How New Is the New Terrorism?

ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN

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ISABELLE DUYVESTEYN

Institute of History
Department of History of International Relations
Utrecht University
The Netherlands

This article aims to challenge the dominant view that the expressions of terrorism since the last decade of the twentieth century are fundamentally new. It questions the new aspects of terrorism, such as the transnational nature of the perpetrators and their organizations, their religious inspiration and fanaticism, their use of weapons of mass destruction, and their indiscriminate targeting. It points out essential continuities with previous expressions of terrorist violence, such as the national and territorial focus of the new terrorists, their political motivations, their use of conventional weaponry, and the symbolic targeting that is still aimed at achieving a surprise effect. The article calls for more thorough historical investigations in order to appreciate truly new aspects of terrorism.

New terrorism is a concept that has recently been used by many and questioned by few; "Many contemporary studies begin . . . by stating that although terrorism has always been a feature of social existence, it became 'significant' . . . when it 'increased in frequency' and took on 'novel dimensions' as an international or transnational activity, creating in the process a new 'mode of conflict.' "[1] This quote makes sense in light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, were it not that it was written in the early 1980s describing a situation starting in the 1960s.[2] The present generation is thus not the only one perceiving terrorism to be fundamentally new.

What does it mean when something is labeled new? David Rapoport has argued that the label new even in the 1960s was not contentious: "we analyze contemporary experiences as though the statement declaring them *sui generis* is itself clear and at the same time provides the only evidence needed to establish the case!"[3] "New" can signify that a phenomenon has not been witnessed before, such as the discovery of a new star in a far-away galaxy. Alternatively, the label "new" can rightly be applied when it concerns seen-before phenomena but an unknown perspective or interpretation is developed, such as the theory of relativity or the idea that the earth is round. In the case of the arguments that are presented about the new terrorism the first understanding of new

is prominent, that is, among others the fanaticism and ruthlessness of the Al Qaeda terrorists, who are held responsible for the devastating terrorist attacks, has not been seen before. This article will argue that from a historical perspective there are several reasons to be hesitant about the application of the label new.

While the label new has not been hotly debated in regard to terrorism, the concept of terrorism itself has.[4] The concept of terrorism has, in the past, been pronounced dead, analytically useless, and only valid in the eye of the beholder. Despite all the problems, the term and concept continue to be used. This continued use, perhaps because of the lack of a viable alternative, suggests that the term does seem to be able and useful to describe or denote a social phenomenon.

A study by Alex Schmid compared a large number of existing definitions of terrorism he had come across in his investigations.[5] The factor that in a quantitative perspective carried most agreement in these definitions was violence (over 80%). The second most common element of "political" that was contained in definitions of terrorism already showed a lot less agreement (65%). Fear or terror as the third element could only be found in 51% of the definitions. The limited extent of the agreement is an indication of how contentious the term is analytically.[6]

Apart from being difficult to define, the term should also be judged from the perspective of the beholder. This refers to the too often quoted cliché that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Put in the words of Noam Chomsky, "we have to qualify the definition of 'terrorism' given in official sources: the term applies only to terrorism against *us*, not the terrorism we carry out against *them*."[7] Terrorism is thus often a pejorative term.

When terrorism is such a semantic, terminological, and conceptual minefield, why is it still used in academic study? The aim of this article is to demonstrate that a substantial input by historians in the debate about the nature of terrorism has been lacking. The dominating influence of social and political science has had as a result that the label new has largely gone unquestioned but more importantly that a systematic, large-scale, and cross-case comparison of historical cases has to date not been written. This has not only hampered the understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism, but has prevented the development of insights into patterns, trends, and transformations of terrorism in the modern period. First, the article will briefly survey the state of terrorism research in order to outline what is known about the phenomenon. Two main fields of study that have devoted substantial attention to the subject of terrorism, social science—in particular psychology—and political science will be discussed. Each of these fields will be reviewed in order to appreciate the debates that have ensued here. After this brief survey of the field, the main part of the article will challenge the current dominant view on the newness of terrorism.

The Study of Terrorism

Although it has been another often quoted cliché about terrorism that it is as old as history, the academic interest in the subject only seriously took off in the early 1970s.[8] In particular, political science has dominated the field since that period.[9] However, other fields such as social science, psychology, criminology, law, and military and communication studies have made contributions as well. Despite these scholarly endeavors, judgments on the overall state of terrorism research have not been favorable. As Alex Schmid has stated, "[m]uch of the writing in the crucial areas of terrorism research . . . is impressionistic, superficial and at the same time often also pretentious, far-reaching

generalizations on the basis of episodal evidence."[10] Furthermore, "[p]erhaps as much as 80 percent of the literature is not research-based in any rigorous sense; instead it is too often narrative, condemnatory and prescriptive." [11] Despite this criticism, some important insights have been gained.

Social Science

The main psychological explanations for terrorism have focused on the link between frustration and aggression, group dynamics, and individual psychological dispositions. In the 1970s Robert Ted Gurr developed the Relative Deprivation Theory. This theory contends that when there is frustration about the relative position of individuals in terms of what they have and their perceptions of what they ought to have, that is, deprivation, the chances of seeing violence increase.[12] When this situation is compounded by an ideology inciting uprising and violence and the chances and opportunities arise for doing so, persons willing to engage in terrorism will. This theory has been extensively criticized; nevertheless it shows in which direction the terrorism experts have been looking for evidence of the origins of violent and terrorist acts.

