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Global Terrorism

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Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and analysis of global **terrorism**. Its main argument is that any understanding of modern terrorism requires an appreciation of how individuals and groups with localised grievances seek to change perceived injustices through acts of violence targeted at a wider national and even global level. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the vexed issue of defining terrorism – a topic that has divided policy-makers and scholars for over a century – and presents a broad working definition of what terrorism is. It then addresses some of the reasons why terrorism is such a controversial subject. The third section shifts focus to the need to understand acts of terrorism within their social and historical contexts – each act of terrorism has its own unique set of historical circumstances even when part of the same general campaign. The fourth elaborates how terrorism is being transformed under conditions of **globalisation**, focusing in particular on two uniquely modern aspects: the inclination of a growing number of people to redress local grievances through violent actions far from the source of their anger; and the increasing tendency of individuals with no cultural, historical or social ties to a particular conflict to identify with its protagonists and either enlist in faraway terrorist groups or to take matters into their own hands and pursue a violent agenda of their own accord. The chapter concludes with a brief dicussion designed to clear up some misconceptions surrounding terrorism's root causes.

What is terrorism?

Very few concepts in politics can provoke as negative a reaction as terrorism. Even the debates that swirl around the classification of a person or a government as 'despotic' or 'dictatorial' pale in comparison with the near-universal opprobrium carried by the concept of a 'terrorist'. After all, one can claim to be a 'benign despot' or a 'benevolent dictator', and there are also circumstances in which authoritarian or dictatorial governance is deemed (rightly or wrongly) as acceptable and legitimate. For instance, many people argue that during periods of warfare or social turmoil there is a need to suspend **democracy** until **order** is restored. Others argue that authoritarian and non-democratic governance can be culturally sanctioned, which is an argument that is used to legitimate the regimes of countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia and Singapore. However, while some people might be willing under some circumstances to accept being called despotic, dictatorial or authoritarian, almost nobody accepts the label of 'terrorist'. Even Osama bin Laden rejected strongly the charge that he or his followers were terrorists.

Despite the widespread acceptance that terrorism is a bad thing, debates about what terrorism actually is remain politically contentious and clouded by confusion. Indeed, perhaps the most commented-upon issue in terrorism research is that there is still no definition that attracts anything close to universal approval. What is more, this definitional ambiguity is not confined to academe but stretches into the domestic and international policy realms. For example, the definition of terrorism used by the US Central Intelligence Agency is slightly different from that used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which is different again from the definition used by the Pentagon and US Department of Defense. At the international level, almost five decades after beginning the debate the **United Nations (UN)** has still

not settled upon a definition that satisfies all members. Much of the disagreement centres on when violence by **non-state actors** should or should not be considered legitimate. For many smaller countries, especially those that have experienced **colonialism**, there are occasions when organised violence by non-state groups can be considered justifiable. It is often pointed out, for example, that Nelson Mandela was charged, convicted and imprisoned as a terrorist in the early 1960s by the apartheid government of South Africa. There are few today who are prepared to criticise Mandela for the small acts of targeted violence against apartheid era infrastructure he coordinated while leader of the banned African National Congress's military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* ('Spear of the Nation'). Rightly or wrongly, many members of the UN view the actions of Palestinian groups and other organisations – in the Indian province of Kashmir, Sri Lanka, the Caucasus region in Russia, the Basque region of Spain and many other places – in a similarly sympathetic light.

Any blanket definition that encapsulates all acts of politically motivated violence by non-state groups is therefore seen by many smaller states as an implicit rejection of their own struggles for independence and as diminishing the legitimacy of causes that they continue to see as just. For similar reasons, many states with large Muslim populations reject any possible UN definition of terrorism that has the potential to delegitimise the cause of genuine Palestinian independence.

The intricacies of this definitional merry-go-round need not concern us here. For the purposes of understanding the contemporary significance of global terrorism a useful working definition is as follows: 'terrorism is the actual or threatened use of violence against a civilian population undertaken in the pursuit of a political cause'. To be sure, such a definition raises more questions than it answers, but it is useful because it captures four of terrorism's most important and less controversial features.

