



## Theorizing Terrorist Behavior: Major Approaches and Their Characteristics

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**Abstract:** *This paper reviews the major theoretical approaches to the study of terrorism. Despite the abundance of policy-oriented research in the field, terrorism, as an immensely complex subject, is underdeveloped in terms of theorizing. In this essay, I aim to present basic theoretical frameworks that evaluate terrorist behavior and discuss their potential to further develop as scientific theories. Instrumental, organizational, political communication, economic, and psychological theories of terrorism are discussed and some conclusions are drawn as to the future of terrorism studies.*

**Keywords:** Definition of terrorism, instrumental approach, organizational approach

### Introduction

Although terrorism and rule by terror are well-known practices in the history, theoretical literature studying terrorism has not been developed to its fullest extent. In earlier examples of Western political thought, such as in the Greek epics, Thucydides, Roman political thought, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Montesquieu, one can observe examinations of terrorism, however, common characteristics of terrorist rules and insurgencies virtually escaped systematic analyses and rigorous theorizing (Spitz 1967).

Yet, interest in the study of terrorism has changed substantially in the last half century. Terrorism has increasingly become a focus of attention in social sciences since the 1960s. There are some practical reasons for the burgeoning of such literature. The main reason, according to many scholars like Wilkinson and Stewart (1987), Long (1990), Rice (1988), is that the state of the international system in the Cold War made engaging into conventional wars extremely costly. Therefore, the strategic balance favored unconventional warfare as a means of engaging rivals. As a result of these developments, terrorist organizations and their activities spread during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and this increase in use of terror as a tactic by non-state actors brought with it a greater focus on terrorism in the social sciences.

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These academic perspectives on terrorism differ widely. They are influenced by disciplinary interests such as cultural anthropology, religion, social psychology, history, political science, geography, demography, weapons technology, communications, electronics, and forensics (Long 1990, Clutterbuck 1990 and 1994). Due to the limitations of this study, most of these various approaches are not included.

In this paper, I attempt to review the most important theoretical approaches to the study of terrorism in the political science discipline. Terrorism is primarily a political phenomenon. Therefore, the political science theories are the focus in this study. Instrumental, organizational and political communication approaches are taken as the principal representatives of political science theories of terrorism. In addition to those, economic and psychological theories of terrorism are evaluated from the other disciplines. The reason to evaluate economics and psychology literature is simple: these are two of the most developed social sciences.

An important point needs to be explained about this review. This paper has suffered from the basic characteristic of the terrorism literature, that is, there is not a fully developed, widely accepted theory of terrorist behavior. The theoretical approaches presented in this study are 'developing' at best. Although there are plenty of descriptive and prescriptive studies, attempts to theorize terrorism are rather rare. Therefore, at various points in the review, suggestions on how to achieve theoretical development are made.

In the following sections, first, a discussion of definitions of terrorism is presented. In part two, five major theoretical approaches to the study of terrorism are presented. Finally, a brief critique of the literature is presented and suggestions for theory building are made.

### **Definition**

What is terrorism? Why is it there? Who are terrorists? What are the ways to deal with it? These are the major questions that concern researchers who studied this social phenomenon.

The term 'terrorism' suggests political violence or insurgency primarily. Terrorists kill people or destroy property for political purposes. But using the concept of terrorism as a synonym for political violence, which is done in political science literature, is a reductionist approach. According to Wilkinson and Stewart (1987), there is a general recognition that terrorism is a specific method of struggle rather than a synonym for political violence or insurgency. According to Brian Jenkins (in Wilkinson and Stewart 1987), terrorism can be described as a kind of weapons system. This is a useful definition to some extent because it provides a context to the researcher in which this weapon can be used by various actors. It is not the weapon of one group, organization or ideology but it is the weapon of various actors in the international system. It is indeed insightful to describe terrorism as the weapon of the poor. Terrorism is more likely to be used by 'poorer' groups who need to bring an expensive political change because terrorist activities induce lower costs but may bring significant political changes. However, a more scholarly description would require the broader context mentioned above.

