

James Lutz and
Brenda Lutz

Terrorism

the basics

TERRORISM

THE BASICS

'A concise and very accessible introduction to terrorism, touching on all the major debates and issues. Ideal for those who need a quick introduction to the area and a good choice for students coming at the subject for the first time.'

Professor Andrew Silke, *Director Terrorism Studies,*
University of East London, UK

Terrorism: The Basics is the perfect introduction for anyone interested in one of the most discussed, written about and analysed aspects of modern life. Common misconceptions about the nature of terrorism and terrorists themselves are dispelled as the authors provide clear and jargon-free answers to the big questions:

- What does terrorism involve?
- Who can be classified as a terrorist?
- What are terrorists trying to achieve?
- Who are the supporters of terrorism?
- Can there ever be an end to terrorist activity?

These questions and more are answered with reference to contemporary groups and situations allowing readers to relate the theory to what is broadcast in the news. Written with clarity and insight, this book is the perfect first book on terrorism for students of all levels.

James Lutz is a Professor of Political Science at Indiana University-Purdue University, USA and **Brenda Lutz** received her Ph.D in Politics from the University of Dundee, Scotland. They have collaborated on a great number of works dealing with terrorism including major textbooks, edited collections.

The Basics

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TERRORISM **THE BASICS**

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To our beautiful daughters

Carol and Tessa

and

our loyal St. Bernards, Annie, Clarabelle, Oliver
and Barnaby

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PREFACE

When we first started writing and research on terrorism in 1998, we were concerned that too much attention was focused on terrorism in the Middle East. It appeared that many writers have already forgotten about the Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and similar groups in Western Europe and Latin America. As we continued researching in this area, the focus on the Middle East increased after the attacks of 9/11 on New York City and Washington, DC. Now, quite naturally, the focus has been on Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorists. Much has been written, some good and some not so good, on the subject of Islamic terrorism. What has sometimes been lost in the discussion is the fact that terrorism involves more than Islamic groups and more than the Middle East.

Our contribution to the Routledge basics series is designed to provide information on the underlying issues involved in terrorism and to help place Islamic political violence within the broader perspective of global terrorism. There are other groups that have engaged in terrorism, and these organizations will be discussed. This book will provide the essential basic information on terrorism. It will also present an appropriate context for understanding global terrorism today and in the future.

Of course, this book is just a starting point for understanding terrorism and the context in which it occurs. Further, it is designed to provide the reader with a basic framework and basic knowledge of the subject. Given the volume of material that now exists, anyone interested in a deeper understanding of terrorism can find materials on their own (starting with bibliography in this book and the suggested readings which have their own bibliographies and references). This book, however, should provide the necessary starting point for exploring the topic in more depth.

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Concern over terrorism has become a part of life in the twenty-first century. Although terrorism is not new, the events of **9/11/2001** in the United States, the **Madrid train bombings** in 2004, the **London transport bombings** in 2005, continuing suicide attacks in Iraq and Israel/Palestine, and terrorist violence in many other places has focused attention on these types of events. Terrorism, of course, has occurred in many countries and in many contexts. It is not new phenomenon even though events such as these have made terrorism a more prominent concern in many countries. As a result, it is very important to have a better understanding of what terrorism is – why it occurs, who is responsible, what the terrorists hope to accomplish, and what the future holds for terrorism. These questions and others are basic to the topic of this book.

Although many people have a good idea of what terrorism is, it is useful from the outset to have a working definition as to what can be considered terrorism (and what cannot be considered terrorism). It has frequently been stated that: “One person’s freedom fighter is another person’s terrorist.” Basically this statement says that terrorism, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. People have a tendency to brand those who use violence for purposes that they disagree with as terrorists while they regard those using the same kinds of violence in a “just cause” as freedom fighters. It is essential to have a definition that will apply to violent activities regardless of who is opposing or supporting the individuals involved or who the targets are. The fact that terrorism includes all kinds of groups should not blind us to the fact that what might be defined as terrorism by virtually everyone, could be acceptable to others in some circumstances. If Jews in Europe facing Hitler’s efforts to

exterminate them had resorted to terrorism in self-defense, such actions would clearly have been justifiable.

DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

There are many definitions of terrorism that have been used. Oftentimes the definitions are created to identify certain groups as falling within the definition since the term terrorist has a very negative association. If a group is labeled as a terrorist group, then it is easier to mobilize public opinion against it. If supporters of the group are considered to be freedom fighters or a national liberation front, the likelihood that they will be able to generate more sympathy is increased. Other definitions attempt to be more neutral, but it is important to recognize that any definition will include groups that some individuals would exclude because they agree with the goals of the organizations. In other cases, the definition might exclude groups that others think should be considered as terrorists. The best approach, of course, is to first specify a definition and then to determine whether or not a particular group fits the definition. Even with the arguments over the definitions, there are some common elements used by scholars, governments, and journalists.

There are a number of basic components necessary in order for a group to be considered as a terrorist organization. The following characteristics combine to provide a useful and usable definition of terrorism.

Terrorism involves political aims and motives. It is violent or threatens violence. It is designed to generate fear in a target audience that extends beyond the immediate victims of the violence. The violence is conducted by an identifiable organization. The violence involves a non-state actor or actors as either the perpetrator, the victim of the violence, or both. Finally, the acts of violence are designed to create power in situations in which power previously had been lacking (i.e. the violence attempts to enhance the power base of the organization undertaking the actions).

The key elements of the definition will be discussed in the sections to follow. The importance of the various characteristics will

be obvious in many of the other chapters as well. This definition will underlay much of the discussion in the following chapters and will demonstrate why it is important and why it combines in a useful way to describe the phenomenon that we know as terrorism.

POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

The first key element of this definition is that the violence is primarily undertaken for political reasons. The fact that the actions are initiated to achieve political ends is a key element that separates terrorist acts from other forms of violence. The political objectives separate terrorism from violence that is launched for financial reasons or because of personal issues. Kidnappings of prominent political leaders or corporate executives to make political statements are different from those kidnappings that serve as criminal ventures to raise money for the abductors. The use of fear to extort money from businesses (the protection rackets of American gangster fame) is criminal, not political. Sometimes, of course, opposition groups have used kidnapping or bank robberies to finance their organizations, and they have been known to use violence or the threat of violence to levy “revolutionary taxes” on groups that could be forced to pay. In these cases, the goals are still generally political because the money received is used to fund subsequent political activities, including possibly more violence, rather than leading to gains in personal wealth.

While political objectives are a key for defining terrorism, the goals that are sought by terrorists can fall into a number of categories. The terrorists may be seeking to have a change in policies, or a change in leadership, or even a change in boundaries. The attainment of these objectives may be ones that are seen by the terrorists to be immediately possible or they may see them as being the end points of a long struggle. Some groups have indeed geared themselves for a long struggle to achieve these goals while others may believe that a show of violence is all that is necessary to topple the government in power or bring about the other changes that they desire.

VIOLENCE

The second element of a terrorist action is that the activity involves violence or the threat of violence. Requests for changes, demonstrations, and petitions are not terrorism, no matter how disconcerting they may be to a government. Although massive demonstrations may make a government apprehensive about the future, there is no direct threat of violence. Actual violence is fairly obvious when it occurs. Terrorism can also involve the credible threat of violence. One situation in which the threat of violence might be present would be one in which a group issues an ultimatum requiring action; if the appropriate action does not occur, violence will result. The threat of violence is only likely to be effective as a technique, however, with a group that has already demonstrated that it is able and willing to use violence. A political organization that has never undertaken any type of political violence is unlikely to be credible in its threats. Once violence has been used, however, the threat of additional violence may generate the necessary fear that the dissident group desires and lead the government to give in to the specific demands of the group. Hoaxes can, as a consequence, be part of a terrorist campaign, especially when they follow upon actual earlier violent actions.

TARGET AUDIENCE

For violence, and even political violence, to qualify as terrorism, it must include a target audience beyond the immediate victims. The violence is intended to influence the target audience or audiences as part of the attempt to gain the political objectives of the organization. If a political leader is assassinated with the goal of removing that individual in order to permit the next in line to move up, the death is political violence, but it has no target audience and it is not terrorism. It is a practical effort to put someone else in power. For an assassination to be a terrorist action, it must involve parties beyond the assassin or assassins and the immediate victim. If a political leader is assassinated in order to send a message to other members of the political elite that they need to change policies or make concessions in order to avoid a similar fate, then that assassination is a terrorist act. Bombings

of buildings (with or without casualties) or car bombs in crowded areas are often intended to show the general public that they are vulnerable. The resulting fear may lead the public to put pressure on the government to change policies or weaken public support for the leaders in power who clearly are unable to protect the citizens from dissidents. Frequently the victims of terrorist actions are members of the target audience since that is the easiest way to send a message to all the other members of the target audience. One of the primary goals of the violence is to create fear in the target audience. Thus, the immediate victims are usually not chosen specifically, but are simply convenient targets. The target audience, not the immediate victims of a terrorist act, is the key group that terrorist organizations are attempting to influence, and the goal is to generate fear in the target audience.

