

## Chapter 3

# 'New' vs. 'Old' Terrorism: A Critical Appraisal<sup>1</sup>

Martha Crenshaw

The idea that the world confronts a 'new' terrorism completely unlike the terrorism of the past has taken hold in the minds of American policy makers, journalists, consultants and academics (examples include Hoffman 1998; Benjamin and Simon 2003; Laqueur 1999; Lesser et al. 1999; Bremer 2001; Morgan 2004; Giddens 2004). The government and policy elites have been blamed for not recognising the danger of the 'new' terrorism in the 1990s and thus failing to prevent the disaster of 9/11 (see for example Simon and Benjamin 2003, 381; 9/11 Commission Report, chapter 2). Our knowledge of the 'old' or traditional terrorism is considered irrelevant, obsolete and anachronistic, even harmful; the old paradigms should be discarded and replaced with a new reframed understanding (see Hoffman 1998, 196 and 205; Simon and Benjamin 2003, 221 and 384; Lesser et al. 1999, 2; Laqueur 1999, 7).

However, these claims should be systematically examined rather than accepted in their totality as self-evident (for other critical views Tucker 2001; Coolsaet 2005; Zimmerman 2003; Burnett and Whyte 2005, Aldrich 2005; Roy 2004, 41–54).

The point is not that there has been no change in terrorism but that changes need to be precisely identified and that they are not necessarily attributable to 'religious' motivations. This assessment can only be completed by careful and empirically-grounded comparison. If a new explanation of terrorism is necessary, what are the puzzles that the 'old' paradigm cannot solve? My contention is that the departure from the past is not as pronounced as many accounts make it out to be. Today's terrorism is not a fundamentally or qualitatively 'new' phenomenon but grounded in an evolving historical context (for an example see Kalyvas 2001, 99–118).

The differences are of degree rather than kind. Contemporary terrorism shares many of the characteristics of past terrorism, dating back to the late nineteenth century. So far the accounts of a 'new' terrorism are based on insufficient knowledge of history and misinterpretation of contemporary terrorism. The 'new terrorism' literature so far has failed to do two things adequately. First, it does not precisely specify the concept and the distinction between 'new' and 'old'. What are the attributes of the 'new' terrorism? How are they different from those of the 'old'?

---

<sup>1</sup> I have benefited from comments and questions following presentations of this argument at Irvine, Rutgers University, and at the Woodrow Wilson Center, in a lecture series co-sponsored by the Rand Corporation and the US Army's Eisenhower National Security Series.

Second, it needs to clarify which groups or practices belong in which category and explain how these cases satisfy the requirements of the definition. For example, accounts of the 'new' terrorism cite the common characteristic of religious doctrine as motivation. However, although the 'new' terrorists are all supposedly religious, not all religious groups are deemed to be 'new'. The groups that are typically cited as examples of the genre are radical or jihadi Islamists in general (al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Jamaah Islamiyah, the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, and so on), the Christian Identity movement and its offshoots (including Timothy McVeigh, although it is not certain that he represented an organised group, and the attribution of a religious motivation to his violence seems problematic), Ramzi Youcef and his cohort (although some view him as a figure in the early years of al-Qaeda rather than an independent actor), Aum Shinrikyo, and the Jewish radical groups that plotted to blow up the Dome of the Rock and that assassinated Rabin. Hamas, however, is not included. The case of Hezbollah is problematic; it is included by some (see Hoffman 1998) but not others (see Simon and Benjamin 2003). In either case, the category of 'new' terrorists includes a diverse set of actors.

Clarification of the distinction between categories is hard to find. The MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database, which is based on data collected by the Rand Corporation since 1968, lists 130 groups in the category of religious terrorism. Of these 130 cases, 124 are linked to group profiles, which indicate that only 54 of the cases are labelled as exclusively religious. Almost all the others are simultaneously classified as national separatist groups. If it is the case, as Simon argues, that 'the explicitly religious character of the "new terrorism" poses a profound security challenge for the United States', are we to understand the statement to mean those groups that are only religious or those groups that are both religious and nationalist?<sup>2</sup> Which orientation will determine their actions? (Simon 2003, Hoffman 1998).

