Terrorists and their audiences:
Three strategies of political violence[1]

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Introduction

On 11 September 2001, terrorists hit "the temple of free enterprise" and "the cathedral of American military might" (Barber 2001: xi). The attacks shook the confidence of security among Americans, even among Westerners in general. They also raised the fighting spirit of those in the Middle East who felt oppressed by the forces symbolized by the WTC and the Pentagon. A third effect only became manifest some years later when American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, part of a *War on Terror* in response to the attacks, roused the anger of large numbers of Muslims both in the Middle East and among immigrants in Western Europe. Each of these three effects benefits the perpetrator and/or his cause in a different way.

The purpose of this article is to make the distinction between these three effects explicit. While they are not mutually exclusive, and the perpetrator does not always have to choose between them, they have different implications, which a shrewd terrorist may exploit and which pose different obstacles to antiterrorist policies. Although the academic literature recognizes all three effects, it does not clearly distinguish between them and does not draw out their implications. In this article, I use a comprehensive and widely accepted definition (Schmid & Jongman 1988) as a starting point for discussion. I argue that it denotes not one but three uses of political violence, as indicated in the opening paragraph, which are commonly thrown together. I proceed to describe briefly the strategic method and historical antecedents of each. This leads to a reflection on political grand strategies. I conclude with a discussion of two practical implications, first, terrorist target selection, and, finally, counterterrorist strategies tailored to the terrorists' strategy.

One definition, three strategies

One of the most widely accepted definitions of terrorism and certainly, the most comprehensive is given by Schmid & Jongman (1988: 28):

> *Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly*

(targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.

Schmid & Jongman compiled their definition from responses to questionnaires sent out to a large number of scholars in the field. It includes elements named by most or many of the respondents as characteristic of terrorism. The central elements are violence and communication. Schmid & Jongman first identify terrorism as a method, i.e. as a means rather than an end and are mindful that particular terrorist incidents are part of a campaign, which may only achieve its desired ends after multiple violent actions. They specify that the means include violence directed against a direct target, which is not the main target. The latter, instead, is an audience, or more than one audience, which the perpetrators reach indirectly through the communication of their violence. Hence, the importance of the media to terrorists. In order to reach their goals, perpetrators rely on the reaction of their main target audience(s). It is this reaction that they seek to manipulate.

However, this definition is so broad as to include quite a few apparent, and perhaps some real, contradictions. First, according to Schmid & Jongman, target selection is either random or selective. When random, when selective, is an open question. Also unanswered is whether that makes a difference to the message generated. Second, while intimidation and coercion can go together at least to some extent, propaganda (if propaganda is to mean more than agenda setting) implies a wholly different attitude on the part of the main target audience. Third, the target of propaganda can hardly be the same audience in whom the perpetrators' violence inspires anxiety. It is possible to remove the latter two contradictions by limiting the meaning of propaganda to agenda setting, thus asserting that terrorists are content to put their issue on the table, while its resolution is a matter not of persuasion but of coercion. However, the history of terrorism contains many examples where the terrorists strove actively to convince others of the justice of their cause. Since Schmid & Jongman, as well as most other students of terrorism, consider such cases part of the same phenomenon, the limitation is not useful.

The contradiction can also be resolved if there are in fact two or more target audiences. One audience can be the target of intimidation and coercion, another the target of propaganda. However, Schmid & Jongman's definition provides little guidance for determining the relations between multiple audiences, and between the perpetrators

and their various audiences. While it is not necessarily the case that more than one audience is involved in every terrorist campaign, various campaigns (that all fit the definition) feature target audiences that vary according to their type, involving at least one and sometimes more than one different audience.

This article views Schmid & Jongman's definition as a compound in which elements from three different strategies are brought together. The three effects of 9/11 mentioned in the opening paragraph all fit. However, they cannot be made to fit together as a single instance without stretching the definition. For a start, they have different main target audiences. These target audiences naturally receive different messages. To the extent that the perpetrator of the attacks consciously chooses or emphasizes a particular target audience and a particular message, he selects a strategy. The word strategy is chosen to indicate both method and (as Schmid & Jongman phrase it) repetition. It is also intended to reflect conscious planning, similar to conventional military planning.