It can be argued that there is a modest agreement in the literature about defining terrorism as a form of political struggle although there is not a consensus. But there is another question about the definition then: what distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence? Is terrorism, guerilla

warfare, criminal violence or psychopathological motives the same? Tillema (2002) suggests that the purposes behind these acts are not identical: while a terrorist seeks symbolic political effect, guerilla warfare aims to weaken the security forces. Or, for example, criminals may look for material gains while the psychopath may have no comprehensible reason. One of the accepted ways of distinguishing terrorism from other forms of violence is the deliberate and systematic use of coercive intimidation (Wilkinson and Stewart 1987). Terrorists terrify people to force them to do what they want. This means that terrorists aim to create fear among a wider audience than the targets themselves. So terrorists actually do not ask something specific from their victims, but terrorize these people – kill, injure, destroy their property – to create the environment in which they can ask for political changes, usually from governments (Bueno de Mesquita 2000). Therefore, a description of terrorism must include the actors in a terrorist act. According to this definition, there are at least five participators in the process of terror. Primary actors are the terrorists of course who exercise violence. Second, the immediate victims are those who unwillingly become a part of the process. Third, there is the society, or wider audience that terrorists aim to intimidate. Fourth, the neutral parts of the society as bystanders. The fifth part involves international actors, or international community and its opinion (Wilkinson and Stewart 1987).

Making these distinctions or defining these aspects of terrorist acts shows us a fact about the literature: terrorism is a difficult phenomenon to define. Usually there is no wide consensus on issues. On the contrary, terrorism is the kind of subject on which people tend to get involved in polemics. Due to its politically critical nature, who is a terrorist and what is 'terrorism' are very complicated to define.

The discussion presented so far shows difficulties associated with making a definition of terrorism that is accepted by many or all. However, we need to make one that is generally accepted. The basic and to a great extent academically accepted definition of terrorism suggests that, 'terrorism is use of violence aimed to change government's policies on a certain issue (or issues) but directed on people who actually are not related to the policies in consideration'. With this definition at our disposal, we can continue with the analysis of the various theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon.

## **Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Terrorism**

### ***The Instrumental Approach***

Instrumental explanations of terrorism suggest that the act of terrorism is a deliberate choice by a political actor (Crenshaw 1988). According to this approach the terrorist organization acts to achieve political ends. Different acts of terrorism are explained as responses to external stimuli, like government policies..

According to Crenshaw (1995), in this approach, violence is assumed to be intentional for a terrorist organization. Therefore, violence is not the ends as suggested by some other approaches like the psychological theories. Terrorists are not lunatics who violate for the sake of violation. Rather, terrorism is a tool for these actors to achieve political ends. So governments and other actors are perceived as rivals whose actions are taken strategically and a terrorist organization aims

to change other actors' decisions, actions, and policies by using force. As given in the general definition, terrorism is a deliberate action aimed to change government policies; it is not a kind of typical warfare in which parties try to destroy each other militarily.

As to how the terrorist organizations decide particular actions, this line of literature suggested that terrorist groups as non-state organizations make cost and benefit analysis in shaping their actions (Hermann and Hermann 1990, Sick 1990, Crenshaw 1990). This approach suggests terrorist groups calculate the cost of doing and not doing an action and also the probability of success in their actions. In this respect, there are important similarities between instrumental approach and quantitative or formal studies of terrorism. Reviewing the examples from the instrumental approach, one can suggest that the rational choice approach's assumptions are quite similar to those of the instrumental approach. Rational choice studies of terrorism make similar assumptions: terrorists are rational and make their decisions in strategic interactions with other actors (Landes 1978, Sandler et. al. 1987, Enders and Sandler 2004).

One of the major questions in all theories is how one can define 'success' of a terrorist organization. Instrumental theorists suggested that the success is defined in terms of accomplishing the political ends for a given terrorist organization. For example, if a terrorist organization is nationalist-separatist in nature, success is achieving an independent state. However, we also know that a terrorist organization achieving its full ends is almost never the case. No matter how big or influential it is, the rival organization, i.e. the state, is usually significantly more powerful than the terrorist groups and finds ways to deal with the terrorists. According to Crenshaw (1988), very few terrorist organizations achieved their full ideological objectives. So is terrorism a failure at all? There can be a variety of answers to this question, perhaps political, even polemical answers. Different explanations from other theoretical approaches are there too. An advocate of the psychological approach may suggest that it is the act of violence in terrorist's mind that matters; so long-term ideological objectives would not be defining success. Or an organizational approach analyst might argue, as long as the terrorist organization survives, the success is achieved. For an advocate of the instrumental approach, attaining the political ends are important, so the survival of the terrorist organization even though the ultimate aims cannot be achieved could be explained by the achievement of so-called intermediary aims. Crenshaw (1988) suggests terrorism survives because the terrorist organizations achieve their tactical aims such as publicity and recognition. This explanation makes sense considering some political changes that terrorist organizations were able to achieve, despite their failure to reach their ultimate political ends.

