizational leadership. The latter means suggests a more decentralized structure, as they allow for cells to operate independently, whereas the former type is reflective of a more centralized, leadership-based organizational type. Groups vary in structure, and ideology is not a determinant of organizational hierarchy.

Time. Terrorists in the 1970s made their decisions based on the context of the time period they were in, this may appear intuitive, but this context is critical. Televisions were present in most homes, and people often watched the news. Similarly, terrorists in 2019 made their decisions understanding that they have a global audience at their disposal, with the dominance of the internet to report news, and the exponential rise of social media prominence. It is essential to understand that the time in which a group emerges is indeed a mitigating factor; active groups which emerged before the internet needed to perpetrate highly visible, large-scale attacks to draw attention, but groups in the age of the internet and social media do not. Any event, small scale or otherwise, may reach a broad audience – with good marketing. This is not to say that groups operating in the current climate do not perpetrate highly visible or large-scale attacks, this is just an assertion that they do not *need* to in order to draw attention to their cause.

Lack of legal political opportunity. Terrorist activity is present in both democracies and non-democracies, but it is more frequently prevalent in non-democracies.[36] Democracies provide an outlet for political dissent and expression; where these are absent, other outlets, including violence, are sought. This is an extension of the Democratic Peace Theory. This theory suggests that democracies do not seek war, because their nations are inherently more peaceful, given their representative government. This is not an absolute rule, because one must recognize that democracies have gone to war. It is a larger trend outlook, considering events over time. In essence,

[36] Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, "Terrorism, Democracy, and Credible Commitments," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, No. 2 (June 2011): 357-378.

on the whole, democracies are less likely to go to war, and political opportunity explains this.

Power differential. Asymmetric conflict leaves groups with deep grievances and few options. They often do not have the capital or assets that states or international bodies possess, so their tactics and guerilla-like operations are used to fight powers which are far more resourced. This is similar to the previous category; where there is no route to legal, peaceful authority, groups understand the power differential between them and recognized governing bodies. However, unlike the previous category, terrorist groups may also pursue violence because they view their goals to be threatened by other influential factors in society, like a powerful religious influence in a country for example. Consider Saudi Arabia, while the country is a monarchy and governed by the Al Saud family, religious clerics have a notable concentration of power within the nation. Not all of the powerful entities within nations are governing bodies.

Chaos = Opportunity. As previously discussed, the majority of recent terrorist acts are committed in countries at war, or in countries experiencing some armed conflict.

This is supported by the figures, and both recent and historical data, but it is not reflected in media coverage. The most salient attacks have not been those perpetrated in Afghanistan or Iraq. Instead, attacks in the Western world have maintained salience and dominance over media coverage. Consider the Manchester bombings at the Ariana Grande concert or the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris, those attacks gained mass coverage on network and cable news for weeks, but higher casualty events occur on a regular basis in Pakistan or Nigeria and international coverage has been relatively minimal.

Global pandemic. This is the perhaps the most surprising mitigating factor, one that has not yet been explored by empirical study. In late 2019 and 2020, Covid-19 upended the world on a scale one could not have previously imagined. The global pandemic has shaped everyone's actions, including those of terrorists. Some terrorists have warned their groups to limit operations where the virus has been especially catastrophic. For instance, ISIS told its members and followers to avoid going to Europe

in mid-March 2020 to avoid getting infected with the virus.[37] They even issued the same guidelines as global public health officials: to ensure that they wash their hands frequently and cover their faces when coughing or sneezing. This is perhaps the most shocking behavior, but this reaction is preferable considering that other terrorist groups and individuals have decided to capitalize on the crisis and attempt to weaponize Covid-19. In the last week of March 2020, Timothy Wilson, a white supremacist from Missouri, was killed by the FBI as they tried to arrest him; he planned on bombing a hospital during the pandemic to ensure maximum damage. He believed that the pandemic would heighten the attention to his attack, and his proclamation that 'the Jews' created the virus and unleashed it upon the world.[38] Al Qaeda has also decided to take advantage of the circumstances by creating propaganda materials and public statements, suggesting that this virus is the hand of god, coming down on the west. Covid-19 has claimed more lives than 9/11, and they suggest that this is indicative of god's wrath on the United States.[39] Whether groups are directing their members to halt operations and take care of their health, or if they are trying to take advantage of the pandemic, this global event has even altered the actions and decisions of terrorists.