If 'old' terrorism refers to secular groups or groups existing before 1990, we have over 400 examples, more if we go back to the nineteenth century. Accounts of the new terrorism are not specific or comprehensive on this score. For example, Steven Simon lists only the Irish Republican Army, the Red Brigades and the Palestine Liberation Organisation as examples of 'conventional' terrorist groups (Simon 2003).

There is a further problem. Even if a conceptual distinction between two types of terrorism can be established, it is not clear whether there is a chronological dimension. Should we assume that the 'new' is replacing the 'old'? When was the transition? If not, how do we explain the persistence of the 'old' as well as the emergence of the 'new'? David Rapoport has dealt with these questions in analysing the historical evolution of terrorism in terms of 'waves', which in his terms are 'cycles of activity in a given time period' characterised by a common international 'energy' or ideology (Cronin and Ludes 2004). All waves feature nationalist movements that take on different forms according to the nature of the 'wave', whether driven by anarchism,

<sup>2</sup> It is important to look closely at the MIPT–Rand data, since it is the main source of the argument that religiously motivated terrorism is (1) increasing and (2) more lethal and indiscriminate than other forms.

anti-colonialism, 'New Left ideology' or now religion. He sees each wave ebbing as the new wave takes force. Although Rapoport does not espouse the idea that the religious wave is qualitatively different from preceding waves, he does see a process of replacement rather than coexistence. These issues need further empirical study to establish where there is continuity and where and why there is change.

The evolution of the concept of a 'new' terrorism is event-driven (as is much of the study of terrorism). The idea that the world confronted a 'new' threat took hold after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, although Benjamin and Simon argue that the phenomenon itself began in 1990, with the assassination of Meir Kahane in New York (Simon and Benjamin 2003, 3–4; Morgenthau 1993, 18). The argument was well established, and had been criticised, by the time of the 9/11 attacks. The idea that there was a distinctively 'religious' terrorism began to develop with the growth of radical Islamic movements after the Iranian revolution (particularly as a reaction to the use of suicide bombings by Hezbollah in Lebanon) and was strengthened by the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the discovery of subsequent ambitious plots directed by Ramzi Yousef (such as blowing up airliners over the Pacific). These suspicions were exacerbated by the fear that terrorist groups might acquire nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons, especially considering the insecurity that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The new terrorism idea gained momentum with the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway and the Oklahoma City bombing. Growing awareness of the extent of the al-Qaeda conspiracy caused more alarm (see Rose 1999).

The 1998 embassy bombings, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and the millennium plots strengthened the perception of a completely new threat. Not only the attacks of 9/11 but the following anthrax attacks also heightened concern. Although the risk of highly destructive terrorism was and is real, the 'new terrorism' school of thought is open to challenge. My critique of 'new terrorism' thinking analyses its propositions concerning the goals, methods and organisational structure and resources of groups practicing terrorism. I also question the historical application of the distinction between 'new' and 'old' terrorism. I challenge the soundness of the definition and its applicability to empirical data.

### Goals

First, the *ends* of the 'new' terrorism are presumed to be both unlimited and non-negotiable. Fanaticism is the motivation, not political interest, according to Laqueur.<sup>3</sup> These aims are also considered largely incomprehensible and amorphous. In this view, the goals of 'new' terrorists are derived exclusively from religious doctrines

<sup>3</sup> Laqueur's (1986) argument actually focuses more on the motivations or 'mind-sets' of the individual than the objectives of the group. He says, for example, that the new terrorists (who are characterised by rage, aggression, sadism, paranoia as well as fanaticism) can be found on the fringes of any extremist movement (p. 281). At other times he is contradictory; he seems to imply that the motive for terrorism, fanaticism, has not changed but that the availability of weapons has. At other times he suggests that religious fanaticism is different. The 'new breed' of terrorist enjoys killing (p. 231).