Related to the problem of achieving ends, the literature dealt with another question: if there is no possibility of achieving ultimate success for terrorist organizations, how does the organization survive and how can theories explain the factions in the terrorist organizations? The pieces of the instrumental approach reviewed suggest that these factions are the result of disagreements about the political ends, ideological stands, or results of unsuccessful actions to achieve these aims (Crelinsten 1988, Crenshaw 1988, Long 1990). For example the factions in the IRA, or in extreme-left organizations in Italy and Turkey, or divisions born from the PLO are the examples of how terrorist groups are divided after serious concerns about political ends in the organization.

The instrumental approach to terrorism is one of the most developed approaches to the subject in the discipline of political science. It is simple and comprehensible as Crenshaw (1988) suggests. It is comprehensible because the intentions of actors are inferred from their behavior according to logical rules. Also, this approach is intellectually satisfying and provides researcher with a rather easier context of study since information requirements about secretive terrorist organizations are relaxed. It is substantially influenced by conflict studies, so its range is extremely broad as it is applied to all manner of conflict regardless of the identity of the actors (Crenshaw 1988). However this leads to a weakness of the instrumental approach: it cannot explain how the preferences of the actors are determined, since it does not incorporate analyses of the internal workings of terrorist organizations. So, if we assume actors are identical, we miss the differences in understanding how different terrorist actors act differently. In the next part, the organizational approach, which seeks answers to these questions, is presented.

### ***Organizational Approach***

This approach analyzes terrorist groups from the perspective of organization theories. As seen in other fields of social sciences, basic explanations about terrorist groups are based on the organizational perspective. The aim, the actions, and the internal dynamics of an organization are explained in relation to internal organizational processes.

The organizational approach suggests a terrorist organization's main goal is 'survival', like any other organization such as a state institution or a commercial enterprise. Hence this approach explains terrorism as a result of an organization's struggle for survival, usually in a competitive environment (Crenshaw 1988). Leaders of the organization deliver benefits, incentives to the members to provide for the survival of the organization. The organization responds to pressures from outside by changing incentives offered to members or through innovation. Maybe the most interesting explanation about terrorist organizations from this line of literature is that, terrorist actions do not necessarily or directly reflect ideological values (Crenshaw 1988, Oots 1986, Rapoport 1977).

As we elaborate more on the examples of this literature, one can observe that there is great significance given to the internal dynamics and processes of the organization. The determinants of political actions or violent policies by terrorist organization are organizational rather than political or ideological. These organizations are taken as self-sustaining and they do whatever necessary to survive. Organization delivers goods to the members to keep them in the organization. These can be tangible goods or public goods in Olsonian terms (Olson 1988), or even be intangible goods like respect, of feeling of belonging to a network of social relationships (Oots 1986).

Organizational theories suggest that what defines the actions of a terrorist organization is not purely political. But this approach does not provide us with the necessary simplification we need in theory building. Because it is difficult to understand the reasons behind terrorist acts since actions are assumed to depend on the internal, clandestine dynamics of a terrorist organization. However, in the instrumental approach, scholars infer the intentions of the actors from their behavior. This provides us with an easier framework to study in than some of the other approaches. Rather practical problems about the organizational approach are that understanding the internal dynamics, processes in the organization is challenging since terrorist organizations are

typically secret. How do we provide information about them, is it possible at all? The problem of imperfect information also affects the quality of the studies in this line of the literature.

Another problematic assumption in the organizational approach is that terrorist acts are assumed to appear inconsistent, erratic and unpredictable (Crenshaw 1988). It is so because terrorists do not act according to external pressures, like from governments. They do not make the cost and benefit analysis of purely political actions, and act strategically according to the political interactions between the actors. So although the instrumental theories and economic approach allows us to explain even surprise attacks that can be stimulated from external pressures, organizational theories do not provide such an insight, or it is at least difficult to explain the actions of terrorists by the organizational approach since we can have little information about the inner processes of these organizations. For example, this theory assumes that incentives promised to members of the organization are of great importance understanding why individuals subscribe to terrorism. How can we possibly achieve adequate information about the leaders, members and incentives of these organizations? Without these insights, can our explanations about terrorist actions be valid at all? These are difficult questions to be answered by the advocates of this approach.

