

**WHEN HATRED IS BRED IN THE BONE:
Psycho-cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism**

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Jerrold M. Post, M.D.

While the lay public often considers terrorists to be crazed fanatics, in fact terrorist groups regularly exclude emotionally disturbed individuals from their ranks—after all, they represent a security risk. My own comparative research on the psychology of terrorists¹ does not reveal major psychopathology, agreeing with the finding of Crenshaw² that "the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality." In a review of the Social Psychology of Terrorist Groups, McCauley and Segal³ conclude that "the best documented generalization is negative; terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology."

It is social psychology that provides the most powerful lens through which to examine and explain terrorist behavior, with the majority of the experts stressing the "normality" of the terrorists and emphasizing group psychology⁴ and collective identity, not individual psychopathology. The importance of collective identity and the processes of forming and transforming collective identities cannot be overemphasized. This in turn

¹ Post, J. "It's Us Against Them" The Basic Assumptions of Political Terrorists," in *Irrationality in Organizational Life*, Kranz, J. (ed.) A.K. Rice Institute Press, Washington, D.C. 1987

--- "Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces" in *Origins of Terrorism*, Reich, W.(ed.) Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990.

--- "Differentiating Terrorist Psychologies: The Basis for a Rational Differentiated Anti-terrorist Policy", Proceedings of Conference *Academic Research in Terrorism and Public Policy*, Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1991.

² Crenshaw, Martha 1981 "The Causes of Terrorism" *Comparative Politics* 13: 379-99

³ McCauley, Mark and E. Segal 1987 "Social Psychology of Terrorist Groups" in *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* Vol. 9 of *The Annual Review of Social and Personality Psychology* Hendrick, C.(ed.) Beverly Hills: Sage

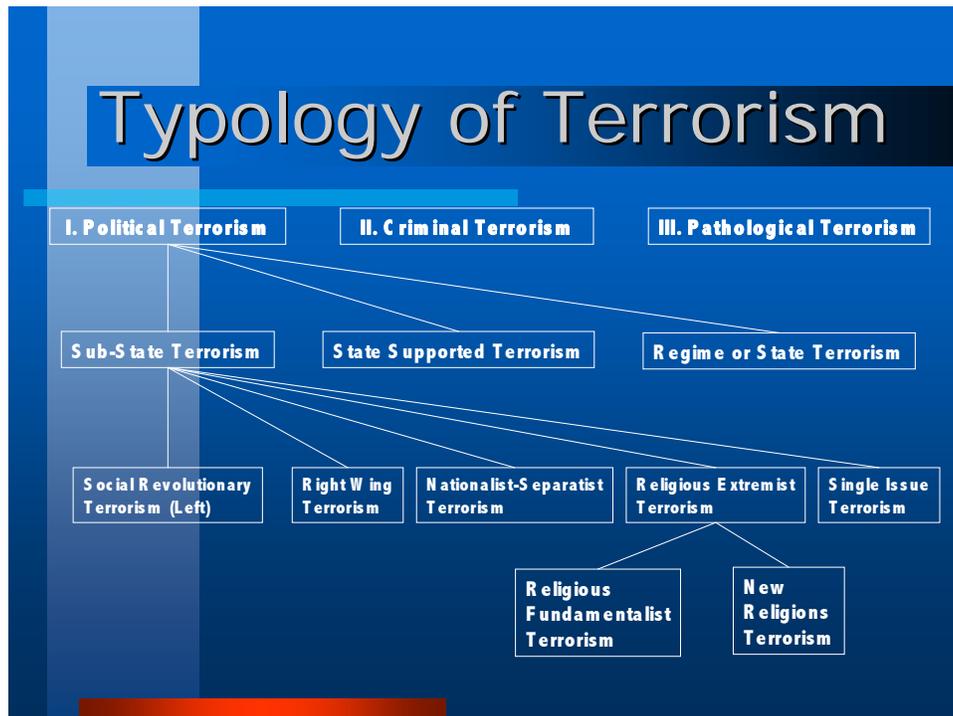
⁴ Post, J. "Group and Organizational Dynamics of International Terrorism: Implications for Counter Terrorist Policy," in Wilkinson, Paul and A.M. Stewart (eds.) *Contemporary Research on Terrorism*, 1987. Aberdeen, Scotland: Aberdeen University Press.

--- "Hostilité, Conformité, Fraternité: The Group Dynamics of Terrorist Behavior," *Int. J. of Group Psychotherapy*, Vol. 36, No. 2, April, 1986.

--- "It's Us Against Them: The Group Dynamics of Terrorist Behavior," *Terrorism*, V. 10, # 1, 1987.

emphasizes the socio-cultural context, which determines the balance between collective identity and individual identity.

