A Theory of Categorical Terrorism

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Abstract

When revolutionaries or insurgents, broadly defined, indiscriminately attack civilians, they generally attack "complicitous civilians," i.e., those categories of noncombatants which the revolutionaries see as benefiting from, supporting and/or having a substantial capacity to influence the states that the revolutionaries are attempting to displace or overthrow. Such "categorical" terrorism will be most extensive when revolutionaries view these states (or complicitous civilians themselves) as perpetrators of extensive, indiscriminate violence against the revolutionaries and their constituents. However, if significant numbers of complicitous civilians are seen by rebel groups as potential supporters (or as capable of being influenced by nonviolent appeals or protests), then they will not be indiscriminately attacked. Whether specific categories of civilians will be perceived as potential allies by revolutionaries depends mainly on the prior history of political interaction and cooperation between these civilians and the revolutionaries. Categorical terrorism is most likely where there has been little such interaction or cooperation, resulting in weak political alliances between the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians – for example, where the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians speak different languages, practice different religions, claim the same land, and/or are territorially segregated.

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have spurred many social scientists to explore the dynamics of terrorism, most for the first time. Before 9/11, terrorism research was the exclusive preserve, with very few exceptions, of small networks of political scientists and non-academic "security experts," relatively few of whom were interested in social-science theory. Descriptive case studies abound, replete with ad hoc, case-specific explanations of terrorism. Curiously, most scholars of rebellion and revolution have had virtually nothing of significance to say about terrorism. More generally, the *strategic choices* of social movements – of which terrorism is one – have received much less scholarly attention than the causes and consequences of such movements.

In this article, I begin with a definition of terrorism and revolutionary terrorism; I then discuss several extant theories of terrorism, noting their insights and shortcomings; and I outline my own theory of "categorical" terrorism, a type of terrorism that has been employed by insurgents with increasing frequency in recent years. Although my theory requires more rigorous empirical testing than I can provide here, I believe that it helps to explain – better than extant approaches – why some revolutionary movements, *but not others*, employ or try to employ a strategy characterized by the use of violence against anonymous civilians or noncombatants who share a particular collective identity. It is terrorism in this sense which today alternately fascinates, repels and inspires women and men across large parts of the globe.

What is Terrorism?

Like "democracy," "power," "class," "revolution" and so many other "essentially contested concepts," there is no commonly accepted definition of "terrorism." And yet explanation

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requires a clear analytic definition or demarcation of the phenomenon to be explained, even if, empirically, terrorism is not always easily distinguished from cognate phenomena. "Leaving the definition implicit is the road to obscurantism." (Gibbs 1989:329)

Several representative definitions of terrorism are presented in Table 1. The *deliberate use of violence in order to influence some audience (or audiences*) is common to most of these definitions, but there are also several areas of divergence. First, there is no consensus as to who can *practice* terrorism: Can states as well as oppositional groups engage in terrorism? Several definitions (Hoffman; the U.S. State Department; Black; Bergesen and Lizardo) seem to imply that "state terrorism" is either a misnomer or at least something that needs to be distinguished from terrorism proper and presumably analyzed in its own right. Second, there is disagreement as to who can be the *target* of terrorist threats or violence: Can *anyone* be a target of terrorism – or just civilians (or "noncombatants")? Several definitions (Carr; Ganor; the U.S. State Department; Black; Bergesen and Lizardo) suggest that only civilians or noncombatants can be the targets of terrorism, properly understood. Finally, there is disagreement as to whether terrorism necessarily produces *terror* among some audience – that is, extreme fear or anxiety. Several definitions (Tilly; Crenshaw; Ganor; the U.S. State Department; Black; Bergesen and Lizardo) make no mention of terror or fear. Carr is more ambiguous, defining terrorism as intending to "destroy the will" of civilians to support certain leaders or policies. These definitions seem to imply that terrorism may not always terrorize and hence may in fact influence audiences by other means.

I believe that non-state or oppositional terrorism is most usefully defined as follows: *Terrorism is the strategic use of violence and threats of violence by an oppositional political group against civilians or noncombatants, and is usually intended to influence several audiences*. This definition, which is fairly conventional, agrees with those that suggest terrorism involves violence or threats *by civilians against other civilians*, thus differentiating terrorism from guerrilla warfare, on the one hand, and state violence, on the other. (This definition is also agnostic as to whether terrorism is intended literally to terrorize.) What we must explain in order to explain terrorism is not why political groups sometimes resort to violence, but why they employ violence against civilians or noncombatants in particular (Goodwin 2004). Following this definition, *revolutionary terrorism* may be defined as *the strategic use of violence and threats of violence by a revolutionary movement against civilians or noncombatants, and is usually intended to influence several audiences*. I employ the concept of "revolutionary movement" broadly here, meaning any organization or network, and its supporters, which seeks to change the political, and in some cases the socioeconomic, order in more or less fundamental ways. The audiences that revolutionaries attempt to influence with terrorism generally include the category of civilians whom they have targeted for violence, the state(s) that they wish to change, the revolutionaries' constituents, the revolutionaries' own ranks, and those other states and publics that might influence the outcome of the conflict.

These definitions do not imply that state violence or "state terrorism" does not exist or should not be studied. On the contrary, state terrorism is an enormously important subject; it is incontestable, for example, that state terrorism has claimed many more victims than has terrorism as I define it here. (See, for example, Herman and O'Sullivan 1989: chaps. 2-3; Gareau 2004). But state terrorism and oppositional forms of terrorism need to be clearly distinguished if only to understand better the relationship between the two.

My definition of revolutionary terrorism also has the advantage of demarcating a widely recognized political strategy that has been employed by revolutionary groups with some frequency, especially since the 1960s – a strategy clearly distinct from, albeit sharing family resemblances with, such violent oppositional strategies as coups d'état, conventional and guerrilla warfare (directed at a state's armed forces), and economic sabotage. Indeed, at least

Table 1: Definitions of Terrorism

Government by intimidation as directed and carried out by the party in power in France during the Revolution of 1789-94 … 2. A policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation … " – *Oxford English Dictionary*

Terrorism "means an activity that … appears to be intended to (i) intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping." – *U.S. Code* (cited in Chomsky 2001:16)

Terrorism is "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change." – *Bruce Hoffman* (1998:43)

Terrorism is "asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some current regime." – *Charles Tilly* (2004:5).

