

## **FFI RAPPORT**

### **WHY TERRORISM OCCURS - A Survey of Theories and Hypotheses on the Causes of Terrorism**

LIA Brynjar, Skjølberg Katja H-W

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THESAURUS REFERENCE: 8) ABSTRACT Research literature on terrorism has often been criticised for a general lack of scientifically sound theoretical research on patterns and causes of terrorism. This report provides an updated survey of existing theories and hypotheses on the causes of terrorism, drawing upon studies not only from recent terrorism research literature, but also from general social science and conflict studies. The purpose of this survey is to establish analytical tools for predicting future patterns and developments of terrorism, which is a major research objective of the Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare Project. At the end of the report, we deal briefly with a few security policy implications of the theories surveyed. They have been discussed more fully, however, in our report "Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism: Patterns and Predictions", FFI/RAPPORT-2000/01703.				
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## WHY TERRORISM OCCURS - A Survey of Theories and Hypotheses on the Causes of Terrorism

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This report is the third publication by the “Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare Project at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI).<sup>1</sup> The overall aim of the research project is to map out and analyse asymmetric, non-conventional security challenges with a view to assessing their importance for Norwegian national security. A key research objective is to provide a systematic survey of these threats, based on existing research literature. In the final analysis, conclusions will be drawn regarding the implications of these threats for overall security policy planning in general and long-term defence planning in particular.

This report outlines a range of theories on the causes of terrorism. A list of these theories is presented in brief at the end of the report. The aim of this exercise is to provide a tool for analysing future patterns of terrorism. Another report entitled *Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism: Patterns and Predictions* draws heavily upon the theoretical literature surveyed in this report. This survey is not meant to be completely exhaustive, but the reader will find that all major theories are discussed. Some theories are well founded in theoretical and empirical studies, others are admittedly not, and should be seen as hypotheses which are frequently encountered in the research literature, rather than established theory. Hopefully, the present review of theories on the causes and conditions for terrorism will enable researchers to establish the first building blocs of a sound predictive model.

There is an extensive literature in the field of terrorism, most of it written after 1968. However, much of this work either falls into the trap of being ideologically biased, purely psychological, speculative commentary, or built on data of uncertain quality. Furthermore, the bulk of the research is dedicated to conceptual or definitional problems, and only limited efforts are put into systematic empirical work. Thus, literature is suffering from a general lack of good empirically tested findings on patterns and causes of terrorism. Gurr once argued that the research questions raised often are considerably more interesting than most of the evidence brought to bear on them.<sup>2</sup> Schmid and Jongman follow up the critique, arguing that

There are probably few areas in the social science literature in which so much is written on the basis of so little research. Perhaps as much as 80 percent of the literature is not research-based in any rigorous sense; instead, it is too often narrative, condemnatory, and prescriptive.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FFISYS Research Project No.776 “Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare: Emerging Security Challenges After the Cold War (TERRA)” began officially in March 1999 and will be concluded by June 2001. An outline of the entire project and some initial theoretical work were done in our “Analytical Framework for the Study of Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare”, published September 1999. For other studies completed in the project period, see Lia and Hansen (2000a), (2000b), (1999b), Lia (2000a), (1999c), (1999d).

<sup>2</sup> Gurr (1988), p.115.

<sup>3</sup> Schmid and Jongman (1988), p.179

Our challenge, therefore, is to survey and critically examine the existing theoretical work in the field, while keeping in mind that not all of these “theories” have been rigorously tested.

## **2 APPROACHES TO EXPLAINING TERRORISM**

There is a multitude of situations capable of provoking terrorism. We find terrorists among deprived and uneducated people, and among the affluent and well educated; we find terrorists among psychotic and ‘normal’ healthy people; and among people of both sexes and of all ages. Terrorism occurs in rich as well as in poor countries; in the modern industrialised world and in less developed areas; during a process of transition and development, prior to or after such a process; in former colonial states and in independent ones; and, in established democracies as well as in less democratic regimes. This list could easily be extended, but it suffices as a demonstration of the wide diversity of conditions we need to consider when trying to develop an understanding of terrorism. Obviously, this diversity makes it difficult to generalise about terrorism, and the dynamic nature of most of these conditions makes it hard to predict anything about future terrorism. Probably for this reason, as Kegley has observed “many rival explanations have been advanced but none has managed to command widespread respect”.<sup>4</sup> However, prediction can only be based on theories that explain past patterns, and effort should therefore be placed at systematic comparative studies of the causes of terrorism.

When analysing the causes of terrorism, we are confronted with different levels of explanations. These are clearly marked by diverging notions about which research questions are the most central ones to be answered. There are explanations on the individual and group level, on which much of the existing research on terrorism has been focused. These aim primarily at psychological explanations, such as identifying why individuals join a terrorist group. Explanations on the societal or national level primarily attempt to identify causal relationships between certain historical, cultural and socio-political characteristics of the larger society and the occurrence of terrorism. Explanations on the systemic or international level seek to establish causal relationships between characteristics of the international state system and relations between states on the one hand, and the occurrence of international terrorism on the other.

## **3 PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS**

The individual and group levels of analysis aim mostly at psychological explanations. Some of the major tasks in this field would be to identify why individuals join a terrorist group in the first place, and secondly, why they continue to stay with the group.<sup>5</sup> Other related research questions on the individual and group levels of analysis would be: Who are the terrorists? Is there a specific ‘terrorist personality’? What drives individuals towards the act of terrorism? Why do they act the way they do? What are the psychological mechanisms of group

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<sup>4</sup> Kegley (1990), pp.109-110.

<sup>5</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.125.

interaction? Psychological research on terrorism can be divided into two main traditions: the psycho-pathological and the psycho-sociological traditions.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1 Psycho-Pathological Theories

The first tradition treats the individual terrorist in isolation, searching for deviant character traits. The simple basic assumption of such pure psychological theory of terrorism is that non-violent behaviour is the accepted norm, and that those engaged in terrorist activities therefore necessarily must be abnormal. Based on behavioural studies and profiles, several researchers of psychology claim to have identified a distinguishable terrorist personality. Spoiled, disturbed, cold and calculating, perverse, excited by violence, psychotic, maniac, irrational and fanatic, are character traits frequently claimed to be typical to the terrorist.<sup>7</sup> Although he has dismissed the theory of a terrorist personality, Jerrold Post claims that there is a special logic of terrorist reasoning. He terms this the “terrorist psycho-logic” – referring to his research proposition that “terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and that their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalise acts they are psychologically compelled to commit.”<sup>8</sup>

In diagnosing terrorists as mentally disturbed individuals, and portraying terrorism as violence just for the sake of violence itself, explanations like these de-politicise terrorism. Psycho-pathological explanations have been much criticised, not only for divesting terrorism completely from the socio-economic and political setting, but also on empirical grounds. Sprinzak claims that students of political violence so far have failed to give any viable psychological explanation of the violent personality.<sup>9</sup> Several researchers have pointed to the conclusion that “the best documented generalization is negative; terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology.”<sup>10</sup> Crenshaw adds that the most outstanding characteristic of terrorists, on the contrary, seems to be their normality.<sup>11</sup> However, Sprinzak points to the complexity of the phenomenon, admitting “[w]e just know that the evolution and activity of certain violent groups, especially those that are small and poorly organized, cannot be reduced to socio-political factors.”<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2 Psycho-Sociological Theories

In the second field of psychological terrorism research, the focus on individual characteristics and mechanisms are supplemented by recognition of the influence of the *environment* on individual behaviour. Among others, Wilkinson is seemingly sceptical to pure psycho-

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of these two traditions see Kegley (1990), pp.99-101.

<sup>7</sup> Schmid & Jongman (1988), pp.7-98.

<sup>8</sup> Post (1990), p.25.

<sup>9</sup> Sprinzak (1995), p.40.

