

Toward An Integrated Behavioral Framework for Analyzing Terrorism: Individual Motivations to Group Dynamics

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Abstract

By building on a theoretical framework, which expands rational choice theory to include group-based motivations, this paper offers an integrated behavioral model for analyzing terrorism. This model is used to understand the life cycle of a terrorist group; their formation and demise and also their transformation from ideological groups to criminal gangs and vice versa. For understanding terrorism, it is not essential to offer a strict functional model of human motivations. However, in this article, I argue that if we must, we should expand the rational choice model to include the primordial human urge of belonging to a group.

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Introduction

While the number of books with “terrorism” in their titles was increasing steadily over the last 50 years, the rate of growth of their publication since the fateful September day of 2001 has simply been nothing short of spectacular. Figure 1 tells the story visually far better than can be explained in words. We should recall that this impressive picture of an exponential growth does not include articles published in academic and non-academic outlets.

[Figure 1 about here]

As trickles turn into a torrent, it is natural to take stock of the accumulated knowledge. A number of books and articles have done a great service to the readers by putting the burgeoning contributions to the understanding of global terrorism within a manageable framework (see for example, Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004; Victoroff, 2005; Bjorgo, 2005). Yet, in the realm of social sciences, there seems to be a gap in our understanding of acts of terrorism from a coherent behavioral perspective. The vastness of the existing literature requires an overall scheme of classification. The first part of this article will present such a scheme along with their respective advantages and shortcomings. The second part explains the dominance of rational choice theory in the realms of social sciences and its challenges from the behavioral economists and political scientists. In the third part, I propose an integrated behavioral model for participation in acts of terrorism. Based on this theoretical framework, the fourth part will present a set of hypotheses regarding the life cycle of a terrorist group. The final section concludes with the policy implications of such an expanded model.

Before we begin our discussion, it is important to start with three important and interrelated caveats. Within the extremely diverse literature, there is a thin but resolute strand on which there is a general agreement: it is impossible to offer a universally accepted definition of terrorism (Schmid 1984; Weinberg, Pedahzur, and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004). Therefore, with the term terrorism remaining largely ambiguous, conveying

different meaning to different people, its analyses suffer from an inherent and yet incurable conceptual weakness. This current effort is no exception to this rule

Second, although terrorism has a long history, its systematic analysis has a short past. In fact, the earlier significant writings concerned themselves with social movements rather than terrorism. Therefore, I am viewing terrorism in its broadest possible connotation as a part of a larger social movement, a politically inspired collective action to procure public goods for the enjoyment of every member of the community.² Hence, in this article, I am simply defining terrorism as a particular form of politically motivated collective action.

My third caveat relates to my attempt to put the burgeoning literature on terrorism in a schematic form. It is useful to note at this point that these classifications are not airtight and, therefore, are merely heuristic ideal types with a considerable degree of conceptual overlap.

I. A Classification Scheme of Theories of Collective Movement and Terrorism

Case Studies and other non-theoretical approaches

I have presented my classification scheme for analyzing social movements in general, and terrorism in particular, in Table 1. We may start out with a dichotomy: those who use theoretical frameworks for analyzing the causes of terrorism and those who do not and, in stead, draw conclusions from detailed descriptive studies. The vast majority of the books and articles do not use any theoretical structure. For instance, Walter Laqueur's (1977) classic study of terrorism is a historical analysis. So are the works of eminent social and political historians such as Theda Skocpol (1976) and David Rapoport (1977; 1984; 2005). Similarly, terrorism specialists, such as Brian Jenkins (1975), Alex Schmid (1983), Bruce Hoffman's (1998) or Rohan Gunaratna (2002) have made valuable contributions, which are not grounded in any particular social theory. Then there are

² The concept of public goods was introduced by Samuelson (1965) and are defined with two important attributes, *excludability* and *exhaustibility*. Public goods are for the enjoyment of every member of the community, regardless of their level of involvement in the effort at procuring these goods. Thus, if tax dollars pay for clean air, a destitute person who does not pay any taxes is free to enjoy the benefits of a clean environment. Second, the benefits of public goods do not get exhausted with the increase in the number of users. Therefore, when a new child is born, we don't worry about her share of the clean air (see Baumol and Blinder, 1985, pp 543-44).

numerous books and articles by eminent journalists, which illuminate us about the ground realities in which terrorism can flourish (see, for example, Miller, 1996).

Psychological approaches

For those who use theoretical framework, I start with yet another dichotomy, where the researchers make an explicit assumption regarding human behavior, and where they do not. In the area of social movements, most theories make no explicit assumption about what motivates an individual. The social structural theorists seek the root causes of political violence and social movements within the structure of the society. In contrast to the meta-structural theorists, psychologists, psychiatrists and social psychologists study individual behavior and attempt to understand their collective behavior. Since psychiatry and psychoanalyses are driven by observations of individual behavior, their approach to the analysis of political violence started out by scholars attempting to understand the motivations of the leaders (Wolfenstein, 1967).³ One of the most interesting findings of this line of reasoning is that while terrorist groups are some times led by people, who may be classified as “insane,” “psychopathic” or “sociopathic,” the foot soldiers of terrorism are rarely diagnosed as such (Crenshaw, 1981; Ferracuti, 1982; Reich, 1998; Silke, 1998; Merari, 1998; Horgan, 2003).

However, a number of studies have been conducted on the basis of detailed interviews of the terrorists and participants in the violent social movements by eminent psychiatrists or psychologists. Their collective work has significantly enhanced our knowledgebase regarding the motivations of not only the leaders (Post, 1996; Schneider and Post, 2003) but also the followers in the global campaigns of terrorism (Russell and Miller, 1983; Clark, 1983; Weinberg and Eubank, 1987; Strenz, 1988; Handler, 1990; Post, 1997; Robins and Post, 1997; Hassan, 2001; Pedahzur, Perliger, and Weinberg, 2003; Horgan 2003; Sageman, 2004).