The need to reach a target audience is one reason why terrorist groups seek publicity. If no one knows of a terrorist act, the goals have not been achieved. If the deaths of government personnel are ascribed to a plane crash rather than a bomb on the aircraft, the target audience will draw the wrong conclusion about threats to the state or to the safety of individuals. The need for publicity is a key reason why some terrorist organizations have established pre-set code words with the media so that they can authenticate the claims of the organization when they provide a warning that a bomb is about to detonate. Of course, it will not be necessary in all cases for particular organizations to claim credit for particular terrorist actions. If a terrorist group has been active in the past, violence against the government or its supporters will be ascribed to the group without any need for a pronouncement from the terrorist group. The local situation and the target will often make it clear that the cause of a particular group of dissidents is behind the activity. If swastikas are painted on a Jewish synagogue, the anti-Semitic message is obvious. If a car bomb goes off at the headquarters of the ruling party, the general population is likely to know whether it is a local minority group or whether it is the political opposition that is behind the attack. Even if the source of the violence is obvious, it will still be necessary for information about the action to reach the target audience.

ORGANIZATION

For political violence to be terrorism there must be an identifiable organization. A lone individual is unlikely to be able to carry out the actions, reach the target audience, and present the political demands for the changes that are necessary to end the violence. An effective campaign to create change also requires enough actions to be credible, an effort beyond a single individual over time. A political assassination to change a leader can be very effective even if the assassin is killed *if the change in leadership results in a desired change in the government*. If the leader is simply replaced by another person with the same program and policies, then nothing has been accomplished and the solitary individual who was seeking the change is likely to be killed or captured. Terrorist actions almost inevitably lead to casualties or arrests among the dissidents; thus, a single individual is very likely to be captured or killed. Large organizations do not have to be as concerned about casualties among the members, while smaller organizations have to conserve scarce resources (members).

Theodore Kaczynski, the **Unabomber** in the United States, is a classic example of the limitations inherent with campaigns by one individual. Kaczynski sent package bombs to a variety of individuals. He was essentially upset over the pace of modernization and damaging changes that were occurring in the environment. His bombings over the years inspired fear, but the target audience was unclear, and it was not obvious what actions the target audience was expected to take. The FBI and other police agencies knew that the bombings were related due to forensic analyses, but they were unable to establish the linkages between the victims, and were they were unable to identify the political agenda of the person behind them. Until Kaczynski had a rambling manifesto published, his goals were unclear. Once they were published, he was identified by his writing and arrested. His activities demonstrate the need for a broader organization and the need for publicity (as well as the dangers that may come with greater publicity).

Organizational structures have changed in recent times with improved communications and transportation that have resulted in

a smaller world. Organizations, such as **Al Qaeda**, can maintain linkages with each other and even support or cooperate with groups that are not a formal part of the organization. Al Qaeda, for example, has supported actions by other groups that were not part of the organization. It provided funding and technical support for a number of attacks when it agreed with the goals and when it thought there was a chance of successful actions. With mobile phones, the internet, and other forms of communication, such improvised or informal cooperative arrangements can extend the reach of a formal organization and make it much more dangerous. Basically terrorist groups set up a network operation. The network does increase the dangers and at the same time often makes it more difficult for the authorities to infiltrate informers or breakup the groups involved.

Another form of organization that is present in the modern world is what has come to be called **leaderless resistance**. Leaderless resistance involves individuals or small groups that identify with some larger cause acting to achieve the goals of a larger group. There may be an organization that provides some direction to those wishing to undertake such “lone wolf” attacks by indicating appropriate targets or disseminating information on how to make bombs or use other types of violence. The individuals who were responsible for the London transport bombings in 2005 were not formal members of Al Qaeda or any other formal group. They did identify, however, with the goals of Al Qaeda and similar groups, and they saw their action as part of the broader struggle of militant Islam against activities of the West with which they disagreed. These individual attacks do add to the strength of a group, and there is an element of implied organization present. There has to be some group that provides a central reference for the identification and perhaps even to provide information on targets and techniques. The individuals agree with the broader goals, and they clearly seek to link themselves with the broader cause and to influence a target audience. This kind of loosely coordinated activity thus exists in addition to the more conventionally organized groups; they do not replace them completely.

The **anarchists** were a group that operated in the late 1800s and the early 1900s seeking to change political systems to provide