All three strategies involve indirect targeting, where violence is brought against one target in order to influence another main target, which witnesses, but does not directly suffer, the attacks. Schmid & Jongman's distinction between immediate victims and main targets and their emphasis on communication applies. Their understanding that media coverage is crucial to success holds true. Aware of this, the perpetrators in each strategy stage their violence as a spectacle to be witnessed. In this sense, all three strategies discussed in this article are types of theatrical violence[2]. There are nevertheless important differences between these strategies. These differences reflect the apparent contradictions in the definition. What makes the distinctions between the three different types of theatrical violence is the character of the audience or audiences and the behavior expected of them by the perpetrators. The following three sections give brief descriptions of the three strategies.

Classical terrorism

Terrorism in the narrow sense makes use of fear, hence the name. (It will become clear that fear does not play the same role in the other two strategies.) While the physical attack commonly kills or hurts persons who are usually defined by the terrorists as enemies, the larger effect consists of the generation of a psychological reaction in an audience. This effect is fear. Fear, then, does the terrorist's work, inflating his presence so as to put his causes on the political agenda or forcing the audience to change its behavior. The main target, as Schmid & Jongman write, is the audience. In this case, the audience is identified with the victim of the direct attack. It is hostile to the goals of the terrorists, and so is not convinced but defeated. The purpose of the terrorist campaign is to terrorize an enemy so that he loses the will to fight. At minimum, terrorism impresses on a

hostile audience the recognition that a given situation constitutes a problem.

Terrorism can be considered a "military strategy" that avoids a direct confrontation with enemy forces in order to strike straight at the will of the enemy. Military campaigns generally aim at disarming the opponent through a victory over his military or through occupation of his territory. However, military theorists have sometimes developed strategies directed at the enemy's will to fight. Early airpower theorists, such as Giulio Douhet, advocated massive strategic air strikes against population centers in order to overwhelm the opponent psychologically. It should be noted that Douhet and other air-power theorists believed that strategic air strikes would so shorten the duration of wars that the net effect would be to save lives (Klinkert 2002). Perhaps because they have little chance of success in conventional warfare, terrorists also attempt to circumvent the opponent's armaments (whether military or police) and strike directly at the locus of the opponent's will to fight. Democracies are particularly vulnerable to this type of attack, although all regimes are susceptible to the extent that they rest on public support. This is not to say that terrorist operations resemble conventional military operations, or terrorist organizations military organizations. In these respects and particularly with regard to the laws of war, terrorists distinguish themselves unfavorably from (most) militaries. It should nevertheless be recognized that terrorism perfectly adheres to Clausewitz' (1968: 101) dictum that 'War is ... an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will'.

Propaganda by deed

A very different process occurs when the perpetrators of an act of political violence want to inspire the faithful. Here, the method is also indirect and theatrical, but the target audience is a public thought to be sympathetic towards the political ends of the terrorists. The will of the opponent plays no role[3]. Instead, the focus is on the will of the "domestic public", i.e. of the members of what the terrorists consider their constituency. It is thought that this target audience is likely to take an active part in the struggle when roused by the example of great deeds and of the oppressor's vulnerability. The intended psychological effect is quite the opposite of fear. In the words of Pyotr Kropotkin (1978), '*Action*, the continuous action, ceaselessly renewed, of minorities brings about this transformation [of the passive masses into a revolutionary army]. Courage, devotion, the spirit of sacrifice, are as contagious as cowardice, submission, and panic'.