<sup>10</sup> Crenshaw (1981), Corrado (1981), Turco (1987) and Heskin (1984). The quotation is from Heskin (1984), p.26. Corrado (1981) for example has concluded that “political terrorists, overwhelmingly, are not viewed as suffering from mental disorders. With a few important exceptions, political terrorists are seen as being motivated by ideologies or values that justify the use of terrorism as a legitimate political tactic”. See Corrado (1981), p.156.

<sup>11</sup> Crenshaw (1981), pp.379-399.

<sup>12</sup> Sprinzak (1995), p.40.

pathological explanations of terrorism, and theories of violence for the sake of violence, and attempts to relate psychological factors to the societal environment.<sup>13</sup> Pointing to the bulk of psychological literature actually emphasising the *absence* of diverging personality traits among terrorists, as well as to the failure of socio-economic research to explain both the “comings and goings”<sup>14</sup> of terrorism in relatively similar societies, Wilkinson argues that explanations of terrorism should concentrate on the social context of the terrorists’ ideologies and beliefs. He asserts that the most powerful tool for understanding terrorism is to explore the individual political motivations of terrorists, and to relate them to particular ideologies and beliefs. He claims that “it is essential to take account of the unique political, historical, and cultural context, and the ideology and aims of the groups involved.”<sup>15</sup>

Crenshaw too argues that psychological variables must be integrated with environmental factors on various levels in order to reach a comprehensive theory of the causes of terrorism.<sup>16</sup> Her argument is that though terrorism initially is a matter of individual motivations and perceptions of social conditions, and about the deliberate *choice* of the individual to join a terrorist group, to participate in acts of terrorism, and to continue engaging in terrorist activity, the phenomenon must be studied in relation to the social context in which it occurs. Hence, the central problem is to determine when and under what circumstances extremist organisations find terrorism useful.<sup>17</sup>

There are many examples of this type of explanations of terrorism. Strategies of political violence have been dealt with extensively in radical leftist and revolutionary writings from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the doctrine of ‘urban guerrilla warfare’ became a central tenet in radical leftist ideology after the defeat of the rural guerrilla movements in Latin America in the 1960s. Hence, there is a vast body of literature available for students of motivations and justifications of political violence, seen from the perpetrators’ own perspective.<sup>18</sup>

A very common thesis is that the decision to employ terrorism is a result of failure of other attempts of influence, and hence “the outcome of a learning process from own experiences and the experience of others.”<sup>19</sup> It has been observed that masses seldom rise spontaneously – the decision to employ terrorism often follows the failure to mobilise popular support for a radical political programme, or the failure of non-violent means of struggle to address political or ethnic grievances. Crenshaw argues that the excitement of terrorism poses an additional point of influence to the decision of whether to employ terrorism or not. Besides demonstrating that illegal opposition actually is possible, she argues that a successful terrorist attack, or the thrill of it, can inspire the belief among perpetrators that terrorism might be a short-cut to revolution and that it may act as a catalyst, not substitute, for mass revolt.<sup>20</sup> The decision to employ terrorism may also be ideologically grounded in revolutionary theories in which political

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<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson (1990).

<sup>14</sup> Accounting for the “comings and goings” of a phenomenon means being able to explain why, in cases of similar conditions, some cases are exposed to the phenomenon while others are not – terminology of Charles Tilly (1978), p.59.

<sup>15</sup> Wilkinson (1987), p.ix.

<sup>16</sup> Crenshaw (1990b), p.259.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>18</sup> See Crenshaw (1995) for an overview of European leftist traditions on the issue of political violence.

<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw (1990b), p.11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.19.

violence plays an essential role in sparking off a mass uprising and a popular revolution. Another variation of this theme is that the decision to employ terrorism stems from the “useful agenda-setting function” of terrorist acts, especially in the age of modern electronic media.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the perpetrators often perceive terrorism as a force multiplier, compensating for numerical weakness.

Perceptions of a “window of opportunity” may also be influential in determining whether sub-state groups turn to terrorism against the regime. According to Crenshaw, “time constraints contribute to the decision to use terrorism .. an organization may perceive an immediate opportunity to compensate for its inferiority vis-a-vis the government [as a result of] a change .. in the situation, which temporarily alter the balance of resources available to the two sides”.<sup>22</sup> Examples of such influential resources might be new sources of funding, or changes in the climate of international opinion, which might reduce the legitimacy of a targeted regime. Also a sudden downturn in a dissident organisation’s fortunes may prompt an underground organisation into acting in order to show its strength and potential.

Other examples of this type of explanations can be found in Stephen Stedman’s writings on intrastate conflicts and peace processes. Stedman has analysed the context of decisions to violate a cease-fire and resume armed campaigns, which in the case of intrastate conflicts often assume the form of urban terrorism. According to Stedman, the resumption of armed campaigns is a strategy frequently used by radical members of coalition groups to prevent further progress in the peace talks, hence the term “spoiler problems in peace processes.”<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2.1 Relative Deprivation Theories

Relative deprivation theory is one version of the psycho-sociological research tradition. The connection between human frustration and political violence was recognised in ancient times, and it is essential in Aristotle’s classical theory of revolution. Later we find discussions of these mechanisms both in Tocqueville’s<sup>24</sup> work on revolution and in the early work of Freud. These theories connect individual mobilisation of aggression and political violence to social, economic and political circumstances. Dollard et al. first assumed that aggressive behaviour always originated in frustration.<sup>25</sup> Later, Galtung argued that the situation most likely to provoke aggressive behaviour is one in which individuals find themselves in a state of disequilibrium along various socio-political dimensions of status.<sup>26</sup> Davies, on the other hand, claimed that the probability of conflict is highest when improvements, either economic or political, increase the individual’s expectations, only to be followed by a general deterioration, thus decreasing the ability to satisfy accustomed needs and expectations.<sup>27</sup> Several systematic studies of relative deprivation theories have supported the hypothesised relations between

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<sup>21</sup> To support this thesis, it is common to cite PFLP commander George Habash’ statement from the early 1970s that by using terrorism, “we force people to ask what is going on”. See Crenshaw (1990b), p.18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.13

<sup>23</sup> Stedman (1997). See also Atlas and Licklider (1999) for a similar discussion.

<sup>24</sup> Tocqueville (1961[1835]).

<sup>25</sup> Dollard et al. (1939).

<sup>26</sup> Galtung (1964).

<sup>27</sup> Davies (1962) and Davis (1973). This hypothesis is illustrated in the well-known ‘Davies’ J-Curve’ See Davies 1962), p.69.

frustration and aggression both at the micro- and macro-level of society.<sup>28</sup> Gurr terms this gap between expectations and satisfaction *relative deprivation*.<sup>29</sup> He argues that tension based on the perception of such relative deprivation is the basic condition for participation in collective civil violence. Przeworski consents, asserting that “as long as masses of people experience material deprivation, any notion of the end of conflicts is illusory.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Contagion Theory of Terrorism

An important variant of the psycho-sociological research tradition is the contagion theory, explaining the variance in terrorists’ decisions to launch terrorist attacks. A number of studies have demonstrated that the occurrence of terrorism is far from random, but there is a clear trend of periodical cycle in the occurrence of terrorist attacks, or waves of terrorism. A high level of terrorism in one month is likely to be followed by few incidents in the next month, suggesting that the decision by terrorist groups to launch an attack is influenced by similar attacks elsewhere, hence, the “concept of contagion”.<sup>31</sup>

Weimann and Brosius have observed that the number of victims, like the number of occurrences, has been steadily growing in the period from 1968 to 1986. At the same time, the variance of victimisation has become greater. While there is no such clear periodicity regarding the degree of victimisation, the occurrences of terrorist attacks reveal a clear trend of periodical cycle.<sup>32</sup> Evidence of contagion has been related to large-scale incidents of violence, including racial disturbances, domestic political violence and international terrorism. Weimann and Brosius concludes that there is “accumulating empirical evidence pointing to the contagiousness of terrorism.”<sup>33</sup>

#### 3.2.2.1 Mass Media and Terrorism as Communication

The role of modern mass media in this process is seen as a key explanation of the phenomenon of contagion. Several scholars have reconceptualised the phenomenon of terrorism in the framework of symbolic communication theory, viewing “terrorism as theatre” and as a medium of communication.<sup>34</sup> As Brian Jenkins has noted, “[t]errorists do not try to take and hold ground or physically destroy their opponents’ forces. While terrorists may kill — the object of terrorism is not mass murder ... Terrorism is a theatre.”<sup>35</sup> Engene’s quantitative study of European terrorism also reveals that only a small minority of terrorist attacks kill, indicating a preference for acts which symbolise rather than cause violence.<sup>36</sup> Hence, as a symbolic act, terrorism can be analysed much like other mediums of communication, consisting of our basic

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<sup>28</sup> Wiberg (1990) and Gurr (1970).