However, the results of the interviews or careful studies of case histories of the terrorists by trained psychologists and psychiatrists produced contradictory results. In fact, the myriad literature on the psyche of the terrorists produced the meager harvest of

³ Although Freud (1929) in his later life attempted to use his own theory of psychoanalysis to the understanding of social violence by arguing for a dialectical process between love and death, eros and destruction, his line of reasoning did not fare well in the subsequent scholarly evolution.

two conclusions: First, the vast majority of the perpetrators of the terrorist acts, however egregious, cannot be classified as psychotics or suffering from any other diagnosable maladies of the mind. Second, there is no stable profile of terrorists or potential terrorists.⁴

Social structural theories

The sociologists and political scientists hypothesize that social and political movements take place as a result of imbalances within the social structure. For instance, Karl Marx argued that the capitalist system of production dissociates laborers from their own fruits of labor. As a result, they feel alienated. Their alienation gives birth to political actions (“class struggle”) against the capitalist socio-political and economic superstructure. Practicing Marxists throughout the world based their revolutionary activities on the theory of class struggle. In this struggle it was not important to focus on the psychological aspects of an individual since their participation resulted from the manifest destiny of the flawed system. Therefore, although “alienation” is a psychological term, Marx and his followers were by no means interested in the psychological state of an individual. They assumed that the existence of alienation of the proletariat would propel them to take up arms against the capitalist system as soon as they realized the “true” causes of their anguish. The revolutionary leaders only differed as to how this “realization” would come about. While Mao (1961) and Lenin (1969) proposed extensive “education” for the “politicization of the masses,” Guevarra (Loveman and Davies, 1985), Marighela (1985) and other Marxist revolutionaries, such as the leader of the Naxalite movement in India Charu Mazumder (Banerjee, 1980; Ray, 2002) argued for armed insurrection to serve as the catalyst force to ignite the fire of class hatred.

In Western sociology and political science, Smelser (1963), Lipset (1963) Deutsch (1969), and Huntington (1968) sought reasons for political stability and rebellion within the folds of social structure. When imbalances cause structural strain (Smelser and Deutsch) or a regime suffers from a lack of political legitimacy (Lipset), or the

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the psychological theories of terrorism, see Victoroff (2005).

demands on the polity outstrips its ability to deliver (Huntington) social order tends to break down.

Relative deprivation theory

Insightful as they were, the early efforts at linking sociopolitical and economic inequalities to rebellions and insurrections did not address the critical question of testing the hypotheses with the help of empirical investigations. While structural theorists were happy attempting to explain rebellion in the third world nations, the decades of 1960s and 70s saw a rising tide of dissident activities in the affluent West, where the structural inequities were supposed to be low. Davies (1962), Feierabend and Feirabend (1966, 1972) and Gurr (1970) attempted to provide an answer to this puzzle by attempting to fuse an essentially individual-based theory of aggression, proposed by Dollard et al (1939) to the structural conditions of a society. They argued that when expectation outstrips achievement -- regardless of the absolute levels of economic consumption or the provision of political rights -- frustration is generated. The collective frustration turns to anger and hence, to violence.

Concerns over mass rebellion and terrorism in Europe and North America, saw a significant increase in government funding for collecting quantitative data on various aspects of political violence (Banks and Textor, 1963; Banks, 1971; Feierabend, Feierabend, and Nesvold, 1969; Taylor and Hudson, 1973, Taylor and Jodice, 1982). The accumulated numerical information gave a shot in the arms for quantitative research into mass movements and allowed researchers to test hypotheses with statistical techniques. Thus, a number of scholars attempted to establish a link between social movements and factors of economic inequality. For instance, Hibbs (1973), Venieris and Gupta (1983), Muller (1985) attempted to correlate political violence with inequality in income. Russett (1964), Mitchell (1968), Paige (1970), Paranzino (1972), Midlarsky (1982), Midlarsky and Roberts, (1985), Seligson (1966) examined its causal link with land distribution. Gupta (1990) attempted to develop a surrogate for measuring relative deprivation as a determining factor of sociopolitical instability. Unfortunately, the results, based on cross-national analyses produced a mixed bag of relatively weak correlations. This demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the macro theories of

revolution. Social, economic, and political inequalities do provide the necessary conditions for violent uprising, but they are not the sufficient causes. In other words, acts of rebellion do not take place simply because there is widespread frustration. For that they need additional factors.

Resource mobilization theory

The search for the sufficient causes of political violence propelled a number of prominent sociologists (Tilly, 1978, 1993; Tarrow, 1994, McAdam, 1982; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 1997) to offer theories of resource mobilization. Their theory points to the need of social networks to channel the individual frustrations and alienations into a coherent collective action. In this theory the community institutions and social networks become effective mobilization vehicles for collective action when the dissident leadership can draw on shared beliefs and worldviews that motivate individual actors and legitimize the acts of rebellion. Although the resource mobilization theory attempts to bring about a synthesis between social structural theories and psychological theories, the problem they face is that a theory of rebellion based on leadership and social networking is not amenable to testing of hypotheses based on statistical techniques. Therefore, those who have attempted to offer quantitative evidence have faced number of serious methodological problems (Varshney, 2002).

II. Modeling the Mind: Rational Choice and Behavioral Challenges

While the above-mentioned theories shed important lights on the motivations of rebellious behavior, none of them make any effort at modeling the mind; they do not make any fundamental assumption about what motivates a human being. Only neoclassical economics builds its theoretical edifice on the foundation of the assumption that human motivation. Writing in 1881, Edgeworth, one of founding fathers of neoclassical economics, asserted that: “the first principle of Economics is that every agent is actuated only by self-interest (1881: 16).” This fundamental assumption of

human motivation has since been the foundation on which the edifice of economics as a social science has been constructed.

The formal theoretical structure of economics is based on the rational calculation of maximization of self-utility, given an individual's set of tastes and preference. In this theoretical structure, one does not question the origins of tastes and preferences and takes them as given.⁵ Economic methodology, born out of the need to understand market behavior of buyers and sellers, made spectacular advancements in formulating and testing hypotheses by using econometric analyses. Their success allowed economists an unprecedented access to the inner sanctum of power; they alone among social scientists became integral parts of macroeconomic policy making in the United States and elsewhere. Thus, in their classic study, Stigler and Becker (1977: 89) felt justified in asserting: "Our hypothesis is trivial, for it merely asserts that we should apply standard economic logic as extensively as possible."