1. Violence (or the threat of violence) has a purposive value for terrorists in that it is used to generate fear and uncertainty within a community, and to elevate this fear to such a level that it becomes so psychologically unbearable that it elicits a change in the political or social behaviour of that community, or it forces them to pressure their political leaders to change their behaviour or policies.

2. The fact that the violence is directed at achieving political goals is similarly important. Threats of violence for personal financial gain constitute criminal extortion or blackmail. Terrorism is in a class of its own; it is of course a criminal act, but at its core it is motivated by political rather than private financial objectives.

3. I have suggested confining our definition of terrorism to actual or threatened violence against civilian targets, for the simple reason that to include threats against military or police targets introduces the complicating issue of **insurgencies** and **guerrilla warfare**. There are insurgency groups in many parts of the world that not only engage in conventional military combat against soldiers and police but that also occasionally resort to acts of terrorism against civilian targets; however, once again the nexus between insurgency and terrorism is complex and introducing it here would unnecessarily confuse an already complicated issue.

4. The definition above also recognises the uncomfortable truth that terrorism is a tactic that is used not only by non-state actors but also by some governments against their own populations or against the populations of other states. However, as with the relationship between insurgencies and terrorism, the phenomenon of

state terrorism is complicated and, although it is an important and often overlooked part of the more complex terrorism equation, there is insuffient space to explore it in any detail here.

Some secondary warnings for the unaware

At first reading, the brief introductory points set out above are unlikely to appear controversial. Sadly, however, in the field of terrorism studies there is precious little that can sustain a consensus for anything but a brief moment. Therefore, for those about to embark on 'terrorism studies', it is worth keeping in mind that very little of what you encounter and study will ever be without its critics. As pointed out in the preceding section, even the concept of 'terrorism' itself is contested. Perhaps the most famous aphorism in the field, that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter', remains as true today as when it was first coined in the 1970s (see Box 29.1).

Terrorism is, therefore, a highly emotive issue. Just as political debates about terrorism are inevitably highly charged and sometimes highly divisive affairs, so too is terrorism scholarship often highly volatile. Indeed, even the premise of this very chapter – that to understand global terrorism we need to understand its root causes – would not be accepted by some scholars. For such critics the search for root causes of terrorism weakens the moral clarity that our society needs if it is to defeat terrorism (see Newman 2006). They worry that any discussion about *why* terrorists kill risks legitimising such actions at a time when what is needed is universal condemnation. For others, including this author, not only is this argument logically flawed – we can understand why a person might murder a business rival without accepting the act as morally legitimate, so why can we not apply the same principle to understanding global terrorism? – but it is also a potentially dangerous argument. Allowing our justifiable outrage at the murder of innocent human beings to divert us from the search for an understanding of what motivates terrorists to kill ignores the obvious point that to manage a threat effectively we first need to understand the forces that drive it (see Silke 2004). Having an understanding *of terrorism* is not the same as having an understanding *with terrorism*.

Second, conceiving of terrorism as a phenomenon with its roots deeply embedded in the society in which it takes place obliges us to develop an understanding of what we mean by 'society'. This is not the place to interrogate the various ways in which the concept of society has been and is currently debated in domestic and international politics (for example, is there such a thing as a 'society of states'?), but it is important to note that the concept is critical to understanding terrorism. In fact, one way of viewing terrorism is as a tactic used by individuals who see themselves as at **war** with other groups in society, or indeed at war with other societies altogether – the latter a theme common in terrorism carried out in the name of religion (Jones 2008). Typically, the terrorists have as their goal an alternative vision of society, or even the establishment of their own separate society.

Historically speaking, individuals who might have felt alienated, disempowered and inclined to lash out almost always targeted local symbols of power within the society in which they resided – politicians, police, national governments or neighbouring ethnic groups. However, because of globalisation (see Chapter 28) the idea of 'society' has expanded, with individuals taking on a much broader understanding of who are their

neighbours and which groups or governments might have an influence over their own lives. Social grievances have therefore taken on an increasingly global character: with anger born of events both at home and abroad, blame is attributed to both local and global forces; violence is aimed at both local and global targets. This is what is meant when we speak of the 'globalisation of terrorism'; it is the emergence of global issues as a source of local anger and the development of global networks as a way of lashing out violently against the perceived causes of this anger.