This strategy may be referred to as propaganda by deed, a revolutionary strategy first defined by the Italian nationalist Carlo Pisacane. Bruce Hoffman (1998: 17) summa-rizes Pisacane's argument: 'Violence ... was necessary not only to draw attention to, or generate publicity for, a cause, but to inform, educate and ultimately rally the masses

behind the revolution. The didactic purpose of violence, Pisacane argued, could never be effectively replaced by pamphlets, wall posters or assemblies'[4]. While Pisacane practiced open, conventional warfare, nineteenth century revolutionaries adopted unconventional tactics, i.c. the assassination of rulers (such as Alexander II, Czar of Russia, in 1881). These tactics associate propaganda by deed with (what at a later time came to be called) terrorism at the same time that they made them better suited to the requirements of small revolutionary groups. They also associate propaganda by deed with tyrannicide. Like modern terrorism, it has an important psychological component, an indirect effect on a target that is distinct from the direct target of violence; but like tyrannicide it argues that its violence is legitimate because its target is an oppressor who has broken the compact of society by his own deeds and has thereby placed himself outside of the protection of the (moral) law. Propaganda by deed thus appeals to a long tradition in (Western) thought, in which breaches of positive law and of the normal order of society were justified by the morality of the end, the removal of tyranny[5].

The historical continuity between terrorism and propaganda by deed appears to have led to conceptual confusion. The two strategies are not actually mutually exclusive either: a demonstration of the vulnerability of the terrorists' enemy may result in a mood of fear among the enemy public, while at the same time creating a mood of enthusiasm in a friendly audience. They are nevertheless distinct strategies, aiming at different psychological effects on different audiences. Where terrorism focuses on an enemy, propaganda by deed is directed at the home constituency. The desired outcome is not a defeated enemy, but a people rising vigorously.

Provocation by violence

The third type, which I shall call provocation by violence, combines elements of the other two. Two audiences are involved in this strategy, one identified as enemy, one friendly. The main target is the friendly audience. The purpose is to motivate it to give active support, but this is achieved by way of a second, enemy audience. The intermediate goal is to incite the enemy audience to overreact. That overreaction is then expected to generate support for the perpetrators among a friendly audience outraged by the overreaction. Therefore, the objective of the physical attack is inducing anger, lust for vengeance, and like emotions in the enemy audience[6]. Provocation succeeds when the enemy lashes out against the terrorist's constituency.

Even compared to terrorism and propaganda by deed, provocation by violence is an indirect strategy. It involves the manipulation of an enemy audience as a step on the way to achieving the desired effect on a friendly audience. The perpetrator must be certain that his enemy will react in the desired way or the strategy will fail. In the (pos-

sibly acute) perception of the 'terrorist', the enemy already fights a hidden, "dirty war". The agent needs only to provoke him to carelessness to be able to expose it. Although a revolutionary mood may not yet exist among the terrorists' constituency, the conditions justifying and enabling a revolution are already in place and in fact the struggle is already underway.

A variant of provocation by violence would translate structural but inconspicuous repression into a kind of violence more prone to discovery. Several Western European and North American terrorist groups (and some non-violent groups) were motivated by analyses of this kind during the 1960s and 1970s[7] (Laqueur 2001). According to such self-proclaimed revolutionaries, bourgeois capitalist societies practice a kind of repressive tolerance that prevents awareness of the need for revolution. Here it is the agent's self-imposed task to unmask the enemy. His violence wants to provoke examples of the enemy's reprehensible nature and tactics. He initiates actual violence in order to provoke the authorities into committing similar acts of violence instead of their usual covert violence.

Motives behind the methods

Another weakness of Schmid & Jongman's definition, not yet discussed, is the indeterminacy of the reasons. Schmid & Jongman have it that terrorism has 'idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons.' Among Western politicians there has been a tendency since 9/11 to label as terrorist anything that is considered dangerous (illicit drug trade or "narcoterrorism") or even merely annoying (loitering teenagers or "street-terrorists"). Among terrorism scholars the issue is that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. A solution would be to evade the problem by designating as terrorist anyone who uses the methods included in the definition. But the evasion does not work.