<sup>29</sup> Gurr (1970).

<sup>30</sup> Przeworski (1995), p.ix

<sup>31</sup> Weimann and Brosius (1988), pp.491-502.

<sup>32</sup> One explanation for this is that “terrorists can plan the location and timing of their actions. However, the number of injuries and fatalities caused by the act cannot be planned. Thus, aside from the constant rise in the rate of terrorist victimization the number of victims varies in a random and unpredictable way”. See Weimann and Brosius (1988), p.498.

<sup>33</sup> Weimann and Brosius (1988), pp.498-499. See also Midlarsky, Crenshaw and Yoshida (1980) and Redlick (1979).

<sup>34</sup> Crelinston, R.D (1987a, 1987b).

<sup>35</sup> Jenkins (1978), 235 cited in Weimann and Brosius (1988), p.500.

<sup>36</sup> Engene (1998).

components: transmitter (the terrorist), intended recipient (target), message (bombing, ambush) and feed back (reaction of target). The terrorist's message necessitates a victim, but the target or intended recipient of the communication may not be the victim.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the 'waves' of terrorism may be partly explained by the desire of terrorists to guarantee newsworthiness and consequently, media access.<sup>38</sup>

This perspective on terrorism has been developed further to explain the sudden increase of international terrorism in the late 1960s. One assertion frequently met in the literature on international terrorism is that the introduction of new electronic mass media, especially modern hand-held Television cameras, was a crucial facilitating factor in the rise of international terrorism in the late 1960s, while the underlying causes lie elsewhere.<sup>39</sup> These technological innovations enabled media reporters to bring live coverage of dramatic events directly into the living rooms of millions of peoples. According to Hoffman, the emergence of new broadcasting technologies, enabling news networks to broadcast instantaneously, coupled with the fierce competition between the news networks meant that the media revolutions presented terrorist groups with unprecedented opportunities for media attention and publicity.<sup>40</sup>

The symbiotic relationship between modern mass media and terrorism is also seen as a major force behind the rising lethality of international terrorism over the last decades. Crenshaw argues that "the need for international recognition encourages transnational terrorist activities with escalation to ever more destructive and spectacular violence. As the audience grows larger, more diverse, and more accustomed to terrorism, terrorists must go to extreme lengths to shock".<sup>41</sup> Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel also argue that the contagion effect, particularly with respect to the intensity of terrorism, "imply a growing loss of state control over more effective technologies of terrorism".<sup>42</sup> The empirical evidence supporting this latter thesis is still somewhat uncertain, however, despite frequently cited statements by terrorist group members that the fierce struggle for media attention forced them to more extreme measures.

### 3.2.2.2 The Contagion Theory and The Spread of Terrorism

The thesis of contagion is used to explain why the occurrence of terrorism in one country often leads directly or indirectly to more terrorism, whether by the same organisation, or by "second-generation" groups or imitators in other countries.<sup>43</sup> Crenshaw maintains that "[a]ttitudes and beliefs that condone terrorism are communicated transnationally."<sup>44</sup> Redlick argues that "informational flows, thus, seem to benefit militants or discontented individuals or groups in today's international system" in several ways.<sup>45</sup> The extensive media coverage of the terrorists

<sup>37</sup> See in particular Kraber (1971), pp.527-533.

<sup>38</sup> Weimann and Brosius (1988), p.500.

<sup>39</sup> According to Wilkinson, two major international developments triggered this outbreak of international terrorism in 1968: (i) the defeat of the Arab states in the June 1967 war with Israel (from 1968-1972 there was a tremendous upsurge in Arab-Israeli terrorism, and close to 15% of all international terrorist incidents were carried out by Palestinian groups), and (ii) resurgence of neo-Marxist and Trotskyist left among students in the industrialised West. See Wilkinson (1987), p.xvi.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Hoffman (1998), pp.136-137.

<sup>41</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.118.

<sup>42</sup> Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel (1997), p.227.

<sup>43</sup> Crenshaw (1983), p.15. See also Midlarsky, Crenshaw and Yoshida (1980).

<sup>44</sup> Crenshaw (1990a) p.115; Wilkinson (1987), pp.xv-xvi.

<sup>45</sup> Redlick (1979), p.91.

attracts attention to the group's cause, and as an increasing larger section of society is exposed to media coverage, information concerning specific terrorist tactics and strategies are thus communicated world-wide. Crenshaw argues that the roots of terrorism in various national contexts are not completely indigenous, hence events in one country may inspire imitation in others:

Terrorist organizations frequently have direct, physical contacts with other terrorist groups and with foreign countries. Collaboration extends to buying weapons, finding asylum, obtaining passports, and false documents, acquiring funds, and sometimes rendering assistance in the planning and execution of terrorist attacks... it means that transnational links among groups with shared aims make terrorism in one state likely to lead to terrorism in nearby states .. In addition, the contagion process may operate in the absence of physical contacts when terrorist organizations, often geopolitically distant, become significant models for imitation.<sup>46</sup>

Moorhead Kennedy has also suggested similar effects of improvement in communication: disaffected groups “find ways to communicate and bond, and to the extent that there is little hope for ameliorating of their situation, terrorism on a wider scale becomes increasingly possible in the next century.”<sup>47</sup>

In sum, both empirical observations and studies of patterns of terrorism appear to give some credibility to the contagion thesis, which points out that increased transnational flow of information, and the symbiotic relationship between modern mass media and terrorism, may cause increased terrorism.

#### 4 SOCIETAL EXPLANATIONS

National and systemic levels of analysis are so far assumed to be the most applicable for this study. Higher level analyses first and foremost have the advantage of not being constrained by too many situational and case specific factors, and may, as such provide viable generalisable explanations. Societal explanations thus, albeit often vague and underdeveloped, can more easily be integrated into a more comprehensive and predictive model on terrorism.

On the societal level of analysis, explanations of terrorism are primarily sought in the historical development and culture of a larger society or system, and in its contemporary social, economic and political characteristics and environments. Research questions often focus on whether it is possible to identify a causal relationship between certain characteristics of a society, be it a region, a nation or an international system, and the occurrence of terrorism within the same. Systemic explanations might include virtually all developments in the global

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<sup>46</sup> There are many examples of such transborder contacts. West European terrorists trained at Palestinian camps in Lebanon in the 1980s. Red Brigades were in contact with Rote Armé Fraktion and Czechoslovakia, the IRA received substantial assistance from Libya, the Japanese Red Army trained in Lebanon, members of the IRA even offered to the Norwegian Lapp activist movement in the early 1980s to sabotage Norwegian energy infrastructure. Crenshaw (1983), p.17. For the IRA offer to the Norwegian Lapp movement, see *Dagbladet* 17 December 1983, *Klassekampen* 17 December 1983, and conversation with Dr. Tore Bjørge at the Norwegian Institute for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>47</sup> Kennedy (1998), p.190.



system, such as patterns of conflict and co-operation, international trade and investments, distribution of wealth and power, and the internal policies of other states.