BOX 29.1: CASE STUDY

The first terrorists?

Around the first century of our common era, violent groups emerged in the area of Judea, a region now located in present-day Israel. Among them were the 'Sicarii' and the 'Zealots', made up of members from Jewish sects opposed to Roman rule in Judea (see M. Goodman 2007; Horsley 1979). Forced to pay taxes to their Roman conquerors, to display reverence for Roman gods, with limited or almost no influence over Roman policy, and confronting what was a far superior and highly professional Roman army, some of these individuals resorted to terrorism as the only conceivable way of liberating themselves from occupation. The tactics employed to drive the Romans from Judea included the stalking and execution of Roman soldiers, officials, Greek merchants and even fellow Jews considered to be collaborating with the Roman authorities. For the Sicarii and the Zealots, the utility of their violence lay in its potential to strike fear into the Roman community and those who supported them, and by so doing to either drive them from Judea or cause an implosion of the Roman administrative apparatus so that Judea was rendered ungovernable. However, it is important to note that Zealot and Sicarii terrorism was not a function of their Judaism, or of any innate hatred of Romans or Roman collaborators. Rather, their terrorism sprang from feelings of alienation and humiliation experienced as a subjugated people, which – when combined with the psychological effects generated by an overwhelming sense of political impotence in the face of exclusionary political structures and a substantially more powerful occupying army – triggered in some people an urge to strike out violently against their perceived oppressors. Understanding how the economic, political and social structures of Roman **imperialism** in Judea generated feelings of alienation is thus the first step to understanding Zealot and Sicarii terrorism.

It is therefore always worth keeping in mind that no one is born a terrorist and that those who eventually become terrorists do so only after passing through an evolutionary progression involving a complex mix of social, political and psychological forces. Putting the argument slightly differently, terrorism is a form of learned behaviour and rests upon a highly personal and symbiotic relationship between potential and actual terrorists and the society in which they exist. And because the societies in which we live are becoming increasingly global in character, it is not surprising that the grievances that inspire terrorists, and the methods that they use to try to rectify these grievances, are also becoming increasingly global.

Terrorism by individuals and groups associated with al-Qaeda is a useful example of this phenomenon. Forged by Osama bin Laden (a Saudi), Ayman al-Zawahiri (an Egyptian) and others in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s, al-Qaeda is often misrepresented as a vanguard movement intent on a global Islamic revolution. However, if we look behind the surface-level rhetoric of its leaders and adopt a more forensic

approach to the group's origins and evolution in the decade after the attacks in the US on 11 September 2001, we see an amorphous network of loosely connected individuals motivated by a disparate array of local grievances but united by a shared view that the sources of their local concerns are corrupt local governments sponsored by the US and its allies. In other words, the disaggregation of al-Qaeda into a network of loosely affiliated franchises – such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and so on – gives violent voice to the modern terrorist phenomenon of local grievances being perceived through an increasingly global lens (Riedel 2010). Individuals and groups angry with local circumstances and frustrated at their inability to change things through peaceful means are increasingly inclined to follow the global connections of their perceived oppressors and strike out against them anytime, anywhere. Under conditions of globalisation, anger and violence do not require passports.

The idea that terrorism is a political act motivated by anger brings us to the third and final issue which needs to be clarified. It is not possible to begin to understand the complexity of terrorism until we combine the idea of terrorism as an increasingly global phenomenon with the act of violence itself as something more than an act by 'evil' or 'mad' people. Nobody is born a terrorist; terrorists are made from a combination of social circumstances and individual psychologies. Terrorism does not spring forth spontaneously but, as shown in the biographies of individual terrorists and the histories of terrorist movements, it typically emerges only after a long gestation period whereby the anger and frustration eventually erupt into hatred and violence (see Atran 2010; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Moghaddam 2005; J. Davis 2004; Sageman 2004; Silke 2003). However, this does not mean there is a single magic formula that, once identified, will allow us to understand the precise mix and measures of ingredients that when combined will produce a terrorist. Terrorism is essentially an 'acting out' of accumulated feelings usually associated with alienation, anger, frustration and humiliation, but this does not mean that *every* person who experiences such feelings will become a terrorist or even sympathise with terrorist causes. For example (as has been pointed out by many authors), prolonged exposure to the deprivations of an authoritarian state might breed a deep sense of non-violent anomie in some people, while a shorter exposure can inculcate an energised embrace of violence in others. There is no single avenue along which all terrorists have travelled in their journey towards violence. Rather, to paraphrase Taylor and Horgan, there are only 'individual routes to terrorism, and furthermore those routes and activities as experienced by the individual *change* over time' (Horgan and Taylor 2006: 597; see also McCauley 2007).