This success soon allowed economics and its progeny, the rational choice theories to impose their hegemonic control over other branches of social sciences.⁶ The popularity of rational choice theory in the realm of political sciences began with the publication of Anthony Downs's (1957) seminal work and quickly became a recognized discipline. Let us discuss the development and shortcomings of rational choice theory in understanding the motivation of the terrorists.

The name "rational choice" carries with it a number of important implications. To begin with, the rational choice not only models an actor's decision-making calculus, it proceeds to define *rationality* itself. It tells us that rational people take decisions based on the assessment of expected benefits and costs of each action and that to do otherwise, is "irrational", or a bit more charitably, "a-rational."

The precept of economic rationality can be applied to the action of a single participant in an act of political rebellion (Lichbach, 1995), or a rebel organization

⁵ For a vigorous defense of economic rationality, see Stigler and Becker (1977). And for a cogent criticism, see Sen (1990).

⁶ For an excellent early discussion of this hegemonic influence of neoclassical economics, see Hirschleifer (1985). For one of the latest, see Ruttan (2002).

(Chong, 1991; Kydd and Walter, 2001), or to a state actor (Stohl, 2003).⁷ These analyses of human behavior are based on the ubiquitous assumption of self-utility maximization by a “rational” actor, where rationality is strictly interpreted as following the dictates of maximization of narrowly defined self-interest. There are several important analytical problems with the assumption of individual short-term *selfish* utility maximization.

The American political science literature, in the decades immediately following the WWII was awash with celebratory writings of the democratic achievements of the voluntary association of free citizens to further their own interest. The triumph of democracy over its totalitarian alternative was seen through its bedrock assumption of voluntary association. Yet, in 1965, in one of the most influential publications, Olson pointed out the logical pitfalls of using economic rationality in explaining the emergence of voluntary associations. His original intent was to explain why people did not automatically form collective organizations and mobilize to provide public goods. Olson introduced the term “free rider” in the social science lexicon, where “rational” individuals would argue that since the benefits of a public good is not restricted to those who participate in the attempt to procure it, it would make sense for each individual to free-ride and let others pay for it. With everybody reasoning this way, no public goods would be produced. Suppose, there are two individuals both of whom would benefit from a political change resulting from the removal of a tyrant from power. However, one has decided to participate in an act of political dissidence, the other has decided to do nothing. We can see that the two actions would mean the following to the two members of the community:

Participant = Benefit – cost

Non-participant = Benefit

As we can see from the above formulations, since a non-participant does not have to pay any cost (from loss of time, income to even loss of life) to get benefits from a collective good, there is no reason for any rational human being to participate in a collective action. Furthermore, as the group size increases, a single participant’s

⁷ The literature on the use of “rational actor” model to political rebellion is voluminous. I am mentioning only a few representative ones.

contribution to the cause becomes increasingly insignificant. A single voter cannot affect the outcome of a national election. Nor can a single Islamic suicide bomber expect to establish a global Islamic state with his or her sacrifice. Therefore, nobody would have any reason to contribute to a collective cause. As a result, no collective action will ever be undertaken, no war will be fought (and won), and much of what we see around us as public goods within an organized society will cease to exist.

There are several important policy implications of rational choice theory for the analysis of acts of political dissidence. Tullock (1971) pointed out that given this paradox, a revolutionary is either an irrational being or is a hypocrite, who hides his ulterior self-serving motives under the guise of lofty ideals. The former case, such behavior is a matter of psychology or psychiatry and in the latter case his actions are no different from those of a common criminal. In either case, economics has nothing to contribute toward the explanation of such acts. Thus, Olson (1965: 161-62) noted that

“It not clear that this is the best way of theorizing about either utopian or religious groups.... Where nonrational or irrational behavior is the basis for a lobby, it would perhaps be better to turn to psychology or social psychology than to economics for a relevant theory.”

During the mid-1980s in a private correspondence to the author, Sir Arthur Lewis, a Nobel Laureate economist, responding to an empirical study of cross-national political violence, remarked that:

Political disturbance may be likened to a big and dangerous dog that is peaceful most of the time, but occasionally barks shyly, or gets very angry or even bites a member of the family. What you are asking is what causes these changes of mood. This is a problem of psychology.

The second implication of the rational choice theory is that if these acts are no different from those of common criminals, the only way to restrict such behavior is to increase the costs (punishment) of participation.⁸

⁸ For a discussion of economic approach to criminal behavior, see Becker (1976).

History has its own way of injecting irony. Olson wrote his famous book to repudiate the idea of instant formation of interest groups within a democratic system and to explain inactivity even in the face of a dire collective need. His book was published just when the country was going through a “participation explosion.” While his seminal contribution created a cottage industry among the academics explaining why people would fail to form groups in many areas of economic political lives, another noted economist observed that “astoundingly large number of citizens, far from attempting to free ride, have been taking to streets, to the nation’s capital, or to other places where they expect to exert some influence for change” (Hirschman, 1971: 5). The illogic of collective action flew in the face of human need to form groups and attempt to solve problems facing an entire community or even a nation.

The behavioral challenge

The parallel course of the dialectical evolutionary process of Western social sciences saw the development of rational choice school starting in the 1950s while a contrasting view of trying to understand how people *actually behave* as opposed to how they *ought to behave* was shaping up under a broad and extremely loose rubric of behavioralism. In his presidential address to the American Political Science Association, Robert Dahl (1961: 763) began by noting that: “Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the “behavioral approach” in political science is the ambiguity of the term.” The behavioral approach in the United States started by the “radicals” in the academia and was greatly aided by the infusion of new ideas from Europe as well as the development of survey methods as a tool of analysis, which gave researchers a window into the minds of the people.