As for the field of psychology, while terrorists have been found to mostly operate in small groups,[13] there is no evidence of a terrorist personality, nor has there been a consistent finding of abnormality or derangement in persons involved in the undertaking.[14] Terrorism is mainly a small-group activity and has a tendency to involve groupthink and group dynamics, which are much more likely to occur than individual psychological abnormalities.[15] Several attempts have been made to develop a terrorist profile. Based on data gathered from press reports on 350 individual terrorists in the period 1968–1976, the following profile has been compiled: "They are in the main, single, male, 22 to 25 years old . . . university trained, reared in an urban environment, middle to upper class in social origin, and anarchist or Marxist in ideology."[16] The exceptions were Germany, where there were more female terrorists active; Japan, where the average age was older; and Northern Ireland, where the origin was of the lower social strata. Furthermore, "the vast majority of terrorists with university backgrounds have studied in the humanities and non-technical fields," with exceptions for Iran and Turkey.[17] Despite heavy criticism over the years, especially concerning its testability, this profile does not seem far off the mark when surveying the material that has come out in the media on, for example, the Al Qaeda terrorists.

Not only the individual terrorist and the interaction in groups have received attention in the field of psychology, the effects of terrorism have also been studied. There are indications of a copycat or contamination effect of terrorism.[18] Most of the studies in this area, however, focus on individual coping mechanisms.[19] One example is the Stockholm syndrome, where the victim starts to identify with the terrorist. Also the after-effects in victims have been studied, which can be long-lasting, both mentally and physically.

Political Science

Whereas the social sciences have devoted considerable attention to actor-focused perspectives of terrorism, political science has presented many purpose-focused studies. The purposes or aims of terrorist movements have often been cloaked in left-wing/right-wing dichotomies. In particular, left-wing terrorism, that is, inspired by Marx, Lenin, Mao, anarchism, or nihilism has received attention.[20] This is not to suggest that the political scientist has not had an eye for the actors perpetrating terrorist acts. Especially

the distinction between state and non-state actors is important in this respect, for example, the terrorism of the Nazi and Stalinist states.[21]

Apart from divisions into left-wing and right-wing terrorism, nationalist, separatist, irredentist, ethnic, and religious motivations have been offered as explanations for terrorism. Although during the 1960s and 1970s the debate was heavily focused on left-wing terrorism, since the 1990s the bulk of the literature concerns religious terrorism. In particular, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York, the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway by the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo sect, and the Oklahoma City bombing by the Christian-inspired Timothy McVeigh were instrumental in putting this perspective on the research agenda.[22] Overall the political science approach is characterized by eclecticism. It has borrowed theories from other fields such as Robert Ted Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory[23] and, furthermore, it has adopted characteristically the case study approach. Among the most investigated case studies are the Northern Irish and Algerian examples.[24]

Historical Research

Walter Laqueur is generally credited with linking history and terrorism.[25] Laqueur himself has expressed doubt, however, about the usefulness of the study of terrorism's history. Although "[t]he history of terrorism remains an essential key to understanding the phenomenon"[26] at the same time he has argued that "all this history has to be recalled for the simple reason that an analysis of the roots of terrorism at the beginning of the twentieth century cannot be based exclusively on the experience of earlier phases."[27] Ironically, one of the founding fathers of the historical approach to terrorism has serious reservations about the usefulness of studying the phenomenon in a historical perspective. This does seem to be a wider shared opinion: "For most commentators terrorism has no history, or at least they would have us believe that the 'terrorist problem' had no significance until the 1960s, when the full impact of modern technology was felt, endowing most individuals as individuals or as members of small groups, with capacities they never had before."[28] These doubts and reservations have led to a state of affairs in which a thorough study of the history of modern terrorism is completely lacking.[29]

Several attempts in the direction of historical analysis of terrorism have been made. There are authoritative encyclopaedias that cover the whole of the modern period, notably the excellent work done by Martha Crenshaw and John Pimlott.[30] However, these are works of reference and lack systematic analysis and cross-time comparisons. Furthermore, historical anthologies about terrorism exist.[31] Although presenting important documents and texts, they do no meet the specifics of historical studies either. Also, a very limited number of studies exist that try to map the development of terrorism. Notable is Andrew Sinclair's study, *An Anatomy of Terror*.[32] His book, however, aims to be comprehensive by starting in antiquity, but lacks analysis and critical examination of competing sources. Furthermore, Martin Miller has made an attempt to study the intellectual origins of modern terrorism in the nineteenth century.[33] He points out that the institutionalization, organization, and intellectual and theoretical foundations shifted in this period from tyrannicide to more limitless terrorism. Unfortunately he has limited himself to only the nineteenth century. Finally, many terrorism studies do start with an obligatory historical introduction but these are in the majority of the cases not based on independent historical research and only function as a stepping stone toward discussing other aspects of the phenomenon.[34]

In general there are several problems with the literature on terrorism. First, there is

very little building on previous work that has been done in the field.[35] Terrorism seems to be an area of expertise built around big names and individual projects. Second, there exists a strong temptation to predict the future. The fact that those predictions were not always on the mark can be illustrated by the following example. In the 1968 International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, the concept of terrorism was completely missing. David Rapoport speculated that the editors seemed to have believed the prediction of the experts in the previous 1933 edition that read that 'assassinations and acts of terror were declining so much that in the future the subjects would be interesting to historians or antiquarians only."[36] Prediction, however, if at all undertaken by social scientists should be based on thorough investigation of the subject including a basis of historical trends, patterns, and development and this is, as noted, what the field needs. The current research agenda will now be discussed, and it will be demonstrated where and how historical studies could contribute to and shed a different light on the discussion of the nature of terrorism.