In considering psychological and behavioral bases of terrorism, it is important to consider each terrorism in its own political, historical and cultural context.⁵ For terrorism is a product of its own place and time. It is an attractive strategy to a diverse array of groups which have little else in common. In considering the psychology of the broad spectrum of terrorist types reflected in the lower tier of Figure 1.⁶ –right-wing, nationalist-separatist, social revolutionary and religious fundamentalist terrorists— given how different their causes and their perspectives, these types would be expected to differ markedly. So we should be discussing terrorist psychologies-plural-rather than searching for a unified general theory explaining all terrorist behavior.



⁵ Crenshaw, M. 1995 (ed.) *Terrorism in Context* University Park, Pa. Pennsylvania State University Press

⁶ This typology is a modification of the typology introduced by Alex Schmid (1983) in *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* New Brunswick CT:Transaction

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President George W. Bush declared that this was “the first war of the 21st century.” But in fact, the modern era of terrorism is usually dated back to the early 1970s, as represented by the radical Palestinian terrorist group Black September seizure of the Israeli Olympic village at the 1972 Munich Olympics, an event which captured an immense international television audience and demonstrated powerfully the amplifying effect of the electronic media in the information age. In the early years of the modern eras of terrorism, two terrorist types dominated the landscape. They were the *Social revolutionary terrorists*, also known as terrorism of the left, groups seeking to overthrow the capitalist economic and social order., exemplified by the Red Army Faction in Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy and *Nationalist-separatist terrorists*, such as al-Fatah and other radical secular Palestinian terrorists, the Provisional Irish Republican Army of Northern Ireland (PIRA), and the Basque separatist group Euskadi ta Askaratsuna (ETA) (Freedom for the Basque Homeland), seeking to establish a separate nation for their national minority. Both of these group types wished to call attention to their cause and would regularly claim responsibility for their acts. They were seeking to influence the West and the establishment. Often there were multiple claims of responsibility for the same act.

The collective identity of the two group types—social-revolutionary and nationalist-separatist terrorists— that predominated at the onset of the modern era of terrorism could not be more different. Indeed, the generational dynamics of these two group types are polar opposites as reflected in Figure 2.⁷

⁷ This generational matrix was first presented in “Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorism”, Post, J. 1984, in *Terrorism*, Vol 7, #3.

Generational Pathways To Terrorism

	Parents' Relationship to the Regime	
Youths' Relationship to Parents	L oyal	D isloyal Damaged Incident
L oyal	X	National-Separatist Terrorism
D isloyal	Social Revolutionary Terrorism	

As reflected in the upper left hand cell of Figure 2, individuals who are at one with their parents who are at one with the regime, do not become terrorists.

Social-Revolutionary Terrorism

As reflected in the lower left hand cell of Figure 1, social revolutionary terrorists are rebelling against the generation of their parents who are loyal to the regime. They are disloyal to the generation of their families that is loyal to the regime. Their acts of terrorism are acts of revenge against the generation of their family, which they hold responsible for their failures in this world. One of the Baader-Meinhof gang spoke derisively of his parent's generation as follows: "These are the corrupt old men who gave us Auschwitz and Hiroshima." Social-revolutionary terrorist groups have experienced a significant decline over the last two decades, paralleling the collapse of Communism in Europe and the end of the Cold War.

Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism

In contrast to the social-revolutionary terrorist groups, nationalist-separatist terrorism continues as one of the two predominant terrorist types active today. Also known as ethno-nationalist terrorism, these groups are fighting to establish a new political order or state based on ethnic dominance or homogeneity. In vivid contrast to the generational dynamics of the social-revolutionary terrorists, as reflected in the upper right hand cell of Figure 2, they are carrying on the mission of their parents and grandparents who have been damaged by, or are disloyal to, the regime. They are loyal to families that are disloyal to the regime. Their acts of terrorism are acts of vengeance against the regime that damaged their families.

Islamist Fundamentalist Terrorism

But in the past decades, no responsibility has been claimed for upwards of 40% of terrorist acts. We believe this is because of the increasing frequency of terrorist acts by radical religious extremist terrorists, in particular radical Islamist fundamentalist terrorists. They are not trying to influence the West. Rather the radical Islamist terrorists are trying to expel what they consider the corrupt, secular modernizing West. And they do not need recognition by having their name identified in a New York Times headline or on a story on CNN. They are “killing in the name of God” and don’t need official notice; after all, God knows.

Traditional groups include Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Sikh radical fundamentalist extremists. In contrast to social revolutionary and nationalist-separatist terrorists, for religious fundamentalist extremist groups, the decision-making role of the preeminent leader is of central importance. The radical cleric, who is seen as the

authentic interpreter of God's word, provides interpretation of the religious text endowing the destruction of the defined enemy with sacred significance. This interpretation is uncritically accepted by his "true believer" followers, so there is no ambivalence about killing the defined enemy which is religiously commanded. These groups are accordingly particularly dangerous, for they are not constrained by Western reaction, but seek to expel the West, seek revenge against the West.. They have shown a willingness to perpetrate acts of mass casualty terrorism, as exemplified by the 1993 truck bombing of the World Trade Center in the U.S., the 1996 bombing of of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the 1998 coordinated twin city attacks on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es-Salaan, Tanzania, the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole in the Gulf of Yemen, and the mass casualty terrorism on a scale never seen before in the coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Osama bin Laden, responsible for these events, has actively discussed the use of weapons of mass destruction in public interviews.