Economist Amartya Sen (1987: 16) puts the problem with the concept of economic rationality the best by pointing out that “universal selfishness as *actuality* may well be false, but universal selfishness as a requirement of *rationality* is patently absurd” (emphasis Sen’s). However, after nearly half a century of criticism of rational choice, exposing its fundamental flaw, behavioralism came to the end of its tether for one simple reason: It could not offer an alternate framework. Thus, Elinor Ostrom in her Presidential address to the American Political Science Association (1998: 9) nearly four

decades after Dahl acknowledged the shortcomings of the assumption of economic rationality, but insisted that “While incorrectly confused with a general theory of human behavior, complete rationality models will continue to be used productively by social scientists, including the author.” An accepted theoretical framework, which Thomas Kuhn (1970) calls the “normal science” is never discarded until an alternate framework is proposed and its advantage over the former is clearly demonstrated. As a result, despite the shortcomings of the methodological monism of neoclassical economics, without an alternative theoretical structure, the behavioral challenge turned into a failed revolution.

However, today as the world faces extreme threats of terrorists from those whose devotion to their cause is stronger than the love of their own lives, those of us involved in understanding such behavior from a theoretical perspective must ask ourselves whether we should be glued to an incomplete theory or should try to develop an alternate structure. In my previous writings, I have offered an alternate framework by expanding rational choice framework by including insights from social psychology (Gupta, 1990; Gupta and Singh, 1992; Gupta, Hofstetter and Buss, 1997; Gupta, 1998; Gupta, 2001; Gupta, 2002; Bandyopadhyay and Gupta, 2002). Let me explain its implications for the analysis of terrorism.

III. Economics and Social Psychology: An Integrated Approach

I hypothesize that human beings as social animals, not only strive to increase their personal well being, but also try to increase the welfare of the group in which they claim their membership.⁹ Judging from the human evolutionary perspective, there is nothing irrational about this dual objective. We argue that such an expanded view of human rationality would allow us to explain a number of important anomalies while linking a number of important theories regarding participation in terrorism and other acts of social violence.

However, the problem with considering group-identity is that unlike individual identity, it is not invariant. A collective identity, after all, as Benedict Anderson points out is an “imagined community.” As social beings in complex societies we carry literally innumerable collective identities. Many of these identities are *ascriptive*, based on birth

⁹ For a formal presentation of my dual utility hypothesis, see Gupta (1990, 2001, 2002).

characteristics (e.g., nationality, or ethnic, linguistic, or religious affiliation, etc.) and others are based on, what I call, *adoptive* identity. The *ascriptive* identities, with their quintessential images of “good” and “evil” create a mindset, which Professor Post (see Robins and Post, 1997; Post, 2003) calls “hatred bred in the bone.” These are images to which a baby gets inculcated from birth (also see Volkan, 2004). In these societies, where widespread socialization into the politics of extremism also offer extensive social network, joining a terrorist organization can become synonymous with the rights of passage for many young men and women. Thus, being born into the hateful world of the working class Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, the Palestinian refugee camps or the territories controlled by the LTTE in Sri Lanka or the FARC in Colombia would ensure a steady recruit into the extremist organization. But not everybody joins.

While ascriptive identities are part of an individual’s socialization process often from infancy, there are identities that people choose to adopt at a later stage of life. They may include belonging to an environmental group, a new religious cult, or even developing a Marxian class identity. These identities are to be taught since they do not come naturally.

I argue that perhaps every conscious human action is a mixture of both individual and collective identity. Although for the most part the two cannot be separated, we are on a safe ground when we look at the extreme ends of our motivational spectrum. For instance, when I am investing my money in the stock market, I am acting solely on the basis of my self-interest. On the other hand, when suicide bombers sacrifice their lives, their actions reflect the total submersion of their individual identities in the collective. However, even in these extremes, we can detect the possibility of a mixed motive; if I invest only in those companies, which confirm to my moral ethical standards or, I blow myself up with the hope of personal salvation (Juergensmeyer, 2000) or fulfill some sexual fantasies (Konet, 2001; Morgan, 2002) through my act of ultimate sacrifice, I may be following a mixed motivational directive. However, if I am not constrained by any such moral considerations in my investment decisions or if I sacrifice my life for a secular cause (or without any conviction for rewards in the afterlife), then these may be assumed to reflect the purest forms of motivations of the two ends of the spectrum. It would seem absurd to assume that we will be able to classify any single act, much less an

actor, as purely self-serving or purely altruistic. We do not even comprehend our own motivation; the essence of Hindu philosophy puts quest to “know thyself” as the highest form of knowledge, an essentially unattainable journey toward nirvana. However, economics faced a similar dilemma by asserting that individuals maximize their own utility. Without any way of measuring utility (or preference), Samuelson argued that our actions reveal our true preferences. In economics, it is known as the “revealed preference” hypothesis. Similarly, I argue that although pure motivations are never known, we may be able to analyze our actions through our “revealed preferences.”

Political Entrepreneurs

Our collective identities firmly establish our membership in “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983). Since there are infinite numbers of collective identities that an individual can assume, the process of developing a compelling identity on the basis of which a large number of people would act is one most intriguing questions that face us. I argue that the development of a collective identity depends upon the abilities of “political entrepreneur(s)” to put together a coherent story -- by borrowing selectively from history, religion, and mythology -- that resonates with a large number of people. The importance of “framing,” particularly by the authority figures in human decision-making process is well recognized in the field of psychology and cognitive sciences (see, for example Simon, Morreal and Gronbeck, 2001). The concept of “entrepreneur” as a catalytic agent for change has been around at least since economist Joseph Schumpeter introduced it in 1912.¹⁰ I argue that while aspects of absolute and relative deprivation provide the necessary condition, the presence of a political innovator provides us with the sufficient condition for producing collective movements in general, and terrorism, in particular. My point can be further elucidated with the help of the example of the current wave of Islamic terrorism.¹¹ Sageman (2003) explains well the process by which the Salafi movement spread throughout the Islamic nations. To be sure the presence of sheer frustration and anger in the region had been building up against the West for a long time (Lewis, 2002). However, it took political entrepreneurs like Osama bin Laden and

¹⁰ Frohlich and Oppenheimer introduced the concept of an entrepreneur in the context of political mobilization (1978).