First, conventional military forces sometimes use the same methods, albeit by different, not usually clandestine, modes of operation and on a different, much larger scale. (Compare the World Trade Centre to Dresden, Hiroshima, or Nagasaki.) As already discussed, early airpower theorists advocated *shock and awe* in order to break the enemy's will to fight. This was also the strategy of Bomber Command according to Directive 22 of 14 February 1942 and it was the dominant factor in the success of the atomic weapon against Japan later in that war (Wijninga 2002). Propaganda by deed has a military equivalent in the form of spectacular actions which have little impact on the balance of forces but which raise the morale of the home public. An example is the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo by the American air force in early 1942, which advertised the United States' determination eventually to bring the war to the Japanese homeland. Although the raid did negligible damage to Japanese military capability and the airplanes involved in it

could not return to America, it was widely publicized in order to invigorate an American public badly shocked by the attack on Pearl Harbor[8]. Provocation has been a favorite means throughout military history to draw enemy forces into situations where they are exposed. As such, it is an element of many military stratagems.

Second, political philosophy enters into the choice of strategy. Of the three strategies discussed in this article, two adhere to a revolutionary perspective. Only terrorism in the narrow sense is not associated with revolution. Terrorists may well foresee an entirely reformed constitution, a comprehensive change in the direction of society, in its class composition and in its mores. However, if so, their focus is on the enemy as an obstacle. They aim to remove him, then perhaps afterwards to convince the public to adopt their proposals or simply to impose them. Their political strategy is not at all revolutionary; whatever the extent of the social reordering, without the belief that the people rise up *en masse*, the word is misleading. Indeed, many terrorists have no revolutionary aspirations at all: they desire freedom from foreign occupation or even freedom from domestic oppressors, while leaving the structure of society generally as it is. Once the enemy leaves or gives up, their job is done. They may go on to rule in the oppressors' stead but, aside from their own improved position, will not change the character of this rule. More importantly, these prospects have no impact on the choice of method; they are a separate matter to be decided at a separate and later point in time.

Propaganda by deed and provocation by violence, on the other hand, both aim to rouse a public to revolution. A massive uprising and a fundamental shake-up of society is precisely the point. The vanguard's job does not really end until the revolution has run its course, but its first and most important task is to inspire the people. If the conditions for a revolution are not in place (cf. Brinton 1965), the strategy fails – indeed the perpetrators will find themselves increasingly hard pressed to justify their violence. Many movements have ebbed away when sympathizers, beginning with intellectual fellow travelers, questioned first the methods, then the overall strategy and finally the goals. The decline in support for the Rote Armee Fraktion in 1970s West Germany, for example, followed this pattern[9].

From the perspective of political philosophy, the difference between propaganda by deed and provocation by violence lies in their analyses of the pre-revolutionary situation. The propagandists are rather more optimistic about the will of the people to rise up once they have demonstrated the vulnerability of their oppressors. In the provocateurs' view, the people are not yet sufficiently aware of the necessity of revolution. Provocateurs possess knowledge not shared by their public, so they constitute an intellectual vanguard in an objective sense, by virtue of a privileged social position (cf. Gramsci 1971). Propagandists, on the other hand, assume that insight into the actual conditions of oppression is readily accessible to the audience, which, in fact, may already share their

analysis (e.g., Sorel 1941). The revolution needs only the spirit of action to proceed. This philosophical difference expresses itself most dramatically when public support for the revolution does not materialize and sympathizers drift away. The propagandist in this situation must re-evaluate his analysis, may find that it was wrong and cease his activities; or he may conclude that oppression was less obvious than he thought and adopt the perspective of the provocateur. The provocateur is likely to conclude that he has been too timid in exposing the brutality of the oppressor and so is likely to escalate the level of his violence.

If an uprising does occur, the strategic situation changes dramatically. Since whatever the revolutionaries can do to their enemies beforehand pales in comparison, damage to the enemy is a decidedly secondary consideration. In contrast to terrorism, the revolutionary strategies set very little store by their opponent's morale; provocation by violence even raises the enemy's fighting spirit (while lowering the enemy's capacity for sober judgment). It is a common hope among revolutionaries that their enemies will simply give up when faced with incontrovertible evidence of a popular uprising. Nor is this an unreasonable hope: many revolutions, particularly since the 1980s, have been remarkably bloodless.