Terrorism is "the contemporary name given to, and the modern permutation of, warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable." – *Caleb Carr* (2003:6)

Terrorism is "the premeditated use or threat of symbolic, low-level violence by conspiratorial organizations." – *Martha Crenshaw* (1981:379)

Terrorism is "organized political violence, lethal or nonlethal, designed to deter opposition by maximizing fear, specifically by random targeting of people or sites." – *Austin T. Turk* (1982:122).

"Terrorism is the intentional use of or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims." – *Boaz Ganor* (1998)

Terrorism is "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." – *U.S. State Department* (cited in Hoffman 1998:38)

"Pure terrorism is self-help by organized civilians who covertly inflict mass violence on other civilians." – *Donald Black* (2004:16)

Terrorism is "the use of violence by nonstate groups against noncombatants for symbolic purposes, that is, to influence or somehow affect another audience for some political, social, or religious purpose." – *Albert J. Bergesen and Omar Lizardo* (2004:50).

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since the 1960s, terrorism has become part of the "repertoire of contention" (Tilly 1995), which is culturally available to virtually all insurgent groups around the globe, whatever their political goals may be.

Finally, my definition of revolutionary terrorism emphasizes, conventionally, that the groups that employ terrorism are oppositional *political* groups which view terrorism, for the most part, as a *political* strategy. These groups may also be nationalist, ethnic, religious, class-based

and/or criminal in nature, but they seek – whatever else they may seek – to change the political (and perhaps socioeconomic) order more or less fundamentally. Revolutionary groups that employ terrorism as a strategy (like those which eschew it) seek, minimally, to overthrow or terminate a state's power within a specific territory (including colonial and military occupations) or to secede from a political order and set up a new state (or join a preexisting one). Accordingly, violence directed at civilians by vigilante or paramilitary groups that are *not* attempting to change the political order in fundamental ways would count, depending on the circumstances, as either state-sanctioned or oppositional terrorism, but not as revolutionary terrorism.

Two types of terrorism need to be analytically differentiated, both of which differ from conventional and guerrilla warfare, insofar as the latter are directed against a government's armed forces, state-sanctioned paramilitaries or armed civilians (see Table 2).[1] Of course, as Donald Black points out, "those popularly known as guerrillas may sometimes engage in terrorism [when they attack civilians], and those popularly known as terrorists may sometimes engage in guerrilla warfare [when they attack military facilities or personnel]." (2004:17)

One type of terrorism, which we may call "selective" or "individualized," is directed against noncombatants who are targeted because of their individual identities or roles; in fact, these individuals are typically known *by name* to at least some members of the revolutionary movement. These individuals typically include politicians and (unarmed) state officials, usually those held responsible, directly or indirectly, for the social and political arrangements and government policies that the revolutionaries oppose (including "counter-terrorist" policies). They may also include competing oppositional leaders and political activists, presumed government collaborators and spies, unsympathetic intellectuals and journalists, and common criminals who prey upon the revolutionaries' supporters. This type of terrorism – essentially a strategy of "targeted assassination" – was employed by some 19th-century Russian revolutionaries, a number of anarchist groups and several radical European groups of the 1960s. Terrorism of this type, especially when targeted at real or imagined collaborators whom the government cannot (or will not) protect, may result in an exceedingly large number of casualties, as in Peru during the 1980s and Algeria during the 1990s (see, e.g., Kalyvas 1999).

Table 2: Three Types of Armed Struggle

Targets of Revolutionaries		
Combatants	**Noncombatants**	
Defense Forces	Politicians	Anonymous members of an ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class, etc.
Security Forces	State Administrators	
Paramilitaries/ Armed Civilians	Leaders/Activists of Competing Oppositions	
	Presumed Collaborators	
	Common Criminals	
1. Conventional or Guerrilla Warfare	2. Selective or Individualized Terrorism; Targeted Assassination	3. Categorical or Indiscriminate Terrorism

Targeted assassination or selective terrorism is very different from "indiscriminate" or what I term "categorical" terrorism, which is directed against anonymous individuals by virtue of their belonging (or seeming to belong) to a specific ethnic or religious group, nationality, social class or some other collectivity. This type of terrorism – the focus of this article – is typically called indiscriminate or "random" terrorism because it makes no distinctions among the *individual* identities of its targets. In another sense, however, such terrorism is *very* discriminate, being directed against specific categories of people and not others. For this reason, "categorical terrorism" is a more accurate label than "indiscriminate terrorism" for this strategy. Revolutionaries who practice terrorism, whether selective or categorical, also display varying degrees of tolerance for harming anonymous bystanders, that is, people who are not the individual, or who do not belong to the category, targeted for violence. The U.S. military refers to such casualties as "collateral damage."

Following the general definition of terrorism given above, *categorical terrorism* may be defined as *the strategic use of violence and threats of violence, usually intended to influence several audiences, by oppositional political groups against civilians or noncombatants who belong to a specific ethnicity, religious or national group, social class or some other collectivity, without regard to their individual identities or roles*. In much, if not most, popular discourse, as well as for many scholars (e.g., Turk 1982; Senechal de la Roche 1996; Black 2004), "terrorism" fundamentally *is* categorical terrorism in this sense. "Indiscriminate" violence is seen by many as an essential property of terrorism. Terrorism in this sense, particularly as it is practiced (or not) by revolutionary movements, is what I seek to explain with my own theory of categorical terrorism.

There is substantial variation in the extent to which revolutionary movements employ categorical terrorism as a strategy. Table 3 lists some of the more important revolutionary groups that arose during the period since World War II as well as their principal violent strategies (excluding economic sabotage). Of course, revolutionary groups generally employ a number of both violent and nonviolent strategies in pursuit of their goals, and their mix of strategies typically changes over time. For this reason, it can be quite misleading to describe some such groups as "terrorist organizations" or others as "guerrilla groups." These labels falsely "essentialize" revolutionary movements not just in terms of their strategic orientation – a rather limited view of what any movement is all about – but also in terms of just *one* of their strategies at any given moment.

The first five sets of revolutionary groups listed in Table 3 perpetrated or continue to perpetrate extensive categorical or indiscriminate terrorism. The other listed organizations were (or are) generally much more selective or individualized in their use of terrorism; at least one group, the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, employed virtually no terrorism to speak of. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA) are borderline cases. Before it went on cease-fire in 1997, the IRA typically engaged in attacks on security forces as well as some selective terrorism, but it also occasionally carried out bombings and other sectarian killings of ordinary Protestants in both Northern Ireland and Britain, especially during the height of "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland during the mid-1970s (English 2003). Historically, ETA has directed most of its violence against the Spanish military and police presence in the Basque region and against politicians of parties that oppose Basque independence. However, it has also engaged in occasional bombings and attempted bombings against civilians (Clark 1984).