Contemporary terrorism in context

A decade after the tragedy of September 11 and former US President Bush's declaration of the 'war on terror', the threat of terrorism seems more pervasive than ever. Not only have terrorist attacks been a sad feature in conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq, and in states where conventional political authority is undermined and being challenged by new grass roots movements in places such as Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. Local and international agents of these and other movements and ideologies have also used or attempted to use terrorism against civilian, commercial, military and political targets across a diverse terrain – including Australia, Britain, Canada,

Denmark, France, Germany, Jordan, India, Indonesia, Italy, Norway, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey and the US. At the same time, although they have not attracted as much attention, less spectacular terrorist strikes have imposed similarly serious economic, social and psychological costs on communities in sub-Saharan Africa and in Central and South America. The net effect of this pattern of violence has been a steady supply of media-friendly outrages that have kept terrorism at the forefront of the Western imagination and turned counter-terrorism into a new organising principle within domestic and international politics (see Box 29.2).

BOX 29.2: DISCUSSION POINTS

Some recent terrorist plots

21 December 1988:	UK – bombing of Lockerbie/Pan Am flight 103
26 February 1993:	US – attack on and partial destruction of World Trade Center
20 March 1995:	Japan – Sarin gas attacks, Tokyo underground
19 April 1995:	US – Oklahoma City bombing
7 August 1998:	East Africa – bombings of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam
11 September 2001:	US – attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon
12 October 2002:	Indonesia – Bali bombing
11 March 2005:	Spain – Madrid bombings
7 July 2005:	UK – London bombings
1 October 2005:	Indonesia – Bali bombing
11 July 2006:	India – Mumbai train bombings
14 August 2007:	Iraq – four coordinated suicide bombings kill over 500
18 October 2007:	Pakistan – suicide bombings near Karachi
25 April 2008:	Sri Lanka – bombing of commuter bus in Colombo
13 May 2008:	India – coordinated bombings in Jaipur
26–29 November 2008:	India – terrorist attacks in Mumbai
7 March 2009:	Northern Ireland – two unarmed British soldiers shot dead
17 July 2009:	Indonesia – coordinated bombings at two Western hotels
27 November 2009:	Russia – bomb on railway track derails train
25 December 2009:	US – Nigerian citizen attempts to blow up a flight from Europe with explosives hidden in underpants
29 March 2010:	Russia – two female suicide bombers attack Moscow subway
1 May 2010:	US – New York's Time Square evacuated after discovery of car bomb
11 July 2010:	Uganda – Somalian terrorist group bombs venues showing World Cup
30 September 2010:	Britain, France, Germany – discovery of coordinated bombing plot

| 29 December 2010: | Denmark – discovery of plot to launch attacks in Copenhagen |
| 24 January 2011: | Russia – suicide bombing at Moscow airport |

This has not always been the case. Although there have been periods in history when individual **sovereign states** have wrestled with the threat of terrorism – such as Tsarist Russia's battle with anarchist groups in the 1870s and 1880s and Britain's struggle in the 1970s and 1980s with violence by Irish terrorists – the emergence of a globally networked terrorist menace marks a new development in international affairs. Indeed, for some writers the emergence of transnational terrorists with an ability to strike almost anywhere at any time signals the end of an **international system** in which **states** enjoyed a virtual monopoly over the ability to wage war (Beck 2009; Bauman 2002; Kaldor 1999).