While many who are drawn to the path of religious fundamentalist terrorism are poor and uneducated, for some of these terrorists there are suggestive similarities to the generational dynamics of the social revolutionary terrorists. Osama bin Laden himself is the most striking example of these generational dynamics and can be considered a political revolutionary operating under the guise of religious fundamentalism.⁸ He is the 17th of 25 sons of a multi-billionaire Saudi construction magnate, whose financial empire

⁸ Post, J 2001 "Killing in the Name of God: Osama bin Laden and Radical Islam" Foreign Service Journal, December, 2001; with expanded political personal profile of bin Laden, Posat, J. "Killing in the Name of God: Osama bin Laden and Radical Islam, " chapter in *Know thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and their Strategic Cultures* Schneider, B. and Post, J. (eds.) Montgomery, Alabama: Counter Proliferation Center, U.S. Air War College

and wealth came from a special relationship with the Saudi royal family. When Osama bin Laden was eleven, his father died. He was worth between two and three billion dollars at his death; Osama bin Laden inherited some 57 million dollars at age 16. After his victory in Afghanistan, expelling the Soviet superpower, bin Laden actively criticized “the apostate regime” in Saudi Arabia for permitting the U.S. military to “occupy the land of the two cities (Mecca and Medina.) When he railed at the corruption of the Saudi royal family and their lack of fidelity to Islam in permitting the American military to establish a base on holy Saudi land, he was striking out at the source of his family wealth, leading not only to his being expelled from Saudi Arabia, but also severely damaging his family, who also turned against him. He was, after all, biting the hand that fed them and had enriched them. He was rebelling against the family that was loyal to the regime.

While not a religious authority, Osama bin Laden is known for his piety, and has been granted the title emir. Like Khomeini, Osama bin Laden regularly cites verses from the Koran to justify his acts of terror and extreme violence, employing many of the same verses earlier cited by Khomeini. Consider this extract from the February 1998 Fatwa, Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, World Islamic Front Statement:

In compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God."

We -- with God's help -- call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it.

Note, it is not Osama bin Laden who is ordering his followers to kill Americans. It is God! Osama bin Laden is the messenger, relaying the commands of God, which are justified with verses from the Koran. The author discussed this language with a moderate Muslim cleric, who indicated that this was blasphemous, that bin Laden was speaking as if he were the new prophet, and was the authentic interpreter of the Koran. He emphasized that many of the actions for which bin Laden found justification in the Koran were in fact prohibited by the Koran.

Al Qaeda, HAMAS, Hizballah and the Islamic Jihad all have found an abundance of recruits, eager to join these Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations. Indeed, Ariel Merari⁹, a prominent Israeli expert on terrorism, noted wryly that for every terrorist killed or captured, there were ten waiting to take his or her place, and that there were now more terrorist volunteers than there are suicide explosive belts.. For them, like the youth drawn to the path of nationalist-separatist terrorism, hatred has been “bred in the bone.”

This emphasizes the crucial role of the leader. The hate-mongering leader plays a crucial organizing role, provides a sense-making explanation for what has gone wrong in their lives, identifying the external enemy as the cause, as well as drawing together into a collective identify otherwise disparate individuals who may be discontented and aggrieved, but who, without the powerful presence of the leader, will remain isolated and individually aggrieved. It was Osama bin Laden and his designated successor Ayman al-

⁹ Merari, Ariel April, 2003 Personal communication.

Zawahiri, co-founder and principal ideologue of al-Qaeda, who provided this sense-making role and forged the collective identity of the radical Islamist fundamentalist trans-national terrorist organization al-Qaeda.

Terrorists in their Own Words

These two groups—nationalist-separatist terrorists and Islamist religious fundamentalist terrorists— represent the major threats to contemporary society and will be the focus of the balance of this paper. To bring the reader into their minds, we will draw upon the words of terrorists themselves, drawing on material from a research project funded by the Smith-Richardson Foundation¹⁰ involving semi-structured interviews with 34 incarcerated radical Middle Eastern terrorists, both radical Islamist terrorists from HAMAS, Islamic Jihad, and Hizballah, and secular terrorists from FATAH and the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as interviews conducted with an Abu Nidal terrorist and al Qaeda terrorists in connection with federal trials.

Secular Palestinian Terrorists in their Own Words

While most Fatah members reported their families had good social standing, their status and experience as refugees was paramount in their development of self-identity.

I belong to the generation of occupation. My family are refugees from the 1967 war. The war and my refugee status were the seminal events that formed my political consciousness, and provided the incentive for doing all I could to help regain our legitimate rights in our occupied country.

