TERRORISM AS A PRODUCT OF CHOICES AND PERCEPTIONS
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Throughout the past several decades, and particularly since the attacks of September 11, 2001, much has been written and said about the root causes of terrorism. In fact, an entire field of study has developed which seeks to help us understand why this complex phenomenon emerges in some contexts (and not others), and what the major contributing factors to terrorism appear to be. Some of my own publications have contributed to the area of inquiry, although my thoughts on these matters are continually evolving and (hopefully) becoming more refined.[1] For example, I have recently learned from others the wisdom of using the term "risk factors" instead of "root causes" when trying to describe the broad spectrum of factors that can produce the phenomenon of terrorism. This essay reflects my most recent thinking on these risk factors, using two frames of analysis for considering the motivations that animate terrorists.

The first analytical frame draws from extensive research on individual and organizational characteristics, environmental conditions that produce grievances among members of a population, and environmental conditions that provide opportunities for individuals and organizations to sustain violent activity. This "static frame" of analysis indicates the need to address enabling contexts—including grievances that help an ideology of violence find resonance among members of a particular community, and the environmental conditions that facilitate opportunities to conduct violence (including weapons trafficking, porous borders, etc.)—while continuing to target a terrorist

organization's members and capabilities through a globally coordinated human intelligence effort.

The second frame draws from recent scholarship which describes an individual's engagement in (or disengagement from) terrorist activity as a process—using analogies like pathway, staircase, elevator, and ziggurat to explain the trajectory of a person's involvement in terrorism. This area of inquiry examines complex interactions between individuals, organizations and environments, and perceptions and convictions generated by these interactions as well as by other influencers (peers, family, educational and religious leaders, etc.). This "dynamic interactions" frame suggests that understanding the processes of action and reaction—structurally framed by relationships (political, socioeconomic, ethnic, etc.)—between individuals and organizations within a particular environment is a necessary first step toward identifying situational, contextually relevant counterterrorism strategies.

After briefly introducing the two frames of analysis, the essay suggests that combining the two frames underscores the need to understand the mechanisms and tools (including ideologies, myths, symbols, social networks and the Internet) that frame the relationships between the individual, organization and environment. A handful of propositions are offered to describe these relationships, highlighting the importance of strategic communication, public diplomacy and counterideology as critical components of a robust counterterrorism strategy. The essay then concludes by offering some implications for consideration by a new presidential administration, with particular focus on how the U.S. might improve our effectiveness at influencing street level perceptions

and interpretations of policies and conditions which terrorist groups have used to justify their violent actions.

Before beginning, some conceptual and definitional caveats are needed. First, For the purposes of this discussion, the terms "terrorism" and "terrorist activity" are used somewhat interchangeably to indicate a rather broad category of actions that range from kinetic (bombings, kidnappings, hijackings and other kinds of violence that kills or destroys property) to funding, recruitment, safe haven and other types of activity upon which violent groups depend. The rationale for this is that the same interactions between individual, organizational and environmental dimensions can motivate a variety of important terrorist-related activity beyond direct involvement in attacks. Further, for the sake of simplicity, the assumption is made here that individuals engaged in terrorist activity do so knowingly, even though we know of cases where an individual was an unwitting participant in activities directed by someone else.

Essays like this always run a risk of oversimplifying what is in essence a very complex phenomenon. For example, the environmental conditions or policies that inform one individual's decision to conduct a terrorist act may include state sponsorship (e.g., Libyan agents bombing a club in Germany or Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland). Meanwhile, in another part of the world a terrorism act may be the result of a "lone wolf" (like Timothy McVeigh or Eric Rudolph) with no recognizable organizational affiliation. But overall, this essay argues that we should understand terrorism as a product of characteristics and conditions combined with interactions between individual choices, organizational choices, and the environmental dimensions that influence those choices. Framing our analysis in this way can help illuminate patterns

of interaction that are consistent across several contexts in which the risk for terrorism is of concern, and can yield insights for what can be described as "influence warfare"— efforts by states to influence the choices individuals make toward (or against) engaging in any kind of terrorist activity.[2]

Two Frames of Analysis

Examinations of the so-called "root causes" or "risk factors" of terrorism have pointed to a variety of individual and organizational characteristics, and to the impact of political conditions (like oppressive or corrupt governments) and socioeconomic conditions like poverty.[3] Gifted scholars like Martha Crenshaw, Jeffrey Ian Ross, and Assaf Moghadam[4] have offered typologies and models that help clarify and categorize these factors, highlighting similar precipitant conditions, triggers, and opportunities for actions in both local and global dimensions. Efforts to summarize and synthesize these typologies and other studies can yield a variety of visual representations of how various risk factors and levels of analysis intersect and overlap with each other, highlighting the analytical complexity inherent in the study of terrorism. Figure 1 exemplifies such an effort by attempting to capture at least the primary categories of risk factors which have been examined by terrorism scholars over the past several decades.

To begin with, there has been ample research on individual characteristics—including psychological influences, kinship, belief system, grievances (like revenge, perceptions of injustice)—that contribute to a person's motivations for engaging in terrorist activity. There have also been numerous studies on the leadership, membership, history, and ideology of terrorist organizations. But perhaps the broadest category of

research on "root causes" or "risk factors" of terrorism is examines the structural risks for terrorist activity (e.g., socioeconomic, political and other conditions which give legitimacy to an individual's grievances) as well as the triggering events and facilitators that have played a prominent role in historical cases of terrorism. While an exhaustive account of the research in each of these categories far exceeds the scope of this paper, some highlights from the individual, organizational and environmental levels of analysis will be provided later in the discussion.

Figure 1. The Static Frame: Observations of Characteristics and Conditions that Contribute to the Risk of Terrorist Activity (♦)
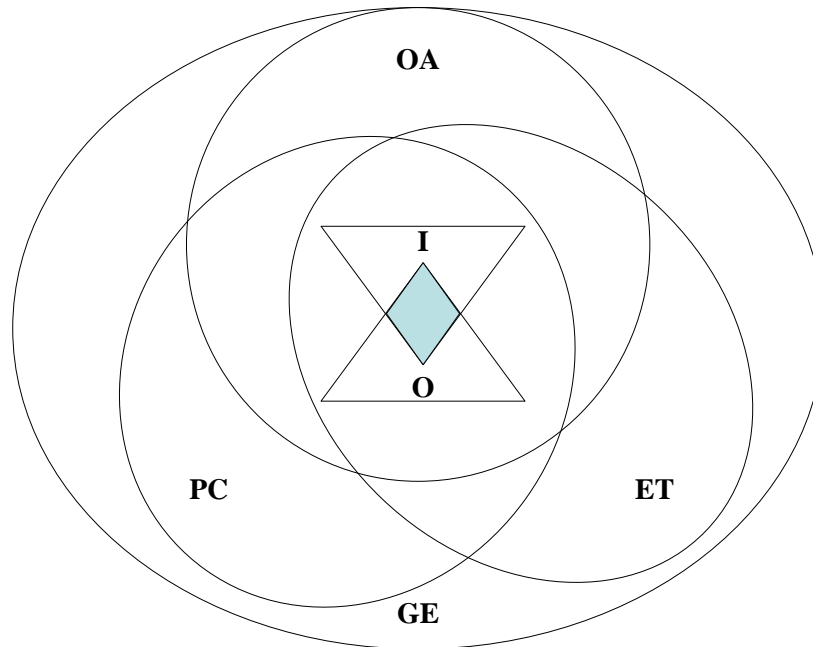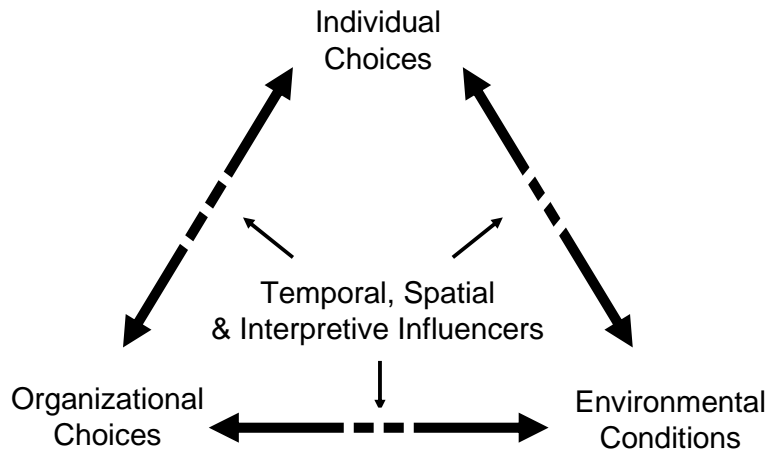