Discussion: Mitigating factors and ideology

Making the argument that ideology is a key driver of terrorist choices is not to suggest that the mitigating factors noted here are irrelevant or

[37] Aitor Hernandez-Morales, "How the Coronavirus Is Reshaping Terrorists' Attack Plans." *POLITICO*, 3 Mar. 2020, www.politico.com/news/2020/03/27/coronavirus-terrorism-justice-department-150870.

[38] Pete Williams, "Missouri Man Planned to Bomb Hospital during Pandemic to Get Attention for White Supremacist Views," *NBC News*, NBC Universal News Group, 30 Mar. 2020, www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/missouri-man-planned-bomb-hospital-during-pandemic-get-attention-white-n1172346; Paul Caine, "Right-wing Terrorists Looking to 'Weaponize' Pandemic, Says U of C Expert," *WTTW News*, Public Broadcasting Service, 8 Apr. 2020, news.wttw.com/2020/04/08/right-wing-terrorists-looking-weaponize-pandemic-says-u-c-expert.

[39] James G. Meek, "Terrorist Groups Spin COVID-19 as God's 'Smallest Soldier' Attacking West," *ABC News*, ABC News Network, 2 Apr. 2020, abcnews.go.com/International/terrorist-groups-spin-covid-19-gods-smallest-soldier/story?id=69930563.

insignificant. They play a significant role in the choices that groups make, or do not make. This text simply argues that ideology is the overwhelming driving force for groups. Ideology shapes the group's identity, actions, and outward messaging. Groups are formed around ideas, values, and beliefs. These predate any operational planning. In essence, a group has to be built before it may take action. Mitigating factors are a consideration only after the group has been established, ideology in tow.

Furthermore, while the discussion in this text largely centers around groups and group dynamics, it is of critical importance to note that terrorism is not limited to group perpetrators. There are many individuals who commit acts of terrorism, and one could also argue that ideology is the greatest driver of individuals' behavior and choices, as shown by the case of Brenton Tarrant. Tarrant, a right-wing, racist, terrorist perpetrated an armed assault attack on two mosques in March 2019 in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51[40] people. His manifesto and live stream of the attack affirm that his ideology was his motivation. Legal access to his utilized weaponry simply gave him the capability.

Organization and group dynamics are not prerequisites to the consideration of ideology.

Although this text seeks to establish ideology as the greatest mitigating factor for group decision-making, there are competing theories within the scholarly community.

For instance, David Rapoport (2002) suggests that terrorism has come in waves.[41] Rapoport theorizes that there are four waves. The first being an anarchist wave which began in the 1880s, the second being the anti-colonial wave in the 1920s, the third being the left wave in the 1960s, and the fourth being the religious wave beginning in 1979.[42] In accordance with this theory, we are currently living within the fourth wave. Within this frame, each wave is associated with specific tactics, e.g. the first wave is associated with assassinations and bank robberies, while the fourth wave is

[40] The New York Times, "More Than a Dozen Victims in Critical Condition After New Zealand Shootings," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/16/world/asia/new-zealand-shooting.html.
[41] David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11," *Anthropoetics* 8, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002), n.p.
[42] Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11."

associated with bombings, kidnapping, and assassination.[43] In previously published scholarly work, this theory was tested empirically, and mixed support was found,[44] e.g. in the fourth wave kidnappings decreased, contrary to expectation, but bombings increased, in line with expectations. This frame is of use, but empirically, it does not hold in totality.

Rapoport argued that it was time that guided operational decisions and group actions. One cannot dispute that context is key, including time, as noted above. Especially when one considers that changes in politics, technology, and the media have all contributed to the change of group behavior. However, fundamentally, guidance comes from the leading voice of the group – the core foundational element of the group – the group ideology. Ideology is the idea that binds the members of the group together.

The following chapters will discuss each aforementioned ideology on an individual basis. Using both current and historical examples, this text will seek to convey the significance of ideology, and how it influences terror. Examples will first provide a brief summary of the respective group's history before delving into the role of ideology on their actions or decisions. Chapters will include graphs and other visuals; to see more interactive versions of these visuals, as well as additional visuals, scan the QR code included at the beginning of this text.

[43] Ranya Ahmed, "Terrorist Group Types and Tactic Choice," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 13, No. 1 (January 2018): 89-110.

[44] Given data restrictions, only the third and fourth waves could be empirically tested.