What are the forces that are leading a growing number of individuals to detach from the protective membrane of the state and try to rectify perceived injustices by taking matters into their own hands? Why are a steady stream of mainly young people abrogating national allegiances and defining themselves in transnational religious or cultural terms and in ways that sit in high tension with the dominant identities of the societies into which they were born? The answers to these conundrums provide vital clues to the deeper forces that are driving the spread of global terrorist networks and the ideologies that sustain them. Unfortunately, the complex multidimensional character of these issues means that easy answers are elusive. Explaining *how* this evolution in global politics has occurred requires the student of IR to sift through a complex amalgam of economic, political and technological forces. The task becomes even more difficult if we want to understand *why* a growing number of individuals appear willing to engage in or even support the use of terrorist violence. To address this part of the terrorism puzzle we also need to add insights from psychology and sociology so that we can understand how attitudes and behaviour are shaped by the increasingly global character of economic, political and social issues. In short, global terrorism is a highly complex phenomenon and there is no single academic **discipline** that holds the key to understanding its root causes.

However, there are some general attributes that have recurred with terrorist movements in different historical epochs and that allow us to make some general claims about the political and social character of terrorism. The most important of these characteristics is that terrorism rarely bursts forth spontaneously. It is almost always the result of a period of increasing alienation and anger among those who perpetrate the violence. Another important but often ignored historical fact is that even though terrorism has always been a feature of organised human societies, the causes of the anger that inspire it – and the types of violence used – differ over time. In this sense, as we shall see, in recent years terrorism has become both more deadly, as terrorists adopt new destructive technologies, and more global, operating across a wider international terrain as a result of globalisation (see Chapter 28). Putting this point in a slightly more controversial way, the root causes of terrorism lie not in religion or culture but in the economic, political and social structures of the society in which it emerges. This is as true for early terrorist groups such as the first century Sicarii and Zealots (see Box 29.1) as it

is for contemporary terrorist movements as diverse as violent Christian **fundamentalist** groups in the US and al-Qaeda and its various international components.

The globalisation of terrorism

As mentioned above, one of the defining features of terrorism today is the enhanced role played by global contact in shaping the different routes that individuals take towards violence. This aspect of the contemporary terrorism phenomenon should alert us to the extent to which the emergence of terrorist groups that are international in their aims and contacts – such as the different components of the al-Qaeda franchise – is part of the same general trend that is also leading to other problematic developments in terms of **peace** and **security**. Under conditions of globalisation there has emerged a wide array of issues that elude resolution by states acting alone. Among the most obvious is the rapid deterioration in the sustainability of the Earth's ecosystems (see Chapters 34 and 35), but into the mix we also need to include the re-emergence of militarily significant private armies, crime syndicates with sufficient financial and fire-power to intimidate, and perhaps even control, the governments of small nations.

Looking at this development from a different angle, globalisation is eroding the protective **power** of national borders and diminishing the utility of conventional military doctrines and equipment as the fulcrum upon which national security rests. There is very little that the best-equipped and most technologically advanced army in the world can do to protect the welfare of a **nation** suffering the effects of drought or floods, exacerbated by climate change that in turn is caused by the actions of the entire global community (although clearly some members cause more damage than others). Similarly, there is little that conventional military forces can do to combat the threat to national security posed by individuals whose anger is invisible but intense, who might live anonymously among us, travel with legitimate visas and passports, carry legally mandated identity cards, and who have learnt from the internet how to make a bomb from products found in almost every modern kitchen or laundry. In this way, globalisation is feeding a curious development which might be called the 'privatisation of violence'; a situation whereby states are losing their erstwhile monopoly over the means to wage war. Although it is true that states are likely to remain the sole proprietors of cutting-edge military technology costing billions of dollars, globalisation is feeding the development of new forms of warfare which are allowing enemies of the state, such as terrorists, to 'level the playing field' through the use of simple, cheap but highly deadly technologies and tactics. Reflecting on the implications of the attacks of September 11 for international politics, the distinguished scholar Robert Keohane (2002: 89–90) observed that:

[t]he terrorist attacks on New York and Washington force us to rethink our theories of world politics. Globalism should not be equated with economic integration. The agents of globalization are not simply the high-tech creators of the Internet, or multinational corporations, but also small bands of fanatics travelling on jet aircraft and inspired by fundamentalist religion. The globalization of informal violence has rendered problematic our conventional assumptions about security threats. It should also lead us to question the classical **realist** distinction between important parts of the world, in which **great powers** have interests, and insignificant places, which were thought to present no security threats although they may raise moral dilemmas. Indeed, we need to reconceptualise the significance for homeland security of geographical space, which can be as much a carrier of malign informal violence as a barrier to it.