	CODES	*Includes items such as:*
I	Individual characteristics	Personal motivations for action, including psychological influences, kinship, belief system, grievances (like revenge, perceptions of injustice), etc.
O	Organizational characteristics	Leadership, membership, history, an ideology that articulates seemingly legitimate grievances, along with strategies to mitigate them, etc.
PC	Precipitant Conditions	Structural reasons why an ideology resonates; socioeconomic, political and other conditions which generate (or give legitimacy to) grievances
ET	Environmental Triggers	Specific actions, policies, and events that enhance the perceived need for action (very dynamic and time-relevant) within a particular

		environment
OA	Opportunities to Act	Facilitators like access to weapons; freedom of movement; funding; safe haven/state sponsorship; weak governments; porous borders, etc.
GE	Global Environment	Interdependent economies, inter-state conflicts, diaspora, transnational criminal networks, Internet, etc. that influence local conditions and opportunities

While these kinds of studies have illuminated a variety factors that contribute in some way to a greater risk of terrorism, one of the primary concerns is that they are often snapshots in time, unable to adequately account for elements of time, perceptions and the nature of dynamic interactions between individuals, organizations and their environment. More importantly, this research may lead to overly simplistic explanations of how this or that "causes" terrorism, while minimizing the dimension of individual agency. Indeed, it can be truly said that the primary "cause" of terrorism is an individual's choice to conduct terrorist activity. Because of this, when studying the phenomenon of terrorism it becomes necessary to include some analysis of the interpretations and influences upon which individuals make choices. Thus, a second frame of analysis, illustrated in Figure 2, can be combined with the previous frame to help account for the variables of time, perceptions and interpretive influencers.

Figure 2. The Dynamic Interactions Frame:
Incorporating Time, Perceptions and Interpretive Influencers

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                          Individual
                           Choices


          Temporal, Spatial
        & Interpretive Influencers


      Organizational                              Environmental
         Choices                                    Conditions

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    │ Terrorism as product of choices informed by dynamic interactions │
    │ between individuals, organizations and environmental conditions,  │
    │ influenced by time and space considerations and by whomever       │
    │ and whatever help us interpret the world around us.               │
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Using these two frames together, one can explore the phenomenon of terrorism through a sort of bi-focal lens, one focused on characteristics and conditions, the other focused on perceptions and dynamic interactions. This kind of analysis helps us understand the mechanisms and tools (including ideologies, myths, symbols, social networks and the Internet) that frame the relationships between the individual, organization and environment. These relationships can be illustrated by the following propositions, which emphasize the importance of perceptions and influences behind an individual's choice to engage in (or disengage from) terrorist activity.

7 Propositions from a Dual-Frame Analysis of Terrorism

1. **Individual choice (even if reluctant or coerced) is the primary "cause" of terrorist activity.** Some individuals choose direct involvement in actions that kill, while others choose to engage in support activities like providing funding, safe haven or ideological support. But whatever you do that is terrorist-related, the chances are good that you chose to do it.

2. An individual's decision to engage in (or disengage from) terrorist activity is influenced by characteristics (like psychological traits, gender, age, socioeconomic status, religiosity, etc.) as well as by their perceptions toward and interactions with specific organizations and environmental conditions. In other words, an individual's choice to engage in or disengage from terrorist activity occurs at the intersection of ideas, perceptions and opportunities. Further, the nature of these characteristics, perceptions and interactions change over time. From a counterterrorism standpoint, the importance of this line of reasoning is that ideas and perceptions about environmental conditions, opportunities and organizations can be influenced.

3. An individual's perceptions toward and interactions with organizations and environmental conditions are influenced by their family, peers and personal role models, educators, religious leaders and others who help interpret and contextualize local and global conditions. These are examples of the kind of interpretive influences, or credible voices, that must play a role in a government's strategic communications effort. The recent trend of popular moderate Muslim preachers on Saudi satellite TV is an especially promising development in this regard.

4. The members of terrorist organizations influence an individual's decisions about terrorist activity by providing ideological justification for violence, along with training and expertise, material support, connections with others, etc. This emphasizes the importance of understanding terrorist ideology, especially where and why a particular organization's ideology resonates.

5. Individual decisions (within and outside the organization) shape the choices and trajectory of an organization and the kinds of terrorist activity they may conduct. The organization swims in a sea of people; without individuals, there is no organization. An important point here is that perceptions of an organization's leadership, especially its competence and personal agendas, are vital, and can be undermined. As well, organization's actions are determined by individual perceptions, which are naturally subject to influences as described earlier.

6. The motivations and opportunities for individuals to engage in terrorism are framed by their views toward environmental conditions and policies (domestic and foreign), some of which are used to legitimate the grievances articulated in an organization's ideology. The point to make here is that addressing perceptions of environmental conditions—including triggers, precipitant conditions, opportunities and the impact of the global environment—is an important aspect of a strategic communications effort.

7. And of course, the actions of individuals and the organizations they comprise produce a wide range of effects that impact their surrounding environment. For example, how a government or its citizens react to acts of terrorism impacts the likelihood of future terrorist activity.

These 7 propositions are explored throughout the remaining sections of this essay, organized around the 3 levels of analysis (individual, organizations, and environmental conditions) reflected in the diagrams and propositions offered above.

On Individuals

To begin with, it must be re-emphasized that the *primary cause* of terrorism is a human being's decision to commit some form of terrorist activity. Some individuals choose direct involvement in actions that kill, while others choose to engage in support activities like providing funding, safe haven or ideological support. While a variety of factors influence a person's decision to engage in terrorist activity—from kinship and ideology to the availability of weapons and criminal network connections—the dimension of individually *choosing* to commit a terrorist act is central. Even the relatively few "reluctant" terrorists we know of had to at some point decide whether to pull that trigger, detonate that bomb, or do some other specific act which would lead to death and destruction. Thus, a considerable amount of research in this field examines the personal motivations behind an individual's choice to engage in terrorist activity, including psychological influences, kinship, belief system, and grievances (like perceptions of injustice). Scholars have cited the importance of a person's hatred of others, desire for power or revenge, despair, risk tolerance, unbreakable loyalty to friends or family who are already involved in a violent movement, prior participation in a radical political movement, thirst for excitement and adventure, and many other types of motivations.

Research in this area typically focuses on background characteristics of individuals who have engaged in terrorist activity, emphasizing the role of psychological

traits, gender, age, socioeconomic status, religiosity, etc.). Terrorism is a distinctly human endeavor—that is, of all species on earth only humans have been known to engage in terrorist activity, either individually or as members of an organization, and victims and targets of terrorism are always human. Thus, academic disciplines which study human behavior, and particularly the field of psychology, can contribute much to our understanding of what motivates individuals to choose terrorism. According to renowned psychologist Max Taylor, much of this research has attempted to describe personal characteristics of terrorists, on the assumption that terrorists can be identified by these attributes.[5] Surely, many have argued, terrorists are sociopaths, psychopaths, paranoid, pathological narcissist, etc.—individuals with anti-social or other personality disorders that drive them toward terrorist activity—and therefore, through rigorous research, we can derive some form of "terrorist mindset." For example, Jerrold Post's research led him to coin the term "psycho-logic" to describe how the terrorist constructs a personal rationalization for acts they are psychologically compelled to commit.[6] In essence, a polarizing and absolutist "us versus them" rhetoric of terrorists reflects their underlying views of "the establishment" as the source of all evil, and provides a psychologically satisfying explanation for what has gone wrong in their lives; a "psychopolitics of hatred."[7]

Proponents of similar psychological explanations for terrorism describe individuals consumed by hatred towards others and willing to kill without remorse or regard for those who may die from their terrorist act.[8] Walter Lacquer has argued that "madness, especially paranoia, plays a role in contemporary terrorism. Not all paranoiacs are terrorists, but all terrorists believe in conspiracies by the powerful, hostile forces and

suffer from some form of delusion and persecution mania."[9] Others have suggested that

an emphasis on rote memorization and an unwillingness to challenge authority may

contribute to a propensity for indoctrination by terrorist groups.[10]