For the secular terrorists, enlistment was a natural step. And it led to enhanced social status.

Enlistment was for me the natural and done thing ... in a way, it can be compared to a young Israeli from a nationalist Zionist family who wants to fulfill himself through army service.

¹⁰ Post, J., Sprinzak, E. and Denny, L. 2003

My motivation in joining Fatah was both ideological and personal. It was a question of self-fulfillment, of honor and a feeling of independence ... the goal of every young Palestinian was to be a fighter.

After recruitment, my social status was greatly enhanced. I got a lot of respect from my acquaintances, and from the young people in the village.

In addition to causing as many casualties as possible, armed action provided a sense of control or power for Palestinians in a society that had stripped them of it. Inflicting pain on the enemy was paramount in the early days of the Fatah movement.

I regarded armed actions to be essential, it is the very basis of my organization and I am sure that was the case in the other Palestinian organizations. An armed action proclaims that I am here, I exist, I am strong, I am in control, I am in the field, I am on the map. An armed action against soldiers was the most admired. ...the armed actions and their results were a major tool for penetrating the public consciousness.

The various armed actions (stabbing, collaborators, martyrdom operations, attacks on Israeli soldiers) all had different ratings. An armed action that caused casualties was rated highly and seen to be of great importance. An armed action without casualties was not rated. No distinction was made between armed actions on soldiers or on civilians; the main thing was the amount of blood. The aim was to cause as much carnage as possible.

View of Armed Attacks

Armed attacks are viewed as essential to the operation of the organization. There is no question about the necessity of these types of attacks to the success of the cause.

You have to understand that armed attacks are an integral part of the organization's struggle against the Zionist occupier. There is no other way to redeem the land of Palestine and expel the occupier. Our goals can only be achieved through force, but force is the means, not the end. History shows that without force it will be impossible to achieve independence.

Socialization of Hatred

The hatred socialized towards the Israeli was remarkable, especially given that few reported any contact with Israelis.

You Israelis are Nazis in your souls and in your conduct. In your occupation you never distinguish between men and women, or between old people and children. You adopted methods of collective punishment; you uprooted people from their homeland and from their homes and chased them into exile. You fired live ammunition at women and children. You smashed the skulls of defenseless civilians. You set up detention camps for thousands of people in sub-human conditions. You destroyed homes and turned children into orphans. You prevented people from making a living, you stole their property, you trampled on their honor. Given that kind of conduct, there is no choice but to strike at you without mercy in every possible way.

The Cauldron of Life Experiences of an Abu Nidal Terrorist

In 1997, I had the opportunity and challenge of assisting the Department of Justice as an expert on terrorist psychology in the trial in Federal Court in Washington DC of Mohammad Rezaq, an Abu Nidal terrorist who played a leading role in the skyjacking of an Egypt Air passenger jet in which more than fifty lost their lives in the skyjacking and the subsequent SWAT team attack on the hijacked plane in Malta.¹¹ The defendant epitomized the life and psychology of the nationalist-separatist terrorist. The defendant assuredly did not believe that what he was doing was wrong, for from boyhood on Rezaq had been socialized to be a heroic revolutionary fighting for the Palestinian nation. Demonstrating the generational transmission of hatred, his case can be considered emblematic of many from the ranks of ethnic/nationalist terrorist groups, from Northern Ireland to Palestine, from Armenia to the Basque region of Spain.

¹¹ Post, J. 2000 “Murder in a Political Context: Profile of an Abu Nidal Terrorist” *Bulletin of the Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* (Spring, 2000).

In 1948, when subject's mother was eight, as a consequence of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, her family was forced to flee their home in Jaffa in Israel. They left for the West Bank, where Rezaq was raised. In 1967, when Rezaq was eight, the family fled their pleasant West Bank existence during the 1967 war, ending up in a crowded Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. She told him bitterly that this was the second time this had happened to her.

There he went to school funded by the UN and was taught by a member of FATAH whom he came to idolize. At the time, Arafat's stature as a heroic freedom fighter was celebrated in the camps. He was taught that the only way to become a man was to join the revolution and take back the lands stolen from his parents and grandparents. He first joined FATAH after going AWOL from the Jordanian Army. When he first participated in a terrorist action, he felt at last he was doing what he should do. He left Fatah after becoming disillusioned with Arafat's leadership and ended up in the most violent secular Palestinian terrorist group, the Abu Nidal Organization. When he ultimately was assigned a command role in the skyjacking of an EgyptAir airliner, he felt he was at last fulfilling his destiny. He was taking a bold faction to help his people. He was a soldier for the revolution and all of the actions that he directed that led to the major loss of life were seen as required by his role as a soldier for the cause, a cause that ultimately would lead to the restoration of his family's lands.