Clearly, any adequate theory of categorical terrorism needs to explain the wide variation shown in Table 3. That is to say, it is necessary but not sufficient to explain why some revolutionary movements have practiced categorical terrorism; an adequate theory must also explain why other revolutionary movements have *not* carried out categorical terrorism or have done so relatively infrequently.

Table 3: Coercive Strategies of Revolutionary Organizations

Country	Dates	Main Organization(s)
Algeria	1954-1962	**National Liberation Front (FLN)** *categorical and selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
Palestine/Israel	1964-present	**Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad** *categorical and selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
Sri Lanka	1983-2002?	**Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** *categorical and selective terrorism; conventional and guerrilla warfare*
Various countries	1988-present	**al-Qa'ida** *categorical and selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
Chechnya/Russia	1996-present	**Chechen separatists** *categorical and selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
Nicaragua	1961-1979	**Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)** *very limited selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
South Africa	1961-1990	**African National Congress (ANC)** *very limited categorical terrorism; some selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
Basque Country/ Spain	1968-2006?	**Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA)** *very limited categorical terrorism; selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
N. Ireland/U.K.	1969-1997	**Irish Republican Army (IRA)** *some categorical terrorism (esp. mid-1970s); selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*
El Salvador	1980-1992	**Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN)** *limited selective terrorism; guerrilla warfare*

Extant Theoretical Approaches

When social scientists attempt to explain why revolutionaries employ terrorism, how do they do so? Here, I briefly review three theoretical claims: (1) terrorism is a product of the *weakness and desperation* of revolutionaries; (2) terrorism is a response to *state terrorism*; and (3) terrorism is a result of extreme "*social polarization*" between groups. While these claims offer important insights into terrorism, they are ultimately unsatisfactory.

Before examining these claims, however, I should note that a typical explanation for terrorism in much public discourse, and by many scholars, is *grievance-based* (Stern 2003). That is to say, many people suggest that the "root causes" of terrorism are found in the specific and variable grievances of those who utilize terrorism as a strategy. But this argument is extremely problematic. The removal of grievances that presumably motivate revolutionaries should end their acts of terrorism. But those who make this argument never explain which kinds of grievances require or somehow cause terrorism to be utilized by revolutionaries as

opposed to other political strategies. Grievances may be a necessary cause of collective action, but it is less clear how they cause people to act in the ways that they do. In fact, ends do not explain means any better than they justify them. Thus, as they are typically articulated, grievance-based accounts of terrorism are at best incomplete and at worst quite misleading (Goodwin 2004).

After grievance-based explanations, perhaps the most frequently cited hypothesis is that terrorists are very weak, lack popular support, and yet are desperate to redress their grievances. This claim – or rationalization – also seems very popular among many groups that employ terrorism. The core idea here is that groups that lack the capacity to organize nonviolent protests or conventional or guerrilla warfare against repressive governments, or which fail to attain their goals when they *do* employ these strategies, will turn to terrorism as a "last resort." Martha Crenshaw, for example, suggests that "Terrorism is the resort of an elite when conditions are not revolutionary… terrorism is most likely to occur precisely where mass passivity and elite dissatisfaction coincide." (1981:384) For these reasons, Rubenstein (1987) calls terrorists "alchemists of revolution."

Disaffected elites, according to Crenshaw, turn to terrorism because it is easier and cheaper than strategies based on mass mobilization, especially when government repression makes mass mobilization difficult if not impossible. "In situations where paths to the legal expression of opposition are blocked, but where the regime's repression is inefficient, revolutionary terrorism is doubly likely, as permissive and direct causes coincide." (Crenshaw 1981:384) Revolutionary groups will presumably employ categorical terrorism, moreover, because it is generally even cheaper than selective terrorism (Kalyvas 2004). There may be only so many opportunities available for killing a particular politician or competing opposition leader, for example, but setting off a bomb in a pub or bus may be relatively simple and will also produce more casualties. "The observation that terrorism is a weapon of the weak," Crenshaw concludes, "is hackneyed but apt. At least when initially adopted, terrorism is the strategy of a minority that by its own judgment lacks other means. When the group perceives its options as limited, terrorism is attractive because it is a relatively inexpensive and simple alternative, and because its potential reward is high." (1981:387) (For similar views, see Rubenstein 1987; Irvin 1999:chap. 2; Pape 2005:92-4; Bloom 2005.)

There are a number of logical and empirical problems with this theory of terrorism. Most importantly, this theory by itself does not explain why attacking or threatening ordinary civilians would be perceived by revolutionaries as beneficial instead of detrimental to their cause. Terrorism may be cheaper than many other strategies, but why employ it at all? We need to know what revolutionaries believe they will gain by attacking specific categories of civilians. What are their strategic goals and expectations? Would not attacks on civilians simply undermine the popularity of revolutionaries or their own morale? To say that the revolutionaries are weak begs these questions.

Second, there does not seem to be a particularly strong empirical relationship between the organizational strength of revolutionary groups and their use (or not) of terrorism. Some quite formidable revolutionary movements have employed terrorism. For example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka are, by all accounts, a very powerful revolutionary group. The LTTE has sometimes even employed methods of conventional warfare against Sri Lankan government forces. Yet the (predominantly Tamil) LTTE has also occasionally engaged in indiscriminate attacks on ordinary ethnic Sinhalese civilians, and it has done so long after it decimated rival Tamil nationalist groups (Bloom 2005:chap. 3). Why?