Overall, these and various other studies in psychology have sought to illuminate a

unique set of attributes that contribute to terrorism. There is clearly a demand for this

among policymakers and the general public who seek clarity in what is in fact a very

complex problem.[11] However, the most common result of research in this area actually

reveals a pattern of "normalcy"—that is, the absence of any unique attribute or identifier

that would distinguish one individual from another. Andrew Silke recently observed how

research on the mental state of terrorists has found that they are rarely mad, and very few

suffer from personality disorders.[12] According to John Horgan:

> Many of the personal traits or characteristics [identified in this research] as
> belonging to the terrorist are neither specific to the terrorist nor serve to
> distinguish one type of terrorist from another. . . There are no a-priori
> qualities of the terrorist that enable us to predict the likelihood of risk of
> involvement and engagement (which is, after all, the true scientific test of
> such profiles) in any particular person or social group that is valid or
> reliable over a meaningful period of time. [13]

Clark McCauley has observed that "30 years of research has found little evidence

that terrorists are suffering from psychopathology,"[14] and Marc Sageman agrees, noting

how "experts on terrorism have tried in vain for three decades to identify a common

predisposition for terrorism."[15] Sociologist Martha Crenshaw also agrees with these

scholars in declining to ascribe abnormal pathology to terrorists, arguing instead that

terrorists' actions are the product of a strategic, rational choice.[16] Overall, there is no

single psychology of terrorism, no unified field of theory.[17] The broad diversity of

personal motivations for becoming a terrorist undermine the possibility of a single,

common "terrorist mindset." Thus, profiling individuals based on some type of perceived propensity to conduct terrorist attacks becomes extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible.[18]

The research finding that there is no common profile reinforces the importance of individual choice; that is, individuals from virtually any background can choose to engage in terrorist activity. Further, a person's decision to engage in (or disengage from) terrorist activity is influenced by their perceptions toward and interactions with specific organizations and environmental conditions, which naturally change over time. Thus, an especially promising area of research on the individual risk of terrorist activity uses phrases and metaphors like "pathways to radicalization" and "staircase to terrorism" to describe a dynamic process of psychological development that leads an individual to participate in terrorist activity.[19] In one particularly noteworthy example, Max Taylor and John Horgan offer a framework for analyzing developmental processes—"a sequence of events involving steps or operations that are usefully ordered and/or interdependent"— through which an individual becomes involved with (and sometimes abandons) terrorist activity.[20] Their research highlights the importance of understanding "process variables such as the changing context that the individual operates in, and also the relationships between events and the individual as they affect behavior."[21]

Each day, countless individuals grapple with situations and environmental conditions that may generate feelings of outrage and powerlessness, among many other potential motivators for becoming violent. But an individual's view of these situations and conditions—and how to respond appropriately to them—is clearly influenced by their family members, peers and personal role models, educators, religious leaders and

others who help interpret and contextualize local and global conditions. Because these interpretive influences play such a key role in how an individual responds to the kinds of structural challenges, events and trends that generate political grievances among members of a particular community, we sometimes see a contagion effect, whereby an individual's likelihood of becoming involved in terrorism is increased because they know or respect others who have already done so. Further, the trajectory and sources of a person's interpretive influences change over time, as life is naturally full of meetings, journeys, departures and events which impact us in many unforeseen ways. Indeed, as Taylor and Horgan note, "There is never one route to terrorism, but rather there are individual routes, and furthermore those routes and activities as experienced by the individual change over time."[22]

The dynamics of an individual's connections to others—including family, friends, small groups, clubs, gangs, diasporas, etc.—also help an individual interpret the potential legitimacy of an organization that has adopted terrorism as a strategy. According to Michael Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, individuals are often introduced to the fringes of violent extremist groups by friends, family members, and authority figures in their community, among others.[23] For example, psychologist Marc Sageman has argued that social bonds play a central role in the emergence of the global Salafi jihad, the movement whose members comprise organizations like al-Qaida, Jemaah Islamiyya, etc.[24] As described in the next section of this essay, an organization that is perceived as legitimate is then able to exert influence on the individual's perceptions of environmental conditions and what to do about them. In sum, a central component of any terrorism analysis should be understanding the dynamic nature of an individual's

interactions with and perceptions toward their environment and specific organizations, along with the many developmental processes into, through and out of terrorist activity.

On Organizations

For many years, esteemed scholars like Martha Crenshaw, Bruce Hoffman, Steve Simon and Louise Richardson have illuminated the special qualities of terrorist organizations that help develop an individual's will and ability to kill.[25] Within these organizations, the most salient attributes include ideology, strategy, leadership, history and membership—especially members who bring practical knowledge on (and possibly connections with others who can assist with) acquiring weapons, funds and intelligence to the group. These and other attributes of an organization influence their chances of achieving at least some of their objectives, and subsequently helps determine the likelihood of attracting recruits and various forms of support. Organizations can play a critical role in shaping an individual's trajectory toward terrorism by interpreting environmental conditions and events in ways that resonate among members of a particular community, and by offering ways and means to engage in terrorist activity. Few individuals have all the requisite knowledge, connections, etc. to be effective terrorists, and this is a primary motivator for joining a group or social network within which their terrorist aspirations can be achieved. Of course, while individual terrorists like Carlos the Jackal or Theodore Kaczynski have caused a considerable amount of suffering in recent decades, these exceptions reinforce how difficult it is to overstate the importance of group membership or affiliation in the world of terrorism.

Interactions between individuals and organizations are typically based on perceptions of trust, legitimacy, power, competence, and mutual benefit. Organizations influence an individual's decisions about terrorist activity by providing ideological justification for violence, along with training and expertise, material support, connections with others, and socialization. Terrorist experts like Ehud Sprinzak and Ariel Merari have demonstrated how these organizations recruit individuals who evolve gradually into terrorists through a process of radicalization that involves a disengagement of moral self-sanctions from violent conduct.[26] In exploring this "moral disengagement," renowned psychologist Albert Bandura identified several developmental processes that can disengage morality from an individual's conduct, such as reconstruing conduct as serving moral purposes; obscuring personal agency in bad activities; disregarding consequences of actions; and blaming or dehumanizing victims.[27]

According to Clark McCauley, terrorists kill for the same reasons that groups have killed others for centuries—they kill for cause and comrades, a combination of ideology and intense small group dynamics.[28] A terrorist group's ideology can play a particularly vital role in an individual's decision to engage in terrorist activity by sanctioning harmful conduct as honorable and righteous. These ideologies typically articulate and explain a set of grievances (including socioeconomic disadvantages, a lack of justice or political freedoms, etc.) that are seen as legitimate among a target audience, along with strategies to mitigate them (typically arguing that the present is inadequate and violent action is necessary in order to ensure a better future).[29] Usually, but not always, the strategies they put forward require joining or at least supporting the organization—thus, an ideology also provides a group identity and highlights the

common characteristics of individuals who adhere to, or are potential adherents of, the ideology. According to Assaf Moghadam, "ideologies are links between thoughts, beliefs and myths on the one hand, and action on the other hand . . . [that] can be used as instruments of competition and conflict, whereby a group can utilize ideology as a means of opposition and contestation. Once a group internalizes the sets of beliefs associated with a given ideology, that ideology provides a "cognitive map" that filters the way social realities are perceived, rendering that reality easier to grasp, more coherent, and thus more meaningful."[30]

Research by Andrew Kidd and Barbara Walter indicates that terrorist organizations are usually driven by political objectives, and in particular "five have had enduring importance: regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control and status quo maintenance."[31] These objectives have led to terrorist group formation in Ireland, Italy, Egypt, Germany, Sri Lanka, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United States, and many other nations. The members of these groups have viewed terrorism as an effective vehicle for political change, often pointing to historical examples of terrorism driving the United States (and later Israel) out of Lebanon, and convincing the French to pull out of Algeria. Ethnic separatist groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, in Sri Lanka), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG, in the Philippines), and the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Batasuna (Basque Fatherland and Liberty, or ETA, in Spain) all want the power to form their own recognized, sovereign entity, carved out of an existing nation-state, and believe terrorist attacks can help them achieve this objective. Groups engaged in the Middle East intifada—like the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Palestine Liberation Front—want the power to establish

an Islamic Palestinian state. Other groups want the power to establish an Islamic state in their own region, including Ansar al-Islam (in Iraq), the Armed Islamic Group (in Algeria), Al-Gama 'a al-Islamiyya (in Egypt), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (in Central Asia), Jemaah Islamiyah (in Southeast Asia), and Al Qaeda. In all cases, these groups seek power to change the status quo, to forge a future that they do not believe will come about naturally, and are determined to use terrorism to achieve their objectives.