¹¹ I am treating “terrorism” as a subset of collective movement and therefore, not distinguishing between terrorism, insurrection, and other forms of political movements.

Ayman al-Zawahiri to crystallize the widely felt antipathy into a coherent political movement. They fused the basic tenets of Salfism with the current political and economic crisis in the Arab/Islamic world to give birth to political Islam with the clear identification of “near” and “far enemies.”

The Dual Motivations

However, if we assume that people are motivated by both ideology and personal rewards, we can rewrite the above cost/benefit equation as:

$$\textit{Benefit to the self} + \textit{Benefit to the group} + \textit{net cost of participation} > 0$$

In this formulation, I not only divide up the benefits into individual and collective, also I view the cost as a net of participation versus non-participation. That is, if an individual takes part in a dissident activity, he risks punishment from the state. However, if he remains neutral, he incurs the possibility of retribution by the insurgent forces. If the fear of government is higher than that of the rebel group, without any ideological imperative, an individual will remain passive. However, if the fear of the rebel group exceeds the fear of the government, the same individual will take part in dissident activities.

I argue (see, Gupta 2001) that in any political movement we are likely to find those who join for personal gains. I call them *mercenaries*. Their motivations are no different from those who join criminal gangs all over the world. However, I call those, who join primarily out of their desire to do good for their group, *ideologues*. Finally, there are those who join out of fear. For them the cost of non-joining may be too high. I call these individuals *captive participants*. Hence, the motivations for joining a group can be greed, ideology, or fear.

An organization – terrorist or legitimate – thrive being protean in its goals and objective (Stern, 2005). However, once a group is established, it develops an organizational structure. It acquires funds and fire arms and gains power. Money, guns, and power inevitably draw many whose interests are primarily personal. Furthermore, when a group gains enough power, it derives the ability to coerce those who might not otherwise join them. Although it is not possible to peer into the minds of anybody and

classify an individual into this motivational scheme, I argue that a proper set of public policies must begin by distinguishing among the ideologues, mercenaries, and captive participants.

Mass Communication and Expressive Choice: Gaining vs. Being

When we purchase something or join a collective action, why do we do it? Economics has traditionally linked the demand for a good with its utility value. This is known as “instrumental rationality,” where, I purchase a commodity for its intrinsic value. However, our purchases not only allow us to *enjoy the utility* of the products we buy, but also to *become a certain person* through our consumption.¹² In other words, my choice has an instrumental component, where I want a certain product for its specific functionality, I also covet it for its symbolic value. Thus, I demand a product for what it *offers me*, but also my demand for it is influenced by what *it says about me*. For instance, when I buy a car, I buy it as much for its technical specification (the instrumental component of “gains”) as much for the image of me that it projects. My driving a particular automobile allows me to be a certain individual.

Mass marketing, like political communication, has always depended on expressive or symbolic aspect of the message (Maddock and Fulton, 1996; Roberts, 2004). Perhaps, the most successful advertisement campaign in history is the “Marlborough Man.” The most striking aspect of this ad is that the character does not say or does anything remarkable other than quietly lighting up a cigarette. An analysis of this powerful image suggests that the ad conveys a very important message of rugged individualism, which resonates deeply with the American psyche. Therefore, when I light a cigarette, I not only *enjoy* the taste, but also *become* my own person. In the area of political communication, the 1988 advertising campaign in the presidential race featuring an African American convict named Willie Horton, similarly stands out as a prime example of appealing to a large segment of the population’s quintessential image of a threatening figure (see Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen, 2000).

Research on political communication also demonstrates the importance of use of symbolic words in mobilizing people. For instance, the Republican Party had been trying

¹² For an excellent discussion, see Schuessler (2000). Also, see Bandyopadhyay and Gupta (2002).

to eliminate the estate tax, tax on large sums of bequeathals. However, they realized that to the public, the term “estate” evokes images of large inheritance. As a result, they found little public support for it, until they started calling it the “death tax.” Suddenly, common people started to associate the tax with the ultimate injustice of having to pay taxes even in death.¹³

If we want to understand the primary recruiting tool for many terrorist organizations, we must pay attention to the message that the leaders send out, which taps into the deeply held religious or cultural ethos of the people. The image of Osama bin Laden, for example has been carefully crafted by the al-Qaeda. Having shunned a life of extreme privilege, the carefully monitored pictures show him living an ascetic life, sharing simple food with his comrades in a tent. This image cut a highly potent symbol in the minds of those who live in societies plagued by corruption and extreme economic inequalities. Therefore, when young men follow bin Laden’s path, they become part of this mythological image of Islamic life. It is, of course, important to note that the power of the image is specific to culture, history, and socio-economic condition of the audience. For instance, the image of bin Laden, which works so well in the Islamic world, creates an opposite impression in the Western world. The media plays an important role in creating the image of a hero or a villain and increasingly, the Internet is becoming the most potent tool of mass marketing of terrorism. The motivations of extremes of human acts confound us. For example, it is impossible to fully comprehend the mental process that produced the suicide missions of the 9/11 attackers. It will be impossible to put such action within the framework of instrumental rationality. Yet, such actions make more sense as choice based on the logic of expressive rationality. Perhaps the reason the attackers chose their destiny has less to do with *achieving something as a result of their action*, and more to *be somebody in their own eyes*.

In sum, I argue that it is not essential to offer a strict functional model of human motivations to understand the root cause of terrorism. However, if we must have a theoretical structure, we should expand the rational choice model to include the primordial human motivation of belonging to a group.