The Research Agenda

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have given rise to what can almost be called a tidal wave of literature trying to understand, if not explain, the surprise attacks on the American mainland. Characteristic of this literature is the qualification of the attacks as part of a new chapter in the history of terrorism. This is not to stress that the label new is inextricably linked to the events of 11 September. As already noted the term new had been used extensively before and in particular in the mid- 1990s the term resurfaced in the debate.[37] The now widespread stress on the new character of terrorism might be due to the enormity of the shock and the damage that was suffered that September day, both physically and emotionally. Another explanation might be that the high production rate has been caused by ambitious and eager scientists who aim to contribute to the debate. Or, less idealistically, they see an opportunity to establish their reputation.[38] All seem to regard the use of the label new as a way to originality.

The new terrorism is supposedly new because of the following prominent features.[39] First, the perpetrators of terrorism act transnationally and operate in loosely organized networks. Second, they are inspired by religion and are seen as religious fanatics. Third, they seek weapons to attack as many people as possible, notably weapons of mass destruction. Fourth, their victims are not carefully selected but their targeting is indiscriminate. On the basis of arguments pertaining to the actors, their motivation, the instruments they use, and the effects they aim to achieve, several questions will now be raised concerning the extent of the "newness" of the new terrorism.[40]

The Actors

The actors carrying out the new terrorism are said to operate transnationally. They are not bound by national ties or sentiments but are loosely organized in the form of networks and with their own channels of finance. This is in contrast to traditional terrorism, which was supposed to be characterized by a purely national and territorial focus and a hierarchical organization. Examples are said to be the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Basque ETA movement.

Three points can be raised here. First, the actors responsible for the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were also focused on national and territorial aspects similar to the traditional terrorists. Second, the traditional terrorists also operated transnationally to a

significant extent. Third, the traditional terrorists' organizational structure was in several cases also based on networks.

To start with the last point, a network structure is not exclusive to the new terrorism. An important historical example forms the anarchist movement in the nineteenth century, which was active most notably in imperial Russia and France. This anarchist organization was responsible for several high-profile attacks among others against heads of state. The organization was network- instead of hierarchically based.[41] Furthermore, even in the twentieth century terrorist organizations used the network structure. David Tucker argues that the PLO and Hezbollah operate fundamentally as networks with very little formal central control being exercised.[42]

Furthermore, there is evidence that terrorists received support from outside sponsors, such as princes and other wealthy individuals even in antiquity.[43] In the historic literature this transnational aspect is a given and is not adequately realized by the authors from the new terrorism school.[44] More recently, the transnational nature of many traditional terrorist organizations can be read from, for example, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom and the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany. These groups trained with the Palestinian Liberation Organization fighters in the Middle East, among others in Libya. These contacts led to Palestinian groups hijacking an airplane, which landed in Somalia in 1977 in order to put pressure on the German government to release RAF comrades from jail.[45] The Somali liberation attempt by the German GSG9 Special Forces cost the lives of several involved.[46] Another example is the Japanese Red Army, which was fighting in the 1970s to bring about a more just world according to a Marxist agenda. They carried out attacks in three continents. Even though they never had a true base in Japan itself, they managed to carry out attacks at Lod Airport in Israel, a Shell refinery in Singapore, and the French embassy in The Hague. They even enjoyed support from, among others, the North Korean regime.[47]

Finally, the national and territorial aspects of the new terrorists have also not received the attention they deserve. For example, the territorial aspects of the members of the Al Qaeda organization and Osama bin Laden's wider group of supporters can be read from their main preoccupations. First, the main aim of bin Laden and his fighters is the establishment of a Caliphate that stretches at least from North Africa to Southeast Asia. This is decidedly a territorial aim that overlaps with the present settlement of the community of believers, the Umma.

Second, they are concerned with the occupation by the United States of the holiest places of Islam. American troops have since the end of the Second Gulf War been stationed in Saudi Arabia, the land of Mecca and Medina.[48] The fighters have an axe to grind with the regimes that have allowed such a state of affairs to develop, among others the Saudi Arabian rulers and the Egyptian regime. These concerns can be seen as highly national and territorial. It is true that the church and state or rather, the mosque and the state are not separate in most Arab states. The distinction between the national, territorial, and the religious can therefore be problematic. The acceptance by political Islam of the nation-state makes the distinction impossible.[49] However, it does not discredit the existence of territorial claims of these groups.