Religious ideologies can be an especially powerful motivator for human action because religion offers powerful interpretations of ultimate human concerns like life and death. Indeed, as catalyst for change (or attempts to bring about change), few belief systems can match the power of religious ideologies. As British researcher JP Larsson has observed, there are several unique aspects to religion which help explain how and why violence may be condoned and necessary to achieve ideologically-related goals. First, these ideologies are often theologically supremacist,[32] meaning that all believers assume superiority over non-believers, who are not privy to the truth of the religion. Second, most are exclusivist—believers are a chosen people, or their territory is a holy land. Third, many are absolutist—it is not possible to be a half-hearted believer, and you are either totally within the system, or totally without it. Further, only the true believers are guaranteed salvation and victory, whereas the enemies and the unbelievers—as well as those who have taken no stance whatsoever—are condemned to some sort of eternal punishment or damnation, as well as death. Overall, religious ideologies help foster polarizing values in terms of right and wrong, good and evil, light and dark—values which can be co-opted by terrorist organizations to convert a devout believer into a lethal killer.

The most worrisome representation of these polarizing values is seen among today's religious extremists. From the Muslim Brotherhood (founded in Egypt in 1928 and responsible for numerous terror attacks and assassinations) to American anti-abortion extremist Paul Hill (convicted of terrorizing and killing members of the medical profession), religious ideals have led to violent acts that are perpetrated by individuals who believe their actions are sanctioned by a higher power. Indeed, most extremist movements and groups have an additionally powerful element in their belief systems— the conviction that God requires them to commit violent acts, for the sake of all humankind.

In one of the most eloquent descriptions to date of religious terrorism, Harvard researcher Jessica Stern describes how her interviews with extremist Christians, Jews and Muslims revealed a sort of "spiritual intoxication," a spiritual high or addiction derived from the fulfillment of God's will (or the individual's interpretation thereof).[33] For these individuals, religion has helped them simplify an otherwise complex life, and becoming part of a radical movement has given them support, a sense of purpose, an outlet in which to express their grievances (sometimes related to personal or social humiliation), and "new identities as martyrs on behalf of a purported spiritual cause."[34] In a unique form of transcendental experience, the religious extremist seems to "enter into a kind of trance, where the world is divided neatly between good and evil, victim and oppressor. Uncertainty and ambiguity, always painful to experience, are banished. They believe that God is on their side."[35]

In addition to compelling ideologies and practical knowledge, there are important psychological and other reasons that draw individuals toward membership in a terrorist

organization. For example, as Jerrold Post argues, the need of individuals to belong and to exercise control in their own lives is intensified in communities where segments of the population are ostracized or persecuted based on ethnic, religious or social background. By belonging to a radical group, otherwise powerless individuals become powerful. Group identity provides a foundation of relative stability upon which disenfranchised or isolated members of a society build a base of commonality and join together.[36] Bard O'Neil and Donald Alberts have described how organizations provide a blend of ideological and material incentives that meet an individual's need for belonging, identity and rectifying perceived injustice. Once individuals have joined or otherwise actively supported terrorist groups for ideological reasons, it is difficult to win them back, because of the psychological and emotional investments they have made.[37] And other reasons individuals join these groups include a perception of rewards for participating in terrorism; friendships and camaraderie that lead to and are solidified within the terror cell or organization; and the perceived opportunity to attain a higher social status derived from group membership (e.g., members of Hamas and Fatah are treated with considerable respect among Palestinians).

Importance of Ideological Resonance

From political revolutionaries to religious militants, ideologies of violence and terrorism must have resonance; that is, an ideology has no power unless it resonates within the social, political and historical context of those whose support the organization requires. The resonance of an organization's ideology is largely based on a combination of persuasive communicators, the compelling nature of the grievances articulated, and the

pervasiveness of local conditions that seem to justify an organization's rationale for the use of violence in order to mitigate those grievances. When an organization's ideology resonates among its target audience, it can influence an individual's perceptions and help determine the form of their "decision tree," a menu of potential options for future action that may include terrorism.

Support for terrorism among community members can rise and fall over time, and the ideologies of many organizations have not had long-lasting resonance. Over the past two decades, ideologies that have seen a significant decline in support include the nationalist/separatists and the Marxist/communists, while we have seen a significant increase among Islamist and other religious groups, environmentalists, and right-wing extremists. Resonance and support is also influenced by the choices made by individuals within an organization about the kinds of terrorist activity they conduct. How organizations choreograph violence matters; in particular, terrorist groups must avoid counterproductive violence that can lead to a loss of support from the community. From this perspective, it is particularly useful to incorporate research on how organizational dynamics influence the various forms of terrorism chosen by that organization. For example, Mia Bloom has demonstrated how suicide terrorism can be thought of as a competitive strategy, where individual terrorist organizations contend for the attention of various audiences and, consequently, resources (both money and members).[38] Similarly, this research has shown how groups can become more radical in response to environmental and policy changes (including new threats from security forces), competition (or alignment) with other groups, and internal competition and/or tensions (e.g., pressures from charismatic leaders to take more violent action). Clearly, the choices made by

organizations (or specific individuals within them) influence the potential resonance of their ideological rationale for terrorism.

Overall, successful terrorist organizations capitalize on an environment in which their ideology resonates and their grievances are considered legitimate by smart, competent individuals who are then motivated to act either with or on behalf of the organization. The importance of ideological resonance underscores the need to understand issues of perceptions, interpretations and influences within a given context confronting the risk of terrorist activity. As many scholars have noted, the likelihood of ideological resonance is greater when members of a community are desperate for justice, social agency, human dignity, a sense of belonging or positive identity when surrounded by a variety of depressingly negative environmental conditions, and intense outrage or hatred of a specific entity because of their actions (real or perceived). How a local environment sustains a terrorist organization depends largely on how individuals within the community view the opportunities for that organization's success. The past also matters: Is there a history of political violence either locally or within the surrounding region? Are there regional examples of success or failure of terrorism? As discussed in the next section, terrorist organizations thrive in an environment where they can find weapons and safe haven, communicate, transport humans and materiel, attract financial and other forms of support, and provoke a draconian governmental response which further validates their ideological rationale for violent action. Environmental/structural conditions (and perceptions thereof) influence both organizational and individual characteristics to varying degrees, and inform their strategic choices and rationales for violence. Indeed, the old maxim that "all politics are local" holds true for political violence as well. Thus, the third and most expansive—and, from a counterterrorism perspective, perhaps most

important—level of analysis examines the environmental conditions surrounding existing or burgeoning terrorist movements.

On Environmental Conditions

As Mia Bloom and many other scholars have explained, environmental conditions can be a primary source of legitimacy and resonance for a terrorist group's ideology, and a central factor behind an individual's willingness to participate in terrorist activity.[39] Expanding on the work of Martha Crenshaw's enormously useful typology from the early 1980s,[40] this essay suggests that the wide variety of environmental conditions can be loosely organized around four (somewhat overlapping) categories: precipitant conditions, environmental triggers, opportunities to act, and global environmental factors (see Figure 1 above). While an exhaustive review of all possible variables within each category is not feasible here, the following discussion illustrates the general themes and offers some highlights from the relevant literature.

Precipitant conditions are described as structural reasons why a terrorist organization's ideology resonates among a particular audience. Here, scholars have drawn links between terrorism and local conditions like government oppression or corruption (governmental legitimacy is a particularly common theme), foreign occupation, poverty, discrimination (ethnic, racial, religious, etc.), injustice (real or perceived), a lack of political or socio-economic opportunities, and so forth. For example, Jeffrey Ian Ross identified seven kinds of "structural" grievances that are the most important contributors to political violence—ethnic, racial, legal, political, religious, social, and economic (including poverty, exploitation, expropriation, indebtedness, and

unemployment).[41] According to Michael Leiter, the most common catalysts that lead to terrorist radicalization include blocked social mobility, political repression and relative socioeconomic deprivation.[42]

Shawn Flanigan has suggested that a great deal of political violence originates from a sense of social and political exclusion and in situations where the minority grievances are not sufficiently met.[43] Lydia Khalil has described how corruption—specifically, when resources, privileges and advantages are reserved for a select group of the people or ruling elite—encumbers the fair distribution of social services and adds another layer to the resentment caused by the lack of political participation. When a government fails to adhere to the conventional social contract between governor and the governed, its citizens become disenfranchised and seek the power to force change. Corrupt governments seek to maintain and increase their power over others (and over resources) by any means necessary, while the powerless see the corruption and look for ways to combat it—even through violent acts of terrorism, as that may be perceived as their only form of recourse.[44] These and many other researchers have collectively assembled a broad and colorful landscape of the many structural issues that must be addressed by governments seeking to reduce the risk of terrorism. How these issues are perceived by local communities must also be addressed, as oftentimes politically violent groups will seek to convince others that things are far worse than they truly are.