¹³ For an interesting discussion of mass communication, see “The Persuaders” *Frontline* at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/>

Question of falsifiability

Karl Popper (1968) pointed out that the core of scientific reasoning rests on the principle of *falsifiability*; our ability to prove or disprove hypotheses with empirical data. The fear of enlarging the fundamental assumption of *homoeconomicus* is that by arbitrarily including extraneous factors, we would render the foundation of human motivation to an unfalsifiable sponge that explains everything yet, at the end, becomes tautological (Lichbach 1997). However, I argue that preferences based on collective identity are equally falsifiable as those grounded on the assumption of self-interest. Strength of collective identity or group-preference can be estimated directly with the help of survey data for individual actors or can be approximated by using surrogate variables for national or cross-national investigations. Thus, based on a survey response Gupta, Hofstetter, and Buss (1997) showed that variables measuring „us%“ and „them%“ are critical in explaining participation in a collective action. Similarly, Kelman (1973) pointed out that with increased levels of the intensity of collective identity within a nation will be greatly influenced by the depth of ethno-linguistic and/or religious cleavages within a society. Without mentioning collective identity, Gurr (1993) found „group cohesion%“ to be the most significant variable in explaining violence against minorities around the world.

IV. Implications of the Expanded Model of Human Behavior

The dual-argument utility function can serve as an important guidepost for understanding motivations behind actions aiming at achieving public goods including those being strived by the terrorist groups. We may summarize the specific implications for the analysis of terrorism as follows:

Individual Participants to Groups: Ideology and Self-Interest

As individuals join groups from their dual motivations, the preponderance of one kind of participants or their leadership can tilt a group’s orientation. Thus, while a group can be quite ideological, there are those, which use ideology as a smoke screen to hide their true intentions of private gains. I have argued (Gupta, 2005, forthcoming) that terrorist groups reflect their ideological orientation through their revealed preference for

choice of activities. Available data show that most terrorist groups tend to specialize in their activities. It appears that extreme ideological groups (e.g., al-Qaeda, Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, etc.) specialize in suicide attacks and other attacks that require the assailants to be physically close to their victims. The less ideological groups (the IRA, ETA, etc.) show their prudence by specializing in remote controlled bombings. And those, which are mostly interested in personal gains of their members, concentrate on moneymaking activities, such as hostage taking and kidnapping (e.g., Abu Sayyaf and the FARC).

Furthermore, it seems logical to assume that a group's orientation may not remain fixed and may alter over time. A group that may start out being highly ideological, with steady infusion of money and accumulation of power, can become more interested in making money. There are reasons to believe that the LTTE and the PKK may be examples of such groups. The history of the IRA has shown that there has been a constant struggle between those who have strong ideological goals and those who are primarily interested in profiting through criminal activities.

Jessica Stern, having interviewed numerous members of terrorist organizations all over the world, noted (2005: 112):

“Over time, however, militants have told me, terrorism can become a career as much as a passion. Leaders harness humiliation and anomie and turn them into weapons. Jihad becomes addictive, militants report, and with some individuals or groups – the “professional” terrorists – grievances can evolve into greed: for money, political power, status, or attention.

The true test of a revolutionary leadership rests with the ability to manage the conflicting aspirations its membership.

Organizational Structure, Ideology and Modality of Recruitment

In terms of organizational structure, most terrorist groups with a criminal bend tend to have a strict hierarchical structure, which is reflective of their need to control the financial flow. Ideological groups, however, particularly if it is a part of a larger

movement are inspired by the concept of a common destiny and the images of a shared enemy. In such cases, the organizational structure may show a good deal of flexibility. Sageman (2003) points out that while al-Qaeda has a relatively non-hierarchical organizational structure, another ideological group, Jemaah Islamiyah in South Asia is much more hierarchical.

Within a strict hierarchical structure, discipline of individual members is maintained through a formal process. For instance, many groups, such as the IRA develops its own system of internal justice. But how do the non-hierarchical groups carry out their assigned duties? When a terrorist ideology becomes part of a movement, semi-independent cells are often created, where small numbers of members are bound by their mutual contract of commitment. Sageman (2003) calls this a “bunch of guys” hypothesis, which reinforces their group identities through the adherence to an ideological orientation and a strong bond of mutual commitment.¹⁴

Rise, Decline and Transformation of Terrorist Groups: A Theoretical structure

I can summarize my arguments regarding the rise, decline, and transformation of terrorist groups with the help of Figure 2. As we can see from this diagram, terrorism or any other kind of collective action begins with the presence of both motivations relating to collective and individual identities. Collective identity can be based on birth characteristics (ethnic, religious, linguistic, national origin, or gender) or can be “adopted” through indoctrination and education by groups.

Together, the two identities provide motivations for participants who join a terrorist group out of ideology, greed, or fear. The composition of the group and its leadership determine its overall orientation on the scale of being ideological or criminal. These groups like any other organization pursue their goals. For terrorist organizations, these include achieving their political and/or economic goals by increasing their membership and coercing their opposition.

The two side boxes show the factors that help or hinder a group from achieving its goals. Thus, the rise of a charismatic leader crystallizes the collective identity for a large

¹⁴ In economics, Amartya Sen (1967, 1984) has noted the importance of commitment as a assurance toward participation in collective action.

number of people. External conditions of injustice, humiliation, and anger reinforce the base by attracting people of various motivations (ideology, greed, and fear) to join the dissident movement. Forming a network of support, particularly when a regional conflict is linked to a global movement strengthens the group. Finally, the group is able to put up an effective challenge to the government when money and arms start flowing.

The negative factors include those, which contribute to the shrinking of their power bases. This happens as a result of a loss of a charismatic leader, military defeat, stopped flow of money and arms, alienation from its support bases, or the destruction of social network for joining the group.

Finally, the figure shows the possibility of a group's migration from the ideological to criminal and vice versa. Let us discuss the various components of this overall theoretical structure with the help of real world observations.

A terrorist group is as good as the support of its base. Mao (1962) called the base "the rump" of a revolutionary. If a revolutionary group does not have a rump, Mao argued, it will simply have to run until it drops down in exhaustion. All of the following comments relate to the issue of the base. I am summarizing some of the more important ones.

Government overreaction: Andrew Silke (2003) in his insightful article quotes the first Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, MacStiofain "... most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries in the first place, but by the stupidity and brutality of government." Terrorism offers a perfect policy trap for the government. The staging of a sensational act of terrorism creates a condition, where the political leaders try to outdo one another in their demonstration of disgust and the corresponding toughness of stance. In their state of hyper reaction, they fail to realize that while an entire community may be sympathetic to the cause, a miniscule minority carries out the acts of violence. The political leadership immediately calls for acts of retribution, which targets the entire community. The communal punishment only solidifies the terrorists' base.