that emphasise transformational and apocalyptic beliefs, usually associated with Islam although present in all monotheistic religions. Millenarianism is key. The 'new' terrorists are presumed to hate Western and especially American values, culture, civilisation and existence. As Ambassador Bremer expressed it, it is not that they do not understand us: 'They hate America precisely because they *do* understand our society; they hate its freedoms, its commitment to equal rights and universal suffrage, its material successes and its appeals ...' (Bremer 2001, 24). President Bush described the enemy thus: 'we face an enemy which cannot stand freedom. It's an enemy which has an ideology that does not believe in free speech, free religion, free dissent, does not believe in women's rights, and they have a desire to impose their ideology on much of the world' (White House 2006). Further,

we are not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with inalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world. No act of ours invited the rage of the killers – and no concession, bribe, or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder. (Bush 2002)

The new terrorism threat is compared to the existential threat of Communism during the Cold War, not past terrorism (Bush 2005a). It is considered a war on civilisation itself. The goals of terrorism are inextricably linked to the means, in this view. The new terrorists are fanatics unconstrained by any respect for human life. Violence is at the heart of their beliefs. There is some ambiguity about whether violence is 'strategic', since Simon and Benjamin argue that for the new actors terrorism is used strategically and not tactically, by which they mean killing is an end in itself (see for example Simon and Benjamin 2003, 419). If destruction is an end in itself rather than the means to an end, then it is not strategic but expressive. Rather than choosing among alternative ways of achieving political ends, the new terrorists seek primarily to kill. Lethality is their aim rather than their means. As Benjamin and Simon put it in an editorial in the *New York Times* in early 2000:

The terrorists allied with Mr. bin Laden do not want a place at the table: they want to shatter the table. They are not constrained by secular political concerns. Their objective is not to influence, but to kill, and in large numbers—hence their declared interest in acquiring chemical and even nuclear weapons. It is just this combination—religious motivation and a desire to inflict catastrophic damage—that is new to terrorism. (Benjamin and Simon 2000)<sup>4</sup>

The goals of the 'old' terrorism, by contrast, are thought to have been negotiable and limited. Their ambitions were local, not global. The past aims of terrorism were understandable and tangible, typically related to issues of nationalism and territorial autonomy. Deals could be struck. The state could bargain with the 'old' terrorists. Conflicts could be resolved. In effect, these were presumably sensible terrorists whose objectives were realistic and pragmatic. Is this an accurate depiction of the old terrorism? Unobtainable ends and flamboyantly bloodthirsty rhetoric are not unique to religion or to the contemporary political environment. The European

<sup>4</sup> This indicates perhaps that the new terrorists must be more than religious.

anarchist movement of the late nineteenth century (of which the proponents of terrorism were a fringe) sought to abolish all government as well as capitalist society (Coolsaet 2005). Sendero Luminoso wished to establish a Maoist regime in Peru. Its leader, Abimael Guzman, launched the war in 1980 with a speech titled 'We are the Initiators': 'we begin the strategic offensive for world revolution, the next 50 years will see imperialism's dominion swept away along with all exploiters ... The people's war will grow every day until the old order is pulled down, the world is entering a new era.' The speech continues on a lurid note,

The people rear up, arm themselves, and rise in revolution to put the noose around the neck of imperialism and the reactionaries, seizing them by the throat and garrotting them. They are strangled, necessarily. The flesh of the reactionaries will rot away, converted into ragged threads, and this black filth will sink into the mud; that which remains will be burned and the ashes scattered by the earth's winds so that only the sinister memory will remain of that which will never return, because it neither can nor should return. (Gorriti 1999, 34–5)