Environmental triggers are specific actions, policies, and events that enhance the perceived need for action among members of a community. These are very dynamic and time-relevant, and seized upon by the propagandists of terrorist organizations in their attempts to enhance the resonance of their ideology. Triggers are particularly important

example of interactions between individuals, organizations, and environmental contexts that can increase the risk of terrorism. A trigger for action can be any number of things: a change in government policy, like the suspension of civil liberties, a banning of political parties, or the introduction of new censorship and draconian antiterrorist laws; an erosion in the security environment (like a massive influx of refugees, or a natural disaster that diverts the government's attention away from monitoring the group); a widely-publicized incident of police brutality or invasive surveillance; and even a coup, assassination, or other sudden regime change. Recent examples of triggering events include the films of Theo Van Gogh, which triggered a violent response among Islamist radicals and eventually led to his murder; the publication of cartoons portraying the prophet Mohammed, producing a wave of violent protests and actions worldwide; and Israel's military actions against Palestinian militants, which have mobilized protests among Muslims as far away as Indonesia.

A trigger does not necessarily need to be a relatively quick or contained event. For example, research by Paul Ehrlich and Jack Liu suggests that persistent demographic and socioeconomic factors can facilitate 9/11-type terrorism and make it easier to recruit terrorists. Specifically, increased birth rates and the age composition of populations in developing countries affects resource consumption, prices, government revenues and expenditures, demand for jobs, and labor wages. Without dramatic action, they argue, the demographic and socioeconomic conditions in Islamic nations in the Middle East, South Central, and Southeast Asia could lead to the emergence of more terrorism and terrorists for many decades to come.[45] Similarly, the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project report notes that pending "youth bulges" in many Arab states could contribute to a

"perfect storm" for conflict in certain regions, stating that "most of the regions that will experience gains in religious "activists" also have youth bulges, which experts have correlated with high numbers of radical adherents, including Muslim extremists.[46] Throughout this body of research, however, it seems clear that any potential triggers are far more likely to enhance a terrorist organization's ideological resonance when the structural conditions described earlier are already a source of grievances, and when individuals and organizations perceive ample opportunities to engage in terrorism.

Opportunities to act can encompass the structural or temporary conditions at the community or regional level that facilitate various forms of terrorist activity. Examples include significant access to weapons and explosives, a general sense of lawlessness, freedom of movement (across borders, through ungoverned territories, etc.), availability of funding and safe haven, state sponsorship, a weak government or incompetent security apparatus, and so forth. Countries with a robust "shadow economy" (economic activities that are underground, covert, or illegal) can provide an infrastructure for terrorist organizations to operate in, whereby financing becomes easier and detecting it becomes more difficult.[47]

On a global level, the Internet provides a wealth of new opportunities for terrorist groups to influence (and draw support from) a global audience.[48] To most analysts, al-Qaeda is a pioneer of online terrorist-oriented activity, from soliciting and moving funds to the dissemination of propaganda videos and military instruction manuals in multiple languages. According to a study by Gabriel Weimann, thousands of websites—along with e-mail, chat rooms and virtual message boards—are increasingly used by terrorists as virtual training camps, providing an online forum for indoctrination as well as the

distribution of terrorist manuals and instructions. He also describes how terrorist organizations capture information about the users who browse their Web sites, which can be useful for the early stages of recruitment.[49] Indeed, al-Qaeda leaders view those at the center of their information strategy—the Web site designers, bloggers and video editors—as important mujahedeen. As Abu Yahya al-Libi recently declared, "May Allah bless you lions of the front, for by Allah, the fruits of your combined efforts—sound, video, and text—are more severe for the infidels and their lackeys than the falling of rockets and missiles on their heads."[50]

Certain kinds of physical and cultural geography can also provide opportunities for terrorist groups to thrive. For example, research by Peter Liotta and James Miskel indicates that urban population growth in numerous locations across the Lagos-Cairo-Karachi-Jakarta arc of mega-cities, where jobs and educational opportunities are increasingly unavailable, can result in greater levels of discontent, crime and urban instability which terrorist groups can capitalize upon.[51] An environmental trigger may also create an opportunity to act. For example, a sudden regime change may create an anarchic environment in which groups find greater freedom to obtain weapons, conduct criminal and violent activity. Terrorist groups will usually seize any opportunity to capitalize on events from which they could benefit strategically, tactically or operationally.

Erica Chenoweth has recently argued that the political stability of a state is the most significant factor affecting the risk of terrorism.[52] Her analysis indicates that politically unstable regimes—regardless of regime type—are more likely than stable regimes to provide hospitable environments for terrorist organizations to develop. The

"permissive conditions" of politically unstable regimes inhibit domestic institutional mechanisms that could potentially prevent terrorist organizations from taking root in particular countries. A country's ability to retaliate forcefully is another factor that impacts a terrorist group's opportunities to act. For example, according to Kydd and Walter, "Democracies may be more constrained in their ability to retaliate than authoritarian regimes."[53]

And of course, a terrorist group's opportunities to act are greatly enhanced by the availability of small arms and light weapons. As Peter Singer recently observed, "individuals and small groups can now easily purchase and wield relatively massive amounts of power."[54] Indeed, the number of small arms throughout Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia has been growing for decades, in part due to the various struggles for independence that have taken place within each of these regions. When hostilities ended, many of these weapons were left in the hands of civilians or in arms caches whose locations were forgotten or deliberately not identified so that they could be reused in any possible future conflict.[55] Chris Carr recently observed that in sufficient numbers and in the context of weak states, small arms and light weapons can create an architecture of insecurity which fosters the very circumstances which protect and sustain the culture of terrorism. In Yemen, in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, in the slums of urban Jamaica and in the Caucasus mountains, the proliferation of small arms has allowed armed groups to challenge the primacy of the state and to create conditions of instability which provide aid and comfort to criminal and terrorist communities. In such places, the traffickers in drugs, humans and weapons cohabit with the warlords, militia

leaders and political opportunists in an environment which precludes good governance and judicial oversight.[56]

Finally, one must not overlook <u>elements of the global environment</u> that contribute to both the opportunities and grievances perceived by organizations and individuals interested in terrorist activity, including the impact of globalization and interdependent economies, inter-state conflicts (particularly those that produce refugee camps), transnational criminal networks, and disenfranchised diaspora communities. Regarding globalization, a good deal of animosity—particularly in the developing world—may stem from a perception that they have been victimized by corrupt governments, backed by powerful nations and multinational corporations, that have little concern for their lives, needs, or suffering. Indeed, political theorist Benjamin Barber recently argued that the contemporary struggle against terrorism can be seen as the collision between two forces: one, an integrative modernization and aggressive economic and cultural globalization, which can be called McWorld; and the other, a fragmentary tribalism and reactionary fundamentalism, which can be called Jihad. As globalization has led to increasing interdependence, he argues, we must learn to contain and regulate the anarchy that foments both the destructiveness of terrorists and the injustices of global capital.[57]

Similarly, Michael Mousseau recently described how globalization and greater interdependence may also exacerbate existing tensions between various states and cultures. His research illustrates how two distinct norms of economic integration—contracting and reciprocity—give rise to two distinct political cultures that legitimate, respectively, liberal democracy and collective authoritarianism. In liberal democracies, economic transactions are based on contracting, which requires a recognition of the equal

rights of strangers, as well as religious and cultural tolerance. In contrast, economic environments where reciprocity is the norm—as is the case for many developing nations—trust and cooperation is based more on in-group beliefs and values, loyalty to in-group leaders, and distrust of outsiders. From this perspective, one begins to see how globalization has exacerbated conflicts between these two worlds—particularly when free trade between the developed and developing world hurts the local economy and worsens the conditions of the urban jobless, increasing the dependency of millions who blame the foreigners for their conditions.[58]

