

## Introduction

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## **Introduction**

Terrorism is timeless. That is to say, there has scarcely been a period in recorded history that has not experienced some form of terrorism, even if the term itself did not enter political discourse until the late eighteenth century. Absolutist rulers enforced their writ and religious authorities tried to suppress heresy by resorting to ‘institutionalized’ terror, long before the French Revolution gave the practice its name. In the twentieth century extremist ideologies harnessed to modern technology gave states the capacity to create the Stalinist Great Terror and the Holocaust.

But terrorism has not been the sole prerogative of clerics, monarchs, and dictators. It has long been practiced by many sub-state groups. The Jewish *Sicarii* – also known as the Zealots – harassed the Roman occupiers of first century Judea. The remnants of the movement committed mass suicide rather than surrender.<sup>1</sup> The Assassins were the first *jihadis* and the first international terrorists, who liquidated their political rivals in twelfth to thirteenth century Persia and Syria. Inspired by the mystic recluse Hassan-i-Sabah, the movement survived two centuries before being wiped out by the even greater terror of the Mongols.<sup>2</sup> The ‘Batenberger’ terrorists of the Anabaptist movement spread fear throughout the southern German provinces during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century it was the Anarchists who gave sub-state terrorism its defining concept: ‘propaganda of the deed.’<sup>4</sup> While institutionalised terror dwarfs by many orders of magnitude the lethal capacities of such groups, it is the latter which has captured the headlines and pre-occupied governments since the second half of the twentieth century. Given its twin capacities to horrify and frustrate preventive measures, this is not surprising. The search for solutions, whether in identifying and remedying ‘root causes’ or in applying effective counter-measures of a legal or security character, has also largely driven the scholarly agenda in a ‘normative’ direction, led and dominated by the social sciences and focused on current threats. This too is understandable, especially since the 9/11 attacks. But what is rarely asked is whether sub-state terrorism really makes a difference. Has it acted as a ‘driver’ of history? If so, under what circumstances? And if not, why not? The purpose of this collection of essays is to address those questions. It examines a limited sample of notable incidents and campaigns since 1914, assessing their results and impacts, both intended and unintended. What these cases suggest is that *terrorism can be a driver of major historical change, but only if it develops within a permissive strategic context and under the right operational conditions*. Absent an environment conducive to terrorism it fails to exert a significant influence either on its host society or the wider world.

This volume has its origins in a conference on ‘Terrorism in History,’ organized by the Centre for Conflict Studies (the predecessor of the new Gregg

Centre for the Study of War and Society) at the University of New Brunswick in October 2005. Nine papers from the conference – all revised and edited since their original presentation – appear in this anthology. Two more essays and the Introduction and Conclusion have been added to fill out the collection.

On the face of it, the selection of cases provided here might appear eclectic; so many campaigns that could have been included are not. But this volume is not intended to be a comprehensive history of terrorism over the last century. Rather, it provides a sample of historical cases that is, in fact, representative of the broad spectrum of twentieth-century terrorism. This collection includes national liberation movements that fought for independence, inter-war fascists and neo-fascists, and leftist revolutionaries whose actions dominated terrorism discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, we have included the *jihadists*, motivated by a faith-shaped ideology, whose actions re-defined the terrorism debates at the dawn of the twenty-first century and continue to do so. And whether one adopts the analytical schema of either David Rapoport or Mark Sedgwick, both of whom have identified ‘waves’ or ‘outbreaks’ of terrorism and classified them by their sources of influence,<sup>5</sup> all of those sources are clearly represented here. But, given the historical perspective of the collection and for the convenience of readers, the essays have been arranged in a rough chronological order, covering the span of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first. This, we hope, will situate the cases both within the broad sweep of that century’s history and in relation to each other.

The purpose of the volume, of course, is to attempt to assess the historical significance of these terrorist attacks and campaigns. Each author offers a perspective on their case, using the concept of ‘strategic impact’ as the defining analytical classification. By ‘strategic impact’ we mean the degree to which the terrorist acts or campaigns exerted a ‘significant’ influence on events beyond their immediate targets and time period. Granted that the term ‘significant’ is itself vague and perhaps subjective, but it does imply something more *lasting* than causing the deaths of a few people and collateral damage to property. We take it to mean the ability of the actions or events to effect dramatic and lasting political change within a country or in a regional or inter-national arena. Using these criteria, what becomes apparent from examining the whole package is that each of the cases discussed in this volume can be assigned to one of three categories of ‘strategic impact:’ global, regional, or minimal.

Three campaigns clearly fit under the global category, because their effects resonated on a scale that affected and shaped the strategic policies, actions, and futures of major powers. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand helped to plunge the world into the Great War. The Nazis seized power by politics and subversion, *after* their terrorism had helped to weaken the Weimar state. Like the archduke’s assassination, their actions ultimately led to the outbreak of a global war. Finally, while *al-Qaeda*’s campaign and the American and allied response to it are by no means over, the 9/11 attack already has helped to fundamentally

re-orient the foreign and military policies of the world's only superpower and has drawn it into two wars that have toppled two regimes directly and another indirectly. The ramifications of this conflict continue to play out on the world stage in unpredictable and potentially dangerous ways.

The second category includes four national liberation terrorist campaigns that changed regional politics in a significant way. The Irish Republican Army's campaign (1919-21) ended in the partition of Ireland and the creation of an independent Irish state. This changed the face of Britain, the major imperial power of the time, and set the stage for a 'second wave' terrorist campaign decades later. Likewise, the Jewish terrorist campaign in Palestine led to the founding of a new nation, but also launched the protracted regional conflict between the Israelis, the Arab states, and the Palestinians displaced by the Israeli victory in 1948. The Algerian terrorist success also produced an independent state, but had indirect and unanticipated impacts on European politics which resonate to this day. Like *al-Qaeda's* campaign, terrorism associated with the *al-Aqsa Intifada* represents 'unfinished business,' since the national liberation struggle has not yet yielded a fully independent Palestinian state. But its after-effects are shaping a new reality fraught with uncertain consequences for the Middle East. Arguably, as they have drawn in major powers, the Jewish insurgency and its Palestinian counterpart straddle the boundary between regional and global impacts, but their significance has been primarily regional.