Implicit in Keohane's observation is another aspect of the nexus between globalisation and terrorism, albeit one that is often absent from conventional studies: the role played by the cultural, economic and political consequences of globalisation in generating and feeding a new generation of terrorist motivations. As mentioned above, terrorism has always been a feature of human societies, but it is only recently that it has broken free of local issues and environments and assumed a genuinely global presence – most particularly in the form of al-Qaeda, the organisations with which it is most frequently affiliated, and the individuals who, although not formal members of any sub-group, are nevertheless motivated by its ideology. Within this context, although the late Osama bin Laden and other senior al-Qaeda figures have been most energised by the plight of Muslims in the Middle East, from where they themselves came, they see Western economic and political interference in these countries, along with the simultaneous spread of Western cultural values, as the main reason for the plight of the people they claim to represent. Just as the Zealots and Sicarii attributed the secondary status of Jews in ancient Judea not so much to the corruption of Jewish leaders but to the cooperation of those leaders with the oppressive occupying Roman forces, so too does al-Qaeda see the oppression of Muslims as resulting from a coalition of corrupt local leaders with more powerful foreign forces.

Under conditions of globalisation, however, the dominance of external powers does not have to take the form of direct military occupation or overt political interference. The occupation and humiliation of the weak by the strong can now be secured through the more subtle manipulation of cultural, economic and political institutions by the powerful. It is partly for this reason that the al-Qaeda leadership believes that by provoking the West, particularly the US and its allies, into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq they have revealed to the rest of the world how Western economic and cultural power is ultimately underpinned by a willingness to use force to defend their de facto control over the cultural, economic and political destinies of non-Western peoples. Consistent with terrorists throughout history, al-Qaeda sees its own violence as a legitimate way of fighting back against an oppressor of overwhelming economic, cultural and military superiority. The failure to fight back in this way, for the terrorists, constitutes a form of submission that will only prolong the powerlessness and humiliation of the weak. As the Harvard scholar of terrorism, Louise Richardson, noted of bin Laden:

Bin Laden's statements and interviews constantly reassert his desire to redress Muslim humiliation. Declaring to his followers 'Death is better than life in humiliation,' bin Laden calls on his Muslim brothers 'to expel the enemy, humiliated and defeated, out of the sanctuaries of Islam' (L. Richardson 2006: 126).

However, under conditions of globalisation the boundaries of the 'sanctuaries of Islam' are much less clear than were the 'sanctuaries' of Judaism that motivated the Zealots and Sicarii two millennia earlier. People's senses of **identity** and belonging increasingly transcend the state, cutting across the local and encompassing the regional and the global.

This latter point has been given especially dramatic voice by the actions of individuals who despite having no obvious cultural, religious, historical or familial connections with a given conflict have nevertheless developed a psychological affiliation with its protogonists and sought to engage in terrorist actions on their behalf. In the decade

Figure 29.1   Members of the National Guard at the World Trade Center, New York, 19 September 2001

Source: Andrea Booher/FEMA News Photo.

since the events of September 11 this phenomenon of 'self-radicalisation' has become increasingly prominent, with the conflict in Iraq, the ongoing war in Afghanistan and simmering violence in places such as Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, the Russian Caucasus region and elsewhere, providing young people in places far from the sites of actual battles with an entrée to radicalism and terrorist violence and an outlet for pre-existing existential frustration and anger.

The complex mix of individual and psychological processes that drive this phenomenon of self-radicalisation need not concern us here: suffice it to say that under conditions of globalisation alienated individuals can use a variety of new communication technologies to tap into issues that in earlier times would have been remote and invisible. So, an alienated young man born and raised in Daphne, Alabama can undergo a metamorphosis that leads him to enlist in the al-Qaeda–linked group al Shabab in far away Somalia. This is the life trajectory of Omar Hammami, who – despite the Middle Eastern tone of his name – was born in the US South, raised a Baptist and elected president of his school sophomore class before drifting towards terrorist violence (see Elliott 2010). Similarly, Adam Pearlman was born in Oregon and raised a Protestant in California, where he played Little League Baseball before immersing himself in the heavy metal scene and, just a few years later, making his way to Afghanistan and Pakistan where he adopted the name Azzam al-Amriki and became al-Qaeda's main English-language spokesman. He now lives life on the run with a multi-million dollar bounty placed on him by the US Government (see Khatchadourian 2007). These are just two cases, out of thousands, involving young people with no obvious cultural or historical links to a terrorist cause becoming radicalised through information and contacts channelled through new information and communication technologies. Under conditions of globalisation individuals experience a greater array of cultural raw materials with which to craft their own identities, and terrorist organisations are proving increasingly adept at influencing identity politics to generate fresh waves of new recruits from distant lands.