Islamist Fundamentalist Terrorism

Interview with a Tanzanian Embassy Bomber

In the spring and summer of 2001, I had the opportunity of interviewing at length one of the defendants in the al Qaeda bombing of the US embassy in Tanzania. Raised on Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania, he was eight when his father died and then was educated in a madrassa, where he was taught to never question what you are told by learned authorities. When he was the equivalent of a junior in high school his brother directed him to leave school and help him in his grocery store in Dar es Salaan. There he was miserable-alone, friendless, isolated, except for this attendance at the Friday prayer services at the mosque, where he learned from the imam that they were all members of the *uma*, the community of observant Muslims, and had an obligation to help Muslims wherever they were being persecuted. He was shown videos of Muslim mass graves in Bosnia and the Serbian military, of the bodies of Muslim women and children in Chechnya and the Russian military. He became inspired and vowed to become a soldier for Allah. But he was informed, I infer by a spotter from al Qaeda, that he could not do this without obtaining training. So, using his own funds, he went to Pakistan and then on to a bin Laden training camp in Afghanistan, where he was taught weapons and explosives handling in the mornings and had four hours of ideological training each afternoon. After seven months when he could not join the struggle in Bosnia or Chechnya, although offered the opportunity to fight in Kashmir, he returned to Dar es Salaan, where he again pursued his menial existence as a grocery clerk, frustrated at his inability to pursue jihad. Three years later he was called in the middle of the night and asked, "Do you want to do a jihad job," and without further inquiry, he accepted. What had been a positive motivation to help suffering Muslims gradually was bent to his participating in this act of mass casualty terrorism.

Religious Fundamentalist Terrorists in their Own Words

The mosque was consistently cited as the place where most members were initially introduced to the Palestinian / Israeli conflict, including members of the secular groups. Many of the secular members report that while activism within the community was most influential in their decision to join, their first introduction to the cause was at the Mosque or in another religious setting. Authority figures from the mosque are prominent in all conversations with group members, and most dramatically for members of the Islamist organizations. The introduction to authority and unquestioning obedience to Allah and authority is instilled at a young age and continues to be evident in the individual members' subservience to the larger organization. This preconditioning of unquestioning acceptance of authority seems to be most evident among the members of the Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

I came from a religious family, which used to observe all the Islamic traditions. My initial political awareness came during the prayers at the mosque. That's where I was also asked to join religious classes. In the context of these studies, the sheik used to inject some historical background in which he would tell us how we were effectively evicted from Palestine.

The sheik also used to explain to us the significance of the fact that there was an IDF military outpost in the heart of the camp. He compared it to a cancer in the human body, which was threatening its very existence.

At the age of 16 I developed an interest in religion. I was exposed to the Moslem brotherhood and I began to pray in a mosque and to study Islam. The Koran and my religious studies were the tools that shaped my political consciousness. The mosque and the religious clerics in my village provided the focal point of my social life.

Community support was important to the families of the fighters as well:

Families of terrorists who were wounded, killed or captured enjoyed a great deal of economic aid and attention. And that strengthened popular support for the attacks.

Perpetrators of armed attacks were seen as heroes, their families got a great deal of material assistance, including the construction of new homes to replace those destroyed by the Israeli authorities as punishment for terrorist acts.

The Emir blesses all actions.

Major actions become the subject of sermons in the mosque, glorifying the attack and the attackers.

Joining Hamas or Fatah increased social standing.

Recruits were treated with great respect. A youngster who belonged to Hamas or Fatah was regarded more highly than one who didn't belong to a group, and got better treatment than unaffiliated kids.

Anyone who didn't enlist during that period (intifada) would have been ostracized.

View of Armed Attacks

The more an attack hurts the enemy, the more important it is. That is the measure. The mass killings, especially the martyrdom operations, were the biggest threat to the Israeli public and so most effort was devoted to these. The extent of the damage and the number of casualties are of primary importance. .

Sense of Remorse/Moral Red Lines

When it came to moral considerations, we believed in the justice of our cause and in our leaders. ... I don't recall every being troubled by moral questions.

In a jihad, there are no red lines.

The Justification of Suicide Bombings

The Islamist terrorists in particular provided the religious basis for what the West has called suicide terrorism as the most valued technique of jihad, distinguishing this from suicide, which is proscribed in the Koran. One in fact became quite angry when the term was used in our question, angrily exclaiming

This is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, it is weak, it is mentally disturbed. This is istishad (martyrdom or self sacrifice in the service of Allah.)

Several of the Islamist terrorist commanders interviewed called the suicide bomber holy warriors who were carrying out the highest level of jihad.

*A martyrdom operation is the highest level of jihad, and highlights the depth of our faith. The bombers are holy fighters who carry out one of the more important articles of faith. ***

** Hassan Salame, responsible for the wave of suicide bombings in Israel in 1996, in which 46 were killed. He is now serving 46 consecutive life sentences.

It is attacks when their member gives his life that earn the most respect and elevate the bombers to the highest possible level of martyrdom.