Third, it has been argued, in particular by Lawrence Freedman that the sanctuary that the Taliban regime provided in Afghanistan is decidedly territorial in orientation: "The description of Al-Qaeda as being a non-state was not accurate in that it had gained its base and sanctuary in Afghanistan by effectively sponsoring and then taking over the Taliban regime, and through the gradual integration of its fighters with those of the Taliban."[50] The terrorist organization needed and used the state as a staging base for its operations.[51]

Fourth, the Al Qaeda fighters are also concerned with U.S. support for the state of Israel and its policies toward the Palestinians, among others the occupation of Palestinian land. The fact that American support enables the Israeli state to continue to suppress the Palestinian population is abhorrent to bin Laden and his supporters. Some argue, however, that the Palestinian cause has been pragmatically adopted by bin Laden *cum suis* to increase the appeal and popularity of the movement.[52]

Not only the Al Qaeda terrorists but also the convicted terrorist for the Oklahoma bombing in 1995 claimed to fight against undue interference from the national American government in the lives of ordinary Americans. This can also be seen as national and territorial in focus. Government agents had besieged the compound of the religious sect of David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, in Waco, Texas. According to Timothy McVeigh, the main perpetrator, this action was against the freedoms that are granted to the American people in the United States constitution. The involvement of American national governmental agencies was abhorrent to him. The focus was for this "new terrorist" also decidedly national.

It can thus be questioned in the light of the presence of earlier network structures, the transnational nature, and territorial and national concerns of both the old and the new terrorists whether there is not more continuity than change. Essential continuity in territorial focus, transnational links, and network structures are indicated to exist. The religious can be territorially and even nationally oriented for the new terrorists, transnational operations and ties do not preclude a national and territorial focus for the old terrorists, and network structures have been in operation before. What then is so new about the new terrorism?

The Aims

Religion and fanaticism are said to be the main motivators for the new terrorists. The growth of religiously inspired terrorist organizations is said to overlap with the end of the Cold War.[53] Earlier forms of terrorism were supposed to be characterized by political motivations, such as nationalism and extreme left-wing ideologies. The choice of targets of the old terrorists reflected their ideas and was highly symbolic. Two sets of question marks are in order here. First, the presumably old or traditional terrorists were not a-religious. The IRA, for example, had an almost exclusive Catholic membership. Furthermore, Irgun was a Jewish terrorist organization, EOKA in Cyprus was inspired by the Greek Orthodox Church, and the FLN fighters in Algeria were exclusively Muslim. Second, the new terrorists are not purely motivated by religion. As has already been noted, national and territorial characteristics also play a role.

Religious terrorism as a concept has several problematic aspects. First, when religion and more specifically the beliefs of the *individual* are central to the terrorism under investigation, it can be questioned why acts of violence happen at all. If all that was of concern to the individual was his or her personal relationship with God, "the primary audience is the deity . . . it is even conceivable that he does not want to have the public witness his deed."[54] In several historical cases, the perpetrators of terrorist acts guided solely by religious motivations based on this personal relationship showed that their desire to die in order to please God was far greater than their willingness to kill others.[55] This is clearly not the case in the 11 September attacks, the example of Timothy McVeigh, and the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo sect. The Japanese terrorists, notably, who left sarin gas on the Tokyo underground, had gotten off the train just before the gas was released. Their willingness to take the lives of innocent bystanders was larger than their

willingness to sacrifice their own lives in order to please their spiritual leader. The fact that self-sacrifice is not always present points to a possible second interpretation of religious terrorism.

Killing the infidels or non-believers or reordering the world according to a spiritual ideal, many observers have pointed out, form the main aims in religious terrorist acts. If this desire is inherent in a particular religion, the question needs to be answered why this feature is so prominent here and now that it is perceived as new. Religion is usually a factor that plays a large role in times of insecurity. Some have argued that the process of globalization causes such insecurity. The use of terrorism might even be an attempt to use an idealized past that never existed as an expression of the threat that is felt to be emanating from globalization. It can form a defensive mechanism.[56] However, religiously inspired terrorism aimed at killing others has existed for millennia. According to Rapoport, in the pre-modern age, religion was the only acceptable justification for terrorism.[57] Even during those days, making a distinction between religious terrorism and secular expressions was wholly artificial.[58] Is religious terrorism, when it has existed for millennia and has justified killing non-believers, then really new?

Not only can the conception of the religious factor itself be challenged, the aims of the new terrorist organizations themselves can also in many respects be seen as political.[59] Many have doubted whether the new terrorists have any clear goals, let alone political goals, at all:

> The nihilism of their [Al Qaeda's] means—the indifference to human costs— takes their actions out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself. The apocalyptical nature of their goals makes it absurd to believe they are making demands at all. They are seeking the violent transformation of an irremediably sinful and unjust world.[60]

The argument that religious terrorists have no motivation because the achievement of their goal is impossible seems untenable.

A distinction should be made between short-term and long-term goals. Short-term goals seem highly attainable, that is, provocation, publicity, and hurting the enemy. Long-term goals and whether they are achievable should only be judged by the standards of those who carry out the terrorist acts. The long-term objectives for Al Qaeda and other religious groups are similar to the traditional terrorist organizations, such as the Rote Armee Fraktion or the anarchist movement. How likely was it for them to achieve their goal of revolutionary change or establishing a society based on anarchist principles? Experts have not denied the RAF or the anarchist movement a goal in their descriptions of their activities. Why should Aum Shinrikyo be denied a goal? Why are their preparations for the coming of the Apocalypse any less real than the actions to precipitate the advent of world revolution?