Implications: Terrorist target selection

On a practical level, the distinctions discussed above express themselves in the perpetrators' choice of target. Drake (1998) describes the process by which terrorists select their targets very well. It begins with defining strategic objectives, and continues with (in order) identifying suitable targets, determining whether these are within the group's capability, whether attacking these is ideologically justifiable and justifiable to supporters and/or wider opinion, assessing the target's protection, risks and benefits, to the final decision – if the answer to all these is yes – to attack a particular target. (If the answer is no, a substitute target will be sought, or failing that, the campaign ends.) Unfortunately, Drake does not distinguish between the three strategic variants.

First, the psychological effect of an attack depends in part on the identity of the victim. The more an enemy audience identifies with the victim, the more it is frightened. In order to spread fear widely, it is useful to strike at common representatives of the enemy to give the impression that almost any enemy individual or installation could be the next target. Alternatively, in order to enrage an enemy audience, it is useful to strike at a target that stands as a symbol of its achievements or its identity. A conspicuous target is also useful for propagandistic purposes, as a demonstration of the capacity to inflict substantial damage on specific and significant symbols of oppression. Note that what is symbolic of achievement to one audience may very well be symbolic of oppres-

sion to another audience, but this is not necessarily the case. A friendly audience may applaud the assassination of the director of the secret police, but an enemy audience, accepting his assassination as a professional risk, may not be impressed at all.

Second, ideological justification means something different to the provocateur and to the propagandist than to the terrorist. If, as I assume, Drake includes the acceptability of "collateral damage" (damage to, including death of, innocent bystanders) under this heading, then the question also has profound strategic consequences. Terrorism in the narrow sense needs only to consider the effect on an enemy audience. Collateral damage does not detract from the hurt and the fear, perhaps even adds to it. However, if propaganda by deed is to be effective, it is necessary that the target is perceived by the intended audience as implicated in oppressive practices, i.e. while the target may be civilian, it cannot be innocent in the eyes of the perpetrators' constituency. Collateral damage risks tainting the righteousness of the struggle, which may turn a revolution into a dirty war – with all the loss of public support that entails.

Implications: Counterterrorism
The distinctions made in this article also have implications for the other side. Counterterrorist policies work best when they take account of the various strategies pursued by terrorists. For example, Mark Juergensmeyer (2002: 40) warns of the risks of the American reaction to 9/11:

> *What the perpetrators of such acts expect – and indeed welcome, is a response as vicious as the acts themselves. By goading secular authorities into responding to terror with terror, they hope to accomplish two things. First, they want tangible evidence for their claim that the secular enemy is a monster. Second, they hope to bring to the surface the great war – a war that they have told their potential supporters was hidden, but real.*

And Mark Sedgwick (2004: 800):

> *The primary objective of the 'deed' of 9/11 was not its direct impact on America but rather its indirect propaganda impact on al-Qaeda's potential supporters. A secondary objective would have been to 'provoke' America into actions that would alienate al-Qaeda's potential supporters from America, thus turning more of them into actual supporters.*

Both Juergensmeyer and Sedgwick stress that the terrorists' primary audience is domestic and sympathetic. In terms of the present article, Juergensmeyer refers to

propaganda by deed. Sedgwick refers both to propaganda by deed and to provocation by violence, indeed recognizes the distinction between the two at the same time that he stresses the distinction between both and terrorism in the narrow sense.

Juergensmeyer is primarily interested in understanding the terrorists' rationale. The mechanism in the quotation above appears almost as an afterthought in an article devoted to al-Qaeda's ideology. But it is an important afterthought, as Juergensmeyer plainly recognizes. It furnishes an explanation of al-Qaeda's appeal, or the appeal of its ideology. In addition to the ideology's roots in Muslim theology (as revised since the 19th century; cf. Lincoln 2003), the explanation seems to lie in a clever strategy that induces its enemy to produce evidence of its own claims. The analysis presented here supplements Juergensmeyer by pointing out that both strategy and ideology can be understood as revolutionary.