Use of military versus police. Terrorism is a community problem. The problem is only exacerbated when the army is called in. In many parts of the world the police force is typically corrupt. Even in these circumstances, the police officers live in the

community, while the military officers after each day of duty, go back to their isolated barracks. This community connection and intimate knowledge of the people and the place is absolutely essential for management of terrorism.

Ground-level intelligence. The most effective tool of managing terrorism is ground-level intelligence. As groups become more hierarchical and less ideological, it becomes easier to infiltrate.

Political expediency: Many terrorist groups start with the patronage of political leaders, who believe that they can use them for their own interest. The unfortunate aspect of the evolution of terrorism is that quite often, they get out of hand.

Linking to international movement As Professor Rapoport (2004) has shown, international terrorism tends to come in waves. When there is a particular idea sweeping the world, local groups can get both political legitimacy and develop a wider base by linking itself to the prevailing global movement. For instance, the Abu Sayyaf group attempted to do the same by linking itself to the global *jihadi* movement (Rogers, 2003). However, Osama bin Laden coming to know of the criminal nature of the group cut off its alliance with al-Qaeda. Another group that has done well by internationalizing its grievances is the IRA. In the late 1960s the IRA transformed its retrogressive aims of bringing the entire island under Catholic domination as a civil rights movement. The leftist groups and intellectuals all over the world quickly embraced it, thereby infusing the IRA with new enthusiasm.

International boundary. The terrorists' need for a safe base is often facilitated by its location next to an international boundary, particularly when the government on the other side of the border is friendly to the group's aspirations. Many terrorist groups, spanning time and geographic space have benefited as a result of its location.

Terrain: Some experts mention terrain, particularly a difficult one as boon to the spread of terrorism. However, the experts differ on this topic, since the best terrorist movements are those, which can find sanctuary among the general populace, regardless of the terrain. However, under certain circumstances, terrain can be a help to a dissident group.

Gap between the terrorists and their base: Terrorist groups can undermine their cause by simply staging events that are too unpalatable for the group's constituents or embracing ideologies or strategies alien to its client group. For instance, the Real IRA staged a bombing in Omagh in 1998, in which thirty-one lives, including two unborn babies, were lost. This carnage created a rift between the IRA and their traditional base. Similarly around 1969, the Maoist group called the Naxalites, alienated the Bengali intelligentsia by taking the most strikingly radical slogan, "China's Chairman is our Chairman." Freshly out a border dispute with China, the people of Calcutta, found such enthusiasm for Mao highly objectionable.

Conclusion

It is not absolutely essential to analyze terrorism with the help of a model of human mind. Yet, in our need to develop a body of knowledge, which is based on the Popperian criterion of empirically falsifiable hypotheses, we seek a reductionistic perspective of human motivation. The rational choice model, based on the assumption of an egoist, self-utility maximizing actor is currently the only game in town. Even when the limiting implications of economic approach to the explanation of collective action, the core of political science, was exposed by Mancur Olson (1965) the adherents of economic approach to human behavior could take comfort in the argument that without any alternative, an incomplete theory was better than none (Ostrom 1998; Lichbach, 1995). Indeed, the absence of a competing theoretical structure justified Becker (1996: 7) in boldly claiming that "[O]ur assumption of stable preferences (based on self-utility alone) was intended not as a philosophical or methodological 'law,' but as a productive way to analyze and explain behavior. We are impressed by how little has been achieved by many discussions in economics, sociology, history, and other fields that postulate almost arbitrary variations in preferences and values when confronted by *puzzling* behavior" (emphasis mine). Unfortunately, much of this "puzzling" behavior falls under what would be considered the core of terrorism research. The needs of time have often changed the course of epistemological evolution in the area of social science. Today, when we face the threat of terrorism varying from ultimate self-sacrifice (suicide attacks)

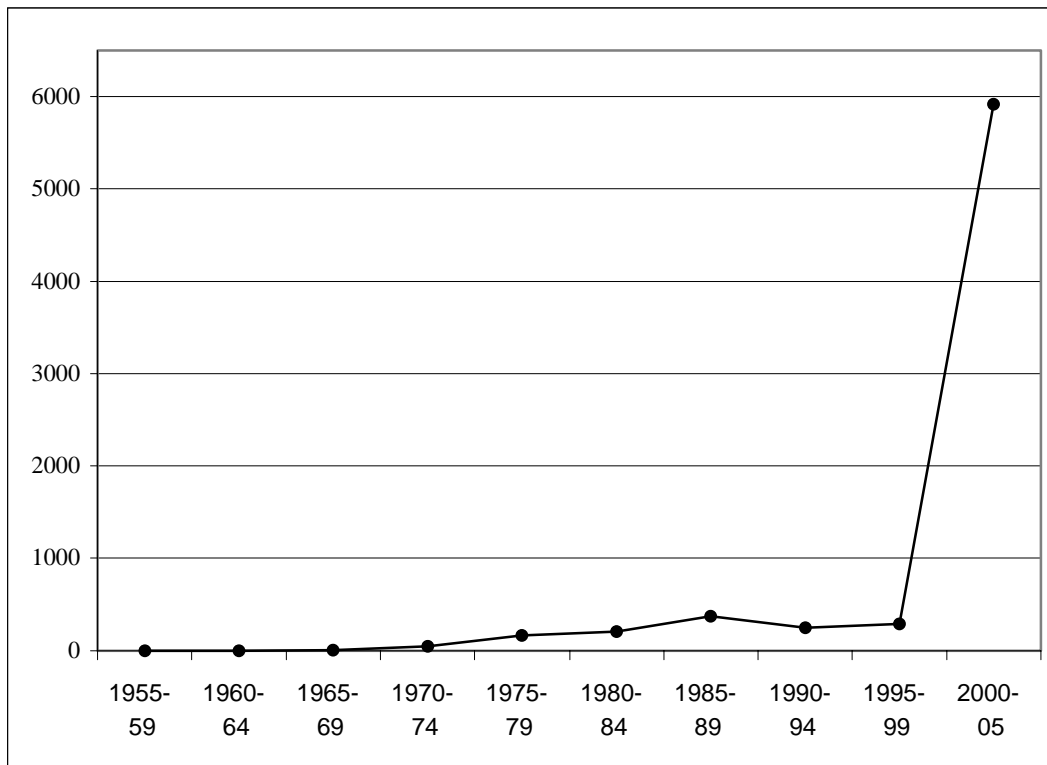
to kidnapping for no motivation higher than making money, the need to develop an integrated framework is stronger than ever.