Some final misperceptions

This final section casts a critical eye over three propositions that are often held to explain core aspects of contemporary terrorist behaviour, but which on closer examination are highly suspect.

The first is the often-heard view that religion causes terrorism. Regardless of the religion involved, there are a sufficient number of life histories of terrorists claiming to be acting in the names of various Christian, Hindu or Muslim causes to question the view that religion in general, or some religions in particular, are prone to fomenting violence. Very few of those terrorists who claim to be acting in the name of religion have been pious for the majority of their lives. Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of terrorists are radicalised by their anger or frustration and embrace violence *prior* to becoming religious. Indeed, biographical surveys of members of violent Islamist, Christian and Hindu groups suggest that fundamentalist interpretations of religion appeal mostly to individuals who are already radicalised, because they provide a pseudo-ethical justification for a *preexisting* urge to act out violently against those who are perceived to have acted unjustly against the individual concerned and his

or her 'in-group' (Jones 2008; McCauley 2007; Moghaddam 2006). In other words, they do not become angry or violent *because* they are fundamentalists, they become fundamentalists because they are already angry and open to extremist ideologies and violent impulses (Wiktorowicz 2005).

Second, it is often argued that terrorists suffer from some form of psychopathological condition that impairs their capacity to make informed rational judgments. Indeed, of all the myths that cloud our understanding of terrorism it is this view that has proven one of the most difficult to debunk. Sustained by media sensationalism and the melodramatic instincts of political leaders, the mistaken assumption that terrorists are 'mad' has led to a series of poorly calibrated counter-terrorism policies that habitually underestimate the operational and strategic intelligence of the vast majority of terrorists. While it is impossible to speak of a single terrorist personality type, there exists a growing body of evidence that terrorists possess high levels of political and social literacy and are directed by a clear capacity for rational decision-making. In short, most terrorists are 'dangerously normal' (Horgan 2005).

The final misconception is that terrorists are motivated to violence because they 'hate us for our way of life', which in the modern Western context translates into the argument that they are moved to violence because they despise the secular **liberalism** and democracy that characterises Western societies. Those who make this claim tend to base their argument on the rhetoric of terrorist leaders such as the late Osama bin Laden and in the erroneous assumption that his utterances were taken as gospel by all terrorists who might act in his name. But close examination of the individual motives of terrorists evinces very little proof that this is the case. More influential in shaping the attitudes of individual terrorists than an innate rejection of dominant cultural and political structures of the society in which they live is a sense that these structures have failed them and impede their efforts to empower themselves and improve their own lives. In this sense, the ideologies that sustain terrorists grow out of perceived failures in the existing social order and are not independent of it. Terrorist ideologies do not grow in a vacuum; they are built out of the life experiences of those who live in a system but who have also experienced its failures. In other words, rather than saying the terrorists hate our democracy because they hate the idea of freedom, it is more accurate to say they hate our democracy for a perception that it fails to accommodate them and their own aspirations for freedom (see Wieviorka 2004).

Conclusion

Terrorism is a dynamic phenomenon, which means that it is inherently fluid and changes along with wider shifts in the character of human society. And just as human societies are becoming increasingly interconnected and **interdependent** in terms of their ecological, economic, political and social needs, so too is the ancient practice of terrorism changing and evolving a global logic. Just as the terrorism of the Zealots and the Sicarii cannot be understood without interrogating the economic, political and social structures of local customs, social habits and political character of the Roman Empire in Judea, contemporary terrorism cannot be understood without being contextualised within the increasingly global nature of modern social structures. In terms of the issues

that can motivate people to anger and violence, in terms of the new technologies that allow for the emergence of formal and informal networks of individuals who share this anger, and in terms of the new destructive technologies that allow these communities to act out their anger, the forces of globalisation have unleashed a powerful force that is likely to challenge states for the foreseeable future.