Other elements of the global environment that can influence an individual's views toward terrorism include simply being in a bad neighborhood; that is, suffering from a spillover effect of terrorism in a neighboring state, or being the target of terrorists whose bases are just across the border (e.g., India and Pakistan, or Turkey and Northern Iraq). A global media influences perceptions in many ways, including whether or not they choose to describe a particular event as an act of terrorism. Globally dispersed diaspora communities provide funding to militants back home (e.g., Tamils in Canada, Pakistani-Kashmiris in Denmark and the U.K., etc.). And, as research by Paul Pillar demonstrates, a nation's foreign policies can significantly influence foreign perceptions and contribute to the threat of international terrorism.[59] As the world's only superpower, this is particularly true for the U.S. While the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the detention of terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay and secret detention facilities elsewhere come to mind as immediate examples of potential triggers, anti-Western jihadists have continually pointed to U.S. support for Israel and tolerance for authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia as important sources of grievances. However, perceptions matter

enormously here. As Ruth Margolies Beitler argues, the United States has supported Israel's existence but it has not always supported its policies, and yet the overwhelming assessment in the Muslim and Arab world is that the United States retains little objectivity when dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. According to Pillar, U.S. policies that Muslims perceive as being on the wrong side of a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims are resented both for the policy itself and for the U.S. motives that they are deemed to demonstrate. A second attribute that makes certain U.S. policies more likely than others to evoke resentment is that they play to other negative stereotypes or preconceptions about the United States. A third ingredient of a policy particularly suited for incurring resentment is in its potential for vivid events that by their very nature may carry emotional impact—especially people dying and suffering as a result of military action.[60]

These are just some of the many elements of the global environment that can influence an individual's views toward terrorism. Together with the other three categories (precipitant conditions, environmental triggers, opportunities to act), the research clearly links environmental conditions with the risk of terrorism. And of course, regarding the seventh proposition offered earlier in this essay, one cannot overlook how the actions of individuals and organizations produce a wide range of effects that impact their surrounding environment, which in turn impacts perceptions derived from environmental conditions. For example, a government's policy choices and other changes in a particular context have a direct impact on the willingness and ability for individuals and organizations to act in certain ways, including terrorism. Similarly, how a public reacts to a terrorist attack (or to counterterrorism measures) can impact the motivations and

opportunities of individuals and organizations. We sometimes forget that the interaction between environment and individuals is not just one-way; it is not only the environment impacting the persons; individuals affect their environment in ways both good and bad. This reinforces the importance of understanding and influencing perceptions, particularly in terms of convincing large, potentially angry populations that they can make a difference, a positive impact on their environment, without resorting to violent means. Based on this analysis, some recommendations can be suggested for a new presidential administration.

Implications for a New Counterterrorism Strategy

This paper illustrates the centrality of perceptions and beliefs in the study of terrorism and counterterrorism. An individual's choice to engage in—or disengage from—terrorism occurs place at the intersection of ideas, perceptions and opportunities. Successful terrorist organizations capitalize on an environment in which their ideology resonates and their grievances are considered legitimate by smart, competent individuals. Combating terrorism requires: knowledge, intelligence, and an ability to influence beliefs. Radicalization is a process that begins with communication. Thus, how we communicate, and how our enemies communicate, is of great significance.

This essay promotes the view that terrorism is a product of characteristics and conditions combined with interactions between individual choices, organizational choices, and the environmental dimensions that influence those choices. Combining the two analytical frames offered here in our analysis of terrorism reinforces the critical importance of the information battlespace, the war of ideas, the need to develop a

supreme ability to conduct influence warfare that is contextually, situationally and culturally relevant. Framing our analysis in this way can help illuminate patterns of interaction that are consistent across several contexts in which the risk for terrorism is of concern, and can yield insights for what can be described as "influence warfare"—efforts by states to influence the choices individuals make toward (or against) engaging in any kind of terrorist activity.[61]

This analysis suggests that the new administration's counterterrorism strategy should focus on at least three target sets: organizations, environmental conditions, and perceptions. First, we should obviously attack organizations and their members, degrade their functional capabilities, encourage "leaving" alternatives, and support socio-political entities that draw support away from them. Second, we need to work with other countries to mitigate socio-political conditions and other grievances which have historically been used by terrorist organizations to justify their use of violence. Here, USAID, along with the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and Education are seen as just as important in helping combat terrorism as the departments of Defense and State. We also need to continue working collaboratively to confront enabling opportunities, things that facilitate terrorist activity, like safe havens, weapons proliferation, border controls, financial networks, etc. And the third target set involves perceptions and interpretations of conditions, opportunities and organizations. We have done quite a lot in the first two areas, particularly since 9/11, but this third area is where we see the greatest need for action.

Several policy implications can be derived from this need to actions that address perceptions and strategic influence, such as committing the U.S. to developing a greater

understanding of contexts in which the risks of terrorism are considered significant. With that knowledge, our counterterrorism strategy should craft appropriate ways to address things that provide resonance to the grievances articulated in terrorist organizations' ideologies. In addition to addressing ideological resonance, the U.S. should also employ the tools of influence warfare to attack perceptions of an organization's competence, integrity and strategic effect. And finally, to achieve the goals suggested in this paper, the U.S. needs a new public influence infrastructure, one that incorporates the strategic purpose of the Department of State's new Counterterrorism Communications Center and engages the Internet in a meaningful way.

Recommendation 1: Develop Contextually-Relevant "Ground Truth"

The first policy implication from this analysis is that counterterrorism strategies must be tailored to local contexts; a "global" approach to combating terrorism that does not take into account the myriad contextual variables described here is destined for failure. All politics is local, and this holds true for political violence as well. Thus, an extensive body of research is needed on situation-specific factors that contribute to political violence in a particular location, in order to develop context-appropriate counterterrorism strategies.

Since a universal "terrorist profile" has thus far been illusive (if not impossible altogether), we need to gain significant clarity on what motivates a person's choice to engage in (or disengage from) terrorist activity. This research should integrate traditional typologies of so-called "root causes of terrorism" with contemporary studies of the mechanisms and tools of radicalization (like myths, symbols, movies, etc.), and should seek to generate new knowledge on the interpretive relationships between individuals and

environmental conditions that contribute to an organization's ideological resonance. Interactions and interpretations allow for an organization's ideology of violence to resonate among individuals. Understanding these can help us to find ways to diminish the ideological resonance. The overall objective should be to develop an understanding of how people make meaning, how perceptions are influenced on the street and online, and then how the U.S. can play a credible role in that process.

Understanding the salience and interconnections of relevant psychological, social, economic and political factors requires careful and systematic analysis in every situation, and should precede the articulation and implementation of a comprehensive counter-terrorist strategy. In support of this search for knowledge, the U.S. should encourage the development of private academic expertise, and should incorporate academic experts from social science, political science, behavioral sciences, psychology, sociology, cultural geography, history, and other disciplines in counterterrorism policymaking.

Experts from within the interagency should also be included in developing a shared base of knowledge about cultural contexts, interactions and interpretations that lead to an individual's perception that violent/terrorist actions are justified. We need to study who are the most prominent influencers in a community; how/where youth congregate and learn from peers; how social networks develop and evolve in different cultural contexts; what interactions matter most in motivating individuals to conduct violence; and other central questions. Individual responses to global issues, like U.S. foreign policies toward Israel and the Palestinians, are framed by local interpretive influences. We must understand why the Israeli-Palestinian issue resonates in Indonesia, for example – clearly, this is a product of more than just a universal affinity for other

Muslims; there are local conditions that influence these perceptions, and are capitalized upon by radical Islamist terror groups.

Finally, this research mission should help us assess the resonance of a terrorist organization's messages, themes, and communication mechanisms, and determine ways to reduce the resonance of these messages and themes within a given context. Christopher Jasparro recently argued that countering an ideology requires determining where a message originates from, along what paths it has diffused, and how the conditions by which it resonates vary from place to place.[62] More specifically, precision in reducing the effect of socio-cultural and demographic "root causes" that give extreme ideologies their resonance demands that we distinguish between universal and place-specific forces of radicalization.