Sedgwick places al-Qaeda in the context of successive 'waves of terrorism' (borrowed from Rapoport 2001). He argues that the fourth wave, contemporary religious terrorism, uses methods that are associated in the history of terrorism with the first wave, rather than those of the second and third wave[10]. Specifically, al-Qaeda employs the propaganda of the deed developed by the socialist/anarchist, sometimes nationalist, terrorists of the 1890s. This argument refers to the primary objective in the quotation above. Additionally, the secondary objective, provocation by violence, represents a strategy that is not explicit in any of the four waves. What Sedgwick calls objectives, this article calls strategies. However, where Sedgwick seeks a historical comparison, this article argues an underlying agreement: both first wave terrorism and present Islamic fundamentalist terrorism are revolutionary in perspective; and this agreement extends both to method and to political philosophy.

Juergensmeyer and Sedgwick demonstrate an emerging interest in the complexities of terrorist and counterterrorist strategies, prompted by al-Qaeda's "Jihad against Jews and crusaders" (reprinted in Rubin and Rubin 2002) and by the United States' *War against Terror*. Both suspect that the West's reaction may be counterproductive, as mounting evidence from Iraq, the greater Middle East and from Muslim populations in Western Europe shows that al-Qaeda's appeal is growing, even after widespread condemnation of its tactics and even as active military and police searches reduce its leadership capabilities (Burke 2004). Western leaders responding to terrorism with vows not to budge and pursuing a strategy of active military engagement in the Middle East seem to be missing a point.

Notes

1. Part of this material was presented to the 2003 Annual Conference of the

Midwestern Political Science Association in Chicago, on April 5, 2003. I thank panel and audience for their comments.

2. This delimitation does not exclude the possibility that other forms of violence, perhaps most or all of them in this age, have important theatrical aspects (cf. Der Derian 2001).

3. Although it may be a factor at a later stage, after the ancient regime is overthrown, when the revolutionary regime attempts to establish itself against outside opposition.

4. Pisacane's own attempt at the practice of propaganda by deed failed miserably. Carlo Pisacane (1818-1857) gave up his birthright as Duke of San Giovanni to join Mazzini's republican forces; his invasion of the Neapolitan kingdom with only 300 men failed to inspire a general revolt, resulting instead in swift defeat and his own death.

5. Tyrannicide contradicts revolution, although not in the original sense of the word: a restoration of an old order long corrupted. The principal distinction between propaganda by deed (applied to revolution in the classic sense) and tyrannicide lies in the awareness, exhibited in the former, that the overthrow of a political system requires more than the removal of individuals, i.e. in the recognition, in its philosophy of history, that social forces are more important than "great men": the removal of individual tyrants can help to undermine the system and it can raise the awareness and the spirits of the oppressed, but it cannot replace revolution (cf. Laqueur 1978).

6. While fear does not equal anger, it often seems to give rise to it. On the other hand, fear can also incapacitate. When fear leads to inaction on the part of an enemy, this strategy fails. Fear is not the point; the point is anger.

7. The Dutch *Provo* group attempted the unmasking by means of non-violent demonstrations that offended the sensibilities of the authorities. Provo achieved some success when smoking dope on the steps of the Second World War memorial led to police intervention violent enough in its turn to offend the sensibilities of the Dutch public. The result was the dismissal of the mayor and the police commissioner of Amsterdam and the eventual adoption of a policy of official tolerance of soft drugs.

8. The movie *Pearl Harbor* (Touchstone Pictures 2001) which begins with the Japanese attack ends with the Doolittle Raid as an apparently, suitably heroic conclusion for a Hollywood blockbuster.

9. I leave aside the question of the conditions for revolution, whether such conditions are objective (as many revolutionaries believe) or intersubjective (discursive), i.e. whether or not they are also in part the product of the revolutionaries' activities.

10. For the sake of completeness: The second wave is the anticolonial terrorism of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The third wave is the leftist terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s. The latter, "fresh" in the memory of terrorism scholars, provides the model for most contemporary theorizing. Perhaps Sedgwick's greatest contribution is freeing terrorism studies from that legacy and pointing it towards the earlier and now, again, more useful model.

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