It is argued by some (e.g. Bauman 2002; Beck 2009) that we are on the cusp of a new era in which the forces of globalisation have unleashed new dynamics that are reshaping how people define themselves and their interests, and how they respond to political and social disappointments and frustrations. Global terrorism signifies one of the most extreme manifestations of this wider social process – which also encompasses a wide variety of other social movements, very few of which resort to violent means but all of which constitute a challenge to traditional forms of political behaviour. The 'war on terror' launched by the administration of former US President George W. Bush in the wake of the September 11 attacks and supported by many of its allies including Britain, other members of NATO and Australia represents an attempt to deal with this problem mainly through conventional military means (see Box 29.3). However, more than a decade after the declaration of this 'war' there is little evidence that the risk of global terrorism has been reduced, and by the turn of the decade almost all governments around the world had abandoned the term. Even intelligence services in the West now agree that since 2001 the threat of terrorism has shifted and morphed rather than decreased.

BOX 29.3: DISCUSSION POINTS

US President Barack Obama on the terrorist threat

'Now, this generation faces a great test in the specter of terrorism. Unlike the Civil War or World War II, we cannot count on a surrender ceremony to bring this journey to an end. Right now, in distant training camps and in crowded cities, there are people plotting to take American lives. That will be the case a year from now, five years from now, and – in all probability – ten years from now.

'Neither I nor anyone else standing here today can say that there will not be another terrorist attack that takes American lives. But I can say with certainty that my Administration – along with our extraordinary troops and the patriotic men and women who defend our national security – will do everything in our power to keep the American people safe.

'And I do know with certainty that we can defeat al Qaeda. Because the terrorists can only succeed if they swell their ranks and alienate America from our allies, and they will never be able to do that if we stay true to who we are; if we forge tough and durable approaches to fighting terrorism that are anchored in our timeless ideals.'

(President Barak Obama, 'Protecting our Security and our Values', speech delivered at National Archives Museum, Washington DC, 19 May 2009).

What is needed is a new global approach to combating the threats posed by global terrorism which involves bold decisions that have thus far eluded governments. This will not happen if emerging generations of scholars and policy-makers retreat into analytical comfort zones which refuse to acknowledge how globalisation has changed

Table 29.1 Recent trends in terrorist violence

	Terrorist incidents	Injuries	Fatalities
2001	1732	6403	4571
2002	2649	7349	2763
2003	1899	6200	2349
2004	2647	1704	1129
2005	4995	15 062	8194
2006	6660	20 991	12 071
2007	4526	20 963	10 232
2008	2846	14 434	5909
2009	560	1957	1197

Source: RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorist Incidents (http://smapp.rand.org/
    nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents.html)

the nature of terrorism and which reproduce simplistic explanations that reduce terrorism to unicausal factors such as religion, culture or the alleged 'madness' of the perpetrator.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you define terrorism?
2. Has globalisation facilitated the growth of terrorism?
3. What are the root causes of terrorism?
4. What are the motives behind al-Qaeda's attacks on Western targets?
5. Do you agree with the saying that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'?
6. Has the character of terrorism changed in recent years? If so, how? And what has caused this change?

FURTHER READING

Burke, Jason 2003, *Al-Qaeda: casting a shadow of terror*, London: I. B. Tauris. Measured and insightful analysis of the origins and motives of al-Qaeda.

Guelke, Adrian 2006, *Terrorism and global disorder*, London: I. B. Tauris. Useful overview of how global forces unleashed since the end of the Cold War have changed the nature of terrorism and turned it into a new organising principle in international politics.

Horgan, John 2005, *The psychology of terrorism*, London: Routledge. Accessible yet thorough examination of the complex mix of individual, group and social forces that shape the evolution of terrorist personalities.

Jackson, Richard et al. 2011, *Terrorism: a critical introduction* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. A useful introduction to the field of critical terrorism study whereby a new generation of terrorism scholars interrogate and find wanting many of our accepted assumptions about twenty-first century terrorism.