Recommendation #2 – Work Collaboratively to Confront Ideological Resonance

The environmental dimensions discussed in this essay can be perceived by individuals as legitimating a terrorist organization's ideological grievances and strategic rationale for using violence to mitigate them. Indeed, a successful terrorist organization capitalizes on conditions to further its cause. According to Michael Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, "Although most individuals reject extremism outright, personal frustration at perceived social injustice and other grievances can prompt individuals to reassess their accepted worldview and be more open to alternative perspectives—some of which espouse violence."[63]

Having gained an understanding of how these conditions are perceived within a local context, the next step in our counterterrorism strategy should be to address these

conditions and the grievances they produce, in order to diminish popular support (or possibility thereof) for a terrorist organization. Kim Cragin (et al.) describe how, as support for terrorism wanes, intelligence tends to increase on terrorist activities, penetrations occur, and operations become more difficult.[64]

The conditions that require attention may range across a broad socioeconomic and political landscape. For example, Anthony Cordesman recently argued that Saudi security is best protected through social, religious and economic reforms, and not by their current security-only approach.[65] Sherifa Zuhur agrees that the future security of Saudi Arabia is contingent on its reforms, and recommends that the U.S. encourage the Saudi government to increase political participation, improve the intelligence services, urge responsiveness to human rights, and increase multilateral discussions relating to anti-terrorism. She concludes that the benefits of enhanced security and democratization in Saudi Arabia will lead to a better relationship with the U.S. and allow the two countries to be more open to each other's viewpoints and insights; it will also help in the fight against global terrorism.[66]

Many analysts have described the need for the U.S. to support democratization, or at least a more equitable distribution of socio-political opportunities to participate in governance, to express grievances peacefully, to congregate freely, and so forth.[67] According to Paul Pillar, the most fundamental point in favor of democracy is that when rulers are answerable to the ruled and must compete for the people's favor to gain or retain office, they are more likely than in autocracies to govern in the people's interests and not exclusively in their own.[68] As President Bush proclaimed in his 2006 State of the Union speech, democracies "replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their

citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror. Every step toward freedom in the world makes our country safer."[69]

According to Francesco Cavatorta, the re-legitimization of state authority in the Middle East and North Africa through the adoption of democratic procedures is certainly a necessary first step to stem the wave of radicalism that is engulfing the region.[70] And Lydia Khalil has argued that the United States and the international community must put authoritarian, corrupt, and illegitimate governments that foment terrorism in a negative spotlight. Mobilizing the international community against authoritarian regimes in the name of effective long-term counterterrorism efforts is needed to put a check on authoritarian governments that breed this threat.[71]

Perceptions and interpretations about democracy must also be addressed; how we frame the need for political reforms is just as important as the reforms themselves. For example, instead of trying to export American-style liberal democracies to the Middle East, we should encourage greater levels of civil discourse in the Muslim world. Further, preaching intolerance, whether in the mosque or at the political podium, should be condemned locally, nationally and internationally. Our rhetoric and our soft power should focus on issues of social and political justice, as well as government transparency and accountability. Our emphasis should be on demonstrating how an environment that allows for *respectful* debate and nonviolent disagreements should be a point of civic and national pride.

Strengthening the legitimacy of a regime among its citizens should be a cornerstone of American foreign policy. We should encourage the reform of security services in regimes considered apostate by those they govern, and address (for example)

perceptions of injustice, political repression and practices of torture. And we should demand and reward transparency and accountability in other countries, especially in the Middle East. The rule of laws and justice (and the perception thereof) is a necessary component of any government's quest for legitimacy, and we should consider imposing sanctions against regimes that refuse to abide by rule of law. Rule by a dictator's arbitrary whim is not in anyone's best interests. Our support for government reforms should also promote equitable distribution of economic opportunities, as a component of justice is a perception that forward progress for an individual and his or her family is not constrained by illegitimate reasons (like race, ethnicity, gender, etc.). Surely some inequities of economic opportunities will always exist, but these should be a function more of individual choices, aptitudes (demonstrated by performance), and merit rather than other dimensions deemed illegitimate by most societies.

Overall, we need to commit ourselves of using what Joseph Nye calls "soft power" in ways that alter the conditions that breed discontent and terrorists. Addressing these environmental conditions can also enhance the resonance of our counterideology messages, and improve the potential success of our information operations and public diplomacy efforts. Transparency and justice should be a hallmark of any government with which we do business; if it is not, we should find ways to compel changes in behavior through our words (e.g., public diplomacy and strategic communication) and policies and actions (especially in political and economic realms). Applying soft power—particularly in the realm of diplomacy, politics, and finance—is in our own national security interests. U.S. foreign policies that are seen to prop up corrupt regimes, or constrain the potential for achieving a terrorist group's objectives inevitably lead the

members of that group to focus on the U.S. as a target of terrorist activity, in the hopes of compelling a change in those policies.

In addition to grievance-related environmental conditions, the U.S. must also continue to address environmental enablers like weapons proliferation, maritime and border security, impact of globalization, illiteracy, human security challenges in the developing world – things that provide terrorist groups with grievances to capitalize upon and opportunities to act. Combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons should receive particular attention, as the United Nations has recently noted.[72] In addition to ongoing bilateral efforts focused on improving border security, the companies and countries from which these weapons originate must be pressured to avoid exacerbating global insecurity for short-term profit.

Addressing these and other environmental conditions should be a cornerstone of our counterterrorism strategy. And yet, as John Horgan has wisely noted, "it is somewhat misleading, if not naïve, to assume that we can remove the grievances of terrorists in an attempt to prevent terrorism from occurring." Indeed, this essay suggests that addressing the enabling environmental factors—through public diplomacy, strategic communications, political and economic reforms, etc.—can help *contain* terrorism, but not eradicate it altogether.

Recommendation 3: Attack the Perceptions Critical to Organizational Success

In addition to confronting the key environmental enablers of ideological resonance, we must attack and discredit the ideologies of violence themselves. We must craft a robust counterideology effort that addresses interpretive influencers, engages radical ideologues

with counterarguments, and overall diminishes the credibility of the ideology. For example, as Assaf Moghadam has recently observed, al Qaida attacks have killed and injured far more Muslims than non-Muslims, which they justify using a logic of the ends justifying the means.[73] Thus, "the United States and its allies should grasp every opportunity to highlight the disastrous consequences that Salafi-jihadist violence has wrought on the everyday lives not only of Westerners, but first and foremost on Muslims themselves."[74] Further, leaders of the al Qaida movement preach about the benefits of martyrdom, but in an example of considerable hypocrisy they rarely if ever conduct suicidal operations themselves, or send their loved ones on such missions.

We should not need to be on the defensive in our counterideology and strategic communications efforts. We clearly have a much more attractive vision of the future than those who deal in hate, violence, terror and death. For example, as Assaf Moghadam has noted, we should consistently point out how al Qaida's ideology offers no real vision of the future for Muslims other than perennial jihad—hardly an appealing prospect.[75] Our primary objective here should be to discredit Salafi Jihadism so it becomes weak, isolated, and perceived by all Muslims worldwide as a radical fringe of Sunni Islam.

In addition to highlighting strategic and ideological deficiencies and encouraging opposition from senior Islamic scholars, we need to identify and enlist other allies within the Muslim world, credible voices who can help us achieve our strategic influence objectives. Among certain communities, we are viewed as a discredited messenger, and thus have limited—if any—chance of convincing those audiences. As a result, we must recognize the limitations of the nation-state in the information domain, and embrace the

new and innovative ways in which individuals are increasingly empowered to confront hostile ideologies.

One recent effort of note is the "Radical Middle Way"—an organization of young British Muslims who have rejected the Salafi-jihadist interpretation of the Qur'an and are trying to consolidate a mainstream response to fundamentalist Islam. Their public events and Internet activities are funded by the sale of music videos, and are being touted as an example of how to weaken the resonance of al-Qaeda's ideology among youth.[76] Similarly, in Indonesia, Ahmad Dhani—the leader of the immensely popular rock band Dewa—has used music to influence millions of fans, encouraging them to resist the tide of religious extremism. As Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid—a former president of Indonesia—observed, "Dhani and his group are on the front lines of a global conflict, defending Islam from its fanatical hijackers [and helping] to rescue an entire generation from Wahhabi-financed extremists whose goal is to transform Muslim youth into holy warriors and suicide bombers."[77]

Egyptian Amr Khaled, who runs one of the Arab world's most popular Web sites and hosts a regular show on a Saudi-owned religious satellite channel, is a moderate who encourages Muslims to transform their lives and their communities through Islam while also getting along with the West. He writes, "Osama bin Laden is saying he is talking on behalf of Muslims; Who asked him to talk on behalf of us? Nobody."[78] And in Saudi Arabia, As Ahmad al-Shugairi, a moderate preacher who is quite popular among a young audience that is hungry for religious identity but deeply alienated from both politics and the traditional religious establishment, uses his satellite TV program "Khawater" ("Thoughts") to preach that Islam's greatest strength from its diversity and its openness

to new ways of thinking.[79] Private initiatives like these will most likely do far more to counter the influence of al-Qaeda than any U.S. public diplomacy strategy or strategic communications effort. We should provide money, diplomatic support and covert assistance to any such activity that poses a threat to the unity and legitimacy of the Salafi-jihadist community.