One can also point, conversely, to quite weak revolutionary organizations that have eschewed terrorism. Perhaps the best example of this is the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. In 1961, as many of its leaders were being arrested and many others driven into exile, the ANC established an armed wing called *Umkhonto we*

Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation" or MK). The ANC explicitly adopted "armed struggle" as one of its main political strategies. By most accounts, however, this armed group failed to become an effective guerrilla force, as the South African Defense Forces were simply too strong and effective. And yet MK did *not* adopt a strategy of terrorism, despite the fact, as Gay Seidman points out, that, "In a deeply segregated society, it would have been easy to kill random whites. Segregated white schools, segregated movie theaters, segregated shopping centers meant that if white deaths were the only goal, potential targets could be found everywhere." (2001:118) However, as Stephen Davis notes, "since the exile leadership sought to portray the ANC as a principled and responsible contender for power, it imposed restrictions against terrorist tactics that specifically targeted noncombatant whites." (Davis 1987:121) The then-president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, "even went to the extent of signing a protocol of the Geneva Convention which legally bound the ANC to avoid attacks on civilian targets, and to 'humanitarian conduct of the war,' marking the first time a guerrilla group had ever done so."[2] (Davis 1987:121-22)

In short, weak revolutionary groups do not necessarily adopt a strategy of terrorism, and strong revolutionaries do not necessarily eschew this strategy. As Turk concludes, "Because any group may adopt terror tactics, it is misleading to assume either that 'terrorism is the weapon of the weak' or that terrorists are always small groups of outsiders – or at most a 'lunatic fringe' . . . Terror is organized violence, but the nature of the organization cannot be specified in defining terror." (1982:122)

Some of the many investigations of the socioeconomic backgrounds of insurgents who have engaged in terrorism, to the extent that they bother to address issues of causation, also point to a type of weakness as the source of terrorism. One idea in this literature is that poor, and poorly educated, people are especially likely to become terrorists because they are desperate for resources, status or power, but lack the ability to use other strategies for securing these. The evidence for this claim, however, is quite weak. In fact, as Crenshaw's thesis suggests, much research demonstrates that the members of revolutionary groups that practice terrorism are just as likely, if not more likely, to come from elite social strata as from working- or lower-class backgrounds (Krueger and Maleckova 2003).

The insight of the "weakness theory" of terrorism is that oppositional groups *do* generally seem to take up arms after they have concluded that nonviolent politics cannot work or that it works too slowly or ineffectively to redress urgent grievances. But notice that this does not tell us why armed groups would employ terrorism as opposed to guerrilla warfare. Moreover, the argument that attacking "soft" targets such as unprotected civilians is cheaper and easier than waging guerrilla warfare against government forces does not explain why *all* oppositional groups do not engage in terrorism. It would seem irrational not to do so.

Another hypothesis claims that terrorism is a response to *state terrorism*. Leftist analysts of terrorism often make this claim, and it is mentioned by Herman and O'Sullivan (1989). They suggest that the "retail" terrorism of oppositional groups is caused or provoked by the "wholesale" or "primary" terrorism of states, especially powerful Western states, above all the United States. The terms "wholesale" and "retail," which have also been employed by Noam Chomsky, are meant to remind readers that state terrorism has been much more deadly than oppositional terrorism. This claim certainly has an intuitive plausibility. Why else would oppositional groups turn to violence except when they confront a government or state that is itself unmoved by and indeed uses violence against peaceful protesters? Avenging such state violence, or trying to deter its future use, would seem to be reason enough for opposition groups to employ violent strategies. And yet, as an explanation of terrorism, this hypothesis is also beset by both logical and empirical problems.

It is certainly true that indiscriminate state violence, especially when perpetrated by relatively weak states, has historically encouraged the development of revolutionary

movements (Goodwin 2001). But why would these movements attack and threaten ordinary *civilians* as opposed to the state's armed forces? In other words, if they are responding to *state* terrorism, why would revolutionaries not target only *the state*? State terrorism would seem to be a better explanation for a strategy of guerrilla (or conventional) warfare than for a strategy of terrorism.

Empirically, one can also point to revolutionary organizations that have arisen in contexts of extreme state violence which have nonetheless eschewed the strategy of terrorism. For example, Central American guerrilla movements of the 1970s and 1980s, including the Sandinistas (FSLN) in Nicaragua and the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador, confronted states that engaged in extensive violence against noncombatants, yet neither revolutionary group engaged in categorical terrorism, and the Sandinistas engaged in virtually no terrorism of any type. Another such example is, once again, the ANC in South Africa. Interestingly, Herman and O'Sullivan's book devotes considerable attention to both South African and Israeli state terrorism (1989:chap. 2). And yet, while they note the "retail" terrorism of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1970s and 1980s – emphasizing that Israeli state terrorism was responsible for a great many more civilian deaths during this period – they do not discuss the oppositional terrorism in South Africa which their theory would seem to predict. In fact, as we have noted, the ANC simply did not carry out much terrorism. State terrorism, clearly, does not always cause or provoke categorical terrorism.

Having said this, it is indeed difficult to point to a revolutionary group that has carried out extensive terrorism which has *not* arisen in a context of considerable state violence. Leaving aside for the moment the case of al-Qa'ida, all of the groups in Table 3 that have engaged in extensive categorical terrorism are drawn from, and claim to act on behalf of, populations that have themselves suffered extensive and often indiscriminate state repression (in French Algeria, the West Bank and Gaza, Sri Lanka and Chechnya). The question is what to make of this correlation. Why, in these particular contexts, have revolutionaries attacked certain categories of civilians as well as government forces?

A final hypothesis worth considering is that terrorism is the result of extreme "social polarization" between groups. Such polarization is said to exist when such groups are relationally distant (i.e., they have little if any intimate contact), culturally distant (i.e., they differ in terms of language, religion, dress and other "expressive" characteristics), functionally independent (i.e., they do not cooperate with or depend on one another for their well-being), and extremely unequal in terms of wealth, status and power (Senechal de la Roche 1996). "Enduring grievances" against, or "intractable offenses" by, socially distant groups allegedly provide the motive for organizing terrorist attacks against them. Thus, "terrorism is most likely in polarized conflicts where the grievance endures." (Senechal de la Roche 1996:120; see also Black 2004:18) By contrast, "closer civilians such as those of the same or similar ethnicity are largely immune to terrorism, especially its deadlier forms. If closer collective conflicts lead to violence at all, they produce different forms with fewer civilian casualties, such as riots, assassinations, kidnappings, and guerrilla warfare." (Black 2004:20)

This theory is also intuitively plausible. It is indeed difficult to imagine that two populations would engage in a violent conflict if they have extensive face-to-face contact, belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language and worship the same god, depend on one another for their livelihoods, and are more or less equal in terms of wealth, status and power. In fact, we would presumably not recognize two such populations as distinct "groups" at all. Furthermore, it is quite *easy* to imagine that members of a subordinate group would come to hate, and even view as inherently evil, members of a dominating group with whom they have little intimate contact and who belong to a different "race," speak a different language, practice a different religion, and are much wealthier and more powerful. Empirically, there

does seem to be a huge "social distance" separating those revolutionaries who practice categorical terrorism (and those they claim to speak for), on the one hand, and their civilian targets, on the other. The conflicts in French Algeria, Palestine/Israel, Sri Lanka and Chechnya were or are characterized by extreme polarization – in terms of wealth, status, power, ethnicity and religion.