Finally, not every terrorist campaign succeeds. This volume includes three that exerted a minimal influence on global and even regional affairs. The French Rightists failed to take power in the 1930s, although their violence and threats contributed to the collapse of the government. The Armenian terrorist groups earned a deadly and infamous, but short-lived, international reputation in the 1970s and 1980s. But for reviving the memory of what many call the twentieth century's first genocide, Armenian terrorism's strategic impact was practically nil. The Greek revolutionary organization, 17 November, was never an authentic revolutionary group, but a clandestine band of disillusioned armed militants who apparently did not care that their campaign was anachronistic, incoherent, and doomed to failure from its very inception.

Noted terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman opens the collection with a retrospective on the past century and more, from which he extracts three strategic impacts of terrorism: first, its monumental power to change the course of history. His example, elaborated on in greater depth by Keith Wilson in his essay, is the assassination of the Austrian Archduke. The second, he says, is its use as a tactical weapon that achieves profound changes in government policy and organization to counter it. He uses the Fenian dynamiters of the 1880s to illustrate this function. Finally, terrorism plays a role as a strategic force, re-calibrating international politics and affairs, and catapulting to prominence (and to an extent, to power) hitherto unknown or inconsequential movements. Here he draws attention to twentieth century terrorism's most enduring legacy: the "the cult of the

insurgent,” which began with the Palestinians and lives on among *al-Qaeda* and the Iraqi insurgents.

It is instructive that Hoffman devotes no time to the “black hole” of terrorism studies: defining terrorism. And neither do we. The absence of a single, all-encompassing definition has not prevented scholarly inquiry over the last 40 years nor rendered the results meaningless. The scholars in this volume have not mistaken their subject for something else. Those who are obsessed with the quest for the perfect definition of terrorism will have to search elsewhere.

George Santayana’s warning that “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”<sup>6</sup> is relevant here. Our conclusion suggests that the study of terrorism over the last century may allow policy makers to avoid creating the circumstances that would lead to a repetition of events on the scale of 9/11. But, studying it may teach some other useful things. First, it suggests that while terrorist attacks and campaigns attract a great deal of media attention and political hype, only rarely is terrorism alone a “driver” of major historical change. Second, “it takes two to tango” – terrorism works only when its targets behave in ways that benefit the terrorists.<sup>7</sup> There are strategies that do not inherently play into the hands of terrorists. Not all terrorist campaigns are equally dangerous, and they do not all warrant the same type or degree of counter-measures. Broad principles need fine tuning to suit each case. Third, the study of terrorism and devising effective responses requires a substantial knowledge base of culture, politics, and history to understand campaigns in their proper context.

Fourth, the historical study of terrorism reminds us that what is often called “the new terrorism” has antecedents, and these in turn tell us a great deal about the circumstances in which it succeeds, fails, and yields unexpected outcomes. In spite of the chaos and suffering it brings, terrorism doesn’t always succeed. In fact, its record is very mixed, and it often produces results unanticipated by both its perpetrators and its opponents. This means we have to be very careful about drawing firm conclusions or making predictions based on past campaigns or emergent trends. It is important to look critically at the terrorist events and campaigns, so as to draw the appropriate ‘lessons’ (if any), and not to assume that each case automatically sets a precedent.

In the conclusion we draw attention to some of the epistemological problems of studying terrorism and pitfalls that arise there from. In particular, it is important – both for historians and for policy makers – not to make erroneous assumptions about the future based on the past. Finally, and in counterpoint to Santayana, Bruce Hoffman’s discourse on “the cult of the insurgent” serves as a warning: *that some terrorists are determined to repeat history*. Thus, it is important to understand history as seen through their eyes and not to do those things that experience suggests would help them achieve that goal. For, as Mark Twain is said to have observed, even if history doesn’t repeat itself, “sometimes it rhymes.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Endnotes**

1. Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, eds., *The History of Terrorism From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 55-58.
2. *Ibid*, pp. 59-75.
3. Gary K. Waite, "Apocalyptic Terrorists or a Figment of Governmental Paranoia? Reevaluating Religious Terrorism in the Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire, 1535-1570," in Michael Driedger, Anselm Schubert, and Astrid Von Schlachta, eds., *Margins of Anabaptism, in the series Schriften des vereins fur Reformationsgeschichte* (Gutersloh, forthcoming 2009).
4. Olivier Hubac-Occipinti, "Anarchist Terrorists of the Nineteenth Century," in Chaliand and Blin, pp. 117-18, 120, 124-25, and 130.
5. David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), pp. 46-73; Mark Sedgwick, "Inspiration and the Origins of Global Waves of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30, Issue 2 (February 2007), pp. 97-112.
6. From George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*, vol. 1 (1905), p. 284, quoted in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu), accessed 18 February 2008.
7. Nicholas O. Berry, "Theories on the Efficacy of Terrorism," *Conflict Quarterly*, 7, no. 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 7-20.
8. Quote attributed to Mark Twain by Tom Callahan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, in "George C. Marshall and the Marshall Plan: A Model of Transformational Diplomacy," remarks at the George C. Marshall Center, Virginia, 2 June 2005, at [www.state.gov/tr/pa/dc/rks/47848.htm](http://www.state.gov/tr/pa/dc/rks/47848.htm), accessed 19 February 2008.