Treating terrorism as a socio-political phenomenon, analyses at these levels usually acknowledge, at a theoretical level, the ultimate importance of the individual actors of terrorism. Terrorism *is* obviously dependent on motivated individuals and on psychological processes at the lower levels of analysis. However, practical integration of individual and societal levels of analysis has traditionally been a significant problem for research on terrorism, resulting in theories taking the influence of psychological factors for granted, without further accounting for such influence in the analysis.

Authors of societal explanations frequently distinguish between *precipitants* and *preconditions* of terrorism.<sup>48</sup> Precipitants are the specific events or phenomena that immediately precede the outbreak of terrorism, while preconditions are the circumstances that set the stage for terrorism in the long run.<sup>49</sup> These circumstances are again subdivided into *permissive factors*, which provide opportunities for terrorism by enabling a certain strategy and making it attractive to political actors, and *direct situational factors* inspiring and motivating terrorists. Crenshaw illustrates the use of this classification of types of factors conducive to terrorism.<sup>50</sup> Her starting point is that there are some social and political conditions that make terrorism more likely to occur. She identifies modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, and the fundamental changes these developments brought to society, as being preconditions of terrorism – creating opportunities, vulnerabilities and motivation. Crenshaw also discusses various direct causes of terrorism – like the existence of grievances among a subgroup, discrimination and lack of opportunity for political participation, and elite disaffection.

#### 4.1 The Impact of Modernisation - Two Opposing Paradigms

In the modernisation literature we find an extensive field of theory relating political violence to the changes brought on by the process of modernisation and globalisation – often termed radical theory, or dependency theory. These theories go back to the sociologist Emile Durkheim and his classical theory of the transition from the pre-modern organic solidarity to the modern mechanic society. The basic classical argument in this tradition is that the modernisation process has a harrowing effect on social society that may weaken the legitimacy of the state, and, ultimately, promote conflict and the use of political violence and terrorism.<sup>51</sup>

Another line of argument, liberal theory, claims that modernisation leads to prosperity and political development – both, in turn, generally expected to be social conditions conducive to stability and the absence of violent conflict. Originally being a theory of causal mechanisms in interstate relations, as put forward and tested by Erich Weede and others<sup>52</sup>, the liberal model

<sup>48</sup> Eckstein (1972), Schmid & Jongman (1988) and Crenshaw (1990a, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.114.

<sup>50</sup> Crenshaw (1990a, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Deutsch (1953), Gellner (1964, 1983), Huntington (1968), Rokkan and Urwin (1982), Horowitz (1985).

<sup>52</sup> Weede (1995); Immanuel Kant's essay 'Perpetual Peace,' first gave the line of reasoning relating economic dependence to peace through the consolidation of a liberal republican state. Kant (1991 [1795]).

has also proven useful employed to domestic relations.<sup>53</sup> In short the theory claims that free trade and an open economy will foster a high level of economic development. A prosperous developed economy will in turn lay the ground for democratic rule, which again, together with a high level of economic development, is argued to have a stabilising effect on internal affairs and ultimately promote domestic peace.

Modernisation theories are often very complex covering a whole range of social, economic and political factors. Within this broad theoretical framework, some focus on the level of industrialisation, globalisation and the capitalisation of the economy, while others emphasise the process of change itself, or the social consequences of these processes, such as urbanisation and social mobility, development of communication networks, specialisation, rapid economic growth and increasing economic inequality, internationalisation of culture, denationalisation and increasing interdependency.

While dependency theory is often primarily interested in the dynamic processes of change put forward by modernisation, the liberal tradition focuses more on the characteristics of the established modernised society, like level of economic development, interdependence and degree of democracy. However, as we shall see, the liberal model also deals with problems of the process of development and democratisation as such. In the following, we will give a brief outline of some of the more established hypotheses of political violence and terrorism within these two modernisation models.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Rapid Economic Growth and Terrorism

Following the radical dependency model, causes of political violence and terrorism may be traced to the process of economic modernisation and growth. The model proposes that economic modernisation influences society in such a way that individuals are willing to resort to terrorism. The hypothesised causal chain goes from the dissolutional effects of modernisation on existing social norms and structures, through the rise of a society in which individuals find themselves alienated from social bonds, without any recognised structures of organisation and influence, to the mobilisation of frustration into terrorist activity. The line of reasoning can be traced back to classical psycho-sociological theories of frustration and relative deprivation.

A prominent example of such a modernisation model is Samuel Huntington's classical study *Political Order in Changing Societies*.<sup>55</sup> Huntington argues that "not only does social and economic modernisation produce instability but the degree of instability is related to the rate of modernisation .. for example wherever industrialisation occurred *rapidly*, introducing sharp *discontinuities* between the pre-industrial and industrial situation, more rather than less

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<sup>53</sup> Jakobsen (1996), Gissinger (1998), Gissinger & Gleditsch (1999).

<sup>54</sup> Dependency theory and liberalism are two of the three main theoretical paradigms of international politics. Realism, the third main paradigm, and until recently the most dominant one, will be excluded from this discussion. So will also the sub-paradigm constructivism and so-called 'state-centred theories'. Realism is predominantly a theory of international relations and proved particularly applicable as one of Cold War international relations. The realist paradigm is not easily employed in a discussion of globalisation and domestic violence.

<sup>55</sup> Huntington (1968).

extremist working-class movements emerged.”<sup>56</sup> Huntington observed that the speed of modernisation has been much higher in the non-Western world, and argued that “the heightened drive for social and economic change and development was directly related to the increasing political instability and violence that characterized Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the years after the Second World War.”<sup>57</sup> Hence, the causal direction tends to be for the occurrence and extent of terrorism to be higher in countries that have had the highest rate of economic growth.

Wilkinson too points to the relationship between what he calls “the stresses and strains of rapid modernisation tending to accentuate socio-economic relative deprivation” and the occurrence of terrorism.<sup>58</sup>

Jan Oskar Engene’s eminent empirical study of patterns of European terrorism reveals that rapid economic modernisation, measured in growth in real GDP<sup>59</sup>, has had a notable impact on the organised challenge of ideological terrorism in Western Europe. Engene’s data cover Western Europe in the period 1950-95. Introducing a distinction between ethnically and ideologically motivated terrorism, Engene finds that there is nearly no systematic relationship between modernisation and ethnic terrorism. However, the data show a strong significant impact of modernisation on ideological terrorism.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Economic Inequality and Terrorism

Income inequality is another modernisation-related factor that has been claimed conducive to terrorism both in developed, as well as in less developed countries. In 1835 Tocqueville argued that “[a]lmost all of the revolutions which have changed the aspect of nations have been made to consolidate or to destroy social inequality.”<sup>61</sup> Tocqueville identified two opposing routes through which inequality might have an impact on revolution – through the aim of consolidating inequality and through the aim of destroying it. The theoretical argument is clearly rooted in relative deprivation theory and related hypothesis. Several studies have concluded that there is a positive correlation between inequality and armed conflict – that is, a tendency for countries with a high level of internal inequality to be more exposed to armed conflicts.<sup>62</sup> This also appears to be the case for political terrorism. Engene finds a clear tendency for higher levels of terrorism in those countries in which income is most unevenly distributed.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Prosperity and Terrorism

Lipset argues that the factors involved in economic development – increased wealth, growth of urbanisation, education and literacy, and communications media – are closely linked to those

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p.45.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.47

<sup>58</sup> Wilkinson (1986), p.37

<sup>59</sup> Economic growth in real GDP is frequently used as an indicator of economic modernisation in research on conflict and violence.

<sup>60</sup> Engene (1994, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> Tocqueville (1961), p.302.

<sup>62</sup> Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn (1985), Muller and Seligson (1989), Boswell and Dixon (1990).