Of course, a terrorist organization's ideology does not have to be based on fact to be believed; it merely needs to be communicated effectively and persuasively within a favorable cultural, socio-economic, and political environment which can enable ideological resonance. It is the way in which people perceive and react to their environment that enables acts of violence. Thus, our efforts to discredit ideologies must go hand in hand with our efforts to mitigate the environmental conditions upon which individuals and organizations base their grievances. If we diminish the local resonance of the organization's ideology, we make it far more difficult for the organization to maintain the narrative they use to justify violent actions. Credibility and legitimacy are vital to a terrorist organization, so governments should do everything possible to make these things difficult if not altogether impossible.

In a similar vein, we should also employ the tools of strategic influence to attack the "street perception" of a terrorist organization, with particular focus on how critical support communities view its leadership and members, its strategies and tactics, the lack of transparency in its financial dealings, and so forth. As a clandestine organization, terrorist groups face a considerable challenge in maintaining operational security, and yet with the increasing use of the Internet by terrorists to engage in heated debates about strategies, tactics, specific individuals within the organization, and so forth, we have a

unique window onto what an organization's members indicate are major concerns and vulnerabilities.[80]

This is where the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point has made a particularly useful contribution to the literature over the last several years, with regard to al Qaida.[81] Research in this area has shown that terrorist organizations suffer when their vital support communities perceive high levels of looting, infighting, burnout, ineptitude, distrust and other aspects of human behavior that threaten the health of the organization. Convincing key populations that a particular group is comprised as murderous thugs helps to discredit the group's rationale for the use of violence.

The U.S. should also work with other countries to provide pathways out of terrorism and into other expressions of political oppositional goals, encouraging individuals to disengage from terrorist activities without necessarily abandoning their political beliefs. We should promote new role models for whom violence is rejected; target/involve broader family network; emphasize failure of violent values, beliefs, strategies (an opposite emphasis from that which is central to radicalization strategies).[82] Terrorism expert Martha Crenshaw explains that a government's counterterrorism message must not only serve to reduce the probability of violence, but also to influence the terrorist organization's incentive structure, increase the opportunities to exit the terrorist group and promote internal dissension. In essence, a government's policy should "aim to make the organization less destructive and less cohesive rather than to defeat it militarily."[83]

Overall, our counterterrorism strategy should exacerbate the internal and perceptive challenges that terrorist organizations face, and encourage them to decay from

within. Further, we should provide money, diplomatic support and covert assistance to any entity or activity that poses a threat to the unity and perceived legitimacy of a terrorist organization. As Secretary Gates notes, "arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower [others]."[84]

Recommendation 4: Become a More Effective Communicator

Introspection has rarely been a hallmark of superpowers, but this analysis suggests that the U.S. should consider taking a hard look at ourselves in the mirror, consider how others perceive our actions and intentions, and do what we can to change those perceptions in more positive ways. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently noted, the U.S. must confront the current crisis of legitimacy and abandon rhetoric (like "we are the best, our way is best") which undermines our ability to attract goodwill and cooperation from vital populations around the world.[85] Our end game in the strategic influence struggle should be to sustain a global perception of the U.S. as a humble, responsible leader of the free world who empowers others, and whose strengths benefit all mankind.

In short, the U.S. must become a more effective worldwide strategic influencer, both at the street level and online. This requires a greater commitment to listening—especially, listening to and learning from others in places where U.S. influence is low or nonexistent. In a speech last year in Kansas, Secretary of Defence Robert Gates observed that "speed, agility and cultural relevance are not terms that come readily to mind when discussing American strategic communications."[86] Thus, a prominent component of our

nations strategic influence effort should include actively listening to and learning from average citizens in foreign countries, rather than relying on analysis of media or government sources of information. Our embassies have a vital role in this effort. Today, U.S. diplomats regularly attend meetings with the people they need to know in order to analyze trends and influence host country policies. However, we also need ambassadors and other representatives to influence not just policies but street level perceptions of U.S. policies and intentions. Engaging the public discourse, particularly in Middle East countries where al Qaida has found many recruits, should be a primary task of all overseas representatives of the U.S. We need to listen, and be seen as active listeners; we must encourage a perception that the U.S. does care about being a more responsible and humble world superpower; and we must articulate and demonstrate how a strong, vibrant U.S. is beneficial for everyone—even those who pursue policies we may not agree with.

Hassan Abbas, a former government official from Pakistan, argues that in the battle for the "hearts and minds" of Muslims, U.S. policymakers should acknowledge past mistakes, understand the limitations of public diplomacy; employ efficient feedback mechanisms to assess the impact of specific policies; establish and encourage forums for people-to-people interaction, frame important issues in more constructive ways than "you are either with us or against us," and support reform of the education sector in Muslim countries, especially where madrasa networks are entrenched.[87] With regard to the Bush administration's approach to countries whose policies we disagree with (like Iran and North Korea), he also notes that "closing the channels of communication and dialogue has never proved to be a productive measure." [88] And, to reiterate, listening has always been a cornerstone of effective communication.

Unfortunately, when considering the first few recommendations of this paper, one major challenge becomes obvious: we have no USIA or robust infrastructure to influence street level perceptions. Further, among the convoluted patchwork of agencies involved for managing U.S. image abroad, we have competing opinions over what should be done and by whom, and we have not yet begun to exploit the power of the Internet effectively. Most of our efforts to influence foreign audiences involve official speeches, documents, policy statements, and so forth with some support from media and state-to-state diplomatic relationships. The analysis offered in this essay suggests that the U.S. needs a new information and public diplomacy infrastructure that incorporates the role of the Internet, with an overall focus on themes that resonate locally on the street and online.

Clearly, strategic communications and public diplomacy have important roles to play in shaping perceptions abroad of the United States and its policies. Building relationships of long-lasting trust with foreign publics should be a central role of embassies and their staff. In addition to greater community interactions, our need to listen and learn should require greater nongovernmental partnerships, to include academic experts with knowledge on particular cultural, ethnic and social nuances in a particular region. Further, messages crafted for a contextually-relevant strategic communications effort must involve individuals from that context; relying exclusively on government staffers sitting in Washington, DC or in embassies will have limited effect. And we need a way to assess and improve the street-level resonance of our own messages and themes.

Finally, as many authors have recently noted, we must engage the Internet as part of a broad public influence effort. As many scholars have observed, the Internet plays an increasingly important role in connecting individuals with terrorist organizations.[89] In

addition to dramatic increases in spending on the civilian instruments of national security—including diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development[90]—the US government must overcome significant limitations in what it can do to confront online radicalization. While some government agencies have been monitoring radical Web sites and blogs for years, authorities are legally constrained in how they can intervene in these forums. In particular, Congress needs to examine the Smith-Mundt Act and provide new legal basis for a robust online counter-ideology effort that should fracture terrorist organizations and their supporting communities, and force the propagandists to defend their deficient ideology and strategy.[91]

Conclusion

Overall, a primary point of this discussion is that a counterterrorism strategy focused on killing, capturing, deterring, interdicting finances, and so forth will not lead to victory unless combined with a concerted effort to discredit the organization, its leaders and ideology, and influence the perceptions of potential supporters within the community targeted by the organization. Combating terrorism effectively is not a matter of appropriately directing kinetic force to identified targets; rather, the primary challenges are acquiring contextually-relevant intelligence and affective perspectives and belief systems in ways that create significant difficulties for a terrorist organization's ideology to find local resonance. Terrorism will not likely be defeated without the use of kinetic force, but it will certainly not be defeated without a commitment to effective communication and strategic influence.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not purport to reflect the position of the United States Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

Notes

[1] For example, please see *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training and Root Causes* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), *Teaching Terror* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) and *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007)

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