I asked Halil what is was all about and he told me that he had on the wanted list for a long time and did not want to get caught without realizing his dream of being a martyrdom operation bomber. He was completely calm and explained to the other two bombers, Yusuf and Beshar, how to detonate the bombs, exactly the way he had explained things to the bombers in the Mahane Yehuda attack. I remember that besides the tremendous respect I had for Halil, and the fact that I was jealous of him, I also felt slighted that he had not asked me to be the third martyrdom operation bomber. I understood that my role in the movement had not

come to an end and the act that I was not on the wanted list and could operate relatively freely could be very advantageous to the movement in the future.

Quote from prisoner sentenced to 26 life terms for role in several suicide-bombing campaigns.

Contrast between Suicide Bombers in Israel and Suicidal Hijackers of 9/11

So-called psychological autopsies, i.e. reconstructions of the lives of suicides, have been developed for some 93 suicide bombers of the suicide bombers in Israel. While these findings are undergoing change, and now the age range has broadened significantly and some women have joined the ranks of suicide bombers, they were for the most part carried out by young men between the ages of 17 and 22, unmarried, uneducated, unemployed. They were unformed youth, who, when they volunteered or were recruited, were told by the recruiters that their life prospects were bleak, that they could do something significant with their lives, that they would be enrolled in the hall of martyrs, and their parents would be proud of them and would gain financial rewards. From the moment they entered the safe house, they were never alone, including someone sleeping in the same room with them the night before the action to ensure that they did not backslide and physically escorting them to pizza parlor, disco or shopping mall to carry out their acts of suicide terrorism. Merari has called attention to the suicide bombe production line, where first individuals volunteer to become a *shahid* (martyr), then they are identified publicly as living martyrs, and finally they make the pre-attack video which will then be used both to memorialize their name as well as for recruitment purposes. He observes it is very difficult to back down after passing through these stages; the shame that would attend such a reversal would be unbearable.

What a vivid contrast with the suicidal hijackers of 9/11! Older, their age range was 28-33, with the exception of a small group of younger terrorists, brought in late for “muscle,” who probably were unaware that theirs was not as conventional hijacking. Mohammad Atta, the ringleader, was 33. A number had higher education; Atta and two of his colleagues were in masters degree programs in the technological university in Hamburg. And most came from comfortable, middle class homes in Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Unlike the Palestinian suicide bombers, these were fully formed adults, who had subordinated their individuality to the organization, as they responded uncritically to the siren song of hatred sung by the hate-mongering desecrative charismatic leader, Osama bin Aden. And ,interestingly, and compellingly, in some cases they had been on their own in the West for upwards of seven years, being exposed to the “buzzing, blooming, confusion of a democracy” we live in, simulating blending in, while carrying within them like a laser beam their mission to give of their lives while taking the lives of thousands. Accused of being hypocrites, they were unbearded, did not exchange Muslim greetings, were not seen in mosques, at prayer, or to be fasting.

In the al Qaeda terrorism manual, Declaration of Jihad Against the Country’s Tyrants, which was introduced as an exhibit by the Department of Justice in the trial of the Tanzanian embassy bombers, it explains the rationale for their apparent hypocrisy. In lesson 11, it explains the answer to the question, “How can a Muslim spy live among enemies if he maintains his Islamic characteristics? How can he perform his duties to Allah and not want to appear Muslim?”

Concerning the issue of clothing and appearance, (the appearance of true religion), Ibn Taimia—may Allah have mercy on him— said, “If a Muslim is in a combat or godless area, he is not obligated to to have a different appearance

from (those around him.) The (Muslim) man may prefer or even be obligated to look like them, provided his action brings a religious benefit...

Resembling the polytheist in religious appearance is a kind of “necessity permits the forbidden” even though they (forbidden acts) are basically prohibited.

Collective Identity – Fusion of the Individual and the Group

Once recruited, there is a clear fusing of individual identity and group identity, particularly among the more radical elements of each organization. This is true both for the Islamist terrorists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as those of al Qaeda. Many of the interviewees reported growing up or living in a repressed or limited socio-economic status. Their ability to work was regulated, the ability to travel freely was severely restricted and there was a general impression that they were denied the opportunity to advance economically. There was a common theme of having been “unjustly evicted” from their land, of being relegated to refugee status or living in refugee camps in a land that was once considered theirs. Many of the interviewees expressed an almost fatalistic view of the Palestinian / Israeli relationship and a sense of despair or bleakness about the future under Israeli rule. Few of the interviewees were able to identify personal goals that were separate from those of the organization to which they belonged. But the appeal of al Qaeda as well is to alienated youth, who often feel they are blocked in societies where there is no real possibility of advancement.

There is a heightened sense of the heroic associated with fallen group members and the community supports and rallies around families of the fallen or incarcerated. Most interviewees reported not only enhanced social status for the families of fallen or incarcerated members, but financial and material support from the organization and community for these families as well. “Success” within the community is defined as

fighting for “the cause” – liberation and religious freedom are the values that define success, not necessarily academic or economic accomplishment. As the young men adopt this view of success, their own self-image then becomes more intimately intertwined with the success of the organization. With no other means to achieve status and “success”, the organization’s success become central to individual identity and provides a “reason for living.” Again, while this dynamic emerged clearly for the youth of Islamic Jihad and Hamas, it is also probably a strong characteristic of those attracted to the path of radical Islam elsewhere.