In the 1970s, revolutionary organisations in Germany (the Red Army faction) and Italy (the Red Brigades), with little to no popular support, thought that they could overthrow well-established liberal democracies, bring down NATO, and deal a death blow to imperialism (see Alexander and Pluchinsky 1992). Separatist organisations are not immune from overreaching. ETA seeks to establish a Basque state that would include regions of both France and Spain. It was not particularly reasonable of Palestinian groups such as the Abu Nidal Organisation or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine or Libya, to believe that they could destroy the state of Israel or bring about revolution in the Arab world. Patrick Seale, in a biography of Abu Nidal, describes his terrorism as 'fitful and purposeless', 'incoherent, incompetent, and invariably counterproductive to Palestinian interests'. There was no 'strategic vision':

His claim that he wanted to prevent a compromise between the PLO and Israel so as to recover Palestine was not a credible objective. The vast imbalance of strength between Israel and its opponents made such pursuit suicidal. By degrading the Palestinian liberation struggle to mere criminal violence, Abu Nidal offered Israel the pretext for refusing to negotiate and to giving the Palestinians nothing but the sword. (Seale 1992, 231)

Do these assumptions about objectives describe the 'new' terrorism? Are such groups led by apocalyptic visionaries with no appreciation of reality? Groups claiming to act in the name of religious doctrine may be more extreme in their rhetoric than in their preferences (although analysis of their rhetoric is certainly worthwhile). They have often shown themselves to be astute political strategists, using terrorism successfully to compel the withdrawal of foreign military forces or to disrupt peace processes. Hezbollah is an excellent example, having transformed itself into a political party as well as a resistance organisation. Some regional experts have interpreted al-Qaeda's activities in pragmatic terms (see for example Doran 2002, 177–90; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003, 76–92). Bin Laden's stated goal of expelling American military forces from Muslim territories is quite specific. He cites the encouraging historical

Coolsaet, Rik (Editor). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*.

Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008. p 46.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10209211&ppg=46>

Copyright © 2008. Ashgate Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

precedents of Vietnam, Somalia and Lebanon, as well as the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (Lawrence 2005). His interpretations may not be completely accurate, but they are not illogical. Just as secular nationalist groups such as ETA and even the IRA took on a Marxist–Leninist veneer when it was ideologically fashionable to do so, nationalistic groups today may take on an Islamic cast. Ideology and religion are useful recruiting and mobilising devices.

A finding that remains constant is that while some members of radical organisations are motivated by sincere beliefs in the cause, others are less committed to group values. Individual militants may be manipulated by their leaders. Undoubtedly all members of the groups designated as ‘new terrorists’ are not religious ‘fanatics’ (see Cullison, 2004, 55–70). As Stephen Holmes observed with regard to the 9/11 attacks:

Many of the key actors in the 9/11 drama, admittedly, articulate their grievances using archaic religious language. But the very fact that the code involved is ancient while the behaviour we want to explain is recent suggests the inadequacy of causal theories that overemphasize the religious element. (Holmes, 2005; Simon and Stevenson 2005, 90–98)

## Methods

Second, the *means* of the ‘new’ terrorism are also assumed to be radically different. The premise is that because the ends of the new terrorism are unlimited, so, too, are the means that groups espousing these goals are willing to use. The ‘new’ terrorists are supposed to be dedicated to causing the largest possible number of casualties among their enemies and also to be willing to sacrifice any number of their own in the process. What happens afterward is of no concern. Thus the ‘new’ terrorists are also thought to be significantly more inclined than secular groups to use ‘weapons of mass destruction’ because their purpose is simply to kill as many people as possible. Apocalyptic motivations are said to lead to a desire for unprecedented lethality. According to Steven Simon, ‘Religiously motivated terrorism, as Bruce Hoffman of the Rand Corporation first noted in 1997, is inextricably linked to pursuit of mass casualties’ (Simon 2003, 18). Presumably for the ‘new’ terrorists the means have become an end in themselves, not a way of reaching an audience other than a deity. They are not concerned with public support. The ‘new’ terrorists seek only to destroy, and their deaths will result only in the reaching of the millennium and a place in paradise, not political change in the here and now.