Nonetheless, the social-polarization theory of terrorism is plagued by a number of ambiguities. To begin with, how could "enduring grievances" or "intractable offenses" arise between groups that are in fact functionally independent, groups that do not cooperate with one another economically, politically, militarily or otherwise? (Senechal de la Roche 1996:111) Indeed, would not functional independence actually *discourage* violence between groups by making it difficult for one group to plausibly blame the other for its grievances? If my own livelihood really does not depend in any way on some other group, why would I care if its members have more money than me or dress differently or do not recognize me on the street? *Extremely* socially distant groups care little about one another, so why would one blame the other for its ills, let alone attack it?

Proponents of the social-polarization thesis are vague about the precise forms of social distance that encourage extreme hatred, moral repulsion or at least callous indifference between groups – sentiments that would seem to be necessary for groups to support terrorist violence against civilians. They speak in very general terms when describing the goals of revolutionary groups, and they say virtually nothing about the strategic goals of terrorist violence. Accordingly, it is difficult to determine from this literature precisely *why* revolutionary groups would indiscriminately attack civilians, be they "socially distant" or otherwise, instead of employing other means to attain their goals. Will just any type of "enduring grievances" lead to terrorism? According to Senechal de la Roche, "Invasions, military dictatorships, and other patterns of domination provide fertile conditions for terrorism." (1996:119) But would not military invasions and military dictatorships encourage their opponents to adopt a strategy of conventional or guerrilla warfare against military forces? Why attack civilians in these contexts? "Terrorists typically demand a restoration of the past," claims Donald Black, "such as political independence, lost territory, or a customary way of life." (2004:18) But, again, why attack civilians indiscriminately in pursuit of such goals? How do these goals require or encourage terrorism?

Finally, there have in fact been situations in which groups have massacred people who are seemingly "socially close" to them, even neighbors. Jan Gross (2001), for example, recounts how the Christian residents of the Polish town of Jedwabne brutally and indiscriminately killed their Jewish neighbors (or stood by silently) in July 1941 – 1,600 men, women and children in all.[3] Previously, according to at least one (non-Jewish) resident, the Jews of Jedwabne were "on good terms with the Poles. Depending on each other. Everybody was on a first-name basis, Janek, Icek . . . Life here was, I would say, somehow idyllic." (Gross 2001:18) There seem to have been extensive economic relations between Jedwabne's Jewish and non-Jewish residents (most Jews were craftsmen and merchants), as well as considerable residential integration.

A Theory of Categorical Terrorism

We can begin to move toward a better understanding of categorical terrorism by considering the precise categories of civilians which revolutionaries (sometimes) target for violence. How revolutionaries "socially construct" and attribute blame to their enemies is something the aforementioned theories generally do not examine. Yet, clearly, revolutionaries do not indiscriminately attack just *any* civilians or noncombatants. Indeed, revolutionaries are also

usually interested in winning the active support or allegiance of certain civilians. So which are the "bad" or blameworthy civilians whom they attack?

When they employ a strategy of categorical terrorism, revolutionaries generally threaten and attack what we might call "complicitous civilians."[4] Revolutionaries view these categories of civilians as complicitous insofar as they are believed to (1) routinely *benefit from* the actions of the government or state that the revolutionaries oppose, (2) *support* the government or state, and/or (3) have a substantial capacity to *influence* or to direct the government or state. Such complicitous civilians are akin to what Charles Tilly calls "polity members," that is, groups which "can routinely lay claim to the generation of action or yielding of resources by agents of the government." (Rule and Tilly 1975:55)

The precise categories of civilians that revolutionaries view as complicitous depend on how revolutionaries construe the extant political order that they are trying to change. Different types of complicitous civilians are generally associated with different regime types (see Table 4). Precisely how revolutionaries construe or socially construct political regimes, hence complicitous civilians, is a complex process, one that depends, among other things, on an organization's ideology, collective memory and practical experience (as filtered through its ideology). One group might view the United States, for example, as a genuinely representative democracy in which the general citizenry is complicit in government policies, whereas another group might view the United States as a "bourgeois democracy" in which only the bourgeoisie or wealthy businesspeople are complicitous. To take another example, some Palestinians believe that Israeli Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza are the complicitous civilians of a settler regime, while other Palestinians believe that *all* Israeli Jews, including Jews living within Israel's pre-1967 borders, are the complicitous civilians of a settler regime, understood in a very different sense. In any event, one will not be able to understand why certain revolutionary groups target particular categories of civilians without grasping the revolutionaries' understanding of the political order that they confront and the complicitous civilians associated therewith.

Table 4: Targets of Categorical Terrorism: "Complicitous Civilians"

How do revolutionaries construe the extant political regime?	
Political Regime	**Complicitous Civilians**
Autocracy	Cronies of the autocrat (usually not anonymous), the wealthy
Oligarchy or "Bourgeois Democracy"	Dominant economic class, businesspeople, the wealthy
Single-party Authoritarian Regime	Party members
Ethnocracy	Dominant ethnic group
Settler Regime	Settlers
Colonial or Neocolonial ("Puppet") Regime	Expatriate and comprador bourgeoisie, metropolitan bourgeoisie, general citizenry of the metropolis
Democracy	General citizenry

But why indiscriminately attack or threaten complicitous civilians? To answer this question, we need to understand not only how revolutionaries socially construct specific civilians as enemies but also how they weigh the costs and benefits of violently attacking such enemies once they have been defined. What, then, are the potential strategic benefits of terrorist attacks against complicitous civilians? The main strategic objective – the primary incentive – of categorical terrorism is *to induce complicitous civilians to stop supporting, or to proactively demand changes in, certain government policies or the government itself*. Categorical terrorism, in other words, mainly aims to apply such intense pressure to complicitous civilians that they will demand that "their" government change or abandon policies that the revolutionaries oppose. Research on terrorism suggests that there are several other strategic objectives behind indiscriminate attacks on complicitous civilians, including:

> • *To provoke a violent overreaction by the government against the revolutionaries and their presumed supporters, ultimately benefiting the revolutionaries*
> • *To undermine efforts at peace or reconciliation between the government and competing oppositional groups, ultimately benefiting the revolutionaries*
> • *To attract, retain and/or boost the morale of revolutionaries and supporters*
> • *To avenge specific acts for which complicitous civilians are held responsible*
> • *To seize or recover territory from the government*