This fusing of the individual to the group is found across all organizations regardless of ideological affiliation. As individual identity succumbs to the organization, there is no room for individuality – individual ideas, individual identity and individual decision-making- while at the same time self-perceived success becomes more and more linked to the organization. Individual self-worth is again intimately tied to the “value” or prominence of the group – therefore each individual has a vested interest in ensuring not only the success of the organization, but to increase its prominence and exposure. The more prominent and more important (and often times the more violent) a group is the greater the prestige that is then projected onto group members. This creates a cycle where group members have a direct need to increase the power and prestige of the group through increasingly dramatic and violent operations.

As the individuals and the group fuse, the more personal the struggle becomes for the group members. There is a symbiotic relationship created between the individual need to belong to a group, the need to ensure success of the group, and an enhanced desire to be an increasingly more active member of the group. There is thus a

personalization of the struggle, with an inability to distinguish between personal goals and those of the organization – they were one and the same. In their discussion of armed action and other actions taken, the success or failure of the group’s action was personal – if the group succeeded, then as an individual they succeeded, if the group failed, they failed. Pride and shame as expressed by the individual were reflections of group actions, not individual actions, feelings or experiences. There is an overarching sense of the collective that consumes the individual. This fusion with the group seems to provide the necessary justification for their actions and absolution, or loss of responsibility, to the individual – if the group says it’s ok, then its ok. If the authority figure orders an action, then the action is justified. Guilt or remorse by the individual is not tolerated because the organization does not express it. Again this is intensified among Islamist groups who feel they have a moral obligation to the cause and a religiously sanctioned justification for their actions.

Most interestingly and illustrative of this concept of individual and group fusion is the perception or characterization of “the enemy.” While there are slight differences between the secular and Islamist groups in the exact definition of the enemy, the overall experience in defining the enemy is remarkably similar. The Islamist groups are fighting for a pure Islamic State. Many interviewees cite Iran as an example of the type of state they would like to create. While the secular groups have a type of constraint by the nature of their view of the struggle, the Islamist groups have no such restraint. There is no concern about alienating any “earthly” population as the only “audience,” for they are seeking to satisfy is Allah. With their direction coming in the form of religious Fatwahs (religious edicts) and sanctioned by religious clerics and other figures the identification of

the enemy -whether Israel or the United States,- is clear and simple for these Islamist groups ; it is anyone who is opposed to their world view.

Terrorist Psychology: Implications for Counter-terrorist Strategy

If these conclusions concerning the individual, group and organizational psychology of political terrorism are valid, what are the implications for anti-terrorist policy? (It is interesting to observe how passionately arguments are waged concerning counter-terrorist policies given the relative lack of reliable understanding of terrorist psychology.) This emphasizes that this is no mere academic exercise, for after all, policies designed to deter terrorists from their acts of terrorism should be based on an understanding of "what makes terrorists tick."

Since terrorisms differ in their structure and dynamics, counter-terrorist policies should be appropriately tailored. As a general rule, the smaller and more autonomous the group, the more counterproductive is external force. When the autonomous cell comes under external threat, the external danger has the consequence of reducing internal divisiveness and uniting the group against the outside enemy.¹² The survival of the group is paramount because of the sense of identity it provides. *Terrorists* whose only *sense of significance* comes from *being terrorists* cannot *be forced to give up terrorism*, for *to do so would be to lose their very reason for being*. To the contrary, for such individuals violent societal counter-reactions reaffirm their core belief that "it's us against them and they are out to destroy us. "A tiny band of insignificant individuals has been transformed into a major opponent of society, making their "fantasy war", to use

¹² Post, J. 1987 "It's Us Against Them: The Group Dynamics of Terrorist Behavior," *Terrorism*, V. 10, # 1.

Ferracuti's apt term, a reality. One can indeed make the case that left to their own devices; these inherently unstable groups will self-destruct.

Similarly, for terrorist organizations for which violence is defined as the only legitimate tactic for achieving their espoused goals, outside threat and a policy of reactive retaliation cannot intimidate the organizational leadership into committing organizational suicide and ceasing to exist. For that is what ceasing committing acts of political violence would be if those acts were the sole self-definition.

For complex organizations dedicated to a cause, such as Basque separatism, where an illegal terrorist wing operates in parallel with a legal political wing as elements of a larger loosely integrated organization, the dynamics-and the policy implications are again different. In such circumstances, if the overall organizational goals—in this case Basque separatism—are threatened by societal reactions to terrorism, one can make a case that internal organizational constraints can operate to constrain the terrorist wing. However, insofar as the terrorist group is not fully under political control, this is a matter of influence and partial constraint only. A striking example is provided by ETA, the Basque separatist terrorist organization, which continues to thrive despite the significant degree of separatism already achieved.