The ‘old’ terrorism is considered to be much more restrained and specific in targeting. The traditional terrorist wanted people watching, not people dead, according to Brian Jenkins’ now famous aphorism. Hoffman describes the old terrorists as selective and discriminating (Hoffman 1998, 197). Benjamin and Simon say past terrorists used ‘carefully calibrated violence’ because ‘they knew that excessive brutality would deny them the place they sought at the bargaining table’ (Benjamin and Simon 2000). These terrorists imposed restraints on their actions because they aimed to change the attitudes of audiences who could help them achieve their goals. Although capable of being more destructive, they chose not to be. Their audiences and reference groups were tangible and present. They were limited by

Coolsaet, Rik (Editor). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*.

Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008. p 47.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10209211&ppg=47>

Copyright © 2008. Ashgate Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

their dependence on constituencies and by their political interests. Their pursuit of legitimacy, in effect, restrained their behaviour.

However, the 'old' terrorists were not always discriminating in their choice of targets. Levels of selectivity and restraint vary across groups and across time, but not according to a religious–secular or past–present divide. A few examples show that killing large numbers is not restricted to groups espousing religious doctrines, although no single attacks were near as deadly as 9/11 (see also Quillen 2002, 279–302). The French anarchists of the 1880s bombed restaurants frequented by the bourgeoisie in order to show the working class who the true enemy was. 'No bourgeois is innocent' was their slogan. The history of anarchism in Spain was particularly violent. Martin Miller refers to a 'will to destroy' in the European anarchist movement (Miller 1995). The concept of 'propaganda of the deed', which is still at the heart of terrorism, was introduced by Peter Kropotkin in 1880. In 1946, the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem killed 91 and injured 45 (Bell 1977, 172). During the Algerian war, the FLN attacked Europeans indiscriminately, leaving bombs in cafes, on beaches, in soccer stadiums, and at bus stops in Algiers during the famous 'Battle of Algiers'. Their bombs often killed Algerians as well as Europeans. (The FLN also considered bombing the Eiffel Tower, in a campaign to bring the war home to France. They did bomb oil refineries near Marseille). The Japanese Red Army's attack on the Tel Aviv airport in 1972 killed 24 and wounded 80 people, most Puerto Rican pilgrims. A Sikh extremist group was probably responsible for the midair bombing of Air India Flight 182 in 1985 (killing 329 people), and the secular regime of Colonel Qaddafi (since rehabilitated) bombed Pan Am 103 in 1988, leaving 270 dead. Far right extremists with no religious connections whatsoever have also been willing and able to cause mass casualties; for instance, 85 people were killed in the bombing of the Bologna railroad station in 1980. As the Algerian war concluded, the OAS (Organisation de l'armée secrète) adopted a scorched earth policy of indiscriminate terrorism against Muslims. For example, on May 2, 1962, a car bomb on the Algiers docks killed 62 and wounded 110 among a crowd of Algerians waiting for day work (Droz and Lever 1982, 337; Harrison 1989).

Moreover, contrary to the expectations of new terrorism thinking, religious terrorists have not been quick to resort to weapons of mass destruction. Aum Shinrikyo's attack on the Tokyo subway is the only example of a deliberate use of chemical weapons against a civilian population.<sup>5</sup> Terrorists have not used nuclear or radiological weapons despite official concern over the prospect since at least 1976 (Central Intelligence Agency 1976).

Moreover, while the September 11 hijackings caused the highest number of casualties of any single terrorist attack in history, other al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda related

---

<sup>5</sup> Another possible example is the LTTE's use of chlorine gas in an attack on a Sri Lankan army base, but their use appears to have been circumstantial and opportunistic, not planned. See in general Tucker (2000). According to this study, there have so far been only nine instances of what might be defined as chemical or biological terrorism, which included deliberate food poisonings. The anthrax mailings of 2001 could be added to the list. See also Falkenrath et al. (1998) and Stern (1999). There are also reports that al-Qaeda tried to acquire chemical weapons.