The fact that the aims of the 11 September attacks go directly against American interests does not negate their political nature. On close inspection of bin Laden's intellectual origins not Islam the religion but Islam the political interpretation based on the specific teachings of Sayyid Qutb are dominant.[61] It cannot be denied that religion has played a role in the formulation of the terrorist targets. However, these are translated to clear political positions related to clear political targets, the spread of political Islam, and the establishment of the Caliphate.

Religion is a problematic label because it implies a monocausal explanation that does not do justice to rich practice of terrorist activity. Several motivations usually play

a role in terrorist organizations. As noted, the IRA was nationalist, predominantly Catholic, but at one point in its existence also Marxist in orientation. This also points to the fact that the traditional terrorist organizations were also marked by religion. Several examples of old terrorist organizations that had distinct religious characteristics and audiences have been named earlier. As Walter Laqueur has argued,

> A mystical element has been noted in nineteenth-century Russian terrorism, an element also present in Irish, Rumanian, Japanese, and Arab terrorists. These terrorists' belief in their cause has a religious quality; the idea of martyrs gaining eternal life appears in Irish terrorism from the very beginning, and it has been pronounced among the Shiite and other Muslims.[62]

The distinction between motivations thus becomes artificial, perhaps even subject to Western bias and leads to simplifications. It should not be forgotten that Marxism, anarchism, and their different variants that were adhered to by several of the old terrorist groups all had universal claims and were applicable to all societies, transcending national boundaries. Links between these organizations existed and state sponsorship did occur.

The new terrorism can both be seen as political and religious at the same time. These factors overlap to a large extent. Furthermore, as the historic examples have hinted, this is not a new phenomenon. The old terrorism also contained religious elements and qualities and some groups fighting to realize ideological aims, such as Marxism, had universal application. Also in respect to the aims terrorists strive to realize, more continuity is indicated to exist than hitherto might have been realized.

The Instruments and Effects

The means that the terrorists use are said to have changed. No longer is it the case that terrorists kidnap individuals, hijack airplanes or carry out bomb attacks, with only a relatively small number of victims. The instruments that the new terrorists use, among others weapons of mass destruction, are aimed at inflicting as much damage as possible and killing many innocent civilians.

Three important questions need clarification for these claims to be substantiated. First, to what extent are the new terrorists actually using weapons of mass destruction? Second, did traditional terrorists always limit themselves in terms of weaponry and third, in terms of the number of victims? When traditional terrorists used conventional instruments, such as small weaponry and explosives, large numbers of victims were often the result. One of the most notable examples is the attack in 1983 on the U.S. barracks in Lebanon, which cost the lives of over 200 American Marines and was carried out with a truckload of conventional explosives.[63] The scale of attacks of the old terrorists has increased as well. The Omagh bombing in Northern Ireland in 1998, for example, which killed 28, was the largest number in one incident of Northern Irish terrorism.[64] As for the number of victims terrorist attacks claim, it should be noted that at least since the beginning of the 1980s, the number of victims has been on the rise. This clearly does not overlap with the claimed development of the new terrorism since the 1990s.[65] Even before the advent of religious terrorists the effects of terrorist activities had been described as horrific and without bounds.[66]

Regarding the first question, the instruments the new terrorists use still continue to rely, to a large extent, on conventional arms.[67] Conventional explosives are the most

important means with which attacks are carried out, for example, a bomb made of fertilizer in Oklahoma. One of the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union has been that the central control has been lost over all kinds of weaponry, not only nuclear material but also chemical and biological components.[68] In addition to weapons material the know-how has also proliferated. It is therefore not surprising that experts continue to speculate if and how individuals with bad intentions have been able to lay their hands on these goods. However, the use of weapons of mass destruction certainly does not constitute a trend, as some experts have tried to make everyone believe. With the exception of the sarin gas attack in Tokyo and the anthrax letters sent in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 in the United States, both of which were strongly indicated to have mainly national sources, there are no other examples of the use of these weapons. This does not mean that they should not be expected in the future. However, two cases do not form a trend.

Even without weapons of mass destruction the new terrorists have been characterized as becoming more and more lethal. It cannot be denied that there is a statistical link between Islamic groups and a high number of fatalities in their terrorist attacks.[69] At the same time, however, the continued use of conventional weaponry, the use of bombs and airplanes, does not automatically lead to more deaths and destruction. The explanation that has been offered by the new terrorism school has been that the choice of targets has changed. It is no longer the individual representative or a symbolic target but the increasingly indiscriminate nature of the targeting that makes the new terrorism stand out in destructiveness.

However, the evidence so far does not completely support this contention. The targets are still largely symbolic. Buildings and structures continue to be selected for their symbolic value, that is, the World Trade Center as a symbol of Western capitalism or the Oklahoma Federal Building symbolizing Federal power. Furthermore, individuals remain important targets for the new terrorists, allegedly the American president in the White House during the 11 September 2001 attack and Paul Wolfowitz, American Deputy Secretary of Defense and Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations special representative in Bagdad.

It should be asked whether the terrorists have changed or whether the world has changed in which they operate. Does the increase in the numbers of deaths resulting from terrorism form a conscious choice of the terrorists, a choice for new targets with high casualties, as stressed by the new terrorism school, or is it a result of the technological progress and the increased effectiveness of the instruments and a necessity to strike harder to achieve the same result? Did the invention of dynamite in the nineteenth century also signal a new era in the history of terrorism because dynamite and hand grenades continued to be used to kill heads of state and other public figures in the nineteenth century?[70] Is it not inherent in the logic of terrorism that the attacks need to be larger and more extreme in order to achieve the same or a larger effect? When the means become available, the terrorist expressions will inevitably become more extreme. What Brian Jenkins argued several years ago, "terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead," no longer seems to apply.[71] However, it is also a truism that the more people are dead, the more will be watching.