Another basic argument about this approach is that terrorist organizations are like firms. Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) economic theory of organizations can be used to explain the maintenance of the organization in a competitive environment. This line of literature suggests that terrorist organizations are like firms competing in an environment in which they will always try to survive. Other terrorist organizations are like rivals in a market place: the Irish Republican Army competes with the Irish National Liberation Army. Moreover organizations are more sensitive to their members' stimuli than they are to government actions.

Related to the assumptions mentioned above, emphasizing organizational maintenance explains why terrorist organizations survive although they never achieve their ultimate goals. Because of a terrorist organization's aim is to survive, it focuses on and uses material benefits. For example, it becomes the center of social networks in a particular district of the city or in a rural area. It provides financial resources to its members. So it is possible to argue that terrorist organizations actually do not want to reach their ultimate aims. If the organization succeeds there are not enough incentives to keep the organization together. Leaders are likely to seek incremental gains sufficient to sustain group morale but not to end members' dependence on the organization (Crenshaw 1988).

The last part of this literature I would like to present deals with transnational terrorist organizations and suggest that transnational terrorist organizations are similar to political organizations in the sense of being political groups (Oots 1986). This line of literature argues that the major function of the organizations is to serve the collective interests of their members (Sandler 1992). In order to achieve this goal, they provide public goods to their members. For example, a Palestinian homeland, an independent Basque state or Marxist revolution are examples of public goods that these organizations aim to provide. Financial gains from terrorist or illegal activities are other examples of these goods. Another way of thinking of terrorist organizations as political interest groups is that they provide externalities (Oots 1986). For example, when a terrorist bombs a shopping center, people injured there experience negative utility over an activity

that they have no control over. It is argued that the difference between a terrorist group and other political organizations is that terrorist groups use political violence to provide these goods, but other groups usually use peaceful means.

This theory provides insights into the internal dynamics of terrorist organizations and how these dynamics influence terrorist acts. It helps us understanding different actors and their different policies. Therefore, it has the potential to accompany the instrumental approach in this sense. However, the approach is inherently complex and far from being parsimonious; it doesn't provide us with a context in which we can make general descriptions, find regularities or make predictions about terrorist behavior because it is assumed that most terrorist acts are random, and have sui-generic characteristics. Since we can know very little about the inside interactions of terrorist organizations, the actions of terrorists are difficult to explain in this context. Therefore, better theorizing and conducting empirical research is difficult to achieve by utilizing this approach.

### **Terrorism as Political Communication**

This approach suggests that terrorism is employed for communicative purposes. That is terrorism is a set of actions that uses political violence for communicative aims. So, the ultimate aim of a terrorist organization in general is to spread political messages and make some segments of the society or state do something they want.

According to Crelinsten (1987), terrorism is a deliberate use of violence and threat of violence to evoke a state of fear (or terror) in a particular victim or audience. Besides that, the terror evoked is the vehicle by which allegiance or compliance is maintained or weakened. In this line of literature too, it is assumed that the terrorized group is not the real target to be communicated to, but the demands of compliance are directed towards on another group. As for the allegiances, there are two possible ways this relationship does work; by either weakening or strengthening the alliance:

...the allegiance to be established or maintained is that between the terrorist and one group of targets, while the allegiance to be weakened is that between the same group of targets from whom allegiance is sought and other groups perceived by the terrorist to be enemies to this cause. (Crelinsten 1987)

To sum, terrorism's ends can vary – they can be a religious, leftist or right-wing terrorist organization – however, all these acts are designed to influence the relationship between individuals in society and the state (Kaplan 1978).

Terrorism as a communication approach is substantially different from organizational or instrumental approaches because their focus of inquiry is on the impact of terrorism according to the advocates of this approach. Causes of terrorism are not purely political ends or the organizational goals. How does a terrorist act influence different targets in a society? What kind of impact does it create on those target groups? And how do relationships between terrorists, terrorized group and the real target group change? These are the questions asked in this literature. For example let us take the Oklahoma bombing of 1996. In this case, the individual terrorist made this attack to protest against certain policies of the US government. Most of the people he killed had no direct effect on these policies. By doing this act, the terrorist used a way of political

communication in which he sought an allegiance from the American people. That is, he tried to strengthen the allegiance between himself and the rest of the society. On the other hand, by using violence and communication, he aimed to weaken the allegiance relationship between the society and the American government.