For state-supported and directed terrorist groups, the terrorist group is in effect a paramilitary unit under central governmental control. In this situation, the individual, group and organizational psychological considerations discussed thus far are not especially relevant. The target of the antiterrorist policy in this circumstance is not the group per se but the chief of state and the government of the sponsoring state. Since the survival of the state and national interests are the primary values, there is a rational case

to be made that retaliatory policies can have a deterring effect, at least in the short term. But even in this circumstance, to watch the children in the camps in the aftermath of bombing attacks shaking their fists in rage suggests such tactics are contributing to rising generations of terrorists. It is important that in pursuing short-term security goals designed to thwart terrorism that the West not so degrade civil liberties that it descends to the level of the terrorists. One cannot eliminate terrorism without eliminating democracy, as occurred with tragic results in the so-called “dirty wars” in Argentina.

Just as political terrorism is the product of generational forces, so too it is here for generations to come. When “hatred is bred in the bone,” and passed from generation to generation, it does not yield easily to peace talks. *There is no short-range solution to the problem of terrorism.* Once an individual is in the pressure cooker of the terrorist group, it is extremely difficult to influence him. In the long run, the most effective antiterrorist policy is one that inhibits potential recruits from joining in the first place, for once an individual is in the grip of the terrorist group the power of the group and organizational psychology will increasingly dominate his psychology.

Political terrorism is not only a product of psychological forces, its central strategy is psychological. For political terrorism is, at base, a particularly vicious species of psychological warfare. It is violence as communication. Up until now; the terrorists have had a virtual monopoly on the weapon of the television camera as they manipulate their target audience through the reactive media. Terrorists perpetuate their organizations by shaping the perceptions of future generations of terrorists; they demonstrate their power and significance and define the legitimacy of their cause. Countering the terrorists' highly effective media-oriented strategy through effective

dissemination of objective information and public education must be key elements of a pro-active program.

One does not counter psychological warfare with smart bombs and missiles, although they can certainly play a useful role in a military campaign against harboring states. One counters psychological warfare with psychological warfare.¹³ In the long run, the most effective ways of countering terrorism are to:

1. Inhibit potential terrorists from joining the group

Security alone cannot accomplish this. Alienated youth must be able to envisage a future within the system that promises redress of long-standing economic and social inequity and come to believe that political activism can lead to their finding a pathway to these goals. Otherwise, striking out violently in despair will continue to seem like the only course available.

2. Produce dissension within the group

The groups are virtual hot-houses of tensions and rivalries. Active measures are required to magnify these tensions and pressures.

3. Facilitate exit from the group,

Once a terrorist has become a member of a group and committed terrorist acts, he is a wanted criminal, and it can seem he has “no way out.” As important as it is to inhibit potential terrorists from joining, so too it is important to facilitate terrorists leaving. The powerful hold of the group has been described in detail. By creating pathways out of terrorism, that grip can be reduced. Amnesty programs modeled after the highly effective *pentiti* program of the Italian government can usefully contribute to that goal. There are

¹³ An expansion of this argument will be found in Post, J. 2004 “Psychological Operations: Key Weapon in Countering Terrorism”. Joint Force Quarterly, Fall, 2004

similar programs in the Basque region, as well as the so-called “super-grass” program in Northern Ireland, where reduced sentences or amnesty are offered for cooperation with the authorities, in effect a “protected witness” program. The Spanish authorities have provided plastic surgery and resettlement in Latin America. Such programs can not only facilitate exit from the group but information derived from these defectors can be employed to produce dissension within the group as well.

4. **Reduce support for the group.**

Reducing support for the group-both in its immediate societal surroundings and in the nation at large-are further long-range programs to foster. This is particularly important, as important as inhibiting potential recruits from joining in the first place, indeed contributing to this goal. Thus the group or organization must be marginalized, its leader delegitimated. Osama bin Laden at the present is a romantic hero to many alienated youth in the Islamic world, his organization al Qaeda a highly attractive option to consider. An effective strategic communication program will increasingly marginalize al Qaeda as an aberrant extremist group that is contrary to mainstream Islam, and will depict bin Laden not as a heroic figure, but as a self-consumed individual whose extreme actions damage all of Islam and the future of aspiring Muslim youth. This will require active leadership by moderate Muslim clerics and moderate Muslim political leaders countering the extremists in their midst.

All of these goals are components of a strategic communication process that must be a central component of our anti-terrorist policy. This is not a policy that will swiftly end terrorism, but a process that must be put in place. Just as many of the attitudes that have made the path of terrorism attractive to alienated youth have taken place over

decades, it will require decades to reduce the attractiveness of terrorism for those who have been raised in a climate dominated by hopelessness and despair, with “hatred bred in the bone,” so that extremism and violence have increasingly come to be seen as the only course.