

Increasingly from the mid-twentieth century disturbing images of terror have the ability to trigger a visceral response irrespective of physical proximity to the event. Advances in technology, the popularity of the Internet, and proliferation of twenty-four hour news coverage have only exacerbated the scale of the psychological impact. The harrowing images of people jumping from the burning towers in New York on September 11, 2001 circulated the world and have even been reported to have caused in some cases psychological trauma brought upon indirect viewing. Today Al Qaeda is considered to exploit Westerners desire to live in an unattainable state of 'absolute security'. Indeed it is from recognition of this apparent modern psychological phenomenon that the large majority of citizens across the world appear to be ambivalent in sacrificing

'freedom for security'. Indeed the fear of violent death, as Thomas Hobbes and other political realists argued, induces us to surrender our absolute freedom to a sovereign authority whom we authorize to use any and every means necessary to safeguard us from a 'state of nature'. It is arguable that with the advent of the possibility of the use nuclear weapons by non-state actors has an unprecedented psychological impact not only civilians but, in some circumstances, the state itself.

Another enduring aspect of terrorism is the communication of meaning. Indeed while terrorism is a specific tactic that necessitates victims, and while civilians remain the prime targets, those victims are not the intended end recipients of the terrorist's message. Stepanova describes the terrorist act as a 'performance that involves the use or threat to use violence against civilians, but which is staged specifically for someone else to watch.' Most commonly the intended audience of the message has been the state (or a group or community of states). With this in mind, in 1970 Rubin remarked that 'you can't be a revolutionary without a color TV: it's as necessary as a gun' However, ancient forms of terrorism found powerful ways by which to communicate. The Assassins' use of assassination had high utility in this respect. Dramatically-staged assassinations drew a lot of attention to the cause in the manner of which they came. In the Muslim context, the basis of power was immensely personal. Hodgson argued that 'when a Sultan died his troops were automatically dispersed. When an Amir died his lands were in disorder'. In the time of the Zealots and Assassins, the most effective medium of communication was by word of mouth. Therefore terrorist acts were planned for venerated sites or on holy days thereby increasing the effectiveness of communication.

In many ways terrorist groups' ability to fulfil their needs to communicate has become somewhat easier. Indeed in the 1950s Carlos Marighella declared that 'the media are important instruments of propaganda for the simple reason that they find terrorist actions newsworthy'. Since the industrial revolution, technology has increasingly shrunk time and space. In today's extremely complex world, Nacos argues that, 'without massive news coverage the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest.' In the early 1980s, Yonah Alexander, referring to the enigmatic Symbionese Liberation Army, asserted that 'for several years, the media have continued to magnify the case out of proportion to its real significance', and through

this have transformed it into an internationally recognised movement possessing power and posing an insurmountable problem to the authorities. Indeed notably some research into the print press, for instance, has revealed that it facilitated the attention-getting desires of the terrorists through accurately portraying their causes and grievances. Dr. Frederick Hacker, a Californian psychiatrist has gone as far to suggest complicity by stating that 'the mass media hanker after terrorist acts because they fit into programming needs.' In reality however the nature and extent of this relationship remains unclear; however, there certainly exists a symbiosis between terrorists seeking attention from an audience and news organizations, which seek dramatic stories to increase their readership and ratings.

In the absence of an outlet there have been a few cases where terrorist groups have been forced to take it upon themselves to become disseminators of their 'message'. For instance, the Russian anarchist group, Zemla I Volya, set up its own print shop in St. Petersburg to act as a medium for communication of its struggle in the knowledge that without its creation communication would be thwarted. In an attempt to find exceptions to the rule, a number of commentators point to Sendero Luminoso: the group largely avoided the media, relying on terrorist actions rather than words. However this example only serves in demonstrating that words are not necessarily required—in this case, solely actions were used to communicate what was a clear message. It should also be of note that terrorist acts have always been designed to communicate to a range of audiences, sometimes different messages. For instance, many terrorist acts have and continue to be directed at recruiting and training new members and communicating through inspiring support and coordinating an emerging network of followers. In the modern day, Weimann has argued that terrorist websites target three different audiences: current and potential supporters; international public opinion; and enemy publics.

Allied to this concept is the issue of symbolism which has been an enduring aspect of terrorism. The significance of symbolism was recognised by the Assassins as early as the first century where they employed terror against figures associated with power solely because they were figureheads. Scholars argue that the assassins' assault patterns were so uniform that they were likely to have been prescribed by religious ritual. In the words of a 12th century Western author, the weapon was "always a dagger; never poison, never missiles – though there must have been occasions when those would have been easier and safer". The chief hands then knives which are "consecrated" Similarly Narodnaya Volya targeted symbolic high-level officials, including police chiefs, government agency heads, members of the royal family and tsar itself. Most recently, the attack on the twin towers, an internationally recognised symbol of US financial power was not a conventional military goal but in being instantly recognisable provided symbolic significance. In the last case, the symbolic target was profoundly visual which served to further the communication needs of the terrorist group at a time when dissemination of news by providers has become predominantly imaged-based.