The fact that a group or movement may have one or more of these strategic objectives or incentives does not automatically "cause" categorical terrorism. Whether such goals will actually induce revolutionaries to adopt a strategy of categorical terrorism depends on a number of other factors, including whether revolutionaries believe they have the organizational and technical capacity to wage an effective campaign of terrorism. More generally, the strategic choice of revolutionaries to employ categorical terrorism is much complicated by the fact that this strategy also has many potential costs as well as benefits. Research on terrorism suggests that there are several reasons why revolutionaries might reject a strategy of categorical terrorism:

> • *Complicitous civilians may be potential members or allies of the revolutionary movement.*
> • *Nonviolent appeals or protests may influence complicitous civilians more effectively than threats or violence.*
> • *Terrorism may anger or repel the members or supporters of the revolutionary movement.*
> • *Terrorism may harm or prevent alliances with actually or potentially sympathetic third parties.*
> • *Terrorism may provoke state repression for which the revolutionaries will be blamed by their constituents.*
> • *Terrorism may provoke state repression that will severely weaken or even destroy the revolutionary movement itself.*

Because there are often very good reasons to employ *and* reject a strategy of terrorism, revolutionaries usually confront a number of "strategic dilemmas." (Jasper 2004:7-10) There may be no simple solution to these dilemmas, because revolutionaries may have imperfect

information about the political regime, complicitous civilians or even their own presumed constituents, and thus cannot easily predict reactions to terrorism. Because these dilemmas are not always easily resolved, moreover, they do not clearly direct revolutionaries along a particular line of action. This may help account for the sheer unpredictability of some terrorist attacks as well as the seemly quixotic or self-defeating character of others.

One strategic dilemma, which Jasper labels "naughty or nice" (2004:9), has to do with whether collective action is more effective when it involves friendly persuasion or coercion. For revolutionaries, one concern is whether complicitous civilians will be more effectively influenced by nonviolent appeals or protests or by violence and threats. Nonviolent appeals are relatively cheap, but they may not work; and violence, even when efficiently executed, may backfire, inducing complicitous civilians, for example, not to pressure "their" government to change its ways but to redouble their support for it. The less familiar revolutionaries are with the cultural beliefs and assumptions of complicitous civilians (i.e., the greater the cultural distance between these groups), the more likely they are to strategically miscalculate.

Another strategic dilemma, which Jasper calls "reaching out or reaching in," concerns the "issue of whether to play to inside or outside audiences once they are defined." (2004:10) As noted above, one reason why revolutionary groups sometimes employ terrorism is to attract, retain and/or boost the morale of activists, but this may only serve to alienate potential allies. On the other hand, heeding such allies and rejecting terrorism may undermine the morale of activists and risk losing the political initiative to more violent organizations (Bloom 2005:chap. 4). This dilemma is evident among Palestinian groups. Terrorism against Israeli Jews has sometimes won the approval of many Palestinians (and other Arabs), but at the cost of alienating potential allies outside the Middle East.[5]

Revolutionaries' calculations about whether they should employ categorical terrorism as a strategy are not made in a vacuum, outside of any social, political or cultural context. A theory of categorical terrorism needs to specify the key contextual factors that create incentives or disincentives for revolutionaries to engage in such terrorism. Sometimes these factors pull in both directions, but sometimes they may convince revolutionaries that their strategic dilemmas may be more or less adequately resolved by a consistent course of action.

The key factors in a theory of categorical terrorism must be those that either *blur* or *brighten* the cognitive, affective and moral distinctions between the political order that a revolutionary group seeks to change and the civilians who live under that political order. Factors that *blur* this distinction encourage categorical terrorism, insofar as the latter rests upon the revolutionaries' failure or refusal to draw a moral, affective or even conceptual distinction between a hated political regime and "its" citizens or some subset of them. Factors that *brighten* this distinction discourage terrorism by dissociating civilians from the targeted regime and its policies.

My theory proposes that three key contextual factors strongly influence the decision of revolutionaries either to employ or not to employ categorical terrorism (see Table 5). First, and most importantly, terrorism is encouraged when revolutionaries perceive that certain categories of civilians – complicitous civilians – benefit from, support, demand or tolerate *extensive and indiscriminate state violence or state terrorism* against the revolutionaries and their presumed constituents. This perception is more or less strongly encouraged by the ideologies of revolutionary organizations, but also by institutional arrangements and everyday practices that (a) blur the boundaries between the government and these complicitous civilians (e.g., elections) and/or (b) blur the boundaries between the military and complicitous civilians (e.g., universal conscription). In other words, practices that tend to elide the distinction between state and citizen, on the one hand, or between combatant and noncombatant, on the other, also tend to elide the willingness or even capacity of revolutionaries (and others) to make moral, affective or even cognitive distinctions between these categories.

Table 5: Key Variables Affecting Revolutionaries' Use of Categorical Terrorism

+		−
1. Complicitous civilians support extensive state violence/state terrorism	vs.	State violence is limited and/ or conspicuously opposed by complicitous civilians
(a) Boundaries between the state and citizens are blurred	vs.	State autonomy from society
(b) Boundaries between the military/ combatants and civilians/ noncombatants are blurred	vs.	Military autonomy from society and/or the political regime
2. Complicitous civilians are numerous and relatively unprotected	vs.	Complicitous civilians are few and well protected
3. Weak or absent political alliances or cooperation between revolutionaries and complicitous civilians (i.e., strong linguistic, religious, and/or territorial segregation)	vs.	Significant political alliances between revolutionaries and complicitous civilians

I noted earlier that revolutionary groups that have employed a strategy of categorical terrorism are usually drawn from, and claim to act on behalf of, populations that have suffered extensive and often indiscriminate state repression (in French Algeria, the West Bank and Gaza, Sri Lanka and Chechnya). In each of these cases, moreover, there was or is a perception by the revolutionaries of *substantial civilian support* for (or toleration of) that repression (by European settlers, Israelis, Sinhalese and Russians, respectively). Indeed, the governments that carried out the repression in these cases had a substantial measure of democratic legitimacy among complicitous civilians; some still do. Democratic rights and institutions are often effective at creating the impression (especially at some social distance) of substantial solidarity between citizens and "their" states. When extensive and indiscriminate state violence is seen to be supported by civilians and/or orchestrated by democratically elected governments, it is hardly surprising that revolutionaries would tend to view both repressive states *and* the civilians who seem to stand behind those states as legitimate targets of counter-violence, typically justified as "self-defense." Nor is it surprising that *retribution* for such violence would be directed at civilians as well as at the state's armed forces. And it would also be reasonable under these circumstances for revolutionaries to conclude that attacking civilians might cause the latter to put substantial pressure on "their" states to change their ways. Extensive state ("wholesale") terrorism begets extensive oppositional ("retail") terrorism, in other words, *only when there exists a citizenry with significant democratic rights*. The latter would appear to be a necessary precondition for extensive categorical terrorism (Pape 2005, Goodwin 2006).