<sup>63</sup> Engene (1998), p.194.

factors that establish legitimacy and tolerance in society.<sup>64</sup> Liberal economists claim that an open economy, characterised by free trade and foreign investments, stimulates economic growth and development. The rationale is that international markets open opportunities for export-oriented production, and when accompanied by an opening of internal markets, this will lead to a more efficient allocation of resources.<sup>65</sup> Literature provides substantial empirical evidence of the trade and growth connection.

The level of welfare in a state is related to economic development and growth.<sup>66</sup> This relation has been confirmed for several measures of welfare – like the level of human development, education, life expectancy, child mortality, and calorie consumption per capita – thus contributing to the popular support and to the legitimacy of the state. As such, and in accordance with relative deprivation theory, the legitimacy hypothesis is pulled further in the liberal tradition, claiming that economic growth and development in turn are conducive to internal political stability and peace.

Hence liberal theory argues that economic growth and affluence stimulate development on the political scene. Przeworski asserts that modernisation today, with the continuous development of capitalism and further sophistication of a consumption-oriented culture, actually *means* liberal democracy.<sup>67</sup> Fukuyama, excited by the end of the Cold War, talks about “the end of history”, referring to his thesis that the power of the economic market eventually will result in liberal democracy replacing all other types of government.<sup>68</sup> Lipset sets out to test the hypothesis that “The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.”<sup>69</sup> He measures economic development in wealth, industrialisation, urbanisation and education, and finds strong correlation between a high value on all these indices and political democracy. As we shall see below, a democratic system of government is frequently associated with domestic peace and a low level of civil violence. In an empirical study of civil war, Jakobsen found that there had been no civil war in highly developed countries in the post-war period 1945-1985.<sup>70</sup>

In short, the liberal model proposes that economic growth and development are conducive to internal political stability and peace, and hence works against the occurrence of domestic terrorism.

## 4.2 Does Political Regime Matter?

### 4.2.1 Democracy and Terrorism – An Ambiguous Relationship

The democracy-fosters-peace theory is originally based on the well-documented observation that democracies do not engage in war against one another. This is an extremely strong correlation on the national dyadic and systemic levels, and it is argued to be something of the

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<sup>64</sup> Lipset (1963).

<sup>65</sup> Przeworski (1995).

<sup>66</sup> Lipset (1963) and Firebaugh & Beck (1994).

<sup>67</sup> Przeworski (1995).

<sup>68</sup> Fukuyama (1992).

<sup>69</sup> Lipset (1963), p.31.

<sup>70</sup> Jakobsen (1996).

closest we will ever get to a law in social sciences.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, pointing to the observation that terrorism and civil violence often originate in already existing conflicts and wars<sup>72</sup> – might the implications of the democratic peace be that democracies, or a democratic world for that matter, would be less prone to internal political violence? Findings suggest an ambiguous relationship in this matter.

A democratic system of government is frequently associated with lower likelihood of internal political violence.<sup>73</sup> Based upon freedoms, openness and popular participation, democracies tend to enjoy greater legitimacy among their population – hence dissatisfaction rarely reaches a level of serious threat to the existence of the regime itself. In addition, democratic systems have various alternative channels for expression and influence through which potential frustration and dissatisfaction can be directed. As to these virtues alone, we would expect a high level of state legitimacy and a low level of terrorism in democratic regimes. Engene's study of patterns of domestic terrorism in Western Europe confirms this thesis. He finds that the occurrence of terrorism is systematically related to low measures of freedom and democracy.<sup>74</sup> This pattern is particularly strong for ideological terrorism, suggesting that political factors like freedom, human rights and democracy have a less important role in producing ethnic terrorism.

In a cross-country study of racist and extreme right violence in Europe, Koopman argues that extreme right violence appears to be motivated more by the lack of opportunities, for example through established political channels of expression, than by grievances.<sup>75</sup> He finds that “contrary to common wisdom, but in line with the expectations derived from the opportunity model, the level of violence tends to be low where extreme right and racist parties are strong and vice versa.”<sup>76</sup> Skjølberg's study of ethnic conflict in Western Europe supports this opportunity model.<sup>77</sup> She finds that ethnic terrorism is more likely in the less proportional democracies than in open proportional systems – indicating that the threshold for using violence depends on the existence of alternative channels of influence.

On the other hand, however, there also seems to be an ambiguity in the relationship between democracy and peace. Due exactly to the open nature of democratic society, democracy may in fact function as a necessary condition for the mobilisation of political frustration and violence.<sup>78</sup> Not only are democracies inherently centred upon human rights and freedoms, which may allow for uncontrolled mobilisation of the population, large-scale organisation of dissatisfaction. The democratic system, emphasising universal participation and majority rule, may also take the form of the majority's dictatorship in practice. This problem arises for example if or when the principle of majority voting repeatedly is perceived as systematic assaults on a minority and their wishes.

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<sup>71</sup> Rummel (1995) and Levy (1988).

<sup>72</sup> Gurr (1990).

<sup>73</sup> Eckstein and Gurr (1975), Rummel (1995) and Gissinger and Gleditsch (1999).

<sup>74</sup> Engene (1998), pp.290-291.

<sup>75</sup> Koopman's study has been criticised for methodological weaknesses, but his conclusions are generally seen as sound. Conversation with Tore Bjørgo, the editor of *Terror From the Extreme Right* (London: Frank Cass 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Koopmans (1996).

<sup>77</sup> Skjølberg (2000).

<sup>78</sup> Rupesinghe (1992).

Moreover, several studies have also found that the process of democratisation itself in some cases can explain the outbreak of internal conflict and civil war.<sup>79</sup> There is substantial empirical evidence that semi-democratic countries have the greatest risk of experiencing civil violence.<sup>80</sup> Crenshaw has argued that semi-democratic regimes are particularly exposed to terrorism: “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.”<sup>81</sup> The theory argues that in periods of protracted democratic transition, the outbreak of civil violence and internal conflicts is more likely. In other words, the relationship between conflict and the form of government is U-shaped – with authoritarianism at the one end and consolidated liberal democracy at the other and transitional governments in between.<sup>82</sup> Empirical observations that highly authoritarian states are less exposed to internal civil strife and terrorism appear to confirm this thesis. Pluchinsky’s study of terrorism in the Former Soviet Union noted that “[n]ot only were there few reported political terrorist incidents carried out in the Soviet Union, but there were also few terrorist incidents directed at Soviet targets outside the USSR.”<sup>83</sup>

In sum, we may conclude that democracy and terrorism are correlated, but the relationship is complex. Semi-democratic regimes and states in democratic transition are more exposed to violent conflict and terrorism than democracies on the one hand and totalitarian regimes on the other.

#### 4.2.2 State Legitimacy and Terrorism

Theories of state legitimacy have been central to the study of the modern state and civil conflict. State legitimacy means in general that the state enjoys popular support and that the citizens consider the rule to be rightful and proper. The theory foresees in short that lack of such support eventually might result in domestic conflict and civil violence. Legitimacy can be anchored in various sources. Forsythe identifies some of these sources to be found in legal traditions, established morals and norms, history, ideology, personal characteristics, and in functional factors like efficient rule and satisfaction of needs.<sup>84</sup> Legitimacy also involves the capacity of the system itself to engender and maintain popular belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society.<sup>85</sup>

The idea of relative deprivation is closely related to state legitimacy. As we have seen, relative deprivation can arise out of discontent with the state’s ability to satisfy the economic, social and political needs and demands of its citizens. This particularly relates to problems of efficient rule, which again might depend on the level of economic development and on the will

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Ellingsen & Gleditsch (1997) and Hegre et al. (1999).

<sup>81</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.116.

<sup>82</sup> Craig and Schock (1992). Using this theory, Michael Micalka for example argues that Romania may be more susceptible to internal conflict than its neighbours Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, since the latter made “a quick transition from communism to a consolidated liberal democracy”. See Mihalka (1999), p.501.