Another enduring feature of terrorism is the existence of a degree of indiscriminateness. Most famously Emile Henry declared in 1894: 'Il n' y a pas d'innocents.' The term 'indiscriminate' has, in recent years, been subject to much debate. No clear consensus as to its critical value has yet appeared. Although, it is important to recognise that there are very few acts of terrorism that have intended to appear indiscriminate. Terrorists have generally wanted to appear selective. From ancient Assassins' use of assassinations of particular leaders to the Continuity IRA's

recent murder of a policeman in Armagh as a member of a specific group—a degree of selectivity can be interpreted. And yet, even from these choices of targets, an element of indiscriminateness persists. Any person that finds themselves a member of a targeted position or group is at risk. At the other end of the scale some terrorist groups have tended to be selective in their choice of physical targets—government buildings or the airliners of a specific national carrier, for instance—but again they are not concerned about potential victims, and thus their violence becomes indiscriminate. For instance, the 1998 United States Embassy bombings in the East African capital cities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad killed hundreds of people which shared nothing more than physical proximity to US government property.

In recent years this enduring aspect has become more pronounced. The argument goes that in the past, 'terrorists wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead'. However commentators today assert that terrorists also want lots of casualties. As Bruce Hoffman put it: 'I don't mean to sound perverse, but there is maybe a certain nostalgia for the old style of terrorism, where there wasn't the threat of loss of life on a massive scale. It is real commentary on how much the world has changed'. It is true that in the past, civilians usually became victims of terrorist operations either because they were captives of hostage-taking events or because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Howard gives the rationale for terrorists taking hostages for the following reasons: to gain attention for their cause, the release of imprisoned comrades, or ransom. A statistical survey has shown that during the 1980s hostages would survive the event 96 per cent of the time. Since the large majority of terrorist attacks since 2001 have been conducted in the global south this has resulted in a significant number of indiscriminate Muslim deaths—and interestingly as a result of this it is believed that Al Qaeda's intention to specifically target the West will grow. Unsurprisingly much of this evidence for lethality has come directly after the events of September 11, 2001 and with the invasion of Iraq. Notably in his analyses of the thousands of Al Qaeda tapes that were recovered from Afghanistan, Schuster highlighted the group's fascination with assassinations, and suggested that this seemingly more discriminate tactic should not be ruled out as having disappeared. In any case, the enduring element of indiscrimination within terrorism continues.

To some extent the history of terrorism offers no clear-cut lessons simply because conditions vary from age to age and country to country—terrorism has and always will occur within a wider context. Moreover terrorist acts that in the future are likely to be successful are also likely to be novel. As one commentator recently quipped, "if you imagine that Osama bin Laden is going to evolve into Nelson Mandela, you need a psychiatrist, rather than a historian". Indeed Burleigh argues against a cyclical understanding of the history of terrorism. However study of the enduring features of terrorism clearly demonstrates that terrorism was not born in the nineteenth century—as many terrorist experts would have us believe—but rather has been a feature of civilisation as early as ancient historical relics record. As such, a solid historical understanding of terrorism clearly demonstrates that terrorism per se cannot be eliminated. Terrorism is too complex, too diverse and too diffuse to ever be eradicated by diligent application of the 'right' strategies. Indeed while Jihadist terrorism, for instance, is likely to be the main purveyor of terrorist attacks in the near future, there is every likelihood that it will eventually be supplanted. Therefore terrorism as a phenomenon needs to be contained.

However examination of enduring aspects of terrorism provides some tactical policy direction. A solid appreciation of the enduring use of asymmetric methods, coercion, psychology, the intent to communicate a message, use of symbolism and indiscriminate use of violence can serve as a basis for countering terrorism. Indeed as early as in ancient times the psychological basis of terrorist activity as a main component of asymmetrical warfare was recognised and responded to. For instance, in psychological warfare against the Assassins; their reputation as users of hashish was circulated with the intention to present them as irresponsible and essentially powerless dreamers. In the modern day, governments are well aware of the use of symbolic targeting by terrorist groups and have responded by increasing security in places which hold high symbolic value. The old adage that "publicity is the oxygen of terrorism" has become a cliché and yet understanding of the complexity of this relationship is still underdeveloped, this suggests the opportunity for historical and archival work to better understand this fundamental component of terrorism. Finally, although a thorough understanding of enduring aspects of terrorism does not necessarily provide any greater definitional clarity to the debate over the term, it goes some way in narrowing the debate—something that is much needed if it will ever be possible to find a universal agreement.