

Chapter 2 ~ Motivations of Terrorists and the Psychology of Terrorism

Chapter Summary

When large groups, whether ethnic, racial, religious, nationalistic, or cultural, feel vulnerable, that is, when they feel the potential loss of their attachment and emotional investment in the group's belief system and leadership, they fear the annihilation of the group-self or (what has been called) the large-group identity. Psychological regression is a common yet primitive defense mechanism used by groups under these stressful circumstances, whether the fear is legitimate or not, real or fantasized. Psychological regression and the associated cognitive and emotional splitting are typical responses to the experience of such profound anxiety (what Firestone calls death anxiety). Under these conditions of psychological regression, members assume a collective, psychological flight behind their leaders and toward more primitive and infantile feelings. Charismatic spiritual leaders and gurus reflecting and articulating expansive visions and absolute ideologies offer the illusion of a safe haven for the seemingly fearful, disenfranchised, and powerless members of society who are searching for simple, black-and-white solutions to complex social and political problems.

Group solidarity emerges from a foundation of ethnic, religious, cultural, and nationalistic similarity and like-mindedness. There is safety in the comfort of the large-group identity and its godlike leader. The combination of homogeneity and group cohesion fosters a loss of individuality and separateness (self and other boundaries) among members. This loss of independence and critical thinking then reinforces polarized, compartmentalized thinking, which produces psychological splitting and regression among group members. It is this black-and-white, absolutist thinking rooted in infantile anxieties that fosters dehumanization of and violence against the other. In the presence of social disorganization and economic and political problems, charismatic leaders can manipulate and provoke group violence by exploiting the "us and them" mentality of the large (ethnic, religious, cultural, or nationalistic) group. By identifying the enemy and then leading the group in attack against a popular scapegoat, terrorist leaders diminish followers' anxieties while proffering them a target for their long-held resentment and hostility.

The extent to which political, religious, and ideological factors contribute to the appeal of engaging in terrorism depends in part on the leadership of the organization. It also depends on the ideologies and motivations of the individuals and/or group members that employ terrorism. What's more, to the extent that leadership, group members, and individuals are motivated to engage in terrorism, the appeal of terrorism is likely to be enhanced.

Key Points to Cover in Lecture

-Ideologies Terrorists Espouse

- Political and Policy-Based Ideologies
 - Marxist-Leninist communism
 - Stalinist communism
 - Maoist communism
 - Castro and Guevarist communism
 - Fascism/neo-fascism
 - European neo-Nazism
 - American neo-Nazism

- Anarchist/nihilist
- Ethnic and national independence movements
- Environmentalism
- Antiglobalization
- Animal rights
- Religious Extremist Ideologies
 - Islamic extremism
 - Christian extremism
 - Anti-abortion/right to life.
 - Militant Zionism
 - Hindu extremism
 - Sikh extremism
 - Messianic salvation/apocalyptic cultism
 - Occultism
 - Paganism/animism

-Terrorist Motivations and Goals

- Primary vs. Secondary Motivations
- French “Reign of Terror”
- Four waves of terrorism

-Internal Psychology of Terrorist Acts

- Theories and Studies

- Large-Group Identity

- What is large-group identity?
- Theories and Studies
- Totalistic Belief Systems

Discussion Questions

1. Why do people affiliate with extremist and fundamentalist groups that condone terrorism?
2. What are the goals of terrorists?
3. What insights can knowledge of the psychology of terrorism offer to counterterrorism?

Chapter 3 ~ International and Domestic Terrorism

Chapter Summary

Historically and presently, countries worldwide experience terrorism. Terrorism has been classified based on geography. More specifically, terrorists and terrorist groups have been classified according to their area of operations. Domestic terrorists operate within their target country's borders. By contrast, international terrorists cross borders and often target and operate within several countries. Numerous domestic and international terrorists pursuing different ideologies exist both in the United States and abroad. Both domestic and international terrorists have demonstrated their ability to strike almost at will. Lone wolves and homegrown terrorist incidents have been revealed across the globe. What is particularly troubling about these types of terrorists is the fact that these individuals are often indistinguishable from the rest of the population and, therefore, very difficult to recognize or uncover.

Key Points to Cover in Lecture

- International Terrorism

- Definition
- 1993 WTC attack
- Subcategories of International Terrorism
 - loosely affiliated extremists
 - formal terrorist organizations
 - state sponsors of terrorism

- Domestic Terrorism

- Subcategories of Domestic Terrorism
 - Left-Wing Terrorists
 - Anarchists
 - Right-Wing Terrorists
 - Special-Interest Terrorists
 - Animal Rights
 - Ecoterrorists
 - Antiabortionist Terrorists

- Domestic and International Lone-Wolf and Homegrown Terrorism

- ALF Lone Wolf
- Islamic Lone Wolves
- Early Homegrown Terrorists (e.g., Mad bomber)
- Non-Islamic Homegrown Contemporary Terrorists (e.g., Hutaree Militia)
- Contemporary Homegrown Islamic Terrorists (e.g., Jihad Jane)

Discussion Questions

1. What are the subcategories of international terrorism?
2. What are the subcategories of domestic terrorism?