<sup>83</sup> Pluchinsky (1998), p.119. There were exceptions, however, such as the Moscow subway train bombing on 8 January 1977, allegedly by Armenian nationalists, killing 30 people.

<sup>84</sup> Forsythe (1993), pp.60-71.

<sup>85</sup> Lipset (1963).

and capacity of political institutions to allocate resources and mediate disputes. Lipset claims that “[T]he stability of any given democracy depends not only on economic development but also upon the effectiveness and legitimacy of its political system.”<sup>86</sup>

Domestic political violence is obviously a question of problems of state legitimacy. Lipset argues that the extent to which democratic political systems are legitimate depends upon the ways in which key issues that historically have divided the society have been resolved.<sup>87</sup> Engene finds that terrorism in western democratic states is systematically related to problems of state legitimacy.<sup>88</sup> His argument is that rather than being unrelated to conventional politics and operating on the outside of politics, terrorism originates from the same political issues and controversies that motivate the other actors of a political system. Gurr also argues that “the campaigns of political terrorists in democratic societies almost invariably emerge out of larger conflicts, and that they reflect in however distorted a form the political beliefs and aspirations of a larger segment of society.”<sup>89</sup>

The conditions for the emergence of terrorism are most favourable in countries where the public is fragmented into several opposing groups, polarised on a dimension ranging from acceptance to rejection of the state. Engene focuses on three main challenges to state legitimacy:

- (i) unsolved ethnic demands
- (ii) problems of continuity in the development of democracy
- (iii) problems of integrating politically marginalised groups

Engene finds a strong association between ethnic diversity and ethnic terrorism. Furthermore, his results show a strong positive correlation between continuity problems and ideological terrorism, and a strong link between problems of integration and ideological terrorism. Ethnic terrorism, on the other hand, does not appear to be significantly related to these two latter factors.

Engene also observes that the levels of unionisation are negatively correlated with domestic terrorism. This may also indicate that the level of integration of politically marginalised groups should not only be measured in participation in party politics. Strong trade unions appear to play a significant role in restraining radical elements in their midst. His findings reveal a large degree of correlation between problems of continuity and integration on the one hand and the level of *ideological* terrorism on the other, while the level of ethnic terrorism apparently is less affected by these factors. Engene’s study concludes that terrorism is only sporadically present in states not affected by any of these kinds of legitimacy problems.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p.64.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> Engene (1994, 1998).

<sup>89</sup> Gurr (1990), p.86.

### 4.3 Social Norms and Historical Traditions

The relationship between prevalent social norms and historical traditions on the one hand and political culture on the other is a difficult one. It is even more complex to assess their possible effect on the occurrence of terrorism. We have already seen that the lack of continuity of democratic regimes tends to make them more exposed to domestic terrorism.<sup>90</sup> One may assume that recent history of widespread political violence, stemming from for example civil wars, ethnic strife, or widespread human rights abuses under a despotic authoritarian rule will leave a legacy of political violence which it takes a long time to eradicate. Memories of the recent past will affect perceptions of injustice and motivate terrorists long after a peace settlement has been reached and democratic rule has been established.

There are, however, few general theories on the relationships between prevalent social norms and traditions and the occurrence of terrorism. Causalities have only been suggested, not established. Crenshaw argues for example that the frequency of terrorism in a given area may be linked to “social habits and historical traditions, which may sanction the use of violence against the government.”<sup>91</sup> Other writers find indications that the traditions of blood feuds have played an important role in providing a direct motivation for terrorist acts in certain regions. For example Dennis Pluchinsky has found that the southern regions of the Former Soviet Union, especially in the Caucasus, have a history of clan-based social structures in which the code of the blood feud is significant, hence the term “blood-feud terrorism”.<sup>92</sup> Students of radical Islamist movements have also noted that Islamist violence in Algeria and Southern Egypt may be partly explained by the strong traditions of revenge and blood feuds in these societies.<sup>93</sup>

Following this discussion, we might expect certain characteristics of a society’s social habits, norms and historical traditions to encourage a higher level of civil violence and terrorism. More empirical evidence is needed, however, to establish sound theories in this field.

### 4.4 The Ecology of Terrorism

The so-called “ecology of terrorism” derives its name from the thesis that societal and technological changes associated with modernisation have created new and unprecedented conditions for terrorism.<sup>94</sup> The ecology thesis focuses on facilitating circumstances, not motivations, needs, experiences or ideology, and “sees modern terrorism occurring because modern circumstances make terrorist methods exceptionally easy”.<sup>95</sup> Significant technological developments, associated with modernisation, such as the rise and expansion of modern transportation and communications as well as modern mass media are seen as important, at least for the types and patterns of terrorist acts, though not as a motivation for employing terrorism in the first place. Wilkinson has argued that the increase in international terrorism in the latter part of this century was partly related to “technological opportunities and the

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<sup>90</sup> Engene has found strong correlation between the lack of continuity of the political system and the occurrence of ideological terrorism in Western Europe. Engene (1998), pp.289ff

<sup>91</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.115.

<sup>92</sup> Pluchinsky (1998), pp.123-124.

<sup>93</sup> For example Shahin (1997).

<sup>94</sup> The term has been discussed more extensively in Segre and Adler (1973). See also Kegley (1990), p.105ff.

<sup>95</sup> Kegley (1990), p.105.



vulnerability of industrial societies and cities to terrorist techniques.”<sup>96</sup> Crenshaw has also argued that industrialisation and urbanisation in a more general sense have made societies more vulnerable to terrorism: “Cities may be significant because they provide an opportunity (a multitude of targets, mobility, communications, anonymity, and audiences) and a recruiting ground among politicised and volatile inhabitants .. The terrorists of *Narodnaya Volya* would have been unable to operate without Russia’s newly established rail system, and the PFLP could not indulge in hijacking without the jet aircraft.”<sup>97</sup>

Kegley argues that modern technology empowers very small groups, and has summed up the argument as follows:

- Air communication was long an easy target. Moreover, it provided world-wide mobility enabling terrorists to strike in other states and on other continents.
- Radio, television and modern communication satellites provide almost instantaneous access to a global audience.
- Weapons and explosives are increasingly available, and a growing arsenal of sophisticated weapons is available to terrorists, including plastic explosives, advanced remote controlled bombs.
- Modern industrial and urban societies present an almost infinite number of vulnerable targets.<sup>98</sup>

In sum, the ecology of terrorism thesis argues that societal changes associated with modernisation have created new and unprecedented conditions for terrorism, such as a multitude of targets, mobility, communications, anonymity, and audiences.

#### 4.4.1 Terrorism and Technological Evolution

A theme, which falls largely under the ecology of terrorism thesis, is the relationship between technology and terrorism. While there is a considerable bulk of writings on the symbiotic relationship between technology and the conduct of war, there is surprisingly little research on the relationship between technological evolution on the one hand and terrorism and low intensity conflicts on the other.<sup>99</sup> Well-established theories in this area cannot be expected. At best, we may identify possible causalities and hypotheses about the effects of technological developments on the evolution of terrorism, while awaiting further progress of academia in this very important field.

In studies of technology and war it is often admitted that the significance of technological innovations has been less revolutionary and more short-lived than often anticipated when technological innovations were introduced for the first time. Writing on military theory and information warfare in light of the history of military theory, Henry and Peartree demonstrate the shortlivedness of theories of military theorists, who linked their theories closely to the technological innovations of their age.<sup>100</sup> Henry and Peartree emphasise the human ability to

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<sup>96</sup> Wilkinson (1987), p.xv.

<sup>97</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.115.