In order for a lot of people to be watching, the terrorists need the media. The role of the media should not be discounted here.[72] The effects of terrorist attacks are greatly enlarged when round the clock news services on television, Internet, and radio report on the terrorist activities. Terrorists thrive by media attention. This has been the case throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The global news media, the product

of modernization, however, has given it a quantitative impetus. If the terrorists simply use the means that have become available in a world that has changed around them and need to strike harder to make their point, how new is the new terrorism?

Although globalization on the one hand has been perceived as having a negative influence of spreading unwanted Western dominance around the world, the terrorists, on the other hand, also benefited from the fruits it offered—international travel, communications, and ideas about weaponry. In order for terrorism not to be considered new it is implied that they should not have moved with the times.[73] It could very well be the case that because of a change in the external factors a change in the phenomenon of terrorism is perceived to have taken place and not because of the terrorists' own making or conscious choice.

The effect the new terrorists are supposedly after is the extermination of the enemy, whereas traditional terrorists had been concerned with bringing across a message and striving for change; often revolutionary change. A surprise effect and publicity was what the traditional terrorists sought. However, annihilating the enemy was important for many traditional terrorists as well and bringing the state or government to its knees or even working toward its collapse does not seem to be so different from the interpretation of the new terrorists. The immediate effect that is aimed for in the old and new terrorist attacks is still geared toward achieving surprise and publicity. The idea of propaganda by deed and the strategy of provocation have antecedents in the nineteenth century but are more applicable than ever in the early twenty-first century.[74] The fact that not every attack is claimed is not new but adds to the surprise effect and uncertainty that the attackers aim to achieve. Al Qaeda does not seem to consistently claim the attacks for which it is responsible, to make it harder for the victims, among others the United States, to retaliate.[75]

With respect to the means that are used, more continuity than change can be argued to exist. The number of terrorist victims has been on the rise for at least two decades, which does not overlap with the rise of the new terrorists. The use of weapons of mass destruction is not an inherent feature of the new terrorism and certainly does not constitute a trend. The new terrorists use predominantly the same weaponry as the traditional terrorists and continue to select symbolic targets such as powerful individuals and important structures. The increased lethality and destructiveness of terrorism can also be explained not only by a gradual increase in the effectiveness of the means in the modern period, but more importantly by the inherent necessity in terrorist actions to strike harder to reach the same effect. There is little evidence that the new terrorists and their predecessors differ in respect to surprise and publicity as effects they are after. Furthermore, the annihilation of the enemy continues to be of paramount importance, a characteristic shared by both the old and the new terrorists.

Preliminary Conclusions and Suggestions
for an Alternative Research Agenda

There are several important continuities between the old and new terrorism, which fundamentally question the distinction that is implied by the use of the two terms. Continuity exists in territorial focus, transnational links, and network structures, which mark both the old forms of terrorism and the new. The overlap between important aims that the terrorist organisations set themselves also constitutes continuity. Political, ideological, and religious themes strongly overlap, making clear goal-oriented distinctions problematic, if not impossible. Continuity further exists in the increase in scale and number of

victims, which has been taking place over a number of years and is not just a recent phenomenon. The use of weapons of mass destruction might be a threat in the future, and we should be well aware of this, but it does not form an inherent feature of the new terrorism. The new terrorists do not differ fundamentally from their ancestors in the type of weaponry they use. Surprise, provocation, and publicity are what the terrorists are after and essential continuity exists here as well.

Some have argued that it might not be the separate features of the new terrorism that have not been seen before but the combination of these characteristics that makes terrorism new[76] and, it is argued, more dangerous. Often the most dangerous element is perceived to be the choice for weapons of mass destruction,[77] which, as has been pointed out, is based on an extremely limited number of cases. If the presence of one fundamental characteristic can already be questioned, how strong are the claims of the remaining combination of characteristics? It seems that the argument for a combination of characteristics making terrorism new is mostly inspired by the activities of A Qaeda and leaves out the other cases.

If indeed it is the combination of factors that assures terrorism's newness, then this should be confirmed on the basis of rigorous empirical tests, which to date have not been systematically carried out. To further substantiate the claims made in this contribution, a proper historical investigation should be made into the history of terrorism. What is called for is a structured investigation, using where possible primary source material, into the development of terrorism in the modern period, that is, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such a longitudinal study should incorporate several variables that are crucial for the understanding of the phenomenon, among others, the actors, their organizational structure, the instruments they use, the effects they manage to achieve, and the measures that are taken against them. Only with such a multivariate analysis can claims regarding terrorism and the extent of trends and transformations, including its newness, be substantiated.

Several requirements of this historical investigation can be formulated on the basis of the arguments presented in this article. First, it should be presumed that the terrorism, which is the subject of analysis, can be rationally understood.[78] This means that even though beliefs are seen as important in the use of violence, it is presumed that these beliefs can be rationally comprehended.[79] This rational understanding, even when disagreeing with the fundamentals of the belief, should be used as an explanatory factor.