terrorism has (fortunately) caused fewer casualties (overall and per incident) and has not involved such innovative methods or sophisticated planning. The bombings in Bali in 2002 (202 killed), Madrid in 2004 (191 killed), and London in 2005 (52 killed) were tragically destructive, but not fundamentally dissimilar to past bombings by secular groups in crowded public venues.<sup>6</sup> The simultaneous explosions are a hallmark of al-Qaeda, but such a tactic was and is within the reach of many groups. More evidence of strategic discrimination in targeting is found in the July 2005 letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The document is sharply critical of indiscriminate terrorism against ordinary Shia, especially attacks on mosques. Zawahiri warns that it will undermine the popular support that is essential to seizing power in the Sunni areas following an American withdrawal in order to establish a territorial base. Any action that the masses do not understand or approve must be avoided, and he notes numerous questions about the wisdom and rightness of anti-Shia terrorism that are circulating among even Zarqawi's supporters.<sup>7</sup>

The 20 most lethal of the groups classified as religious in the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database were each responsible for over 100 total fatalities through December of 2005.<sup>8</sup> However, only nine of the twenty are classified as exclusively religious. They include al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda affiliates in Europe, the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria, the Lord's Resistance Army, Jamaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, al-Gama'a al-Islamiya in Egypt, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and, curiously, Ansar Allah, which is regarded as an offshoot of Hezbollah, an organisation with mixed motives. (Ansar Allah is thought to have bombed Jewish and Israeli targets in Argentina in the 1990s.) Ansar al-Sunnah in Iraq is considered purely religious, while other Iraqi groups are defined as national separatist as well. The other hybrid groups are (1) Palestinian ( Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad), (2) three associated with the struggle in Chechnya, (3) three originating in the war in Iraq, (4) Lashkar-e-Taiba in Kashmir and Pakistan, (5) the Abu Sayyaf Group, (6) Hezbollah, and (7) the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Thus pure religious groups killed a total of 6,120 people, and the hybrid groups killed 4,657. Rank orderings from the database are below. (Note that the combined Caucasus conflict-related groups caused 924 fatalities,

<sup>6</sup> Figures are from BBC Online.

<sup>7</sup> Text accessed on the Office of the Director of National Intelligence website, where it was posted on 11 October 2005: <[http://www.dni.gov/letter\\_in\\_english.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/letter_in_english.pdf)>. I am assuming that it is authentic.

<sup>8</sup> The database did not include domestic incidents until after 1998. Thus older groups that used extensive violence at home against local targets will be underweighted in the comparisons. For example, in 2003 the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that between 1980 and 2000 Sendero Luminoso was responsible for 54 per cent of the 69,280 total deaths in the conflict, thus over 37,000 people – admittedly we might not define all of their violence as terrorism, even though the victims included in the tally were not from the security forces, but this is an extraordinary figure (<<http://www.everdad.org.pe/ingles/ifinal/conclusiones.php>>). By contrast, the Terrorism Knowledge Database credits SL with 133 fatalities and 267 injuries from 1968 to the present. Furthermore, over time small-group or individual access to destructive technologies as well as their knowledge of target vulnerabilities has increased; if most new groups are also categorised as religious, the results will be biased.

Coolsaet, Rik (Editor). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*.

Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008. p 49.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10209211&ppg=49>

Copyright © 2008. Ashgate Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.



which would place them third. The combined Iraqi groups caused 2,141 fatalities.) (See Table 3.1.)

**Table 3.1 Religious Groups Responsible for over 100 Fatalities, 1968–2005**

Group	Incidents	Injuries	Fatalities
Al-Qaeda	28	8,859	3,533
Al-Qaeda Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers*	179	2,719	1,463
Hezbollah*	180	1,538	838
Hamas*	545	2,904	595
Riyad us-Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade* (Chechnya)	11	1,136	514
Armed Islamic Group	64	259	506
Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)	27	291	503
Ansar al-Sunnah Army	49	894	478
Taliban	168	239	339
Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)	4	699	261
Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade (Al Qaeda in Europe)	9	826	249
Dagestan Liberation Army*	4	453	248
Tawhid and Jihad* (Iraq)	30	219	200
Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)*	55	515	197
Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)*	119	971	186
Movsar Baryayev Gang* (Chechnya)	2	657	162
Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)*	17	276	150
Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GAI)	36	229	134
Ansar Allah	3	236	117
Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) *	29	311	104

\*Classified as hybrid religious and national-separatist groups; note also that Hamas is not typically listed as a 'new terrorist' group even though it is religious and causes mass casualties.

