

2 Adumbrating the “New Terrorism”

If terrorism and the “New Terrorism” cannot be properly defined, both can – however sketchily – be described. In the case of the latter phenomenon, a number of researchers have arrived at more or less divergent conclusions about what constitutes the “New Terrorism.” Harvey Kushner, for example, states that the “New Terrorism” has its origins in the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979. Following the Revolution, according to Kushner, “Iran embarked on a systematic campaign of supporting militant Islamic fundamentalist movements throughout the Muslim world.”²⁴ In the same vein, the inauguration of the “New Terrorism” was heralded by an act redolent of the symbolic closure of the “old terrorism”: Sudan’s extradition of the archetypical terrorist of the “traditional” stamp, Illich Ramirez Sanchez, also known by his theatrical epithet, the “Jackal,” in 1994.

Moreover, this view suggests that the “New” terrorists differ from their predecessors in that they are less educated, usually quite poor and are frequently the victims of repression; their militancy is steeped in Islamic orthodoxy (and other denominational, dogmatic thought), they are possessed of religious zeal, and while they are less sophisticated in terms of their methods (e.g. suicide attacks), they are also less organized (i.e. a network structure, as opposed to a rigid form of organization). Finally, their objectives are diffuse. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, “the new terrorism... appears pointless since it does not lead directly to any strategic goal...”²⁵

24 Harvey W. Kushner, “The New Terrorism,” in Harvey W. Kushner, ed., *The Future of Terrorism: Violence in the New Millenium*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 10.

25 Mark Juergensmeyer, “Understanding the New Terrorism,” *Current History*, (April 2000), pp. 158–163, p. 158.

Accordingly, these last two characteristics mentioned render the “New Terrorism” still more of an amorphous threat – a veritable wild card – and commensurately harder to combat. At the same time, this development enables the “New” terrorists to surprise intended targets and audiences with greater facility.

Alternatively, the doyen of terrorism studies, Walter Laqueur, emphasized different aspects of a “New Terrorism” and has recently argued that:

Terrorism has been with us for centuries, and it has always attracted inordinate attention... seen in historical perspective it seldom has been more than a nuisance... This is no longer true today, and may be even less so in the future. Yesterday’s nuisance has become one of the gravest dangers facing mankind. For the first time in history, weapons of enormous destructive power are both readily acquired and harder to track... In the near future it will be technologically possible to kill thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, not to mention the toll in panic that is likely to ensue may take. In brief, there has been a radical transformation, if not a revolution, in the character of terrorism, a fact we are still reluctant to accept.²⁶

Closer to Kushner’s position, Laqueur also acknowledges a significant shift in the nature of the perpetrator:

The traditional, “nuisance” terrorism will continue. But fanaticism inspired by all kinds of religious-sectarian-nationalist convictions is now taking on a millenarian and apocalyptic tone. We are confronting the emergence of new kinds of terrorist violence, some based on ecological and quasireligious concerns, others basically criminal in character, and still others mixtures of these and other influences. We are also witnessing the rise of small sectarian groups that lack clear

26 Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism. Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, (London: Oxford University Press/Phoenix Press, 2001), pp. 3–4.

political or social agendas other than destroying civilization, and in some cases humankind.²⁷

According to Laqueur, the novelty of the “New Terrorism” therefore derives from three factors: first, the type of advanced weaponry that has only recently come within reach of PVMs; second, the coming to the fore of new patterns of PVM motive and new types of PVMs; and, finally, the increasing diffusion of PVM objectives.

Bruce Hoffman of the RAND Corporation points to the key transitional characteristic of terrorism that evolved since 1991.

...Many of our old preconceptions, as well as government policies, date from the emergence of terrorism as a global security problem more than a quarter of a century ago. They originated, and took hold, during the Cold War, when radical left-wing terrorist groups ... were widely regarded as posing the most serious threat to Western security... In no area, perhaps, is the potential irrelevance of much of this thinking clearer... than with regard to the potential use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction.²⁸

Moreover, the convergence of two new characteristics, according to Hoffman, necessarily results in mass casualty terrorism. Hoffman reasons that

The growth of religious terrorism and its emergence in recent years as a driving force behind the increasing lethality of international terrorism shatters some of our most basic assumptions about terrorists and the violence they commit... Few terrorists, it was argued, knew anything about the technical intricacies of developing or dispersing such [WMD] weapons. Political, moral and practical considerations were also perceived as important restraints on terrorist use of such weapons. Terrorists, we assured ourselves, wanted more people watching than dead.²⁹

27 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

28 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 196.

29 Ibid., pp. 204–205.

In support of his argument, Hoffman cites a number of incidences, which provide the basis for his “disquieting trajectory”:

- The first, abortive attack with explosives on the World Trade Center in New York in 1993 by militant Islamists
- The Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in March 1995 by members of the Aum Shinrikyo Cult
- The destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City in April 1995.

The double attack on the US embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in August 1998, then, appeared to corroborate this ostensible convergence of religiously motivated violence and mass casualties.

Brian Jenkins, another member of the RAND Corporation’s terrorism research unit, expanded the range of culprits of mass casualty terrorism somewhat, stating that “the lethality of terrorist attacks gradually increased over time as terrorists motivated by ethnic hatreds *or* religious fanaticism revealed themselves to be demonstrably less constrained, more inclined to carry out large-scale indiscriminate attacks.”³⁰ The mass casualty terrorist attacks of the recent past, especially those against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 (i.e. “9/11”), have added still more weight to this position. And even more recent events appear to corroborate projections prognosticating increased mass casualty terrorism. Attempted, and in one case successful, mass casualty terrorism incidences in the second half of 2002 were carried out in the shape of attacks against tourist resorts on Bali and in Kenya. In both cases, al-Qaida is the prime suspect.

In summary, and on the basis of the various portrayals reviewed above, the “New Terrorism” is presented as predominantly religiously motivated; its objectives are apparently diffuse and its members are organized in a loose, decentralized manner. In addi-

30 Ian O. Lesser, et al., *Countering the New Terrorism*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1999), foreword by Brian Michael Jenkins, vii (my italics).

tion, ABC weapons are understood to be high on the wish list of the “New Terrorists” (or, more pessimistically, have already been acquired and await deployment). Last but not least, and in contrast to earlier incidences, according to the proponents of the “New Terrorism,” recent terrorist attacks are increasingly more lethal, for today’s PVMs prefer to kill and maim many people, over drawing large crowds (or, conversely, maybe it is precisely because they want to increase their audience that they murder great numbers of people indiscriminately).