This approach is successful in bringing the communication dimension into the theory-building processes in studies of terrorism. It is really difficult to construct a comprehensive theory of terrorism without considering the terrorist action's impact on intended and unintended audiences and how these actions change and define relationships in society. However, this approach is not comprehensive itself. It is not capable of explaining the political ends of these organizations. It is insightful to suggest that action-reaction dynamics are to be understood. But why these actions are taken, on what grounds, with which political aims are at least as important as the communication characteristics. Likewise organizational aspects of the subject are treated as unimportant in this approach.

Hence I suggest using this approach as complementary, rather than as a comprehensive theoretical approach to terrorism. In terms of the original perspective it brings to the discussion, it is useful. But it does not involve very critical dynamics of terrorists' acts.

### ***Economic Approach to the Study of Terrorism***

Some terrorism studies employ theoretical and methodological tools from the field of economics (Sandler et al. 1983, Enders et al. 1992, Enders and Sandler 1993, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2001). Although, in the final analysis, terrorism is a political phenomenon, it is not surprising to see such approach due to increasing use of economic applications in political science and other social sciences.

According to Enders and Sandler (2004), the application of economic methods to the study of terrorism began with Landes (1978), who applied the economics of crime and punishment to the study of skyjackings in United States. This literature suggests that economic methodology is particularly well suited to provide insights over and beyond those from a political science approach. Hence scholars in this approach claim empirical superiority to the definitions, institutional analyses, case studies and inductive frameworks provided by political science.

This interpretation can be better explained by providing four different arguments from the supporters of this approach. First, they claim that economic analysis can account for strategic interactions among opposing interests. These relationships include terrorist-government, or two targeted countries relations in transnational terrorism cases. I agree that to explain strategic interactions using economic approaches in political communication, instrumental and organizational studies can prove very useful. Because strategic interactions are assumed in these approaches too, rational choice models (e.g. game theoretic models) can be incorporated in other approaches to explain relationships between terrorist organizations and the others. For example, in the organizational approach, defining relationships within terrorist organizations as problems of collective action can be useful.

Second, authors from this line of literature suggest that rational choice models can be applied to find out how terrorists are apt to respond to policy induced changes to their constraints. Same

methods can be applied also to the government's reaction to the terrorist induced changes. Many examples of the economic approach to the study of terrorism have utilized this advantage of formal modeling. Researchers applied game theoretic models in which strategic interactions between terrorist groups and governments were assumed and action-reaction based models are developed (Lee 1988, Hamilton et. al 1983, Sandler and Lapan 1988). These studies usually aimed to produce specific policy prescriptions.

Third, not only economic methodology, but also theories of economics are assumed to be useful in explaining terrorism. Sandler (1992 and 1997) suggest that theory of market failures can underscore how independent pursuits of well being by the agents maybe at odds with socially efficient outcomes. This approach is useful in understanding government failures: they can also stem from well-intentioned policies too.

Fourth it is suggested that various economic empirical methods can be applied to evaluate theoretical predictions and policy recommendations. Considering the advanced and successful methodologies that are used in economics literature using economic methodologies is a useful option if the researcher's aim is to make predictions and policy recommendations. Various studies with these aims in the literature employed these methodologies.

In terms of its advanced methodologies, economic approaches to the study of terrorism can help. This approach allows you to think and study the phenomenon in a broader sense. For example, in game theoretic studies on terrorism, scholars can focus on both terrorists' and governments' behavior; interaction between the two actors is not random but rather strategic and the researcher can assume uncertainty and imperfect information wherever necessary.

However, there are certain problems with this approach too. Economic theories are abstractions based upon simplifying assumptions. So, wherever these assumptions are not valid, these theories should be reevaluated. For example, how can rationality assumption be compatible with suicide missions? Can cost-benefit analysis of this action be made by economic theories where the actors know the final outcome is death? For such extreme incidents, rationality assumption becomes controversial. However, there are great insights that political science can borrow from economics in explaining terrorist behavior. In most cases, terrorist organizations seem to follow policy patterns that can be explained by rationality assumptions. These patterns show rational calculation than irrational or sporadic behavior. Terrorists calculate the costs and benefits of their actions, they usually react to external stimuli – i.e. government 'oppression' – they account for risks and diversify their portfolios of acts to limit risks. Even though terrorists risk their lives, the effort put to escape plans suggests that life is still important to them (Sandler et al. 1987).