### Organisation

The organisation of the new terrorism is also thought to be fundamentally different from earlier structures of terrorism. The 'new' terrorists are said to be decentralised,

Coolsaet, Rik (Editor). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008. p 50.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=10209211&ppg=50>

Copyright © 2008. Ashgate Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.

with a 'flat' networked apparatus rather than a hierarchical or cellular structure." Sub-units are supposed to have substantial autonomy, if not complete independence, and the scope is transnational (global reach). Much of the new terrorism is thought to be inspirational rather than directed from the top; it is diffuse rather than concentrated. The US Government now says that the war on terrorism is against an ideology rather than an entity. Laqueur says that the new terrorism uses smaller groups (which, in his view, makes them more radical) (Laqueur 1999, 5). Hoffman adds that the new groups are likely to be composed of amateurs rather than professional terrorists who devote their lives and careers to the cause; they are likely also to be less well trained and to rely on information they collect themselves, primarily from the internet (Hoffman 1998, 197 and 203).

By contrast, the 'old' terrorist structure was considered to be centralised and top-down. Orders were given, received, and followed by subordinates. There was a strict chain of command. Hierarchies operated. The classic cellular structure was paramount. Although al-Qaeda is a transnational actor, it is problematic to assume that it is entirely different from the past, that it is necessarily a model for the future, or that secular groups might not organise themselves similarly. First, among 'religious' groups, al-Qaeda is the only example of such a network or franchise/venture capital operation. Other 'religious' terrorist groups are more traditional in form (Hezbollah, Hamas or Egyptian Islamic Jihad). Aum Shinrikyo was extremely hierarchical; like Sendero Luminoso, it was dominated by a charismatic leader. Second, even the intelligence agencies do not completely understand how al-Qaeda is or was organised. There may be or have been much more centralisation than appears to the public eye. Certainly, extensive face-to-face communication occurred within the group, at least prior to 9/11. The importance of the shared experience and socialisation in Afghanistan and subsequent access to recruits from diasporas and from other conflict zones cannot be underestimated in the organisational development of al-Qaeda. The war in Iraq has also provided a training ground and magnet for terrorists. Without these specific historical circumstances and access to territorial bases, the 'new terrorism' might not have evolved.

Furthermore, the organisation of the 'old' terrorism was not always as centralised as it might have appeared. Peter Merkl, for example, has argued that the apparently monolithic quality of the Red Army Faction in West Germany was a myth (Merkl, 1995). The nineteenth-century anarchists formed a transnational conspiracy, linking activists in Russia, Germany, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy and the United States. The essence of anarchism was antipathy to central direction, and much terrorism was locally generated or inspirational. The secular Palestinian groups of the 1970s and 1980s split, merged, resplit and remerged. The relationship of Black September to Arafat and Fatah was one of indirection and deniability. West German and Japanese groups cooperated with Palestinians; in fact, the Japanese Red Army relocated to Lebanon after being driven from Japan. In addition, some of the more hierarchical groups in the past actually allowed significant local autonomy. The Active Service

---

<sup>9</sup> According to Ian Lesser, 'This new terrorism is increasingly networked ... As a result, much existing counterterrorism experience may be losing its relevance as network forms of organisation replace the canonical terrorist hierarchies ...' (Lesser et al. 1999, 87).

Units of the IRA, for example, sometimes acted autonomously, without the approval of the Army Council. The Italian Red Brigades were organised in independent 'columns' in different cities. The French *Action Directe* was actually two groups, one limited to France and the other operating internationally and linked to groups in Belgium.