The conclusion of this study is that terrorism is the outcome of a complex social process. Its motivations are not different from any other collective action in which humans as social beings participate on a daily basis. Therefore, the root causes of terrorism should not be sought within the hidden maladies of the mind or in the deep crevasses of brain tissues. Terrorism results from the social processes which determine our multifarious motivations. The limitations of rational choice approach based solely on the premise of maximization of selfish utility -- the only methodology that aims at developing a formal model of human behavior -- call for its expansion to include the other primordial human need: the need to belong to a group.

Table 1**Classification of Theories of Social Movement and Terrorism**

| No Theoretical foundation | Studies Based on Theoretical Foundations | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| | No explicit assumption regarding human nature | | Explicit assumption regarding human nature (Rational Choice Model) | |
| Descriptive studies | Individual (micro) based | Societal (macro) based | Individual (micro) based theories | Group (macro) based |
| Historical case studies | Social learning Psychological approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychopathology • Social psychology • Social learning • Identity theory • Narcissistic personality • Paranoia hypothesis | Social Structural theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxist theories • Western sociological theories Relative Deprivation theories Resource mobilization theories | Individual cost/benefit analysis and the decision to participate in a collective action | Strategic use of violence by terrorist groups (game theoretic approach). |

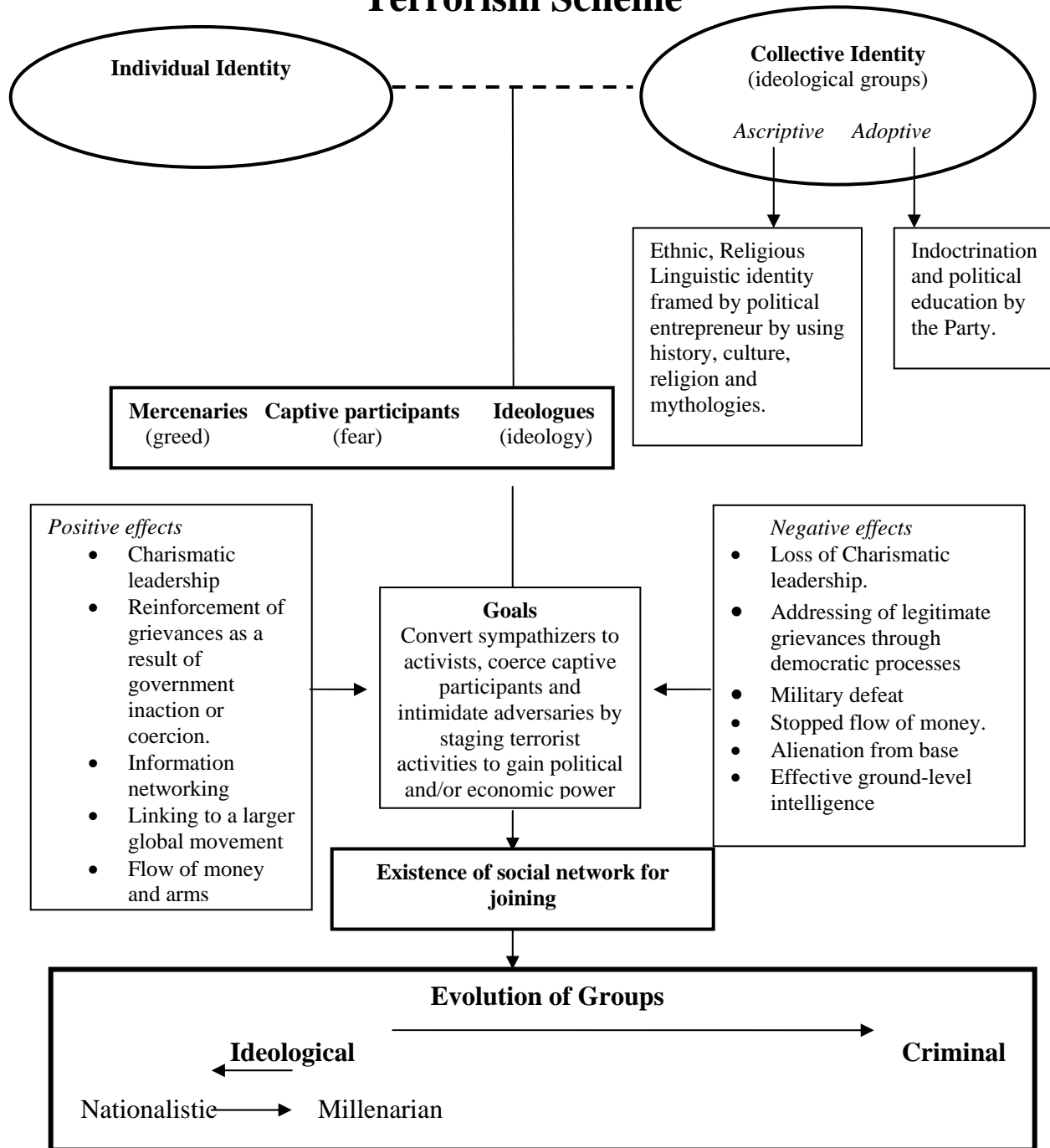
Figure 1
Number of Published Books With “terrorism” in Their Title



Source: Electronic search of the Melvyl library catalog of the University of California system.

Figure 2

Terrorism Scheme



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