Theories and methodologies of economics do help our understanding of terrorism. However, they cannot solely explain terrorism. They should be used with more elaborate political theories of terrorism. For example, the instrumental approach and economic approach could very well be united in terms of their assumptions about the phenomenon. Because the instrumental perspective assumes a context in which strategic interactions take place, the purposes of the terrorist groups are well simplified, and the patterns are assumed to follow action-reaction processes as mentioned. Similar assumptions are made by economic theory too, which makes using these two theories together reasonable.

### ***Psychological Approach***

Psychological approaches to the study of terrorism are concerned with the study of terrorists' profiles (i.e. personalities), their recruitment into terrorist groups, beliefs, motivations, and careers as terrorists. That is, this line of literature attempts to produce profiles of terrorist individuals to answer questions like: who are terrorists? why are they involved in terrorism?: what are the common characteristics of these individuals (if any)? Although there are many examples of such studies in the literature, it is difficult to find a consensus on terrorists' 'states of mind' in these works. Studies focus on substantially different issues from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, there are two approaches within psychological explanations that dominated these studies.

The first approach I present describes terrorists as mentally ill individuals. People who commit such horrible crimes are labeled 'abnormal'. By producing explanations about the mindset of terrorists, this approach achieved its own hypothesis about terrorism. Jerrold Post's definition of terrorist 'psycho-logic' is an important example of this:

[It is] argued that political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and that their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are compelled to commit. ... individuals are drawn to the path of terrorism in order to commit acts of violence, and their special logic, which is grounded in their psychology and reflected in their psychology and reflected in their rhetoric, becomes the justification for their violent acts. (Post 1990: 25). There might be some insights to this approach. For example, terrorists may have personalities more tended to violence. However, such an approach is reductionist and far from being able to explain different dynamics of such a complex phenomenon. This approach excludes the political, ideological, economic, and sociological factors that lead people to become terrorists. Besides, I suggest that this argument takes terrorist organizations homogenous units. It is assumed that all terrorists display the same personalities. Considering there is not such a homogenous group where individuals involved, this approach is not a compelling one.

The second approach characterized terrorists as fanatics. This approach emphasizes the terrorist's rational qualities and views the terrorist as a cool, logical planning individual whose rewards are ideological and political, rather than financial. This approach characterizes terrorists as well-educated and sophisticated people who are capable of using advanced rhetoric and political analysis. As Wilkinson and Stewart (1987) suggests there are two main types of fanatics. First are religious fanatics. Some religious groups employ terrorism for their political purposes, specifically to overthrow 'evil' regimes and replace them with religious ones (Merari 1990). On the other hand, single-issue fanatics are characterized as an obsessive group of people who want a certain policy to be changed, like on abortion or animal rights. This line of literature does not profile terrorist behavior as pathological, but rather suggests that a terrorist's mindset is obsessed with a particular perspective about the world that is so powerful that it can produce such violent acts.

Some other examples of this literature have focused on different motivations that can lead to terrorism and their recruitment processes. Although the psychological approach shows connections between terrorist acts and ideologies, it is still not capable of providing a comprehensive account of terrorist acts. Without considering instrumentalist aims, organizational structures, or strategic

interactions among actors in terrorist acts, psychological approaches alone cannot explain or predict terrorist behavior.

### **A Brief Critique of Terrorism Literature**

Reviewing the literature on terrorism, one concludes that it has yet to develop a grand theory of terrorism. The preceding pages presented the best examples in the literature that suffers from serious problems. These theories are not as comprehensive, rigorous and parsimonious as theories in other fields of political science.

There are certain reasons that can be attributed to the underdeveloped state of theories analyzing terrorism. Wilkinson and Stewart (1987), Crenshaw (1988, 1992, 1995), Crelinsten (1987), Oots (1986), Thackrah (1987), and Wieviorka (1995) stated some important reasons. In the next pages these critics and my evaluations are synthesized.