A second contextual factor that encourages categorical terrorism is the existence of a large and relatively unprotected population of complicitous civilians. By contrast, categorical terrorism is discouraged when the category of complicitous civilians is comparatively small and, accordingly, such civilians are few and far between and/or well protected (usually because of their wealth and/or political status). Hence, categorical terrorism is much more likely when an entire ethnic group or nationality is viewed by revolutionaries as complicitous as compared, for example, to a small social class or the cronies of an autonomous, "above class" dictator. And, in fact, all major cases of categorical terrorism seem to have entailed the use of violence and threats against a large ethnic or national group.

This factor helps to explain why the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua carried out virtually no terrorism during their armed conflict with the personalistic Somoza dictatorship, an otherwise bloody insurgency during which some 30,000 people were killed (Booth 1985). Complicitous civilians in this context consisted of a tiny number of Somoza cronies and a loyal elite

opposition, both of which were drawn mainly from Nicaragua's small bourgeoisie. Virtually all other civilians in Nicaragua, from the lowliest peasant to Somoza's bourgeois opponents, were viewed by the Sandinistas as potential allies, and indeed many would become such (Everingham 1996). Had the Somoza dictatorship been supported by more or larger social strata or by a particular ethnic group of substantial size, the Sandinistas would undoubtedly have engaged in more categorical terrorism against these groups.

The third main contextual factor that encourages terrorism is a particular *type* of "social distance," namely, the weakness or absence of political alliances between revolutionaries and their presumed constituents and complicitous civilians. In fact, where one finds this type of *political* distance as well as mass-supported state violence, ideologies and/or cultural idioms that depict complicitous civilians as blameworthy and perhaps even inherently evil are especially likely to resonate among the victims of that violence. Simply put, these victims will not have experienced any positive political interactions with complicitous civilians to weigh against the palpable evil that the latter are seen to countenance or directly perpetrate. There has in fact been a huge political distance – in this particular sense – separating those revolutionaries who practice categorical terrorism (and those they claim to speak for) and their civilian targets.

By contrast, categorical terrorism is *discouraged* when there *are* significant political alliances or forms of cooperation between revolutionaries and complicitous civilians. (For a similar argument about ethnic rioting, see Varshney 2002.) In other words, when revolutionary groups and their constituents have a history of collaborating politically with significant numbers of complicitous civilians, they are not likely to classify complicitous civilians as enemies. To attack such civilians indiscriminately would jeopardize politically valuable alliances and the resources and legitimacy attached to them.

I believe that this last factor is extremely important for understanding why the ANC in South Africa rejected a strategy of categorical terrorism. The ANC eschewed this strategy even though the apartheid regime that it sought to topple employed very extensive state violence against its opponents. This violence, moreover, was clearly supported (or tolerated) by large segments of the white, especially Afrikaner, population. The Nationalist Party governments that unleashed the security forces against the regime's enemies were elected by the white population. So why did the ANC adhere to an ideology of "multiracialism" and refuse to view whites as such as enemies? The answer lies, I believe, in the ANC's long history of collaborating with white South Africans, especially of British background – as well as with Indian and "colored" (mixed race) South Africans – in the anti-apartheid struggle. Perhaps especially important in this respect was the ANC's long collaboration with whites in the South African Communist Party. Tellingly, an important, long-time leader of MK, the ANC's armed wing, was Joe Slovo, a white Communist. (Try to imagine an Israeli Jew leading Hamas's armed wing or an American Christian directing al-Qa'ida.) For the ANC to have indiscriminately attacked South African whites would have soured this strategic relationship, which, among other things, was essential for securing substantial Soviet aid for the ANC. In sum, given the long-standing multiracial – including international – support for the anti-apartheid movement, a strategy of categorical terrorism against complicitous (white) civilians made little strategic or moral sense to ANC leaders.

In sum, my theory of categorical terrorism predicts – and seems to retrodict accurately – that when revolutionaries indiscriminately attack civilians, they generally attack those large and unprotected categories of civilians or noncombatants, and only those who are perceived as benefiting from, supporting and/or having a substantial capacity to influence states that employ extensive, indiscriminate violence against revolutionaries and their constituents. However, if revolutionaries perceive significant numbers of these "complicitous civilians" as actual or potential supporters (or as capable of being influenced by nonviolent appeals or protests), then they will not be attacked. Whether specific categories of civilians will be

perceived as potential allies by revolutionaries depends mainly upon a history of political interaction and cooperation (or lack thereof) between these civilians and the revolutionaries. Categorical terrorism is most likely where there has been little such interaction or cooperation, resulting in weak political alliances between the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians – for example, where the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians speak different languages, practice different religions, claim the same land, and/or are territorially segregated.

The essential elements of this theory can be represented by means of a conceptual space, represented in Figure 1. The first variable is a measure of the extent to which revolutionaries perceive civilian support for (and/or toleration of) extensive and indiscriminate state violence or state terrorism against themselves and their constituents. This variable can be said to be "strong" if state violence is great *and* revolutionaries believe that large numbers of civilians support or tolerate it. This variable would be "weak" if state violence itself is limited *or* if revolutionaries believe that relatively few civilians support it, however extensive or limited that violence may be. The second variable is the strength of the cross-cutting political alliances that connect (or fail to connect) revolutionaries and their constituents and complicitous civilians. Categorical terrorism occurs when and where revolutionaries perceive strong civilian support for extensive state violence *and* cross-cutting political ties between the revolutionaries and complicitous civilians are weak (i.e., when revolutionary groups fall into the upper left region of the conceptual space in Figure 1). Otherwise, revolutionaries will adopt strategies of conventional and/or guerrilla warfare and/or targeted assassination.