Second, a thematic or typological approach to terrorism is not the most productive way to investigate the phenomenon. Assigning motivations such as religion cannot be objective because terrorist activities are often not claimed and motivations are often multiple and overlapping. Separating out a motivation becomes thus almost impossible.[80] In the literature, actor- and purpose-based typologies dominate.[81] Even refined and multivariate typologies cannot do justice to the rich practice. As Schmid noted: "As long as terrorism is conceptualized as extremism of ends rather than means, the concept cannot be relieved of its ideological baggage."[82] By avoiding a thematic typology, at least an attempt can be made to attenuate this problem.

Third, reactions to and measures against terrorist activities should be taken into account because of the action and reaction cycle between the terrorists and the authorities charged with combating them. This forms an exchange process. The countermeasures define the space that is left for terrorists to operate in. Especially discussions about asymmetric responses should be incorporated here.[83]

The label "new" should only be applied when on the basis of historical research the phenomenon has not been seen before or when it is the subject of a new historical

interpretation. This contribution has indicated that in both cases this might turn out to be ultimately problematic. Terrorism is part of daily reality. Using the label new might give expression to the pain and trauma that is suffered as a result of terrorist activity. However, using the label new does not always help in clarifying and comprehending what is actually occurring in the world today.

Notes

1. David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling; Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, 78(3) (1984), pp. 658–677, p. 658.

2. The label new has been used many times before; even at the beginning of the twentieth century with the advent of nationalist political violence this same label was used. Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanatics and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (London: Phoenix, 2001), p. 20.

3. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 659.

4. Not only terrorism has been labelled new in the past ten years. There has, for example, also been talk of "new wars." See Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999). This proposition has also been questioned: Mats Berdal, "How 'New' are 'New Wars'? Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War," *Global Governance* 9 (2003), pp. 477–502. Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (eds.), *The Nature of Modern War: Clausewitz and his Critics Revisited* (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2003). Isabelle Duyvesteyn, *Clausewitz and African War: Politics and Strategy in Liberia and Somalia* (London: Taylor and Francis, forthcoming).

5. Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman et al., *Political Terrorism; A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1988), pp. 5–6.

6. This is not only a problem for academic studies but also and perhaps more so for government and law in order to put a stop to terrorist activities. See for example, John F. Murphy, *State Support of International Terrorism: Legal, Political and Economic Dimensions* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989).

7. Noam Chomsky, "Who are the Global Terrorists?," in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 128–137, p. 131. Italics in original.

8. Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 138. Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, 177. Schmid claims that "more than 85% of all books on the topic have been written since 1968." See also the bibliography of Edward F. Mickolus, *The Literature of Terrorism: A Selective Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), which only lists titles from the 1970s.

9. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 658. Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, p. 207.

10. Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, p. 177.

11. Ibid., p. 177.

12. Robert Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

13. Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Political Terrorism," in Margaret Hermann (ed.), *Political Psychology: Contemporary Problems and Issues* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1986), pp. 379–413, p. 389.

14. Ibid., p. 385.

15. Jerrold Post, "Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism; Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

16. Charles A. Russell, Leon J. Barker Jr., and Bowman H. Miller, "Out-Inventing the Terrorist," in Yonah Alexander, David Carlton, and Paul Wilkinson (eds.), *Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), pp. 3–42, p. 8. See also Charles A. Russell and Bowman H. Miller, "Profile of a Terrorist," *Terrorism: An International Journal* 1(1) (1977).

17. Russell, Barker, and Miller, "Out-Inventing the Terrorist," p. 8.

18. Manus I. Midlarsky, Martha Crenshaw, and Fumihiko Yoshida, "Why Violence Spreads: The Contagion of International Terrorism," *International Studies Quarterly* 24(2) (1980), pp. 262–298.

19. Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Political Terrorism."

20. See for example Martha Crenshaw's book *Terrorism in Context*, which only includes left-wing terrorism, while the book purports to discuss the whole phenomenon of terrorism. Martha Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in Context* (University Park 1995).

21. Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little Brown, 1996).

22. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

23. See also Kent Layne Oots and Thomas C. Wiegele, "Terrorist and Victim: Psychiatric and Physiological Approaches from a Social Science Perspective," *Terrorism; An International Journal* 8(1) (1985), pp. 1–32, p. 4.

24. Martha Crenshaw Hutchinson, *Revolutionary Terrorism: The FLN in Algeria 1954–1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978). John Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles, A Generation of Violence 1967–1992* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1993).

25. Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, p. 181.

26. Laqueur, *No End to War*, p. 7.

27. Ibid., p. 29.

28. David C. Rapoport, "Introduction," in David C. Rapoport and Yonah Alexander (eds.), *The Morality of Terrorism: Religious and Secular Justifications* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. xii.

29. One will look in vain for the historical approach to terrorism in Schmid's handbook. See also: Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 672.

30. Martha Crenshaw and John Pimlott, *Encyclopedia of World Terrorism* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1997). See also Harvey W. Kushner, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003).

31. Walter Laqueur, *The Terrorism Reader, A Historical Anthology* (London: Wildwood House, 1979).

32. Andrew Sinclair, *An Anatomy of Terror: A History of Terrorism* (London: MacMillan, 2003).

33. Martin A. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins of Modern Terrorism in Europe," in Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, pp. 27–62.