<sup>98</sup> Kegley (1990), p.105ff

<sup>99</sup> One of the very few and admittedly sketchy studies available is Hirst (1998)

<sup>100</sup> Henry and Peartree (1998). See also Craig (2000).

find counter-responses which reduced the effectiveness of new technology, and warn against believing that technological revolutions will ever revolutionise warfare:

war remains essentially what it has been for centuries: Clausewitz's 'act of force to compel our enemy to do our will'. .. Perhaps it is too much to expect truly revolutionary technologies to lead to fundamental changes in the forms and functions of conflict.<sup>101</sup>

Even if theories of terrorism cannot be deduced directly from military theory, this nevertheless gives an additional reason for caution when looking at the long-term effects of technological innovations on the occurrence of terrorism.

There are nevertheless technological developments which clearly appear to have had a significant effect on terrorism, if not on its occurrence, then at least on the forms of terrorism. Technological innovations have provided terrorist groups with new and unprecedented means of destruction, first and foremost the introduction of dynamite and explosives.<sup>102</sup> They are still among the most popular weapons used by terrorist groups.

In one of very few available studies of terrorism and technology, Hirst argues convincingly that the importance of technological advancement should not be overstated. First of all, throughout history terrorist groups have proved to be pragmatic users of technology. They are seldom driven by technology, more often terrorist groups have been surprisingly conservative in their choice of weapons.<sup>103</sup> This line of thinking fits well into the terrorism as communication thesis, emphasising the choreography of the terrorist act rather than its effectiveness in causing killing and physical destruction.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Hirst details the profound development in counter terrorist technologies, i.e. technology to help limit the ability of terrorists to deploy their weapons, which states now employ to different degrees. The relationship between technology and terrorism is therefore very much a dialectic one, and Hirst is probably right in warning against establishing a direct causal link between the "growing ferocity" of terrorist incidents and advances in technology. The introduction of "[new] technology *per se* is not a fundamental factor in this trend ... it is difficult to identify clear links between developments in technology and trends in terrorism."<sup>105</sup>

In sum, although technological developments provide new and more efficient means and weapons to terrorist groups, the willingness to use such weapons should not be taken for granted. Furthermore, technological developments have a significant potential in increasing the counter-terrorist capabilities of states.

#### 4.4.2 Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism

One facilitating factor, which also falls under the ecology-of-terrorism thesis, is the symbiotic relationship between organised crime and terrorism. It seems clear that the occurrence of

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<sup>101</sup> Henry and Peartree (1998).

<sup>102</sup> Crenshaw (1990a), p.114.

<sup>103</sup> Hoffman (1998).

<sup>104</sup> See previous sub-chapter on mass media and terrorism as communication.

<sup>105</sup> Hirst (1998), p.123.

terrorism in certain regions is influenced by the growth and expansion of transnational organised crime, and illegal global parallel trade, especially drug trade because of the huge returns of this trade. The relationship between organised crime and terrorism is an ambiguous one, and is still too little theory developed in this field.<sup>106</sup> So far only tentative assumptions can be made.

What seems clear, however, is that in several regions, such as the Latin American states of Peru and Colombia, in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan, there has been considerable interaction between transnational organised crime and terrorist groups.<sup>107</sup> In the recent decade, in particular in the republics of the Former Soviet Union, the distinction between terrorism and organised crime has become blurred, inspiring mixed terms such as “criminal terrorism” and “economic terrorism.”<sup>108</sup> The significance of this is that the existence of global criminal networks of illegal trade and transactions provides golden opportunities for terrorist groups, with exceptions for groups with clear ideological qualms about co-operating and indulging in regular organised crime. Co-operation or even direct involvement in transnational organised crime may provide terrorist groups for example with additional means of funding, access to weapons smuggled into the country and other potential benefits accruing from co-operation with transnational clandestine networks. Or as Neal Pollard has observed, “this interaction [with transnational organised crime] offers smuggling routes long established and tested by crime syndicates for drug and arms running, potentially providing terrorists with logistical infrastructure to clandestinely move people, arms and material”.<sup>109</sup> Michael E. Brown argues that the similarities between terrorist organisations and organised crime are growing, and that it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate the two.<sup>110</sup>

A slightly different perspective is offered by Phil Williams, the editor of the journal *Transnational Organised Crime*, who holds that transnational organised crime and terrorism are not really converging into a single phenomenon. They are developing closer relationships, however, and creating what he terms “an organised crime-terrorism nexus”.<sup>111</sup> But the distinction between terrorist and criminal organisations should not be blurred. They still have different objectives — political change in the former case and the accumulation of wealth in the latter. These divergent aims and priorities represent a potential source of tension between them. Co-operation is still more likely to be fragmented and temporary than systematic and long-term.

While credible theoretical models on the relationship between terrorism and organised crime are only rudimentary, there are strong arguments that the two phenomena are partly inter-

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<sup>106</sup> There is a growing body of literature describing differences and similarities between organised crime and terrorism and presenting several theses of possible future evolution of interaction. See for example Schmid (1996) and Williams (1998).

<sup>107</sup> The Columbian FARC guerilla and the Peruvian Shining Path are known to have provided mercenary security support for narcotics production and trafficking lines in South America. The Palestinian PFLP-GC has reportedly “been using infrastructure in Lebanon to support drug trafficking.” Pollard (1997) and Brown (1997).

<sup>108</sup> For the term “criminal terrorism” see Pluchinsky (1998), pp.123-124 and for the term “economic terrorism”, see Schweitzer (1998), p.35.

<sup>109</sup> Pollard (1997).

<sup>110</sup> Brown (1997).

<sup>111</sup> Williams (1998).

linked and that growth in transnational organised crime may under certain circumstances contribute to increased levels of terrorism.

## 5 CAUSES OF TERRORISM ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The literature on international terrorism<sup>112</sup> has frequently assumed that the occurrence of terrorism, especially international, must be sought in external sources and the character of the international system, including foreign policies of states, and the global circumstances that generate a conducive environment for terrorist activity.<sup>113</sup> One common argument is that the fierce competition between the superpowers during the Cold War and the existence of nuclear arms made international terrorism a preferred weapon in the struggle for global hegemony. Hence, the superpower sponsorship for Communist and anti-Communist guerrilla movements and violent opposition groups worldwide played a crucial role in sustaining a high level of international terrorism.<sup>114</sup> Or as Rushworth M Kidder has argued, “the military stalemate of the great powers and the prohibitive costs of conventional war pushed guerrilla uprisings, low intensity conflict and terrorist activities to center stage.”<sup>115</sup>

### 5.1 State Sponsorship of Terrorism

In the literature on terrorism a school of thought assigns great weight to the influence of “state sponsored terrorism” as an explanation for the growth of international terrorism since the 1960s. Since clandestine groups often face a funding problem, “substantial financing may be a precondition for international terrorism as well as a contributing cause of it.”<sup>116</sup> Hence, contemporary international terrorism is seen as driven primarily by the material and financial support and propaganda assistance provided by states or government sponsors. This was a popular explanation, especially during the Reagan administration, who pointed to the Soviet role in sponsoring international terrorism. The thesis drew evidence from works such as Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism*, but has come under heavy criticism, especially from the radical left, who viewed the US role in sponsoring anti-Communist guerrillas as the other side of the coin.<sup>117</sup> Both schools assigned, however, a significant role to state sponsorship.

### 5.2 Hegemony and Bipolarity in World Politics

Until recently this thesis has not been rigorously examined. A 1997 study of Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel, however, looks at whether “hegemon capabilities, acceptance of hegemonic leadership, bipolar conflict, bipolar balance and contagion effects can account for variations in international terrorist activity.”<sup>118</sup> Their results show that hegemonic control is significant and that changes in hegemonic capabilities – measured by the hegemon’s share of the world’s

<sup>112</sup> It should be noted, however, that only a minority (5-10%) of terrorist acts can be described as international terrorism. See for example Engene (1998) and Waldman (1999), pp.21-28.

<sup>113</sup> Kegley (1990), pp.97-98.

<sup>114</sup> See for example Wilkinson (1987), p.xv.