First, in most of the examples of literature, researchers focus exclusively on terrorism by small groups or non-state actors. Crelinsten calls this weakness in the study of terrorism a truncated object of study. In fact, in almost all pieces covered for this review, I have hardly encountered any important example that does not take this approach. Terrorism is exclusively defined as insurgency in most of the studies. However, this leads us to limited analyses because in doing that, we reduce the domain of our studies to a single perspective. Actually terrorism can be defined in terms of a power relationship. We should be including this power relationship as it is exercised from top to bottom, as well as we do for bottom to top relations. So the definition of terrorism given at the beginning of this paper as the use of violence aimed to change government's policies on a certain issue should be broadened for better understanding of the phenomenon. By providing this larger domain of study, the researcher will have the opportunity to make comparative analysis (Crelinsten 1987). If we do not modify the object of our study as such, we will not have the opportunity to see the similarities and differences across contexts. Hence, terrorism is not only the use of violence by the non-state actors, but it is a tool of persuasion in a wide variety of power relationships.

The second critique of the literature is that most research on terrorism focuses on policy prescriptions. The most frequent type of study in the literature is a policy-oriented one.<sup>1</sup> From an economic perspective, one can argue that it is so because there is great demand for this type of research, especially from governments. The problem with policy-oriented studies is that they narrow the scope of scientific study. Because these studies are designed to help governments, they focus on the prevention and control of terrorism. This approach leads us to work with narrow conceptual frameworks (Wieviorka 1995, Crenshaw 1995, Crelinsten 1987). Terrorism is a broader and more complex subject, reducing the scope of analysis to prevention hurts theoretical development.

Third, studies in terrorism literature should refrain from being ahistorical, actor- or incident-oriented (Crenshaw 1995). That is, although we need the rigor of linear and causal models, we

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<sup>1</sup> For example in Turkey, most of the literature on terrorism focuses on rather specific problems such as the PKK (Özcan 1999, 2008; Özen 2008), spread of WMDs (Kibaroglu 2004, 2007), or religious terrorism (Özen 2007).

should not fall into the pitfalls of these approaches. The importance of finding general patterns, trends and cycles is undeniable. However, although there are commonalities, each case is unique. Terrorism remains unpredictable in part because its multiple contexts are dynamic (Crenshaw 1995). So our studies must consider the historical, geographical and cultural contexts. There are great insights that we can learn from comparative case studies of terrorism.

Fourth, the literature has to find ways to change our focus from descriptive studies to more complex theoretical work. Terrorism literature largely includes descriptive studies in that researchers tend to describe and define terrorism and terrorists. We need more than that. That is, we need to develop theories, comprehensive case studies and we need to test our hypotheses against evidence, both with qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

After presenting the weaknesses found in the terrorism literature, lastly I discuss what kind of theories we need for better explanations of terrorism. First, the literature needs to determine proper scope and unit of analysis. As described in this paper, there are various approaches to this question. Social, organizational, political or individual levels of analysis are used. To build better theories, I suggest that the political level of analysis is the most appropriate one because, first and foremost, terrorism is a political phenomenon. Even though other explanations give insights, terrorists' aims are primarily political. I do not suggest excluding insights from other approaches, but rather they should complement political explanations. Second, in theorizing about terrorism, we need to construct our assumptions very carefully. These assumptions should take into consideration that terrorism is a political phenomenon. Thus assumptions should primarily be based on political motives. Third, we need to focus on the simplification of this complex phenomenon in building our theories. Terrorism is an extremely complex issue, so we need to focus specifically on simplification of the complex reality. Fourth, we need to construct theories that are falsifiable. That is, theories of terrorism should be testable against evidence.

In terms of these four criteria, I suggest that the theoretical approach that has the largest potential is the instrumental approach. We can develop instrumental theories and achieve a well-developed theory of terrorism because this approach can support the criteria mentioned above. The instrumental approach's scope of analysis is political. Terrorists attempt to achieve political ends. The intentions of actors are inferred from political actions, violent or non-violent procedures. Assumptions of this approach are simpler than others and intellectually more satisfying (Crenshaw 1988). And last, it is easier to test the hypotheses that can be drawn from this approach. As mentioned above, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be applied within this framework. To sum up, the instrumental approach provides a firm base to develop comprehensive theories of terrorism. If the instrumental approach can resolve the weaknesses mentioned in this section and develop itself to meet the four criteria, a rather developed theory of terrorism can be built on the bases of it.

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