Figure 1. A Theory of Categorical Terrorism

	Cross-cutting political alliances and/or cooperation between revolutionaries and complicitous civilians	
	Weak	**Strong**
Strong		
Perceived civilian support for extensive state violence against revolutionaries and their constituents	French Algeria Israel/Palestine Sri Lanka Chechnya	Apartheid South Africa
Weak	[categorical terrorism] Northern Ireland (1970s-80s) El Salvador (1980s)	Basque Country Nicaragua (1970s)

Conclusion

Al-Qa'ida and 9/11

By way of conclusion, let me turn to the question of whether the theory outlined here explains why al-Qa'ida and affiliated Islamist groups have carried out extensive categorical terrorism, including the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. I believe that it does. To be sure, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates differ from other revolutionary organizations that have practiced categorical terrorism insofar as they represent a genuinely *transnational* revolutionary movement. That is to say, al-Qa'ida not only has militants in more than one national society, which is by no means unusual among revolutionary groups, but it also opposes and seeks to overthrow not just one, but several political orders (Gunaratna 2002). Al-Qa'ida is also unusual insofar as it has employed extensive

categorical terrorism against the citizens of states that it is trying to influence but not overthrow.

Al-Qa'ida has a pan-Islamic revolutionary project, viewing itself as the vanguard and defender of the transnational *umma* or Muslim community. Unfortunately, in al-Qa'ida's view, this multiethnic, transnational community is currently balkanized and violently oppressed by "apostate" secular and "hypocritical" pseudo-Islamic regimes, from Morocco to Mindanao, as well as by the "Zionist entity" in Palestine. And standing behind these regimes – and now occupying Iraq – is the powerful U.S. government (and, to a lesser extent, other Western governments, especially the United Kingdom). This perception that the United States is the ultimate power which is propping up repressive, un-Islamic regimes in the Muslim world is the fundamental source of al-Qa'ida's conflict with the United States. Al-Qa'ida believes that until the U.S. government – the "far enemy" – can be compelled to end its support for these regimes – the "near enemy" – and withdraw its troops from Muslim countries, local struggles against these regimes cannot succeed (Anonymous 2002, Doran 2001).

But why kill ordinary Americans in addition to U.S. armed forces? Why would al-Qa'ida target the World Trade Center, for example, in addition to U.S. military installations? Shortly after 9/11, Osama bin Laden described the rationale for the attacks in an interview that first appeared in the Pakistani newspaper *Ausaf* on Nov. 7, 2001:

> *The United States and their allies are killing us in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine and Iraq. That's why Muslims have the right to carry out revenge attacks on the U.S. . . . The American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government and that they voted for their president. Their government makes weapons and provides them to Israel, which they use to kill Palestinian Muslims. Given that the American Congress is a committee that represents the people, the fact that it agrees with the actions of the American government proves that America in its entirety is responsible for the atrocities that it is committing against Muslims. I demand the American people to take note of their government's policy against Muslims. They described their government's policy against Vietnam as wrong. They should now take the same stand that they did previously. The onus is on Americans to prevent Muslims from being killed at the hands of their government. (Quoted in Lawrence 2005:140-1.)[6]*

Bin Laden seems to be saying here that because the United States is, in his view, a genuinely representative democracy, ordinary citizens are responsible for the violent actions of "their" government (and, indirectly, of governments supported by the United States) in Muslim countries (Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003:88-9). Al-Qa'ida views ordinary American citizens as complicitous civilians – morally culpable for the U.S.-sponsored "massacres" of Muslims in a number of countries. This idea was also expressed by Mohammad Sidique Khan, one of the four suicide bombers who killed more than 50 people in London on July 7, 2005. In a videotape broadcast on *al-Jazeera* television on Sept. 1, 2005, Khan said, "Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters." (BBC News 2005)

To be sure, al-Qa'ida's precise strategic goal in attacking U.S. citizens remains unclear: Was 9/11 a reprisal for massacres carried out or supported by the United States? Was 9/11 meant to "wake up" Americans to what their government was doing in the Islamic world, in the hope that they would force it to change its policies? Or was the goal perhaps to provoke a violent overreaction by the U.S. government, luring it into Afghanistan, where it would become

bogged down (like the Soviet Union before it) in an unwinnable war? Or some combination of these goals? What is certain, however, is al-Qa'ida's belief that it is logical and indeed just for it to attack ordinary Americans in order to bring about change in "their" government's policies.

As in similar cases in which revolutionaries have turned to a strategy of terrorism, al-Qa'ida perceives that the state violence and oppression which it and its constituents suffer has widespread civilian support in the United States. At the same time, al-Qa'ida and its Islamist sympathizers obviously do not have the type of history of political collaboration with American citizens which might lead them to reject a strategy of categorical terrorism; language, religion and geography have created a formidable chasm between the two. The confluence of these factors, as elsewhere, has strongly encouraged, and continues to encourage, al-Qa'ida's terrorist strategy against the United States and its allies.

Notes

1. Some authors seem to assume that the tactic of suicide bombing is inherently terrorist in nature (e.g., Bloom 2005; Pape 2005). This is incorrect. Suicide bombings may either be part of a strategy of conventional or guerrilla warfare (if they are aimed at military and/or political targets) or a strategy of terrorism (if aimed at ordinary civilians or noncombatants) (Goodwin 2006).

2. Several indiscriminate bombings were carried out by ANC cadres during the mid-1980s, contrary to ANC guidelines, but these caused relatively few casualties and were publicly denounced by the ANC leadership. There were also many incidents of violence against cadres in ANC camps outside of South Africa, including the killing of dissidents and presumed dissidents. But these were targeted killings, not the kind of indiscriminate violence that I wish to explain in this article.

3. Of course, I do not mean to claim that this massacre is an example of categorical terrorism. It was not perpetrated by an oppositional political group; on the contrary, it was encouraged by the governing Nazi occupation forces in Poland. Accordingly, the Jedwabne massacre is not a case of terrorism as I am using the term, although it clearly has affinities with terrorism, like other state-sanctioned atrocities.

4. My thanks to Steven Lukes for suggesting this term.

5. See the various polls conducted since 1993 by the Palestinian Center for Political and Survey Research (http://www.pcpsr.org/index.html).

6. Prior to 9/11, in a December 1998 interview that appeared on *al-Jazeera* television, bin Laden remarked, "Every American is our enemy, whether he fights directly or whether he pays taxes. Perhaps you have heard the recent news that three-quarters of the American people support Clinton in attacking Iraq. This is a people whose votes are won when innocents die, whose leader commits adultery and great sins and then sees his popularity rise – a vile people who have never understood the meaning of values." (quoted in Lawrence 2005:70)

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