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Kegley (1990), p.105.

<sup>116</sup> Kegley (1990), p.105ff.

<sup>117</sup> See for example Chomsky (1987) and Herman (1987).

<sup>118</sup> Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel (1997), p.207.

economic and military capabilities – demonstrate a strong effect on terrorist frequency.<sup>119</sup> Regarding terrorist intensity (measured in number of casualties), both bipolar balance between the superpowers, hegemonic support (support for the two superpowers, measured by surveying patterns of voting in the UN), and hegemonic capabilities account significantly for variation in the intensity of global terrorism. Of the three independent variables, hegemonic control seems to be most strongly associated with the intensity of terrorist activity. Hegemonic control over systemic resources still remains important in accounting for the frequency of terrorist activity, even when the hegemon is no longer the direct target of terrorism.<sup>120</sup>

Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel use data covering only the period from the late 1960s until the 1990s and cannot explain the changing patterns before that period. They observe, however, a remarkable reduction in frequency and intensity of international terrorism at the end of the Cold War in the period 1987-1992: “The actual decline in terrorist activity (frequency, between 1987 and 1992) is 45,4% [and] The intensity of terrorist activity during this period declined by 74,2 %”.<sup>121</sup> Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel’s results are indicative of the importance of the international system and the struggle for hegemony in explaining patterns of international terrorism.

In sum, the character of the international system obviously seems significant. A system characterised by strong bipolar hegemony and a high level of bipolar conflict in world politics is expected to be more exposed to international terrorism. A corollary of this is that growing multilateralism and institutionalised international co-operation, which reduce the scope of state sponsorship of terrorism, might eventually reduce the level of international terrorism.

### 5.3 Weak and Collapsed States

While state sponsorship and hegemonic rivalry may have encouraged the growth of international terrorism, the existence of weak and collapsed states also seem relevant in explaining international terrorism, although theoretical studies in this field are scant. Weak and collapsed states whose main characteristic is the absence of a central government authority controlling most of its territory, often attract both domestic and foreign insurgent groups and have in some cases been a major training ground for international terrorist organisations.<sup>122</sup> Lebanon became the host of a truly international network of revolutionary guerrilla movements and terrorist organisations, including both organisations with a local or regional cause, such as the Palestinian groups and Islamic resistance movements, and organisations such as the Armenian ASALA, and the Japanese Red Army. During the 1990s Afghanistan,

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p.219.

<sup>120</sup> In the case of governmental targets, both bipolar and hegemonic considerations were significant in accounting for variations in the level of international terrorism, according to Volgy, Imwalle and Corntassel’s study. Regarding non-governmental targets, the only significant variable in the model was the hegemonic factor. Volgy et al also examined geographical differences, and found no significance in the Western Hemisphere as expected. In Europe and Middle East, on the other hand, at least one of the bipolar variables was significant, and hegemonic considerations were important in both regions. They also showed that changes in levels of hegemonic resources (of the superpowers) had a pronounced impact on the level of international terrorism in Europe. In the Middle East both bipolar and hegemonic considerations were significant in accounting for variations in the level of international terrorism. *Ibid*.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, pp.225-226.

<sup>122</sup> For a classical study of the concept of collapsed states, see Zartman (1995).

ravaged by civil war, has also become an important training ground and safe haven for a number of insurgent groups and terrorist organisations.<sup>123</sup> Hence, there is much empirical evidence that the existence of weak and collapsed states might encourage both the spread of internal conflicts and international terrorism.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Research literature on terrorism has long been criticised for a general lack of empirically grounded and scientifically sound research on patterns and causes of terrorism. This article has provided an updated survey of existing theories and hypotheses on the causes of terrorism, drawing upon studies not only from the specialised terrorism research literature, but also from general social science and conflict studies. As we have seen in this study, there are still few established theories and many hypotheses in the research literature on the causes of terrorism. Future research should therefore focus more attention on improving existing theoretical understanding of the causes of terrorism. The study of terrorism may divest some of its stigma as a non-scientific genre by testing out widely accepted, but not rigorously tested truths about causes of terrorism. Moreover, the genre could also be strengthened by drawing more upon theoretical frameworks from recent peace and conflict study traditions.

The security policy implications of the theories that we have surveyed in this report are evident in a number of areas. A full in-depth discussion is outside the scope of this study, but are analysed in more detail in our report “Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism”, *FFI-REPORT 2000/01704*. A few illustrative examples will nevertheless be given. The relatively well-established thesis that terrorism and civil violence tend to occur more frequently in democratising states will have particular relevance in Europe’s Southern and Eastern periphery, where a number of states are currently undergoing various forms of political transition processes to more democratic rule. The thesis that terrorism tends to occur in countries undergoing rapid economic modernisation and growth, as well as in countries experiencing high levels of economic inequality should perhaps be a warning to the apologetics of globalisation and rapid economic growth. And finally, the theory that a high level of bipolar rivalry and hegemonic dominance in world politics tends to encourage international terrorism, (and conversely, that a more co-operative world order and growing multilateral co-operation appear to discourage international terrorism) is interesting. It should serve as a much-needed correction in the current debate on the strategic implications of terrorism and so-called asymmetric threats facing the Western world from transnational terrorist and rogue states.

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<sup>123</sup> For the Lebanese civil war, see for example Sirriyeh (1989). For Lebanon and international terrorism, see Hoffman (1998).

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## A APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF CAUSES OF TERRORISM

### A.1 Psycho-Sociological Theories

#### *Relative Deprivation*

- The perception of relative deprivation, when the gap between expectations and satisfaction is growing rapidly, is the basic condition for participation in collective civil violence and terrorism.

#### *The Contagion Theory of Terrorism*

- The occurrence of terrorism in one country often leads directly or indirectly to more terrorism in other countries.
- There is a symbiotic relationship between modern mass media and terrorism, but the character of the relationship and its consequences are ambiguous.

### A.2 Societal Theories

#### *Rapid Modernisation, Inequality*

- Rapid economic modernisation measured in GDP-growth, makes societies more exposed to ideological terrorism.
- Social inequality measured in income inequality tends to increase the potential for ideological terrorism.

#### *Liberal Peace Theory*

- Increased trade and economic interdependence tends to discourage both inter-state and probably also the prevalence of international terrorism.
- “The prosperous peace” — long term economic growth and development are conducive to internal political stability and hence works against the occurrence of domestic terrorism.

#### *Political Regime*

- Democracy and terrorism are correlated, but the relationship is complex. States in democratic transition are more exposed to armed conflict and terrorism than democracies and autocracies. Because of pervasive state control, totalitarian regimes rarely experience terrorism. At the same time, states with high scores on measures of human rights standards and democracy tend to be less exposed to domestic ideological terrorism.
- Terrorism is closely linked to a set of core legitimacy problems: lack of continuity of the political system tends to encourage ideological terrorism, while the lack of integration of political fringes also tends to encourage ideological terrorism. Ethnic diversity, however, tends to increase the potential for ethnic terrorism.
- A high level of unionisation i.e. the density of trade union membership in a population, appears to discourage the growth of domestic ideological terrorism.

#### *The Ecology of Terrorism*

- Societal changes associated with modernisation have created new and unprecedented conditions for terrorism (such as a multitude of targets, mobility, communications, anonymity, and audiences).
- Technological developments offer new and more efficient means and weapons for terrorist groups, but at the same time increase the counter-terrorist capabilities of states.
- Transnational organised crime and terrorism are partly inter-linked phenomena and growth in transnational organised crime may contribute to increased levels of terrorism.

### **A.3 Changes in the International State System:**

- The character of the international system is significant. A system characterised by strong bipolar hegemony and a high level of bipolar conflict in world politics is more exposed to international terrorism.
- State sponsorship of international terrorism has been a significant cause of terrorism.
- The existence of weak and collapsed states tends to encourage both internal armed conflicts and international terrorism.



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