34. See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London: Gollancz, 1998) and Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*.

35. Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Political Terrorism," p. 381

36. Rapoport, "Introduction," p. xi.

37. See for example, Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism," *Survival* 42(1) (Spring 2000), pp. 59–75.

38. This does not seem to be uncommon in this field: Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, p. 180.

39. Laqueur, *No End To War*, pp. 8–9. Simon and Daniel, "American and the New Terrorism," p. 66. David Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism and How Dangerous is It?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13(3) (2001), pp. 1–14.

40. Strangely enough, what could be seen as truly new forms of terrorism, ecoterrorism and narcoterrorism, two phenomena clearly linked to societal developments in the last half of the twentieth century have hardly been studied in this light. Perhaps new also has a connotation of extremely dangerous and threatening. For another approach to questioning the newness of terrorism see Thomas Copeland, "Is the 'New Terrorism' Really New?: An Analysis of the New Paradigm for Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 21(2) (2000) pp. 7–27. Copeland argues that "the new terrorism is primarily a US policy frame," p. 22.

41. See also Bruce Hoffman, "Change and Continuity in Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24 (2001), pp. 417–428, p. 426, footnote 1.

42. Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism," p. 3–4.

43. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 658.

44. Crenshaw claims that the transnational nature of the phenomenon has made terrorism a difficult subject to study; Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Political Terrorism," p. 383. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 673.

45. Tatjana Botzat, *Ein deutscher Herbst: Zustande, Dokumente, Berichte, Kommentare* (A German Autumn: Circumstances, Documents, Reports and Commentary) (Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 1978).

46. J. Paul de B. Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages: Government Responses to Terrorism* (New York: Praeger, 2002).

47. Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 182.

48. The United States now intends to withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia.

49. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*.

50. Lawrence Freedman, "A New Type of War," in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 37–47, p. 38. Thomas Copeland stresses that state sponsorship of terrorist movements in general continues both actively and passively (safe havens and condoning criminal activities). Copeland, "Is the "New Terrorism" Really New?," p. 13.

51. This also questions the globalisation argument that has stressed the irrelevance of state actors. See Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

52. Samuel R. Berger and Mona Sutphen, "Commandeering the Palestinian Cause; Bin Laden's Belated Concern," in James F. Hoge Jr. and Gideon Rose (eds.), *How Did This Happen: Terrorism and the New War* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), pp. 123–128.

53. Simon and Benjamin, "America and the New Terrorism," p. 59.

54. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 660.

55. For an example of such a terrorist organization, see the "Thugs" in what is now India. The Thugs worshipped the Hindu Goddess of destruction and terror, Kali. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 660.

56. Giles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

57. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling," p. 658.

58. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins," p. 30.

59. John Gearson, "The Nature of Modern Terrorism," *Political Quarterly* 73(4), Supplement I (2002), pp. 7–24, p. 21.

60. Michael Ignatieff, "It's War—But It Does not have to be Dirty," *Guardian*, 1 October 2001.

61. Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberialism* (New York: Norton, 2003).

62. Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*.

63. Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (London: Deutsch, 1990), pp. 39–40.

64. James Dingley, "The Bombing of Omagh, 15 August 1998; The Bombers, their Tactics, Strategy and Purpose Behind the Incident," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24(6) (2001), pp. 451–466.

65. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 94, 201. David Tucker has noted that the conclusion of a rise in mass-casualty attacks seems to be based on a very small number of cases. Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism," p. 6. He also notes that conventional warfare has become more lethal in terms of civilian casualties in the course of the twentieth century; why should unconventional war in the shape of terrorism not?, p. 9.

66. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins," p. 31.

67. Hoffman, "Change and Continuity in Terrorism."

68. Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

69. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 94, 201.

70. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins."

71. Brian M. Jenkins, *International Terrorism: A New Kind of Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1974), p. 4.

72. A lot of research is being conducted into the role of the media and conflict. See for example, W. P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997). L. Minear, C. Scott, and Th. G. Weiss, *The News Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

73. This revolves around the age-old debate in the social sciences between agency or structure as determinate factor.

74. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins."

75. According to some the feature of not claiming attacks is increasing. Gearson, "The Nature of Modern Terrorism," p. 11.

76. See for this suggestion E. R. Muller, R. F. J. Spaay, and A. G. W. Ruitenberg, *Trends in Terrorisme* (Trends in Terrorism) (Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer, 2003), p. 211. See for an example based on Al Qaeda, David Martin Jones, "Out of Bali; Cybercaliphate Rising," *The National Interest* 71 (2003), pp. 75–85.

77. Tucker, "What is New About the New Terrorism," p. 9.

78. See Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism, Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice," in Reich, *Origins of Terrorism*. This point of view is not always shared: Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists*, in particular chapter five. Laqueur, *The New Terrorism*, p. 91.

79. See for rational choice theory, Herbert Simon, *Models of Man: Social and Rational: Mathematical Essay on Rational Human Behavior in a Social Setting* (New York: John Wiley, 1957). Michael Allingham, *Rational Choice* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999).

80. Chris Quillen, "A Historical Analysis of Mass Casualty Bombers," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2002), pp. 279–292.

81. Schmid, *Political Terrorism*, in particular the chapter "Terrorism and Related Concepts: Typologies."

82. Ibid., p. 56.

83. Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 26(1) (1974), pp. 175–200.