### The Appeal of the 'New Terrorism' Idea

Why is the idea of a fundamentally new terrorism attractive, if indeed it is as flawed as I claim? One reason may be that the conception of a 'new' terrorism supports the case for major policy change – a justification for a war on terrorism, a strategy of military preemption, and homeland security measures that restrict civil liberties. It is a way of defining the threat so as to mobilise both public and elite support for costly responses with long-term and uncertain pay-offs. Moreover, the shock of the surprise attacks of September 11 was a turning point, especially for officials such as Richard Clarke (and including Simon and Benjamin as former officials from the Clinton Administration National Security Council) who had long warned that terrorism could be a major danger and who felt that they had been ignored (Clarke 2004). The effect of 9/11 resembles the impact of the North Korean invasion of the South in cementing the ideas behind interpretations of the threat of Communism and the militarisation of containment.<sup>10</sup> It seemed and may still seem impossible to consider terrorism a 'first order threat' unless it is defined as unprecedented. If 9/11 had precedents, then we should have taken terrorism seriously and anticipated escalation.

Furthermore the new terrorism model permits top-down processing of information. If policy-makers can rely on a set of simple assumptions about terrorism, they need not worry about a contradictory and confusing reality. In the presence of incomplete and ambiguous information, policy-makers are prone to rely on prior cognitive assumptions. Doing so saves them time, energy and stress. They rely on metaphors, narratives, and analogies that make sense of what might otherwise be difficult to understand, if not incomprehensible. In the same vein, terrorism 'experts', especially newcomers to the field, might find it convenient not to have to take the time to study the complicated history of the phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> If the past is dismissed as irrelevant and only al-Qaeda matters, then the task of analysis becomes much easier. If religion is the cause of the sort of terrorism that poses a threat to national security, then we

<sup>10</sup> Indeed Simon calls for a policy of containment, as the US contained the Soviet Union during the Cold War. A comparison of presidential speeches in the early Cold War years and the post-9/11 period would be instructive. (This is not to say that we should neglect the rhetoric of the second Clinton term) (Simon 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Burnett and Whyte go further to say that 'It is certain that some elite groups will make a great deal of political and social capital out of this war on terror. It is equally certain that state interventions against the terrorists will continue to be supported by a manufactured conception of 'new terrorism' that is founded upon a highly questionable knowledge base' (Burnett and Whyte 2005, 15). They are particularly critical of the role of the Rand Corporation.

need to look no further for an explanation. Nor need we worry about other 'types' of terrorism.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

Rejecting our accumulated knowledge of terrorism by dismissing it as 'obsolete' is dangerous. A misdiagnosis of what the 'new' actually entails could lead to mistakes as grave as those attributed to lack of recognition. For example, the assumption that the sort of catastrophic terrorism that many defined as 'new' would necessarily involve the use of weapons of mass destruction turned out to be mistaken. The expectation was one factor in making surprise possible. Hijackings were thought to be a tactic of the past. Differences among groups and over time do exist, but they may be attributable to a changing environment (processes associated with what is termed globalisation, in particular, such as advances in communications and mobility), specific opportunity structures, and evolutionary progression, even learning. Observations about a 'new' terrorism lack a basis in sustained and systematic empirical research and they neglect history. This school of thought overestimates the effect of religious beliefs on terrorism. The distinction between religious and nationalist motivations is not clear or empirically substantiated, and the argument undervalues the power of nationalism.<sup>12</sup> The data on which the association between religion and mass casualties is based are incomplete, excluding as they do domestic terrorism prior to the late 1990s. Secular ideologies can also be fundamentalist, exclusive and totalitarian, as the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded in the case of Sendero Luminoso.

---

<sup>12</sup> Note Robert A. Pape's argument that suicide terrorism occurs when a resistance movement confronts a foreign military occupier of a different religious faith. I am not in complete agreement with his argument but it is worth considering in relation to this issue. See Pape (2005).